

Fostering independence through care?

A study of the preparedness and deployment of Special Needs Assistants
when supporting pupils' behavioural care needs and independence
development in mainstream primary schools in Ireland.

Claire Griffin-O'Brien

University College London

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Declaration

I, Claire Griffin-O'Brien, 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:

Abstract

The educational landscape in Ireland for persons with special educational needs (SEN) has changed significantly over the past two decades. This research project sought to explore the preparedness and deployment of Special Needs Assistants (SNA) in supporting pupils with behavioural care needs in mainstream primary schools in Ireland. In particular, the research aimed to obtain a detailed and integrated account of the preparedness and deployment of SNAs when supporting target pupils' behavioural care needs and developing target pupils' independence. This study employed a mixed-methods approach to data collection. The study's research design was modelled on that employed in Strand 2 Wave 1 of the internationally renowned 'Deployment and Impact of Support Staff' project (Blatchford et al., 2008), as conducted in the United Kingdom. This study comprised a large scale SNA survey (n = 814), in addition to systematic classroom observations and case studies conducted across 20 mainstream class contexts. Throughout the study, focus was placed on the preparedness of SNAs to engage in their pupil care role including their training, continuing professional development, knowledge and understanding of pupils' needs, and school-based planning. The deployment of SNAs to support pupils' behavioural care needs and independence development was explored through minute-by-minute systematic classroom observations and in-depth case studies, with additional comparative observational data collected on average-attaining comparison pupils. Focus was placed on contextual classroom information, pupil interactions with the class teacher, SNA and peers, level of pupil independence and support patterns employed by SNAs with the target pupils. Data was analysed using a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Findings highlighted an array of strengths and limitations of the current SNA scheme in Ireland in supporting pupils with behavioural care needs, particularly in terms of SNA training, school-based preparation and use of evidence-based strategies to support pupils' behavioural care needs and development of pupils' independence. In addition, findings revealed the disparate classroom experiences of pupils with behavioural care needs in receipt of SNA support when compared with their average-attaining peers. Results are discussed in light of the current status of the SNA scheme in Ireland, with a focus on implications for research, theory, policy and practice. This research serves to extend the limited data-set on SNAs in mainstream schools in Ireland and addresses the dearth of national and international research on the role of paraprofessionals in educational contexts, particularly in relation to positive behaviour support and supporting pupils' development of independence.

Impact Statement

The aim of this study was to obtain a detailed and integrated account of the preparedness and deployment of SNAs when supporting pupils with behavioural care needs in mainstream primary schools in Ireland. In particular, the author sought to explore the topics of 'preparedness' and 'deployment' in terms of SNAs' support of target pupils'¹ behavioural care needs and SNAs' development of target pupils' independence within the mainstream class context. A three-phased multi-method approach to data collection was adopted for this research, including an online large-scale SNA survey, systematic observations and case studies, as conducted across 20 class contexts. Findings are presented across *Chapters 4, 5* and *6*, and discussed thereafter in *Chapter 7*.

This study is recognised as a highly comprehensive piece of research which poses a range of benefits for the field, both at academic and applied levels. To date, the author has already published two book chapters related to the SNA scheme (Griffin, 2014, 2018a) and has presented papers at three international conferences (Griffin, 2015, 2016a, 2017) and four national conferences (Griffin, 2016b, 2016c, 2016d, 2018b). Such work points to the impact that this research has had to date, whereby audiences have included a range of academics, policy-makers, researchers and practitioners. Moving forward, it is anticipated that the findings of this research will continue to be disseminated both nationally and internationally through book publications, conference papers and peer-reviewed articles in scholarly journals. In addition, the author intends to design a range of practitioner-focused workshops and publications for SNAs and the wider school context to aid to increase the level of evidence-based practices within Irish schools. The focus of these workshops and publications will relate to positive behaviour support, developing pupils' independent skills and considering alternatives to over-reliance on SNAs within schools, as informed by this research and the wider literature base.

It is also notable that in parallel to this research project, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) conducted a comprehensive review of the SNA scheme over the 2016/2017 academic year, as requested by the Minister for Education and Skills in 2015. This review was aimed at ensuring that the SNA scheme continues to meet its objectives and that resources are being utilised effectively and efficiently, in

¹ The term 'target pupils' is used throughout this thesis to refer to pupils with behavioural care needs in receipt of SNA support, as was employed in the 'Deployment and Impact of Support Staff' (DISS) Project in the United Kingdom (U.K) (Blatchford et al., 2008).

line with policy guidelines (NCSE, 2015a). In light of the author's involvement in this research project, the author was invited to present at the NCSE Council meeting (Griffin, 2016c) and again, at the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) annual conference (Griffin, 2016b). Thereafter, the author was invited by the NCSE to act as an external peer-reviewer on a number of research outputs produced by the NCSE to inform the comprehensive review of the SNA scheme (NCSE, 2018). Currently, the Irish education system awaits national policy changes to the SNA scheme, as informed by the work of the NCSE (2018). Based on the author's involvement in the comprehensive review process, it is clear that this project has already contributed to national debate on the SNA scheme and is anticipated to inform future changes in applied settings.

Overall, this study's design and findings are deemed to make a significant contribution to the national research base concerning the SNA scheme and specifically, SNAs' support of pupils with behavioural care needs. Although the Irish SNA scheme is not directly comparable with other international models of paraprofessional support, it is envisaged that many findings of this study may also inform international research and highlight the need for evidence-based best practices within schools, as informed by theory and research. By disseminating this research to national and international audiences, the author aims to "give psychology away" (Miller, 1969, p. 1074) and be an 'agent of change' through the translation and dissemination of research to practitioners (Dunsmuir & Hardy, 2016).

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	23
1.1 Introduction.....	23
1.2 Overview of the Research.....	23
1.3 Research Aim and Questions	24
1.4 Contribution of the Research to the Field	26
1.5 Thesis Terminology.....	28
1.6 The Research Context	29
1.6.1 A move towards inclusive education.....	29
1.6.2 Overview of the SNA scheme.....	32
1.7 Research Rationale	34
1.7.1 Dearth of national SNA research.....	34
1.7.2 National review of the SNA scheme.....	35
1.8 Autobiography.....	36
1.8.1 The 'I' as Pupil.....	37
1.8.2 The 'I' as Teacher.....	38
1.8.3 The 'I' as 'Educational Psychologist' and researcher.....	39
1.9 Theoretical Framework	40
1.10 Order of Presentation.....	42
1.11 Conclusion.....	44
Chapter Two: Literature Review	46
2.1 Introduction.....	46
2.2 National Policy Context.....	46
2.3 SNA Preparedness	50
2.3.1 SNA training and professional development.....	50
2.3.1.1 <i>National policy context</i>	50
2.3.1.2 <i>Review of national and international research</i>	51
2.3.2 SNA knowledge, understanding & self-efficacy to support pupils' behavioural care needs.....	53
2.3.2.1 <i>Review of national and international literature</i>	53
2.3.3 Individual pupil planning.....	55
2.3.3.1 <i>National policy context</i>	55
2.3.3.2 <i>Review of national and international research</i>	56
2.3.3.3 <i>Voice of the child</i>	58
2.3.4 Summary of 'preparedness' and research question one.....	60
2.4 SNA Support of Pupils' Behavioural Care Needs	61

2.4.1 National policy context.....	61
2.4.2 Irish data: Prevalence and nature of behavioural care needs.....	63
2.4.3 Theoretical perspectives on challenging behaviour.....	66
2.4.3.1 <i>Bio-psycho-social perspective</i>	68
2.4.3.2 <i>Review of national research on behaviour support</i>	69
2.4.3.3 <i>Positive behaviour support</i>	70
2.4.3.4 <i>Relational role with the pupil</i>	75
2.4.4 Summary of ‘behavioural care needs’ and research question two.....	77
2.5 Pupil Independence	78
2.5.1 National policy context.....	78
2.5.2 Review of national and international research.....	79
2.5.2.1 <i>Independence-related national research</i>	79
2.5.2.2 <i>Independence-related international research</i>	82
2.5.2.3 <i>Paraprofessional-pupil proximity and classroom interactions</i>	87
2.5.2.4 <i>Differentiation and pupil independence</i>	89
2.5.2.5 <i>Prompting and pupil independence</i>	91
2.5.3 Theoretical viewpoints of independence.....	93
2.5.3.1 <i>Learned helplessness/Learned hopefulness</i>	93
2.5.3.2 <i>Self-determination theory</i>	96
2.5.3.3 <i>Independence: A critical viewpoint</i>	98
2.5.3.4 <i>Scaffolding theory</i>	99
2.5.4 Increasing pupils’ level of self-management.....	105
2.5.5 Alternatives to overreliance on paraprofessionals.....	106
2.5.6 Summary of ‘pupil independence’ and research questions three and four	108
2.6 Conclusion	110
Chapter Three: Methodology	111
3.1 Introduction	111
3.2 A Framework for Research	111
3.2.1 Research aim and questions.....	111
3.2.2 Research framework.....	112
3.3 Philosophical Perspective and Authorial Stance.....	113
3.3.1 Axiology.....	115
3.3.2 Ontology and epistemology.....	115
3.3.3 Reflexivity.....	116
3.4 Research Design.....	117
3.4.1 Mixed methods approach.....	117

3.4.2 Overview and rationale for the research design.....	118
3.5 Large-Scale SNA Survey	120
3.5.1 Survey design.	120
3.5.2 Survey pilot study.	122
3.5.3 Survey sampling strategy.	122
3.5.4 Ethical considerations: Survey.....	124
3.5.5 Data analysis: Survey.....	125
3.6 Systematic Observations	126
3.6.1 Systematic observations: Overview.	126
3.6.2 Systematic observations: Researcher training.	127
3.6.3 Observation schedule design.	128
3.6.3.1 <i>Observation schedule criteria</i>	129
3.6.3.2 <i>The ‘Observing Pupils and Teachers in Classrooms’ schedule</i>	130
3.6.3.3 <i>Qualitative note-taking</i>	132
3.6.4 Pilot study: Observation schedule.	132
3.6.5 Sampling strategy: Systematic observations.	134
3.6.6 Ethical considerations: Systematic observations.	137
3.6.7 Procedure: Systematic observations.	138
3.6.8 Reliability: Systematic observations.....	139
3.6.9 Data analysis: Systematic observations.	140
3.7 Case Studies	140
3.7.1 Case study research: Overview and rationale.	140
3.7.2 Case study sample.....	141
3.7.3 Case study methodologies.	142
3.7.3.1 <i>Semi-structured interview</i>	142
3.7.3.2 <i>Semi-structured interview schedules</i>	143
3.7.3.3 <i>Documentary review</i>	145
3.7.3.4 <i>Field notes</i>	145
3.7.4 Pilot case study.	146
3.7.5 Case study: Procedure.	147
3.7.6 Case study: Ethical considerations.	150
3.7.6.1 <i>Informed consent</i>	150
3.7.6.2 <i>Privacy and confidentiality</i>	150
3.7.6.3 <i>Use of data</i>	151
3.7.6.4 <i>Working with potentially vulnerable participants</i>	151
3.7.6.5 <i>Sensitivity of topic</i>	152

3.8 Qualitative Data Analysis	152
3.8.1 What is IPA?	153
3.8.2 Rationale for selecting an IPA approach to data analysis.	154
3.8.2.1 <i>Summary rationale for selecting an IPA approach.</i>	158
3.8.3 Use of NVivo11 data analysis software.....	158
3.8.4 Phases and steps taken in the analytical process.....	159
3.8.4.1 <i>Step 1: Reading and re-reading.</i>	159
3.8.4.2 <i>Step 2: Initial noting.</i>	159
3.8.4.3 <i>Step 3: Developing emergent/sub-ordinate themes.</i>	160
3.8.4.4 <i>Step 4: Case study report and movement to the next case.</i>	161
3.8.4.5 <i>Step 5: Searching for connections across emergent themes.</i>	162
3.8.4.6 <i>Step 6: Looking for patterns across cases.</i>	163
3.8.5 Data write up.	164
3.8.6 Linking the IPA analytic process and use of NVivo11.	167
3.9 Quality of the Research.....	168
3.9.1 Sampling Strategy.	168
3.9.2 Selection, self-selection and under-coverage biases.	169
3.9.3 Social desirability of participants.	171
3.9.4 Observer influence.....	171
3.9.5 Reliability.....	172
3.9.6 Validity.....	173
3.10 Conclusion	174
Chapter Four: Findings from the Large-Scale SNA Survey	176
4.1 Executive Summary	176
4.2 Section A: Demographics.....	176
4.3 Section B: Preparedness.....	178
4.3.1 Education and training.	178
4.3.1.1 <i>Highest level of qualification.</i>	178
4.3.1.2 <i>SNA-specific training.</i>	178
4.3.1.3 <i>Satisfaction levels regarding training.</i>	179
4.3.2 Planning and Preparation.	180
4.3.2.1 <i>Planning and feedback meetings with the class teacher.</i>	180
4.3.2.2 <i>SNA attendance at IEP meetings.</i>	182
4.3.2.3 <i>Target pupil involvement in his/her personalised planning.</i>	182
4.3.2.4 <i>SNA awareness of pupils' IEP targets.</i>	182
4.3.3 SNA efficacy in dealing with challenging behaviour	183

4.3.3.1 <i>Self-efficacy and gender</i>	183
4.3.3.2 <i>Self-efficacy and training in behaviour management</i>	183
4.3.3.3 <i>Self-efficacy and training in supporting the development of pupils' independent skills</i>	183
4.3.3.4 <i>Self-efficacy and attendance at IEP meetings</i>	183
4.3.3.5 <i>Pearson product-moment correlations</i>	184
4.4 Section C: Independence	185
4.4.1 Length of time working with the target pupil	185
4.4.2 Pupil dependence on the SNA	186
Chapter Five: Results of Systematic Observations	187
5.1 Observation Data Overview	187
5.2 Observed Lessons	187
5.3 Total Target Task	187
5.4 Total Target Pupil Seating Context	188
5.5 Total SNA Context	188
5.6 Total Teacher Context	189
5.7 Total Interaction Data	190
5.8 Composition of Total Pupil Interactions with the Teacher and SNA	192
5.9 OPTIC Schedule Data for the Target Pupil Across All Cases	197
Chapter Six: Results Case Studies	200
6.1 Chapter Overview	200
6.2 Theme 1: SNA preparedness	202
6.2.1 SNA training and CPD	202
6.2.2 School-based preparation	204
6.2.2.1 <i>Individual pupil planning</i>	204
6.2.2.2 <i>Collaborative practices</i>	205
6.2.3 SNA knowledge and understanding	207
6.2.4 Summary of theme 1: SNA preparedness	208
6.3 Theme 2: SNAs' Support of Behaviour	209
6.3.1 Strategies to support pupils' behavioural care needs	213
6.3.2 Proactive strategies	214
6.3.2.1 <i>Ecological strategies</i>	214
6.3.2.2 <i>Positive programming</i>	217
6.3.2.3 <i>Focused strategies</i>	218
6.3.3 Reactive strategies	219
6.3.3.1 <i>Pupil prompting</i>	219

6.3.3.2 <i>De-escalation techniques</i>	221
6.3.3.3 <i>Pupil withdrawal</i>	221
6.3.4 SNAs' support of behavioural care needs: Focus on pupil voice	222
6.3.5 Summary of theme 2: SNAs' support of behaviour	223
6.4 Theme 3: Pupil independence versus dependence	223
6.4.1 SNA deployment: Supporting/hindering the development of pupils' independence.....	225
6.4.1.1 <i>Whole-school strategies</i>	226
6.4.1.2 <i>Classroom level strategies</i>	227
6.4.2 Alternate strategies.....	233
6.4.3 SNAs' support of independence: Focus on pupil voice	234
6.4.4 Summary of theme 3: Pupil independence versus dependence.....	234
6.5 Theme 4: SNA Relational Role with Pupil	235
6.5.1 SNA-pupil relationship	235
6.5.2 SNA-pupil emotional support	236
6.5.3 Pupil-SNA emotional dependency	237
6.5.4 Summary of theme 4: SNA relational role with pupil	237
Chapter Seven: Discussion.....	238
7.1 Introduction	238
7.2. Research Question 1:	238
7.2.1 Training and professional development	238
7.2.2 Knowledge and understanding of challenging behaviour	242
7.2.3 Self-efficacy in dealing with challenging behaviour	245
7.2.4 Individualised pupil planning	247
7.3 Research Question 2:	252
7.3.1 Ecological strategies.....	252
7.3.1.1 <i>Pupil proximity</i>	252
7.3.1.2 <i>Movement breaks</i>	254
7.3.2 Skill development	256
7.3.3 Focused support.....	258
7.3.4 Relational role with the pupil	260
7.3.5 Reactive strategies	261
7.4. Research Question 3:	264
7.4.1 Whole-school approaches	264
7.4.2 Classroom-based practices	266
7.4.2.1 <i>SNA-pupil proximity</i>	266

7.4.2.2 SNA-pupil prompting.....	268
7.4.2.3 Reward strategies, pupil self-regulation and self-management.	271
7.5 Research Question 4:	273
7.5.1 Seating context.....	273
7.5.2 Academic tasks.	275
7.5.3 Interactions.....	278
7.6 Voice of the Child.....	283
7.7 Conclusion	284
Chapter Eight: Conclusion.....	286
8.1 Introduction	286
8.2 Thesis review.....	287
8.3 Overarching Conclusion: The Education-Care Divide	289
8.3.1 From SNA to ‘edu-carer’.....	291
8.3.2 Pupil intervention over assistance/care.	294
8.4 Macro System Recommendations	296
8.4.1 Policy changes.	296
8.4.2 Training and qualifications.....	300
8.4.3 National support services.	300
8.5 Key Recommendations: Exosystem.....	302
8.5.1 School Level: Whole-school approach and leadership.....	302
8.5.2 School self-evaluation and resource allocation.....	303
8.5.3 Whole-school SNA deployment.	305
8.5.4 Collaborative pupil planning.....	305
8.6 Key Recommendation: Mesosystem (Classroom level)	306
8.7 Limitations of the study and future research.....	309
8.7.1 Duration and breadth of the case studies.	309
8.7.2 Voice of the child: Research methodologies.	309
8.7.3 Use of audio-recordings.	310
8.7.4 Expansion of research contexts.....	311
8.7.5 Presentation of findings.	311
8.8 Conclusion.....	312
References	314
Appendices	343

List of Tables

Table 1: Research aim and questions	25
Table 2: The Challenging Behaviour Matrix (Kelly et al., 2004).....	64
Table 3: Inadvertent detrimental effects of excessive paraprofessional proximity (Giangreco, 2010a, p. 5)	84
Table 4: Characteristics of each of the assistant types (Hemmingson et al., 2003, p. 91).....	86
Table 5: A range of supports (listed from most intrusive to least intrusive), as sourced from Causton-Theoharis (2009, p. 42).	92
Table 6: Alternatives to overreliance on Teacher Assistants (Giangreco, 2013)	107
Table 7: Research aim and questions	112
Table 8: Approximate number of students with EBD for whom SNA support was allocated to schools for the academic year 2011-2012, as sourced from NCSE (2012, p. 26).....	123
Table 9: Overview of target pupil data	137
Table 10: Kappa scores for inter-rater reliability analysis	139
Table 11: Overview of case study data.....	149
Table 12: Rationale for selecting an IPA approach to data analysis.....	155
Table 13: Quantification equivalencies employed in data write up, as sourced from Daly et al. (2016, p. 193).....	165
Table 14: Linkages between the IPA analytic process and the use of NVivo11 software	167
Table 15: Age profile of SNA participants	176
Table 16: Participants' satisfaction levels with the availability and quality of training to support their work with pupils with challenging behaviour.....	179
Table 17: A series of Pearson product-moment correlations between SNAs' efficacy in dealing with challenging behaviour and other variables	185
Table 18: Type of academic task undertaken by target pupils across all observed lessons (n = 77).....	187
Table 19: Total target pupil seating context across all cases.....	188

Table 20: SNA classroom context across all cases	189
Table 21: Teacher classroom context across all cases	189
Table 22: Total interaction data across all cases for target pupils and comparison pupils	191
Table 23: Independent samples t-tests comparing total mean interactions, across all cases, for target pupils and comparison pupils, with reference to the class teacher, SNA, peers, and no interaction	192
Table 24: Composition of target pupil and comparison pupil interactions with the teacher and SNA across all cases.....	194
Table 25: Independent samples t-tests comparing mean component interactions, across all cases, for target pupils and comparison pupils with reference to the class teacher, SNA, peers, and no interaction.....	196
Table 26: OPTIC schedule observation data for target pupils across all cases.....	198
Table 27: Paired samples t-tests comparing mean OPTIC schedule behaviours of teachers and SNAs with the target pupil across all cases	199
Table 28: Quantification equivalencies employed in data write up, as sourced from Daly et al. (2016, p. 193).....	200
Table 29: Analysis of case study pupils' challenging behaviour using 'The Challenging Behaviour Matrix' (Kelly et al., 2004)	210
Table 30: Proactive and reactive strategies employed by case study SNAs to support pupils' behavioural care needs	213
Table 31: Target pupils' needs across an array of domains, as described by teachers and SNAs, outlining reduced independence compared to their age-related peers	224

List of Figures

Figure 1: Sample Interactive Factors Framework, as modelled on that in Frederickson and Cameron (1999, as sourced in Frederickson & Cline, 2015)	42
Figure 2: Selection of research directions, as informed by the Value for Money review (DES, 2011a).....	48
Figure 3: Summary of the literature reviewed related to SNA preparedness and the focus of research question one	61
Figure 4: Continuum of Support, as sourced from SESS (2018a)	62
Figure 5: Evolution of interventions for SEBD/EBD in major educational interventions. Source: Cooper and Jacobs (2011, p. 210)	67
Figure 6: Diagrammatic illustration of the 'Bio-Psycho-Social' approach. Source: Cooper and Jacob (2011, p. 57).....	69
Figure 7: Support plan aspect of the 'Positive behaviour support' framework, depicting both proactive and reactive strategies (LaVigna, Wilis, & Marshall, 2009, p. 7)	71
Figure 8: Conceptual framework to describe learning behaviour in school, as sourced from SESS (2011, p. 14, adapted from Powell and Tod, 2004)	76
Figure 9: Summary of the literature reviewed related to SNA support of pupils' behavioural care needs and the focus of research question two	77
Figure 10: A model of Learned Helplessness (Zimmerman, 1990, p. 75).....	94
Figure 11: A model of Learned Hopefulness (Zimmerman, 1990, p. 75)	96
Figure 12: Conceptual model of scaffolding (Van de Pol et al., 2010, p. 274)	100
Figure 13: The scaffolding process, as sourced from Bosanquet et al. (2016, p. 45)	101
Figure 14: Scaffolding framework, outlining the roles and responsibilities of the teacher and the TA, as sourced from Radford et al. (2015, p. 8)	102
Figure 15: 'Planning and Assessing for Independence' model, as sourced from The Education Endowment Foundation (2018, as adapted from Bosanquet et al., 2016)	104
Figure 16: Summary of the literature reviewed related to the role of the SNA and pupils' behavioural care needs and the focus of research question three	109

Figure 17: A framework for research: The interconnection of worldview, design and research methods (adapted from Creswell, 2014b, p. 5).....	113
Figure 18: Convergent parallel mixed methods design, as sourced from Subedi (2016).....	118
Figure 19: Research design, comprising large scale SNA survey, systematic observations and case studies.....	119
Figure 20: Screenshot sample of the initial noting (annotation) in the data analysis process, as sourced from the researcher’s NVivo codebook.....	160
Figure 21: Screenshot of the main sub-ordinate themes, as sourced from the researcher’s NVivo codebook	161
Figure 22: Screenshot of the super-ordinate themes and related sub-themes, as sourced from the researcher’s NVivo codebook	163
Figure 23: Screenshot of the in-case and cross-case analysis across cases 9 to 14, as sourced from the researcher’s NVivo codebook.....	164
Figure 24: Overview of the inter-linked and iterative nature of the IPA analytical process, as sourced from QDA Training (2018).....	166
Figure 25: School type in which SNA participants were employed	177
Figure 26: School level in which SNA participants were employed	177
Figure 27: Participants’ highest level of qualification.....	178
Figure 28: SNAs’ completion of role-specific training.....	179
Figure 29: Participants’ frequency of engagement in planning and feedback meetings with the class teacher.....	180
Figure 30: Most common format of planning and feedback meetings between SNA and class teacher	181
Figure 31: Time scheduling of formal meetings between the SNA and class teacher	181
Figure 32: Participants’ reported awareness of pupils’ targets in personalised planning	182
Figure 33: Length of time participants reported working with the target pupil	185
Figure 34: SNAs’ perceptions of target pupils’ dependence on the SNA, as compared to his/her peers	186

Figure 35: Four super-ordinate themes and related sub-ordinate themes from case study data	201
Figure 36: Superordinate theme 1: SNA preparedness and the relationship between related sub-ordinate themes.....	202
Figure 37: Presentation of different categories of challenging behaviour by the target pupils across case studies, as organised using the ‘Challenging behaviour matrix’ (Kelly, Carey, & McCarthy, 2004)	212
Figure 38: SNAs’ justifications for using close pupil proximity as a preventative strategy with target pupils	215
Figure 39: Considering SNA deployment: Strategies identified during case studies detailing means by which SNAs support/hinder pupil independence	226
Figure 40: Revised 'Interactive Factors Framework' template, as modelled on that in Annan et al. (2013, p. 83)	244
Figure 41: Visual representation of the SNA role in practice occupying a ‘third space’ between care and education.....	290
Figure 42: Intricate relationship between principles of ‘care’ and ‘education’ in supporting a child’s holistic development	291
Figure 43: Visual representation of the edu-carer role.....	293
Figure 44: NBSS Model of Support, as sourced from NBSS (2018b)	297
Figure 45: NBSS Model of Support, highlighting its in-school curricular framework (as sourced from NBSS, 2018 (NBSS, 2018b).....	298
Figure 46: The Policy Cycle, as proposed by Knill and Tosun (2008, p. 10)	299
Figure 47: Summary of the recommendations at each level of the system	308

List of Appendices

Appendix	Title	Page
A	Online SNA Survey.....	345
B	Survey information sheet and consent for participants.....	351
C	Observation schedule.....	352
D	Information letter for Principal.....	357
E	Consent form for Principal	360
F	Information letter for class teacher.....	361
G	Consent form for class teacher.....	364
H	Information letter for SNA.....	365
I	Consent form for SNA	368
J	Information letter for parents.....	369
K	Consent form for parents	372
L	Semi-structured interview schedule teacher.....	373
M	Semi-structured interview schedule SNA.....	375
N	Semi-structured interview schedule pupil.....	376
O	Guiding template for documentary review.....	377
P	Guiding template for field notes.....	379
Q	Information letter for pupils.....	381
R	Pupil letter of assent.....	382
S	Overview of initial noting and coding phase, as sourced from the researcher's NVivo codebook.....	383
T	Overview of sub-ordinate themes, as sourced from the researcher's NVivo codebook.....	385
U	Sample case study report.....	387
V	Sample 'Interactive Factors Framework', completed in light of SNA interview for case no. 12.....	394
W	Sample 'Interactive Factors Framework', completed in light of all case study data for case no. 12.....	395

X	Superordinate themes and sub-ordinate themes, as sourced from the researcher's NVivo codebook.....	396
Y	In-case and cross-case analysis matrix.....	398

Abbreviations

ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
CA	Content Analysis
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DA	Discourse Analysis
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DISS	Deployment and Impact of Support Staff
EBD	Emotional Behavioural Disorder
EPSEN Act	Education for Person with Special Educational Needs Act
FETAC	Further Education and Training Award Council
GOI	Government of Ireland
GT	Grounded Theory
IEP	Individual Education Plan
IF framework	Interactive Factors framework
IGEES	Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service
INTO	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
ISA	Inclusion Support Assistant
MaSt	Making a Statement
NA	Narrative Analysis
NBSS	National Behaviour Support Service
NCSE	National Council for Special Education

NDA	National Disability Authority
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
No.	Number
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPTIC	Observing Pupils and Teachers in Classrooms
PBS	Positive Behaviour Support
PSI	Psychological Society of Ireland
R1	Researcher 1
R2	Researcher 2
SEBD	Severe Emotional Behavioural Disorder
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENSE	Special Educational Needs in Secondary Education
SERC	Special Education Review Committee
SESS	Special Education Support Service
SET	Special Education Teacher
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timed
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
SPHE	Social Personal and Health Education
TA	Teaching Assistant
T.A	Thematic Analysis
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
U.K	United Kingdom
U.S	United States
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Chapter One details the context, rationale, focus and guiding theoretical framework of this thesis. The chapter positions the research within the historical and current policy context related to inclusive education in Ireland 2018, with specific focus on the Special Needs Assistant² (SNA) scheme. A clear rationale for the research is provided, with reference to the dearth of national research in the field and the drive by the Irish Government to review the SNA scheme, as initiated in July 2015. The research aims and questions are presented, as informed by the literature review and a brief overview of the research methodology is provided. Thereafter, the author's previous experiences of being a pupil, teacher, educational psychologist and researcher are critically discussed, in order to 'position' the author explicitly in the research process. Following this, the influence of the author's pragmatic worldview on the research is outlined, including the theoretical framework which guided the author's thinking during the research process. Finally, the chapter concludes with the order of presentation for the thesis.

1.2 Overview of the Research

The educational landscape in Ireland for persons with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities has changed significantly over the past two decades. Fuelled by numerous national and international policy changes (Government of Ireland [GOI], 1998, 2004, 2005), the focus on inclusive education and the rights of pupils with disabilities to be educated in mainstream settings has taken precedence. In line with such policy changes, the need for 'additional supports' within educational settings has been emphasised to facilitate inclusionary practices, particularly that of additional school personnel (Department of Education and Science, 2007; Department of Education and Skills [DES], 2010; GOI, 2004). This has been evidenced by a significant increase in the number of non-teaching support staff in classrooms, not alone in Ireland but so too, across a range of international countries (Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, & Webster, 2009a; Giangreco, 2010a; NCSE, 2018).

² In March 2018, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) recommended that 'Special Needs Assistants' (SNAs) be referred to as 'Inclusion Support Assistants' (ISAs; NCSE, 2018). Throughout this thesis, the term SNAs and ISA may be used interchangeably, with both referring to the non-teaching care role of paraprofessionals in Irish schools.

This study focuses on the Irish education system and particularly, on SNAs working to support pupils with behavioural care needs within mainstream primary schools; henceforth referred to as ‘target pupils’. A review of international models of paraprofessional support shows significant disparity across countries in the duties and functions related to this non-teacher role (Giangreco, Doyle, & Suter, 2014a, 2014b).

Within an Irish context, the SNA role is of a non-teaching nature, whereby SNAs are sanctioned to support pupils with disabilities presenting with significant *care needs*. In this regard, their duties span two interconnected domains, namely, *to support pupils’ care needs* and *to develop pupils’ independence* (DES, 2011a; GOI, 2014; NCSE, 2018). Interestingly, a review of national literature highlights that the SNA scheme has grown exponentially in Ireland over the past 20 years (NCSE, 2018). In contrast, this has been paralleled by a significant lack of applied research in the field to verify the effectiveness of the scheme. Although various studies have highlighted many strengths and benefits of the SNA scheme (DES, 2011a; NCSE, 2018), the majority of national research conducted in this area has pointed to a plethora of issues and tensions inherent in the role and duties of the SNA (DES, 2011a; Elliott, 2004; Logan, 2006). In light of such matters, the need for robust and reliable data related to the SNA scheme was recognised. In particular, the author sought to interrogate the tensions that exist between SNAs’ provision of care support for pupils with behavioural care needs and the means by which SNAs develop such pupils’ level of independence.

1.3 Research Aim and Questions

Informed by a comprehensive review of both national and international literature, the research aim and questions of this thesis are presented in *Table 1* and justified thereafter in *Chapter Two*. Such questions then served to direct the ensuing research methodology, as outlined in *Chapter Three*.

Table 1: Research aim and questions

Research Aim

To obtain a detailed and integrated account of the preparedness and deployment of SNAs when supporting target pupils' behavioural care needs and developing target pupils' independence in mainstream primary schools

Research Questions

- 1. To what degree are SNAs prepared to support target pupils' behavioural care needs and develop target pupils' independence in mainstream primary schools?*
 - 2. What strategies do SNAs use to support target pupils' behavioural care needs in mainstream primary schools?*
 - 3. To what extent do SNAs support/hinder the development of target pupils' independence in mainstream primary schools?*
 - 4. To what extent do the classroom experiences of pupils with behavioural care needs in receipt of SNA support differ to that of their average-attaining peers?*
-

In an effort to answer the research questions, a three-pronged multi-method research design was adopted for this study. Firstly, the use of a large-scale online survey was selected. This methodology aimed to capture a broad national picture of SNAs' perceptions regarding their preparedness to support target pupils' behavioural care needs and develop target pupils' independence across a range of educational contexts. Secondly, the use of a multi-site case study methodology was adopted. This methodology aimed to gain insight into the preparedness and deployment of SNAs to engage in their prescribed role across a range of classroom contexts, with due regard for the similarities and differences across classrooms and school settings. By focusing on the individual voices and lived experiences of class teachers, SNAs and target pupils, in addition to documentary review and field notes, this allowed the 'detail' within each classroom context to be captured (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Thirdly, systematic observations were used as a central component of each case study. This ensured that objective data could be gathered on the moment-by-moment occurrences within each classroom context, with particular focus on themes of behaviour support and pupil independence. Thereafter, by combining observational data across case study classrooms, this facilitated the comparison of data across target pupils and their average-attaining

peers, allowing general trends, similarities and differences to be extrapolated from the data regarding the pupils' classroom experiences. In this way, the use of a mixed-methods research design was viewed as an effective means of capturing in-depth data at a national level, classroom level, and individual, 'person-in-context' level to answer the related research questions.

The focus and design of this research project was influenced by three significant studies from the United Kingdom (U.K) related to Teaching Assistant (TA) support of pupils with disabilities. These including the *Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project* (Blatchford et al., 2008), the *Making a Statement (MaSt) project* (Webster & Blatchford, 2013a) and the *Special Educational Needs in Secondary Education (SENSE) study* (Webster & Blatchford, 2017). The DISS project presents as the world's largest study of TAs and other school support staff, undertaken between 2003 and 2009 in England and Wales (Centre for Inclusive Education, 2017). The project was also named by the *British Educational Research Association* (2014) as one of 40 landmark studies to have had a significant impact on education in the last 40 years. In contrast, the MaSt project (Webster & Blatchford, 2013a) and the SENSE study (Webster & Blatchford, 2017) were designed to explore the everyday educational experiences of pupils with a statement of SEN in mainstream primary schools and mainstream secondary schools in the U.K respectively. Inspired by these three studies and particularly, their selected research methodologies, the current research serves to provide critical dialogue and reflection on the SNA scheme in Ireland. In addition, it also facilitates some cross-country comparisons to be drawn between this study's data and that deduced in studies by its U.K counterparts (Blatchford et al., 2008; Webster & Blatchford, 2013a, 2017).

1.4 Contribution of the Research to the Field

Whilst many findings of this study are in agreement with existing national and international research in the field, the contribution of this study lies in the depth of information gleaned from the mixed-methods approach and the wealth of insight the study provides on the SNA scheme in Ireland. The study provides a detailed and integrated account of the preparedness and deployment of SNAs when supporting target pupils' behavioural care needs and developing target pupils' independence across a range of mainstream primary schools in Ireland.

Firstly, this research presents as the first Irish study to examine the SNA role using systematic observations as a research methodology. Although this methodology had been employed across a range of international studies pertaining to paraprofessionals (Blatchford et al., 2008; Webster & Blatchford, 2013a, 2017), an intensive review of national literature revealed a dearth of comparable research in an Irish context. By employing this research methodology, a comprehensive set of objective, valid and reliable data was obtained on the moment-by-moment classroom experiences of pupils with behavioural care needs in receipt of SNA support, alongside that of their average-attaining peers. In this way, the study supports the comparison of target pupils' classroom experiences with that of their classmates, with due regard for pupils' classwork, classroom interactions, seating context and receipt of academic and behavioural support.

Secondly, the study provides insight into the impact of the SNA scheme on pupil independence and pupils' development of independent living skills. Although the topic of pupil independence forms a central tenet of educational policy documents pertaining to the role of the SNA (Department of Education and Science, 2002; DES, 2014), a review of the literature highlighted how this presents as a particularly under-researched area in an Irish context. By employing a mixed-methods research design, including quantitative and qualitative methods, this study provides a rich insight into the complex relationship between SNAs' provision of care support for pupils with additional needs and SNAs' development of pupils' independence.

Thirdly, the study provides insight into SNAs' support of pupils presenting with behavioural care needs, particularly in relation to SNAs' use of proactive (preventative) and reactive strategies in the mainstream class context. A review of the literature, particularly that of the *Value for Money review of the SNA scheme* (DES, 2011a), highlighted how SNAs' support of pupils' behavioural care needs had previously been identified as a highly complex and problematic area within an Irish context. In particular, the aforementioned study, as conducted by the DES (2011a), called on researchers to further explore this topic to ensure that SNAs play a preventive role in managing pupils' behaviour, in lieu of "containing" potential unwanted behaviours (DES, 2011a, p. 73). Given that one of the main research questions of this study pertained to SNAs' use of strategies to support target pupils' behavioural care needs, it is clear that this research addressed a particular lacuna in the Irish context.

Finally, this research serves to capture the voices of class teachers, SNAs and pupils with behavioural care needs through the use of semi-structured interviews. This presents as a particular strength of the study, whereby it allowed the daily classroom experiences of key classroom personnel to be sought in an authentic manner. In addition, by employing a sophisticated strategy for qualitative data analysis, namely 'Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis' (Smith et al., 2009), this ensured that the researcher could engage in deep levels of interpretation at a range of analytical levels. In this way, detailed insight was gained into *particular* experiential phenomena from the perspective of *particular* people in *particular* contexts grounded in the meeting of researcher and text (Smith, 2004).

Overall, the study's design and findings are deemed to make a significant contribution to the national research base concerning the SNA scheme and specifically, SNAs' support of pupils with behavioural care needs. It is anticipated that the findings of this research will inform future policy and practice within the Irish education system.

1.5 Thesis Terminology

Throughout this thesis, a number of specific terms have been used to communicate literature and research findings. Specifically, the term 'SNA' has been adopted to refer to the non-teaching staff that support pupils with significant care needs in Irish schools. Notably, in March 2018, the NCSE (2018) recommended that SNAs be referred to as 'Inclusion Support Assistants' (ISAs); a title that was deemed to better reflect the increased focus on the development of pupil independence inherent in the role. In addition, it was thought that the ISA title moves away from special needs terminology which is often disliked by pupils and parents (NCSE, 2018). Accordingly, throughout this thesis, the terms SNA and ISA have been used interchangeably with reference to the non-teaching care-support staff within Irish schools. In particular, the term ISA has been employed in the final chapter of this thesis with reference to the future of the SNA scheme. In light of the disparity across countries in relation to the roles and functions of non-teacher educational staff, country-specific terminology has been employed throughout the thesis. For example, the term 'paraprofessional' has been used to represent international models of non-teacher support, particularly in the context of the United States (U.S). With reference to the U.K, the term 'Teaching Assistant' (TA) has been applied, as coined within that jurisdiction. Similarly, pupils with behavioural care needs have

been referred to as ‘target pupils’ throughout this thesis, akin to the terminology used in the DISS project (Blatchford et al., 2008). Finally, for clarification purposes, the Irish primary school system, which presents as the main context of this study, caters for children between the ages of 4 to 12 years, spanning eight academic years. This includes a two-year infant cycle followed by six years from first class to sixth class (Department of Education and Science, 2004). All remaining terminology and acronyms employed throughout the document are outlined in the preface of this thesis.

1.6 The Research Context

In order to fully appreciate the rationale for engaging in this research and the relevance of this study in Ireland 2018, it is firstly necessary to reflect on some of the contextual factors underpinning this research. Such factors relate to the recent move towards inclusive education for children with SEN both nationally and internationally, the rise in resource-based provision for pupils with SEN and the magnitude of the SNA scheme in today’s education system. Each of these matters will be discussed in turn.

1.6.1 A move towards inclusive education.

A reflection on the past two decades highlights the significant changes that have taken place nationally and internationally for persons with SEN and disabilities. In particular, the movement from exclusionary practices towards that of inclusion has been fuelled by an emphasis on de-marginalising the marginalised in society and a quest for social justice for all (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2017). This educational shift has stretched beyond Irish shores. Specifically, an analysis of international discourse highlights a global movement towards the philosophy and practice of inclusion. The rights of persons with special needs to equality of opportunity have been highlighted, not solely in relation to education, but at a larger societal level (UNESCO, 1994). This has been underpinned by the work of the United Nations and their philosophy that, “every learner matters and matters equally” (UNESCO, 2017, p. 12).

The trajectory towards inclusive practices can be traced back over 60 years to the U.S. At that time, both social developments and legal proceedings were seen to challenge the notion of segregated education systems; deemed at the time to stem from a civil rights perspective. An example includes the landmark *Brown versus Board of Education* case (1954, as cited in Egan, 2013), which declared the unconstitutional nature of segregated education systems based on race or skin colour. Such cases fuelled subsequent public laws in the U.S, including the *Education of All Handicapped Children Act* (United States Congress, 1975). This law stipulated that schools were required to guarantee a free and appropriate public education for all children with disabilities, in the 'least restrictive environment', to the maximum extent appropriate.

Based on such significant changes in the U.S, an international shift towards integration, and later inclusion, began to occur. This was most notably underpinned by *The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education* (UNESCO, 1994). This document, adopted by the World Conference on Special Needs Education, saw 92 governments and 25 international organisations convene in Salamanca, Spain, to consider the policy shifts required to promote inclusive education for all. Outlined in this document, the right of every individual to education was emphasised, thereby reaffirming the *1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. More notably, the document posited the principle of 'Education for All', whereby the rights of children with SEN were outlined in terms of inclusive schooling. A number of guiding principles in this framework included the right of such children, "to access regular schools...accommodate[d] within a child-centred pedagogy capable of meeting these needs" (UNESCO, 1994, p. viii). This inclusive orientation was viewed as the most effective means of building an inclusive society so that long-term, those with and without disabilities can successfully live, work and be together in the community as adults. In this regard, Causton-Theoharis (2009) highlights the need for inclusive schools to promote intellectual growth, alongside issues of independence and peer-interaction.

Within an Irish context, the concept of inclusive education can be viewed as a much newer phenomenon than that reflected by its international counterparts. In fact, a number of authors have highlighted the cautious, pragmatic approach adopted by the Irish Government towards its legislative commitment to such principles. MacGiolla Phádraig (2007, p. 289) coined the nation "a latecomer to inclusion", noting how the weigh-up of economic considerations with educational principles served to delay Ireland's arrival to this movement. This is evident whereby in the

1980 *White Paper on Educational Development*, the government stressed the complexity surrounding the notion of 'integration' (GOI, 1980) and later, justified shortcomings in this field in light of the country's demographic and geographical presentation at the time (European Commission, 1991). Nonetheless, the 1990s bore witness to significant developments within the country from segregated to more inclusive practices. In particular, this was fuelled by the work of the *Special Education Review Committee* (SERC), a group established by the then Minister for Education, Mary O'Rourke. Their purpose was, "to report and make recommendations on the educational provision for children with SEN" (GOI, 1993, p. 15). Based on seven guiding principles, the final report highlighted the right of all children to an appropriate education, including those with SEN. Echoing key tenets of the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), the report also emphasised the "additional supports" that should be made available for children with SEN, including additional support teachers, support services and SNAs. This was deemed necessary to ensure that such children receive an appropriate education in "ordinary classes" (p. 20).

Recommendations of the SERC report can be viewed as one of the main catalysts for educational change in Ireland, whereby the subsequent decade witnessed an unprecedented transformation in Irish educational policy. Example of such policy documents include *A Strategy for Equality* (GOI, 1996), *The Education Act* (GOI, 1998), *The Equal Status Act* (GOI, 2000a), *The Education for Person with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act* (GOI, 2004) and *The Disability Act* (GOI, 2005), to name but a few. In particular, the EPSEN Act highlighted the foundational aim of inclusive education within Ireland in terms of, "...assist[ing] children with SEN to leave school with the skills necessary to participate, to the level of their capacity, in an inclusive way in the social and economic activities of society and to live independent and fulfilled lives" (GOI, 2004, p. 5). In spite of such changes, one must remain mindful that policy commitments to inclusion do not automatically guarantee paralleled proceedings in working practices. This cautionary message has been highlighted by many authors, including Shevlin, Kenny, and Loxley (2008), whereby research has highlighted numerous disparities between the enactment of enabling legislation in Ireland and the effective implementation of inclusionary principles on the ground. In this regard, Rose, Shevlin, Winter, and O'Raw (2010) called on researchers to interrogate this issue. They highlighted the need for researchers to examine the ways in which policy is being translated into working practices to ensure successful educational outcomes can occur for all.

1.6.2 Overview of the SNA scheme.

Reflecting on the principle of inclusion, the issue of additional structures and supports within the system also took precedence. In fact, throughout almost all policy documents related to inclusion, the need for a continuum of supports and services for schools is highlighted (GOI, 1998; Rix, Sheehy, Fletcher-Campbell, Crisp, & Harper, 2013; UNESCO, 1994). Such supports are deemed necessary in order to match the continuum of special needs encountered within schools and to facilitate inclusionary practices. Notably, one of the largest support systems implemented in the Irish education system presents as the SNA scheme. Origins of the SNA scheme can be traced back to the introduction of the *Child-Care Assistant Scheme* which commenced in the 1979/1980 school year. This scheme, initiated exclusively in special schools, sought to provide non-teaching assistance for class teachers (DES, 2011a). However, following the introduction of national inclusive educational policy, the need to expand this scheme to mainstream schools appeared warranted. In line, the Government established SERC in 1991; a committee granted the task of reviewing existing SEN services in Ireland and making recommendations for their future development (GOI, 1993). Based on SERC advice to increase said posts across educational sectors, the press release on 5th November 1998 formed a significant juncture in the landscape of Irish SEN resource provision in education. Specifically, the then Minister for Education and Science, Mr. Micheál Martin, declared a major initiative in special education, providing the “first ever automatic supports” for children with SEN across special schools, special classes and ordinary schools (DES, 1998, as cited in DES, 2011a, p. 127). This support was deemed necessary to allow such children, “to participate fully in the education system...and to enable them to reach their potential” (pp. 127-128). In addition to extra teaching hours, this announcement sanctioned the introduction of a formalised system of childcare support for all children with SEN assessed as requiring such support.

Echoing key tenets of the original *Child-Care Assistant Scheme*, *Circular 07/02* verified such changes in official departmental documentation. The role of the SNA was outlined, “...to assist school authorities in making suitable provision for a pupil or pupils with special care needs arising from a disability” (Department of Education and Science, 2002, p. 1). Based on this scheme, three categories of significant care needs were deemed eligible for SNA support consisting of pupils with:

- (1) A significant medical need
- (2) A significant impairment of physical or sensory function
- (3) Where the pupil's behaviour is such that they are a danger to themselves or to other pupils.

(Department of Education and Science, 2002, p. 2)

From the outset of the scheme, the 'non-teaching nature' of the SNA role formed a central tenet of Irish policy documents. This aspect of the Irish SNA scheme stands in stark contrast to numerous international models of paraprofessional support whereby TA duties form a central component of the paraprofessional's role. Examples include auxiliary educational roles in the U.K, Finland and Italy, to name but a few (Giangreco & Doyle, 2007; Giangreco et al., 2014a). In contrast, the Irish system saw such duties to lie outside of the SNA remit and rather, with the class teacher and special education teacher (SET), where required. Akin to original documentation of *Circular 10/76*, the duties of the SNA post were detailed to include pupil and classroom assistance, for the main part, in light of the child's specific care needs, with a 'care role' taking precedence over that of a TA role (Department of Education and Science, 2002).

In light of such policy changes, subsequent years saw a remarkable growth in the number of SNAs in the Irish education system, with total numbers increasing from 2,988 in 2001 to 10,342 in 2009 (DES, 2011a). This was paralleled by a significant increase in expenditure in this domain, with expenses rising by 922% over the same period and estimated to cost the Exchequer over €340m per annum (DES, 2011a). Although a cap at 10,575 SNA posts was introduced in December 2010 in light of the National Recovery Plan of Ireland's economic recession, subsequent press releases and national budgets highlighted reneged thinking on such decisions. This was evident in educational budgets over ensuing years, where each year was met with a significant number of additional SNA posts. In fact, recent data from the DES outlines that the total number of SNAs now stands at almost 15,000; the largest number of SNAs ever in the Irish education system (DES, 2018b). This presents as a 42% increase in the number of SNAs since 2011, accruing to a total gross annual cost of €524 million (DES, 2018b). It is notable that this growth in SNA posts is deemed to mirror the expanding number of paraprofessionals in educational settings in several western countries (Blatchford, Russell, & Webster, 2012; Bourke, 2009; Giangreco, Broer, & Suter, 2011), as well as the growth of participation of children with SEN in inclusive educational settings (DES, 2017a).

1.7 Research Rationale

1.7.1 Dearth of national SNA research.

In spite of the significant increase in SNA personnel over recent decades, related research during that same period was slow to follow suit. This research lacuna has been recognised across an array of publications, both nationally (Elliott, 2004; Logan, 2006) and internationally (Giangreco, 2010a, 2010b; Giangreco, Edelman, Broer, & Doyle, 2001). In fact, Giangreco (2010b), a renowned U.S researcher and author in the field, encapsulated the irony that underpins the ever-expanding deployment of paraprofessionals in education, considering the lack of related research. He stated:

Given the contemporary emphasis on theoretically grounded and evidenced-based approaches in education, it is interesting and somewhat perplexing that teacher assistant utilization has advanced steadily and their roles have expanded instructionally despite lacking both a theoretically defensible foundation and a substantive evidence base.

(Giangreco, 2010b, p. 341)

Reflecting on the Irish context, this matter was perceived as particularly concerning considering the significant annual increase in SNA personnel in the Irish education system over a 20 year period (DES, 2011a; Fórsa, 2018). Based on this matter, the need for further research in this domain was imperative. More specifically, the author recognised the minimal research that had examined SNAs' support of pupils with behavioural care needs in an Irish context, in addition to some methodological issues in previous research. Although a range of studies had examined the role of the SNA in providing care support to pupils with SEN/disabilities, the specific focus on pupils with behavioural care needs had been either neglected in previous research or subsumed within much larger research questions. Given the complexities of understanding and effectively supporting pupils displaying challenging behaviour, coupled with the number of pupils with behavioural care needs in Ireland in receipt of SNA support (Irish Government Economic & Evaluation Service [IGEES], 2016), the need for in-depth research in this field was deemed paramount.

In addition, the author identified the necessity for more systematic research on the relationship between SNA-pupil support and the development of pupils' level of independence. Although this matter had been researched to some degree in an international domain (Egilson & Traustadottir, 2009; Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, & Macfarland, 1997; Harris, 2011; Hemmingsson, Borell, & Gustavsson, 2003), a

review of national literature highlighted that the level of related research in Ireland was but minimal (Elliott, 2004; Keating & O'Connor, 2012; Logan, 2006; Shevlin et al., 2008). Given the discrete focus in Irish policy on SNAs' development of pupil independence (DES, 2014), the need for in-depth research in this area was warranted. Accordingly, the dual focus within this research on SNAs' support of pupils with behavioural care needs, coupled with SNAs' development of pupils' independence, appeared both topical and necessary.

1.7.2 National review of the SNA scheme.

Less than nine months into commencing this PhD journey, the rationale for engaging in research on the SNA scheme was further endorsed by an announcement by the Minister for Education and Skills. Specifically, in July 2015, Minister Richard Bruton outlined a national drive in Ireland to review the SNA scheme. At that time, the Government emphasised the need for "robust and reliable data" to ensure that the SNA scheme continued to meet its objectives and that resources were being utilised effectively and efficiently, in line with the guidelines (NCSE, 2015a, p. 1). This national drive was subsequently characterised by a *Focused Policy Assessment of data on SNAs* (IGEES, 2016) and a comprehensive review of the SNA scheme, as conducted by the NCSE over the 2016/2017 academic year. The main focus of this review was to identify and form recommendations on how the additional care needs of pupils, which are over and above those needs that could be reasonably expected to be managed by teaching staff, should be met. In addition, the review aimed to identify and recommend the most appropriate form of support options to provide better outcomes for pupils with SEN who have additional care needs, having regard for the significant amount of State investment in this area (NCSE, 2016a).

In light of this Governmental announcement, the current research project was deemed to firmly align with national research priorities at the time. From the outset, it was anticipated that engagement in this research could aid to add to the 'robust and reliable data' sought within an Irish context, thereby supporting ensuing national policy changes for the betterment of all pupils. It is notable that as part of the NCSE review of the SNA scheme, expertise was sought from numerous national bodies and researchers in the field. In light of the breadth and depth of this research project, the author was invited to present to the NCSE Council in October 2016, focusing on the key tenets of this research and international perspectives on the use

of paraprofessionals. Thereafter, the author was invited to act as external peer-reviewer on a number of research outputs produced by the NCSE to inform the comprehensive review of the SNA scheme. Such developments clearly acknowledge the significance of this research project in Ireland's education system, serving to validate the motives for undertaking the same.

It must be highlighted that on 30th May 2018, the NCSE published its recommendations to the Minister for Education and Skills arising from the comprehensive review of the SNA scheme (NCSE, 2018). At that point in time, all data for this research had been collected, analysed and written up. Nonetheless, due to the significance of the NCSE research in an Irish context, findings from the comprehensive review were subsequently incorporated across this thesis. In this way, the current research study is positioned clearly within the most up-to-date research and policy context, both nationally and internationally.

1.8 Autobiography

Commencing this research project, the author was aware of the need to 'position' herself in the research. This concept, referred to as *reflexivity*, occurs whereby the researcher makes his/her position explicit and is conscious of the biases, values and experiences that he/she brings to a qualitative piece of research (Creswell, 2014a). Notably, Braun and Clarke (2013) outline the divergences between quantitative and qualitative research in terms of objectivity and subjectivity. They highlight that whilst objectivity is valued in a quantitative paradigm, subjectivity is positively valued in a qualitative paradigm. Considering the latter, qualitative research is understood to be a subjective process whereby the researcher brings his/her own history, values, assumptions and perspectives into the research. Through this viewpoint, any knowledge produced from the research process serves to reflect the subjective experiences of both the researcher and the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell, 2014a). To support this process, the author reflected on personal experiences of being a pupil, teacher, educational psychologist and researcher, noting the impact of each of these experiences on her worldview.

1.8.1 The 'I' as Pupil.

Reflecting on my experiences as a pupil in primary and secondary school, I recognise the limited exposure that I had to inclusive education. Having attended an all-girls convent primary and secondary school, my schooling was homogenous in nature. At primary level, there were no pupils with explicit signs of SEN within my school. Similarly, at post-primary level, I was in a streamed higher-level class, with limited exposure to any pupils with learning difficulties or additional needs. Across all of my schooling, SNAs were not a feature of provision. Rather, my only recollections of special education related to a small number of classmates who attended 'remedial teaching' throughout my primary school years. Reflecting on such memories, I recalled the way in which those pupils had been collected daily from our classroom by the remedial teacher. I remembered how this tuition was often scheduled during the less academic subjects such as art and music. I recalled the way in which this withdrawal model had highlighted those pupils as being 'different'. What did they learn in that classroom? What was so 'special' about that tuition? I also considered how the scheduling of those lessons, in fact, appeared punitive in nature, whereby those pupils 'endured' additional maths and English as we enjoyed the 'fun' classroom lessons of music and art. Having reflected on this experience, I noted the way in which the withdrawal model had, in fact, coloured my view of my peers. I had come to view those pupils as being 'different', as though they required 'special' teaching to enable them to keep abreast of the class content. I wondered what impact this withdrawal model had on the pupils themselves. Did they feel punished as they left the classroom? Did they feel 'different?' I also queried the effectiveness of this withdrawal model whereby the same pupils continued to avail of that additional support right throughout their primary school years. Would a more inclusive approach to pupil support, such as through in-class support or team teaching, have afforded the pupils the same level of provision? If that had been the case, would I have viewed the pupils differently? Would they have viewed themselves differently?

Based on such reflections, I recognise how this primary school experience shaped my view of additional educational resources. Rather than viewing my peers' remedial teaching through the lens of 'pupil support', I instead came to view it through the lens of 'disability'; a support that served to marginalise and segregate my peers and highlight them as being 'different'. Notably, this issue is acknowledged throughout the literature. For example, Egan (2013) notes how the withdrawal model of support can be completely at odds with inclusive policies, such

that it can reinforce social inequalities in classrooms. Throughout the research process, I recognised my heightened awareness of the implicit messages that additional resources can communicate in educational settings, conscious of how the organisation and deployment of resources must be carefully considered to ensure positive implications on principles of inclusion and on pupils' perceptions of the same.

1.8.2 The 'I' as Teacher.

Beyond my experiences as a pupil, my work as a primary school teacher also required consideration. Having worked for a number of years as a teacher in a mainstream primary school, my teaching career afforded me an array of direct and indirect experiences with SNAs. On one hand, I experienced the merits of a highly skilled SNA within my classroom. This was evidenced both in terms of supporting my work as a teacher and more specifically, in aiding the development of an array of pupils with significant care needs. Throughout the school day, the SNA provided appropriate levels of support to the pupils under her care. In terms of behaviour management, the SNA utilised an array of preventative strategies to support the relevant pupils, intervening appropriately, where required and preventing the escalation of problematic behaviours. In addition, the SNA was highly skilled at reacting to behavioural outbursts, serving to calm pupils and de-escalate any episodes of challenging behaviour with minimal classroom disruption. The SNA also displayed strong awareness of the need to foster independence in the pupils with whom she worked. This was evidenced by the way in which she positioned herself away from the pupils, yet effectively provided contingent support to pupils, where required, in light of their specific needs. This behaviour was also recognised in the graduated approach she employed to pupil prompting, which again, always appeared in line with pupils' levels of need. In contrast to this skilled practice, I was highly cognisant of some SNA practices within the school that were less constructive in nature. For example, I had observed an array of ineffective behaviour management approaches executed by teachers and SNAs alike. Moreover, I had observed a range of SNA-pupil interactions that appeared to indicate potential over-support of the SNA for the pupil. I questioned the potential development of pupil dependence on the SNA as a direct result of such intense levels of support.

Based on such reflections, I was conscious of the juxtaposing views I brought to this research in relation to SNA provision. On one hand, I recognised the distinct merits of the SNA scheme for teachers and pupils alike, whereby SNAs can aid to support inclusive practices in schools. In contrast, I was conscious of my reservations in relation to the SNA scheme, whereby at times, SNA support can appear counterintuitive to inclusive practices and positive pupil development. Notably, such conflicting views are in line with research in the field, whereby various publications have highlighted both the strengths and limitations of the SNA scheme and paraprofessional support in terms of principles of inclusion (Blatchford et al., 2009a; DES, 2011a; Giangreco, 2010b). By reflecting on and bringing awareness to my past experiences, I aimed to reduce potential biases that I would bring to the research process (Creswell, 2014a).

1.8.3 The 'I' as 'Educational Psychologist' and researcher.

Having engaged in further studies in Educational Psychology after teaching, I view the 'I' as Educational Psychologist to be synonymous with the 'I' as researcher. Over the course of my Educational Psychology training, the focus on problem analysis and resolution highlighted to me how situations are invariably complex and dynamic, involving multiple interacting perceptions and actions. In addition, the commitment to evidence-based practice and scientific research within my training has guided my approach to research and practice. In this regard, the American Psychological Association defines evidence-based practice as the "integration of the best available research with clinical expertise in the context of patient characteristics, culture, and preferences" (2006, p. 273). This is supported by Frederickson (2002) who outlines how educational psychologists must seek to integrate professional expertise with best available external evidence from systematic research. Having reflected on this central tenet of my Educational Psychology training, I am aware of how I constantly strive for best practice in education. I particularly value reflective practice based on critically evaluated, best available research. Throughout this research project, I was cognisant of how my Educational Psychology worldview aided me to combine the best available research with my professional expertise in making inferences from the data. It also caused me to critically reflect on observed practices in schools and caused me to query the degree to which theoretical frameworks guide SNAs' practices with pupils. Notably, several researchers and psychologists have emphasised the fundamental link between research, theory and practice in education in determining the nature of

educational practice and related reflections (Higgs, 2013; Oonk, 2009; Schön, 1983).

Finally, based on my Educational Psychology training, I was cognisant to ensure principles of reliability and validity lay at the heart of this research process, stemming from psychology's focus on rigour (Miller & Todd, 2002).

1.9 Theoretical Framework

Undertaking this research, the author was conscious of the need to adopt a clear theoretical framework to guide the work. Firstly, the author recognised how her pragmatic worldview aided to inform and shape this research. Pragmatism derives from the work of Peirce, Mead, James and Dewey and is concerned with focusing attention on the research problem (Cherryholmes, 1992). Mertens (2015) details how such early philosophers rejected the scientific notion that social science inquiry was able to access the 'truth' about the real world solely by virtue of a single scientific method. Rather, this approach highlights the importance of practical thinking and "workability" of the research approach (Morgan, 2007, p. 66). In selecting the methodology for this research project, a pragmatic approach was adopted, whereby focus was placed on the most appropriate methods of research for studying the issue at hand. This approach considers practice, rather than theory, to be the driving force for inquiry (Norwich, 2013). In this way, pragmatism ensured that I, as researcher, was free to choose the methods, techniques and procedures that best met the needs and purpose of the research (Creswell, 2014a). Further details related to the pragmatic approach and this study's research methodologies are presented in *Chapter Three*.

In addition to a pragmatic approach, the author also used the *Interactive Factors (IF) framework* (Frederickson & Cameron, 1999, as cited in Frederickson & Cline, 2015) as a structure to guide her conceptual thinking throughout the research process, particularly when reflecting on data within each case study. Derived from the causal modelling framework of Morton and Frith (1995), the IF framework highlights the complex and multi-faceted nature of individual children's needs or developmental problems. The framework shows the biological, cognitive and behavioural factors for an individual that represent what is known about the complexity of that individual's particular pattern of strengths and needs. In addition, the framework recognises the operation of environmental and other factors that may be influencing the individual's learning and development (Frederickson & Cline,

2015). *Figure 1* presents an IF framework template, as modelled on that in Frederickson and Cameron (1999, as cited in Frederickson & Cline, 2015). Annan et al. (2013) outline how use of the IF framework allows for all of the major “conceptually relevant” problem dimensions to be identified, together with other significant aspects of the problem situation for which there is evidence (p. 84). Notably, Frederickson and Cline (2015) highlight that in recent years, the IF framework has undergone small but significant changes to that originally proposed by Morton and Frith (1995). In particular, greater conceptual space has been afforded to environmental factors to highlight the centrality of the environment in approaches to intervention and management.

Although the IF framework is typically used to guide hypotheses and interventions in clinical settings, the value that this framework could bring to this research process was recognised. Firstly, this study sought to explore SNAs’ preparedness, with due regard for SNAs’ knowledge and understanding of target pupils’ behavioural care needs. Accordingly, the IF framework was deemed an appropriate conceptual framework for use when analysing SNAs’ interview responses. Specifically, did SNAs present a holistic understanding of pupils’ behavioural care needs, with due regard for each level of the framework, where relevant? Secondly, this study sought to explore what strategies SNAs use to support target pupils’ behavioural care needs in mainstream primary schools. Again, the IF framework was viewed as highly relevant in analysing the different intervention strategies underway for the pupil within the class setting, with due regard for addressing the relevant biological, cognitive, behavioural and environmental factors. By ensuring that the IF framework was used by the researcher, particularly at a conceptual level, this acknowledged the importance of considering *all* factors when exploring SNAs’ understanding and support of pupils with behavioural care needs in mainstream primary schools. It was anticipated that by focusing on all interacting factors in the research process, particularly during data collection, analysis and the subsequent write-up, a more holistic, comprehensive and valid picture of the research context and related findings would be achieved.

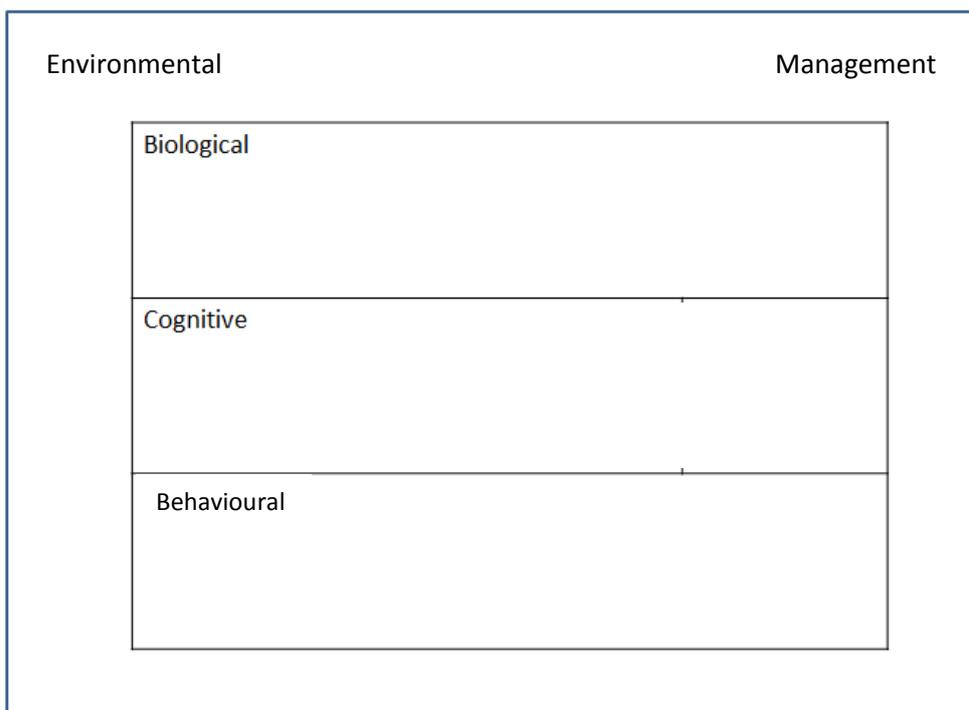


Figure 1: Sample Interactive Factors Framework, as modelled on that in Frederickson and Cameron (1999, as sourced in Frederickson & Cline, 2015)

1.10 Order of Presentation

This study is presented over eight chapters.

Chapter One detailed the context, rationale, focus and guiding theoretical framework of this thesis. The chapter sought to position the research within the historical and current policy context related to inclusive education in Ireland 2018, with specific focus on the SNA scheme. A clear rationale for the research was provided, with reference to the dearth of national research in the field and the drive by the Irish Government to review the SNA scheme, as initiated in July 2015. The research aims and questions of the applied research were presented, as informed by the subsequent literature review, and a brief overview of the research methodology was provided. Thereafter, the author's 'positionality' in the research process was made explicit. Following this, the influence of a pragmatic worldview to the research was outlined, including the theoretical framework which guided the author's thinking and approach to the research process.

Chapter Two presents a critical review of national and international literature related to the SNA scheme and the wider context of paraprofessional support of pupils with disabilities/SEN in educational contexts. Firstly, the national policy context of the SNA scheme is outlined, with due regard for the most recent educational *Circular 0030/2014* (DES, 2014). Following this, national and international research is presented and critiqued, based on an in-depth review of the literature. Where relevant, underpinning educational and psychological theories are forwarded, with the aim of linking theory, research and practice. In particular, the literature review highlights the gaps in national research related to the preparedness and deployment of SNAs when supporting target pupils' behavioural care needs and developing target pupils' independence in mainstream primary schools in Ireland. In this way, it provides context and a clear rationale for this study's chosen research questions and ensuing methodology.

Chapter Three presents a detailed description of the research design adopted for this study, including an overview and justification of the methodologies employed. The chapter begins by describing the philosophical underpinnings of the research which served to guide the research process. The research design, sampling strategy and data collection methods are outlined. Following this, the data analysis process is presented, both in terms of quantitative and qualitative data approaches. A clear rationale is provided for the specific qualitative data analysis methodology selected, in light of alternative methodological approaches. Issues related to the quality of the research are forwarded, including limitations of the study and matters of validity and reliability. Finally, the chapter concludes by outlining ethical considerations associated with the research.

The findings of this research project are presented across three chapters. *Chapter Four* presents findings related to the online SNA large-scale survey, as based on quantitative data analysis. This includes both descriptive analyses and correlational statistics. Such findings serve to provide a macro view of SNAs' perceptions on their role in supporting pupils with behavioural care needs, with particular focus on the areas of preparedness and deployment.

Chapter Five presents quantitative findings related to the systematic observation of target pupils in their classroom contexts. Additional analyses serve to compare and contrast the classroom experiences of the target pupils to that of their average-attaining peers, as based on the systematic observations.

Chapter Six presents findings related to the case study data, with particular focus on the semi-structured interview data and documentary analysis. Such findings are based on qualitative data analysis, as based on the principles of 'Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis' (IPA; Smith, 1996; Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008). Key findings from the research are presented in terms of the super-ordinate themes, with reference to related sub-ordinate themes. Within case and cross-case analysis is presented, interwoven with raw transcript extracts and detailed analytic commentary. Using a measurement and weighting criteria framework, as adopted from Daly et al. (2016), the frequency with which different themes occurred, both at case and participant levels, is outlined to enhance the validity of findings.

Chapter Seven presents a discussion of the key research findings. This chapter serves to synthesise the findings from *Chapters Four – Six*, including the online large-scale survey, systematic observations and case studies. In this way, it provides a detailed and integrated account of the preparedness and deployment of SNAs when supporting target pupils' behavioural care needs and developing target pupils' independence in mainstream primary schools in Ireland. Comparisons are drawn between the findings and the extant literature in the field, both nationally and internationally.

The final chapter, *Chapter Eight*, serves to conclude the thesis. This chapter outlines the key findings of the study and draws conclusions and recommendations for the role of the SNA/ISA, both in terms of policy and practice. Reference is also made to the recommendations outlined in the *comprehensive review of the SNA scheme* (NCSE, 2018), thereby aligning the research with national priorities in Ireland. Limitations of the study are acknowledged and avenues for future research identified. The chapter concludes by highlighting the distinct contributions that this study makes to the existing body of research in the field.

1.11 Conclusion

This chapter presented the context, rationale, focus and guiding theoretical framework of this thesis. The chapter sought to position the research within the historical and current policy context related to inclusive education in Ireland 2018. A clear rationale for the research was provided, with reference to the dearth of national research in the field and the national drive by the Irish Government to

review the SNA scheme. The research aim and questions were outlined, including a brief overview of the research methodology. Following this, the positionality of the author was described and the theoretical framework adopted for the research process outlined. Finally, the chapter concluded with the order of presentation for the thesis.

Chapter Two will now follow, constituting the literature review.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

To support the inclusion of pupils with SEN and disabilities in education, paraprofessionals are increasingly being employed in mainstream classrooms (Blatchford et al., 2012; Egilson & Traustadottir, 2009; Sharma & Salend, 2016; Webster & Blatchford, 2017). In tandem with this growth in magnitude of paraprofessionals, the related research base is deemed to be at an “emerging” stage, both nationally and internationally (Giangreco et al., 2014a; Sharma & Salend, 2016, p. 118). *Chapter Two* seeks to provide a critical review of national and international literature related to the SNA scheme and the wider context of paraprofessional support of pupils with disabilities/SEN in educational contexts.

A structured approach has been adopted for this chapter. Firstly, the national policy context of the SNA scheme will be presented, with due regard for the most recent educational *Circular 0030/2014* (DES, 2014). Following this, national and international research will be outlined and critiqued, based on an in-depth review of the literature. Where relevant, underpinning educational and psychological theories will be forwarded, with the aim of linking theory, research and practice. It is envisaged that this literature review will highlight gaps in national research related to the preparedness and deployment of SNAs when supporting target pupils’ behavioural care needs and developing target pupils’ independence in mainstream primary schools in Ireland. In particular, the literature review will focus on the areas of preparedness, behaviour support and pupil independence in light of the role of the SNA. It is intended that this literature review will provide a context and clear rationale for this study’s chosen research questions and ensuing methodology.

2.2 National Policy Context

As previously outlined in *Chapter One*, the SNA scheme commenced in Ireland in 1998, aimed at supporting the care needs of pupils with SEN, “to participate fully in the education system...and to enable them to reach their potential” (DES, 1998, as cited in DES, 2011a, pp. 127-128). From an Irish perspective, early research in the field was particularly sparse and somewhat limited in focus. Initial studies outlined some strengths of the scheme, such as the provision of an “extra pair of hands” in

schools for children with SEN (Lawlor & Cregan, 2003, p. 83). In contrast, many early studies highlighted a number of significant and controversial issues inherent in the system. In particular, these pertained to the shifting role of the SNA from the original objectives of the scheme, with a distinct discrepancy identified across many studies between the prescribed 'care role' of the SNA and that of actual practices in schools (Carrig, 2004; Elliott, 2004; Lawlor & Cregan, 2003; Logan, 2006; O'Neill & Rose, 2008; Shevlin et al., 2008; Spens, 2013). For example, many concerns pertained to adopted duties of the SNA including learning-support or teaching-assistant roles, tasks related to literacy, numeracy, speech and language and social-skill development (Carrig, 2004), lesson adaptation or interpretation, individual/group assistance with educational activities (Logan, 2006) as well as therapeutic, behaviour management and pedagogical activities (Rose & O'Neill, 2009). Interestingly, this issue of 'role clarification' has been recognised as a longstanding international issue pertaining to the use of paraprofessionals/TAs in education, as identified recently by Giangreco et al. (2014b) in their review of international peer-reviewed articles between 2005 and 2012.

In light of such issues, a review of the SNA scheme was undertaken by the Irish government in 2009, entitled *A Value for Money Review of Expenditure on the SNA Scheme* (DES, 2011a); henceforth referred to as the *Value for Money* review. Using a variety of methodological and analytical approaches, this review forms the largest applied research data-source on the SNA scheme in Ireland, with data collected from a stratified random sample of 100 Irish schools, spanning mainstream primary, post-primary and special school settings. Although it was beyond the scope of this research project to address each finding and recommendation of the review, a selection of key findings and recommendations from the *Value for Money* review (DES, 2011a) were central in directing the focus of this research, spanning SNA preparedness, SNAs' support of pupils' behavioural care needs and SNAs' development of pupils' independence. These are presented in *Figure 2*.

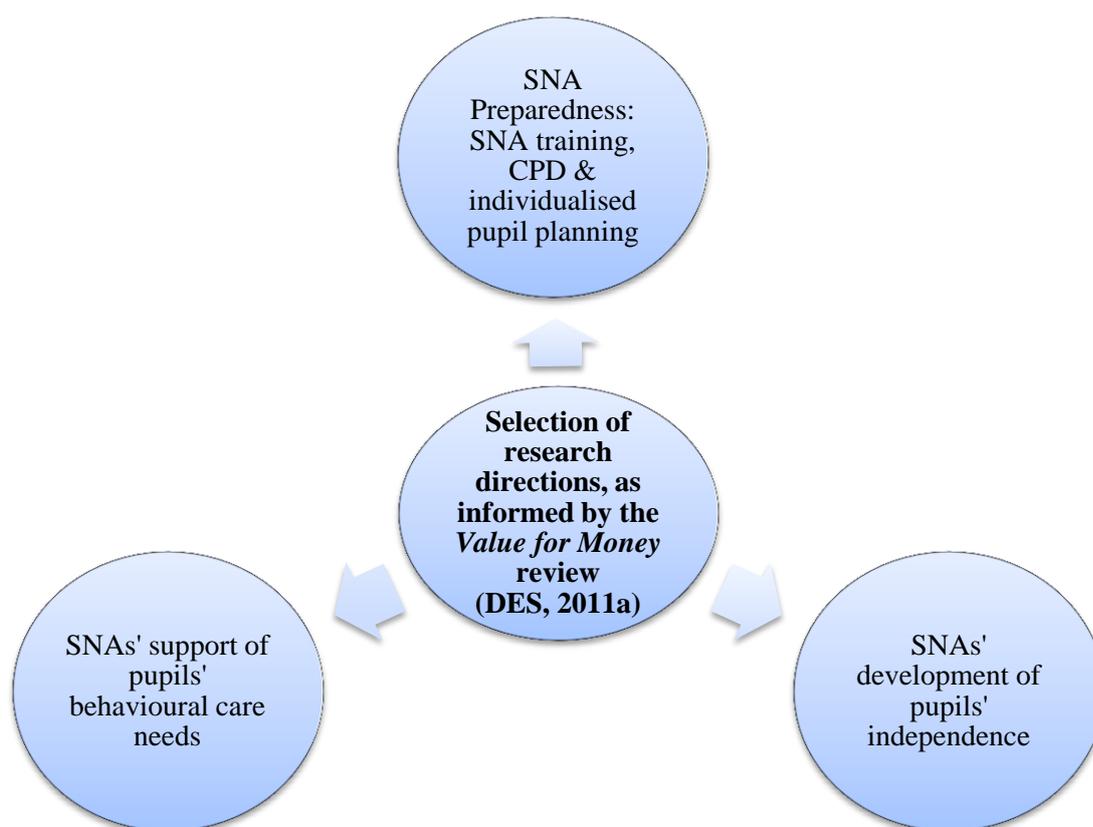


Figure 2: Selection of research directions, as informed by the Value for Money review (DES, 2011a)

On a positive note, findings indicated that the SNA scheme was effective in assisting schools to meet the care needs of pupils with disabilities, having contributed significantly to the enhancement of pupils' experiences and inclusion in schools (DES, 2011a). In contrast, the review pointed to a number of controversial issues inherent in the scheme. Firstly, the issue of *SNA preparedness* was highlighted, whereby the review queried the training needs of SNAs. Moreover, the review highlighted how SNA support should be linked to pupils' individualised planning, with a focus on the proactive development of pupils' independence. Secondly, particular concerns were raised in relation to the role of the SNA in supporting pupils with *behavioural care needs*. Specifically, findings reported considerable SNA involvement in the management of pupil behaviour, with concerns related to SNAs' knowledge of when and how to intervene in such scenarios, both in terms of proactive (preventative) and reactive strategies (DES, 2011a). Thirdly, the report placed significant weight on the issue of *pupil*

independence and the role of the SNA. Based on international literature (rather than applied research in an Irish context), the authors outlined how excess paraprofessional support may lead to an over-dependence by the pupil on such support, a loss of opportunity for the pupil to develop independent skills and an over-reliance by the class teacher on the pupil having such support. This was viewed to have particularly negative implications for pupils' classroom experiences and development across an array of domains, including reduced interactions with the class teacher and other pupils, interference with teacher engagement and the social isolation of target pupils. Stemming from such matters, the report called for a reinstatement of the role of the SNA by the Irish government. Moreover, the report highlighted the need for further research in the field, particularly in relation to SNAs' support of pupils' behavioural care needs and the proactive development of pupils' independent living skills. Outlined in unambiguous language, the report stated: "...the involvement of SNAs in the management of students' behaviour requires further scrutiny" (DES, 2011a, p. 78).

In response to such issues, the GOI issued a new and more comprehensive circular on the SNA scheme in 2014, namely *Circular 0030/2014* (DES, 2014). This circular placed strong focus on the dual role of the SNA, both in terms of supporting pupils' care needs and the development of pupils' independence (DES, 2014). The circular restated the role and duties of the SNA in supporting pupils with behavioural care needs, with particular focus placed on SNAs' support of pupils through both preventative and reactive strategies. Moreover, the issue of pupil independence was emphasised, including appropriate and inappropriate models of pupil support to develop pupils' independent skills and reduce SNA deployment posing negative implications for pupils' daily classroom experiences. By clarifying and restating the purpose of the SNA scheme within this circular, it was hoped that SNA deployment would align with the original objectives of the scheme, rather than that identified in the *Value for Money* review (DES, 2011a).

Stemming from this circular, the need for up-to-date, applied research on the SNA scheme was deemed necessary, particularly in the three areas aforementioned, as emphasised within the *Value for Money* review (DES, 2011a). Accordingly, this chapter presents a review of national and international literature in such key areas including paraprofessional preparedness, support of pupils' behavioural care needs (particularly that of challenging behaviour), and the support of pupil independence. It is envisaged that the literature review will provide a clear rationale for the selected research questions and the ensuing research methodology.

2.3 SNA Preparedness

2.3.1 SNA training and professional development.

2.3.1.1 National policy context.

In considering the role of the SNA, a review of original educational policy highlights the minimum required standard of education for appointment to the SNA post. Currently, this comprises (i) a Further Education and Training Award Council (FETAC) level 3 major qualification on the National Framework of Qualifications³ or (ii) a minimum of three grade Ds in the Junior Certificate or (iii) equivalent (DES, 2011b). Since 2005, the DES has provided funding for continuing professional development (CPD) programmes for SNAs, with reference to the role of the SNA. These programmes, originally delivered by three Colleges of Education in Ireland and now, solely by St. Angela's College, Sligo, comprise a 20 hour introductory course or a 60 hour certificate course related to the role of the SNA (DES, 2011a; Kerins et al., 2015). In addition, St. Angela's College, Sligo offers a Level 7 programme on the National Framework of Qualifications, devised for SNAs working in primary, post-primary and special schools. This programme is aimed at enabling SNAs to develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and understanding regarding the role of the SNA in order to respond to the SEN of all pupils (Kerins et al., 2015). Although this programme is accredited and recognised by the DES, national policy outlines how SNAs are currently not required to engage in any specialist training to secure employment (DES, 2011a; Kerins et al., 2015). Notably in March 2018, the NCSE recommended that a national training programme be introduced at Level 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications for existing SNAs who do not have the requisite level of relevant training and for new ISAs on appointment. Such recommendations were made in light of the comprehensive review of the SNA scheme (NCSE, 2018), whereby the training needs of SNAs were particularly noted in relation to supporting pupils with medical needs and those with challenging behaviour, as well as in areas of developing pupils' independence and resilience. In addition, the NCSE (2018) recognised the need for further focused training for SNAs/ISAs tailored to the needs of specific pupils, as well as whole school training. Nonetheless, these recommendations have not been enacted in policy changes to date.

³ The Irish National Framework of Qualifications, established in 2003, is a framework through which all learning achievements may be measured and related to each other in a coherent way. Qualifications included in the framework are organised based on their level of knowledge, skill and competence. Qualifications range from Level 1 (certificate) to Level 10 (doctoral degree/higher doctorate; Quality and Qualifications Ireland, 2018)

2.3.1.2 Review of national and international research.

A review of national literature highlights how the low level of qualification for SNAs, as outlined in *Circular 0021/2011*, has been a contested topic for years (Daly et al., 2016; Kerins et al., 2015; Lawlor & Cregan, 2003; Logan, 2001; Ware et al., 2009). In fact, this issue was highlighted in some of the earliest national research conducted in this area (Logan, 2001, 2006). Interestingly, findings from the *Value for Money* review (DES, 2011a) showed that by 2010, only 480 SNAs had completed the DES-funded certificate programme for SNAs. In addition, the review raised questions regarding the appropriateness and quality of SNA training received outside of the established routes provided by the DES and Colleges of Education. In this regard, the need for training programmes based on the role of the SNA, as outlined in Departmental circulars, was emphasised (DES, 2011a).

A review of a subset of international peer-reviewed articles between 2005 and 2012, as conducted by Giangreco et al. (2014b), also revealed 'inadequate training' as a longstanding issue in the field of paraprofessional support for over 20 years. In particular, the issue of assigning "the least qualified staff members [to] students with the most complex learning characteristics" is emphasised repeatedly throughout the literature (Giangreco, Yuan, McKenzie, Cameron, & Fialka, 2005, p. 29; Malmgren & Causton-Theoharis, 2006). This is coined a 'double standard', whereby the instruction of pupils with disabilities is compared to that received by their typically-developing peers (Giangreco, 2003; Webster et al., 2010). Although in an Irish context, SNAs are not afforded a teaching role, their low level of training still renders them to be the least qualified staff members often working with pupils with the most complex needs.

Focusing specifically on SNAs working with pupils with behavioural care needs, the issue of preparedness becomes even more significant. This issue was particularly emphasised in the policy advice paper from the NCSE to the Minister for Education and Skills in 2012 on the future education of students with challenging behaviour arising from severe emotional disturbance/behavioural disorders. In this paper, the NCSE (2012) pointed to the often complex and enduring nature of needs presented by pupils with challenging behaviour arising from severe emotional disturbance/behavioural disorders. The necessity for training for both teachers and SNAs to work with this cohort of pupils was highlighted. In particular, the benefits of a whole school approach to training were acknowledged, to ensure an inclusive and supportive culture is fostered within schools. Although this advice paper did not serve to bring about changes to national policy regarding the standards for SNA

training, research highlights that in recent years, some schools and education centres have begun to provide additional CPD for SNAs to address identified skill deficits related to behaviour support (Daly et al., 2016; Kerins et al., 2015). Nonetheless, the focus and depth of this training remains unclear. Moreover, embarking on this study, a review of the literature highlighted a dearth of information related to SNAs' preparedness to develop pupils' independence. In light of the focus on pupil independence in national policy (DES, 2014), the need for further research in this area was deemed necessary. In particular, the author sought to establish a broad national picture of the level of initial training and CPD undertaken by SNAs. Thereafter, data was sought on the specific level of training completed by SNAs in relation to supporting pupils' behavioural care needs and developing pupils' independence.

It is notable that having commenced this research study, two significant national studies were published related to SNA training. Firstly, this pertained to research conducted at St. Angela's College, Sligo across ten counties in the border, midland and western regions of Ireland (Kerins et al., 2015). Focusing on findings related to 216 mainstream primary schools, results showed that over one quarter of SNAs in primary schools indicated that their highest level of qualification was a Certificate/Diploma at Level 6/7 on the National Framework of Qualifications. Although two fifths of those SNAs indicated that they had undertaken some training in the area of SEN before commencing employment, over half of such respondents (53%, n=97) identified categories relating to behavioural difficulties as a key training need; a finding also reflected in school Principals' responses (68%, n=83). Interestingly, training in 'encouraging pupil independence' was also identified as a clear professional development need by almost one third (32.2%) of the SNAs at primary level; a finding also endorsed by 56.5% of all school Principals.

Secondly, findings from Fórsa Trade Union also shed light on initial SNA qualifications. Based on a national survey completed by 2,688 SNA members in 2017, findings revealed that the majority of SNA respondents held a FETAC Level 5 (30%) or Level 6 (27%) qualification, with only 3% of respondents holding the minimum qualification of a Junior Certificate. Qualifications varied significantly across the remaining participants, spanning Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Applied, Ordinary Degree (Level 7), Honours Degree (Level 8), Master's Degree (Level 9) and 'other'. Notably, 82% of respondents also expressed interest in receiving further training related to the SNA role (Fórsa, 2018).

Although findings from these two studies served to address the preceding national research gap related to SNA training and CPD, further research in this area was still deemed necessary. This was particularly in terms of linking SNA training with SNAs' knowledge, understanding and self-efficacy to support pupils with behavioural care needs in applied educational settings.

2.3.2 SNA knowledge, understanding & self-efficacy to support pupils' behavioural care needs.

2.3.2.1 Review of national and international literature.

In considering the minimum required standard of education for appointment to an SNA post (DES, 2011b), one must query the related impact on SNAs' job-specific knowledge, understanding and self-efficacy to engage in the SNA role. Following a review of the literature, a small number of studies were identified that highlighted a strong desire amongst SNAs to improve their job-related knowledge and skills (Daly et al., 2016; DES, 2011a; Kerins et al., 2015). For example, research conducted by Daly et al. (2016) across 24 educational sites in Ireland highlighted variances in SNA knowledge with regard to supporting pupils with ASD. Specifically, findings showed that SNAs' knowledge ranged across settings from an 'acceptable' understanding of ASD to 'excellent' knowledge (p. 15). In particular, research highlighted how many SNAs across primary settings relied heavily on experiential learning for knowledge acquisition, with an overreliance on trial and error learning. Significant frustrations were expressed across almost all stakeholders in the study with regard to the lack of systematic national opportunities for SNAs to develop their knowledge and skills.

Although this finding sheds light on SNA knowledge/understanding related to ASD, a review of the literature highlighted a dearth of research related to SNAs' knowledge, understanding and self-efficacy to support pupils' behavioural care needs and development of pupils' independence. In this regard, research highlights that many staff working with persons with challenging behaviour hold very limited and often faulty attributions for underlying causes of challenging behaviour (Grey, McClean, & Barnes-Holmes, 2002; Rae, Murray, & McKenzie, 2011). Research shows the importance of staff attributions, whereby a direct correlation has been shown to exist between staff attributions about the causes of challenging behaviours and staff responses to such behaviours (Grey et al., 2002; Hastings, 1996; Hastings, Reed, & Watts, 1997). Research also shows that the belief systems

employed by staff to understand challenging behaviour may support or impede the delivery of effective support plans for such children (Bromley & Emerson, 1995). Although a range of previous studies have assessed teachers' beliefs about why a child displays challenging behaviour (Male, 2003; Morgan & Hastings, 1998; Rae et al., 2011); a review of the literature revealed that no research had been undertaken with SNAs in this domain. Based on such findings, and in light of the fact that staff training can increase the alignment between staff attributions about challenging behaviour and the actual function of challenging behaviour (Berryman, Evans, & Kalbag, 1994; Grey et al., 2002), the author recognised the importance of assessing SNAs' understandings and attributions of pupils' challenging behaviour as part of the research process.

Finally, SNA preparedness was considered in terms of SNAs' self-efficacy to deal with challenging behaviours. Self-efficacy is defined as people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives (Bandura, 1994). Bandura (1994, 1997) outlines how a strong sense of efficacy enhances human accomplishment and personal well-being in many ways. People with high self-efficacy in their capabilities approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than as threats to be avoided. In addition, such people heighten and sustain their efforts in the face of failure, quickly recover their sense of efficacy after setbacks and attribute failure to insufficient effort, knowledge or skills which are acquirable. In contrast, people with low self-efficacy doubt their capabilities and shy away from difficult tasks which they view as personal threats. When faced with difficult tasks, such people dwell on their personal deficiencies and on the obstacles they will encounter and give up quickly. They are also slow to recover their sense of efficacy following failure or setbacks (Bandura, 1994, 1997). Hastings (2005) concluded that under some circumstances, self-efficacy might mediate the effect of problem behaviour on staff stress, and under others, it might interact with exposure to problem behaviour to affect stress outcomes. Based on such findings, Hastings (2005) noted how self-efficacy may be amenable and affected by staff training, particularly in cases where staff self-efficacy is low.

In this regard, Hastings and Brown (2002) created a scale of five efficacy items including feelings of (1) *confidence* (2) *control* (3) *satisfaction in dealing with challenging behaviours* (4) *perception of having a positive impact on the challenging behaviours with which they deal* and (5) *perception of difficulty in working with challenging behaviours*. Each item is rated on a seven-point scale, whereby

summing of the ratings on the five items derives a total score. Previous studies have shown this scale to have an excellent level of internal consistency with Cronbach's α of 0.94 (Hastings & Brown, 2002). Although the self-efficacy of parents (Sanders & Woolley, 2005) and special education staff (Hastings & Brown, 2002) has been previously assessed, a review of the literature revealed that this had not been extended to SNAs in an Irish context. Interestingly however, recent research conducted in the U.S has showed the positive effect of training as a means to increase self-efficacy of TAs (Weiniger, 2008).

Based on such findings, it was deemed timely that SNAs' self-efficacy in supporting pupils with challenging behaviour was assessed. In this way, findings could contribute to the overall understanding of SNAs' preparedness to engage in their role and support pupils with behavioural care needs.

2.3.3 Individual pupil planning.

2.3.3.1 National policy context.

Beyond initial SNA qualifications and CPD, the issue of 'preparedness' was also considered in relation to individual pupil planning. From a policy viewpoint, SNA *Circular 0030/2014* highlights the need for schools to create a 'Personal Pupil Plan' for all pupils availing of SNA support, as introduced from the 2015 school year onwards (DES, 2014). This presented as the first legal stipulation in Ireland for schools to produce such documentation, whereby prior to 2015, the 'Individualised Education Plan' (IEP) process had not been legally mandated in Ireland. Echoing key tenets of the IEP guidelines document (NCSE, 2006), *Circular 0030/2014* outlines the need for a collaborative approach for the development, implementation and review of care plans, including contributions from the SNA and child (DES, 2014). The DES outlines how information must be detailed in the plan in terms of the child's care needs, how the SNA will be utilised, alongside the timeframe for which the SNA is expected to be required. In terms of independence-building, the DES (2014) outline a number of key features within the planning process. Namely, they state how the plan must focus on the "pro-active development of students' independence skills" and "demonstrate how the school intends to actively reduce, and where appropriate, eliminate dependency on SNA support within a reasonable timeframe" (p. 17). Clearly, there is a need for time-bound targets to develop the child's independence, supported by appropriate programmes and strategies.

Undoubtedly, this focus on care planning within recent DES circulars stands as a significantly positive juncture within the Irish education system and larger framework of inclusion. It is notable, however, that the document does not cease at the planning stage alone. Rather, the distinct role of the SNA in the assessment and review process is also outlined. It states: “The SNA will also assist in monitoring the implementation and impact of the plan including documenting, via observation schedules, the progress being made in relation to the child’s care needs on a day-to-day basis” (p. 17).

2.3.3.2 Review of national and international research.

Although the role of the SNA in the planning, assessment, monitoring and review process of individualised pupil planning is clearly outlined in policy documentation (DES, 2014; NCSE, 2006), an analysis of Irish research revealed mixed findings in this regard. For example, early research conducted by Lawlor and Cregan (2003) in schools for pupils with Mild General Learning Disabilities revealed that 53% of SNAs were not involved at all in the planning process. In particular, a lack of time was noted as a preventative factor by teachers and SNAs alike. This time-related issue was also stressed by participants in research conducted by Carrig (2004), Logan (2006) and Shevlin et al. (2008). Similar findings were deduced by Elliott (2004) in special classes for children with ASD, where only 42% of teachers and 35% of SNAs stated that SNAs had the opportunity to attend IEP meetings at their school. In particular, the SNAs who did not attend such meetings expressed views that they were at a disadvantage when they were not fully aware of pupils’ developmental levels, teaching goals and strategies. Such knowledge was deemed a means of achieving “consistency in the treatment of each individual with the child” (p. 28). It is notable, however, that in this context, a number of teachers did not feel it appropriate for the SNA to attend the IEP meeting, but rather, discussed information before and after the meeting with the SNA. In terms of assessment procedures, research carried out by O’Neill and Rose (2008) with 82 SNAs outlined how only 28% of SNAs were involved in assessment of pupil performance, with this falling to 16% when considered on a daily basis. Notably however, the authors failed to outline the focus of the assessment, whereby it is questionable whether this pertained to curricular or non-curricular areas. Interestingly, more recent research conducted by Rose, Shevlin, Winter, and O’Raw (2015) as part of *Project IRIS* (i.e. a longitudinal study of the experiences of and outcomes for pupils with SEN in Irish schools), highlighted how in most schools, SNAs play no role in IEP planning,

despite being involved in delivering teaching programmes. In addition, the researchers noted variability between and within schools on progress monitoring and assessment practices. Such inconsistencies were also recognised in the research conducted by Daly et al. (2016) and were deemed a significant barrier to providing an inclusive learning environment for children with ASD. In light of such findings, Rose et al. (2015) highlighted the need for greater clarity on the legal status of IEPs to facilitate a more consistent approach to pupil support nationwide.

Interestingly, a look to international research also highlights issues with individual pupil planning and the role of paraprofessionals. For example, a review of the landmark DISS Project in the U.K showed that 75% of teachers had no allocated planning or feedback time with TAs, with this figure rising to 95% for secondary school teachers (Webster et al., 2011). Moreover, teacher-TA communication was deemed to occur in an ad hoc manner, occurring either at lesson change-over, before/after school, or at break/lunch times. The research highlighted that many TAs were not involved with lesson planning and felt underprepared for supporting pupils during such tasks. Notably, similar findings were also deduced in more recent U.K studies including the MaSt project (Webster & Blatchford, 2013a) and the SENSE study (Webster & Blatchford, 2017). This issue has also been recognised in a range of other international research, including that conducted in Iceland (Egilson & Traustadottir, 2009), the U.S (Giangreco et al., 2001) and Canada (Gazith, 2004, as cited in Giangreco & Doyle, 2007).

Based on national and international findings, it is clear that paraprofessional 'preparedness', or lack thereof, is a common phenomenon across education systems. Nonetheless, the author recognised the need for more in-depth, up-to-date research in an Irish context with regard to school-based planning, assessment, monitoring and review of pupils' *care needs*, particularly for those presenting with behavioural care needs. Although a range of Irish studies have focused on the issue of individual pupil planning in general, an intensive review of the literature failed to deduce any study in an Irish context that specifically focused on planning and review procedures for pupils' *behavioural care needs* in light of the role of the SNA. Moreover, due to the recently mandated requirement that schools must prepare a 'Personal Pupil Plan' for pupils with significant care needs (DES, 2014), it was queried whether this may have caused related changes in school practices for pupil planning. Notably, Douglas et al. (2012) emphasised the need for schools to assess and monitor progress in areas of particular relevance to persons with SEN, with

specific focus on the informal curriculum, including independence and happiness-related outcomes. The authors stated:

An educational system concerned with how well children with SEN are doing would, logically, be interested in careful assessment and monitoring of engagement, outcomes and progress relating to aspects of the curriculum which fall beyond those things typically recorded in national assessments.

(Douglas et al., 2012, p. 169)

Based on such recent changes, the need for additional research in this domain was deemed necessary, with a particular focus on the role of the SNA supporting pupils with behavioural care needs.

2.3.3.3 Voice of the child.

In addition to the collaborative approach for pupil planning, *Circular 0030/2014* (DES, 2014) also emphasises good practice in terms of the SNA supporting the pupil to voice his/her views on the Personal Pupil Plan. Across national and international policy (GOI, 2000b) 'student voice' has been recognised as a recent line of inquiry in the field of paraprofessional research, with current data on this topic deemed to be at a "modest" and "preliminary" stage (Giangreco et al., 2014b, p. 692). This matter is in line with the *National Children's Strategy* which states that "children will have a voice in matters which affect them and their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity" (GOI, 2000b, p. 28).

Nonetheless, a review of the literature shows that vulnerable populations are often denied a voice, including those with SEN (Tangen, 2009, as cited in Rose et al., 2015). From an Irish perspective, it remains unclear the degree to which the voice of the child is welcomed or heard in schools, both in terms of the planning process and in relation to SNA access. From a research perspective, only a small number of researchers have sought children's views concerning SNA allocation. For example Logan (2006) identified both strengths and limitations of SNA support as expressed by 12 children with learning disabilities. Strengths pertained to support gained in terms of schoolwork, social relations and behaviour, with pupils alluding to SNAs' usage of preventative strategies at yard-time. In contrast, the impact of the SNA on social relations was noted as a distinct disadvantage by pupils, particularly in light of the overprotective nature of some SNAs. Notably, one pupil stated, "She just follows me and...she says that she's a shadow...that she's my shadow...She always interferes with other things" (Logan, 2006, p. 95). Similarly, Prunty, Dupont, and

McDaid (2012) elicited positive and negative feedback from focus groups and interviews with children (N=38), all based in special schools/classes. Although some strengths were noted in terms of SNA support of academic work, particular annoyance was expressed by pupils in terms of SNAs providing excessive support during activities. In contrast, the value of peer-support was outlined as a recurring theme by pupils, which appeared to have additional benefits for social relations over that of SNA access. More substantial research findings from the *Value for Money* review (DES, 2011a) and *Project IRIS* (Rose et al., 2015) also served to capture the voice of the child in this regard. Akin to previous research, strengths of the SNA scheme, as expressed by pupils, related to assistance during lessons and in terms of behaviour support. In contrast, some older pupils expressed mixed feelings regarding SNA support, with reference to feelings of isolation and pupils' changing needs over time.

From an international perspective, a similarly limited number of studies have included the voices of pupils with disabilities regarding their own experiences of paraprofessional support. In this regard, research conducted by Broer, Doyle, and Giangreco (2005) highlighted the primacy and sometimes exclusivity of the relationships formed between pupils and paraprofessionals, spanning themes of (a) *mother* (b) *friend* (c) *protector from bullying* and (d) *primary teacher*. Similar findings were deduced in Sweden, whereby pupils' perceptions about their relationships with paraprofessionals were deemed to be *mutual*, *non-mutual*, *ambivalent* and *unequal* (Skär & Tam, 2001). Hemmingsson et al. (2003) highlighted the limited control many pupils experience in relation to when and how paraprofessional support is provided. Based on research with pupils with physical disabilities, the authors deduced that "assistance was shaped and dominated by the adults in the classroom, beyond the pupils' influence and active participation" (p. 93). In particular, the authors outline the negative impact of inadequate pupil participation in decision-making on the child's sense of self-efficacy. Interestingly, they noted then when given choice, pupils' responses varied from seeking full assistance to minimal assistance, if any. Based on data analysis, the authors deduced social participation as the determining factor in this regard. Specifically, if assistance increased opportunities for social participation, it was accepted; however, if assistance was perceived to threaten aspects of social inclusion, it was avoided. Again, such issues highlight the need for heightened levels of awareness and planning on the part of the school, with due regard for the voice of the child, to ensure that assistance does not impact on the child's social relations.

In light of such findings, it is clear that the voice of the child should be obtained and given due weight in educational contexts, particularly when deploying SNA support. Based on a review of the literature, it was also clear that further research was warranted in this domain in an Irish context, both to ascertain pupils' viewpoints on SNA support, as well as to clarify the degree to which schools capture the voices of children as part of the Personal Pupil Plan process.

2.3.4 Summary of 'preparedness' and research question one.

Research Question 1: *To what degree are SNAs prepared to support target pupils' behavioural care needs and develop target pupils' independence in mainstream primary schools?*

Having reviewed policy documentation related to inclusive education and the role of the SNA (Department of Education and Science, 2002; DES, 2014; NCSE, 2006), it is clear that SNA preparedness is not strongly prioritised in current Irish educational policy, particularly in terms of initial SNA qualifications and ensuing CPD. Based on a review of national and international literature, recent years have seen an increase in research in this area. Nonetheless, research gaps continue to exist in a national context, particularly when considering SNA preparedness to support pupils' behavioural care needs and develop pupils' independence. Accordingly, the first research question selected for this study sought to investigate the degree to which SNAs are prepared to support target pupils' behavioural care needs and develop target pupils' independence in mainstream primary schools. Stemming from the literature review and the complexities of the matter of 'preparedness', this study sought to investigate SNA preparedness in relation to (i) training and CPD (ii) knowledge, understanding and self-efficacy (iii) individualised pupil planning, including the voice of the child. This research question and related sub-questions are depicted in *Figure 3*.

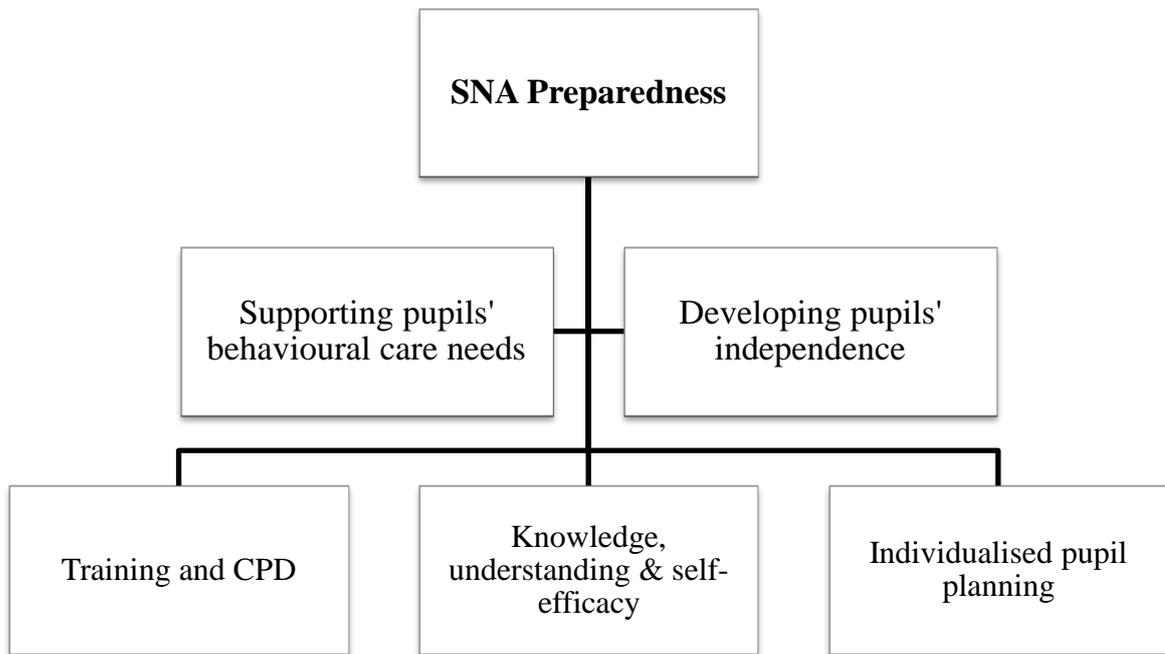


Figure 3: Summary of the literature reviewed related to SNA preparedness and the focus of research question one

2.4 SNA Support of Pupils’ Behavioural Care Needs

2.4.1 National policy context.

Beyond the area of SNA ‘preparedness’, a return to *Circular 0030/2014* (DES, 2014) highlights how the support of pupils’ behavioural care needs presents as one of the main tenets of the SNA role. Notably, the circular stipulates that pupils experiencing behavioural difficulties or diagnosed with Emotional Behavioural Disorder (EBD) or Severe Emotional Behavioural Disorder (SEBD) do not automatically qualify for, or require, SNA support. Rather, the circular places emphasis on a staged-approach to behaviour management based on that proposed within the NEPS guidelines (Department of Education and Science, 2007; DES, 2010). Specifically, support is required at three distinct levels across the school system comprising *Classroom Support*, *School Support* and *School Support Plus*; see *Figure 4*, as sourced from the ‘Special Education Support Service’ (SESS, 2018a). The first stage, *Classroom Support*, entails simple, informal problem-solving approaches commonly used by class teachers to support pupils’ emerging needs. The second stage, *School Support*, involves more systematic gathering of information and the development and monitoring of an ‘Individual Pupil Learning Profile’. At that point in time, the

special education teacher (SET) is usually involved. The final stage, *School Support Plus*, involves the most intensive support whereby external agencies, such as the NEPS psychologist, may be involved to support the child's needs. The need for an IEP and clear, targeted interventions are also required. Ultimately, *Circular 0030/2014* highlights how the responsibility for the overall progress of pupils with behavioural difficulties lies with the classroom teacher, with a larger school-level focus on the "development of well co-ordinated interventions in response to the child's identified needs" (DES, 2014, p. 9).

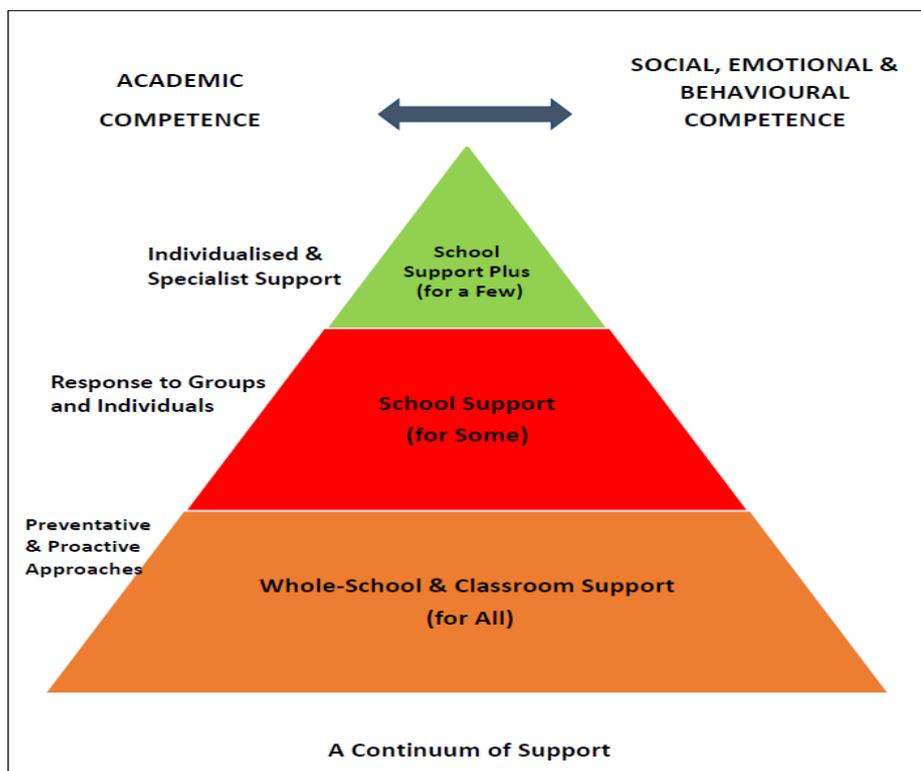


Figure 4: *Continuum of Support, as sourced from SESS (2018a)*

With regard to SNA provision, *Circular 0030/2014* outlines how the SNA is retained for more challenging behavioural cases:

Where there is a clear diagnosis of EBD/SEBD, or a behavioural disorder in conjunction with another disability, and also where it is clear that behavioural management strategies have not been successful to date and where it is demonstrated how access to SNA support can assist the child.

(DES, 2014, p. 2)

Additional criteria for sanctioning SNA support also include where there is a clear and documented history of violent behaviour, assault, or self-harm, or other safety issues including leaving the school premises, and in situations where sustained efforts have been put in place by the school that have not proven successful in the amelioration of documented behaviours (DES, 2014). Grounded in such extreme circumstances, the behavioural care role of the SNA is outlined by the DES (2014) across four distinct areas. These include:

- Preserving the safety of the pupil and others with whom the pupil is in contact
- Assisting to ensure the prevention of self-injurious or destructive behaviour
- Reinforcing good behaviour on the child's part and acting as a positive role model for the child
- Assisting with recording data in relation to pupil behaviour and behavioural development

(DES, 2014, p. 12)

In addition, the circular notes that SNA support should not be considered a permanent solution to behavioural difficulties but as an assistive support to try and improve and adjust behaviours in a managed way over a period of time (DES, 2014). As previously outlined, SNA provision must also be linked to the child's personalised planning, with strong emphasis placed on timed target-setting for pupil support in light of the role of the SNA (DES, 2014).

2.4.2 Irish data: Prevalence and nature of behavioural care needs.

Stemming from policy guidelines outlined in *Circular 0030/2014* (DES, 2014), a review of the literature revealed that the most up-to-date national data detailing the number of Irish pupils in receipt of SNA support for behavioural care needs stemmed from 2012 (NCSE, 2012). At that time, national data showed that the majority of children with EBD/SEBD were attending inclusive educational settings. Although a total of 7,830 pupils with clinically diagnosed EBD/SEBD were included in mainstream Irish schools at that time, only 3,385 of the same cohort were in receipt of SNA support (NCSE, 2012). This high figure continues to prevail, whereby numerous recent studies have shown EBD/SEBD as one of the primary reasons for SNA provision in Irish mainstream schools (Kerins et al., 2015; Kinsella, Murtagh, Senior, & Coleman, 2014).

In order to effectively support pupils with EBD and/or behavioural care needs, one must firstly understand the nature of such needs. As defined by Cooper and Jacobs, children with behavioural difficulties or emotional disturbance comprise, “a group of children within an educational setting who present with disturbing and/or disruptive behaviour that interferes with social functioning and academic engagement” (2011, pp. 8-9). Such social, emotional and behavioural difficulties are understood to occur along a continuum, ranging from mild/transient through to more significant and/or persistent issues often requiring clinical referral and intervention. Similarly, the term ‘challenging behaviours’ encompasses a wide range of behaviours, from those that can be accommodated in accordance with schools’ agreed disciplinary procedures to those which severely challenge both pupils’ capacity to realise their educational potential and the system’s ability to respond to the behaviours concerned (NCSE, 2012). Within an Irish context, research conducted by Kelly, Carey and McCarthy (2004) has shed light on the range of behavioural manifestations of challenging behaviour. Informed by a review of the literature, Kelly et al. (2004) developed a matrix of challenging behaviour types in order to categorise the incidence, prevalence and severity of particular types of challenging behaviour (see *Table 2*). This involved compiling categories and definitions of challenging behaviour types presented in a number of research studies.

Table 2: *The Challenging Behaviour Matrix (Kelly et al., 2004)*

Categories of challenging behaviour	Examples of behaviour displayed
1. Self-injurious behaviour	Skin picking or peeling, scratching, pinching. Cutting, biting, head/body banging, punching, slapping, hitting, kicking self against others and objects. Digit chewing, eye gouging, hair pulling, stuffing fingers in body openings, mouthing, eating inedible objects, self-induced vomiting, deliberate breath holding.
2. Aggressive behaviour that physically harms others	Pinching, biting, scratching others. Punching/slapping/pushing or pulling. Kicking, head-butting people. Pulling hair. Choking/throttling. Using objects as weapons against people (e.g. knife or other hand held object). Throwing things at people. Tearing other people’s clothes.
3. Non-compliance	Lying down, disobedience, non co-operation, resistance to teaching or contact with adults. Refusing to do things.

4. Disruptive, nuisance or threatening behaviour to others	Shouting, screaming, swearing, verbal abuse and curses. Gestures or threatens harm. Mocking, sneering, deriding, personal targeting. Distracts, teases, pesters (repetitive), argues, interrupts, obstructs, nonsensical verbalisations. Set off fire alarm, taking food and/or drink from others. Hyperactivity, unpredictable behaviour.
5. Absconding	Wandering within internal environment or unsupervised area. Running away, trying to, or, absconding from facility
6. Psychological disturbance	Emotional instability, low frustration tolerance, wants excessive praise and resents attention to others.
7. Ritualistic/stereotypical behaviour	Ritualistic (e.g. closes/opens doors, rearranges furniture, hoards rubbish) and stereotypical behaviour (e.g. body rocking, finger tapping, hand waving).
8. Inappropriate sexual behaviour	Stripping. Inappropriate exposure of body, masturbation, sexual advances. Unsafe sexual behaviour and practices.
9. Destruction of property	Damage to property or school objects. Defaces, vandalises or destroys things e.g. tears, cuts, burns, throws objects.
10. Socially inappropriate behaviour	Defecating, smearing and, deliberate urinating. Soiling, wetting or vomiting when upset, distressed or agitated. Self-induced regurgitation. Stealing, spitting and inappropriate eating habits and eating things (e.g. rubbish, faeces, objects).
11. Substance and alcohol abuse	Drinking alcohol-cider, beer, spirits on school premises and within school hours. Use of solvents (gas, glue), marijuana (grass, pot) or cannabis (hash, hash oil).
12. Temper tantrums	Outbursts of bad temper or petulance.
13. Passive challenging behaviour	Glaring, refusing to respond, averting gaze, isolating themselves, withdrawal.

Notably, children with a diagnosis of EBD/SEBD present on the latter end of the challenging behaviour scale, with a tendency to display more aggressive and extreme forms of challenging behaviour (NCSE, 2012). This category of disability is defined by the Department of Education and Science (2005, p. 19) as pertaining to, “Such pupils [who] are being treated by a psychiatrist or psychologist for such conditions as neurosis, childhood psychosis, hyperactivity, attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and conduct disorders that are significantly

impairing their socialisation and/or learning in school". In terms of schooling, research shows that children with EBD/SEBD can present unique challenges to the education system whereby their behaviour can interfere with their own learning as well as that of others (Lodge & Lynch, 2004). Examples of such behaviours include: violent physical aggression towards other pupils and towards teachers, sustained and offensive verbal assault, refusal to take part in classroom activities, shouting, bullying and disruption of the classroom, throwing books, chairs and desks, consistently destroying their own work and the work of others, as well as behaviours such as kicking, punching, biting (NCSE, 2012). Research has shown how this group of children are likely to have the least satisfactory experience of schooling, be subject to high levels of exclusionary responses in schools as well as have strong associations with educational failure (Hayden, 1997; Lodge & Lynch, 2004).

2.4.3 Theoretical perspectives on challenging behaviour.

In an effort to best understand the underpinnings of behavioural difficulties or clinically diagnosed EBD/SEBD, a range of theoretical perspectives are outlined in the literature. Gullotta (1996, as cited in Cooper & Jacobs, 2011) provides a typology of four distinct approaches, comprising psychological theories, social psychological theories, sociocultural theories and biological theories. Each of these approaches is disparate in nature, providing alternate means for understanding and addressing children's behavioural needs. Cooper and Jacobs (2011) provide further detail in this regard, outlining how the history of psycho-educational interventions for EBD/SEBD reflects the development of therapeutic psychology and psychiatry over the years. This information is summarised in *Figure 5*, and includes psychodynamic, behavioural, humanistic, cognitive behavioural and systemic approaches.

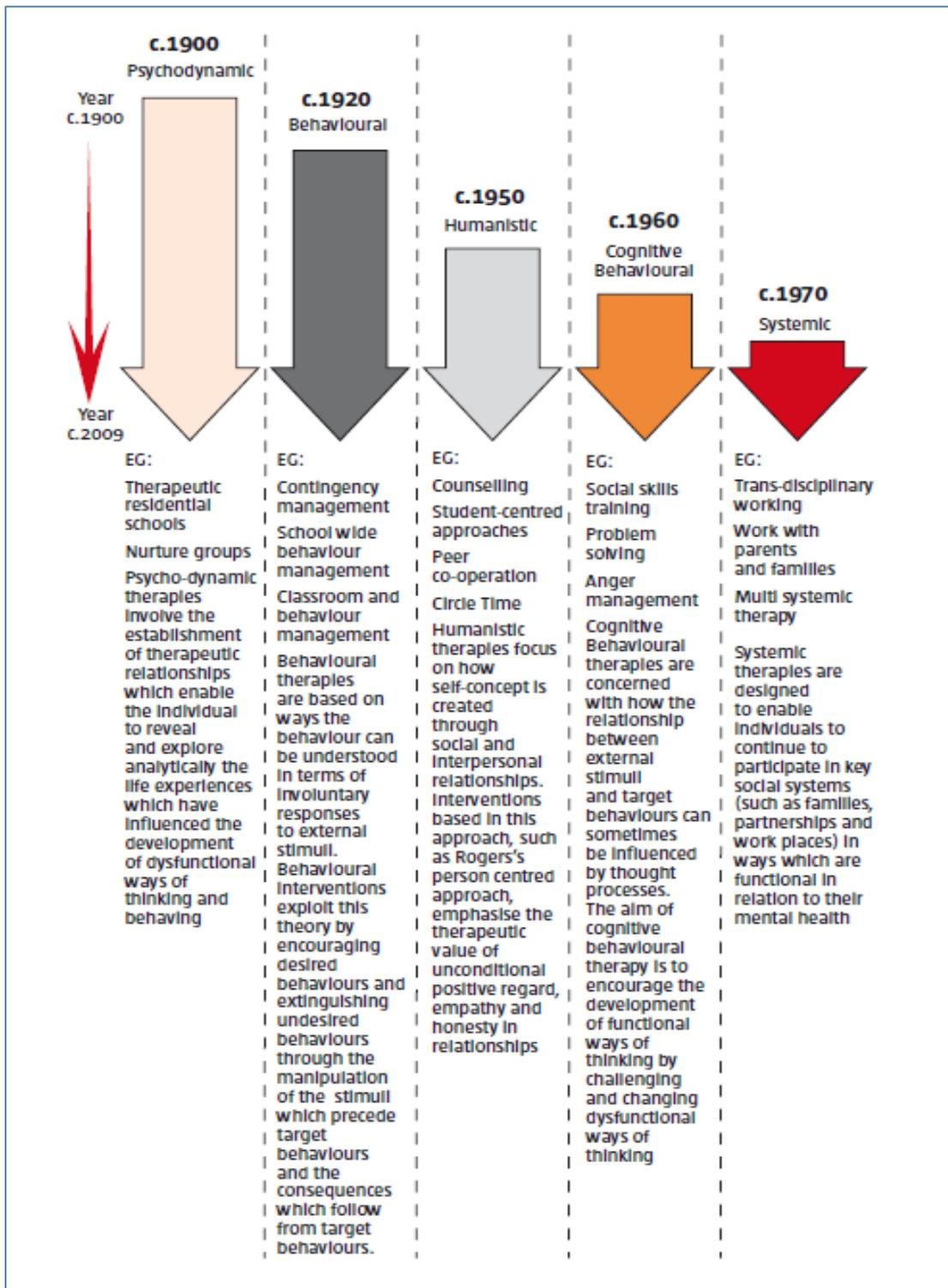


Figure 5: Evolution of interventions for SEBD/EBD in major educational interventions. Source: Cooper and Jacobs (2011, p. 210)

2.4.3.1 Bio-psycho-social perspective.

Although each of the theoretical approaches provides unique insight into understanding and supporting pupils' behavioural difficulties, more recent work has criticised many of these early theoretical approaches for their narrow and often limited viewpoint of the child and his/her difficulties (DES, 2010). In contrast, a move towards a broader conceptual framework has occurred in recent years, spanning health, education and psychological spheres. This approach, namely the 'bio-psycho-social' perspective (Cooper, 2008; Engel, 1977; Hernandez & Blazer, 2006), draws on a range of theoretical frameworks for understanding behaviour and developing related interventions. NEPS outline how through this approach, one recognises, "...that humans are complex beings whose functioning is determined by interrelated and interdependent biological, psychological and socio-cultural factors" (DES, 2010, p. 8).

Rather than focusing on one discrete area of behavioural causation, the bio-psycho-social approach recognises that inherited biological factors interact with various environmental influences to produce particular patterns of behaviour, cognitive, social and emotional functioning (DES, 2010; Engel, 1977). *Figure 6*, as sourced from Cooper and Jacobs (2011, p. 57), presents a diagrammatic depiction of the bio-psycho-social model. The 'bio' aspect recognises the underlying role of biology/genes in development. Stemming from a medical, within-child perspective, this includes chemical, neurological and genetic factors underpinning the child's condition. In comparison, the 'psycho-social' aspect focuses more on interpersonal and social dimensions, whereby the focus is shifted from within-child to more socially-oriented factors. This emphasises the role of one's cognition (e.g. motivation) on behaviour, in addition to contextual factors such as one's environment. Notably, research shows how many children with behavioural difficulties come from socially deprived or disrupted family backgrounds, whereby they may be recognised in terms of disruptive, 'acting-out' behaviour or more withdrawn, avoidance, 'acting-in' behaviour (Banks, Shevlin, & McCoy, 2012; Cooper & Jacobs, 2011; McCoy, Banks, & Shevlin, 2012). Additional risk factors for categories of EBD/SEBD also include early life trauma and membership of certain minority ethnic groups, to name but a few. It must be noted, however, that a direct link does not occur between such risk factors and the development of significant behavioural difficulties, whereby numerous protective factors may serve to offset and override adverse life circumstances for the child. Cooper and Jacobs (2011) highlight the inter-related nature of each of the bio-psycho-social factors, such that

by integrating biological and intra-psychic dimensions with interpersonal and social dimensions, a truly holistic viewpoint of the individual is achieved. In this way, the complexities of EBD/SEBD and its concomitant interventions can be better understood.

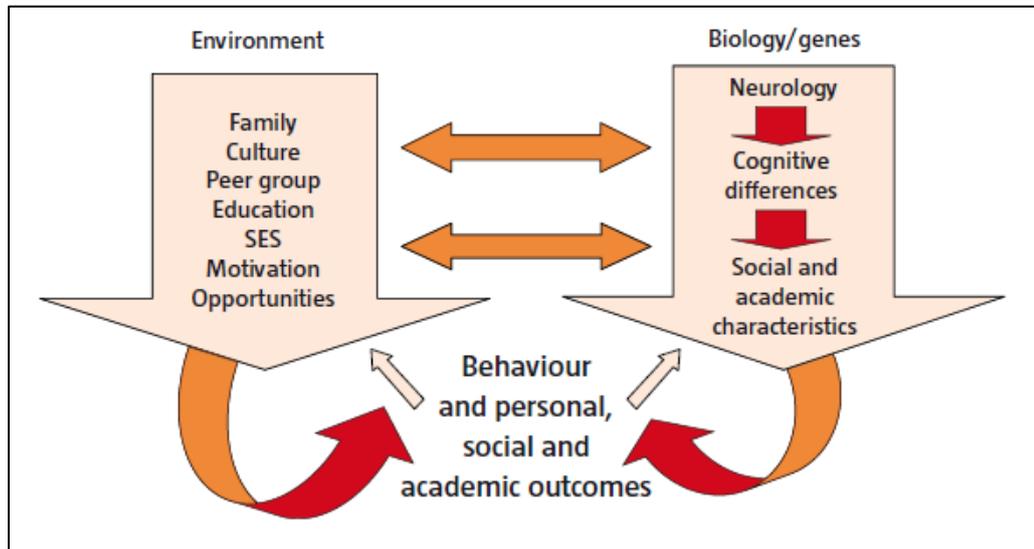


Figure 6: *Diagrammatic illustration of the 'Bio-Psycho-Social' approach. Source: Cooper and Jacob (2011, p. 57).*

2.4.3.2 Review of national research on behaviour support.

In considering SNAs' support of pupils' behavioural care needs, a review of the literature revealed a lack of national research related to behaviour support in mainstream settings. Whilst the *Irish National Teachers' Organisation* (INTO) and the NCSE have produced a range of guidelines for teachers on supporting challenging behaviour in Irish schools (INTO, 2002, 2004, 2005; NCSE, 2012), such guidelines provide minimal, if any reference to the role of the SNA. Although some Irish research has explored behaviour support in mainstream settings, such studies also show limited reference to the role of the SNA (Grey, Honan, McClean, & Daly, 2005; Kelly, Carey, McCarthy, & Coyle, 2007; Shevlin et al., 2009; Shevlin, Winter, & Flynn, 2013). In contrast, findings from the *Value for Money* review (DES, 2011a) shed particular light on SNAs' support of behaviour in mainstream settings. At that point in time, a range of concerns were raised, including SNAs' knowledge of when and how to intervene when working with pupils with behavioural difficulties. Findings indicated that SNAs were often more involved in the 'containment' of potential unwanted behaviour rather than their prevention. The review also outlined lack of clarity in terms of whether SNA management of pupil behaviour was in line with

whole-school policies, related to individualised planning and whether it occurred under the direction of the class teacher (DES, 2011a). Observations highlighted how the SNA was regularly involved in both preventative and reactive strategies, including the temporary withdrawal of pupils from the classroom, both on the grounds of safety and/or medical needs. In particular, the *Value for Money* review emphasised the need for constant monitoring of SNA support, "...to ensure that the support is not contributing to the emergence of problem behaviours for individual students" (DES, 2011a, p. 13). In contrast, more recent research by Daly et al. (2016) has shed light on SNAs' support of behaviour for pupils with ASD. Focusing specifically on data from the five primary school sites, findings highlighted high levels of variance in the standard of SNA practices observed across settings. Nonetheless, the small sample size and the heterogeneous nature of pupils' needs within the latter study reduce the generalisability of the findings to larger populations.

In light of such issues and the recent introduction of *Circular 0030/2014* (DES, 2014), the need for up-to-date national research on the strategies employed by SNAs to support pupils' behavioural care needs was recognised. Accordingly, the author sought to adopt a framework for assessing SNAs' support of pupils' behaviour in the classroom context. Following a review of *Circular 0030/2014* (DES, 2014) and behaviour-related educational guidelines, including that forwarded by NEPS (DES, 2010), Cooper and Jacobs (2011) and the NCSE (2012), the lack of any overarching framework to guide SNAs' support of behaviour was deduced. Accordingly, 'Positive Behaviour Support' (PBS) was selected as an appropriate framework, as used by the 'National Behaviour Support Service' (NBSS, 2018a) in Ireland. This framework was deemed to align with the proactive (preventative) and reactive strategies that SNAs' are encouraged to employ to support pupils' behavioural care needs, as outlined in *Circular 0030/2014* (DES, 2014). This framework will be presented below and cross-referenced with the role of the SNA, as presented in *Circular 0030/2014* (DES, 2014).

2.4.3.3 Positive behaviour support.

Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) is an applied science that uses educational and systems change methods to enhance the individual's quality of life and minimize his/her problem behaviours (Carr et al., 2002). The approach stems from three major sources including applied behaviour analysis, the normalization/inclusion

movement and person-centred planning. The approach moves away from pathology-based models of behaviour support to a model that focuses on strengthening and expanding a person’s display of positive behaviour (Carr et al., 2002; Horner, 2000; LaVigna et al., 2009). PBS places particular emphasis on the proactive prevention of problem behaviours through ecological changes, skill building and focused support, with the overall aim of supporting a high quality of life for the individual (Carr et al., 2002; McClean & Grey, 2012). Reactive strategies, on the other hand, are viewed in terms of situational management, which aim to manage the behaviour at the time it occurs (LaVigna & Willis, 2005). Notably, a review of previous research shows SNAs’ strong involvement in both preventative and reactive strategies when supporting pupils with behavioural difficulties (Daly et al., 2016; DES, 2011a). The support plan aspect of the PBS framework is presented in *Figure 7*, as sourced from (LaVigna et al., 2009, p. 7).

Support Plans			
PROACTIVE STRATEGIES			REACTIVE STRATEGIES
ECOLOGICAL STRATEGIES	POSITIVE PROGRAMMING	FOCUSED SUPPORT	SITUATIONAL MANAGEMENT

Figure 7: Support plan aspect of the ‘Positive behaviour support’ framework, depicting both proactive and reactive strategies (LaVigna, Willis, & Marshall, 2009, p. 7)

- *Proactive strategies*

The dominant focus within the PBS framework is on the proactive prevention of problem behaviours (LaVigna & Willis, 2005). This is firstly targeted through ecological strategies and environmental changes. This approach attempts to ‘smooth the fit’ between the person and his/her environment by modifying the environment (LaVigna & Willis, 2005; Rhodes, 1967). Examples include a review of the person’s physical, interpersonal or programmatic environments such as noise level, seating arrangements, interactions, or number and characteristics of other people in the setting (LaVigna et al., 2009). Within an Irish context, NEPS (Department of Education and Science, 2007; DES, 2010) and the NBSS (2018a) place strong focus on the physical and learning environment of pupils with behavioural difficulties, encouraging teachers to assess the learning environment and ensure that individualised practices are utilised, where required. Although minimum Irish studies have examined the seating context of pupils with SEN in

receipt of SNA support, Daly et al. (2016) highlighted that for some pupils with SEN, separate seating arrangements are used within the mainstream class to reduce distractions and provide adequate space for the pupil to self-regulate (Daly et al., 2016). These findings are in line with that from the MaSt study in the U.K (Webster & Blatchford, 2015), which showed that some case study pupils were positioned at the side or back of the classroom and away from peers; an arrangement deemed by the researchers to constitute, “a clear form of separation from the rest of the class, and – with the presence of TA – a separation from the teacher” (p. 42). The significant drawback of individual workstations was emphasised by Webster and Blatchford (2015) such that they can constitute a subtle form of segregation for pupils within an otherwise inclusive classroom environment. In contrast, case study findings from the MaSt study highlighted that in some cases, such ‘exclusionary’ arrangements formed a preventative strategy for problematic behaviours and were in line with pupils’ needs, and indeed, the collective needs of the rest of the class, such that distractions were minimised for all and pupils’ own anxieties reduced (Webster & Blatchford, 2015). Considering such exclusionary practices, Webster and Blatchford (2015) highlight the importance of considering the decision-making processes that lead to stigmatised pupils’ separation, giving due regard for the fundamental link between pupils’ locations within learning environments and their opportunities for learning and social experiences.

Beyond the individual pupil seating context, a review of previous literature highlighted how the physical proximity of the SNA to the pupil has particular relevance in the learning environment for supporting/hindering pupils’ development (Giangreco et al., 1997). In terms of challenging behaviour, Quinn et al. (2000) note how close pupil proximity can be viewed through the lens of ‘proximity control’. This behaviour management strategy comprises the adult using his/her physical presence to reduce inappropriate behaviours and increase appropriate ones. In addition, previous research has highlighted the role of the SNA in preventing challenging behaviour by changing pupils’ learning environments through movement/sensory breaks (Daly et al., 2016). This is deemed an effective strategy in supporting pupils to self-regulate their behaviour in advance of a behavioural outburst (SESS, 2018a). Accordingly, the author sought to review SNAs’ support of pupils with behavioural care needs with a focus on ecological strategies, where relevant.

Beyond ecological strategies, the PBS framework focuses on 'positive programming' as a proactive, preventative strategy for behavioural support. Positive programming is concerned with changing the person's skills and competencies to enable him/her to cope better with the environment (LaVigna & Willis, 2005). LaVigna et al. (2009) outline how there are four variations of positive programming, comprising general skill development, functionally-equivalent skills, functionally-related skills and coping/tolerance skills. Through this approach, increases in a child's social and adaptive behaviours are thought to result in a concurrent decrease in his/her maladaptive behaviours (Lovaas & Favell, 1987). As this approach focuses specifically on pupils' skill development through systematic instruction, the teacher, rather than the SNA, lies at the heart of this educational process. This is evident whereby a range of Irish educational guidelines encourage skill-teaching to pupils with challenging behaviour, including social skills, communication skills, self-management skills and self-regulation skills (Cooper & Jacobs, 2011; DES, 2010). Nonetheless, a review of *Circular 0030/2014* (DES, 2014) highlights the role of the SNA in supporting pupils' skill development. This is outlined in terms of the SNAs' role in acting as a positive role model for the child, in addition to assisting with data recording in relation to behavioural/skill development. Moreover, a review of previous national research has pointed to SNAs' support of pupils' skill development, including gross and fine-motor skills, language skills, social skills, emotional skills and self-regulation skills, to name but a few (Daly et al., 2016; DES, 2011a; Rose et al., 2015). In light of such DES guidelines, the author sought to review SNAs' support of pupils' behavioural care needs with a focus on supporting pupils' skill development.

The final proactive aspect of the PBS framework concerns 'focused support'. Focused supports are predominantly concerned with antecedent control strategies and schedules of reinforcement. The rapid, proactive nature of focused supports is deemed to reduce the need for reactive strategies (Horner, 2000; LaVigna et al., 2009). Antecedent control strategies seek to eliminate the triggers that off-set the behaviour to reduce the likelihood of the behaviour occurring. In contrast, schedules of reinforcement involve the reward/reinforcement of specific behaviours, aimed at gaining temporary control over the behaviour (LaVigna & Willis, 2005). Although the class teacher may establish focused support strategies within the classroom, a review of *Circular 0030/2014* (DES, 2014) highlights the centrality of the SNA in relation to both antecedent control and schedules of reinforcement. Specifically, the

circular outlines the role of the SNA in preventing self-injurious or destructive behaviour on the part of the pupil and reinforcing his/her good behaviour (DES, 2014). Moreover, a review of previous national research has revealed SNAs' support of pupils' behaviour across a range of settings by minimising behavioural triggers and providing pupils with positive reinforcement (Daly et al., 2016; DES, 2011a). Notably, findings from over 650 in-school reviews by the Inspectorate, as detailed in the *Value for Money* report (DES, 2011a), revealed a high proportion of preventative care duties undertaken by SNAs in relation to students whose behaviour was considered a danger to themselves or others. Specifically, 421 of a total of 889 observed incidents (i.e. 47%) were logged as preventative in nature across primary, special and post-primary schools. Nonetheless, the lack of methodological rigour in the observational component of the study must be considered in the interpretation of findings. Accordingly, the need for further research in this area is warranted, with particular focus on SNAs' use of focused supports i.e. antecedent control strategies and use of schedules of reinforcement.

- *Reactive strategies*

Beyond preventative strategies, the PBS framework emphasises how reactive strategies focus on situational management for persons who display challenging behaviour. LaVigna and Willis (2005) contrast proactive with reactive strategies in terms of speed and degree of effects. Specifically, while proactive strategies address speed and degree of effects over time, reactive strategies serve to bring individual episodes of behaviour under control immediately, with the aim of minimising risk of injury to the person and others in the environment. Accordingly, the predominant focus is on safety in the here and now, rather than on pupils' long-term learning or skill development. A review of *Circular 0030/2014* (DES, 2014) highlights the centrality of reactive strategies to the SNA role, whereby the SNA is required to preserve the safety of the pupil and others with whom he/she is in contact. Moreover, a review of previous research highlights the role of paraprofessionals in responding to incidents. In the U.K context, findings from Rubie-Davies, Blatchford, Webster, Koutsoubou, and Bassett (2010) showed that both teachers and TAs mostly reacted to pupil behaviour rather than using preventative approaches. Such reactions were mainly neutral but firm or negative, with a predominant focus on requests for compliance. In the Irish context, findings from over 650 in-school reviews by the Inspectorate, as detailed in the *Value for Money* report (DES, 2011a), were somewhat similar to that of the U.K. Specifically,

data revealed that 305 of a total of 889 observed incidents (i.e. 34%) were logged as reactive in nature whereby the SNA was observed to respond to incidents dangerous to the pupil or others. Notably, the final 163 observations (i.e. 19%) were logged in terms of the temporary withdrawal of pupils from classrooms for safety or medical reasons. Nonetheless, the nature of such withdrawals was not specified in the report whereby it remains unclear whether they constituted a preventative or reactive strategy (DES, 2011a). Again, such issues related to the gathering and reporting of data reduces the reliability of the findings and calls for further research in the field. Accordingly, the author sought to review SNAs' support of pupils' behavioural care needs with a focus on reactive strategies, with due regard for ensuring methodological rigour in the gathering, analysis and reporting of findings.

2.4.3.4 Relational role with the pupil.

In addition to the use of proactive and reactive strategies with pupils as part of PBS, a return to the bio-psycho-social framework highlights the importance of socially and emotionally supportive relationships for pupils, particularly for those with behavioural care needs. Specifically, research highlights that adult-initiated, emotionally supportive and stable relationships are of central importance in the lives of young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (NCSE, 2012). Moreover, positive interactions with significant adults within school have been shown to correlate with pupils' social competence, improved adjustment to school and display of fewer behavioural problems (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Murray & Greenberg, 2000, as cited in O'Leary, 2011). Research also shows the intricate relationship between pupils' psychological, social, emotional and behavioural needs, and the impact of these factors on pupil learning (Cooper & Jacobs, 2011; DES, 2017a). In this regard, positive relationships for pupils are recognised as a central facet in supporting curriculum access for pupils, as well as supporting pupils' self-concept to engage with the curriculum. *Figure 8* depicts the interplay of these factors in a conceptual framework, as sourced from O'Leary (2011, p. 14, adapted from Powell & Tod, 2004).

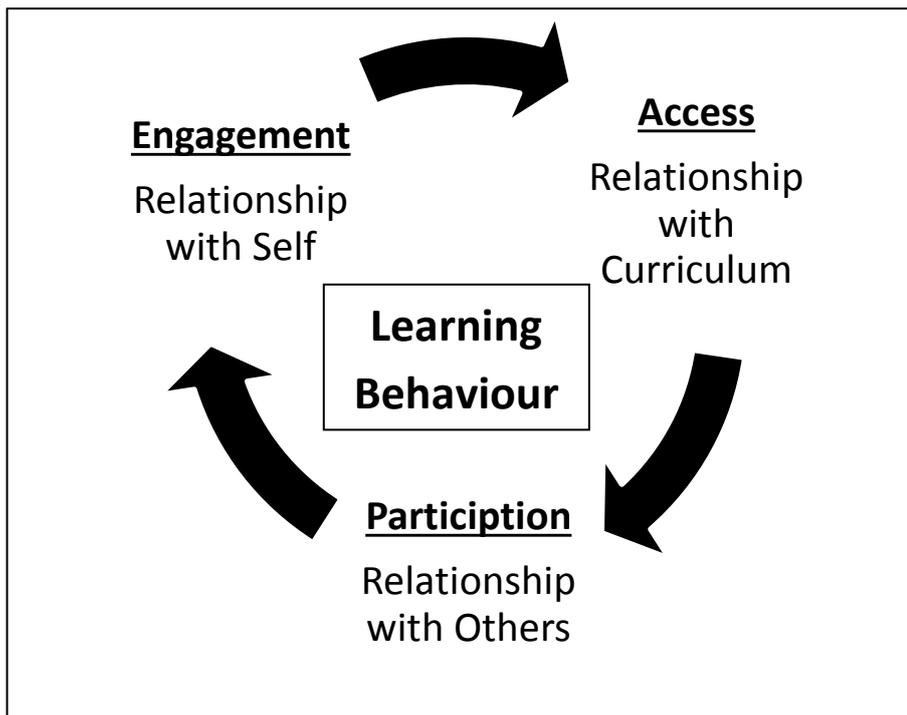


Figure 8: Conceptual framework to describe learning behaviour in school, as sourced from SESS (2011, p. 14, adapted from Powell and Tod, 2004)

In addition, over 40 years of research undertaken by Werner has highlighted that ‘one caring adult’ in a child’s life is possibly the most critical protective factor for a child’s resilience (Kumpfner & Summerhays, 2006). Similarly, the *My World Survey* (Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012) found that the presence of one supportive adult in a young person’s life is vitally important in terms of supporting his/her wellbeing, sense of connectedness, self-confidence and ability to cope with difficulties. Although teachers often present as that one caring adult in a child’s life (NEPS, 2015), previous research has pointed particularly to the emotionally supportive role of the SNA for the pupil with significant care needs. For example, research conducted by Ware, Butler, Robertson, O'Donnell, and Gould (2011) highlighted the strong relationship that often occurs between individual pupils and SNAs. Although long-term SNA-pupil relationships can be appreciated by parents (NCSE, 2018), the drawbacks of an overly strong SNA-pupil relationship must also be acknowledged, particularly in terms of inhibiting social relationships for the child (Ware et al., 2011). Such findings resonate with international data from Broer et al. (2005) who noted the primacy and sometimes exclusivity of the relationships formed between pupils and paraprofessionals. In light of such findings, the author sought to consider the relationship between pupils and SNAs, both in terms of the potential benefits and

drawbacks of the SNA-pupil relationship in light of the pupils' behavioural care needs, development of independence and overall development.

2.4.4 Summary of 'behavioural care needs' and research question two.

Research Question 2: *What strategies do SNAs use to support target pupils' behavioural care needs in mainstream primary schools?*

Having reviewed policy documentation related to inclusive education and the role of the SNA (DES, 2014), it is clear that the support of pupils' behavioural care needs constitutes a core element of the SNA role. Nonetheless, based on a review of national and international literature, it is clear that SNAs lack frameworks to guide their support of pupils' behavioural care needs in mainstream classrooms, particularly in terms of understanding and responding appropriately to pupils' behavioural care needs. Examples include the bio-psycho-social framework (Cooper, 2008; Engel, 1977; Hernandez & Blazer, 2006) and the PBS framework (Carr et al., 2002). Accordingly, the second research question selected for this study sought to investigate what strategies SNAs use to support pupils' behavioural care needs in mainstream primary schools. Elements of this research question are outlined in *Figure 9* below, as based on the literature review.

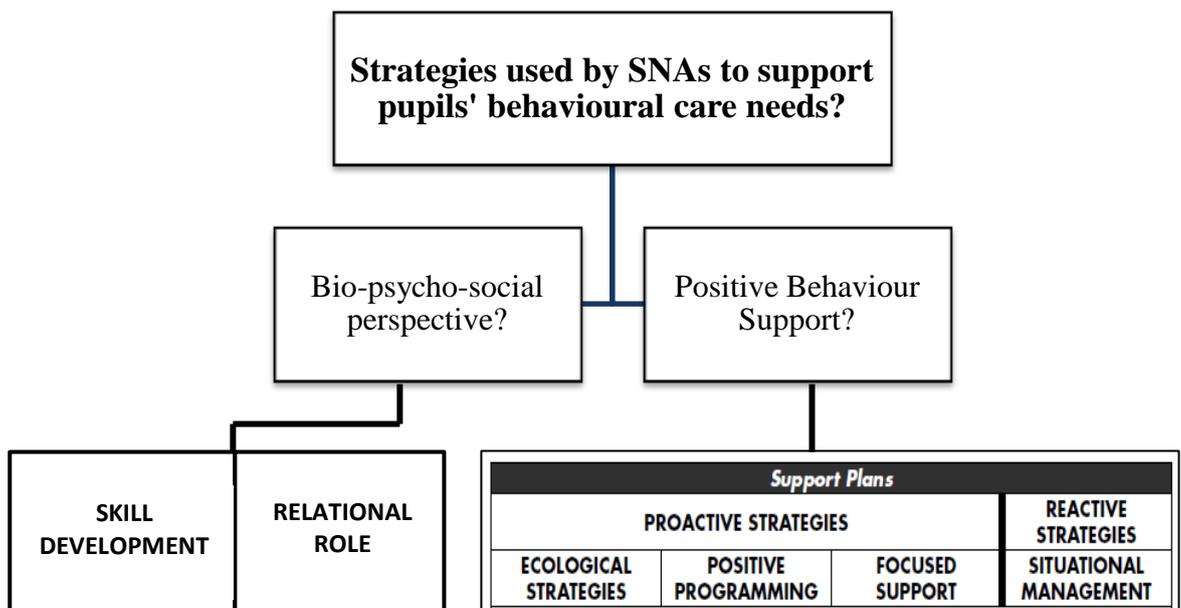


Figure 9: *Summary of the literature reviewed related to SNA support of pupils' behavioural care needs and the focus of research question two*

2.5 Pupil Independence

2.5.1 National policy context.

Beyond the area of SNA preparedness and behavioural care needs, a review of policy documentation highlights SNAs' central role in supporting the development of pupils' independence and related skills. Specifically, the first circular published in this domain outlined that, "...a balance must be struck between allocating necessary care support and the right of the child to acquire personal independence skills" (Department of Education and Science, 2002, p. 2). Under this proviso, it was envisaged that additional classroom personnel should not reduce a child's autonomy but rather, support his/her movement towards personal independence. This concept of independence resonates with numerous legislative documents in Ireland, particularly the seminal EPSEN Act of 2004. Herein, the foundational aim of inclusive education is stated, "...to assist children with SEN to leave school with the skills necessary to participate, to the level of their capacity, in an inclusive way in the social and economic activities of society and *to live independent and fulfilled lives*" (GOI, 2004, p. 5, author's emphasis).

In more recent years, SNA *Circular 0030/2014* has provided more explicit direction to schools in terms of supporting pupil independence (DES, 2014). In fact, the issue of pupil independence was given such weight in *Circular 0030/2014* that documentary analysis reveals the term 'independence' (or a derivative of the same) as being iterated on 30 occasions throughout the 19 page circular. Expanding on this point, appropriate and inappropriate models of support are outlined in the document, with the latter deemed a potential factor in hampering the development of pupil autonomy, interfering with teacher engagement and impacting on social relations for the pupil. Examples of negative support patterns include the SNA acting as a constant personal assistant to individual children, over-shadowing or constantly monitoring the child, or acting as an alternative teacher for children with SEN (DES, 2014). This latter point is particularly relevant whereby the SNA role is outlined as a care role and of a non-teaching nature (Department of Education and Science, 2002; DES, 2014). Issues related to socialisation are also highlighted, such that the SNA may act as, "a barrier or intermediary between the student and class teacher...contributing to the social isolation of students by creating a barrier between the students and his/her peers" (p. 15). Based on previous international research, the circular notes how such models of support can lead to social isolation, frustration and/or feelings of exclusion in the child, with the SNA acting as an

obstacle to a child's achievement of personal independence. In contrast, *Circular 0030/2014* outlines models of good practice to include "SNA aware[ness] of the various configurations of support such as close proximity and distance, as appropriate, with dependency upon a particular SNA being avoided (DES, 2014, p. 15). Accordingly, the optimum level of support recommended is at, "...the minimum level required to meet the care needs of the pupil" (p. 15). In addition, *Circular 0030/2014* outlines the SNA in terms of a "whole school resource" (DES, 2014, p. 15) whereby in lieu of one-to-one pupil assignment, schools are afforded autonomy in the management and deployment of SNAs in their school, such that they are encouraged to adjust or moderate the level of support provided to named children in light of their changing needs. As previously outlined, the circular also places significant emphasis on the link between pupil independence and individualised pupil planning, whereby the school is required to document its intended strategies for actively reducing, and, where possible, eliminating dependency on SNA support within a reasonable timeframe.

2.5.2 Review of national and international research.

2.5.2.1 Independence-related national research.

Although the topic of pupil independence has featured strongly in national policy documentation, a review of the literature highlights that research in this area is only beginning to gather momentum in recent years, particularly in an Irish context. A review of early studies related to the SNA scheme revealed that the topic of 'independence' was either overlooked or subsumed within much larger research questions. For example, some early, small-scale Irish studies pointed to issues of pupil over-dependency, learned helplessness, and overreliance on the SNA, as deduced through a range of interviews with SNAs, mainstream class teachers, pupils and parents alike (Elliott, 2004; Keating & O'Connor, 2012; Logan, 2006; Shevlin et al., 2008). In particular, the latter study pointed to perceived difficulties with individual pupil-SNA assignment, deemed by some SNAs as a means of fostering over-dependence in the child and referred to as the 'velcro' model (Shevlin et al., 2008, p. 147). In addition, participants alluded to the potential stigma that could arise for pupils with SEN whereby the presence of the SNA could lead to the child being treated differently to his/her peers. Additional data obtained by Kelly, Devitt, O'Keeffe, and Donovan (2014) also expanded on such findings. Specifically, 54 special school principals outlined how SNA over-dependence was deemed to be a central issue in posing academic and social-related difficulties for adolescents

transferring from mainstream to special schools, in addition to adjustment and integration problems. In contrast, data from Shevlin et al. (2008) highlighted opposing findings, such that some SNAs sought to maintain a 'caring' yet supportive distance from target children. Within this study, some SNAs were reported as attempting to promote independence for children, especially in the transition towards second-level school systems by working predominantly at the group level with pupils. Nonetheless, concern was expressed by the SNAs with regard to the minimal support they had received in devising strategies to enhance pupils' independence.

More recently, research conducted by Rose et al. (2015), as part of *Project IRIS*, provided more comprehensive data on the topic of pupil independence in an Irish context. This longitudinal study of the experiences and outcomes of pupils with SEN in Irish schools focused explicitly on 'pupil independence' as a measure for assessing pupil progress over time. A review of findings showed high variances across pupils in terms of their development of independent skills, spanning primary, post-primary and special schools. Focusing explicitly on primary schools, findings revealed that SNAs were seen to contribute to pupil independence over time by helping pupils stay on task, thus enabling them to be ready for working independently. In contrast, some pupils were seen to have become overly-dependent on SNA support, whilst others demonstrated a preference for working independently. Based on overall findings, Rose et al. (2015) highlighted the need for schools to assess the broader aspects of the curriculum, including happiness- and independence-related outcomes of pupils. In addition, they emphasised the need for pupils to develop appropriate levels of autonomy, such as by offering SNA support in a flexible manner. This was deemed particularly necessary in cases where pupils require full-time SNA support and as pupils mature and develop. Such recommendations were endorsed in the national evaluation of education provision for students with ASD (Daly et al., 2016) whereby the developmental nature of care needs was acknowledged. At primary level, data pointed to the benefits of rotating SNA support at a whole-school level, placing emphasis on the role of school leadership in this regard. Akin to previous research, some teachers and principals recognised dependency-related issues with SNA support, with one principal stating how some SNAs "don't always have the ability to pull back" (Daly et al., 2016, p. 85). Based on such findings, the need for additional training and CPD for SNAs in this domain was advocated. Nonetheless, the methodological limitations of the latter

study must be acknowledged when interpreting the findings, particularly in terms of the small sample size at the primary school level.

In addition, research conducted as part of the comprehensive review of the SNA scheme (NCSE, 2018), in collaboration with the 'National Disability Authority' (NDA) explored issues of pupil independence (NCSE, 2017). Firstly, data focused on how well young people with disabilities are prepared for life after school. In particular, the study explored the SNA supports that the young people had received in school and the level and adequacy of the same in enabling the young people to prepare for life after school. On one hand, findings showed that some schools had a policy to reduce dependence on SNA support through a staged withdrawal of support and encouragement of young people with disabilities to become more independent in everyday activities. SNA rotation between young people with disabilities was deemed a positive strategy to reduce the formation of an unhealthy dependence on the SNA. In addition, some schools had placed strong focus on individualised pupil planning, whereby independence-related targets had been pre-agreed with the parents and pupils to support pupils' movement towards related outcomes. On the other hand, findings highlighted that some young people had become overly dependent on SNA support during their schooling and as a result, were not adequately equipped for life in post-school environments. In particular, this was highlighted in cases where intensive one-to-one support had been provided for the individual. The need to encourage pupil independence from a young age was noted, with a particular focus on adopting a structured plan for pupil independence in terms of personal development, social development, self-management skills and life skills (NCSE, 2017).

Coupled with the NDA report, findings from the NCSE (2018) also showed variances across pupils in their development of independence over time, with due regard for the role of the SNA. Based on a review of reports compiled by *Special Educational Needs Organisers* on 291 sampled pupils, findings showed that 11% of pupils no longer required SNA support; 39% of pupils required reduced support; 10% of pupils required increased support; and 40% of pupils retained the same level of access to SNA support. Based on such findings alongside those previously outlined, the literature clearly points towards variances in practices across Irish classrooms in relation to the support of pupils' care needs and the impact of such support on pupils' development of independence.

2.5.2.2 Independence-related international research.

Focusing on international literature in the field, the significance of this issue extends beyond our national shores. In fact, early research can be traced back to the late 1990s during which leading U.S. author, Michael Giangreco, alongside colleagues, highlighted significant concerns related to pupil independence. In particular, such researchers focused on the issue of paraprofessional proximity on pupils with disabilities and associated implications for the child. Such information is outlined in the seminal paper entitled, *'Helping or Hovering? Effects of Instructional Assistant Proximity on Students with Disabilities'* (Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, & MacFarland, 1997). Within this study, data was collected through case studies in 16 classrooms in 11 public schools in the U.S, where pupils with multiple disabilities were educated in general education classrooms. Methodologies included extensive classroom observations, in addition to semi-structured interviews with students' team members. Based on triangulation of data sources, results highlighted incessant support patterns of paraprofessionals with pupils. This was evidenced by the instructional assistant maintaining physical contact with the pupil; sitting in a chair immediately next to the child; accompanying the pupil with disabilities to virtually every place the pupil went within the classroom, school building, and grounds; and/or, the pupil sitting in the instructional assistant's lap when classmates were seated on the floor.

Despite some benefits noted in relation to this close paraprofessional-pupil proximity, including instructional interactions, health management and tactile signing, data analysis revealed eight negative sub-themes in this regard. These included:

1. Interference with ownership and responsibility by general educators
2. Separation from classmates
3. Dependence on adults
4. Impact on peer interactions
5. Limitations on receiving competent instruction
6. Loss of personal control
7. Loss of gender identity
8. Interference with instruction of other students

The authors highlighted how such negative findings can often stem from systemic issues within schools, such as a lack of clear expectations in relation to planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and adjustment of instruction and/or support. In particular, the need for greater awareness amongst teachers and paraprofessionals was emphasised in relation to the potential hazards of over-proximity, as well as the need for specific training in, “basic instructional methods designed to fade assistance and encourage students to respond to natural cues” (Giangreco et al., 1997, p. 15). Examples included chaining, time delay procedures, errorless learning, fading, cue redundancy, task analyses and correction procedures that utilize naturally occurring cues as next-step prompts (Alberto & Troutman, 1995; Snell, 1992, as cited in Giangreco et al., 1997). Nonetheless, caution must be exercised in the generalisation of findings, given the modest number of schools within the study and the specific geographical context of the research.

Nonetheless, the aforementioned study served to fuel a range of ensuing international research in the field. Similar to initial findings by Giangreco et al. (1997), researchers noted both positive and negative findings pertaining to paraprofessional proximity, with the majority of results falling to the latter (e.g. Egilson & Traustadottir, 2009; Harris, 2011; Hemmingsson, Borell, & Gustavsson, 2003). In terms of positive outcomes, a number of studies highlighted benefits relating to academic engagement and on-task behaviour (Werts, Zigmond, & Leeper, 2001; Young, Simpson, Myles, & Kamps, 1997), in addition to supporting positive pupil-paraprofessional relationships and some peer interaction (Tews & Lupart, 2008). Nonetheless, the negative issues regarding close paraprofessional-child proximity continued to dominate the literature, coined by Schwartz (1997) as “paradoxical counter-productivity” (cited in Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 1999, p. 286). Interestingly, such studies have spanned a wide variety of pupils with disabilities, including those with behaviour challenges (e.g. Marks, Schrader, & Levine, 1999), visual impairments (Harris, 2011) and physical disabilities (Hemmingsson et al., 2003), to name but a few.

Extending the work of Giangreco et al. (1997), more recent work of Giangreco (2010a) has challenged the notion of providing one-to-one paraprofessional support to pupils with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. In particular, Giangreco (2010a) has argued that no theoretically grounded decision-making models exist in the literature for determining the need for one-to-one paraprofessional supports for pupils with disabilities in general education classrooms. This point is also iterated by Rose (2000), where he highlights how the allocation of individual support to named

pupils may lead to the creation of dependency and the denial of opportunities to develop independent learning skills. In light of such findings, Giangreco (2010a) provided a summary of 10 categories of detrimental effects of excessive paraprofessional proximity, based on a review of contemporary research in the field. These are outlined in *Table 3*. In an appeal to fellow practitioners, he stresses the need, “to ensure that well-intended supports do not inadvertently restrict opportunities for students with disabilities” (p. 4).

Table 3: *Inadvertent detrimental effects of excessive paraprofessional proximity (Giangreco, 2010a, p. 5)*

Category of Effect	Description
Separation from classmates	Student with a disability and paraprofessional are seated in the back or side of the room, physically separated from the class
Unnecessary dependence	Student with a disability is hesitant to participate without paraprofessional direction, prompting, or cueing
Interference with peer interaction	Paraprofessionals can create physical or symbolic barriers interfering with interactions between a student with disabilities and classmates
Insular relationships	Student with a disability and paraprofessional do most everything together, to the exclusion of others (e.g., peers)
Feelings of stigmatization	Student with a disability expresses embarrassment/discomfort about having a paraprofessional because it makes him/her stand out in negative ways.
Limited access to competent Instruction	Paraprofessionals are not always skilled in providing instruction. Some do the work for the students they support in an effort to keep up (a sign that instruction has not been adequately adapted)
Interference with teacher Engagement	Teachers tend to be less involved when a student with a disability has a one-to-one paraprofessional because individual attention is already available to the student
Loss of personal control	Paraprofessionals do so much for the students with disabilities that they do not exercise choices that are typical of other students

Loss of gender identity	Student with a disability is treated as the gender of the paraprofessional (e.g., male taken into female bathroom)
Provocation of problem behaviors	Some students with disabilities express their dislike of paraprofessional support by displaying undesirable behaviors (e.g., running away, foul language, aggression)
Risk of being bullied	Some students are teased or bullied because they are assigned a paraprofessional

Based on a review of international literature, the prominence of these aforementioned themes is verified. In particular, recurrent themes in the literature relate to the creation of over-dependency in the pupil on support, the social isolation of the pupil and interference with teacher engagement (e.g. Blatchford et al., 2012; Giangreco & Doyle, 2007; Rose & Forlin, 2010). Literature analysis reveals a range of terminology to describe the support patterns regularly adopted by paraprofessionals. Visual analogies include the ‘velcro model’, in which the SNA persistently monitors the pupil, and the ‘helicopter model’, in which the SNA constantly ‘hovers’ near the pupil (Down’s Syndrome Association, 2003; Lorenz, 1998; Shevlin et al., 2008). Moran and Abbott (2002) also allude to the ‘overprotective’ nature of teaching assistants, whereby the dangers of ‘nannying’ and ‘spoon-feeding’ children are outlined. Similarly, Fox (1998, as cited in Carrig, 2004, p. 119) refers to the “personal servant” model of support for the pupil, whereby issues of over-dependence are again emphasised. In addition, Malmgren and Causton-Theoharis (2006) refer to the presence of the paraprofessional in terms of a “bubble” (p. 303), whereby he/she can act as a physical or symbolic barrier that interferes with social relationships for the pupil.

The work of Hemmingsson et al. (2003) serves to expand on such linguistic terms, whereby specific characteristics of the help provided by classroom assistants are summarised under three assistant types. These include ‘The Stand-in’, ‘The ‘Help-Teacher’ and ‘The Back-up’ assistant. Such profiles were deduced from research carried out in Swedish schools using field observations and interviews. Herein, the authors explored the impact of paraprofessional proximity on seven pupils with physical disabilities. In particular, findings illustrated how the physical distance between the pupil and assistant did not correspond with the degree of pupils’ performance limitations and/or, age. Rather, the assistants’ classroom position

seemed to relate to specific characteristics of the help provided, which was then observed to pose either positive or negative implications for the child. *Table 4* provides a summary of related characteristics of each assistant type, as sourced from Hemmingsson et al. (2003, p. 91).

Table 4: Characteristics of each of the assistant types (Hemmingsson et al., 2003, p. 91)

Characteristic	The Stand-In	The Help-Teacher	The Back-Up
Proximity to the pupil	Sits next to the pupil	One or two desks away	Outside the group of pupils
Initiative for assistance	Often the assistant's initiative	On both the pupil's and the assistant's initiative	The pupil's or the teacher's initiative
Pupil's accessibility to the assistant	In classroom-related activities	In all activities during the school day	In all activities during the school day
Main responsibilities	Help the pupil manage the working pace in class	Help the teacher organize everything that specifically concerns the pupil with disabilities	Practical assistance

An analysis of each of the assistant types shows the impact of this role on the pupil, particularly in terms of levels of independence, social interaction and pupil-teacher interaction. Focusing on the 'The Stand-In' assistant, the close, incessant proximity of the assistant was described in terms of negating the child's need to request help, whereby assistance often serves to substitute for the pupil and perform parts of the task for him/her. This was recognised in terms of blocking pupil-teacher interactions and reducing opportunities for peer interactions during lessons.

In comparison, the 'Help-Teacher' was characterised as one who sits within the class grouping but further away from the pupil, reducing his/her impact on social interactions and/or, the pupil's initiative in school activities. In such scenarios, help is usually initiated by the pupil, but at times, the assistant also repeats teacher instructions to the child on a one-to-one basis. This role is viewed as intermediary between the teacher and pupil. Notably, in this situation, the assistant also engages in differentiation of school material for the child, where he/she is viewed to assume "overall responsibility" for the child (Hemmingsson et al., 2003, p. 92) and decreases pupil-teacher interaction.

Finally, the 'Back-Up' assistant was described as one positioned outside of the class grouping, remaining "ready in the background in case his or her support was needed but did not interfere until help was asked for" (Hemmingsson et al., 2003, p. 92). As duties of this assistant type mainly pertain to practical support in self-care activities, this role appears to have highest correspondence with the prescribed remit of the Irish SNA (DES, 2014). The impact of environmental factors in the classroom also appears to influence the type of assistance provided, with greater levels of environmental supports and adaptations related to this more detached role. Hemmingsson et al. (2003) highlighted the strengths of this role, whereby clear educational and care boundaries between the teacher and assistant, alongside the assistants' classroom positioning, increase pupil-teacher interactions as well as pupil-peer interactions. In this regard, the 'Back-Up' assistant was noted to support social interactions at break times by inviting other pupils to participate in games with the target child.

Although this study serves to augment the research base on pupil independence, the direct comparison of such findings to the Irish system is questionable. This is primarily due to the non-educational remit of Irish SNAs, alongside the small sample size of this study (N=7). Nonetheless, the key characteristics of each of the assistant types can serve to inform research in the field and act as a reference point for data analysis of further observations within an Irish context.

2.5.2.3 Paraprofessional-pupil proximity and classroom interactions.

Although research from the U.S and Sweden offer particular insight into the potential benefits and drawbacks of paraprofessional support on pupils' development of independence, the unstructured nature of some of the observations and the dominant reliance on field notes call to question the reliability and validity of some of the findings. More recently, however, large-scale research conducted in the U.K has provided greater insight in this domain by employing structured, systematic observations as a central tenet of the research process. Such studies include the DISS project (Blatchford et al., 2008), the MaSt project (Webster & Blatchford, 2013a) and the SENSE study (Webster & Blatchford, 2017). Across all three studies, use of a sophisticated moment-by-moment systemic observation component supported the objective collection of data related to the behaviour of teachers, TAs and pupils. This allowed comparisons to be drawn between the classroom experiences of pupils with SEN and their typically developing peers. With regard to independence, all three studies highlighted the high levels of proximity

between the TA and pupil with SEN in comparison to TA proximity to non-SEN pupils. Results from the DISS project (Blatchford et al., 2009a) revealed that pupils with SEN experienced less overall interactions from the class teacher than pupils with no SEN (76.2% versus 90.7% respectively).

In contrast, pupils with SEN interacted far more frequently with TAs than pupils with no SEN (22% versus 6.6%). These findings were verified within the MaSt project and SENSE studies, whereby proximity was explored with regard to interactions between pupils and adults. In fact, control⁴ pupils in the MaSt project (Webster & Blatchford, 2013a) were shown to have only 5% of interactions with TAs in comparison with 47% for statemented pupils. Although close TA-pupil proximity was noted to limit instances of negative behaviour for pupils and support their on-task behaviour (Blatchford et al., 2009a; Webster & Blatchford, 2013a) the research also highlighted the unintended consequences of high TA-pupil proximity. Specifically, the presence of support staff was noted to lead to supported pupils having less contact time with the teacher, particularly less individual attention and less active interactions with the teacher at secondary level (Blatchford et al., 2009a). In fact, findings from the MaSt project (Webster & Blatchford, 2013a) revealed that statemented pupils were in excess of three times more likely to interact with TAs than teachers, whereby the dominant focus on one-to-one interaction with TAs was often at the expense of interactions with teachers and peers. Strikingly, a review of overall data showed that pupils with statements had roughly half as many interactions with peers (18%) compared to control pupils (33%). In contrast, the proportion of time both groups of pupils spent not interacting was roughly equal, accounting for approximately one quarter of overall observations (control: 26%; statemented pupil: 24%). In addition, findings from the SENSE study highlighted an unintended consequence of close proximity with regard to pupils' opportunities for, and sense of, independence (Webster & Blatchford, 2018).

Such findings highlight that although close paraprofessional-pupil proximity can reduce negative behaviour for pupils and support pupils' on-task behaviour, such high levels of support present significant opportunity costs for pupils, including interference with teacher engagement, reduced peer-interactions and reduced autonomous classroom functioning for the pupil. Overall, such findings point to the negative impact on target pupils' development of independent skills, whereby high

⁴ In the MaSt project (Webster & Blatchford, 2013a) and SENSE study (Webster & Blatchford, 2018), comparison pupils were coined as 'control' pupils. However, for the purposes of this study, the term 'comparison' pupils has been solely employed to denote the average-attaining comparison pupils.

levels of one-to-one assistance can pose negative implications on pupils' overall classroom experience. Although such findings are extremely insightful in the U.K context, the difference in roles between the TA in the U.K context and the SNA in Ireland render it impossible to generalise U.K findings to the Irish context. In addition, a review of the literature revealed that no Irish study to date had engaged in systematic observations to explore the moment-by-moment interactions of pupils with SEN in mainstream classrooms, particularly when in receipt of SNA support. Accordingly, this offered clear avenues for future research for the current study to ensure the topic of pupil independence could be comprehensively explored through the lens of 'interactions'.

2.5.2.4 Differentiation and pupil independence.

Considering paraprofessional support and pupils' development of independence, two related factors were also considered, comprising differentiation of teaching/learning material and the creation of prompt dependence for the pupil. In an Irish context, research conducted by Ware et al. (2011) provided particular insight in this regard, whereby the experiences of 46 pupils with SEN in mainstream primary school classes were explored. Findings revealed that SNA support alone was deduced as the most frequent means by which the curriculum was differentiated for pupils, occurring in 40.6% of all observed tasks. Such SNA differentiation predominantly involved verbal prompting, with an almost even split in academic-related prompts and behaviour-related prompts observed across the research (Ware et al., 2011). Notably, Ware et al. (2011) highlighted that of all tasks observed, 83.4% involved the pupil with SEN engaging in the same tasks as his/her peers. Although some lessons involved modified and/or reduced content for pupils with SEN (11.7%), this mainly involved a reduction in pupil output rather than that of learning outcomes and was almost always accompanied by additional SNA support. In contrast, no lesson was observed that involved different task content for pupils with SEN. Such findings highlight the stretched role of the SNA in terms of providing academic support for pupils; a role that clearly resides outside of the SNA's prescribed remit (DES, 2014). In addition, the findings highlight how the lack of differentiation of class material can foster a direct dependency in the child on the SNA in terms of providing academic support. Notably, Koyama and Wang (2011) outline that of all adult-delivered prompts, verbal cues are the most difficult to fade, whereby they can significantly impede independent performance of learners.

Reflecting on international data related to the primary school context, results highlight similar findings to that of Ware et al. (2011) in terms of limited level of differentiation for pupils with SEN beyond that of paraprofessional support. For example, findings from the DISS study (Blatchford et al., 2008) revealed that in over half of observations (55%), pupils with SEN undertook tasks that were the same as classmates. In only 35% of observations, the task was differentiated and in a further 9% of observations, the task was different. In contrast, findings from the MaSt study (Webster & Blatchford, 2013a) showed that in 81% of observations, statemented pupils undertook the same task as control pupils. In only 12% of observations, statemented pupils undertook a differentiated task, and in a further 5% of observations, the task was different. Interestingly, findings from the DISS and MaSt studies highlighted that such differentiation predominantly occurred in the moment, such that TAs were heard to repeat the teacher's whole-class talk to statemented pupils, often word for word, directly after the teacher had spoken; a phenomenon coined as 'stereo teaching' (Blatchford et al., 2012). Moreover, audio-recording analysis later revealed stark differences between teacher-to-pupil talk versus TA-to-pupil talk. Specifically, findings showed that teacher-pupil interactions were focused more on pupils' learning, cognitive engagement and understanding, whilst TA-pupil interactions were focused more on task completion. In addition, while teachers used a variety of open and closed questions, TAs almost exclusively asked closed questions of their pupils (Rubie-Davies et al., 2010). Where pupil thinking was not encouraged as part of the prompt, TAs' interactions with pupils were noted to limited pupil independence by supplying pupils with answers, writing answers for pupils and telling pupils what to write, providing ideas for pupils, reading out questions and spelling out words for pupils (Rubie-Davies et al., 2010).

In light of such findings, the direct link between differentiation of learning content and pupil dependence/independence is evident. This issue is even more pertinent in an Irish context when the prescribed role of the SNA is of a non-teaching nature (Department of Education and Science, 2002; DES, 2014). In this regard, the author was particularly curious to obtain up-to-date, reliable data on the degree to which learning tasks are differentiated for pupils with behavioural care needs in mainstream classrooms (where required); viewed through the lens of supporting pupils' independent functioning in the classroom. The author also sought to establish the level of SNA-pupil interactions in a classroom, both in terms of academic support/differentiation and behavioural support.

2.5.2.5 Prompting and pupil independence.

Related to the issue of task differentiation and pupil (in)dependence is that of adult prompting. A review of the literature shows that whilst paraprofessionals may offer various forms of support to pupils, constant adult prompting can pose many difficulties for pupils, particularly that of prompt dependence. Hume, Loftin, and Lantz (2009) outline how prompt dependence can occur when the teaching or learning conditions create an overreliance or dependence within the pupil on adult support, thus inhibiting the pupil's independence. Research shows that when this occurs, pupils fail to respond to natural stimuli and rather, become dependent on external cues, particularly in the form of adult prompts, verbal cues and gestures. Additional drawbacks for pupils in cases of excessive pupil prompting include reduced levels of pupil participation, increased pupil passivity and learned helplessness (Goodson, Sigafoos, O'Reilly, Cannella, & Lancioni, 2007).

A review of the literature highlights the importance of paraprofessional awareness of the prompting hierarchy, ranging from full physical assistance right up to independent pupil functioning (Causton-Theoharis, 2009). To support this process, Fields (2013) outlines how pupils must firstly be given the opportunity to respond to natural environmental cues independently. Expanding on this point, Bosanquet, Radford, and Webster (2016) emphasise the importance of giving pupils time to think, whereby the provision of three to five seconds of 'wait-time' is recommended; a strategy shown to improve children's attention and motivation (Rowe, 1986). Based on the least-to-most fading strategy, the adult allows the learner a brief opportunity to respond independently and then delivers the least intrusive prompt, if required (Libby, Weiss, Bancroft, & Ahearn, 2008). In contrast, some studies have shown effective results using the most-to-least fading strategy, particularly if errors have been found to impede a child's learning or increase problematic behaviours (Libby et al., 2008; Lund & Troha, 2008). Nonetheless, in all cases, the prompting technique must be tailored to the individual learner's needs. Notably, a number of standardised and non-standardised scales have depicted the acquisition of independence as a gradual process of fading support and transference of responsibility to the child. This is reflected whereby both the pursuit of independence and the provision of support are depicted along continua which gradually release responsibility to the child. Examples of such scales include *The Functional Independence Measure for Children* (1897, as cited in Wong & Wong, 2007) and scales provided by Doyle (2008) and Causton-Theoharis (2009); see *Table 5*.

Table 5: A range of supports (listed from most intrusive to least intrusive), as sourced from Causton-Theoharis (2009, p. 42).

Type of Support	Definition
Full physical	Direct and physical assistance used to support a student
Partial physical	Physical assistance provided for some of the total movement required for the activity
Modelling	A demonstration of what the student is to do
Direct oral	Oral information provided directly to the student
Indirect verbal	A verbal reminder that prompts the student to attend to or think about what is expected
Gestural	A physical movement to communicate or accentuate a cue (e.g. head nod, thumbs up, pointing)
Natural	Providing no cue; allowing the ordinary cues that exist in the environment help the student know what to do

Hume et al. (2009) also outline that in situations where repeated adult prompting or high levels of pupil assistance are required, strategies that promote pupil independence must be embedded in the acquisition instruction. In this way, a shift can occur over time from paraprofessional support to an alternative stimulus that provides the pupil with cues and information about expectations. Conversely, research shows that while there are many intervention approaches that have been shown to be quite effective at promoting skill acquisition, fewer interventions take into account the development of independent functioning or do so too late after patterns of learning and responding are entrenched (Hume et al., 2009). In contrast, effective evidence-based strategies to promote independent functioning include video modelling, individual work systems, visual cues, activity schedules and self-monitoring procedures, to name but a few (Cooper & Jacobs, 2011; Copeland & Hughes, 2000; DES, 2010). Notably, numerous research studies have shown that people with disabilities can learn to use a range of prompts to perform a simple action or a complex behaviour chain, beyond that of a supervising adult (Copeland & Hughes, 2000; Hume et al., 2009; Koyama & Wang, 2011).

Moreover, the benefits of paraprofessional training in this domain have been detailed in the literature, whereby paraprofessionals have learned to promote pupil independence and decrease the level of pupil prompting required, with training predominantly based on principles of applied behaviour analysis (Hall, Grundon, Pope, & Romero, 2010; Robinson, 2011; Schepis, Reid, Ownbey, & Parsons, 2001). In all cases, the autonomous functioning of pupils is dependent on the gradual fading of prompts from the supervising adult. Notably, cues can relate to a range of domains, including prosocial behaviour, academic tasks, and/or social skills. In contrast, Giangreco et al. (2011) highlight that when services are delivered by inadequately trained personnel, serious problems may arise, such as creating prompt dependency, evoking and escalating challenging behaviours and inhibiting academic and social progress.

2.5.3 Theoretical viewpoints of independence.

2.5.3.1 Learned helplessness/Learned helpfulness.

Considering pupil independence, it is necessary to explore the theoretical underpinnings of this concept. A number of authors have highlighted the direct link between the provision of excessive support to a pupil and his/her development of learned helplessness (Causton-Theoharis, 2009; Logan, 2006). Learned helplessness, a construct developed by Seligman (1975) and later revised by Abramson, Seligman, and Teasdale (1978) is defined as, "behaviour resulting from a perceived absence of control over the outcome of a situation" (Seligman, 1975, as cited in Nezu, Martell, & Nezu, 2013, p. 30). Seligman outlined how this psychological condition occurs when the human has learned to act or behave helplessly in a particular situation, even when he/she has the power to help him/herself. The cornerstone of this theory involves learning that outcomes are uncontrollable, resulting in cognitive, motivational and emotional deficits. From a cognitive perspective, the theory postulates that mere exposure to uncontrollability is not sufficient to render an individual helpless; rather, the individual must come to expect that outcomes are uncontrollable in order to exhibit helplessness. In turn, motivational deficits can result, whereby the individual displays diminished initiation of voluntary responses in the situation. This is then seen to pose significant emotional implications for the individual, typically evidenced in depressed or lowered affect (Abramson et al., 1978).

It must be acknowledged that the addition of an attributional component to the theory highlights the mitigating role of one's attribution style in impacting on one's perceptions of controllability (Abramson et al., 1978). Stemming from *Attribution Theory*, Weiner (2000) highlights how one's attributions of successes and failures can be characterized in terms of three dimensions: *locus of control, stability and controllability*. Such dimensions have important implications for children's motivation and self-esteem, as well as their perceptions of personal competence and control in a given situation. Individuals who attribute failure to stable, global and internal factors are deemed at greater risk for developing learned helplessness than those with unstable, specific and external attributions. Woolfolk and Margetts (2013) outline how the greatest motivational problems arise when pupils attribute failure to stable, uncontrollable causes. Outlined in *Figure 10* is a model of learned helplessness, as proposed by Zimmerman (1990).

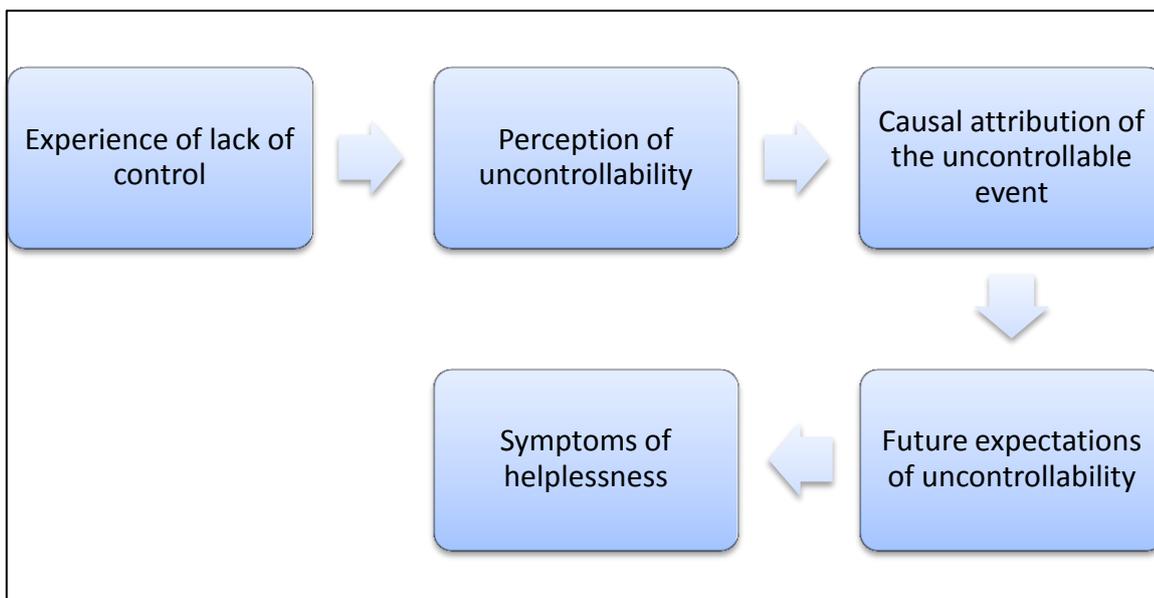


Figure 10: A model of Learned Helplessness (Zimmerman, 1990, p. 75)

Based on this model, Zimmerman (1990) outlines how one's experience of events can impact on perceptions of control in the situation. Such perceptions can range from feeling a lack of control in the situation to feeling successful control in the situation. In line, individuals are deemed to make causal attributions for the event, which directly impact on one's expectations about future events. Zimmerman (1990) details that when future events are expected to be uncontrollable, learned helplessness symptoms can present, including performance deficits on subsequent tasks.

Focusing on the child with SEN and/or significant care needs, the principle of learned helplessness is particularly applicable. Swain (1989) outlines how characteristics of some pupils with SEN, including apathy and under-confidence, can actually be the “direct manifestations of the dynamics arising from the lack of power” (p. 116). In this regard, an over-reliance on SNA support for individual pupils is thought to increase the potential for learned helplessness and diminish the speed at which a pupil develops independence (Logan, 2006). Causton-Theoharis (2009) notes that when adult support is consistently present, is overbearing, and does not fade appropriately, the pupil can learn to expect such adult support. Herein, a perceived lack of control on the part of the pupil can result in him/her learning to wait for cues, direction, or prompting from an adult before engaging with the task. A detailed account of this classroom presentation is provided by Lorenz (1998, p. 14):

Children used to their own personal slave may...feel unable to initiate an activity without the permission of their assistant. These children then begin to believe that they can only produce good quality work when there is an adult sitting beside them, attributing success to the adult rather than their own efforts. This learned helplessness ensures that they stop work as soon as their support assistant or teacher moves away, but start up again the minute they return.

In contrast, Zimmerman (1990) proposes an alternative to learned helplessness, coined as ‘learned hopefulness’ (see *Figure 11*). Through this viewpoint, the positive consequences that result when one exerts control in a situation are emphasised, particularly in terms of psychological empowerment, proactive behaviour and reduced alienation for the individual. This process of developing learned hopefulness involves one learning and utilizing problem-solving skills in the situation, resulting in the acquisition of perceived or actual control in the situation. Akin to learned helplessness, a number of authors have highlighted the individual cognitive, personality and motivational factors that underpin the development of this construct, including theories of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982), locus of control (Rotter, 1966) and motivation to control (DeCharms, 1968). In light of learned hopefulness theory, Zimmerman (1990) details how as individuals gain control and mastery over their own lives and learn to utilize skills for influencing life events, they gain psychological empowerment. This construct, initiated by the work of Rappaport (1987), aims to enhance the possibility for people to control their own lives and is applicable to individual citizens as well as to larger organizations. Empowerment is defined as “convey[ing] both a psychological sense of personal control or influence and a concern with actual social influence, political power and legal rights” (p. 121).

Stemming from this definition, Lord and Hutchison (1993) note the multifaceted, ecological nature of this construct, emphasising the need to focus on the ‘person in the environment’. Through this lens, empowerment can be viewed as a process in which individuals achieve increasing control over various aspects of their lives and participate in the community with dignity. In particular, the necessity to focus on skill-building for the individual is emphasised, with strategies including observation, modelling and imitation (Bandura, 1982). Notably, the power of learning in natural settings is also highlighted through this theory, whereby social and community supports are particularly valued and deemed to stem from a strengths-based orientation (Lord & Hutchison, 1993; Zimmerman, 1990).

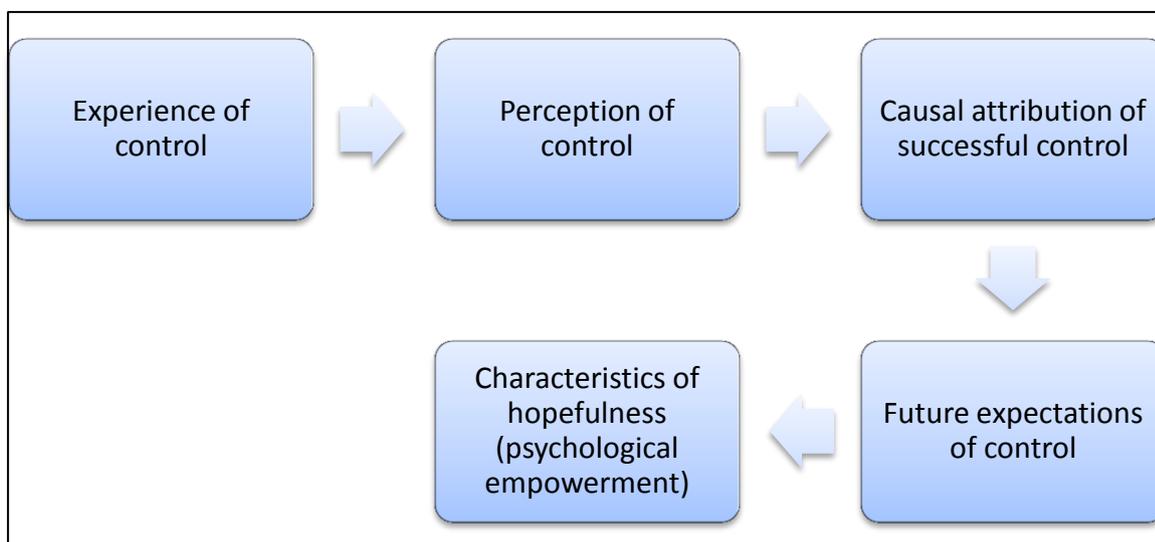


Figure 11: A model of Learned Hopefulness (Zimmerman, 1990, p. 75)

2.5.3.2 Self-determination theory.

In light of the theories of ‘learned helplessness’ (Abramson et al., 1978; Seligman, 1975); and ‘learned hopefulness’ (Zimmerman, 1990), the need to support the child’s development of perceived and actual control in the given situation is irrefutable, with implications posed across cognitive, motivational, affective and behavioural domains. In particular, this issue underpins the principle of independence, particularly in terms of supporting the child’s movement towards independent functioning through the acquisition of personal independence skills. In considering this progression, the concept of ‘independence’ requires interrogation. From a Western societal viewpoint, independence is associated with being able to do things for oneself, i.e. to be self-supporting and self-reliant (Morris, 1997;

Reindal, 1999). This particularly relates to self-care activities, including cooking, washing, toileting, writing etc. In terms of SNA support, independence is defined by Rose et al. (2015, p. 119) as one's "ability to work independently; not over-dependent on SNA support". Palm (2014) highlights how independence has now become the 'ideal' towards which care policies, services, technical supports and educational systems are all striving; a concept deemed to be "...a universally desirable goal" (Fine & Glendinning, 2005, p. 602). This aim stands in stark contrast to the notion of dependency, a construct that when viewed through a Western societal lens, can be interpreted as "an undesirable state that should be avoided as far as possible" (Palm, 2014, p. 119). In fact, Fine and Glendinning (2005) highlight the emotional, and often 'cold' undertones associated with this concept, whereby dependency is often viewed as being subordinate; as being the subject to the control of others (Morris, 1997). Joyce and Mamo (2006) also highlight how dependency has become a socially stigmatised notion in Western society; an adverse position to behold.

Exploring this construct at a deeper level, disabled activists, including Oliver (1989) and Morris (1997), contest independence as being an 'ideology', noting the disparity between professionals' and disabled persons' viewpoints on the same term. Independence is not solely considered through the operational view of autonomous skill performance, but rather, by an ability to be in control of and make decisions about one's life (Reindal, 1999). Morris (1997) highlights how "...independence is not linked to the physical or intellectual capacity to care for oneself without assistance; independence is created by having assistance when and how one requires it" (p. 56). Similarly, Palm (2014) outlines how independence is not framed as an autonomous state of being but rather, as achieved by separation from control by others or reliance on others for support. In particular, the author emphasises the role of personal control and self-determination, whereby freedom to choose care support serves to empower individuals with care needs. Based on the work of Oliver (1989), independence is then viewed as a cognitive process rather than merely a physical one, whereby aspects of socio-psychological decision-making take precedence. For example, the notion of 'control in principle' is central to this debate, whereby an individual can be in control of his/her life, despite receiving the support of others in performing physical or intellectual tasks. From this viewpoint, the need to move beyond the independence-dependence dichotomy is emphasised, whereby the role of cognitive capacities and self-determination must be acknowledged. In addition, the potential for interdependence is also highlighted. In fact, the aim of

complete independence has been subject to significant refute, deemed at times as an “untenable” notion (Palm, 2014, p. 16), particularly in light of human being’s need for a sense of connectedness, social relations and interpersonal interactions (e.g. Maslow, 1943). In contrast, interdependence is taken from a relational view of the subject, particularly in terms of partnership (Reindal, 1999).

2.5.3.3 Independence: A critical viewpoint.

So what is independence? Interestingly, a number of authors have contested the construct analysis proposed by disabled-rights advocates, whereby descriptions of ‘independence’ appear conflated with that of ‘autonomy’. In particular, they highlight the power of language in creating and re-creating social meanings, whereby issues of control, power and vulnerability can often underpin the dependence-independence debate (Palm, 2014). Reflecting on this issue, Palm (2014) notes that although issues of control and self-determination are significant elements of independence, the importance of self-reliance and self-sufficiency must also be recognised. In the same light, Fine and Glendinning (2005) recognise the strong parallels, overlaps and inter-relationships between the provision of ‘care’ and the concept of dependency formation. Nevertheless, they highlight how the two concepts must remain distinct and dichotomised, whereby the need for ‘care’ should not equate to a cause for ‘dependency’. From a practical viewpoint, independence therefore does not solely equate to autonomous functioning, but so too, involvement of the individual in the decision-making or problem-solving domains of care provision. In this way, the voice of the child is central to the debate; a voice that requires recognition in decision-making about how, where, and when assistance/care is provided (Egilson & Traustadottir, 2009). As previously outlined, the DES (2014) has placed strong focus on the child’s voice in the SNA process, alongside the role of the SNA in supporting the pupil to voice his/her views. Yet, it must be recognised that the ultimate goal in the independence debate, particularly in terms of Irish educational literature (DES, 2014; GOI, 2004) is self-reliance and self-sufficiency so that the pupil can reach his/her potential in terms of autonomous functioning and independent living skills; so that the pupil can work independently, without being overly dependent on SNA support (Rose et al., 2015).

2.5.3.4 Scaffolding theory.

In considering SNAs' role in supporting pupils' development of independence skills (DES, 2014), a review of Irish policy and educational literature highlights the absence of any evidence-based theories or frameworks for guiding SNAs' practice. In contrast, a review of international research reveals the recent focus on 'scaffolding' as a central theoretical approach for guiding paraprofessionals' work. The concept of scaffolding is rooted within the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky (1978). This theory emphasises the role of the more able other in promoting the learning and independence skills of the child. Central to this theory is the concept of scaffolding. This term, adopted from the field of construction, is debated in the literature with regard to its definition and related measurement (Granott, 2005). Mermelshtine (2017) presents three dominant components of this construct, as based on a review of the literature. The first strand, which follows the more traditional definition of scaffolding, is concerned with the evaluation of children's region of sensitivity to instruction (Carr & Pike, 2012; Connor & Cross, 2003). The second strand treats scaffolding as a multidimensional concept consisting of at least three facets: cognitive support, emotional support, and transfer of responsibility (Hughes, 2015; Neitzel & Stright, 2003; Neitzel & Stright, 2004). Mermelshtine (2017) outlines how cognitive support is associated with task simplification, demonstration, and marking of critical features; emotional support relates to frustration control and the warm and sensitive manner of instruction, while transfer of responsibility is related to recruitment, attention maintenance, and the child's role in pacing the task for him/herself. Finally, the third strand relates to verbal scaffolding, with a focus on the verbal input of the adult when interacting with the child (Hughes & Ensor, 2009).

In spite of the various discrepancies in defining 'scaffolding', a central tenet of almost all definitions pertains to the temporary nature with which support is provided to the child and the focus on the child's development of independence (Bosanquet et al., 2016). The literature highlights how scaffolding should only occur in situations where the learner might otherwise not be able to accomplish the task without help. In this way, learning is considered to firstly take place on a social (inter-psychological) level, before taking place on an individual (intra-psychological) level. In a recent systematic review of research, van de Pol, Volman, and Beishuizen (2010) highlighted three key characteristics of scaffolding which serve to foster independence in the child. These comprise of *contingency*, *fading* and *transfer of*

responsibility. Figure 12 depicts this scaffolding process, as sourced from van de Pol et al. (2010, p. 274).

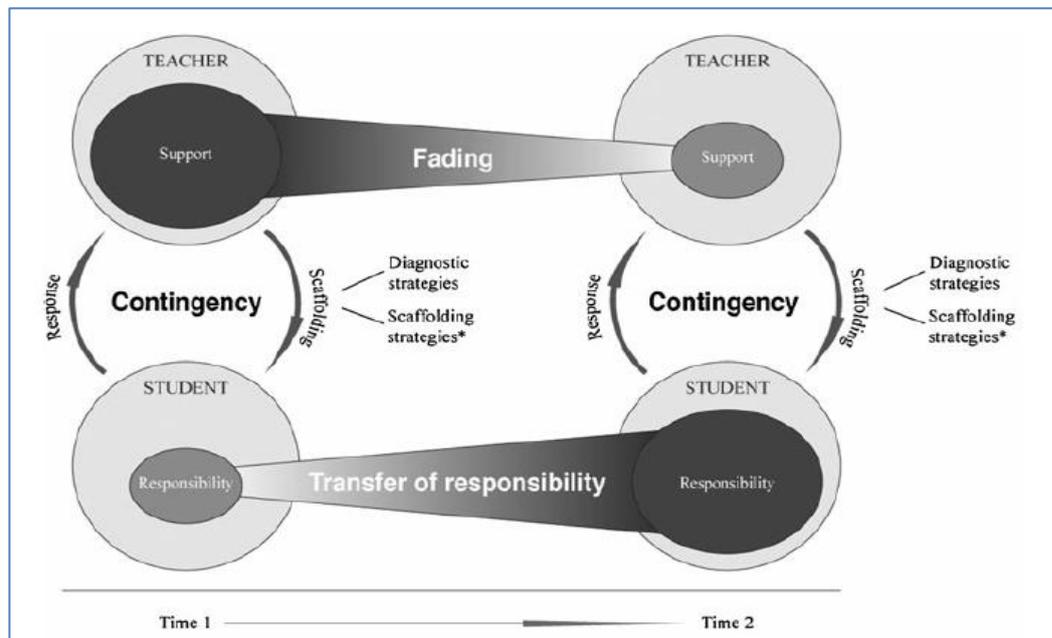


Figure 12: Conceptual model of scaffolding (Van de Pol et al., 2010, p. 274)

The first process, entitled contingency, refers to responsive, tailored or calibrated support, in which assistance must be adapted to the current level of the pupil's performance, or at a slightly higher level. Most notably, the authors highlight the need for this support to be "finely tuned to the learner's ongoing progress" (p. 272), whereby principles of formative assessment are particularly salient in establishing the child's current level of functioning. By ensuring that the support is in line with, or slightly above the child's current developmental level, the assistant is deemed to be working in the child's 'Zone of Proximal Development'. This is defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level, as determined by independent problem solving, and the level of potential development, as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Notably, the child is viewed as an active participant in this relationship, rather than merely the subject of a directive, instructional strategy (Stone, 1998).

Following this contingent support, *fading* occurs, comprising the gradual withdrawal of support from the child. van de Pol et al. (2010) emphasise the individual, differentiated nature of this process, whereby the fading system is dependent on the

child's developmental and competency levels. Finally, *transfer of responsibility* occurs, during which the child assumes increased control over the learning/task. In this way, the learner is thought to have "internalize[d] the support structure associated with the scaffolding, and, in the end, scaffolding is no longer needed as the learner can provide his or her own support" (van de Pol et al., 2010, p. 275). Through this process, the child is seen to adopt increased levels of control over his/her learning over time. Notably, in the review of scaffolding literature, van de Pol et al. (2010) highlight how this movement towards increased levels of responsibility pertains to the learners' cognitive or metacognitive activities, or to learners' affect. Accordingly, the scaffolding intervention, both in terms of process and outcome, should be evident in the behaviour and performance of both the learner and that of the teacher/instructor.

Recent research in the field of paraprofessional support has highlighted the direct application of scaffolding theory to inform paraprofessional practice (Bowles, Radford, & Bakopoulou, 2017; Radford, Bosanquet, Webster, & Blatchford, 2015; Radford, Bosanquet, Webster, Blatchford, & Rubie-Davies, 2014). Radford et al. (2015) note how scaffolds can be used to support pupils across a range of conditions, including contingency management, frustration control, cognitive restructuring, reducing the degrees of freedom (i.e. simplifying a task), recruitment of pupil interest and direction maintenance. In addition, the authors note the complex skill-set required in the provision of oral scaffolds to pupils, such as through modelling, instructing, explaining, questioning, prompting and feeding back.

Figure 13, as sourced from Bosanquet et al. (2016, p. 45), presents an overview of the scaffolding process with regard to the role of the TA and pupil.

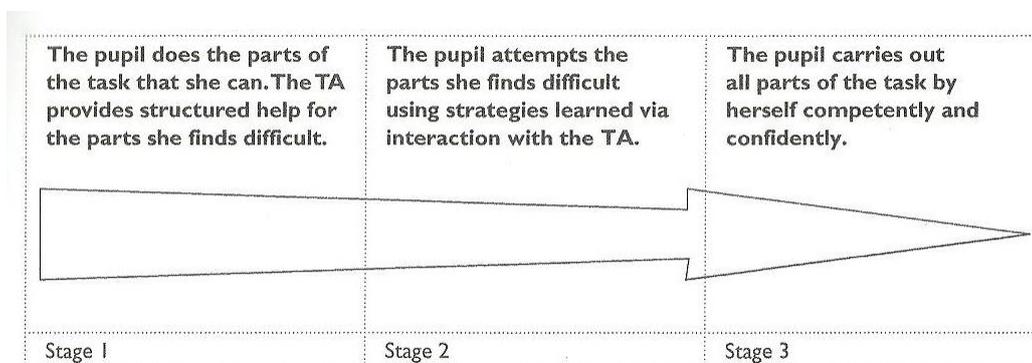


Figure 13: The scaffolding process, as sourced from Bosanquet et al. (2016, p. 45)

Based on a qualitative study of classroom discourse informed by both socio-cultural theory and conversation analysis, Radford et al. (2015) expanded on this model by offering a unique framework for supporting pupils with SEN through interaction in inclusive classrooms (see *Figure 14*). This framework sets out three key scaffolding roles, as informed by principles of scaffolding theory (van de Pol et al., 2010). These include: a) a *support* role that maintains learner engagement, on-task behaviour and motivation; b) a *repair* function that focuses on learning and fostering independence when children are in difficulty; and c) a *heuristic* role that encourages pupils to use their own learning strategies. Notably, Radford et al. (2015) argue that the heuristic role is a particularly skilful, complex endeavour and more challenging than that of support and repair roles. The framework outlines explicit delineation between the teaching role of the teacher and the supportive role of the TA, as well as the need for collaborative practices between key classroom personnel to provide effective pupil support. Although the framework is in the early stages of development (Radford et al., 2015), the model offers strong direction for informing future research and evidence-based practice in this field.

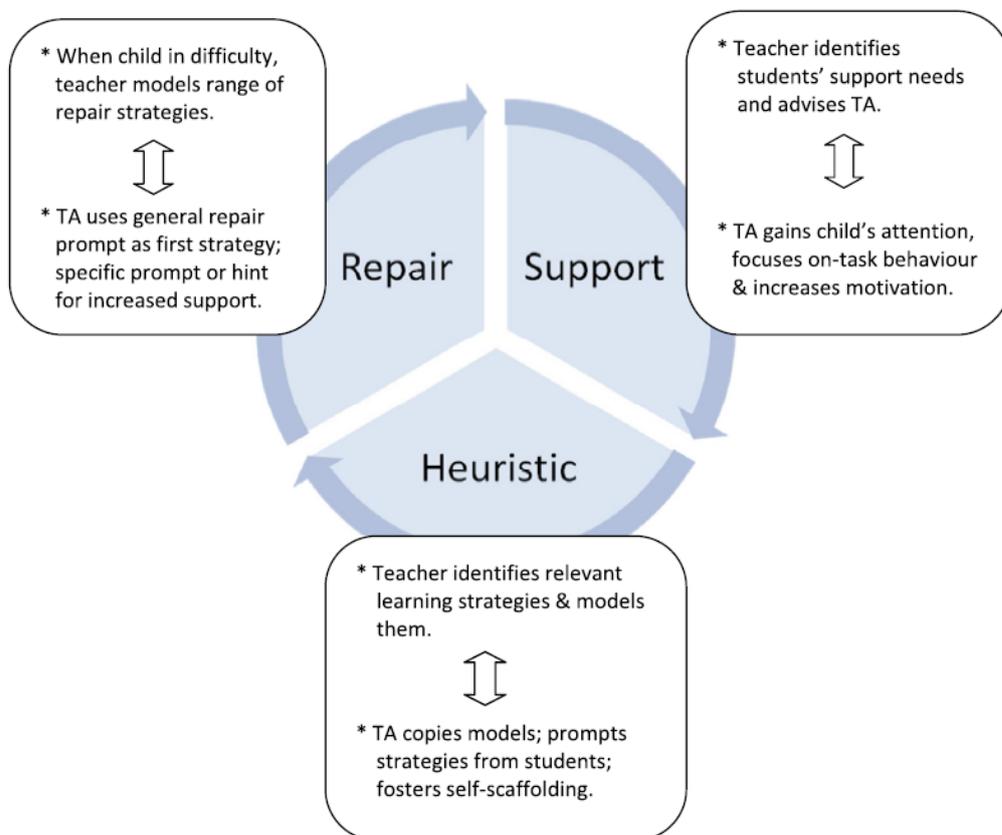


Figure 14: Scaffolding framework, outlining the roles and responsibilities of the teacher and the TA, as sourced from Radford et al. (2015, p. 8)

Stemming from this framework, more recent research conducted by Bowles et al. (2017) has provided insight into TAs' own conceptual understanding of the scaffolding construct. Based on semi-structured interviews with 11 TAs in the U.K, findings revealed some awareness amongst the TAs of *support* strategies and *repair* strategies for scaffolding pupils in the classroom. Support scaffolds included emotional support, curricular support and relational support, whilst *repair* strategies included withholding correction, using a range of question types, modelling, and working within pupils' zone of proximal development. In contrast, findings highlighted a distinct lack of knowledge and confidence amongst TAs in explaining the specific *heuristic* strategies required to scaffold pupils' learning and foster self-scaffolding amongst pupils. On one hand, findings from this research must be interpreted with caution, particularly due to the lack of observation data with which to triangulate the interview data. Nonetheless, the study serves to highlight gaps in TAs' knowledge and skills, mainly in terms of transferring responsibility to pupils. In light of such findings, the authors concluded that, "until all TAs have a good understanding of scaffolding principles and how these translate in the classroom, it will be difficult for them to foster children's independence, despite their best intentions" (Bowles et al., 2017, p. 10).

Based on such findings, it is clear that training and professional development is warranted for paraprofessionals to enhance their knowledge and applied usage of evidence-based scaffolding strategies. In this regard, Bosanquet et al. (2016) offer a graded framework for supporting pupils and their development of self-scaffolding skills. Such skills, underpinned by metacognition, are deemed to represent the highest level of pupil independence and the lowest level of adult support. This framework, entitled the '*Planning and Assessing for Independence*' model (Bosanquet et al., 2016), spans domains of correcting, modelling, clueing, prompting and pupil self-scaffolding (see *Figure 15*). Akin to the 'least-to-most' prompting hierarchy (Libby et al., 2008), Bosanquet et al. (2016) argue that the paraprofessional must start at the top of the framework with the expectation that the pupil will scaffold his/her own learning. Through this lens, interventions should only occur when the pupil experiences a difficulty that he/she cannot overcome independently. The central role of formative assessment must be recognised in this process. Specifically, the paraprofessional must assess and provide feedback regarding pupils' progress against predetermined success criteria to ensure support offered to the pupil is contingent with his/her current level of functioning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Bosanquet et al., 2016).

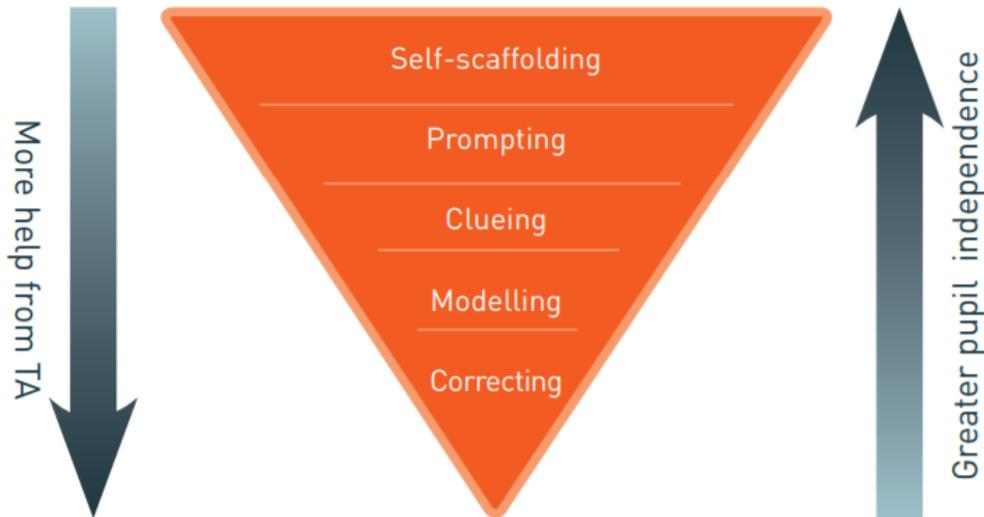


Figure 15: 'Planning and Assessing for Independence' model, as sourced from The Education Endowment Foundation (2018, as adapted from Bosanquet et al., 2016)

Reflecting on this theoretical approach and the Irish educational context, the relevance of scaffolding theory to the work of SNAs requires reflection. On one hand, one might question the relevance of scaffolding theory to the Irish context, particularly in light of the 'non-teaching' nature of the prescribed SNA role (DES, 2014). In contrast, the focus within Irish educational policy (DES, 2014) on SNAs' development of pupils' independent skills undoubtedly calls for an evidence-based framework to guide SNAs' daily interactions with pupils. Accordingly, the three core principles of scaffolding theory appear particularly relevant, whereby *contingency*, *fading*, and *transfer of responsibility* can serve to frame SNAs' work with pupils (van de Pol et al., 2010). From this, evidence-based strategies for assisting pupils' movement towards greater levels of independence must be emphasised, such as that proposed by Radford et al. (2015), Bosanquet et al. (2016), and Causton-Theoharis (2009). Notably, many of these strategies stem from a behaviourist perspective, which align with the DES' focus on SNAs' use of modelling and reinforcement (DES, 2014). Couched in the broader framework of scaffolding theory, the central importance of providing contingent, calibrated levels of support to the child, in light of his/her developmental and competency levels, stands clear.

2.5.4 Increasing pupils' level of self-management.

In considering the movement of pupils towards greater levels of independence, literature related to pupil self-management and self-regulation was also reviewed. Both from a theoretical and pedagogical viewpoint, such approaches seek to move the child along a continuum from adult-control (external authority) to pupil control (internal evaluation), with the ultimate goal of realising pupil-managed independent learning and behaviour (O'Leary, 2011; Westwood, 2015). Research highlights that for pupils with intellectual disabilities or emotional disturbance, the skills and strategies involved in self-management and self-regulation often need to be explicitly taught to the pupil (Hoff & Ervin, 2013; Regan & Martin, 2013). With regards to pupils with challenging behaviour, self-regulation includes the ability to manage one's emotions, to control anger or frustration and to cope with stress (Ennis & Jolivette, 2014). Thereafter, self-management presents as one aspect of self-regulation and is defined as, "An individual's ability to function independently in any given environment without the need for constant supervision, prompting or direction from others" (Westwood, 2015, p. 62). Research shows that the learning and demonstration of self-management skills by a child with a disability or care need appears to be one of the most important factors contributing to his/her successful inclusion in a mainstream classroom (Salend, 2011). In addition, self-management strategies have been shown to be successfully applied across all age groups from pre-school to second-level, and with pupils presenting with a range of disabilities (O'Leary, 2011).

Westwood (2015) recommends a five-step procedure for teaching self-management to pupils with SEN, comprising *explanation, demonstration, role-play, cueing and maintenance*. Westwood (2015) notes that to teach self-management, teachers must firstly recognise that such teaching is important and necessary. Secondly, teachers need to consider the precise skills or behaviours that the pupil requires to function independently. Thirdly, pupils' current strengths and needs in these skills must be assessed. Finally, all skills that are lacking must be explicitly taught using direct methods and corrective feedback. Although the SNA clearly should not be involved in the teaching process, as per policy guidelines (DES, 2014), the SESS outline the vital role that SNAs can play in supporting the implementation of self-management strategies with pupils, referring to their role as the "guide on the side" (SESS, n.d., p. 1). In particular, SNAs' use of effective levels of cueing and positive feedback could support pupils' maintenance and generalisation of learning. Nonetheless, Westwood (2015) cautions against the use of constant reminders with

pupils, in light of the potential formation of prompt dependence, as previously outlined.

2.5.5 Alternatives to overreliance on paraprofessionals.

In considering pupils' development of independence, research in the U.S has also begun to explore alternatives to overreliance on paraprofessionals, aimed at ensuring appropriate supports for all pupils (Carter, Cushing, Clark, & Kennedy, 2005; Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Giangreco, Halvorsen, Doyle, & Broer, 2004; Giangreco, Smith, & Pinckney, 2006). Giangreco and Broer (2003) created a planning tool entitled, '*Guidelines for Selecting Alternatives to Overreliance on Paraprofessionals*' which comprises a 10-step team process to examine a school's practices for supporting pupils with disabilities in general education classrooms, alongside an array of alternative options. In particular, the tool highlights issues related to pupil dependence on paraprofessionals and inappropriate pupil autonomy as one of the four problem clusters for reflection within schools. Based on this 10-step process, applied research across 26 schools in six states in the U.S deduced positive results from use of the tool, serving as a catalyst for planning, change and capacity-building within schools (Giangreco et al., 2011). Examples of some of these potential alternative options are presented in *Table 6*, as sourced from Giangreco (2013). In contrast, a review of the literature highlights that self-reflection and self-evaluation within Irish schools is but at an early stage. Although schools are now mandated to engage in self-evaluation processes (DES, 2012), current practices remain focused on curricular matters, with issues related to SEN, inclusion or pupil autonomy predominantly unexplored (DES, 2016b). Nonetheless, the strength of the reflective tools provided by Giangreco and colleagues must be recognised, whereby they offer avenues for future change in an Irish context.

Table 6: Alternatives to overreliance on Teacher Assistants (Giangreco, 2013)

Category of alternatives	Brief description of alternatives
Resource reallocation	Resources may be reallocated by trading in teacher assistant positions to hire additional SETs. Typically, one early career special educator can be hired for approximately the same cost as three teacher assistants.
Co-teaching	Co-teaching involves assigning a teacher and special educator to work together in the same classroom. To maintain a naturally occurring number of students with special needs, it may be necessary to share the special educator across three or four classes, depending on class size.
Building capacity of teachers	Building teacher capacity (e.g., expectations of teacher engagement with students with disabilities, differentiated instruction, universal design, response to instruction, positive behaviour supports, curriculum overlapping, assistive technology) can reduce overreliance on teacher assistants.
Paperwork assistants	Teacher assistants may be assigned clerical paperwork duties that free time for special educators to collaborate with teachers and work directly with students.
Improving working conditions for special educators and classroom teachers	Reducing caseload size, the grade range covered, and the number of teachers with whom special educators interact can improve their working conditions. Exploring changes in class size, availability of special educator support, scheduling coordinated meeting times, and providing access to adapted materials are examples of steps that can improve working conditions for teachers.
Peer supports	Encouraging peer support strategies can provide natural ways to support students with disabilities that may also benefit students without disabilities.
Self-determination	Purposely teaching self-determination skills provides opportunities for students with disabilities to have a voice in determining their own supports.
Teacher assistant pools	Establishing a small pool of highly skilled teacher assistants (or one floating position for a small school) allows for their temporary assignments to address specific, short-term needs.
Fading plans	In cases where a student is receiving a substantial amount of teacher assistant support, developing a plan to fade that support as much as possible can lead to greater student independence and more natural supports.
Dual certified teachers	Hiring teachers who are certified in both general and special education provides enhanced personnel capacity for all students.

2.5.6 Summary of ‘pupil independence’ and research questions three and four.

Research Question 3: *To what extent do SNAs support/hinder the development of target pupils’ independence in mainstream primary schools?*

Research Question 4: *To what extent do the classroom experiences of pupils with behavioural care needs in receipt of SNA support differ to that of their average-attaining peers?*

Having reviewed policy documentation related to inclusive education and the role of the SNA (DES, 2014; GOI, 2004), it is clear that the topic of ‘pupil independence’ has gained prominence across national policy documents over recent years. Following an in-depth review of the literature, it is also evident that research is beginning to mirror policy changes, with an increase in both national and international research related to pupil independence and the role of paraprofessionals. Nonetheless, research gaps continue to exist in a national context, particularly when considering the SNA role and its impact on the development of pupils’ independence. Moreover, the need for objective, reliable data-gathering methodologies was recognised within an Irish context, whereby the use of systematic observations was recognised as a potential tool to support data gathering in classrooms, in addition to case studies. Based on this literature review, the third research question selected for this study sought to investigate the extent to which SNAs support/hinder the development of pupils’ independence in mainstream primary schools. Thereafter, the fourth research question sought to explore the extent to which the classroom experiences of target pupils in receipt of SNA support differ to that of their average-attaining peers. This question was particularly viewed through the lens of ‘inclusion’ and ‘independence’, with reference to pupils’ seating contexts in the class, pupils’ academic work and pupils’ moment-by-moment interactions with the teacher, SNA and peers. Given the complexities of the topic of independence and the various underpinning theoretical frameworks, a summary of some of the main tenets of the reviewed literature is outlined in *Figure 16*.

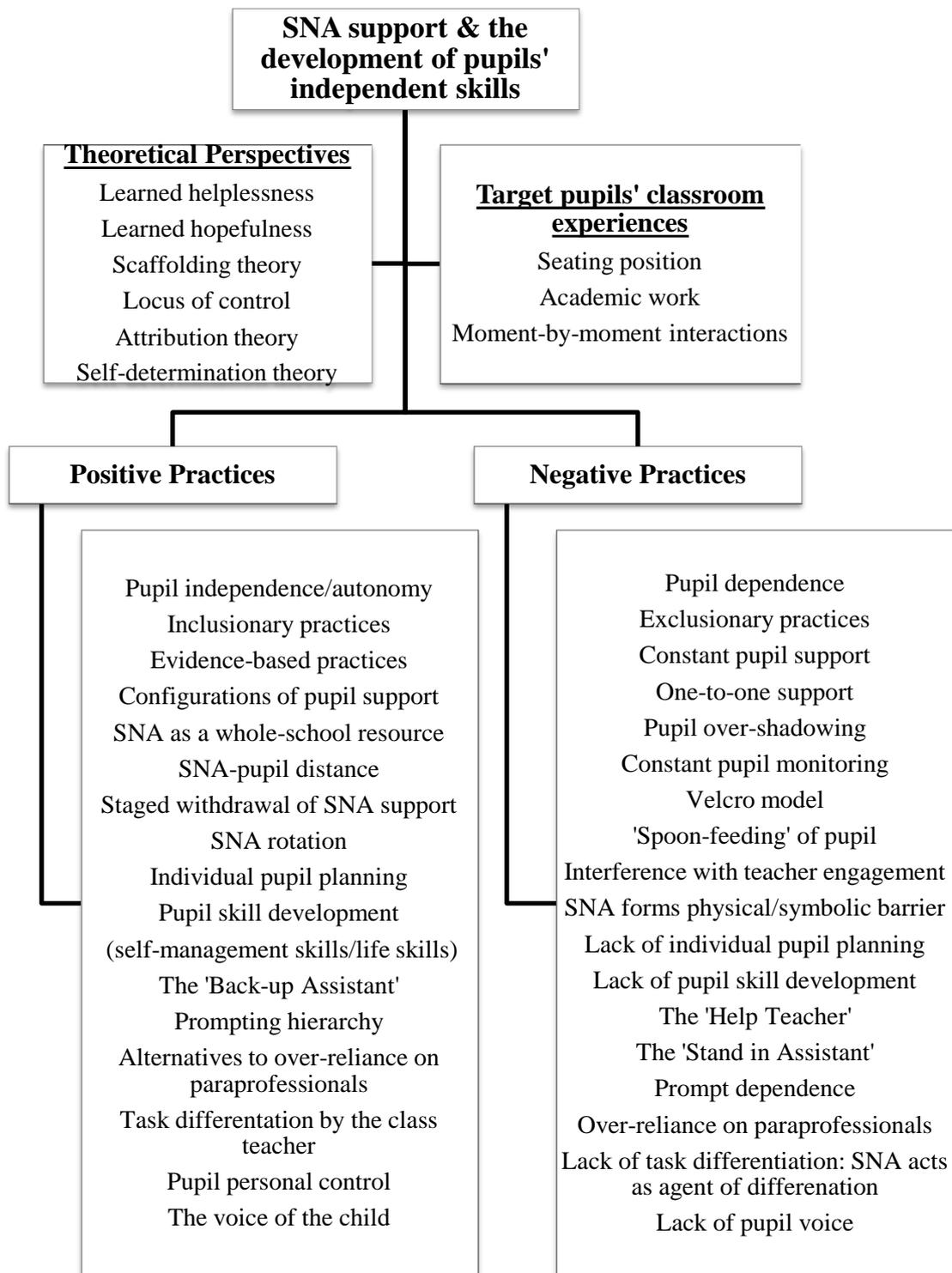


Figure 16: Summary of the literature reviewed related to the role of the SNA and pupils' behavioural care needs and the focus of research question three

2.6 Conclusion

Chapter Two sought to provide a critical review of national and international literature related to the SNA scheme and the wider context of paraprofessional support of pupils with disabilities/SEN in educational contexts. Firstly, the national policy context of the SNA scheme was presented, with due regard for the most recent educational *Circular 0030/2014* (DES, 2014). Following this, national and international research was outlined and critiqued, based on an in-depth review of the literature. This spanned three main areas including (a) *paraprofessional preparedness* (b) *support of pupils with behavioural care needs* (c) *pupil independence*. Where relevant, underpinning educational and psychological theories were forwarded with the aim of linking theory, research and practice. By engaging in this literature review, the gaps in national research were clearly identified related to the preparedness and deployment of SNAs when supporting target pupils' behavioural care needs and developing target pupils' independence in mainstream primary schools in Ireland. Accordingly, this provided a clear context and rationale for the study's chosen research questions. The research methodology will now be presented in *Chapter Three*, aimed at addressing a range of these research gaps.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The aim of the study was to obtain a detailed and integrated account of the preparedness and deployment of SNAs when supporting target pupils' behavioural care needs and developing target pupils' independence in mainstream primary schools. A three-phased multi-method approach to data collection was adopted for this research, combining qualitative and quantitative methods.

This chapter presents a detailed description of the research design adopted for this study, including an overview and justification of the methodologies employed. The chapter begins by presenting the research framework, including the philosophical underpinnings of the research. The research design is then outlined and a clear rationale provided for its selection. Thereafter, each of the three research methodologies is presented in turn, namely the large-scale online survey, the systematic observations and the case studies. Under each research methodology, a description of the data collection process is provided with reference to research tool design, sampling strategy, pilot study, procedure and ethical considerations. Following this, an in-depth section on data analysis is presented, both in terms of quantitative and qualitative data. Finally, the chapter concludes with acknowledgement of some of the methodological limitations of the research and defence of the quality procedures inherent in the study, with reference to matters of reliability and validity.

3.2 A Framework for Research

3.2.1 Research aim and questions.

In selecting the methodological approach for this research, the researcher was primarily guided by the research aim and related questions. These were derived from the review of national and international research, including national educational policy. *Table 7* outlines the research aim and questions of this study, as previously introduced in *Chapter One*.

Table 7: Research aim and questions

Research Aim

To obtain a detailed and integrated account of the preparedness and deployment of SNAs when supporting target pupils' behavioural care needs and developing target pupils' independence in mainstream primary schools

Research Questions

1. *To what degree are SNAs prepared to support target pupils' behavioural care needs and develop target pupils' independence in mainstream primary schools?*
 2. *What strategies do SNAs use to support target pupils' behavioural care needs in mainstream primary schools?*
 3. *To what extent do SNAs support/hinder the development of target pupils' independence in mainstream primary schools?*
 4. *To what extent do the classroom experiences of pupils with behavioural care needs in receipt of SNA support differ to that of their average-attaining peers?*
-

3.2.2 Research framework.

In parallel to the research questions, a number of fundamental research factors were also considered. These included the researcher's philosophical worldview, the research design and the research methods. Creswell (2014a) emphasises how each research approach involves the intersection of a range of research components, such that each component influences and interacts with the other. This interaction is presented in *Figure 17* and discussed thereafter.

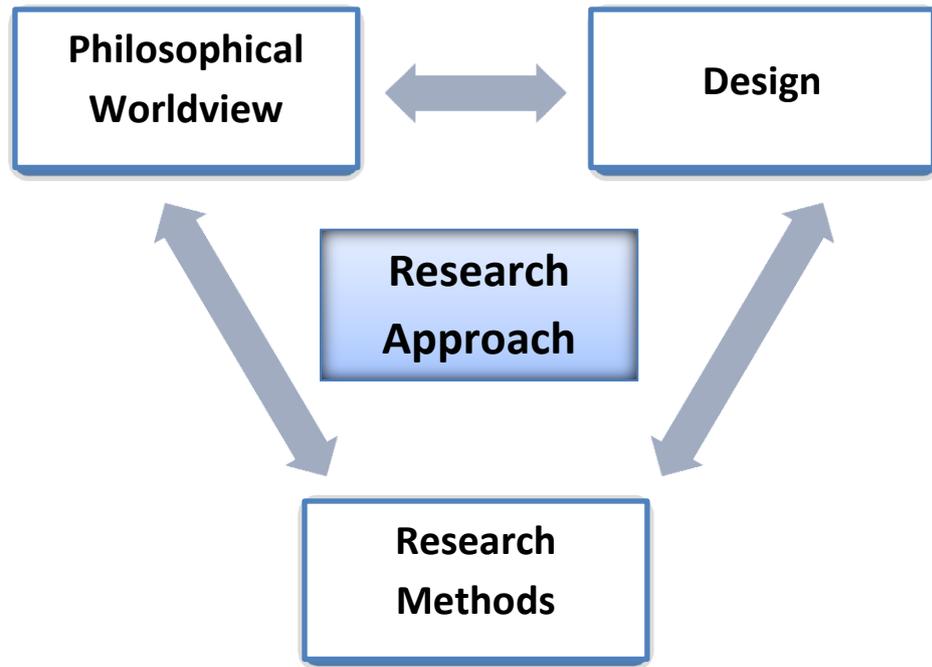


Figure 17: A framework for research: The interconnection of worldview, design and research methods (adapted from Creswell, 2014b, p. 5).

3.3 Philosophical Perspective and Authorial Stance

Creswell (2014a) outlines how one’s worldview is regarded as, “a general philosophical orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher brings to a study” (p. 6). Similarly, Guba (1990, p. 17) defines it as, “a basic set of beliefs that guide action”. From the outset of this study, the researcher was guided by a pragmatic epistemological stance. Specifically, a practical, ‘what works’ way of thinking underpinned the approach to this research, whereby the research design and methods were selected with the aim of best answering the research questions at hand.

Pragmatism derives from the work of Peirce, Mead, James and Dewey and is concerned with focusing attention on the research problem (Cherryholmes, 1992; Mertens, 2015). Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) detail how such early philosophers were interested in examining practical consequences and empirical findings to help in deciding which action to take next as one attempts to better understand real-world phenomena. Pragmatism offers an account of research that is pluralistic in nature and goes beyond simple dichotomies of theory and practice. Rather, it focuses on research as serving to resolve problems that present

themselves in experience (Dewey, 1938). This approach considers practice, rather than theory, to be the driving force for inquiry (Norwich, 2013). Patton (1990) emphasises that through this worldview, the distinct focus is placed on 'what works' and related solutions to research problems, with a focus on the importance of practical thinking (Mertens, 2015). Embarking on this study, the researcher was guided by a practical mind-set, whereby the research design and methods were chosen in light of the research questions. Creswell (2014a) notes that through this approach, the researcher is free to choose the research methods, techniques and procedures that best meet the needs and purpose of the research.

Reflecting on this worldview, pragmatism can be viewed as one which offers a useful middle position both philosophically and methodologically. On one hand, it offers a practical and outcome-oriented method of inquiry that is based on action, leading iteratively to further action. On the other hand, it offers a method for selecting mixed methodological approaches that can help researchers to better answer an array of research questions (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). According to Mertens (2015), the pragmatist's goal is to search for useful points of connection throughout the research process.

Pragmatism places high regard on the reality and influence of the inner world of human experience in action, whereby knowledge is viewed as being both constructed and based on the reality of the world in which we live and experience. In practice, pragmatic researchers employ multiple methods of data collection to best answer the research question at hand. In fact, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) refer to pragmatism as the "philosophical partner for mixed methods research" (p. 16). In this way, pragmatism helps to shed light on how both quantitative and qualitative research approaches can be mixed fruitfully, thereby offering best opportunities for answering important research questions (Hoshmand, 2003; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). In addition to the range of research methods and data sources, pragmatists also look to the context of the research, including the social and political context (Creswell, 2014a; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Awareness of the research context was central to this study's approach, whereby each level of the ecological context, including policy, familial and school contexts, were seen to impact on the classroom functioning and directly, on the pupils. In this way, the IF framework (Frederickson & Cameron, 1999, as cited in Frederickson & Cline, 2015) guided the author's conceptual thinking throughout the research process, particularly when reflecting on data within each case study. Nonetheless, although pragmatism can be viewed as a promising philosophical approach to

applied research problems, Alexander (2006) emphasises that one must be mindful to avoid the “quagmires of self-defeating relativism to which pragmatism too often succumbs” (p. 206).

3.3.1 Axiology.

A review of the work of early pragmatists reveals how questions of ethics were deemed of central importance within the pragmatic approach. Researchers such as Dewey and James emphasised an ethics of care, in particular for the youngest members of society (Hall, 2013). Mertens (2015, p. 37) outlines that for contemporary researchers working within the pragmatic paradigm, the ethical goal of research is, “to gain knowledge in the pursuit of desired ends”. This research axiology was recognised to align with the author’s worldview. In particular, the study was deemed as ethically justifiable in terms of gaining insight into the phenomena from different viewpoints, including that of the child, and in seeking related findings.

3.3.2 Ontology and epistemology.

Ontology is defined as one’s assumptions about how the world is made up and the “nature of ‘things’” (Keegan, 2016, p. 51). Mertens (2015) outlines that through a pragmatic worldview, the use of metaphysical concepts such as truth and reality are avoided. Rather, pragmatics treat issues of inter-subjectivity as a key element of social life. Maxcy (2003) emphasises how pragmatics judge the value of research in terms of its effectiveness, or the degree to which the findings ‘work’ with respect to the specific research question. This contrasts with other paradigms that seek correspondence of findings to some objective truth in the real world. Based on this ontological viewpoint, the researcher was aware that matters of ‘truth’ did not relate to the research focus. Rather, a practical approach to this research was adopted, whereby research methods were chosen that best aligned with the research questions.

Epistemology is defined as, “attempts to describe our beliefs about how one might discover knowledge about the world” (Keegan, 2016, p. 51). Stemming from the work of Dewey, his epistemology viewpoint was that research takes place in communities and thus, the researcher needs to interact with the diverse members of the community to both understand and address the problem (Mertens, 2015; Morgan, 2007). As a result, the pragmatic paradigm and related epistemology does not view the researcher as a distant observer. Rather, the researcher should choose

the methods that are deemed most appropriate and utilise the results “in ways that can bring about positive consequences within your value system” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, p. 30). Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013) emphasise how pragmatism deals with different viewpoints and therefore, tries to create coherence in the data. Through this worldview, the criterion for judging the appropriateness of a method is if it achieves its purpose (Maxcy, 2003). During the research process, the researcher was mindful to select appropriate research methods that allowed her to interact and connect with the research participants, thereby creating a coherent understanding of the phenomena at play.

3.3.3 Reflexivity.

Creswell (2013) highlights the importance of the researcher ‘positioning’ him/herself in the research study. This concept, referred to as *reflexivity*, occurs whereby the researcher makes his/her position explicit and is conscious of the biases, values and experiences that he/she brings to a qualitative piece of research. As outlined in *Chapter One*, the researcher had previously worked across educational contexts and had first-hand experience of working with SNAs. During that period, an array of both positive and negative SNA practices had been observed which directly related to pupils’ challenging behaviour and levels of independence/dependence. Stemming from such experiences, the author was mindful of the pre-conceptions and biases that she could potentially bring to the research. Considering such matters, previous experiences were acknowledged and checks of validity and reliability were conducted throughout the research process.

In spite of the importance of researcher objectivity, post-modern thinkers now acknowledge that all researchers influence and shape the writings that emerge. Bryman (2012) notes that one’s writing forms a reflection of one’s own interpretation of the data, based on the cultural, social, gender and personal matters that one brings to the research. This is echoed by Gilgun (2005), who outlines how writings present as co-constructions of data i.e. representations of interactive processes between the researcher and the research subjects. In light of such thinking, openness was adopted in the write-up of this research, serving to balance researcher objectivity with an acknowledgement that past experiences and the current national educational context may shape the researcher’s interpretation and conclusions regarding the phenomena. This acknowledgement was central to the method of data analysis selected for the qualitative data, as outlined in *section 3.8*.

3.4 Research Design

3.4.1 Mixed methods approach.

A mixed methods approach was selected for this study. Mixed methods is defined by Creswell (2014a) as, “the collection and ‘mixing’ or integration of both quantitative and qualitative data in a study” (p. xxiv) and is deemed to align with the pragmatic paradigm (Mertens, 2015). This research approach can be viewed as a relatively new methodology, with its origins dating back to the late 1980s and early 1990s. In more recent years, the use and centrality of this research methodology has expanded across disciplines and countries, including education, management, sociology and health sciences (Creswell, 2014a; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). In addition, the approach has undergone several periods of development in terms of philosophical, procedural and reflective debates.

The primary rationale for selecting a mixed methods approach was that a combination of quantitative and qualitative data was deemed most appropriate for answering the research questions. On one hand, the strength of quantitative research methods was recognised in terms of gathering data from a large cohort of SNAs in relation to preparedness and deployment. In addition, a quantitative approach supported the use of systematic observations to explore the moment-by-moment behaviours of pupils, SNAs and teachers in the classroom. On the other hand, the strengths of qualitative data were recognised in terms of providing an in-depth perspective on the preparedness and deployment of SNAs from the perspective of SNAs, teachers and pupils alike. Notably, a range of researchers have acknowledged the strengths of adopting a mixed methods approach, whereby the use of both methods can provide a more holistic understanding of the research question than one method alone (Creswell, 2013, 2014a). As stated by Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 42), when one combines quantitative and qualitative data, “we have a very powerful mix”.

In selecting the mixed methods approach, a ‘convergent parallel mixed methods’ design was adopted (see *Figure 18*). This methodological approach stems from the earlier multi-trait work of Campbell and Fiske (1959) who felt that a psychological trait could be best understood by gathering different forms of data. The convergent parallel mixed methods design is a form of mixed methods in which the researcher converges or merges quantitative and qualitative data in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem. Creswell (2014a) outlines how in this form of research, the investigator typically collects both forms of data at roughly

the same time and then integrates the information in the interpretation of the overall results. It was envisaged that this methodology would allow for the comparison of different perspectives across data sources, including the large-scale SNA survey, systematic observations and case studies, shedding light on both similarities and differences across settings and participants. In addition, it was anticipated that any contradictions or incongruent findings across data sources could be further probed both within and across cases.

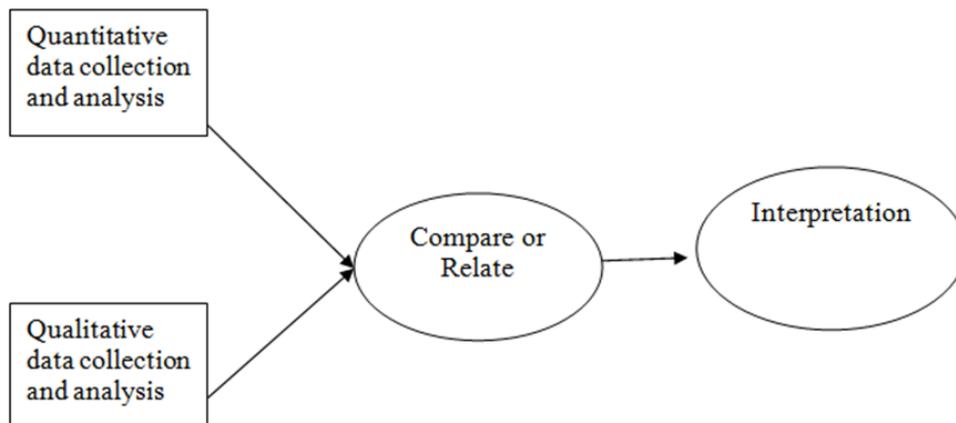


Figure 18: Convergent parallel mixed methods design, as sourced from Subedi (2016)

In choosing the mixed-methods research design, the challenges of employing this approach were clear. Firstly, Creswell (2014b) outlines how this type of design can be deemed an “advanced methods procedure” (p. 565), as one must understand both quantitative and qualitative research. In particular, this pertains to the time-intensive nature of the methodological approach, such as in terms of collecting and analysing the data. In addition, a systematic approach is required in merging, integrating and linking the two strands of research to ensure that the detail and complexities of the research are addressed. Nonetheless, guided by the pragmatic worldview, the benefits of the large, comprehensive dataset were deemed to override the challenges of the mixed-methods approach.

3.4.2 Overview and rationale for the research design.

Adopting this mixed-methods research design, a three-phased multi-method approach to data collection was devised, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. Specifically, the researcher aimed to obtain a detailed and integrated account of the preparedness and deployment of SNAs when supporting pupils’

behavioural care needs and developing pupils' independence in mainstream primary schools. This research design is modelled on that employed in *Strand 2 Wave 1* of the DISS project (Blatchford et al., 2008) comprising large scale SNA survey, systematic observations and case studies. *Figure 19* presents a visual description of the research design, comprising each of the three components.

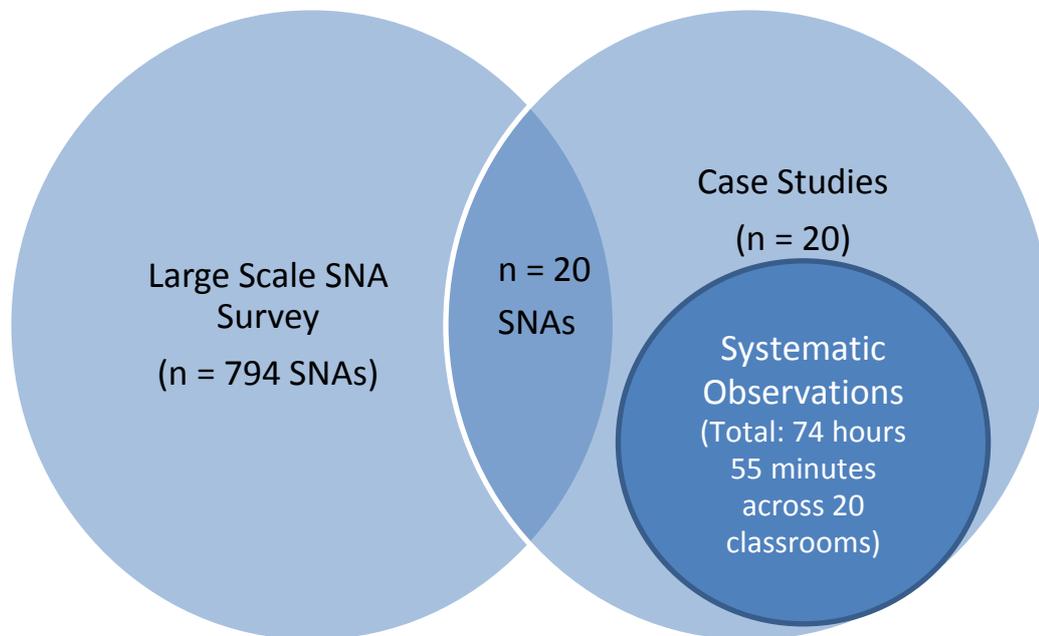


Figure 19: Research design, comprising large scale SNA survey, systematic observations and case studies

The need for additional data collection methodologies, beyond that of case studies alone, was recognised, particularly in light of the dearth of large-scale research related to SNAs in the Irish context. Whereas the DISS study (Blatchford et al., 2008) provides a national backdrop for data collected in the MaSt project and SENSE study (Webster & Blatchford, 2013a; 2017, respectively), there was potential absence of this contextual data in an Irish context if case study methodology was solely employed. In addition, due to the researcher working independently i.e. without a team of research assistants, it was clear that the number and breadth of each case study in an Irish context would be reduced when compared to that employed in the MaSt project and SENSE study. Considering such factors, use of a large scale SNA survey was deemed an effective means of collecting comprehensive feedback from a nationally representative sample of SNAs within an Irish context. In this way, ensuing case studies could serve as interpretive and grounded analysis of quantitative findings from closed survey questions.

To support the research design and subsequent data analysis, aspects of the *Wider Pedagogical Role Model*, as presented in the DISS project (Webster et al., 2011), were adopted as part of the research framework for this study. This model was presented by Blatchford et al. (2012) to explain the situational and structural factors within which TAs work, with specific reference to 'preparedness', 'deployment' and 'practice'. With regard to this study, focus was placed on the themes of SNA *preparedness* and *deployment* alone to explore SNAs' support of target pupils' behavioural care needs and development of target pupils' independence.

The following section will detail each of the three research methods adopted. Firstly, information pertaining to the large-scale SNA survey will be presented, with reference to instrument design, pilot study, sampling strategy, ethics and data analysis. Thereafter, the same format will be adopted with regard to the systematic observations and case studies.

3.5 Large-Scale SNA Survey

3.5.1 Survey design.

The large-scale survey was designed in light of the research questions and informed by previous national and international data and policy documentation in the field (Blatchford et al., 2008; DES, 2011a, 2014). In particular, the survey sought to obtain large-scale data related to SNA demographics and the themes of 'preparedness' and 'independence'. The survey was sub-divided into five main sections. *Part A* addressed demographic questions, including SNA gender, age range, number of years working as an SNA, school type and school level in which the SNA was working. *Part B* addressed SNA training, with questions directly related to research question one: 'preparedness'. Questions included the SNA's highest level of qualification, SNA engagement in job-specific training (including behaviour management and development of pupils' independence), the SNA's perceived greatest training needs, and the SNA's satisfaction with the availability and quality of previous training undertaken. *Part C* also addressed the topic of 'preparedness', with a discrete focus on collaborative pupil planning. To answer such questions, the SNA was requested to focus on one specific pupil with whom he/she had worked who presented with challenging behaviour. Questions then related to the SNA's attendance at planning, feedback and IEP meetings for that pupil, the format and timing of meetings, the involvement of the target pupil in

his/her personalised planning and the SNA's awareness of the pupil's IEP targets. Following that, *Part D* pertained to SNA deployment, with a particular focus on research question 3: 'pupil independence'. Questions related to the length of time the SNA had been working with the target pupil and the level of dependence the target pupil had on the SNA, as perceived by the SNA. Finally, *Part E* returned to the topic of 'preparedness', focusing on SNAs' perceived self-efficacy to deal with challenging behaviours. Using the 'Efficacy in dealing with challenging behaviours' scale (Hastings & Brown, 2002), SNAs were invited to rate each of the five items on a seven-point Likert scale including feelings of (1) *confidence* (2) *control* (3) *satisfaction in dealing with challenging behaviours* (4) *perception of having a positive impact on the challenging behaviours with which they deal* and (5) *perception of difficulty in working with challenging behaviours*. As aforementioned, previous studies have shown this scale to have an excellent level of internal consistency with Cronbach's α of 0.94 (Hastings & Brown, 2002). See *Appendix A* for a copy of the survey.

Mertens (2015) highlights 'clarity' as a paramount matter when designing the survey instrument. This matter was central to survey design whereby short questions were selected over long items, negative wording was avoided, and clear, simple vocabulary was used throughout. Creswell (2014b) notes that although open-ended questions can be useful in surveys, the lack of contextual data can often render the results problematic and lengthy to analyse. Accordingly, questions were predominantly closed and scaled in nature, with the inclusion of relatively few open-ended questions. Once all research questions had been designed, considerable time was given to the formatting of the survey. In line with research recommendations (Mertens, 2015), sharp type face and colours were utilised, questions were organised in a coherent, logical sequence and 'signposts' were inputted throughout the survey to guide participants to completion.

To facilitate access to a large sample, the web-based survey tool 'Google Forms' was selected as the means by which to design and circulate the large-scale SNA survey. Converse, Wolfe, Huang, and Oswald (2008) outline the advantages of adopting an online survey method including access to larger samples, reduced costs, and faster responses.

3.5.2 Survey pilot study.

Prior to circulating the large-scale survey, a pilot test of the survey instrument was undertaken. This was distributed to a range of colleagues, all of whom had prior experience of conducting research using survey instruments. The survey was also circulated to 10 SNAs previously known to the researcher. Participants were asked to provide feedback on the instrument, particularly in terms of phrasing of questions, points of confusion and survey layout. All feedback was considered resulting in the re-phrasing and shortening of some questions to ensure clarity for participants. Two questions were also rearranged and bold print used to emphasise key vocabulary. Such changes were deemed to improve the quality and reliability of the instrument.

3.5.3 Survey sampling strategy.

This study sought to obtain a nationally representative sample of SNAs to respond to the large-scale SNA survey. Although national data shows that almost 15,000 SNAs are employed within the Irish education system (DES, 2018b), up-to-date national data pertaining to the total number of pupils availing of SNA support for behavioural care needs was not available. Following a systematic literature review and phone contact with the NCSE, the most recent data on the total number of pupils in receipt of SNA support in light of care needs arising from EBD/SEBD dated back to 2012. Such data was provided in the NCSE report entitled, *The Education of Students with Challenging Behaviour arising from Severe Emotional Disturbance/Behavioural Disorders* (NCSE, 2012) and is outlined in *Table 8* (NCSE, 2012, p. 26).

Table 8: Approximate number of students with EBD for whom SNA support was allocated to schools for the academic year 2011-2012, as sourced from NCSE (2012, p. 26)

	Primary (n.)	Post-primary (n.)	Total (n.)
Total students with SNA support	9,387	3,314	12,701
Of whom are students diagnosed with EBD	1,864	777	2,641
Of whom are students diagnosed with severe EBD	554	190	744
Total students with EBD/severe EBD accessing SNA support	2,418	967	3,385
Students with EBD/severe EBD as % of total with SNA support	25.8%	29.2%	26.7%

As shown in *Table 8*, over one quarter of all pupils in receipt of SNA support at that time were those with a diagnosis of EBD/SEBD. Across both primary and post-primary school sectors, data showed that at that time, 2,641 pupils with EBD and 744 pupils with SEBD were in receipt of such support in mainstream primary schools. Accordingly, responses from more than 339 SNAs would have been deemed a nationally representative sample of the total number of SNAs supporting pupils with EBD/SEBD (i.e. 10% of 3,385). Nonetheless, it was clear that the figure of 339 SNAs may, in fact, have been erroneous in the current climate on two grounds. Firstly, this was due to the significant increase in the number of SNAs working across the education system, having risen from 12,701 in 2012 to 13,990 in September 2017. Secondly, since 2014, the SNA circular clearly outlined broad criteria for granting SNA access to pupils with behavioural disturbance or behaviour related care needs, whereby a diagnosis of EBD or SEBD is no longer required (DES, 2014). As a result, it was deemed likely that the number of pupils accessing SNA support for behavioural care needs had expanded since the NCSE publication in 2012. In light of such issues, the aim was to obtain as many SNA responses as possible, based on the criterion that the SNA had to work with, or previously work with, a pupil with behavioural care needs.

Adopting convenience and snowball sampling approaches, the large-scale survey was circulated to SNAs using a range of strategies. Firstly, a link to the SNA survey was circulated via the social media site 'Facebook' on 8th May 2017. This survey link was posted publically on 'Facebook' and in addition, on a range of education-

focused Facebook pages including those for teachers and SNAs in Ireland. Facebook users were encouraged to 'share' the survey link on their personal pages and to 'tag' any friends or colleagues working as SNAs, to encourage participation in the survey.

Secondly, all Irish primary and post-primary schools were sent a generic email on 10th May 2017, outlining the focus of the research and requesting SNA support to engage in the survey. School email addresses were sourced from the DES website to ensure the most up-to-date school contact list was utilised. All schools were asked to circulate the survey link to any SNAs working within the school.

Thirdly, one of the major SNA trade unions, namely IMPACT, was contacted by phone and email in early May 2017. On 13th May 2017, IMPACT Trade Union circulated the survey link to all IMPACT Trade Union members through their e-newsletter. This was followed by the posting of the survey link on the IMPACT Trade Union 'Facebook' page on 19th June 2017.

Finally, the survey link was re-circulated publically on 'Facebook' on 8th September 2017 and left open for a ten day period. The survey was finally closed on 18th September 2017.

3.5.4 Ethical considerations: Survey.

In conducting research, the welfare and protection of individuals and groups must be a central tenet of the psychologist's work (Psychological Society of Ireland [PSI], 2010). In this regard, the study sought to abide by the *PSI Code of Professional Ethics* (PSI, 2010), ensuring full commitment to ethical practice and to safeguarding research participants. The study also adhered to all ethical guidelines, principles and standards from University College London. Full ethical approval was obtained for this study from the *Institute of Education Research Ethics Committee* in February 2016 before the commencement of any data collection. With regard to the large-scale survey, careful steps were taken to ensure participants made informed decisions regarding consent before engaging in the research. Participants self-selected to engage in the survey by clicking on the online survey link. All participants were required to read an information section online (see *Appendix B*) before commencing the survey. In addition, participants were required to tick a box to outline their agreement with the following statements:

- I understand what the study is about and what the results can be used for.
- I know that participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any stage without giving reason.
- I am aware that my results will be kept confidential.
- I am over 18 years of age.
- I agree to take part in the above study.

Once participant agreement had been sought, participants commenced the online survey. Throughout the process, participants had the option of omitting survey questions that they did not wish to answer. Participants also had the right to withdraw from the survey at any time before completion, if they so wished, without any penalties or implications. On completion of the survey, participants were thanked for their time and provided with the researcher's email details, should further information be required. Notably, no identifying information was recorded within the large-scale survey.

3.5.5 Data analysis: Survey.

Quantitative data analysis was undertaken on the survey data. Using the *SPSS Statistics 25 Programme*, descriptive analyses were conducted on survey responses related to demographics, preparedness and independence. Frequency counts and percentages were calculated across almost all questions, with tables and figures used to represent data, where appropriate. Based on participants' responses on the 'Efficacy in dealing with challenging behaviours' scale (Hastings & Brown, 2002), a total self-efficacy score was calculated for each participant and a mean score calculated across the sample. Following this, a series of independent samples *t*-tests were run to establish the impact of a range of variables on participants' self-efficacy scores. Finally, a series of Pearson product-moment correlations were run to determine the relationship between SNAs' self-efficacy scores and a range of factors including length of time working as an SNA, satisfaction with the availability of training, quality of training to support challenging behaviour, SNA awareness of IEP targets and the degree to which the SNA's voice is heard in relation to pupil planning. Results related to the large-scale survey are presented in *Chapter Four*.

3.6 Systematic Observations

3.6.1 Systematic observations: Overview.

Beyond the online survey, systematic observations were selected as the second core research method for gathering data on class-level processes. Croll (1986) describes how the purpose of this research method is to provide an accurate description of selected activities and interactions in classrooms. A review of the literature shows that systematic observations have been employed as a research approach in classrooms for decades, with significant early studies including the *One in Five* (Croll & Moses, 1985), *The ORACLE Project* (Galton, Simon, & Croll, 1980), and *A Study of Schooling* (Giesen & Sirotnik, 1979; Sirotnik, 1983), to name but a few. In more recent years, researchers from the Institute of Education, University College London have relied heavily on this research methodology to collect objective and reliable data across a range of educational contexts in the U.K (Blatchford et al., 2008; Webster & Blatchford, 2013a, 2017). Specifically, in three large-scale, internationally renowned studies, namely the DISS project (Blatchford et al., 2008), the MaSt project (Webster & Blatchford, 2013a, 2013b) and the SENSE study (Webster & Blatchford, 2017), highly sophisticated moment-by-moment systematic observation research components were employed. Key observation measures included the context of classroom personnel, the interactions between individuals, the extent of pupils' on and off-task behaviour, the type of tasks undertaken by pupils and the curriculum focus within lessons.

A review of the literature shows both the strengths and limitations of this research methodology. On one hand, systematic observations present as a useful research tool when answering specific research questions; particularly when data is required on easily observed, high-frequency behaviours (Blatchford, Bassett, & Brown, 2005; Croll, 1986; McIntyre & Macleod, 1986). In addition, systematic observations allow researchers to take 'snapshots' of the classroom at regular intervals, focusing on the observed behaviour of school personnel and pupils. Through this method, data can be logged on a consistent basis on mutually exclusive categories of behaviour, in addition to interactional contexts. This ensures that ongoing features of behaviour and interaction can be logged in an objective manner over time. This contrasts with other data collection methodologies that may be more subjective in nature e.g. rating scales. Expanding on this point, Webster (2015) alludes to the strength of this approach in terms of objectivity, whereby it provides, "A valuable objective insight into the main features of classroom life often unavailable to everyday experience or received opinion" (p. 994). Moreover, the careful definition of variables and

categories in systematic observation make it suitable for large-scale, comparative research, as well as small-scale research and case studies (Croll, 1986).

In contrast, systematic observations have also been subject to an array of criticisms, particularly when contrasting systematic observations with ethnographic research methods. Such criticisms most frequently query the validity of this research methodology, whereby systematic data logging can serve to omit salient contextual and ecological factors. For example, Barrow (1984) refers to the way in which this data collection system can overlook key aspects of the teaching process, including background pupil characteristics and related environmental information. Similarly, Delamont and Hamilton (1986) argue that systematic observations do not take account of the intentions of key personnel whose interactions are the subject of observation. In particular, the use of a limited number of pre-defined observational categories as the basis for describing classroom activities has been criticised for leading to a partial and potentially narrow view of the learning environment. In defence, however, Croll (1986) highlights that *all* descriptions of the social world involve the selection of aspects of something that is evanescent, such that selections are made based on the purposes which the description is to serve. In addition, he argues that the simultaneous coding of several variables through systematic observation, including environmental factors, can provide a more comprehensive description of the individual experience and overall classroom processes than that of qualitative research alone (Croll, 1986). Addressing such criticisms, Webster (2015) acknowledges the limitations of systematic observations, whereby the intent of producing cumulative, replicable results can overlook the hidden, more nuanced aspects of teaching and learning. Nonetheless, he emphasises that by using systematic observations in conjunction with other data collection techniques, this research methodology can be applied across a large number of classrooms to support the formulation of a detailed picture of classroom life.

3.6.2 Systematic observations: Researcher training.

Prior to designing the observation schedule or undertaking related data collection, the importance of establishing competence and fluency in using the observation schedule was recognised. Croll (1986) highlights the complexity of engaging in live observations, whereby the process of observing and recording data on an array of observational criteria demands a high skillset and familiarity on the part of the observer with the research tool. Accordingly, the researcher selected to undertake training on advanced systematic observational data collection methodologies in

Cambridge, London over a two day period (28th – 29th October 2015), as delivered by Rob Webster, University College London, Institute of Education. This was followed by one week of data collection in the U.K (9th – 13th November, 2015), as part of the SENSE study (Webster & Blatchford, 2017). Although the researcher had previously engaged in national case study research (Daly et al., 2016), this opportunity provided her with first-hand experience of using the SENSE observational tool in an applied setting. In addition, the broader case study elements of engaging in semi-structured interviews, documentary analysis and field notes, alongside the compilation of the case study report, supported foundational, fundamental learning upon which the current research project was subsequently designed and executed.

3.6.3 Observation schedule design.

The observation schedule employed in this study was designed in light of the research questions and informed by previous research in the field (see *Appendix C* for a copy of the schedule). Specifically, the study sought to obtain a detailed and integrated account of the preparedness and deployment of SNAs when supporting target pupils' behavioural care needs and developing target pupils' independence in mainstream primary schools. Guided by the study's research questions, a range of published observation schedules were examined and critiqued. Following a lengthy review and design process, the study's observation schedule was modelled predominantly on the SENSE study schedule (Webster & Blatchford, 2017) with some additional observation criteria added from the MaSt schedule (Webster & Blatchford, 2013a) and the *Observing Pupils and Teachers in Classrooms* schedule; henceforth referred to as the OPTIC schedule (Merrett & Wheldall, 1986).

The SENSE study schedule (Webster & Blatchford, 2017) was designed to collect systematic data on the educational experiences of pupils with statements in mainstream secondary schools and special schools. The schedule captures both contextual information and interaction data within the classroom and allows systematic observations to be coded on a minute-by-minute basis, both for statemented pupils and their average-attaining peers. Guided by the current study's research questions, almost all criteria on the original SENSE study schedule were retained for this study's schedule, with particular focus on the collection of interaction data between pupils and adults within the classroom. Such data was deemed important to focus on support strategies used with pupils and particularly,

on matters related to pupil independence. In contrast, the 'group size', 'location' and 'class attainment level' criteria were removed as they were not deemed pertinent to the research context or questions. The 'lesson focus' criterion was reduced to *English, mathematics* and *other*, whereby the aim was to conduct the majority of the systematic observations during core curricular lessons, in so far as possible. The 'people in classroom' criterion was also reduced and only counted at the start of the observed lesson, due to the general consistency in classroom composition within mainstream primary school lessons in Ireland.

Some elements from the MaSt observation schedule (Webster & Blatchford, 2013a) were also included in this study's observation schedule. These comprised 'target seating context', 'adult context' and 'target task'. Such information was deemed important, particularly when considering research questions related to pupils' behavioural care needs and pupil independence. For clarity purposes, each of these observation schedule criteria will be presented below. Thereafter, the final component of the observation schedule, as based on the OPTIC schedule (Merrett & Wheldall, 1986), will be outlined.

3.6.3.1 Observation schedule criteria.

- ID and logging information

ID and logging information was firstly recorded to ensure that the observation schedule could be matched to additional school data. ID codes were employed to respect the anonymity of all parties. Data categories included: *Pupil ID, School ID, Date, and Observation ID (day, lesson/session)*.

- Contextual information

Contextual information criteria were mainly drawn from the MaSt project observation schedule (Webster & Blatchford, 2013a), with some slight adaptations undertaken to reflect the Irish educational context. As per the MaSt project and SENSE study, the 'bin' criteria was included to cater for any observation or behaviour that was perceived as being difficult to categorise. Categories and sub-categories on the observation schedule included:

- *Target seating context* (usual class seating, part of group, separated from peers, bin)
- *Adult context* (teacher/SNA: leading class, with group (<10 pupils), with individual non-target, with target (1-1), part of audience, roving/monitoring, not working with pupils)
- *Lesson/subject* (English, mathematics, other)
- *Target task* (same/not differentiated, differentiated classwork, different topic/subject, intervention, bin).

As outlined in the MaSt study (Webster & Blatchford, 2013a), a ‘differentiated’ task was defined as a task modified in some way from the core task undertaken by the comparison pupil. A ‘different’ task was defined as a task related to a different topic or curriculum area to that undertaken by the comparison pupil. Verbal differentiation of a task was not documented.

The *number of people* in the classroom was also logged at the start of the lesson, including pupils, teacher, SNA and other.

- *Interaction data*

Interaction data categories were adopted from the SENSE study (Webster & Blatchford, 2017). Interaction data was logged in terms of:

- *Social mode of pupils’ interactions* (pupil interacting with a teacher, SNA, peer, no interaction, bin)
- *Interaction level* (whether the pupil is the focus of attention or part of the audience)
- *Interaction context* (whether the interaction takes place on an individual, group or whole-class basis).

3.6.3.2 The ‘Observing Pupils and Teachers in Classrooms’ schedule.

The final component of the observation schedule was adopted from the OPTIC schedule. The OPTIC schedule was created by Merrett and Wheldall in 1986 and forms a behavioural observation schedule for use in classrooms. It was developed in an effort to provide a systematic logging system on key teacher and pupil behaviours related to classroom management. Stemming from a behavioural-orientated research stance, the observation tool is divided into two sections. *Section*

A, the teacher observation, focuses on teachers' use of approval and disapproval of pupils' social and academic behaviours, logged under four discrete categories: *positive academic*, *positive social/conduct*, *negative academic*, *negative social/conduct*. In contrast, *section B*, the pupil observation, focuses on the effect of the teacher's behaviour on pupils' on and off-task behaviour. Merrett and Wheldall (1986) outline how a complete observation session using the OPTIC schedule takes 30 minutes, whereby the observer alternates between *section A* and *section B* of the observation schedule every three minutes.

Reflecting on this study's research questions, *section A* of the OPTIC schedule was deemed most appropriate to facilitate the recording of the nature of teachers' and SNAs' focused interactions with pupils with behavioural care needs, with due regard for supporting pupils' behavioural care needs and developing pupils' independence. Instructions for the observation and logging of behaviours related to *section A* are outlined below, as sourced from Merrett and Wheldall (1986, pp. 68-69).

Teacher behaviours which should be recorded as positive events include verbal praise ("Correct!", "That's great!", "I like that!", "Well done!"); gestures like nodding encouragingly, smiling, giving the thumbs up sign, physical contact like placing the hand on the shoulder; the granting of privileges and the giving of tokens of approval like stars, ticks, points and so on. Teacher behaviours which should be recorded as negative events include verbal criticism, reprimands, the pointing out of failure, error or general disapproval ("That's wrong!", "You're a dead loss!", "Don't do that!"); gestural responses like frowning or glaring; aversive contact involving shaking or smacking; withdrawal of privileges, points or rewards; isolation from the rest of the group and so on. The observer is also required to distinguish between the teacher's responses to academic behaviours (like giving a correct answer) and social (conduct) behaviours (like putting up a hand to answer a question)...If the teacher says, "Sit down, John," the observer would circle the next number in the appropriate segment box (negative social). If the teacher gives a star to a pupil for work completed correctly the observer would mark the next number in the segment box under positive academic.

As *section B* of the OPTIC schedule pertains to on/off-task pupil behaviour, this section was omitted from the schedule as it was deemed beyond the focus of this study's research questions. Accordingly, *section A* of the OPTIC schedule was added to this study's observation schedule, with the aim of logging the nature of teachers' and SNAs' focused interactions with target pupils on a minute-by-minute basis.

3.6.3.3 Qualitative note-taking.

Finally, space was assigned on the observation schedule for additional note-taking. This was deemed essential to facilitate the logging of any contextual data to supplement and contextualise the quantitative data points. Croll (1986) highlights the strength of documenting contextual information to ensure that the systematic observations do not result in “atomistic” data (p. 162). In particular, any additional observational information related to the research questions were documented including data related to SNAs’ support of target pupils’ behavioural care needs and SNAs’ support or hindrance of target pupils’ development of independence.

3.6.4 Pilot study: Observation schedule.

In advance of engaging in data collection, the observation schedule was piloted over a two day period. This took place in May 2016 in a primary school in the Munster region of Ireland. Robson (2002) highlights the importance of piloting any research instruments to support the design, content and overall data collection process. During the pilot phase, focus was placed on the practicalities of engaging in the observation in a classroom context, the usability of the observation schedule and the degree to which the instrument supported the logging of all salient information related to the research questions.

A range of key learning points emerged from the pilot phase. Firstly, this pertained to the positioning of the observer in the classroom. Commencing the pilot study, the researcher sought to position herself at the back of the classroom. This was deemed necessary to remain as unobtrusive as possible and to reduce observer influence on the target pupil, SNA, teacher and comparison pupils. Nonetheless, it quickly became apparent that the distance between the observer and target pupil prevented the observation of specific behaviours. This particularly related to the OPTIC schedule criteria, whereby the nature of interactions between the SNA and target pupil were often indistinguishable from a distance. Based on such learning, a more balanced approach to observer positioning was adopted over pilot study day two; far enough away from the pupil to reduce observer influence, but yet close enough to support the accurate and reliable logging of all observation criteria.

Although the repositioning of the observer supported accuracy of data logging, the pilot study highlighted the need for additional changes to be made to the OPTIC schedule component of the observation schedule. This formed the second main learning point of the pilot study. Specifically, whilst the MaSt project (Webster &

Blatchford, 2013a) and SENSE study (Webster & Blatchford, 2017) schedules included a 'bin' category to cater for any observation or behaviour that was difficult to categorise, this category was not a feature of the OPTIC schedule (Merrett & Wheldall, 1986). Over the course of the pilot study, however, it became apparent that the nature of the SNAs' focused interactions with the target pupils was often indiscernible, predominantly due to the discreet manner in which interactions took place. In addition, some observed behaviours did not neatly align with any of the four observation criteria, namely *positive academic*, *positive social/conduct*, *negative academic* and/or *negative social/conduct*. Accordingly, a 'bin' category was added to the OPTIC schedule component of the observation schedule following day one of the pilot study. This category was used to cater for any SNA or teacher-led focused interactions that were perceived as being difficult to categorise, or an interaction that did not align with one of the four criteria aforementioned. This revised schedule was used on day two of the pilot study with positive effect, serving to increase the validity and reliability of all logged observations.

Thirdly, the pilot phase resulted in changes to the overall layout of the observation schedule. Initially, two different schedules had been created for logging target pupil and comparison pupil observations, akin to that employed in the SENSE study schedule (Webster & Blatchford, 2017). However, in light of the fact that both target pupil and comparison pupil data were collected in the same class context (the former in the first 30 seconds of the minute period; the latter in the second 30 seconds of the minute period), it was decided to combine the logging information of both pupils onto the same observation schedule. This change was undertaken following day one of the pilot study to ensure that the revised version could be piloted over day two. Immediately, the benefits of using a combined schedule were evident, serving to reduce the level of paperwork during classroom observations and aiding to reduce any potential errors in moving between observation schedules.

Finally, the pilot study provided the researcher with an opportunity to build competence and confidence in using the observation schedule. Whilst initially, deliberations were required over some coding decisions, the 10 hours of observations conducted over the pilot study supported the researcher in building fluency with the research tool. This resulted in a transition from a more cautious coding approach to almost simultaneous observation and coding, thereby, supporting the logging of additional, qualitative information in the 'notes' column of the observation schedule. Overall, the pilot phase was deemed a highly beneficial period, serving to fine-tune the research instrument, build researcher confidence

and competence in using the schedule and support the practicalities of engaging in live observations.

3.6.5 Sampling strategy: Systematic observations.

Twenty pupils with behavioural care needs were recruited for this study. These pupils formed the focus both of the systematic observations and the subsequent case studies. This sample size was selected primarily to ensure adequate statistical power during quantitative data analysis of the observational data and to facilitate the establishment of research trends across pupils in receipt of SNA support (Yockey, 2018). Prior to recruitment, inclusionary criteria were established for the target pupils. Firstly, all target pupils had to present with EBD, SEBD, or primary care needs related to behavioural disturbance or behaviour-related care needs. This criterion aligned with *Circular 0030/2014* (DES, 2014) regarding the provision of SNA support for pupils with behaviour-related care needs in mainstream schools. Secondly, all target pupils had to be in receipt of SNA support for more than 50% of the school day. This criterion was selected to ensure that the selected pupils were receiving sufficient SNA support to facilitate exploration of the research questions.

As national data was unavailable in terms of the specific geographical location of pupils with behavioural care needs in receipt of SNA provision in mainstream Irish primary schools, a three-staged stratified sampling approach was adopted.

Stage 1 involved an exploration of data from the NCSE 2015/2016 school allocations database (NCSE, 2015b). Based on the *SNA Allocations to Primary Schools* document for the 2015/16 school year (NCSE, 2015b), mainstream primary schools in Ireland in receipt of SNA-provision were identified. Due to the high level of schools nationwide in receipt of SNA provision, particular focus was placed on schools within the Munster region of Ireland.

Stage 2 involved the implementation of a stratified sampling procedure based on school-level data. Using nationally representative data from schools, collected as part of the *Adapting to Diversity: Irish Schools and Newcomer Students* study (Smyth, Darmody, McGinnity & Byrne, 2009, as cited in Banks & McCoy, 2011), the distribution of pupils with EBD across certain school sectors and school types was examined. Such information is based on data obtained from a representative sample of primary and second-level principals, with results subsequently weighted to reflect the full population of primary and post-primary schools in Ireland. At

primary level, the study focused on school type in terms of designated disadvantaged schools i.e. DEIS⁵ (Urban band 1, urban band 2, rural), non-DEIS schools and Gaelscoileanna (Irish-medium speaking schools). Based on this data, results showed a much higher concentration of pupils with EBD in DEIS schools than any of the other school type categories. This was particularly the case in urban band 1 schools, with results showing one in five schools to have greater than 40% of pupils with EBD. This was followed by urban band 2 schools, non-DEIS schools and finally, rural schools. Gaelscoileanna emerged as having the fewest pupils with EBD, with 83% of Gaelscoileanna and 81% of Gaeltacht schools having less than 5% of pupils with EBD, as compared with 64% of English medium schools. It is notable that more recent data from *The Growing Up in Ireland Study* (Murray et al., 2011, as cited in McCoy et al., 2012) has shown similar findings in terms of prevalence rates of EBD across school-type.

Based on findings from both national studies, schools identified in stage 1 of the sampling process were sub-divided into school type, namely DEIS (urban band 1, urban band 2, rural) and non-DEIS schools. The school type categories were then weighted in accordance to identified prevalence rates, with a ratio of 4:3:2:1 employed for DEIS urban band 1, DEIS urban band 2, Non-DEIS and DEIS rural schools respectively. In light of the low numbers of pupils with EBD identified in Gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht schools, and taking language concerns into consideration, it was decided that such schools would be omitted from this research.

Stage 3 involved the random selection of schools from each of the school type categories identified at stage 2 in the sampling process, with respect to the prevalence ratio criterion applied at stage 2. Using contact details from the schools' websites, school principals were contacted by phone and informed of the details of the study. Specific focus was given to the study's inclusionary criteria. Each phone conversation was then followed with email contact, whereby information letters and consent forms were emailed to the school.

During this recruiting process, the gender composition of pupil participants was also considered, with the aim of recruiting a greater number of boys than girls. This is in light of data outlined in numerous international and national studies which highlights boys as being substantially more likely to be identified with EBD than girls, all else being equal. In fact, Banks et al. (2012), using data from *The Growing Up in Ireland*

⁵ DEIS schools are under the 'Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools' scheme, aimed at providing better opportunities for those in communities at risk of disadvantage and social exclusion (DES, 2017b)

study (Murray et al., 2011), outlined how over 5% of boys are identified with EBD by their teacher as compared with less than 2% of girls. In light of this finding, it was anticipated that a ratio of 5:2 would be sought for this study in terms of boy:girl participants respectively. With regard to class level, initial focus was placed on the middle classes (1st – 4th classes) to support comparative data analysis with the age profile of pupils in the MaSt project (Webster & Blatchford, 2013a). Although a clear, systematic, stratified sampling process was adopted for the study, the recruiting of participants proved to be more challenging than originally envisaged. This was firstly due to the fact that although the NCSE 2015/2016 school allocations database (NCSE, 2015b) outlined the number of SNAs allocated to each school in Ireland, the nature of pupils' needs in receipt of this SNA support was not available. As a result, numerous phone calls and emails to school principals resulted in a lack of pupils who met the study's inclusionary criteria. In addition, many schools who met the study's inclusionary criteria were not in a position to partake in the study. This was due to an array of factors, including high demands on schools to partake in research, as well as unwillingness amongst some parents and school personnel to become involved in the research, often due to the sensitivity of the topic and the vulnerability of the target population. Stemming from such issues, the stratified sampling criteria had to be loosened to ensure a sufficient number of pupils could be recruited for the study. Accordingly, the class level of the target pupils was expanded to span the entire primary school system. In addition, school type categories were collapsed into DEIS and non-DEIS bands, with the aim of obtaining a higher number of DEIS than non-DEIS case studies, where possible.

Following a lengthy recruitment process, a total of 20 target pupils were secured for the research, spanning all class levels. The composition of the school and pupil data is outlined in *Table 9*, including *school type*, *pupil gender*, *class level* and *pupil age*.

Table 9: Overview of target pupil data

Pupil Number	School Type	Pupil Gender	Class Level	Pupil Age
1.	Non-DEIS	Male	5 th class	11 years
2.	DEIS band 2	Male	4 th Class	10 years
3.	DEIS band 2	Male	1 st class	7 years
4.	Non-DEIS	Male	3 rd class	10 years
5.	DEIS band 2	Male	4 th class	10 years
6.	DEIS band 2	Male	4 th class	10 years
7.	DEIS band 2	Male	4 th class	10 years
8.	Non-DEIS	Male	4 th class	10 years
9.	Non-DEIS	Male	Junior Infants	5 years
10.	Non-DEIS	Male	3 rd class	9 years
11.	Non-DEIS	Male	2 nd class	8 years
12.	DEIS band 1	Male	4 th class	10 years
13.	Non-DEIS	Male	Senior infants	7 years
14.	DEIS band 1	Male	2 nd class	8 years
15.	Non-DEIS	Male	6 th class	12 years
16.	Non-DEIS	Male	5 th class	12 years
17.	Non-DEIS	Male	2 nd class	8 years
18.	Non-DEIS	Female	2 nd class	8 years
19.	Non-DEIS	Male	Senior Infants	6 years
20.	DEIS band 1	Male	6 th class	11 years

3.6.6 Ethical considerations: Systematic observations.

Prior to commencing data collection, including the pilot study, full ethical approval was obtained for the research from the *Institute of Education Research Ethics Committee* in February 2016. Abiding by the *Psychological Society of Ireland's Code of Professional Ethics* (PSI, 2010), information letters and consent forms were provided to each school principal seeking permission to conduct the research in his/her school (see *Appendix D* and *E* respectively). Thereafter, information letters and consent forms were provided to the target pupils' class teacher, SNA and parents (see *Appendices F - K*). To reduce the effect of observer influence, pupil participants were not informed about the classroom observations. However, it was ensured that written consent was obtained from all target pupils' parents prior to

engaging in the school-based observations. At all stages during the process, all parties were informed that they could withdraw from the study, if they so wished, without any penalties or implications.

3.6.7 Procedure: Systematic observations.

Fifteen school visits were conducted across the 2016/2017 academic year, with the remaining five visits taking place in September 2017. Systematic observations were conducted in the target pupils' mainstream classroom over the course of two school days. The observations occurred during core curricular lessons including English, mathematics, Gaeilge, history, geography and science. Observation of average comparison pupils also took place in parallel to target pupil observations for comparative purposes. Adopting the observational technique employed in the MaSt project (Webster & Blatchford, 2013a), mainstream class teachers were asked to identify at least three 'average' pupils in the target pupil's class, both in terms of academic performance and behaviour. These comparison pupils were also matched to the target pupils in terms of gender and class-level. This resulted in a total of 60 comparison pupils across the 20 cases (three per target pupil). During each lesson observation, one of the three pupils acted as the comparison, with comparison pupils rotated regularly to extend the reliability of the observations conducted.

Systematic observations occurred on a minute-by-minute basis, equating to approximately four hours of in-class observational data for each target pupil and comparison pupil. Specifically, target pupil observations took place for the first 10 seconds of each 30 second block and were subsequently coded. A comparable format was followed for the second half of each minute period, with focus placed on the comparison pupil. For each lesson observed, contextual data was logged with reference to *target child seating context, lesson type, number of people in the classroom* and *target task*. Thereafter, minute-by-minute data was logged with regard to *target child interactions, the nature of the interactions (focus/audience), target child seating context, teacher and SNA classroom context* and *the nature of the focused target pupil interactions* (using the OPTIC schedule). Comparative data was also logged for the comparison pupils with regard to *interactions* and *the nature of the interactions (focus/audience)*. Overall, a total of 74 hours 55 minutes of observations took place across 77 lessons, yielding a total of 4,495 data points.

3.6.8 Reliability: Systematic observations.

Reliability is defined as a measure of “dependability, consistency and replicability over time” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 199). Across all data gathering procedures, reliability was central to the research process. With regard to the observation data, two rounds of inter-rater reliability checks were undertaken near the start and mid-point of observational data collection. This involved the principal investigator (Researcher 1 [R1]) spending half a day with a research assistant (Researcher 2 [R2]) in one of the schools. Using the systematic observation schedule, both researchers coded the data independently yet contemporaneously. Data was subsequently entered into *SPSS Statistics 25 Programme* and reliability coefficients (kappa) calculated for the main sets of mutually exclusive categories. Reliability was calculated by taking the observations for each minute as the unit of analysis and examining the extent of agreement between the codes recorded by R1 and R2. Each analysis was based on four hours of observation. The kappa scores for the two analyses are shown in *Table 10*. Based on the Landis and Koch (1977) benchmarks for agreement, almost all coefficient scores lay between 0.81 and 1, which is deemed as ‘almost perfect’. In contrast, scores for the OPTIC schedule showed lowest similarity, with a kappa coefficient of 0.61. Nonetheless, according to Landis and Koch (1977) benchmarks for agreement, this still lies within the ‘substantial’ strength range. Such findings verified the reliability of the data across those two cases, supporting the generalisation of this finding to the remaining data.

Table 10: Kappa scores for inter-rater reliability analysis

Variable	R1 and R2
Target seating context	1.00
Lesson/subject	1.00
#People in classroom	1.00
Target task	1.00
Teacher context	0.86
SNA context	0.84
Target pupil interactions social mode	0.86
Target pupil interactions level	0.81
OPTIC schedule	0.61
Comparison pupil interactions social mode	0.84
Comparison pupil interactions level	0.82

3.6.9 Data analysis: Systematic observations.

Following data collection, all quantitative observational data was inputted into the *SPSS Statistics 25 Programme*. Descriptive statistics were undertaken with the contextual data to provide an overall picture of the classroom contexts across the 77 lessons. Thereafter, data points for each observation criterion were totalled across the 20 pupils to provide frequency data (e.g. total number of observations) and percentage data (e.g. percentage of total observations). Comparative quantitative data analysis was conducted to compare the interactions for target pupils and comparison pupils across all cases. Finally, comparative analysis was conducted to compare the mean interactions for target pupils and teachers, and target pupils and SNAs, in relation to each of the four conditions on the OPTIC schedule across the 77 lessons. Results pertaining to the systematic observations are presented in *Chapter Five*.

3.7 Case Studies

3.7.1 Case study research: Overview and rationale.

The third and final stage of the data gathering process involved case study research. This research method is defined as an empirical inquiry that:

- Investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident;
- Copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points;
- Relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion;
- Benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis.

(Yin, 2014, pp. 16-17)

Although case study research is deemed to be one of the most challenging of all social science endeavours (Yin, 2014), this approach was recognised as being highly appropriate for this study. On one hand, the strengths of the quantitative data from the large-scale survey and systematic observations were evident, particularly in terms of providing a broad picture related to the 'preparedness' and 'deployment' of SNAs when supporting target pupils' behavioural care needs and developing target pupils' independence in mainstream primary schools. In addition, the potential to generalise the quantitative findings to larger populations was recognised as a

distinct strength of both the large-scale survey and systematic observations (Polit & Beck, 2010). Nonetheless, a review of the quantitative data alone highlighted gaps in the data; particularly in terms of a lack of detail and rich contextual information that is more typically associated with qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Smith et al., 2009). In contrast, the addition of case study research was recognised in terms of the potential depth it could bring to the study. In particular, the focus on understanding the phenomena in context and providing key stakeholders with a voice was deemed central to fully exploring the research questions and providing deep 'meaning' to the study (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Smith et al., 2009). By adopting an array of qualitative approaches within case study research design including semi-structured interviews, documentary review and field note-taking, the researcher aimed to achieve a more balanced, holistic approach to data collection and to answering the research questions. Accordingly, this approach sought to add depth, meaning and context to exploring the preparedness and deployment of SNAs when supporting target pupils' behavioural care needs and developing target pupils' independence in an Irish context.

3.7.2 Case study sample.

Initially, the option of engaging in case study research with a sub-set of the systematic observation sample was considered, particularly in light of the demanding nature of this research methodology. Nonetheless, as the research progressed, the value of situating the quantitative data within the unique context of each case was recognised. In addition, Stake (2006) argues that the use of multiple case studies serve to explore the research questions across several settings, showing both converging and diverging perspectives. Through this means, although each case study 'story' is given due regard, the focus shifts more to the collective; on how the phenomenon is exhibited across cases, with reference to the similarities and differences across cases. Stake (2006) refers to this phenomenon as a 'quintain' i.e. something that the researcher seeks to understand more thoroughly and which is studied through each case. Accordingly, the focus was placed on better understanding the quintain of 'preparedness', 'deployment', 'behaviour support' and 'pupil independence' through a multi-case method approach. Zucker (2009) encourages the selection of cases that most enhance one's understanding of the quintain, rather than solely selecting the most typical cases. Although the sampling strategy for recruiting participants for the systematic observations posed some challenges (see section 3.6.5), the classroom and school contexts that were

finally recruited were diverse in nature, providing a rich variety of target pupils and related ecological contexts. Accordingly, each of the 20 pupils selected for the systematic observations became the central focus around which each case study was built. This methodology was modelled on that employed in the MaSt project and SENSE study (Webster & Blatchford, 2013a; 2017 respectively), whereby the systematic observations were embedded within each case study. In this way, the research design ensured that data from the systematic, quantitative observations functioned independently across pupils and within the context of each comprehensive case study. Similarly, each case study 'story' functioned independently, in light of its own unique context and collectively, across the multi-case studies, to support greater understanding of the quintain. Finally, both the systematic observations and case studies were embedded within the large-scale survey data to provide a broad, national context for interrogating the research questions and related quintain. Accordingly, the complexity and richness of the research design was clear.

3.7.3 Case study methodologies.

To support data collection, a range of case study research methodologies were adopted. These included semi-structured interviews, documentary review and field notes. Each of these methodologies will be presented in turn, including preparation of the related research tools.

3.7.3.1 *Semi-structured interview.*

Central to each case study was the semi-structured interview, conducted with the class teacher, SNA and target pupil. Semi-structured interviews are defined by Kvale and Brinkmann (2008, p. 3) as, "An interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena". Bryman (2008) notes the strengths of semi-structured interviews in facilitating in-depth exploration of pre-defined themes or concepts, while simultaneously, providing flexibility and scope for discussion of themes beyond the research guide. This research approach was deemed highly suitable for engaging with the research participants, ensuring a number of key topic areas could be covered in a relaxed, flexible manner. Moreover, Yin (2014) notes how semi-structured interviews are particularly suitable for multiple case study research, facilitating comparative analysis both within and across cases.

Although semi-structured interviews can yield valuable in-depth information from participants, limitations of this approach must also be acknowledged. Wengraf (2001) refers to the issue of 'double attention' when engaging in semi-structured interviews, whereby the interviewer must both listen to the informant's responses whilst concurrently, formulating questions to support the interactive nature of the communication. This is thought to require high levels of skill and concentration on the part of the interviewer to ensure that all questions are answered within the fixed time and with the level of depth required (Wengraf, 2001). Denzin (1989) also notes that when comparing participant responses to interview questions, the researcher must ensure that any differences in responses arise from actual differences amongst the participants rather than as a result of the questions posed. In this regard, 'equivalence of meaning' must be transmitted in the questioning process rather than strict adherence to the interview guide (Denzin, 1989; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). Such approaches are noted to support the reliability and validity of the data gleaned in the interview process.

3.7.3.2 Semi-structured interview schedules.

To support the semi-structured interview process, schedules were prepared for the teacher, SNA and target pupil interviews (see *Appendix L, M and N* respectively). These schedules were designed in light of the research questions, with particular focus on the areas of *preparedness, deployment, behavioural care needs and independence*. Interview schedules were also informed by an in-depth review of national and international literature. From a national viewpoint, this spanned policy and research publications including the *Value for Money* review (DES, 2011a), Cooper and Jacobs (2011), *Circular 0030/2014* (DES, 2014) and Rose et al. (2015). International research also provided strong guidance during this preparatory phase, with particular learning gleaned from the DISS study (Blatchford et al., 2009a), the MaSt project (Webster & Blatchford, 2013a) and the SENSE study (Webster & Blatchford, 2017). All interview schedules commenced with opening, introductory questions, aimed at establishing rapport with the participant. Thereafter, an initial, broad question was posed to set the tone for a guided conversation (Yin, 2014). Notably, Braun and Clarke (2013) highlight the importance of well-planned questions for building rapport with participants and generating rich and detailed information relevant to the research questions. Accordingly, a range of open-ended questions were prepared to enable deep exploration of the quintain, with due regard for the sequencing, construction and wording of the questions. Prompts and probes

were also included on the schedules to encourage participants to expand their answers and provide more detail, where necessary. With regard to the topic of 'preparedness', teacher and SNA interview schedules spanned a range of questions related to *training, CPD, individual pupil planning, collaboration, target-setting/review, SNAs' training needs* and *pupil involvement in his/her planning*. Thereafter, questions related to 'deployment', 'behavioural care needs' and 'independence' were included. Examples included *the role of the SNA in supporting pupils with behavioural care needs, strategies used to support challenging behaviour, comparison of the target pupil's level of independence to that of his/her peers, level of dependence of the target pupil on the SNA, the SNA's role in promoting the pupil's independence* and *alternate supports within the school for the pupil, other than the SNA*. Finally, the interview schedules concluded with a closing or 'clean-up' question, allowing the participant to raise outstanding issues that had not already been covered (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

The pupil interview, on the other hand, was prepared with the aim of providing a voice to pupil participants in the study. In particular, the study sought to obtain the target pupils' views with regard to the role of the SNA and the impact of the SNA on his/her behaviour and development of independence. Based on a review of the literature, the challenges in establishing children's views in research were acknowledged, whereby a range of researchers have outlined the key issues when interviewing children. In addition to ethical concerns (see section 3.7.6), this spans a range of topics including the unequal power relationship between the child and the adult researcher, difficulties in establishing rapport with the child, reluctance on the part of the child to respond to an adult stranger, potential language difficulties of children and environmental influences on the child (Einarsdóttir, 2007; Parker, 1984; Scott, 2008). To address some of these issues, the need for a familiar, yet distraction-free environment for engaging in pupil interviews was acknowledged. In preparing the interview schedule, guidance was sought from the *Checklist for Interviewing Children* (Parker, 1984, pp. 27-28). This checklist spans a range of topics related to interviewing children including rapport-building, phrasing of questions, use of child-friendly language, as well as matters related to reliability. In particular, the researcher sought to reduce bias in interview questions, mainly due to young children's tendency towards high suggestibility. Moreover, Gollop (2000) emphasises the distinct child-friendly approach that must be adopted by the interviewer, whereby the interview should resemble more of a conversation with the child rather than an interview, per se. Focusing on the content of the interview

schedule, guidance was sought from the research questions as well as published, pupil-friendly interview schedules in the field, including that by Broer et al. (2005), Skär and Tam (2001) and Mortier, Desimpel, De Schauwer, and Van Hove (2011). In addition to rapport-building questions, questions spanned a range of areas including *school-based supports, likes/dislikes of the SNA support, pupil positioning in the classroom, triggers for challenging behaviour, strategies that support/hinder positive behaviour, strategies that support/hinder independence, times when help is required/not required, views on the level of SNA support received and alternate support strategies*. Akin to the teacher and SNA interview schedules, the pupil interview concluded with a closing question, aimed at allowing the child to add any additional information that had not been covered (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

3.7.3.3 Documentary review.

Beyond the semi-structured interviews, documentary review also formed a central component of the case study methodology. This process involves reviewing school-based planning documents related to the pupil, including that of an IEP, Behaviour Support Plan and/or Personal Pupil Plan. Notably, professional reports related to pupils were not reviewed during case studies in light of the sensitivity of the information inherent in such documents. Mohd Noor (2008) highlights the strength of documentary review, whereby it acts as a method to cross-validate information gathered from interviews and observations and enhance the validity and reliability of findings. To support this process, a guiding template was created, as outlined in *Appendix O*. This was informed by the research questions as well as *Circular 0030/2014* (DES, 2014) and the IEP Guidelines (NCSE, 2006). This aided to ensure that salient information related to individual pupil planning was recorded whilst reviewing documentation, particularly in relation to *collaboration, the role of the SNA, assessment, target-setting, use of 'SMART' targets i.e. 'Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timed* (NCSE, 2006), in addition to *progress monitoring, review and the voice of the child*.

3.7.3.4 Field notes.

The final component of the case study was field note-taking. This process involves writing notes either during or soon after data collection which record commentary about, and reflections on, the data collection session (Braun & Clarke, 2013). To support this process, a template was created comprising a number of keywords

related to the research questions (see *Appendix P*). These words were intended to serve as prompts to encourage the documentation of any additional information either during or after the site visit. For the most part, however, the template was left blank to support unrestricted documentation of additional observations and reflections.

3.7.4 Pilot case study.

In advance of engaging in case study data collection, one pilot case study was undertaken. This formed an extension of the systematic observation pilot study, as previously described, spanning a two day period. This took place in one school in the Munster region of Ireland in May 2016. Over the course of two days, all aspects of the case study design were piloted, namely the semi-structured interviews, documentary review and field note-taking, in addition to the systematic observations. The main purpose of the pilot study was to test the research instruments and to gain insight into the structure of the data-gathering approach within a busy school context. During the pilot study, the researcher maintained a written record of any methodology-related observations or 'lessons learned' over the period. In addition, feedback was sought from the research participants in relation to the semi-structured interview questions and overall research process, with the aim of making any necessary improvements to the research design in preparation for the main data collection phase.

In addition to changes required to the observation schedule (see *section 3.6.4*), the pilot study also informed minor changes to the teacher, SNA and pupil interview schedules. Although the semi-structured interviews were, for the most part, positive in nature, the pilot study highlighted how the sequencing of some questions required restructuring. This was necessary to support a more natural flow of interaction between the interviewer and interviewee. In addition, the need for more probing questions in relation to 'pupil independence' was recognised, to ensure that the complexity of the construct was interrogated with participants beyond that of physical independence. Such changes were supported by re-examining the literature and related pupil interview schedules and by adding additional questions to the schedule (Rose et al., 2015; Skär & Tam, 2001; Whitburn, 2013). During the data gathering process, some duplication in questions was also identified between the SNA survey and SNA interview questions. This fuelled changes to the SNA interview schedule to support greater interrogation of quintain through more open-

ended questions and probing. Following the interviews, feedback from the teacher, SNA and pupil participants was also supportive, whereby some participants highlighted confusion in relation to the phrasing of some questions. Based on feedback and researcher reflections, relevant changes made to the interview schedules were deemed to increase the strength of the research tools in preparation for the main data collection phase.

Beyond the interview schedules, the pilot study also shed light on a range of scheduling issues related to data collection. Specifically, over the course of the pilot study, the lack of a pre-planned schedule with the teacher and SNA resulted in a range of logistical difficulties including the lack of a meeting room for interviews and the absence of the target pupil for one hour while he attended a local sports event. This learning was vital in highlighting the busy nature of school life. In light of such factors, all subsequent schools were sent a reminder prior to the researcher's site visit to ensure that they were prepared for the research. In addition, a pre-planned timetable was created with the class teacher and SNA prior to commencing the case study to support the smooth running of the data collection process.

Overall, the benefits of the pilot study were recognised in aiding to improve the research and data-gathering process. Resonating with previous literature in the field (Wray, Archibong, & Walton, 2017), the pilot study was deemed an invaluable learning experience, serving to refine the research tools, clarify the logistics of the data-gathering process and enhance the researcher's confidence and competence in engaging in the case study approach. Based on such learning, the main data collection phase ensued.

3.7.5 Case study: Procedure.

Fifteen school visits were conducted across the 2016/2017 academic year, with the remaining five visits taking place in September 2017. Akin to the pilot study, each case study spanned on average two days and adopted a multi-method, pupil-centred approach. Each case study focused on one target pupil who presented with behavioural care needs and was in receipt of high levels of SNA support i.e. greater than 50% of each school day. Over the course of the two days, the researcher engaged in approximately four hours of systematic observations in the target pupils' mainstream classroom (as previously described). In addition, all semi-structured interviews took place in a private room within the school setting and were guided by the prepared interview schedules. Notably, interviews often took place before or

after the school day, or during the main lunch break, to optimise the amount of time the researcher spent observing in class. Prior to engaging in the semi-structured interviews, written consent was sought from the interviewees to audio-record the data. SNAs were also asked to complete a hard copy of the large-scale SNA survey prior to the SNA interview. This served to provide background information on the part of the SNA on the themes of 'preparedness' and 'independence', thereby facilitating more in-depth probing of SNAs' responses during the interview. Target pupil interviews followed the same format as that of SNA and teacher interviews. Although target pupils were permitted to bring a staff member to the interview, if desired, no pupil availed of this option.

Smith et al. (2009) emphasise the importance of establishing rapport with the participant at the beginning of the interview. Once rapport had been established, the interview schedule was used in a flexible manner, moving from general ideas to more particular ones. At all times, the researcher sought to present as an active listener, listening to the participant and probing responses, where required, to gain more in-depth information on pertinent topics. During the interview, participants were afforded time for reflection and expansion on key topics. Where necessary, the researcher documented key words which required follow-up with the participant when he/she had finished speaking, rather than interrupting the interviewee mid-flow. Finally, all participants were provided the opportunity of adding any additional information at the end of the interview, if they so wished. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) note the importance of this strategy in ensuring that the interviewee feels heard and also, to ensure that any salient information related to the research topic is not overlooked. Interviewees were thanked for their time and permitted to pose any outstanding questions. Once all case study interviews were complete, interviews were transcribed verbatim to facilitate ensuing data analysis.

To support documentary review, the target pupil's IEP, behaviour support plan and/or Personal Pupil Plan were reviewed by the researcher, where available, using the prepared template (see *Appendix O*). This typically took place in the mainstream classroom over the course of the two days during usual teaching time. This allowed the researcher to engage in naturalistic observations whilst concurrently, reviewing the documentation. Additional contextual data and observations were also documented during the school visit through field notes, again using the prepared template (see *Appendix P*). Once the case study was complete, the researcher added any outstanding thoughts or reflections to the field notes to support ensuing data analysis and triangulation of findings.

Following completion of the first case study, the logic of replication was adopted in which the procedure for each case was replicated across the range of cases (Yin, 2009). An overview of the case study data is provided in *Table 11*, with reference to the 20 cases.

Table 11: Overview of case study data

Case Study No.	School Type	Teacher Interview	SNA Interview	Pupil Interview	Pupil Gender	Class Level	Pupil Age	Doc. review	Field notes
1.	Non-DEIS	✓	✓	✓	Male	5 th	11 yrs	✓	✓
2.	DEIS B.2	✓	✓	✓	Male	4 th	10 yrs	X	✓
3.	DEIS B.2	✓	✓	✓	Male	1 st	7 yrs	X	✓
4.	Non-DEIS	✓	✓	✓	Male	3 rd	10 yrs	✓	✓
5.	DEIS B.2	✓	✓	✓	Male	4 th	10 yrs	X	✓
6.	DEIS B.2	✓	✓	✓	Male	4 th	10 yrs	X	✓
7.	DEIS B.2	✓	✓	✓	Male	4 th	10 yrs	X	✓
8.	Non-DEIS	✓	✓	✓	Male	4 th	10 yrs	X	✓
9.	Non-DEIS	✓	✓	X	Male	Junior Infants	5 yrs	X	✓
10.	Non-DEIS	✓	✓	✓	Male	3 rd	9 yrs	✓	✓
11.	Non-DEIS	✓	✓	✓	Male	2 nd	8 yrs	X	✓
12.	DEIS B.1	✓	✓	✓	Male	4 th	10 yrs	X	✓
13.	Non-DEIS	✓	✓	✓	Male	Senior infants	7 yrs	X	✓
14.	DEIS B.1	✓	✓	✓	Male	2 nd	8 yrs	X	✓
15.	Non-DEIS	✓	✓	✓	Male	6 th	12 yrs	✓	✓
16.	Non-DEIS	✓	✓	✓	Male	5 th	12 yrs	✓	✓
17.	Non-DEIS	✓	✓	✓	Male	2 nd	8 yrs	✓	✓
18.	Non-DEIS	✓	✓	✓	Female	2 nd	8 yrs	✓	✓
19.	Non-DEIS	✓	✓	X	Male	Senior Infants	6 yrs	✓	✓
20.	DEIS B.1	✓	✓	✓	Male	6 th	11 yrs	✓	✓

3.7.6 Case study: Ethical considerations.

3.7.6.1 Informed consent.

As previously outlined, adherence to ethical principles, standards and guidelines of the PSI (2010) and University College London (2015) was central to this entire research process. Before commencing the case study data collection, full ethical approval was obtained for this study from the *Institute of Education Research Ethics Committee* in February 2016. Abiding by *PSI's principle 1.3* (PSI, 2010), information letters and consent forms were provided to each school principal and to the target pupils' class teacher, SNA and parents. In advance of the case study pupil interview, target pupils were provided with a pupil-friendly information letter providing details on the research (see *Appendix Q*). This letter was read to the target pupil by the researcher and any additional pupil questions answered. Target pupils were then provided with a pupil-friendly letter of assent which they were invited to sign (see *Appendix R*). At all stages during the process, pupils, teachers and SNAs were informed that they could withdraw from the study, if they so wished, without any penalties or implications.

3.7.6.2 Privacy and confidentiality.

Abiding by *PSI principle 1.2* (PSI, 2010), the researcher ensured that all information gathered for the purposes of the research adhered with the principle of privacy and confidentiality. Confidentiality pertains to data with identifiable information and "implies that research should not be disclosed to others without the explicit consent of the participants" (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2012, p. 3). To ensure anonymity of participants, an ID number was generated for each school and participant. This number, rather than the participant's name, was assigned to each participant's data and stored separately from the overall school list. During transcription of voice recordings, no identifying information was transcribed, with each transcription matched to the school data through use of the case study ID number. Any pupil documents were reviewed by the researcher on the school premises and any notes taken were matched to school data through use of the case study ID number, rather than identifying names.

3.7.6.3 Use of data.

Clear information on access to, storage of and use of data was provided to participants in the information sheets. The primary researcher and her supervisor were provided with access to the data and no identifying information was released to any third parties. Throughout the research process, all research data was stored in compliance with the *Data Protection Act* (GOI, 2003). The hard data was stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's work office at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, Ireland. This locked filing cabinet was located in a private office within the College building which is only accessible by key. The signed consent forms and hard data were stored separately to avoid any potential matching of files. The soft data was stored on the researcher's personal password-protected laptop. All soft data was anonymised. A back-up copy of the soft data was contained on a password encrypted USB storage device which was stored in the locked filing cabinet in the researcher's work office. In accordance with data protection policies participants were informed that the hard and soft data would be stored for the duration of the research project plus three years, after which it would be destroyed.

Participants were also informed that following data collection and analysis, information gathered across participants and schools would be compiled to form a set of aggregated results and used to create a report on the findings of the study, necessary for the Doctoral thesis, conference presentations and written publications. During such times, participants were informed that individual quotes from participants may be used to support points made. However, no names or identifiers would be revealed whereby confidentiality and anonymity were assured at all times for all parties.

3.7.6.4 Working with potentially vulnerable participants.

Pupils with EBD/SEBD or those with behavioural care needs can be viewed as a potentially vulnerable population (Cooper & Jacobs, 2011). Throughout the research project, utmost respect was communicated to the pupils and those working with them. All pupil interviews took place on the school campus. An open-door policy was upheld during interviews and where possible, a room with a window was selected to ensure that the pupil could be visible by school staff. Pupil protection guidelines and ethical guidelines were central to the data-gathering process whereby the researcher was aware of the need to follow relevant guidelines if any pupil protection issues came to light over the course of the research. In addition to

matters of informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, pupils were given the choice of bringing a staff member to the semi-structured interview to reduce any apprehensions or anxieties. In the interest of validity and reliability, use of SNAs for such support was not encouraged. In addition, all pupil participants were given the right to withdraw from the study at any time, without consequences.

3.7.6.5 Sensitivity of topic.

When engaging in the semi-structured interviews, the researcher was aware that some of the topics related to SNA preparedness and deployment may have been perceived as sensitive in nature by the teachers, SNAs and/or pupils. To address this matter, the researcher ensured to build rapport with the interviewee prior to commencing the interview. In addition, participants were reminded of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage, without penalties or implications. Participants also had the right to refrain from answering specific questions during the interview, if they so desired.

3.8 Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis was undertaken with the case study data, with particular focus placed on the semi-structured interview data, documentary review and field notes. NVivo software was employed to support this process. The qualitative data analysis methodology adopted was based on the principles of 'Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis' (IPA), as developed by Smith and colleagues (Smith, 1996; Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008).

In order to understand the application of IPA to the research project, some background information on IPA will be presented. Thereafter, a rationale for selecting the IPA approach will be forwarded, with comparisons drawn across other analytical methodologies. Finally, a detailed, step-by-step account of the analytic strategy for the qualitative aspects of this research project will be outlined, as informed by key IPA principles and related guidelines in the field (Smith et al., 2009). Results related to the qualitative data will then be presented in *Chapter Six*.

3.8.1 What is IPA?

IPA presents as a relatively new addition to established qualitative analytic methodologies. Developed by Smith and colleagues in the 1990s, it is described as an increasingly popular approach to qualitative, experiential and psychological research (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This approach has been informed by three key philosophical concepts including phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography (Smith et al., 2009). The first approach, namely phenomenology, concerns the study of lived experience and the meanings people attach to those experiences. In particular, it is concerned with 'persons-in-context', adopting a largely 'contextualist' approach (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). Secondly, IPA is underpinned by principles of hermeneutics. This concerns the theory of interpretation and stems from the work of Schleiermacher (1998), Heidegger (1962/1927) and Gadamer (1990/1960, as cited in Smith et al., 2009). Hermeneutics is concerned with the dynamic relationship between the part and the whole. Through this viewpoint, data analysis is iterative in nature, whereby the researcher moves back and forth through the data in a cyclical process. This allows the meaning of a text to be interpreted at a number of different levels, which together, converge on the part-whole coherence of understanding. Notably, IPA is concerned with the dual interpretative process within data analysis, referred to as the 'double hermeneutic'. This pertains to the researcher's aim to make sense of the participant who is concurrently trying to make sense of his/her own experiences (Smith, 2011; Smith & Osborn, 2008). Finally, IPA is influenced by idiography; a process concerned with the particular. Smith et al. (2009) describe the way in which idiography operates at two levels. Firstly, IPA is committed to 'detail' through a depth of analysis i.e. a thorough and systematic analytical approach. Secondly, IPA focuses on 'detail' in terms of understanding *particular* experiential phenomena from the perspective of *particular* people in a *particular* context. In this regard, Smith (2004) emphasises the need for the researcher to engage in deep levels of interpretation, grounded in the meeting of researcher and text at a range of analytical levels.

Although IPA is typically applied to studies with a relatively small sample size, Smith et al. (2009) support the application of IPA to larger sample sizes. Specifically, they advocate for an analytic process that begins with the detailed examination of each case and then moves to an examination of similarities and differences across cases. In this way, they note that the researcher should seek to establish, "fine-grained accounts of patterns of meaning for participants reflecting upon a shared experience" (2009, p. 38). This resonates with Stake's (2008) description of the

'quintain' within case study research, such that the focus is placed on the collective over the individual. In addition, Smith et al. (2009) detail how the use of multi-perspectives in the research can aid in the development of a more detailed and multifaceted account of the phenomena over that of single perspectives alone.

3.8.2 Rationale for selecting an IPA approach to data analysis.

Before committing to use of the IPA approach, a range of potential methodologies were considered that could have informed the approach adopted for data analysis. These comprised grounded theory, content analysis, discourse analysis, narrative analysis, IPA, and thematic analysis. *Table 12* presents a brief description and critique of each data analysis methodology, in addition to a rationale for discounting or adopting the same.

Table 12: Rationale for selecting an IPA approach to data analysis

Method	Description	Critique	Rationale for discounting/adopting the methodology
Grounded Theory (GT)	Grounded Theory (GT; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) is a systematic methodology involving the generation or discovery of a theory for a process or an action (Creswell, 2013). The researcher seeks to develop a theory in a 'bottom up' approach. GT requires initial or emerging theory to be tested against data that is systematically collected (Mertens, 2015).	In GT, the researcher needs to set aside theoretical ideas or notions so that the analytic theory can emerge. The researcher often faces the difficulty of determining when categories are saturated or when the theory is sufficiently detailed (Creswell, 2013).	Classic GT requires the researcher to engage in 'data saturation' whereby the researcher, having analysed the first round of data, conducts further interviews to address questions arising from previous analysis. As this study utilised a case study approach to data collection, this option of re-entering the field several times after original data collection was not available. In addition, this study sought to triangulate several data types such as interviews, observations, and large-scale survey results. As GT relies primarily on inductively coded interviews or focus groups, GT was therefore ruled out as the most appropriate data analysis methodology for this study.
Content Analysis (CA)	Content Analysis (CA) was first introduced by Lasswell and Casey (1946) and is the analysis of texts of various types including writing, images, recordings and cultural artefacts. It tends to code and analyse qualitative data numerically, often providing frequency counts (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Wilkinson, 2000).	CA has been substantively critiqued (Mayring, 2004) whereby there is strong debate over whether it is, or can be, considered a qualitative method. Braun and Clarke (2013) and <i>The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research</i> (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) scarcely refer to this methodology, in light of this reason.	As outlined, the themes in CA are often quantified and the unit of analysis tends to be a word or phrase. However, in this study, the researcher deemed it best not to quantify the themes. Rather, the unit of analysis in each case comprised a teacher, an SNA and two pupils for comparison. Therefore, CA was not considered to be the best data analysis approach for this study.

Discourse Analysis (DA)	Discourse Analysis (DA) focuses on understanding the meaning of participants' language (Mertens, 2015). The researcher seeks to read 'between the lines' of the participant to determine deeper meanings to qualities of language includes colloquialisms, images, and rules of turn taking.	A range of critics of DA query whether DA actually produces valid knowledge, with criticisms coming from the fields of philosophy, applied linguistics and critical linguistics (Haig, 2004). In addition, this method often does not produce analyses for use in applied research (Braun & Clarke, 2013).	As this study was not examining language, per se, as a means of constructing meaning, DA was not considered to be the optimum choice of methodology for data analysis.
Narrative Analysis (NA)	Narrative Analysis (NA) uses field texts, such as stories and autobiographies, in addition to observations, documents and pictures, as the units of analysis. Using this approach, researchers collect descriptions of events or happenings. Creswell (2013) outlines how narrative analysis seeks to shed light on the identities of individuals and is often shaped by the researcher into a chronology.	Critics argue that NA is a challenging approach to use as it can be difficult to uncover the multi-layered context of one's life (Edel, 1984). In addition, the researcher must be reflective as to how to retell the individual's story (Creswell, 2013).	As this study was not considering an individual's story, but rather, the larger context of the classroom (including nonverbal communications between SNAs, teachers and pupils), it was deemed inappropriate to rely on purely narrative communications in this study.
Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)	The aim of IPA is to explore in detail how participants make sense of their personal and social world (Smith & Osborn, 2007). The approach involves detailed examination of the participant's life-world, whereby it attempts to explore personal experience and an individual's personal perception or account of that experience so as to gain an understanding of the phenomenon in question (Smith et al., 2009). Larkin et al. (2006) describe IPA as a broadly 'contextualist' approach because of its focus on persons-in-context.	Critics argue that at times, it can be difficult to find individuals who have all experienced the same phenomenon. In addition, the researcher must decide how his/her personal understandings will be introduced into the study, whereby they will impact on the interpretation of the individuals' experience (Creswell, 2013).	IPA was considered to be a good fit between the research aims and objectives of this study as it seeks to examine individual's personal experiences of the SNA scheme within mainstream primary schools. In addition, the flexibility of approach when using this methodology for data analysis was deemed positive, whereby it would allow both within case and cross-case analyses of individual themes, with due regard for the similarities and differences across cases (Smith & Osborn, 2007). In addition, the approach would ensure that the individual voice could be central to the final write-up (Smith et al., 2009).

Thematic Analysis (T.A)	<p>Thematic Analysis (T.A) is a method for identifying themes and patterns of meaning across a dataset in relation to a research question. Braun and Clarke (2013) outline how this is possibly the most widely used qualitative method of data analysis. Various forms of this approach include inductive T.A, theoretical T.A, experiential TA and constructionist T.A (Braun & Clarke, 2013).</p>	<p>T.A is perceived by some qualitative researchers as lacking the substance of other 'branded' and theoretically driven approaches, such as IPA and GT (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In addition, analyses can often consist simply of descriptions of participants' concerns, with a lack of more interpretative analysis.</p>	<p>Although T.A presents as a flexible analytical approach, it was deemed that the potential lack of concrete guidance for higher level, more interpretive analysis of the data could render the analysis to lack the depth of other approaches. In addition, Braun and Clarke (2013) outline how the 'voices' of individual participants can get lost in the analysis, particularly when working with larger datasets. As both the individual experience and the persons-in-context were deemed paramount to this research, it was decided to reject this analytical approach in favour of IPA.</p>
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3.8.2.1 Summary rationale for selecting an IPA approach.

Reflecting on all approaches for qualitative data analysis, the researcher debated between use of T.A and IPA. Although T.A presents as a flexible analytical approach, it was deemed that the potential lack of concrete guidance for higher level, more interpretive data analysis could render the analysis to lack necessary depth. In addition, Braun and Clarke (2013) outline how the 'voices' of individual participants can get lost in T.A, particularly when working with larger datasets. As both the individual experience and the persons-in-context were deemed paramount to this research, it was decided to reject T.A in favour of IPA. In summary, it was decided that a case study approach for data collection would be adopted for this study, whereby the researcher would seek to explore and understand complex situations in real world settings. This was then combined with an IPA approach to data analysis (Smith et al., 2009), considered to be the most appropriate methodology to align with the key tenets of the research project. In this way, both within case and cross-case analysis could occur, with due regard for the voices of the individual experience in context (Smith et al., 2009).

3.8.3 Use of NVivo11 data analysis software.

During the data analysis phase, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software programme, namely NVivo11, was utilised to support the organisation, management and data analysis process. Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2011) highlight the limitations of conducting qualitative data analysis manually, particularly with large data sets, whereby one can be restricted to comparative analysis alone. In contrast, several researchers have recognised the scope of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software in allowing the researcher to engage in multiple forms of analyses, thereby facilitating the emergence of underlying theories and relationships in the dataset (Bazeley & Jackson, 2007; Fielding & Lee, 1998; Tesch, 1990). It must be emphasised, however, that when using data analysis software, the researcher does not surrender the hermeneutic task to the software programme. Rather, the researcher remains at the heart of the analytic process, such that the software is used merely as a supportive and facilitative tool with the analyst firmly in charge (Fielding & Lee, 1998).

Importantly, the use of data analysis software also serves to support *commitment and rigour* in the analytic process, in addition to *transparency and coherence*. Notably, Yardley (2000) forwards these standards as key principles for assessing

the quality of qualitative research. By using NVivo11 software, the commitment and rigour underpinning the within-case and cross-case analyses can be established by examining the researcher's codebook. In addition, the software's ability to produce an audit trail ensures that the transparency and plausibility of the study is evident. Specifically, the capacity of the software to log data movements and coding patterns, as well as map conceptual categories and thought progression, render all stages of the analytical process traceable and transparent. Accordingly, this facilitated the researcher in producing a more systematic and comprehensive audit trail than through the manual mapping of this process alone (QDATRAINING, 2018).

3.8.4 Phases and steps taken in the analytical process.

Six discrete cycles of analysis were conducted across the iterative process, in line with that outlined by Smith et al. (2009). Each stage of this analytic process will be presented in turn, followed by an outline of the approach to write-up. Thereafter, *Figure 24*, as sourced from QDATRAINING (2018), serves to summarise the steps involved in the analytic process, highlighting the inter-linked and iterative nature of the analytical process.

3.8.4.1 Step 1: Reading and re-reading.

Step 1 involved total immersion of the researcher in the data through reading and re-reading of the transcribed semi-structured interviews. During the first reading, the researcher simultaneously re-listened to the audio recordings to recall the qualitative aspects of the interview and support a more holistic analysis of the data. Smith et al. (2009) note how this phase serves to begin the process of entering the participant's world by actively engaging with the data.

3.8.4.2 Step 2: Initial noting.

Step 2 involved the examination of semantic content and language use on an exploratory level. Through a highly detailed approach, the researcher sought to remain open-minded, noting and commenting on anything of interest within the transcript. Smith et al. (2009) encourage the use of analytical dialogue when engaging with each line of transcript, such that the researcher asks questions of the data at descriptive, linguistic and conceptual levels. This stage of the process was highly time-consuming to ensure full immersion in the participants' experience and

to support deep data analysis. This initial noting and coding phase resulted in the development of 275 initial notes (referred to as annotations) and 43 initial codes. A sample of this initial noting is outlined in *Figure 20*, as sourced from a screenshot from Case 1 from the NVivo software programme. Thereafter, the 43 initial codes are outlined in *Appendix S*, as sourced from the NVivo codebook.

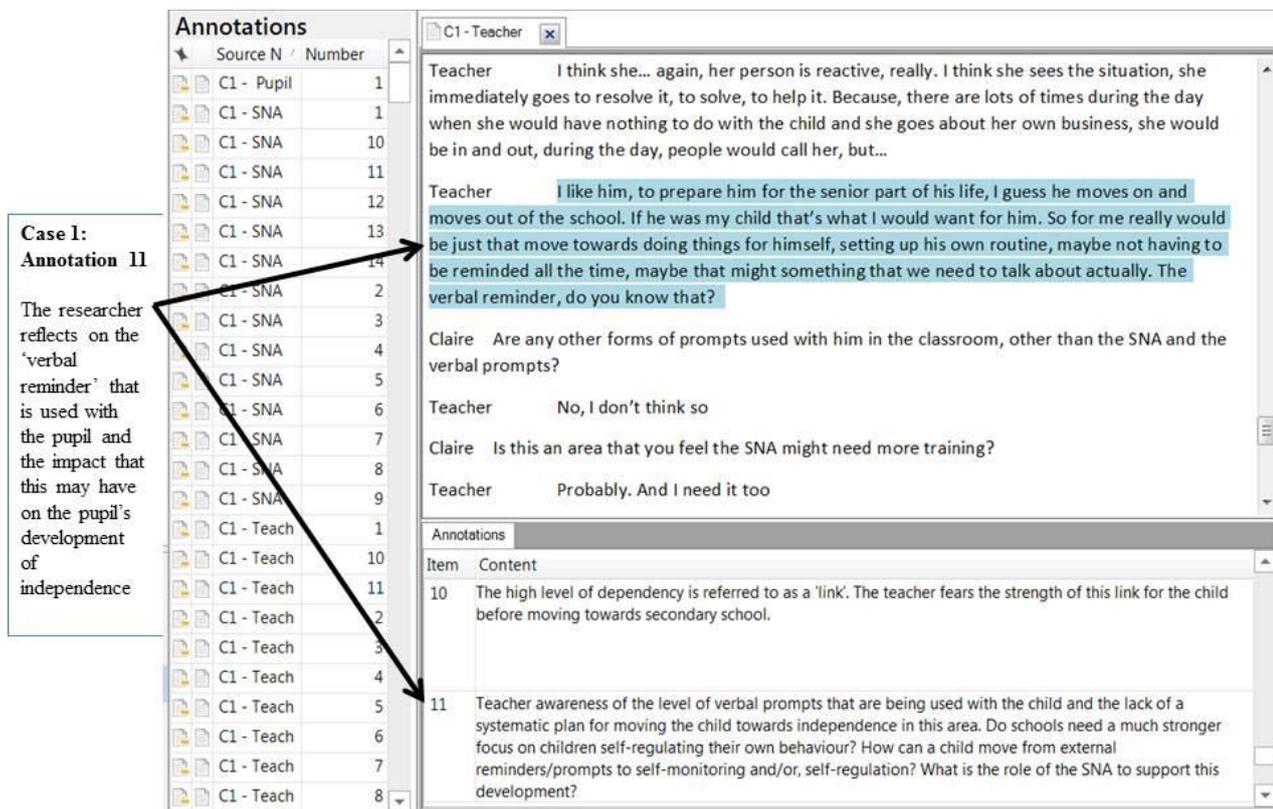


Figure 20: Screenshot sample of the initial noting (annotation) in the data analysis process, as sourced from the researcher's NVivo codebook

3.8.4.3 Step 3: Developing emergent/sub-ordinate themes.

Step 3 involved the development of emergent themes from the data. This involved broad participant-driven open-coding of the interviews, aimed at deconstructing the data from its original chronology into non-hierarchical general codes. Focus was placed on discrete chunks of transcript text, in addition to mapping the connections between the text and the initial exploratory notes. Smith et al. (2009) outline how such emergent themes reflect a synergy between the participant's original words and thoughts, in addition to the analyst's interpretation. The hermeneutic cycle was central to this process, involving a movement between the whole and the part

(Smith, 2007). Once open coding had occurred, related codes were then re-grouped under category headings to form 'sub-ordinate' themes, providing an initial framework for further data analysis. This resulted in the 43 initial codes being mapped onto 12 categories of sub-ordinate themes, which were further underpinned by sub-themes. The 12 main categories of sub-ordinate themes are presented in *Figure 21*, as sourced from a screenshot from the researcher's NVivo codebook. A more detailed account of these subordinate themes and related sub-themes is provided in *Appendix T*.

Phase 2 - Developing Sub-ordinate themes			
Name	Sources	References	
Adherence to classroom rules	22	93	
Ecological awareness	19	50	
Memorable quotes	32	128	
Perspectives on challenging behaviour	29	95	
Perspectives on independence	37	347	
Planning - perspectives	30	139	
Progress noted	25	74	
Role of the SNA	38	194	
Stategies deployed	40	290	
Stress	18	48	
Targets	25	47	
Training	27	118	

Figure 21: Screenshot of the main sub-ordinate themes, as sourced from the researcher's NVivo codebook

3.8.4.4 Step 4: Case study report and movement to the next case.

Once this cycle of analysis had been undertaken with each interview from case 1 (i.e. teacher, SNA and pupil interviews), a case study report was compiled. The purpose of this report was to summarise and triangulate the key learning across the case based on the in-depth analysis of the semi-structured interviews, documentary review and field notes. To support this process, a case study report framework was created, as guided by the research questions and informed by the work of Yin (2014) and Stake (2006). This framework was flexible in nature to ensure all salient aspects of the case could be included. An example of a case study report is presented in *Appendix U*, as couched within the case study framework. In addition to compiling the case study report, related IF frameworks were sketched at that point in time. For the most part, two IF frameworks were sketched per case. The first IF framework summarised the overall information gleaned across the case, illustrating what had been learned by the researcher in terms of the interactive factors impacting on the pupil's particular pattern of strengths and needs. The

second IF framework summarised the information communicated by the SNA alone in relation to the target pupil's strengths and needs. Two sample IF frameworks are included in *Appendices V* (SNA-related IF framework) and *W* (overall IF framework); both related to case no. 12. By creating the two IF frameworks, this supported the researcher to gain greater insight into the SNA's understanding of the pupil's strengths and needs and the SNA's support of the target pupil.

Once the case report and IF frameworks had been drawn up, the entire process was repeated with the next set of case study interviews. During this stage, the researcher treated each interview on its own terms by systematically following the steps aforementioned. Although influenced by previous findings, the emergence of new themes was supported, where relevant.

3.8.4.5 Step 5: Searching for connections across emergent themes.

Step 5 involved the organisation and mapping of emergent themes into more coherent 'super-ordinate' themes. Smith et al. (2009) outline how researchers working with larger datasets are often best to engage in this process when all cases have been analysed individually. Accordingly, once data analysis was complete on all 20 cases, the researcher returned to the list of sub-ordinate themes. At this stage, a charting and mapping exercise was conducted, whereby themes were co-ordinated at a higher level. This process was guided by a range of strategies including abstraction, subsumption, polarization and numeration (Smith et al., 2009). For example, clusters of related themes were collapsed together and some themes discarded, particularly those that did not pertain to the research questions. Other sub-ordinate themes were upgraded to super-ordinate status where they served to bring together a series of related themes. Once this process was concluded, four 'super-ordinate' themes remained which were further composed of a range of sub-themes. These super-ordinate themes then served as the guiding framework for writing up the results. *Figure 22* presents a screenshot of the four super-ordinate themes and related subthemes, as sourced from the researcher's NVivo codebook. A more detailed account of these super-ordinate themes and related sub-themes is provided in *Appendix X*.

Phase 3 - Developing Super-ordinate themes			
Name	Sources	References	
T1 - SNA preparedness	31	341	
T1.1 - SNA training and CPD	28	92	
T1.2 - School-based preparation	30	108	
T1.3 - SNAs' understanding of challenging behavior	31	141	
T2 - SNAs' support of behaviour	42	405	
T2.1 - Type of challenging behaviour	30	122	
T2.2 - SNAs' use of pro-active strategies	41	160	
T2.3 - SNAs' use of reactive strategies	33	123	
T3 - SNAs' role in supporting or hindering independence	42	356	
T3.1 - Pupil's level of independence	36	132	
T3.2 - Level of SNA support	16	75	
T3.3 - SNA deployment	36	149	
T4 - SNAs' relational role with pupils	39	332	
T4.1 - SNA-pupil relationship	35	93	
T4.2 - SNA-pupil emotional support	30	71	
T4.3 - Emotional dependency	24	43	

Figure 22: Screenshot of the super-ordinate themes and related sub-themes, as sourced from the researcher's NVivo codebook

3.8.4.6 Step 6: Looking for patterns across cases.

Step 6, the final stage, involved looking for patterns across cases by engaging in both in-case and cross-case comparative analysis. To support this process, the recurrence of superordinate themes was explored both within and across cases, informed by the line-by-line coding that had previously been undertaken on each interview. Smith et al. (2009) highlight how this stage of the process can serve to shed light on the convergence and divergence of themes both within and across case studies, giving rise to the commonality and individuality across the dataset. This process was facilitated by use of the NVivo software, whereby the final themes were arranged in a matrix (see *Figure 23*). By reading the matrix down, the extent to which the super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes occurred within each case is evident. In contrast, reading the matrix across allows for cross-case comparison on the recurrence of themes. A screenshot of this matrix is provided in *Figure 23*, as sourced from the NVivo codebook, showing the convergence and divergence of themes across cases 9 to 13. Notably, the numbers within the cells refer to the

number of references coded within the interviews which related to each of the themes. Through the use of the colour-coding system, the extent to which each of the themes was evident in a case is depicted along a continuum ranging from not at all (white) to very evident (dark blue). The full in-case and cross-case analysis matrix is provided in *Appendix Y*, as sourced from the researcher's NVivo codebook.

	I : Case 09	J : Case 10	K : Case 11	L : Case 12	M : Case 13
1: T1 - SNA preparedness	22	14	14	37	17
2: T1.1 - SNA training and CPD	8	4	6	6	6
3: T1.2 - School-based preparation	5	6	6	6	3
4: T1.3 - SNAs' understanding of challenging behaviour	9	4	2	25	8
5: T2 - SNAs' support of behaviour	27	25	35	26	25
6: T2.1 - Type of challenging behaviour	16	15	9	10	9
7: T2.2 - SNAs' use of pro-active strategies	11	10	24	8	9
8: T2.3 - SNAs' use of reactive strategies	7	5	8	12	11
9: T3 - SNAs' role in supporting or hindering independence	24	17	16	12	26
10: T3.1 - Pupil's level of independence	13	7	5	6	8
11: T3.2 - Level of SNA support	0	12	11	8	19
12: T3.3 - SNA deployment	14	11	12	6	20
13: T4 - SNAs' relational role with pupils	7	4	10	19	15
14: T4.1 - SNA-pupil relationship	5	3	9	14	12
15: T4.2 SNA-pupil emotional support	2	4	5	12	8
16: T4.3 - Emotional dependency	2	0	5	6	5

Figure 23: Screenshot of the in-case and cross-case analysis across cases 9 to 14, as sourced from the researcher's NVivo codebook

3.8.5 Data write up.

The final aspect of the qualitative data analysis related to the write up of the data, as presented in *Chapter Six*. Smith et al. (2009) outline the flexibility of approach in writing up an IPA analysis, whereby the voices of both the participants and researcher should be presented. To engage in this process, the researcher sought to present the super-ordinate themes in turn, with reference to related sub-ordinate themes. When working with large data-sets, Smith et al. (2009) note how analysis and write-up will generally take place at the group level. Nonetheless, they advocate for the inclusion of a range of individual transcript extracts to ensure that the analysis reflects an IPA approach. In this regard, raw transcript extracts were interwoven with detailed analytic commentary. In addition, Smith et al. (2009) note the importance of deciding on a means by which to classify themes as 'recurrent' in the write up, in an effort to enhance the validity of findings. To support this process, the measurement and weighting criteria framework utilised in the *Evaluation of education provision for students with autism spectrum disorder in Ireland* study was

adopted (Daly et al., 2016); see *Table 13*. Notably, the researcher had prior experience in using the framework as she had worked as a core member of the research team on the Daly et al. (2016) project. In this way, use of the framework facilitated clear communication of the frequency at which different themes occurred, both at the case and participant level.

Table 13: Quantification equivalencies employed in data write up, as sourced from Daly et al. (2016, p. 193)

A few	Some	Half	A majority	Almost all	All
Up to 20%	40%	50%	60%	80%	100%

Figure 24 (overleaf), as sourced from QDATRAINING (2018), serves to summarise the steps involved in the data analysis, highlighting the inter-linked and iterative nature of the overall process.

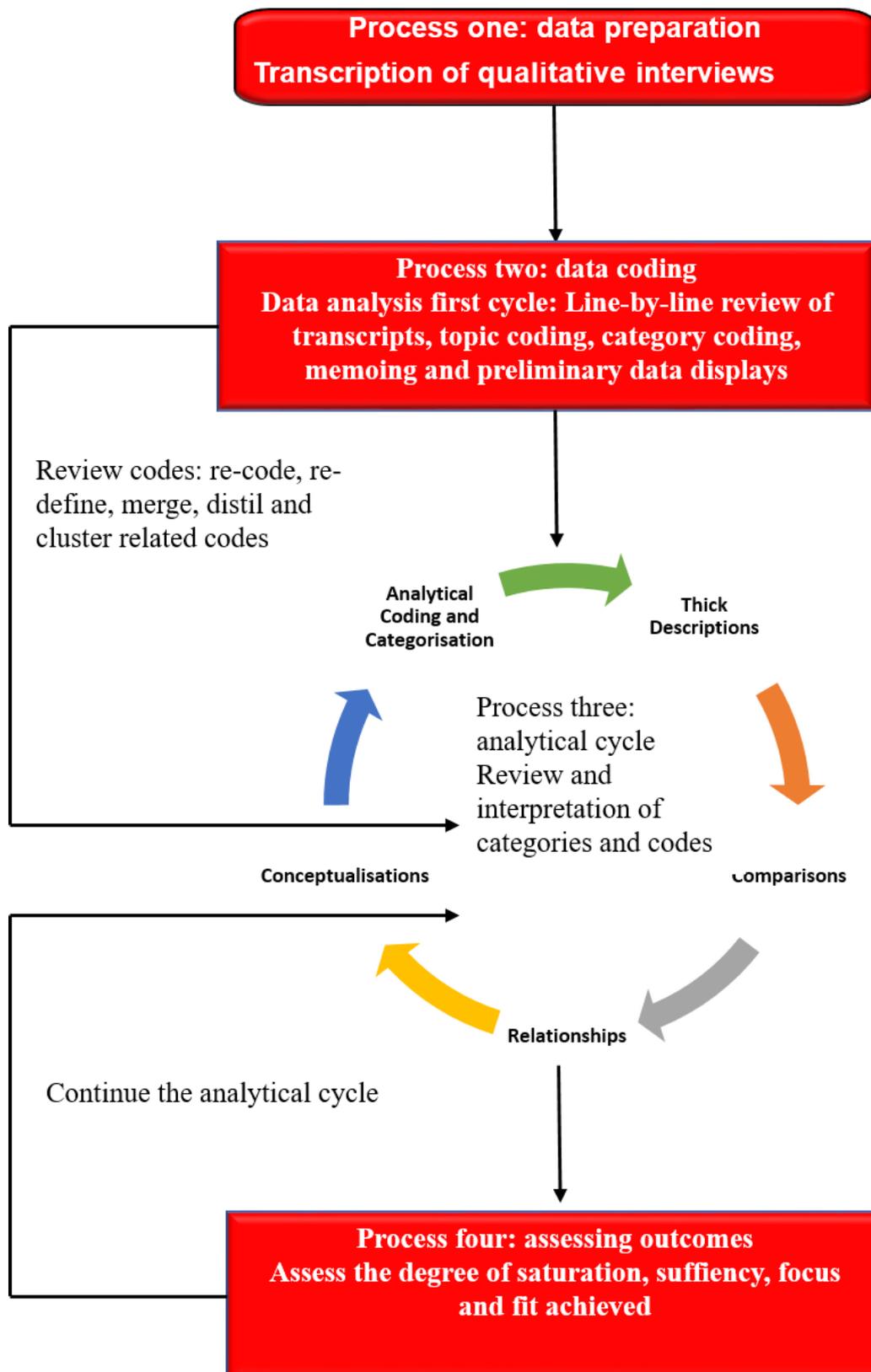


Figure 24: Overview of the inter-linked and iterative nature of the IPA analytical process, as sourced from QDA Training (2018).

3.8.6 Linking the IPA analytic process and use of NVivo11.

As previously outlined, NVivo11 software was used to facilitate the data analysis process. *Table 14* shows the linkage between the guidelines of the IPA approach, as forwarded by Smith et al. (2009) and the stages and processes conducted when using NVivo11 software. This has been adapted from the QDA training resource (QDATRAINING, 2018).

Table 14: Linkages between the IPA analytic process and the use of NVivo11 software

IPA analytic process (Smith et al., 2009)	Use of NVivo11 Software
Steps 1 & 2: Reading and initial noting	While reading and re-reading the transcripts, initial notes were documented using the 'annotations' feature of NVivo11. Thereafter, open codes ('nodes' in NVivo) were created for the participant's transcript through an iterative process. This involved reading through each transcript on numerous occasions to code and re-code the data, adding any additional annotation comments where appropriate. During this phase, code names were selected to capture the overall description of the content.
Step 3: Developing emerging themes	A new 'category' folder for the participant's transcript in NVivo was formed. This folder contained a copy of the set of open codes, leaving the original open codes folder for the participant intact. Each code in the category folder was then reviewed, whereby codes were reordered into broad categories. For this to occur, codes were added to other codes either as 'parent' or, more usually, as 'pupil' codes. During this process, any re-naming of codes was undertaken to reflect coded content.
Step 4: Writing case report and moving to the next case	A case report was created for each case and uploaded to the NVivo software programme. Thereafter, a new open codes folder was created in NVivo. This was used to store the new codes created for each participant's transcript separate from other transcripts. Each transcript was therefore treated as a new analysis as far as possible.
Step 5: Searching for connections across emergent themes	This stage involved employing IPA strategies of abstraction, subsumption, polarization and numeration (Smith et al., 2009) to create superordinate themes. To facilitate this process, categories were linked or reduced further into emergent themes. New names were created for category themes that reflected both the descriptive and the interpretative to create 'superordinate' themes. This process served to consolidate codes into a more conceptual map of a final framework of nodes.

Step 6: Looking for patterns across cases	Emergent themes from the participant's transcript were copied into a common 'themes' folder where they were all merged together for the first time (leaving the category folders for each participant intact). A process of merging and further consolidation of superordinate themes was conducted within the themes folder. A specific type of query in NVivo11 (i.e. 'Matrix coding') was run to produce a table which showed participants in columns and themes in rows to facilitate in-case and cross-case analysis.
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3.9 Quality of the Research

Ensuring quality of the research process is a vital aspect of any research project. Matters of reliability and validity were central to each stage of the research process, particular in terms of research design and data analysis. In addition to the quantitative data, the researcher sought to ensure quality lay at the heart of the qualitative research. This is in light of the criticisms that this form of research has come under due to the different frameworks, sampling approaches, sample sizes and goals that can be employed to that of quantitative research (Hammersley, 2007; Kitto, Chesters, & Grbich, 2008; Mays & Pope, 2000). In this regard, researchers emphasise the need for rigour, credibility, authenticity and trustworthiness as means to judge the quality of qualitative research methodologies (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Kitto et al., 2008). Nonetheless, one must recognise that designing and conducting a 'perfect' study free from imperfections is deemed to be impossible (Howe, 2012). Although the researcher ensured that matters of validity, reliability and fidelity were at the heart of this research approach, a number of limitations are acknowledged as part of the research process. These are presented below, with due regard for overarching concerns with reliability and validity.

3.9.1 Sampling strategy.

Although a systematic, stratified sampling strategy was originally designed for this research, the difficulties in recruiting participants for the study resulted in necessary deviation from this procedure. Accordingly, the final case study schools recruited for this study differed from the national distribution of pupils with EBD across school sectors and school types in Ireland, as based on nationally representative data (Smyth et al., 2009, as cited in Banks & McCoy, 2011). Specifically, although previous research showed a higher concentration of pupils with EBD in DEIS schools than any other school type category, the lengthy recruitment process for

this research resulted in more non-DEIS case study participants than that of DEIS (12:8 respectively). This issue emerged as a result of the difficulties experienced in sourcing schools that met the study's inclusionary criteria, as well as problems in obtaining consent from certain schools and/or parents.

In addition, although data from *The Growing Up in Ireland* study (Murray et al., 2011) outlined a ratio of 5%:2% of boys and girls respectively with EBD (as identified by their teachers), the researcher in this study experienced grave difficulties in recruiting any female case study participants. In spite of best efforts, the final gender balance recruited for this study resulted in 19 boys and only one girl; a deviation from the gender ratio outlined by Murray et al. (2011). On reflection, it is questionable whether significantly less girls are in receipt of SNA support for behavioural care needs than that of boys, given the fact that research shows boys as more likely to exhibit externalising behaviours than girls (Ni Cathain, Cannon, & Clarke, 2016). Interestingly, a review of data from the MaSt study (Webster & Blatchford, 2013a) showed that no girls were included in the sample of pupils with a statement for behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. This was vindicated by the researchers in light of the low prevalence rates of girls with EBD/SEBD in state-funded schools in the U.K. Accordingly, this provides greater justification for the gender imbalance within the current study.

Based on these issues in the recruitment process and the selection of research participants from only one province in Ireland, it is clear that the case study sample cannot be considered an exact reflection of the national spread of pupils with EBD across school sectors and school types. Nonetheless, the diversity in case study pupils and settings recruited for this study must be acknowledged, as was previously outlined. Yin (2014) highlights that by selecting a range of case types that go beyond the specific or typical case, this supports the analytic generalisation of findings. In this way, the principles and 'lessons learned' from the case study research may potentially apply to a variety of situations, far beyond the original cases.

3.9.2 Selection, self-selection and under-coverage biases.

A further limitation of the research sample pertains to a range of biases that were inherent in the sampling strategy. These include *selection*, *self-selection* and *under-coverage biases*. Firstly, a review of the large-scale survey shows that data was only recruited through online methods. Greenacre (2016) argues that use of online

methods alone can result in *selection bias* and *under-coverage bias*, such that this population pertains to 'internet users' only instead of the complete target population. To reduce this effect, the survey link was shared through alternate means, such as through schools' email addresses. Bethlehem (2010) argues that by linking the survey to one's workplace, this reduces selection and under-coverage bias and aids to reach the wider target population. Coupled with this, the online survey was also subject to *self-selection bias*, whereby respondents had to self-select to engage in the survey. Specifically, this involved respondents choosing to access the email or social media site, clicking on the online link and deciding to complete the survey. In this way, Greenacre (2016) highlights how the researcher is not in control of the selection process, whereby the principles of probability sampling are not followed.

The issue of self-selection bias also pertained to the case study schools. Although schools were randomly selected from the *NCSE 2015/2016 school allocations database* following the stratified sampling procedure (NCSE, 2015b), the contacted schools then had the option to 'opt in' or 'opt out' of the research process. As previously outlined, the case study recruitment process was very challenging, whereby a range of schools chose not to get involved in the study. For some schools, this was due to unwillingness on the part of the principal to allow the school to partake in the research, whilst for others, the class teacher and/or SNA were unwilling to be observed. Accordingly, the final case study sample represents those schools and participants that were *willing* to become involved in the research process and to be interviewed and observed. On reflection, the case study schools may constitute a sub-set of the range of schools eligible to partake in the research that perceive themselves in a positive light with regards to principles of inclusion, SNA preparedness and deployment, as well as the support of pupils with behavioural care needs. In contrast, one must query the practices occurring in the 'other' schools. Is it the case that the case study schools represent the 'best' or 'better' practices occurring within mainstream primary schools with regards to SNAs' support of pupils with behavioural care needs? Do the practices in the 'other' schools differ significantly? Although Yin (2014) argues that the inclusion of a range of diverse case studies within the multi-case research design serves to support the analytic generalisation of findings, one must consider the issue of self-selection bias in the final sample of case study schools. The potential for differing, and possibly less positive practices within the 'other' schools (i.e. the schools that chose not to partake in the research) must be acknowledged.

3.9.3 Social desirability of participants.

During the online survey and particularly, the semi-structured interviews, a potential limitation pertained to social desirability bias. This phenomenon can occur when participants wish to present themselves in a 'good light' and therefore, provide socially desirable answers. This study was particularly susceptible to this phenomenon due to the sensitive nature of the topic, the vulnerability of the target pupils and the "lower status of SNAs" within schools, as highlighted in previous research (Daly et al., 2016, p. 150). To reduce the possibility of this type of responding, participants were assured that their responses would be kept confidential and that there was no 'correct' answer to the questions. In addition, during semi-structured interviews, participants' answers were probed to ensure sufficient depth could be gleaned from the interview process. Flanagan (2005) highlights this as a strength of the semi-structured interview over that of structured interviews, whereby in the former, the interviewer can obtain more detailed information from each respondent and allow more unpredictable topics to arise.

3.9.4 Observer influence.

One of the potential limitations of the structured observations was that of *observer influence*. This phenomenon relates to the effects of the observer on the behaviour studied, whereby the researcher's presence in the classroom may have caused the adults and pupils to have reacted in unnatural ways. Notably, Berk (2013) outlines that for young children, observer influence is generally limited to the first session or two, whereby children quickly revert to their typical behaviour. In contrast, older children and adults often engage in more socially desirable behaviour, particularly when they know they are being observed. To reduce the effect of observer influence in this study, pupil participants were not informed about the classroom observations (although from an ethical viewpoint, parental consent was firstly sought from the target pupils' parents). The researcher also positioned herself in a location within the classroom that was as unobtrusive as possible, whilst still supporting the accurate and reliable logging of data. In addition, teachers and SNAs were reassured that the researcher was not seeking to observe *specific* classroom behaviour, but rather, *typical* classroom behaviour. Similarly, research questions or hypotheses were not explicitly shared with the participants to reduce any potential impact they could pose on adults' behaviour. Nonetheless, there is potential that due to observer influence, some SNAs may have offered additional support to target pupils during classroom observations in an effort to 'justify' their role. In contrast,

other SNAs may have reduced their support to target pupils during classroom observations, in light of their awareness of the need for SNAs to develop pupil independence. Ultimately however, it is speculated that the magnitude of observations conducted over the 20 case studies should have aided to increase the reliability of the data obtained. In this regard, Berk (2013, p. 45) argues that due to observer influence, observational data must be interpreted as an indication of the “best behaviour” that the participants could display under the specific circumstances.

3.9.5 Reliability.

Reliability is defined as a measure of “dependability, consistency and replicability over time” (Cohen et al., 2011). Throughout the study, reliability was central to the research process. With reference to the case study research, Yin (2014) outlines the need for the researcher to document the procedures followed in each case study to support replication. Throughout the study, detailed documentation of each phase of the research process was undertaken to ensure that the research process could be replicated across sites. All semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed to ensure that no data was lost in the interview process. A number of additional reliability checks were also conducted, in line with recommendations from Gibbs (2007). During the preparatory phase, semi-structured interview transcripts were cross-referenced with the audio recordings to ensure obvious mismatches or qualitative nuances were not lost in the transcription of the data. During the qualitative data analysis, the six discrete cycles of analysis were followed rigorously. Data was constantly compared with the codes to avoid a drift in the definition of codes. Use of a ‘critical friend’ was also employed during the coding of data to serve as an external check on the coding process. During this phase, the researcher and critical friend discussed, interrogated and sought agreement on code names, the coded passages and related themes; referred to by Creswell (2013) as *intercoder agreement*. NVivo software was particularly useful for this process, whereby the use of initial memos, notes, definitions and codes underpinned the development of sub-ordinate and super-ordinate themes, as evidenced in the comprehensive codebook.

3.9.6 Validity.

Akin to reliability, validity is concerned with errors that may occur in the research process. It is particularly concerned with “whether an item or instrument measures or describes what it is supposed to measure or describe” (Bell, 2010, p. 117). Gronlund (1981) states that it is impossible for research to be 100 percent valid, so validity should be seen as a matter of degree rather than as an absolute state. In considering research validity, Creswell (2014b) encourages the researcher to actively incorporate ‘validity strategies’ into the research process to enhance one’s ability to assess the accuracy of findings. To address this matter, such validity checks were incorporated into the classroom observations. Specifically, the researcher checked with the class teacher after each observation period to verify the extent to which the observed behaviour represented typical classroom life for the target pupil, with reference to the behaviour of adults, pupils and the lesson focus. Notably, across four cases, teachers highlighted issues with one or more of the observed lessons, such as in cases where target pupils or SNAs did not behave in a ‘typical’ manner or when an abnormal event occurred during the lesson that impacted on both adults’ and pupils’ behaviour. In such cases, the observation data was discarded for that lesson and a new observation undertaken, with the aim of supporting overall reliability and validity of the findings.

Thereafter, data was triangulated by using multiple sources and methods to provide corroborating evidence. Triangulation is defined as, “the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behavior” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 233). Researchers highlight the value of engaging in this research process whereby having more than one perspective on a research topic presents a wider, more balanced picture of the phenomenon, aiding to explain more fully the richness and complexity of human behaviour (Bryman, 2012; Cohen et al., 2011). Jick (1979) notes how mixed methods presents as a particularly positive means by which to triangulate data sources by seeking convergences across qualitative and quantitative methods. Throughout this study, research findings were consistently triangulated both within and across data sources, including the large-scale SNA survey, systematic observations and case studies. This supported a coherent justification for research themes whereby high levels of cross-referencing of data across sources and cases occurred. In addition, the researcher also acknowledged discrepant information that ran counter to the dominant themes and sub-themes. Creswell (2014b) notes how the presentation of such contradictory evidence aids to

make the findings more realistic and valid, thereby adding to the credibility of the account.

Beyond triangulation, the researcher was particularly aware to clarify the viewpoint and potential bias that she might bring to the study. Creswell (2014a) outlines how this self-reflection, “creates an open and honest narrative that will resonate well with readers” (p. 202). The need for researcher reflexivity was required, such that the researcher recognised the ways in which her background could potentially influence the interpretation of findings. Throughout the study, continuous reflection on personal biases and preconceptions occurred, whereby the need for an objective viewpoint was emphasised, particularly during data collection and analysis. To support this process, use of a ‘critical friend’ was employed during the research process. Lincoln and Guba (1985) define the role of the critical friend or peer-debriefer as a ‘devil’s advocate’, whereby he/she asks challenging questions about methods, meanings and interpretations. Using this strategy, in addition to clarifying potential researcher bias from the outset of the study, aided to increase research validity and reduce assumptions that may have impacted the inquiry.

Finally, the researcher employed use of rich, thick descriptions when presenting qualitative research themes. Creswell (2013) highlights the importance of this approach in enabling readers to consider whether information can be transferred to other settings due to shared characteristics. Stake (2010) notes the need for the researcher to provide abundant, interconnected details, with descriptions ranging from general ideas to narrow details. Considering this factor, comprehensive qualitative themes were provided for the reader, with reference to convergence and divergence both within and across themes and cases. Where appropriate, reference to contextual factors within case studies was also presented to provide the reader with information about particular cases or settings. In this way, the validity of the data was strengthened and assured.

3.10 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter presented a detailed account of the research design adopted for this study, including an overview and justification of the methodologies employed. The chapter commenced by outlining the framework adopted for this research, including the philosophical underpinnings of the work. Emphasis was placed on how the researcher’s pragmatic worldview, coupled with the clear research questions, served to underpin the selected research approach. Thereafter,

each of the three research methodologies employed in this study was presented in turn, namely the large-scale survey, the systematic observations and the case studies. Under each research methodology, a description of the data collection process was provided with reference to research tool design, sampling strategy, pilot study, procedure and ethical considerations. Following this, the procedures for data analysis were presented, both in terms of quantitative and qualitative analysis. In particular, the in-depth process underpinning the qualitative data analysis was outlined, as based on the IPA approach. This included a rationale for selecting the IPA approach and a step-by-step review of the analytic process, as informed by key IPA principles and related guidelines in the field (Smith et al., 2009). Finally, the chapter concluded with acknowledgement of some of the methodological limitations of the research and defence of the quality procedures inherent in the study, with reference to matters of reliability and validity. Based on this information, *Chapter Four, Five and Six* will present results of the large-scale survey, systematic observations and case studies respectively.

Chapter Four: Findings from the Large-Scale SNA Survey

4.1 Executive Summary

Chapter Four presents findings in relation to the large-scale survey. This is divided into three main sections, with due regard for the related research questions. Section A presents demographic information related to the survey sample. Section B presents data related to research question 1: ‘preparedness’. This is divided into three sub-sections including (a) *SNAs’ level of education and training* (b) *SNAs’ involvement in school-based planning and preparation* (c) *SNAs’ perceived efficacy in dealing with challenging behaviour*. Section C presents data related to research question 3: ‘independence’.

4.2 Section A: Demographics

The online survey was completed by 814 SNAs. The sample comprised of 707 females (86.9%) and 107 males (13.1%). Participants ranged in age from 20 years to 60+ years, with the majority of participants in the 40 – 50 years age bracket (see *Table 15*). Participants’ length of time working as an SNA ranged from two months to 29 years ($M = 9.59$ years, $SD = 5.34$). As outlined in *Figure 25*, participants worked across a range of school types, with over 60% of the sample working in non-DEIS schools. Other settings included urban DEIS band 1 schools, DEIS rural schools, urban DEIS band 2 schools, special schools and ‘other’ settings, including Education Training Board centres and CEIST schools (*Catholic Education An Irish Schools’ Trust*). As outlined in *Figure 26*, participants were employed across a range of school levels, with over 65% working in primary schools. This was followed by post-primary schools, special schools, pre-schools, third-level institutions, and ‘other’ settings, including ASD classes in mainstream school and a mix of primary and post-primary settings.

Table 15: Age profile of SNA participants

Age Range	Number	% of respondents
20 – 30 years	49	11.7%
30 – 40 years	102	24.4%
40 – 50 years	153	36.6%
50 – 60 years	100	23.9%
60+ years	14	3.4%

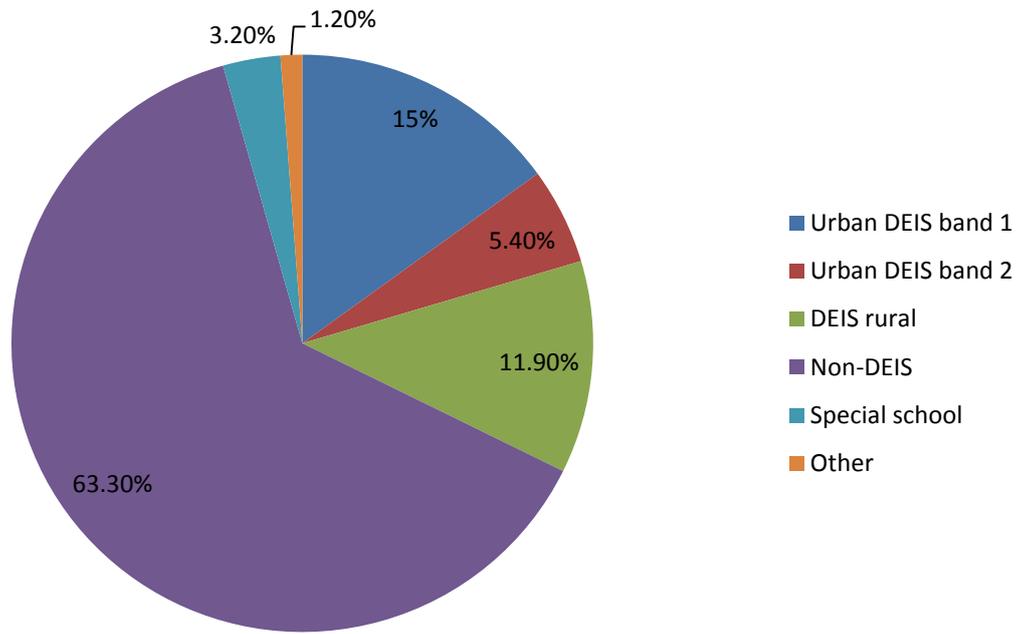


Figure 25: School type in which SNA participants were employed

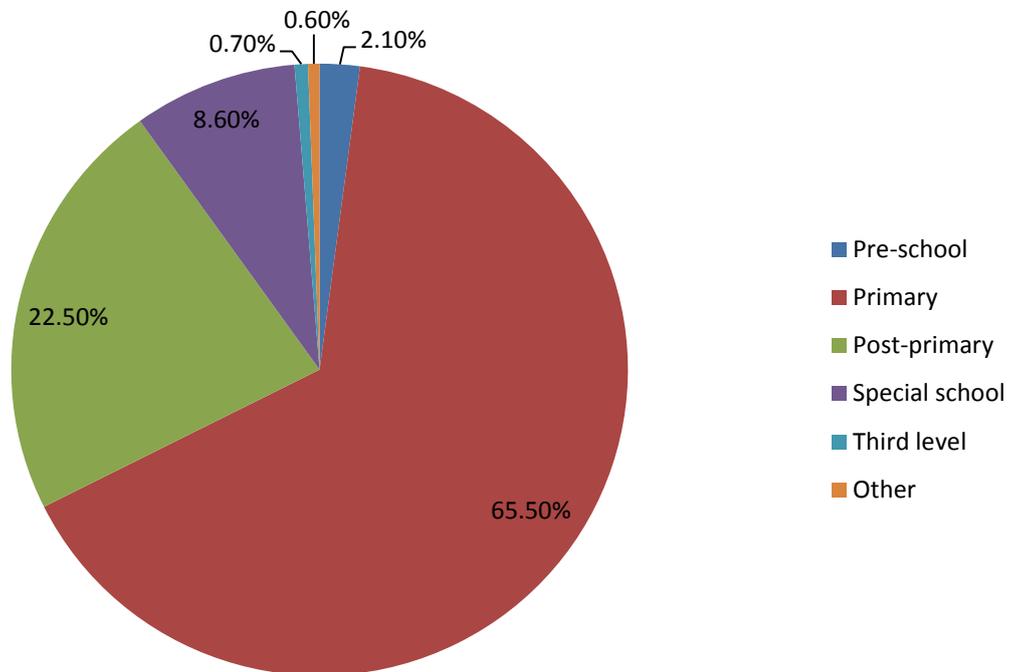


Figure 26: School level in which SNA participants were employed

4.3 Section B: Preparedness

4.3.1 Education and training.

4.3.1.1 Highest level of qualification.

Participants' highest level of qualification varied significantly across the sample, ranging from the Junior Certificate examination to post-graduate Level 10 awards on the National Framework of Qualifications. Results, as presented in *Figure 27*, show that almost all SNAs had obtained qualifications above FETAC Level 3, with over half of SNAs' qualifications ranging between FETAC Level 3 and 6.

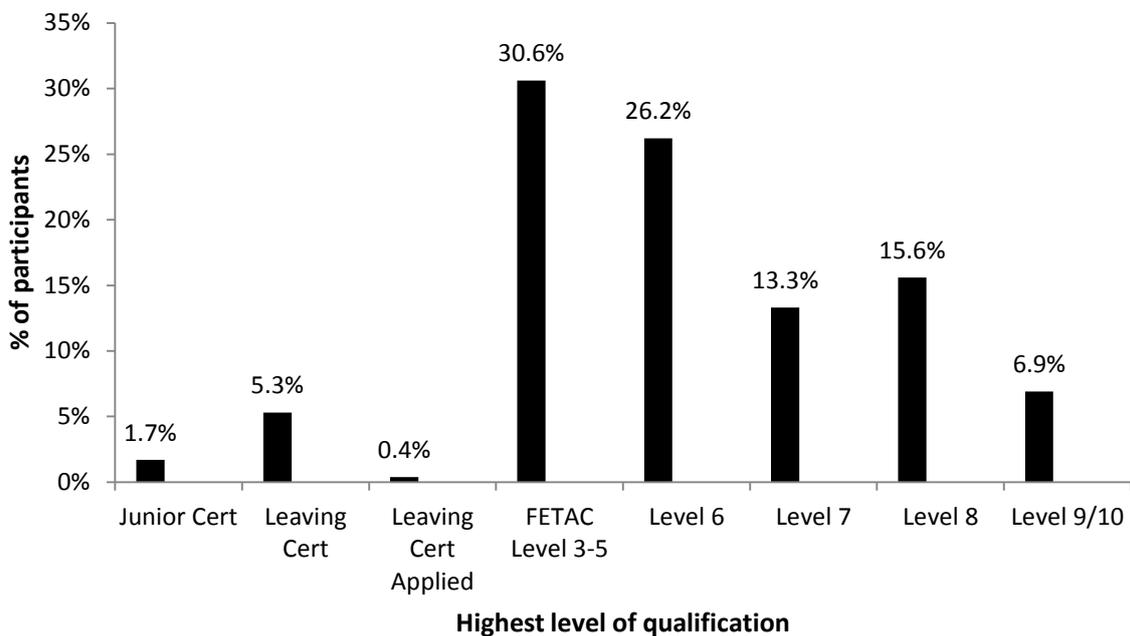


Figure 27: Participants' highest level of qualification

4.3.1.2 SNA-specific training.

Beyond initial qualifications, participants outlined their involvement in role-specific training, both in terms of behaviour management and supporting the development of pupils' independent skills. Findings, as presented in *Figure 28*, show that participants' completion of role-specific training was quite low, particularly in terms of developing pupils' independent skills.

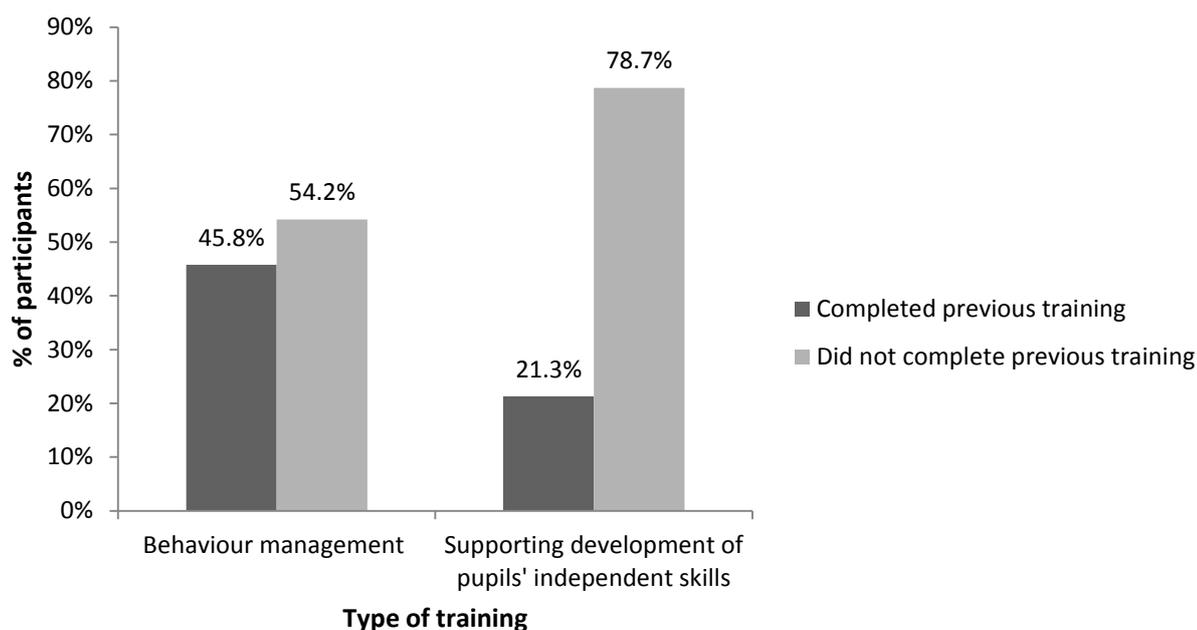


Figure 28: SNAs' completion of role-specific training

4.3.1.3 Satisfaction levels regarding training.

Table 16 presents data pertaining to participants' satisfaction levels with the availability and quality of training to support their work with pupils with behavioural care needs/challenging behaviour. Although findings varied across participants, data shows a general negative trend amongst SNAs across both factors. Specifically, 67.9% of participants indicated satisfaction levels of '1', '2' or '3' in relation to the availability of training, and 51.9% of participants indicated satisfaction levels of '1', '2' or '3' in relation to the quality of training (where '1' = very dissatisfied, '2' = quite dissatisfied and '3' = a little dissatisfied).

Table 16: Participants' satisfaction levels with the availability and quality of training to support their work with pupils with challenging behaviour

	Very dissatisfied (1)	Quite dissatisfied (2)	A little dissatisfied (3)	Neutral (4)	A little satisfied (5)	Quite satisfied (6)	Very satisfied (7)
Availability of training	<i>n</i> = 260 (32%)	<i>n</i> = 155 (19.3%)	<i>n</i> = 135 (16.6%)	<i>n</i> = 132 (16.2%)	<i>n</i> = 74 (9.1%)	<i>n</i> = 29 (3.4%)	<i>n</i> = 29 (3.4%)
Quality of training	<i>n</i> = 172 (21.1%)	<i>n</i> = 123 (15.1%)	<i>n</i> = 128 (15.7%)	<i>n</i> = 157 (19.3%)	<i>n</i> = 115 (14.1%)	<i>n</i> = 87 (10.7%)	<i>n</i> = 32 (4%)

4.3.2 Planning and Preparation.

4.3.2.1 Planning and feedback meetings with the class teacher.

Figure 29 shows findings in relation to the frequency of participants' engagement in planning and feedback meetings with the class teacher. Although findings varied across participants, half the sample indicated regular meetings with the class teacher. As outlined in Figure 30, such meetings were reported to predominantly occur on an informal/ad hoc basis, or through a combination of both informal and formal meetings. Figure 31 shows variances across schools in terms of the scheduling of formal meetings, with almost one third of formal meetings occurring during SNAs' personal, non-paid time. Meetings were also reported to occur during Croke Park⁶ hours and during the school day, such that another teacher would cover the class.

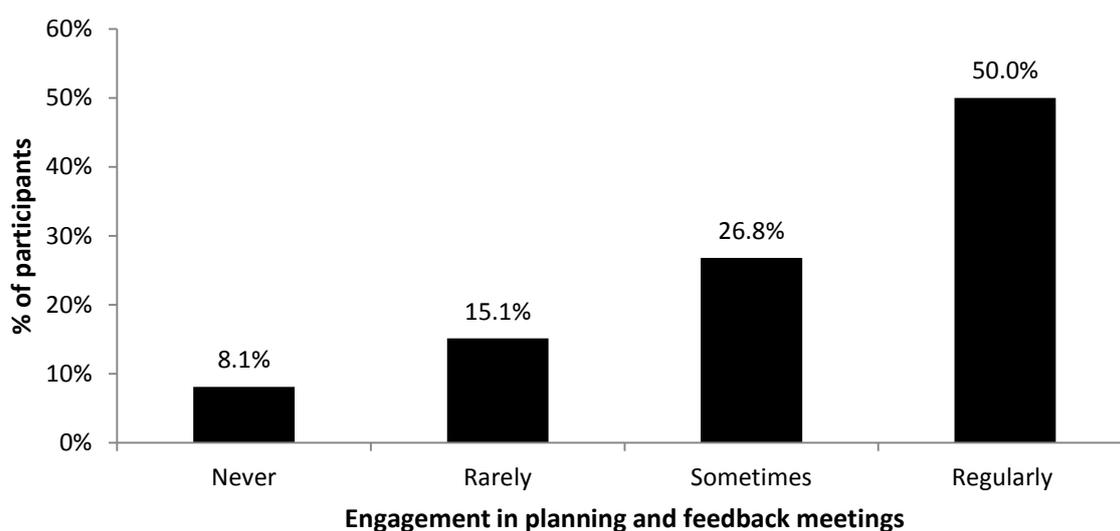


Figure 29: Participants' frequency of engagement in planning and feedback meetings with the class teacher

⁶ Croke Park hours constitute an additional 72 hours, or 12 school days, that SNAs are required to work outside of normal school opening hours and/or the normal school year, as mandated in the *Public Service (Croke Park) Agreement* (DES, 2011c)

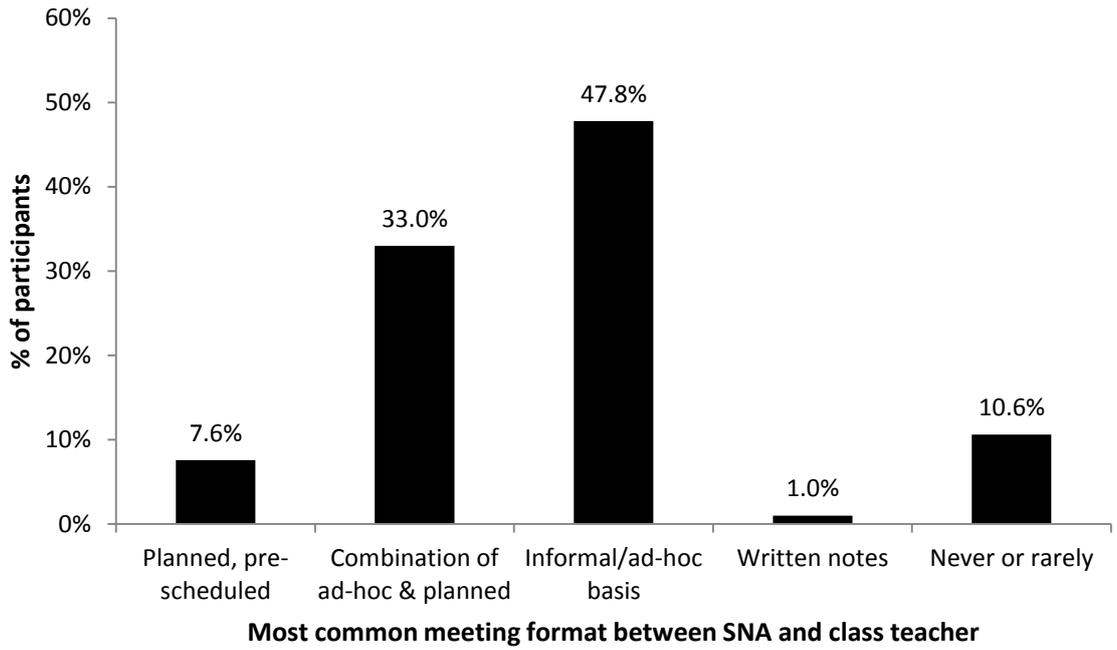


Figure 30: Most common format of planning and feedback meetings between SNA and class teacher

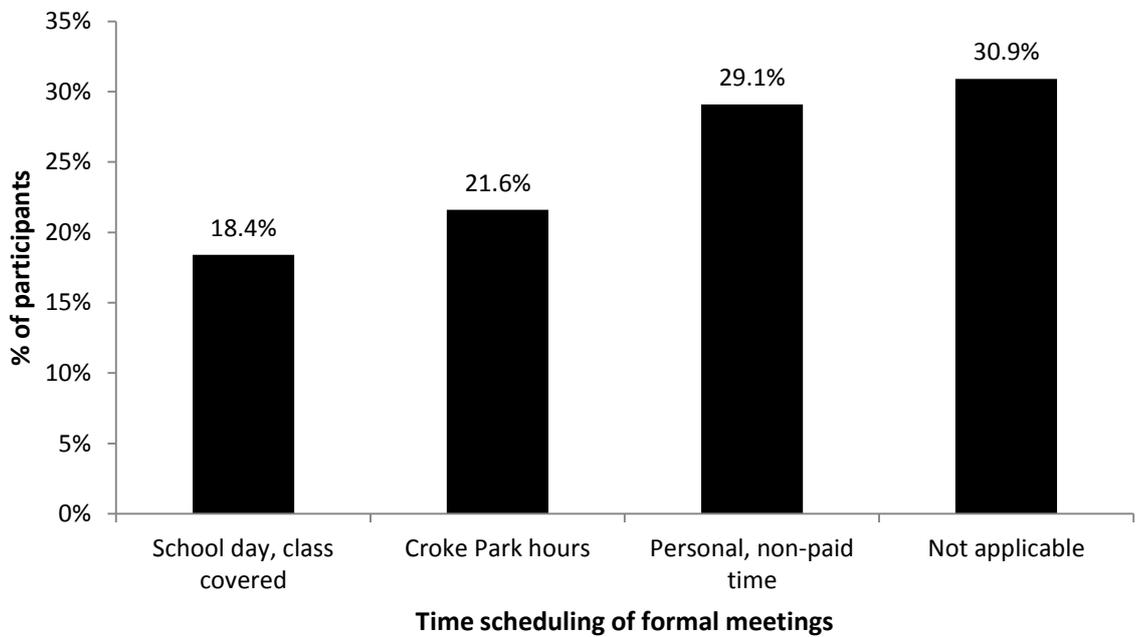


Figure 31: Time scheduling of formal meetings between the SNA and class teacher

4.3.2.2 SNA attendance at IEP meetings.

Large variance was evident across participants in terms of their attendance at pupils' IEP meetings. Over half of participants reported that they do not attend pupils' IEP meetings (58%, $n = 472$). In contrast, 42% of participants ($n = 342$) reported that they attend pupils' IEP meetings.

4.3.2.3 Target pupil involvement in his/her personalised planning.

Findings indicated a general trend towards the lack of involvement of target pupils in their personalised planning, as reported by SNAs. Over half of participants reported the target pupil as not being involved in his/her personalised planning (58.8%, $n = 479$). In contrast, 19.3% of SNAs ($n = 157$) reported that the target pupil is involved in his/her personalised planning. A further 21.9% ($n = 178$) indicated that they were 'not sure'.

4.3.2.4 SNA awareness of pupils' IEP targets.

As presented in *Figure 32*, there was disparity in SNAs' reported awareness of targets in pupils' personalised planning. A review of Likert scale responses shows a general trend towards SNA awareness, with 57.3% of participants responding positively through Likert scale responses of '5', '6' or '7' (where '1' = *very unaware* and '7' = *very aware*). Nonetheless, almost one third of participants (31.2%) indicated low awareness of pupils' targets; evident in Likert scale responses of '1', '2' or '3'.

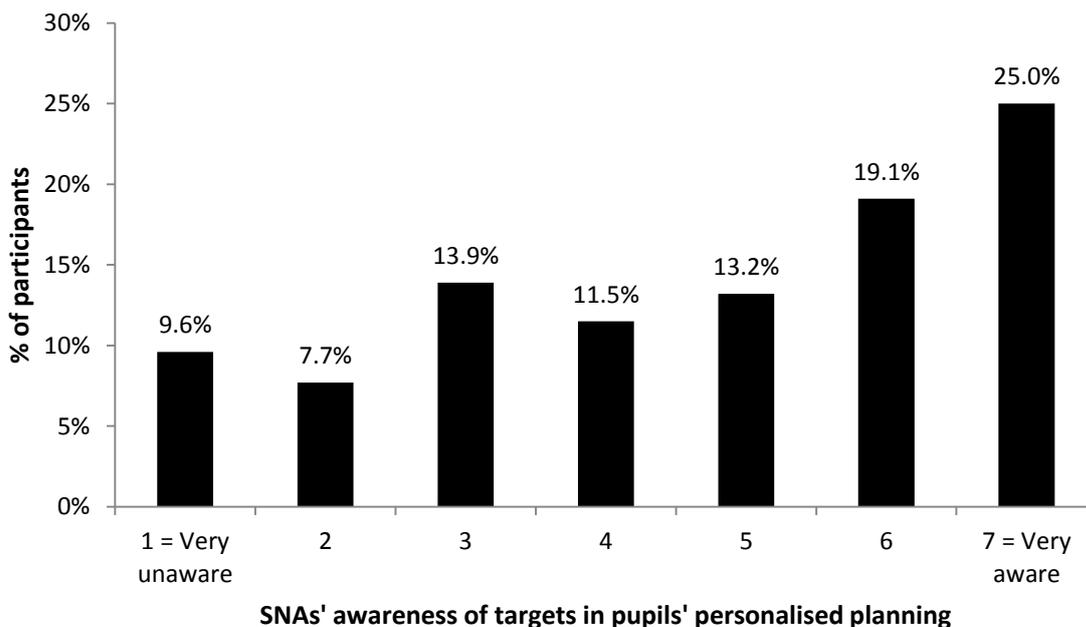


Figure 32: Participants' reported awareness of pupils' targets in personalised planning

4.3.3 SNA efficacy in dealing with challenging behaviour.

Participants' ratings from each of the five items on the 'Efficacy in dealing with challenging behaviours' scale (Hastings & Brown, 2002) were summed to create a total self-efficacy score. The scale had high internal consistency in the current sample (Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$). Self-efficacy scores ranged from 5 to 35, with a mean score of 24.71 ($SD = 5.76$).

4.3.3.1 Self-efficacy and gender.

An independent samples t -test found there was no significant difference between males and females in the current sample and their self-efficacy scores, $p = .239$.

4.3.3.2 Self-efficacy and training in behaviour management.

An independent samples t -test found significant differences in self-efficacy scores for SNAs who had completed behaviour management training and those who had not, $t(743) = 6.07$, $p < .001$. SNAs who had undertaken specific training in behaviour management had significantly higher self-efficacy scores ($M = 26.08$, $SD = 5.30$) than SNAs who had not ($M = 23.57$, $SD = 5.90$).

4.3.3.3 Self-efficacy and training in supporting the development of pupils' independent skills.

An independent samples t -test found significant differences in self-efficacy scores for SNAs who had completed training in supporting pupils' independent skills and those who had not, $t(740) = 3.46$, $p = .001$. SNAs who had undertaken training in supporting pupils' independent skills had significantly higher self-efficacy scores ($M = 26.08$, $SD = 5.43$) than SNAs who had not ($M = 24.31$, $SD = 5.80$).

4.3.3.4 Self-efficacy and attendance at IEP meetings.

An independent samples t -test found significant differences in self-efficacy scores for SNAs who had attended the target pupil's IEP meetings and those who had not, $t(747) = -2.52$, $p = .012$. SNAs who had attended the target pupil's IEP meeting had significantly higher self-efficacy scores ($M = 25.35$, $SD = 5.53$) than SNAs who had not ($M = 24.27$, $SD = 5.89$).

Overall, findings from the *t*-tests show the positive impact of SNA 'preparedness' in supporting SNAs' perceived self-efficacy to deal with challenging behaviour. This is evident whereby training in behaviour management and training in the support of pupils' independent skills, in addition to SNA attendance at pupils' IEP meetings, was related to higher levels of SNA self-efficacy in dealing with challenging behaviour.

4.3.3.5 Pearson product-moment correlations.

A series of Pearson product-moment correlations were run to determine the relationship between SNAs' self-efficacy scores and a range of factors including length of time working as an SNA, satisfaction with the availability of training, quality of training to support challenging behaviour, SNA awareness of the pupil's IEP targets and the degree to which the SNA's voice is heard in relation to pupil planning. Results are presented in *Table 17*. Findings show that there was no significant correlation between length of time working as an SNA and efficacy in dealing with challenging behaviour. In contrast, there was a significant positive medium correlation between SNAs' efficacy in dealing with challenging behaviour and all other variables. Although correlation does not denote causation, these findings suggest that additional SNA experience is not related to higher levels of perceived self-efficacy among SNAs to deal with challenging behaviour. Instead, the higher the availability and quality of training, the higher SNAs' self-efficacy beliefs were in relation to supporting challenging behaviour. Similarly, the more awareness SNAs had of pupils' IEP targets and the more SNAs felt their voices were heard in relation to pupil planning, the higher SNAs' self-efficacy beliefs were in relation to supporting challenging behaviour. Such findings again point to the positive relationship between SNA 'preparedness' and SNAs' self-efficacy in dealing with challenging behaviour.

Table 17: A series of Pearson product-moment correlations between SNAs' efficacy in dealing with challenging behaviour and other variables

	Efficacy in dealing with challenging behaviour
Length of time working as an SNA	.051 ⁷
Satisfaction with the availability of training	.27*
Quality of training to support challenging behaviour	.30*
SNA awareness of IEP targets	.25*
Degree to which SNA's voice is heard in relation to pupil planning	.28*

Note. * = $p < .001$

4.4 Section C: Independence

4.4.1 Length of time working with the target pupil.

Participants indicated the length of time they had worked with the target pupil with challenging behaviour, ranging from less than one year to more than five years. *Figure 33* shows high variance across responses, with equal numbers of participants at both ends of the scale. Such data is informative when considering the potential impact of long-term SNA-pupil assignment on pupils' development of independence.

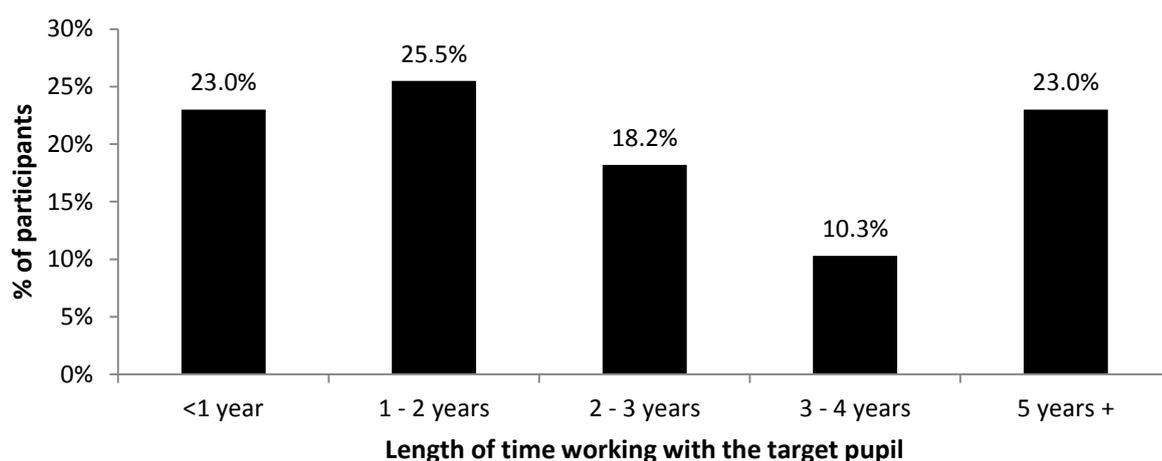


Figure 33: Length of time participants reported working with the target pupil

⁷ Effect sizes for correlations are presented as r , with values of .10, .25, and .37 taken to be indicative of small, medium, and large effect sizes respectively (Cohen, 1988, 1992)

4.4.2 Pupil dependence on the SNA.

Figure 34 shows SNAs' perceptions regarding the degree to which the target pupil displayed/displays dependence on them, as compared to other pupils in the class. Although there was some disparity across participant responses, findings show a general trend towards heightened dependency of the target pupil on the SNA, with 79% of participants selecting Likert scale responses of '5', '6' and/or '7' (where '1' = *minimal dependence* and '7' = *high dependence*). This contrasted with findings related to low dependence, where only 8.1% of the sample reported the pupil to have low dependence on the SNA, as indicated by ratings of '1', '2' and/or '3'.

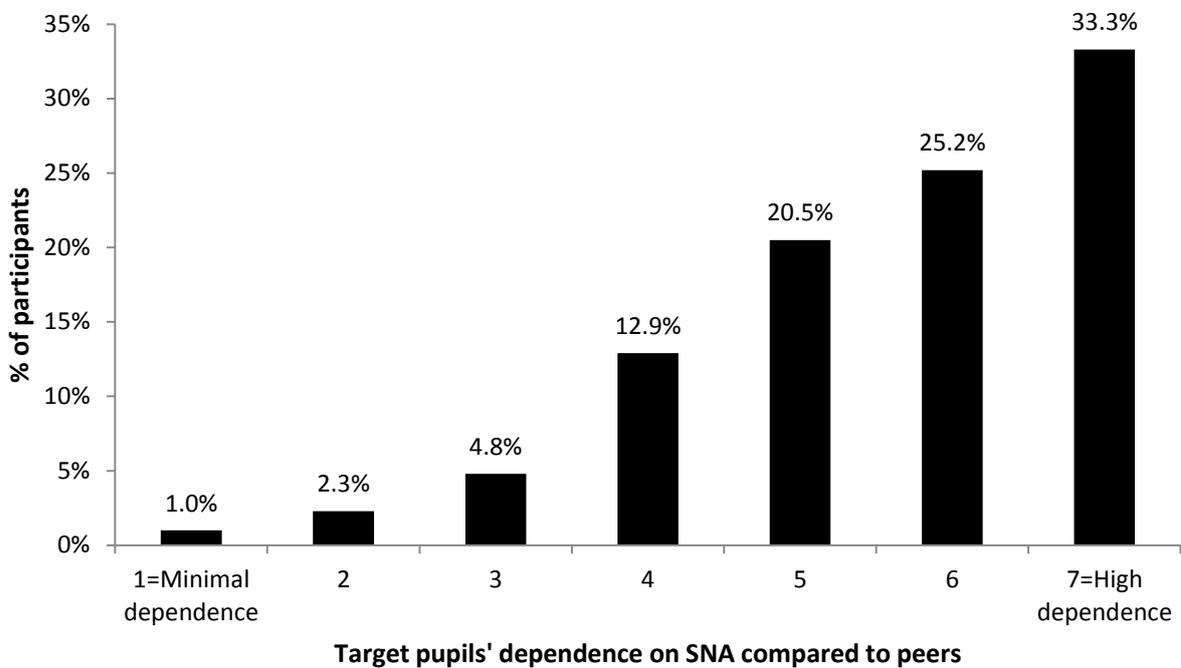


Figure 34: SNAs' perceptions of target pupils' dependence on the SNA, as compared to his/her peers

Chapter Five: Results of Systematic Observations

5.1 Observation Data Overview

As previously outlined in *Chapter Three*, systematic observational data was gathered across 20 classrooms, involving 20 target pupils and 20 average-attaining comparison pupils. The analyses presented in this chapter are based on 74 hours 55 minutes of observations, coded at minute intervals, which yielded a total of 4,495 data points. Observations were conducted across 77 lessons, comprising an average of 224.75 minutes of systematic observations conducted per case ($SD = 40.82$).

5.2 Observed Lessons

Observations were predominantly conducted across areas of English and mathematics. 40.3% of lessons observed were in English ($n = 31$ lessons), 32.5% in mathematics ($n = 25$ lessons) and 27.2% in other curricular areas including Gaeilge, history, geography and science ($n = 21$). Lessons ranged in duration from 30 to 60 minutes, with the mean length of observed lessons as 58.42 minutes ($SD = 5.48$).

5.3 Total Target Task

Table 18 shows the type of academic tasks undertaken by target pupils across all observed lessons ($n = 77$), when compared with their average-attaining peers. Almost all lessons involved academic tasks undertaken by target pupils that were not differentiated in nature (87%).

Table 18: Type of academic task undertaken by target pupils across all observed lessons ($n = 77$)

Target Task	Frequency (# lessons)	Percentage (%)
Same/not differentiated	67	87.0%
Differentiated classwork	2	2.6%
Different topic/subject	8	10.4%
Total	77	100.0%

5.4 Total Target Pupil Seating Context

Table 19 shows the total seating context of all target pupils. Across all observations, target pupils spent over three quarters of their time in the usual class seating context (76.7%). In contrast, almost one quarter of target pupils' time was spent separated from their peers (22.5%), with minimal time spent in a group setting (0.8%).

Table 19: Total target pupil seating context across all cases

Target pupil seating context	Frequency (# observations)	Percentage (%)
Usual class seating	3446	76.7%
In a group <10	38	.8%
Separated from peers	1011	22.5%
Total	4495	100.0%

5.5 Total SNA Context

Table 20 shows the total classroom context of all SNAs across all observations. The most frequent context for SNAs was with target pupils on a one-to-one basis (41.1%). This was followed by 'not working with pupils' (23.3%). This category mainly comprised secondary care-associated tasks⁸ undertaken by SNAs including preparation and tidying of classrooms, organisation of pupils' materials (e.g. homework folders for all pupils), as well as discussions with the class teacher or special education teacher (SET). In summary, SNAs' main work comprised the provision of one-to-one support to the target pupil, with limited support of other pupils within the class context.

⁸ Secondary care associated tasks involve support tasks that the SNA may perform, in addition to the primary care support tasks which are directly pupil-related. These are listed in *Circular 0030/2014* (DES, 2014, pp. 6-7).

Table 20: SNA classroom context across all cases

SNA context	Frequency (# observations)	Percentage (%)
With group <10	240	5.4%
With individual non-target	590	13.2%
With target (1-1)	1836	41.1%
Part of audience	-	-
Roving/Monitoring	787	17.0%
Not working with pupils	1042	23.3%
Total	4495	100.0%

5.6 Total Teacher Context

Table 21 shows the total classroom context of all teachers across all observations. Findings show that almost three quarters of teachers' time was spent leading the class (74.3%). In contrast, minimal time was spent on a one-to-one basis with target pupils (1.3%) or with other individual pupils within the class (2.5%). Such data highlights the limited amount of individual teacher-pupil interactions that were observed across whole-class contexts, with a stronger focus on whole-class teaching.

Table 21: Teacher classroom context across all cases

Teacher context	Frequency (# Observations)	Percentage (%)
Leading class	3339	74.3%
With group <10	8	.2%
With individual non-target	111	2.5%
With target (1-1)	57	1.3%
Part of audience	-	-
Roving/Monitoring	748	16.6%
Not working with pupils	232	5.1%
Total	4495	100.0%

5.7 Total Interaction Data

Table 22 shows the total interaction data between all target pupils and their class teacher, SNA and peers. Total interaction data is also presented for all comparison pupils, with reference to their class teacher, SNA and peers. The frequency of time that target pupils and comparison pupils had 'no interaction' is also presented.

Target pupils' classroom interactions differed to that of comparison pupils across all four categories. Firstly, across all cases, target pupils interacted with the SNA to almost the same frequency as their interactions with the class teacher (39.84% versus 41.20% respectively). This contrasted with comparison pupils, such that across all cases, comparison pupils were observed to almost never interact with the SNA (.07%). Rather, comparison pupils' main interactions were with the class teacher (63.86%). This contrasted with findings for target pupils, whereby across all cases, target pupils interacted much less with the class teacher than that of comparison pupils (41.20% versus 63.86% respectively).

Secondly, across all observations, peer interactions for target pupils and comparison pupils were relatively low. Nonetheless, comparison pupils interacted with their peers almost double the frequency of target pupils (14.35% and 8.66% respectively).

Finally, the frequency with which pupils did not engage in an interaction differed between target pupils and comparison pupils. Across all cases, comparison pupils were observed to have 'no interaction' over twice the number of times as that of target pupils (21.72% and 10.30% respectively).

In summary, total interaction data across all case studies show the disparate classroom experiences of target pupils and comparison pupils. On one hand, findings show that target pupils experienced more SNA interactions than comparison pupils. In contrast, target pupils' interactions with the class teacher, peers and opportunities for 'no interaction' were considerably less than that experienced by their comparison peers.

Table 22: Total interaction data across all cases for target pupils and comparison pupils

	Target pupils		Comparison pupils	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Total teacher interactions	1852	41.20%	2871	63.86%
Total SNA interactions	1791	39.84%	3	.07%
Total peer interactions	389	8.66%	645	14.35%
Total no interaction	463	10.30%	976	21.72%
Total interaction	4495	100%	4495	100%

A series of independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to compare the total mean interactions for target pupils and comparison pupils across all 77 lessons. Results, as presented in *Table 23*, show that there was a significant difference between total observation data for target pupils and comparison pupils across all four categories including *total teacher interactions*, *total SNA interactions*, *total peer interactions* and *total no interactions*. Again, this finding emphasises the significantly different classroom experiences of target pupils and comparison pupils when data is viewed in totality across all case studies. Specifically, target pupils experienced a significantly higher mean level of SNA interactions than that experienced by their comparison peers. In contrast, target pupils experienced a significantly lower mean level of teacher interactions, peer interactions and ‘no interactions’ than that experienced by their comparison peers.

Table 23: Independent samples t-tests comparing total mean interactions, across all cases, for target pupils and comparison pupils, with reference to the class teacher, SNA, peers, and no interaction

	Target pupils		Comparison pupils		95% CI for mean difference	t	df
	M	SD	M	SD			
Total teacher interactions	23.90	15.07	37.73	14.47	-18.53, -9.13	5.81*	152
Total SNA interactions	23.29	18.80	.04	.34	19.02, 27.47	10.87*	152
Total peer interactions	5.05	7.18	8.38	7.53	-5.67, -.98	2.80**	152
Total no interactions	6.34	8.97	12.26	12.49	-9.38, -2.46	3.38*	152

* = $p < .001$, ** = $p < .05$

5.8 Composition of Total Pupil Interactions with the Teacher and SNA

Table 24 presents more in-depth analysis of the composition of target pupils' and comparison pupils' interactions with the class teacher and SNA across all cases. Again, overall data shows the different classroom experiences of target pupils and comparison pupils in relation to teacher and SNA interactions.

Firstly, target pupils' main interactions were at an individual, focused level with the SNA (37.82%). Notably, comparable one-to-one interactions between SNAs and comparison pupils were not observed in any case (0%). In contrast, across all cases, comparison pupils' most frequent interactions were with the teacher as part of the class in an 'audience' mode (62.42%). This contrasted with target pupils whose interactions with the teacher in this format were substantially lower (36%).

Secondly, across target pupils and comparison pupils, teacher or SNA interactions were minimal when pupils were part of a group. This finding is reflective of the low levels of group and paired work that was observed across cases, and in line with the low level of peer interactions observed across cases, as previously outlined in Table 22 and 23.

Thirdly, although individual focused interactions with SNAs were higher for target pupils than comparison pupils, this was also the case for such interactions with the class teacher. Specifically, individual focused interactions between teachers and target pupils were notably higher than comparable interactions between teachers and comparison pupils (3.27% versus 0.22% respectively). Such findings highlight that across cases, comparison pupils were observed to receive negligible levels of one-to-one contact from teachers and SNAs alike, which stood in stark contrast to that received by target pupils. Nonetheless, it must be highlighted that individual one-to-one interactions between the teacher and target pupils occurred at a very low level (3.27%), supporting comparative data in *Table 23*.

In summary, total interaction data across all cases highlighted that target pupils' classroom experiences consisted of very high levels of focused SNA support on a one-to-one basis. This appeared to be at the expense of whole-class interactions with the class teacher in 'audience' mode. In contrast, comparison pupils' interactions were predominantly with the class teacher at a whole-class level in 'audience' mode, with limited one-to-one interactions with the class teacher or SNA.

Table 24: Composition of target pupil and comparison pupil interactions with the teacher and SNA across all cases

		Target pupils		Comparison pupils		
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%	
Teacher	Audience	Part of class	1618	36.00%	2806	62.42%
		Part of group	1	.02%	-	-
	Focused	Part of class	86	1.91%	55	1.22%
		Part of group	-	-	-	-
		Individual	147	3.27%	10	.22%
	<i>Total Teacher interactions</i>		<i>1852</i>	<i>41.20%</i>	<i>2871</i>	<i>63.86%</i>
	SNA	Audience	Part of class	2	.04%	-
Part of group			-	-	-	-
Focused		Part of class	1	.02%	-	-
		Part of group	88	1.96%	3	.07%
		Individual	1700	37.82%	-	-
<i>Total SNA interactions</i>		<i>1791</i>	<i>39.84%</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>.07%</i>	

A series of independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to identify if there were a difference in the mean interactions for target pupils and comparison pupils across all 77 lessons, with regard to each of the component observational domains. Results, as presented in *Table 25*, show that there was a significant difference between total mean observations for target pupils and comparison pupils across a range of domains. Specifically, the total mean interactions between comparison pupils and teachers when pupils were part of the class audience ($M = 36.44$, $SD = 15.50$) was significantly greater than comparable interactions for target pupils ($M = 21.01$, $SD =$

14.39), $t(152) = 6.40$, $p < .001$. This means that comparison pupils spent significantly more time than target pupils listening to the class teacher teach at a whole class level. In contrast, the total mean focused interactions for target pupils with teachers as part of a class and on an individual level were significantly greater than comparable interactions for comparison pupils. Similarly, the total mean focused interactions between target pupils and SNAs as part of a group and on an individual level were significantly greater than comparable interactions for comparison pupils. This means that target pupils experienced significantly higher focused interactions from the class teacher and SNA than that experienced by comparison pupils.

In summary, these findings show that across all observations, comparison pupils spent significantly more time in audience mode with the class teacher than target pupils. In contrast, target pupils spent significantly more time engaging in focused one-to-one interactions with the SNA. In addition, target pupils experienced significantly more focused interactions from the teacher and SNA at a class level and group level respectively than that experienced by comparison pupils, whose one-to-one interactions with any adult were minimal.

Table 25: Independent samples t-tests comparing mean component interactions, across all cases, for target pupils and comparison pupils with reference to the class teacher, SNA, peers, and no interaction

	Target pupils		Comparison pupils		95% CI for mean difference	t	df
	M	SD	M	SD			
Tch. audience (class)	21.01	14.39	36.44	15.50	-20.19, -10.67	6.40*	152
Tch. audience (group)	.01	.114	.00	.00	-00.01, 00.04	1.00	152
Tch. focused (class)	1.12	2.53	.71	2.23	-00.36, 01.16	1.05*	152
Tch. focused (group)	.00	.000	.00	.00			152
Tch. focused individual	1.91	4.13	.13	.522	00.84, 02.72	3.75*	152
SNA audience (class)	.03	.160	.00	.00	-00.01, 00.06	1.42	152
SNA audience (group)	.00	.000	.00	.00			152
SNA focused (class)	.01	.114	.00	.00	-00.01, 00.04	1.00	152
SNA focused (group)	1.14	4.63	.00	.00	00.10, 02.19	2.17**	152
SNA focused individual	22.08	17.33	.00	.00	18.18, 25.98	11.18*	152

* = $p < .001$, ** = $p < .05$

5.9 OPTIC Schedule Data for the Target Pupil Across All Cases

Table 26 presents OPTIC schedule observation data for target pupils across all cases. Such data pertained to the nature of the focused interactions between the teacher and target pupil, and between the SNA and target pupil, spanning categories of *positive academic*, *negative academic*, *positive social/conduct* and *negative social/conduct*. Across all cases and all observations, SNAs engaged in substantially more focused interactions with target pupils than that between target pupils and teachers (39.8% versus 5.18% respectively). In fact, focused teacher interactions with target pupils were observed to occur at a notably low level (5.18% of total observations). On the whole, focused interactions were predominantly positive in nature, with 82.25% of the total focused interactions across all cases coded as *positive academic* or *positive social/conduct*. In contrast, only 8.55% of the total focused interactions across all cases were coded as *negative academic* or *negative social/conduct*. Notably, 9.2% of focused interactions across all cases were coded using the 'bin' category. This was necessary when the nature of the interaction between the target pupil and adult was unclear, or when the interaction did not pertain to one of the four categories in the OPTIC schedule.

The most frequent focused interaction between SNAs and target pupils was academic and positive in nature (21.58% of total observations). This contrasted with *positive social/conduct* interactions between SNAs and target pupils, which were observed to occur across cases at nearly half the frequency (11.95% of total observations). Although *negative social/conduct* interactions between SNAs and target pupils were greater than that of *negative academic* interactions (2.78% versus .29% of total observations), these observations were still at a low level when considered in light of the total number of observations.

In summary, overall findings show that the dominant source of one-to-one support for target pupils across all cases was from the SNA rather than the class teacher. In general, one-to-one interactions were predominantly positive in nature, both in terms of academic and social/conduct interactions. Notably, *positive academic* interactions from the SNA were the most frequent form of focused interactions that occurred for the target pupils across all cases, occurring almost double that of *positive social/conduct* interactions. Overall, the findings suggest that SNAs take greater responsibility than class teachers in interacting with and providing one-to-one feedback to target pupils, with regard to both positive and negative interactions of an academic and/or social/conduct nature.

Table 26: OPTIC schedule observation data for target pupils across all cases

Type of focused interaction with target pupil	Teacher			SNA		
	Frequency	% of focused interactions	% of total observations	Frequency	% of focused interactions	% of total observations
Positive Academic	91	39.06%	2.02%	970	54.22%	21.58%
Negative Academic	1	.43%	.02%	13	.73%	.29%
Positive Social/Conduct	65	27.90%	1.45%	537	30.02%	11.95%
Negative Social/Conduct	34	14.59%	.76%	125	6.98%	2.78%
Bin	42	18.02%	.93%	144	8.05%	3.20%
Total	233	100%	5.18%	1789	100%	39.80%

A series of paired samples *t*-tests were conducted to compare if there were a difference in the mean interactions for target pupils and teachers, and target pupils and SNAs, in relation to each of the four conditions in the OPTIC schedule across the 77 lessons. Findings, as presented in *Table 27*, show that there was a significant difference across findings on three of the four conditions, comprising *positive academic*, *positive social/conduct* and *negative social/conduct*. Specifically, across the three conditions, mean findings for interactions between SNAs and target pupils were significantly higher than for that of interactions between teachers and target pupils. In contrast, there was no significant difference between findings when comparing *negative academic* interactions. In summary, this data highlights that across all cases, SNAs engaged in significantly more one-to-one interactions with target pupils than that of teachers in terms of *positive academic*, *positive social/conduct* and *negative social/conduct* interactions. Data is presented in *Table 27*.

Table 27: Paired samples t-tests comparing mean OPTIC schedule behaviours of teachers and SNAs with the target pupil across all cases

	Teachers		SNAs		95% CI for mean difference	t	df
	M	SD	M	SD			
Positive Academic	1.18	2.39	12.60	16.13	-15.24, -7.59	5.95*	76
Negative Academic	.01	.11	.17	.86	-.04, .35	1.56	76
Positive Social/Conduct	.84	2.61	6.97	8.53	4.22, 8.04	6.41*	76
Negative Social/Conduct	.44	1.37	1.62	3.74	.27, 2.09	2.59**	76

* = $p < .001$, ** = $p < .05$

Chapter Six: Results Case Studies

6.1 Chapter Overview

Chapter Six presents data related to the case studies. Throughout the presentation of results, the prevalence of findings is stated in terms of the number and percentage of case studies in which particular themes were identified (as $n = x, y\%$). The maximum number of cases in which a superordinate or subordinate theme was deduced therefore was 20, or 100%.

In some instances, prevalence rates are expressed at the respondent level. The denominator comprises the total number of teachers interviewed ($n = 20$), the total number of SNAs interviewed ($n = 20$) or the total number of pupils interviewed ($n = 18$). This information is also expressed in terms of a total percentage. Similarly, documentary review is expressed in terms of the total number of pupil plans reviewed; expressed out of a total of 15.

In addition, the measurement and weighting criteria framework, as employed by Daly et al. (2016) was adopted in the presentation of findings, as outlined in *Table 28*. In this way, the frequency at which different themes occurred, both at the case and participant level, is communicated through quantifiable vocabulary.

Table 28: Quantification equivalencies employed in data write up, as sourced from Daly et al. (2016, p. 193)

A few	Some	Half	A majority	Almost all	All
Up to 20%	40%	50%	60%	80%	100%

Case study findings, stemming from the semi-structured interviews, documentary review and field notes, provided insight into the preparedness and deployment of SNAs when supporting target pupils' behavioural care needs and developing target pupils' independence in mainstream primary schools in Ireland. Following in-depth within-case and cross-case analysis, four super-ordinate themes and related subordinate themes emerged from the data. These are presented in *Figure 35* and related results presented thereafter.

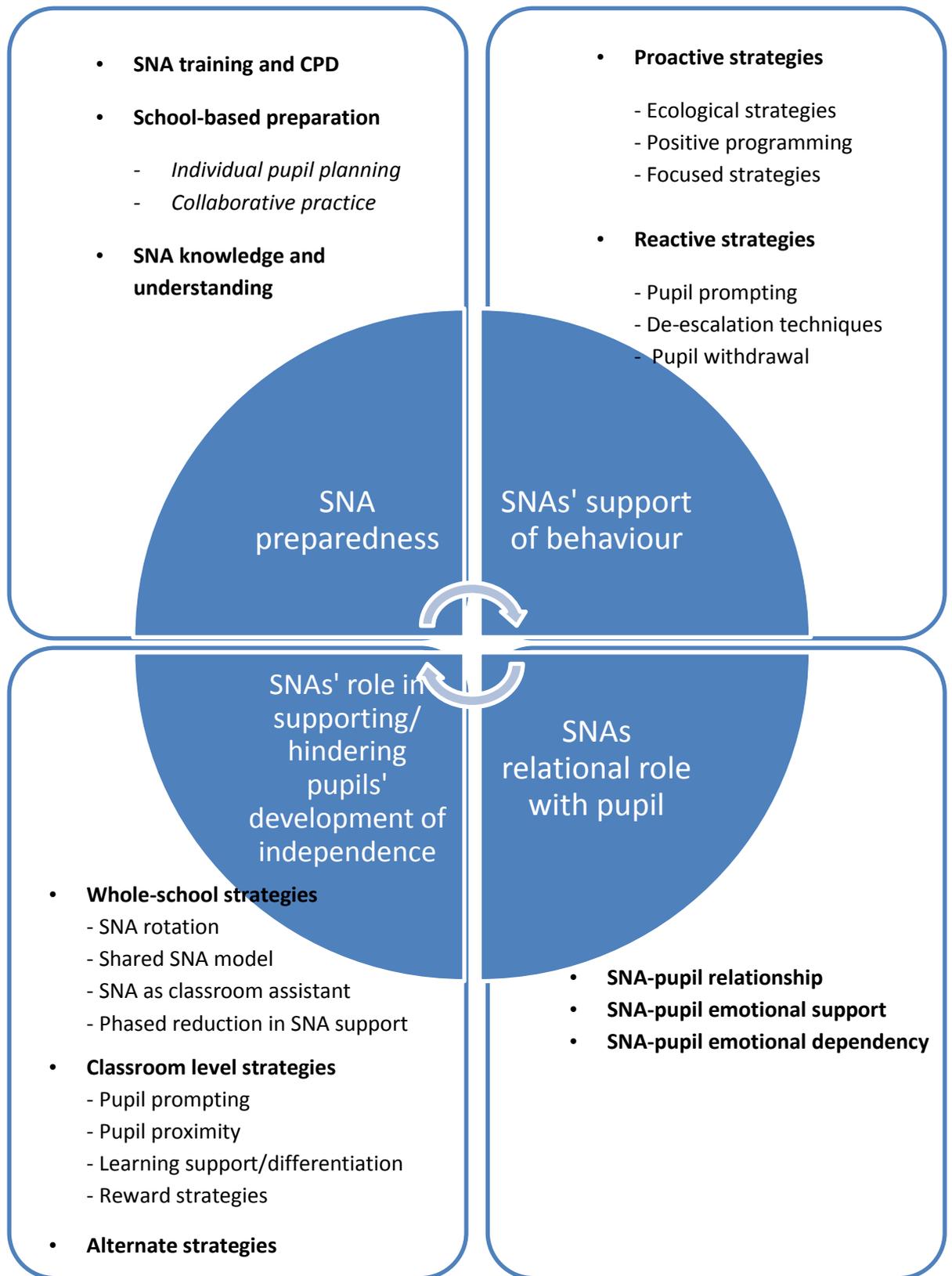


Figure 35: *Four super-ordinate themes and related sub-ordinate themes from case study data*

6.2 Theme 1: SNA preparedness

Building on findings from the online large-scale survey, case study data provided insight into SNAs' level of preparedness for supporting target pupils' behavioural care needs and developing target pupils' independence. Findings spanned three sub-ordinate themes, as presented in *Figure 36*.

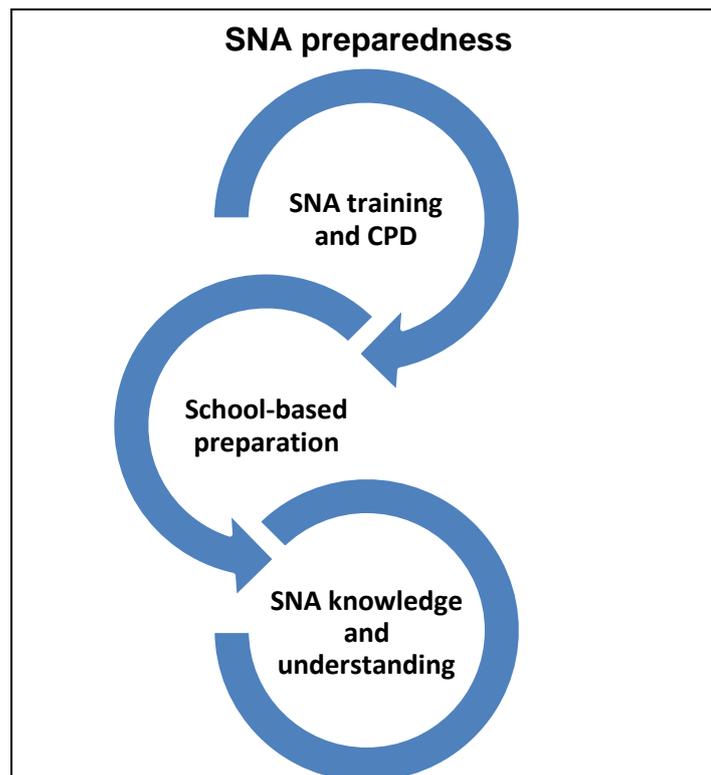


Figure 36: *Superordinate theme 1: SNA preparedness and the relationship between related sub-ordinate themes*

6.2.1 SNA training and CPD.

Across case studies, almost all SNAs ($n = 19$, 95%) and teachers ($n = 18$, 90%) recognised the need for more comprehensive training and CPD for SNAs. Although the majority of SNAs had engaged in some SNA-specific training ($n = 13$, 65%), variances in the standard and quality of courses was evident. Some SNAs ($n = 7$, 35%) referred to the poor quality of initial SNA training, with some courses deemed to have had “no relevance at all to the work of an SNA”. Almost all SNAs ($n = 16$, 80%) voiced frustrations at the lack of CPD courses, with one SNA stating, “There is nothing as such out there for SNAs – no further education targeted at SNAs. And there should be, definitely”. An overreliance on experiential learning was evident across the majority of participants ($n = 15$, 75%), with life experience, motherhood, caring roles and “learning on the job” all cited as primary means of informing

practice. In contrast, positive experiences were cited by a few SNAs ($n = 4$, 20%), with reference to the provision of school-based CPD courses during Croke Park hours, in addition to high-quality training courses outside of school; perceived to promote critical thinking and use of evidence-based practices. Notably, only two SNAs (10%) referred to the use of quality literature to support their work. This contrasted strongly with a few SNAs ($n = 3$, 15%) who voiced their reliance on 'Google' and other non-empirical sources to support their skill development.

Considering target pupils' behavioural care needs, some SNAs ($n = 8$, 40%) and teachers ($n = 6$, 30%) referred to the lack of evidence-based strategies executed by SNAs when supporting pupils, whereby reference was made to "trial and error learning", "going with your gut" and "making good and bad mistakes". A strong desire for training in reacting to significant episodes of challenging behaviour was voiced by some participants ($n = 8$, 40%), such as in scenarios when the child's behaviour is highly aggressive, volatile or violent. This particularly pertained to the de-escalation of aggressive episodes and the physical handling of a child, where required, to ensure the safety of all. The lack of clarity concerning the correct protocol to be executed in such scenarios was noted and referred to by one teacher as "a real grey, dodgy and dangerous area". Some teachers ($n = 5$, 25%) and SNAs ($n = 5$, 25%) noted the vulnerability of all staff when dealing with pupils displaying aggressive behaviour, particularly in terms of potential malpractice and related litigation cases. This lack of clarity for SNAs and teachers alike was outlined by one teacher who stated:

But what happens after they become violent, dangerous and volatile?...Once you get to that stage no one knows what to do. Like, do we put our hand on the child? Is that legal? Are we safe? Are we protecting ourselves? Are we protecting the child? Are we protecting the other children in the class?

In contrast, positive practice was recognised in terms of whole-school training which serves to foster a holistic approach to behaviour support. Similarly, the value of peer-learning at a whole-school level was emphasised as a means of sharing expertise amongst staff and supporting pupil transitions.

Considering pupil independence, almost all SNAs ($n = 16$, 80%) and teachers ($n = 17$, 85%) voiced a need for further SNA training in this area; although this was perceived a less pertinent issue for SNAs than training in the area of challenging behaviour. The complexity of effectively supporting the development of pupils' independent skills was recognised by some teachers ($n = 6$, 30%), with potential areas for SNA training including appropriate prompting, questioning and oral

communication with pupils. In addition, two SNAs (10%) recognised the tendency of some SNAs to employ maladaptive support patterns with pupils, coined by one SNA as “molly-coddling kids”. The potential role of training in teaching SNAs to “keep your distance” and “to take a step back” was forwarded, with reference to appropriately scaffolding pupils’ skill development and supporting pupils’ transition to post-primary schools. Some teachers ($n = 5$, 25%) also highlighted the potential role that SNAs could play in supporting pupils’ self-regulation through reward strategies and self-monitoring strategies in an effort to reduce SNA dependency.

6.2.2 School-based preparation.

Beyond training and CPD, case studies also provided insight into SNAs’ level of school-based preparation for supporting pupils with behavioural care needs. Based on qualitative interview data and documentary analysis, findings revealed a variety of practices across cases in terms of pupil-related planning and review, with variances in the level of SNA involvement in the same.

6.2.2.1 Individual pupil planning.

Across all settings, individual pupil planning occurred for 16 of the 20 pupils (80%). For the main part, such plans took the form of an IEP, with only two schools (10%) using Behaviour Support Plans and no school holding a discrete Personal Pupil Plan. Interviews revealed that for 12 of the 20 cases (60%), collaborative meetings had taken place to support the creation of the IEP including the class teacher, SET and for the most part, the parent. In contrast, SNA attendance at the meeting was reported to occur in only five of these cases (25%). For the remaining 11 cases (55%) for which IEPs had been created without the SNA present, four SNAs (20%) reported that their input was sought both before and after the team meeting.

Although an IEP existed for all but four pupils, documentary review showed that IEP targets pertained mainly to pupils’ academic needs. In contrast, only some IEPs ($n = 5$, 33%) contained targets related to target pupils’ behavioural care needs and independent skill development. In general, IEP targets were extremely broad in nature and did not adhere to the ‘SMART’ framework forwarded as best practice in national documentation (NCSE, 2006). Almost all IEPs ($n = 12$, 80%) were noted to lack specificity in relation to the strategies required to realise pupil targets. In addition, the IEPs did not specify the personnel responsible for supporting pupil

progress, with a clear absence of reference to the SNA role. This was verified in interviews, whereby a 'day-to-day' approach to pupil support appeared to take precedence over long-term planning. During the interviews, eight teachers (40%) recognised the need to improve practice in this area by implementing a more systematic plan for pupil progress.

Positive practice was evident across four cases (20%) whereby SNAs reported clarity in pupils' IEP targets in relation to supporting target pupils' behavioural care needs and developing target pupils' independence as part of a collaborative team approach. In such cases, a coherent pupil plan had been formulated with specific, measurable pupil targets. Review meetings were reported to occur every four to six weeks, during which targets were reviewed, updated and ticked off, where appropriate. In three of the cases (15%), the use of a daily monitoring system for pupil progress was reported and observed by the researcher. In such cases, the SNA monitored the pupil's daily behaviour, with teacher support. Pupil targets were ticked off by the SNA as they occurred, with results reported to the SET at the end of each school day. Where appropriate, the pupil received a daily or weekly reward, provided either by the class teacher, SET, or in one case, the parents. The strength of this daily progress monitoring and monthly review was verified during participant interviews and observed to be highly effective in supporting pupil progress across the school day. As stated by one SNA, "We are all working together and it is working. The pupil is clearly progressing". Notably, in three of these cases (15%), the pupil was aware of his IEP targets and the daily progress-monitoring process. This was verified in classroom observations whereby pupils were observed to regularly check in with their SNAs to ensure their targets were being met. In contrast, a consistent approach to record-keeping or pupil involvement was not evident across the remainder of cases ($n=17$; 85%).

6.2.2.2 Collaborative practices.

Beyond individual pupil planning, the dominant form of communication across cases was reported to occur on an informal basis between the SNA and class teacher. Observations and interviews verified this, with comments including, "I feel we are constantly discussing him"; "We have a chat nearly every day about things"; "We are talking on an ongoing basis". Almost all SNAs ($n = 18$, 90%) and teachers ($n = 18$, 90%) recognised the importance of this regular contact in supporting the teacher-SNA relationship. In addition to informal communication, positive formal

collaborative practices were recognised across 11 cases (55%), involving regular communication between the class teacher, SET, SNA and pupils' parents. This was described by a few SNAs as "singing from the same hymn sheet". Two cases (10%) noted that during the school year, input from external agencies also occurred, such as from occupational therapy (OT), psychology and 'Child and Adolescent Mental Health'. The inclusion of the SNA in such meetings was expressed by one class teacher as particularly positive to ensure that all parties are "able to get on the same page".

In contrast, the remaining nine cases (45%) described a more dis-jointed approach to pupil support. In such cases, the class teacher and SNA were reported to work at a class level, with the SET working completely separately. The lack of a systematic approach to planning was evident in teacher comments such as, "We just discuss things as they arise" and "The SNA would normally follow-in with what I want done". Pupil support was reported to occur on a "day-to-day" basis, with a clear divide between classroom support and SET support for the pupil. For example, in one case, the child was reported to be attending behaviour management classes with the SET. Although the child was learning self-regulation strategies during such classes, the SNA voiced her ignorance in this area which she attributed to the "minimal" collaboration with the SET. She stated, "I actually don't know what she [the SET] does really. I don't have a clue". This was similar to another case, in which the SNA had been afforded primary responsibility for the academic planning for two pupils with behavioural care needs; a duty that clearly stretched beyond her SNA remit. Such findings highlight the stark contrast between both positive collaborative practices and negative practices in pupil support and the need to ensure consistency of approach for the pupil across all environments to support pupil progress and development. In addition, it is notable that across all case studies, only three pupils were reported to be aware of their IEP targets and the daily progress-monitoring process. In two of these cases, pupil targets were decided by the collaborative team and communicated to the child. In the remaining case, the pupil's targets were decided through a collaborative meeting between the teacher and pupil. This contrasted with all remaining cases where the voice of the child was not included in the planning process.

6.2.3 SNA knowledge and understanding.

In addition to reviewing SNAs' training, CPD and school-based preparation, case study data also shed light on SNAs' knowledge and understanding of SEN and particularly, the area of challenging behaviour. Using the bio-psycho-social model as a framework to analyse interview data, findings showed a broad range of understanding amongst SNAs regarding the causes of challenging behaviour and the potential means of supporting the same.

Considering the biological basis of some challenging behaviour, seven SNAs (35%) briefly referred to pupils' underlying diagnoses, including EBD and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). In general, these SNAs showed limited understanding of the main characteristics or underpinnings of SEN conditions, with one teacher stating, "She [the SNA] still comes from a background of the 'bold child' must be punished...The child as 'bold' as opposed to it being a response to some kind of emotional, behavioural thing". In general, these SNAs showed a strong 'within child' understanding of pupils' diagnoses, whereby the SNAs' self-efficacy in positively impacting on target pupils' challenging behaviour appeared questionable. For example, one SNA stated, "You know he has attention-deficit disorder. He just can't help himself. That's just the way he is". In addition, three SNAs (15%) outlined the importance of behavioural medication in serving to calm target pupils, highlighting their strong reliance on the 'medical model' for understanding and supporting challenging behaviour.

From a social/ecological viewpoint, the majority ($n = 12$, 60%) of SNAs referred to the pupil's home environment, particularly in cases where the pupil had experienced stressful life events. Such SNAs showed a strong awareness of the impact of life stressors and home factors on pupils' behaviour, with a sample comment including, "And whatever is happening with family life, it all has a knock-on effect when he comes into school". Interestingly, four of these SNAs (20%) communicated a somewhat powerless attitude to modifying pupils' challenging behaviour in light of pupils' family backgrounds. SNAs referred to the way in which the pupils had been "badly damaged" and "psychologically scarred" in their early years, whereby school-based interventions were perceived to have limited, if any, effect. Of particular note was the limited viewpoint of challenging behaviour expressed by one SNA, who outlined her initial desire to "fix the child". Alluding to the pupil's needs and family background she stated, "I suppose at the start everyone thinks you can cure a child, sort him out. But no, no. We are just trying to keep a cap on him, and get him through it".

Beyond the home environment, eight SNAs (40%) made reference to school-based environmental factors that can influence the pupil's behaviour. These factors included structure, routine, seating position, peer-interactions, academic work, ecological and sensory-related factors. For example, one SNA stated, "He just gets frustrated, a lot of the times when things get difficult for him, when things are out of structure". Such SNAs showed strong awareness of the positive impact of a calm, organised and structured environment on the pupil's behaviour, and the way in which environmental change can positively impact on behavioural change. In contrast, limited reference to environmental factors was made by the remaining SNAs.

From a psychological viewpoint, data also shed light on SNAs' understanding of the impact of pupils' psychological shortcomings on their behavioural presentation. Across all interviews, the majority of SNAs ($n = 15$, 75%) referred to the limited skill-set of the target pupil in relation to behavioural self-regulation and independent functioning. Sample comments included, "His concentration is nearly non-existent", "He'd have no self-discipline" and "He can't manage himself". Conversely, these SNAs showed limited awareness of means by which they could support target pupils' independent skill development and behavioural change. The need for training and CPD in this area was highlighted by a few SNAs ($n = 4$, 20%), to ensure SNAs could gain a more holistic understanding of the child, the behaviour and means of supporting the same.

6.2.4 Summary of theme 1: SNA preparedness.

Overall, case studies provided strong insight into SNAs' preparedness, or lack there-of, to engage in their role and support the behavioural care needs and independent skill development of target pupils. The lack of initial training and ongoing CPD for SNAs was highlighted as a particularly contentious issue within schools, with a general overreliance on experiential learning for SNAs. This was deemed to have negative implications on SNAs' knowledge and understanding of SEN, with a general lack of awareness amongst SNAs of evidence-based strategies to support target pupils' behavioural care needs and to develop target pupils' independence. Although school-based preparation for SNAs varied across cases, the lack of collaborative and formalised individual pupil planning, target-setting and review was recognised to have negative implications on SNAs' knowledge and understanding of how to best support pupil progress. This contrasted strongly with positive, collaborative and more formalised school-based planning that occurred in a

few cases. Overall, the need for higher levels of SNA preparedness emerged as a dominant superordinate theme across cases, with due regard for SNA training, CPD, individual pupil planning and SNAs' knowledge and understanding to effectively support pupils with behavioural care needs.

6.3 Theme 2: SNAs' Support of Behaviour

Beyond 'SNA preparedness', case study data provided insight into pupils' behavioural care needs and the proactive (preventative) and reactive strategies employed by SNAs to support pupils' behaviour. Firstly, target pupils' behavioural care needs were coded using '*The Challenging Behaviour Matrix*' (Kelly et al., 2004), as previously described in *Chapter Two*. This matrix was selected as it was created in an Irish context and stemmed from a review of the literature. Based on an analysis of semi-structured interviews and school observations, findings showed that target pupils' behavioural care needs spanned 11 of the 13 categories of challenging behaviour outlined in the matrix. Such information is presented in *Table 29* and *Figure 37*. Cross-case analysis showed a consistent pattern to pupils' behaviours. On one hand, participants described minor, regular forms of challenging behaviour with which target pupils present, spanning matrix categories of '*non-compliance*', '*passive challenging behaviour*', '*psychological disturbance*' and most elements of '*disruptive, nuisance or threatening behaviours to others*'. Only one pupil was reported to display '*ritualistic/stereotypical behaviour*'. Such behaviours were noted to disrupt and negatively impact on the daily functioning of the classroom and were attributed to pupils' low concentration levels, poor listening skills, resistant, argumentative behaviour, hyperactivity, high distractibility, low frustration tolerance and high attentional needs.

In contrast, participants described the more significant forms of challenging behaviour with which target pupils present; noted to occur less frequently and to pose harm or safety-related issues. These behaviours spanned matrix categories of '*self-injurious behaviour*', '*aggressive behaviour that physically harms others*', '*absconding*', '*destruction of property*', '*socially inappropriate behaviour*', '*temper tantrums*' and some elements of '*disruptive, nuisance or threatening behaviour to others*'. During school observations, all minor forms of challenging behaviour were observed on a regular basis. This contrasted with significant forms of challenging behaviour, whereby only two temper tantrums and one case of 'absconding' behaviour was observed over the course of the research-focused school visits.

Table 29: Analysis of case study pupils' challenging behaviour using 'The Challenging Behaviour Matrix' (Kelly et al., 2004)

Categories of challenging behaviour	Examples of behaviour displayed	Case study number (C = Case)
1. Self-injurious behaviour	Skin picking or peeling, scratching, pinching. Cutting, biting, head/body banging, punching, slapping, hitting, kicking self against others and objects. Digit chewing, eye gouging, hair pulling, stuffing fingers in body openings, mouthing, eating inedible objects, self-induced vomiting, deliberate breath holding.	C3
2. Aggressive behaviour that physically harms others	Pinching, biting, scratching others. Punching/slapping/pushing or pulling. Kicking, head-butting people. Pulling hair. Choking/throttling. Using objects as weapons against people (e.g. knife or other hand held object). Throwing things at people. Tearing other people's clothes.	C1; C2; C3; C5; C11; C12; C13; C16; C19; C20
3. Non-compliance	Lying down, disobedience, non co-operation, resistance to teaching or contact with adults. Refusing to do things.	C1; C2; C3; C4; C5; C6; C7; C8; C9; C10; C11; C12; C13; C15; C16; C17; C18; C19; C20
4. Disruptive, nuisance or threatening behaviour to others	Shouting, screaming, swearing, verbal abuse and curses. Gestures or threatens harm. Mocking, sneering, deriding, personal targeting. Distracts, teases, pesters (repetitive), argues, interrupts, obstructs, nonsensical verbalisations. Set off fire alarm, taking food and/or drink from others. Hyperactivity, unpredictable behaviour.	C1; C2; C3; C4; C5; C6; C7; C8; C9; C10; C11; C12; C13; 14; C15; C16; C17; C18; C19; C20
5. Absconding	Wandering within internal environment or unsupervised area. Running away, trying to, or, absconding from facility.	C2; C6; C7; C11; C13; C17; C19;

6. Psychological disturbance	Emotional instability, low frustration tolerance, wants excessive praise and resents attention to others.	C1; C2; C3; C4; C5; C6; C7; C8; C9; C10; C11; C12; C13; C14; C15; C16; C17; C18; C19; C20
7. Ritualistic/ stereotypical behaviour	Ritualistic (e.g. closes/opens doors, rearranges furniture, hoards rubbish) and stereotypical behaviour (e.g. body rocking, finger tapping, hand waving).	C16
8. Inappropriate sexual behaviour	Stripping. Inappropriate exposure of body, masturbation, sexual advances. Unsafe sexual behaviour and practices.	
9. Destruction of property	Damage to property or school objects. Defaces, vandalises or destroys things e.g. tears, cuts, burns, throws objects.	C3; C5; C19
10. Socially inappropriate behaviour	Defecating, smearing and, deliberate urinating. Soiling, wetting or vomiting when upset, distressed or agitated. Self-induced regurgitation. Stealing, spitting and inappropriate eating habits and eating things (e.g. rubbish, faeces, objects).	C3
11. Substance and alcohol abuse	Drinking alcohol-cider, beer, spirits on school premises and within school hours. Use of solvents (gas, glue), marijuana (grass, pot) or cannabis (hash, hash oil).	
12. Temper tantrums	Outbursts of bad temper or petulance.	C1; C2; C3; C4; C5; C8; C11; C12; C15; C16; C17; C18; C19; C20
13. Passive challenging behaviour	Glaring, refusing to respond, averting gaze, isolating themselves, withdrawal.	C1; C2; C3; C4; C5; C6; C7; C8; C9; C10; C11; C12; C13; C14; C15; C16; C17; C18; C19; C20

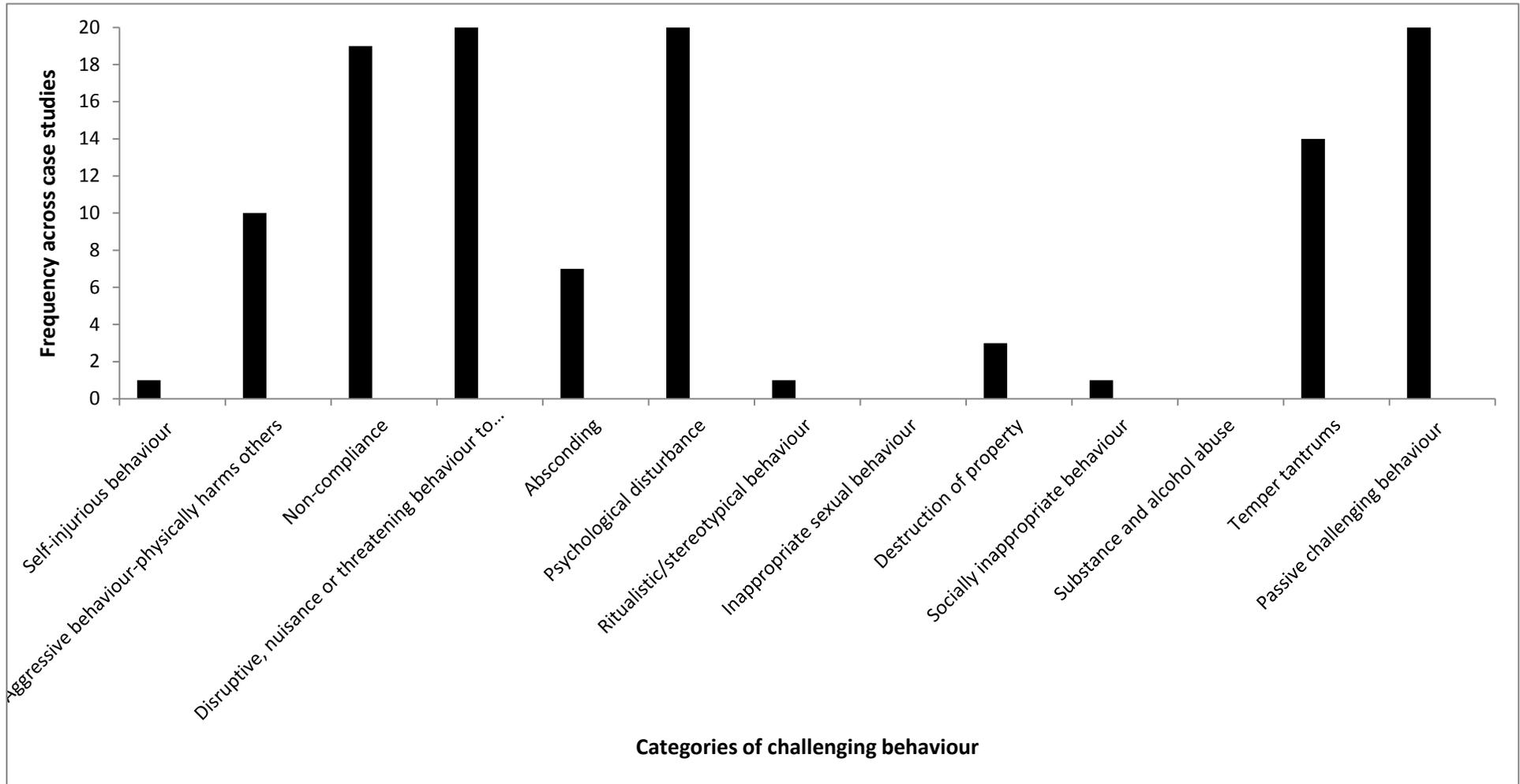


Figure 37: Presentation of different categories of challenging behaviour by the target pupils across case studies, as organised using the 'Challenging behaviour matrix' (Kelly, Carey, & McCarthy, 2004)

6.3.1 Strategies to support pupils' behavioural care needs.

Stemming from pupils' behavioural care needs, semi-structured interviews and observations shed light on the range of proactive (preventative) and reactive strategies employed by SNAs to support pupils' behaviour. Interview data was analysed in light of LaVigna and Willis' (2005) 'Positive Behaviour Support' plan, as previously described in *Chapter Two*. In terms of proactive strategies, various approaches were reported and observed across classrooms, spanning *ecological strategies*, *positive programming* and *focused strategies*. Similarly, SNAs employed a range of *reactive strategies* with target pupils, both to address minor and more significant forms of challenging behaviour. Such strategies are presented in *Table 30* and outlined thereafter. Although strategies appear to be neatly organised in the table below, it must be noted that at times, some strategies functioned both as proactive and reactive strategies, as represented in *Table 30* through the two-way arrows. Notably, the interchangeable nature of some positive behaviour strategies has been previously highlighted in the literature (Zaring, 2011).

Table 30: Proactive and reactive strategies employed by case study SNAs to support pupils' behavioural care needs

Proactive strategies					Reactive strategies		
<i>Ecological strategies</i>		<i>Positive programming</i>	<i>Focused strategies</i>		<i>Minor forms of challenging behaviour</i>		<i>Situation management</i>
Pupil proximity	Movement breaks	Skill development	Antecedent control	Reward strategies	Pupil prompting	De-escalation techniques	Pupil withdrawal

6.3.2 Proactive strategies.

6.3.2.1 Ecological strategies.

- Pupil proximity

Case study analysis revealed that the majority of classroom environmental factors were under teacher control such as classroom organisation, environmental supports and pupils' seating contexts. In contrast, SNAs' main ecological influence pertained to SNA-pupil proximity, both in terms of SNAs' seating position and physical proximity to the pupil. Eight SNAs (40%) described the necessity to be seated alongside or very close to the target pupil at various stages throughout the day. This proximity was evident during classroom observations whereby the SNA's seat was positioned next to or very close to the pupil's seat. Six SNAs (30%) justified this close pupil proximity in terms of supporting pupils' on-task behaviour and compliance with classroom rules. This proximity was recognised as an effective preventative strategy, particularly for passive, non-compliant or disruptive challenging behaviour. For example, one SNA described her role in terms of "Keeping him quiet. Keeping him listening. Getting him to sit". In addition, the need to sit alongside the pupil was justified by SNAs in terms of preventing the target pupil from becoming frustrated, particularly with academic work.

Across case studies, 17 of 20 pupils (85%) were reported to encounter learning difficulties, whereby they regularly struggle to keep pace with the class content. As a result, the majority of SNAs ($n = 17$, 85%) were observed to engage in a learning support role with target pupils, thereby justifying the need for high levels of SNA-pupil proximity. Some participants highlighted that without this level of support, target pupils were likely to become frustrated or upset; a scenario that could easily result in challenging behaviour. As stated by one teacher, "He finds maths very, very difficult. If [the pupil] didn't have [the SNA] sitting beside him for maths he would completely meltdown". Similarly, three SNAs (15%) referred to the close pupil proximity on safety grounds. A sample comment included, "Safety is my thing with him because you have to be right near him for safety with the chair. If he wasn't doing that with the chair you could be further away". In contrast to consistent pupil proximity, nine SNAs (45%) referred to the effectiveness of intermittent proximal

control as a preventative strategy for behavioural care needs. These SNAs (15%) were observed to move close to the target pupil, when perceived necessary, to prevent challenging behaviour from occurring. Such models of support were described by SNAs in terms of “standing next to him”, “sitting on him” and “moving near to him”. In contrast, five SNAs (25%) did not provide any rationale for engaging in such high levels of proximal support, with one SNA vindicating it in terms of “having a little bit of control over him”. *Figure 38* presents a summary of participant information in relation to pupil proximity.

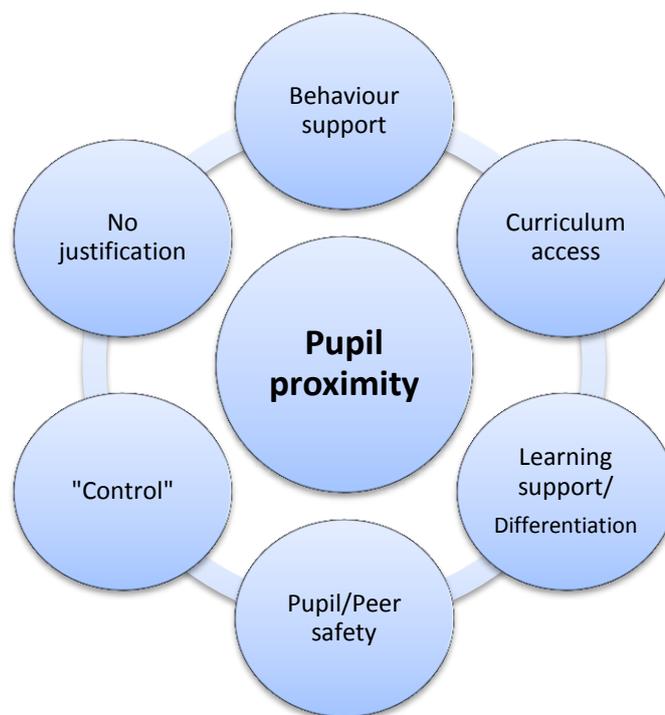


Figure 38: SNAs’ justifications for using close pupil proximity as a preventative strategy with target pupils

– *Movement Breaks*

In addition to pupil proximity, all cases ($n = 20$, 100%) outlined SNAs’ use of classroom breaks as a proactive strategy to support pupils with behavioural care needs. The removal of the target pupil from the classroom was regularly employed to prevent the pupil from becoming over-stimulated, frustrated or agitated in the classroom environment. During breaks, pupils were observed to engage in

movement-based activities, including walking, running, ball games, Frisbee and jumping jacks. In contrast, two cases (10%) used more calming activities, such as breathing exercises and meditation. Interestingly, four schools (20%) had a designated sensory area to support pupils with SEN experiencing “sensory overload”. Such rooms contained specific OT equipment including trampolines, spikey balls, a balance, soft mats, wooden swings, gym balls, resistance bands and weighted jackets/blankets. During school visits, the researcher observed some SNAs using the OT equipment with the pupils. Notably, only one SNA (5%) referred to her use of an OT plan during such sensory breaks, whereby all other sessions were SNA or pupil-led. In addition, 16 of 20 cases (80%) conducted movement breaks on a one-to-one basis between the SNA and pupil. In contrast, four cases (20%) employed group breaks, with the aim of optimising use of the SNA resource whilst concurrently, supporting social interaction for the pupils. In one school, typically-developing peers were also included during the breaks to support turn-taking and social skill development.

Across case studies, the scheduling and duration of movement breaks was variable, often responding to the pupils’ behaviour on any given day. Positive practices were recognised in eight schools (40%) where movement breaks were pre-scheduled into pupils’ routines and employed at regular, short intervals daily with a clear purpose and focus. This was viewed by staff as a positive proactive strategy to break up the school day and reduce the child’s potential of becoming over-whelmed. In such scenarios, pupils were made aware of the daily schedule and breaks were viewed as positive, consistent time-outs, lasting between three and ten minutes. In contrast, the remaining schools ($n = 12$, 60%) employed breaks as required, particularly when pupils’ behaviour was deemed to be escalating. For example, one teacher described how the classroom, “Gets too much for him and he needs to go out”. In this regard, movement breaks could be perceived as a reactive strategy to minor forms of misbehaviour, or a preventative strategy for more significant forms of challenging behaviour. Negative practices were viewed across five cases (25%), whereby breaks often exceeded 20 minutes in duration and occurred on numerous occasions daily, resulting in significant quantities of missed teaching/learning time for pupils.

In general, teachers and SNAs referred to the benefit of the breaks on pupils' behaviour, particularly in terms of preventing behavioural outbursts and supporting behavioural regulation. With reference to the target pupil's behaviour, one SNA stated, "He's just changed. 100%. He is happier in himself". This was echoed by the teacher stating, "He's a different boy when he's brought in there [the sensory room]. If he's upset or anything". This was endorsed by pupil comments, including "breaks make me feel much calmer" and "that's my good time". Similarly, another pupil stated, "Sometimes when I'm really sad, depressed or angry she takes me out for a walk. I think that is probably one of the greatest things she does". In contrast, four cases (20%) highlighted how high energy breaks can sometimes be counter-productive for target pupils, serving to escalate their mood and behaviour. Similarly, four cases (20%) outlined how the movement break had become a work-avoidance strategy for pupils. In such cases, the intended preventative strategy of movement breaks had, in fact, resulted in a contrary effect, serving to increase the pupils' level of challenging behaviour so that he would be removed from the classroom.

Notably, across cases, minimal strategies were observed in terms of the provision of movement or sensory input within the class context. Positive practices were observed in three cases (15%) where SNAs offered pupils use of sensory toys and objects at their desk to support concentration and reduce minor forms of challenging behaviour. Examples included use of terra-putty, ear-phones, blue-tack, fidget spinners and fidget cubes. Interestingly, the three pupils made reference to the calming nature of this strategy in their interviews, with one pupil stating, "She gives me my fidget spinner or this Terra-Putty, and it relaxes me". This was not a feature of practice in the remaining cases ($n = 17$, 85%).

6.3.2.2 Positive programming.

Beyond ecological strategies, case studies provided insight into the low level of input that SNAs had in supporting pupils' skill development to cope with stressful situations. Across eight cases (40%), reference was made to some small strategies employed by SNAs with pupils to improve coping skills and aid them to gain control over their behaviour. Examples included the use of breathing techniques ($n = 4$, 20%) and reminding pupils to use the 'zones of regulation' programme; a programme that had previously been taught in two schools at a whole-class level (n

= 2, 10%). Two SNAs (10%) also referred to the use of role modelling, social stories and role-play with pupils to support oral communication rather than physical aggression. In general, however, SNAs' role in supporting skill development was minimal, whereby in almost all cases, strategies taught by the SET were not reinforced within the classroom by the SNA. This issue was attributed by SNAs to a lack of communication between both parties and a lack of SNA training.

6.3.2.3 Focused strategies.

Beyond ecological strategies and positive programming, case studies also shed light on SNAs' involvement in focused strategies to support positive behaviour for the target pupil and prevent forms of challenging behaviour. These included antecedent control and reward strategies.

- Antecedent control

Across eight case studies (40%), reference was made to the strong preventative role of the SNA in terms of controlling antecedents in the pupils' environment that may cause pupil upset or anxiety. In particular, the SNA's role was described in terms of observing the pupil and watching for triggers that might off-set some form of challenging behaviour. SNAs described the need to consistently monitor the pupil and intervene where necessary. One teacher described the effectiveness of the SNA in engaging in this preventative strategy stating: "She'd be great at, like she knows his triggers. So she's aware of what would set him off...So she's great for being there to prevent things happening". The effectiveness of this preventative role was noted by some of the adult participants and pupils alike. In particular, one pupil outlined how he would be "stressed and upset" if he did not have SNA support, due to the way in which the SNA helps him in situations when he feels he cannot cope. Another SNA noted the heightened possibility of the pupil having a meltdown or hitting another pupil if an SNA was not on the yard to pre-empt pupil stressors and intervene where required.

- *Reward strategies*

In addition to observing for environmental triggers, data also highlighted the SNA's role in supporting individualised reward strategies with the target pupil. Data analysis revealed that across 16 cases (80%), reward strategies were used as a focused support strategy for encouraging positive pupil behaviour and/or, pupil independence. Through this strategy, the SNA was outlined to predominantly adopt a monitoring and observational role. Sample reward systems included the use of tick charts, token systems and the 'first-then' strategy. For the most part, the reward charts employed across cases pertained to independent functioning. In contrast, reward strategies for pupils' behavioural care needs were only employed across five cases (25%). In these cases, tick-charts or jigsaw charts were used with the pupil to support positive behaviour, whereby the day was sub-divided into sections and monitored by the SNA. Emphasis was placed on the collaborative approach to supporting the pupil and the regular updating of pupil targets. As described by one SNA:

We have a tick chart with him, a check list. So there is three things for example, that he would have to check, you know, "Did I not hurt today", "Was I kind to somebody", "Did I do something kind"...So we have a checklist at the end of every day...every few weeks we try to change them slightly. And then he gets a reward from his resource teacher.

Across the five cases (25%), the reward strategies were deemed effective by teachers and SNAs alike, whereby the pupil was reported to be highly motivated to obtain the reward. In general across case studies, a positive approach to behaviour management appeared to take precedence, with only one teacher describing use of a punitive approach. Notably, SNAs' role in punishment did not appear a feature of practice in any case.

6.3.3 Reactive strategies.

6.3.3.1 Pupil prompting.

An analysis of semi-structured interviews and observations showed that beyond proactive/preventative strategies, SNAs' involvement in reactive strategies spanned both minor and more significant forms of challenging behaviour. In general, SNAs' reactive strategies predominantly centred on minor forms of challenging behaviour,

such that the SNA monitored the pupil and prompted his/her compliance with basic classroom rules. The level of SNA-pupil prompting varied across cases, ranging from infrequent to consistent pupil prompting. Examples included prompting pupils to sit still, keep quiet, listen, attend to the teacher etc. On one hand, SNA prompting could be viewed as a preventative, proactive strategy, serving to reduce the chances of pupils' misbehaviours from becoming more significant or challenging. Nonetheless, viewed through the 'reactive strategy' lens, most SNA prompting appeared to occur in response to pupils' minor forms of challenging behaviour, such as *'non-compliance'*, *'passive challenging behaviour'* and most elements of *'disruptive, nuisance or threatening behaviours to others'* (Kelly et al., 2004). In this regard, one teacher stated: "She [the SNA] is reactive to what he is doing, in that if he's calling out or talking out she'll move over straight away to try and quieten him". Similarly, another SNA highlighted the importance of keeping, what she described as the "niggly behaviours" under control. In fact, the extent of pupil monitoring and corrective feedback was so incessant that in some cases, SNAs described their role in terms of "having a little bit of control over him", "keeping on top of him", "keeping a cap on him" or "sitting on him". This level of control was queried by one SNA, who communicated significant concerns over the need for all pupils to "conform" to classroom rules, particularly those pupils with SEN. She stated:

The most challenging part is that they have to conform. Like the sitting, sitting wrong in the chair. Should they be sitting, should they not? To me if they are comfortable and they are not harming anyone, and they are working, then that's okay...School is a lot about conforming. And some special needs children they might not work best with their legs here, but they might work best with their legs there. Is that wrong? Do they have to finish everything? Do they have to be in their chair?

In general, SNAs' reactive strategies were positive in nature through the use of constructive, directive language. Sample prompts included, "Turn around", "keep going" and "listen to teacher". Only one SNA referred to the negative approach that she initially adopted with the target pupil stating, "I was doing nothing but correcting him. You know, I was over with him and I was saying, 'You can't do that, you must listen to teacher, that's not nice, that's not the way we do things here". This SNA's behaviour, however, was recognised as the exception rather than the norm. Interestingly, only two SNAs (10%) commented on the importance of ignoring some minor forms of challenging behaviour to avoid providing constant attention to the pupil.

6.3.3.2 De-escalation techniques.

Across nine cases (45%), SNAs were observed to talk to pupils on a one-to-one basis in an effort to de-escalate the pupil when he/she became agitated. During interviews, the benefit of the SNA role in this regard was highlighted, not alone for the target pupil, but so too in reducing classroom disruptions and stress on the teacher. In general, participants described the calm, low-key approach adopted by SNAs when trying to de-escalate a pupil's behaviour, with one teacher stating: "She generally goes down and talks to him...And it's all done very quietly, and there's no big fuss or no big drama made about it". Although the movement break was generally perceived as a preventative strategy, it was also used across all cases ($n = 20$, 100%) as a de-escalation technique when target pupils became stressed or agitated.

6.3.3.3 Pupil withdrawal.

Across cases, 14 pupils (70%) were described to display significant temper tantrums on an intermittent basis. Across these cases, the main reactive strategy employed by SNAs was pupil withdrawal from the classroom, used to de-escalate the pupil and preserve the safety of all. The severity of some pupil temper tantrums were described such that the SNA would have to physically remove the pupil from the classroom. For example, one teacher stated, "What happens with him is that when he's gone, he's gone. I mean nothing is going to bring him back. He has to be carried out". Across the 14 case studies (70%), all but one case described the SNA withdrawing the pupil from the classroom on her own. A number of SNAs described the ad-hoc approach to dealing with the pupil thereafter, whereby the pupil could be brought to the corridor, school hall, computer room or sensory room, where available. The lack of physical space within schools to accommodate this withdrawal strategy was highlighted across some cases ($n = 5$, 25%), with one teacher describing it as "a real concern for us here". Three teachers (15%) also outlined that at times of particularly volatile behaviour, the target pupil may refuse to leave the classroom. In such scenarios, the teachers reported how they would remove the class from the classroom and leave the SNA with the target pupil, in an effort to preserve the safety of all. Notably, only one school (5%) described a very clear protocol and written policy for managing significant forms of challenging behaviour

through a team approach, with all other cases ($n = 19$, 95%) describing an ad-hoc approach to such incidents. As stated by one SNA, “You kind of just tend to go on your gut and see what’s happening at the time”. Three participants (15%) noted the vulnerability of SNAs and all staff members when dealing with pupils displaying volatile, aggressive behaviour, particularly in terms of engaging in malpractice in this area. The lack of clarity in terms of physically handling a child during significant forms of challenging behaviour was emphasised by these participants and highlighted as a priority area for training.

6.3.4 SNAs’ support of behavioural care needs: Focus on pupil voice.

A review of target pupil interviews provided insight into pupils’ perspectives on the means by which SNAs support their behaviour. In terms of preventative strategies, all interviewed pupils ($n = 18$, 100%) referred to the challenging nature of class-work and SNAs’ role in providing academic support to them. In this regard, 16 target pupils (89%) noted SNAs’ role in aiding them to remain calm, particularly when academic work can cause them to become stressed. As stated by one pupil, “She always calms me down when I get angry or stressed in class”. Within the class context, SNAs were described in terms of using calming talk with pupils as a focused strategy to prevent the escalation of problematic behaviours, with two pupils also noting the supportive nature of desk-based fidget toys (as provided by the SNA). Such calming approaches were also described by two pupils in relation to lunch breaks on the yard, whereby the SNA appeared to serve as a ‘safe haven’ for the boys during playtime. In general, pupil interviewees recognised the role of the SNA in minimising frustrations for them and reducing feeling of anxiety and stress, particularly in relation to class-work. Notably, across all pupil interviews ($n = 18$, 100%), reference was made to the benefit of movement breaks, both in terms of a preventative and reactive strategy. As previously outlined, the nature and duration of movement breaks varied across settings. Nonetheless, all pupils referred to the breaks in a positive light, whereby they serve to reduce negative emotions for the target pupils and provide them with respite from the academic focus and busy nature of the classroom.

6.3.5 Summary of theme 2: SNAs' support of behaviour.

Overall, case studies highlighted the range of proactive and reactive strategies employed by SNAs to support pupils' behavioural care needs. Ecological strategies mainly concerned close pupil proximity and movement breaks outside of the classroom. The link between pupils' academic needs and challenging behaviour was particularly emphasised by participants, whereby pupil proximity served as a means of providing academic support to pupils and preventing related challenging behaviours. In addition, behavioural triggers for pupils were regularly pre-empted by SNAs to prevent pupils becoming frustrated or displaying behavioural outbursts. In some cases, pupil-centred reward strategies were used as a means of providing positive behaviour support, whereby the SNA assumed a monitoring and observational role. Nonetheless, this appeared to be an under-utilised behaviour support strategy across cases. Notably, SNAs' use of *focused supports*, particularly in terms of supporting pupils' skill development, occurred at a minimal level across cases. This was mainly attributed to the lack of SNA knowledge/training in this domain, coupled with the lack of collaboration between the SNA and SET. Across cases, reactive strategies included pupil prompting, de-escalation techniques and pupil withdrawal, with the latter used in more significant episodes of challenging behaviour. Ultimately, the need for greater focus on SNAs' use of evidence-based strategies for pupil support, linked with pupil planning, was evident across the majority of cases.

6.4 Theme 3: Pupil independence versus dependence

In addition to pupils' behavioural care needs, case study data provided insight into target pupils' level of independence and SNAs' role in that regard. Across all interviews ($n = 20$, 100%), teachers and SNAs perceived target pupils' level of independence to lie below that of their typically-developing peers. Pupils' needs were described across an array of domains and verified through classroom observations. These are summarised in *Table 31*.

Table 31: Target pupils' needs across an array of domains, as described by teachers and SNAs, outlining reduced independence compared to their age-related peers

Domain	Sample behaviours in which target pupils were described as showing reduced levels of independence compared to their peers
Organisational needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sorting books • Finding belongings • Finding the right page • Ruling copybook pages • Packing one's schoolbag for home-time • Transitioning between subjects
Self-care needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eating lunch fully • Maintaining a tidy personal appearance • Changing clothes
Learning-related needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following class instructions • Following the sequence of a task • Commencing a task • Staying on-task • Completing a task • Thinking for oneself (not asking an adult the next step) • Keeping pace with the class • Transcribing material from the blackboard or school book • Academic needs e.g. reading the question, requiring additional explanation of the task at hand • Maintaining concentration e.g. need for regular breaks
Emotional needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for constant reassurance • Constantly seeking feedback • Emotional regulation
Social needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging appropriately with peers • Following the rules of a game
Conforming to classroom rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remaining seated • Remaining quiet • Sitting appropriately on the chair • Not fidgeting
Motor needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fine motor tasks e.g. cutting, threading, pencil grip

Although all target pupils ($n = 20$, 100%) were reported to require additional classroom support, pupils' needs and related SNA dependence ranged across cases. On one hand, 12 target pupils (60%) were described as displaying high levels of dependence on the SNA. Sample comments included, "He needs her on every level", "He's not self-sufficient in any way" and "I don't think he'd be able to

cope in the classroom without her”. Negative connotations of this support were described in terms of pupils displaying “learned helplessness”, “reliance on support” and “laziness”. Observations verified such comments whereby a range of pupils were noted to seek SNA support before attempting tasks independently. This was triangulated with pupil interviews, whereby eight pupils (44%) communicated high psychological dependence on their SNA. Sample comments included, “Like she’s my SNA and she’s the only one that can help me” and “She always helps me and without her, I don’t know what I would be able to do”.

In contrast, eight cases (40%) highlighted occasions when target pupils reject SNA support; a scenario that was deemed more prevalent for older pupils. Sample comments included, “He doesn’t want to be dependent, he wants to be like the boys” and “In school, he kind of wants to do it himself...he wants to be independent”. This was echoed by some pupils, with sample comments including, “When [the SNA] goes, I think I do a lot of stuff more on my own...If I were to spend too much time with [the SNA], I reckon I’d probably just become lazy”. Another senior pupil also referred to his desire to function independent of SNA support. He stated, “I want to be like everyone else in the class. I don’t want to be taken out and I don’t want anyone sitting next to me...like I don’t want to be looked over every 10 seconds”.

6.4.1 SNA deployment: Supporting/hindering the development of pupils’ independence.

Considering pupils’ varying levels of need, case studies provided insight into the means by which SNAs and the wider school system serve to support or hinder pupils’ development of independence. Findings related to SNA deployment at a whole-school level, classroom-based strategies for SNA support, as well as alternate strategies to SNA support for target pupils. These are depicted in *Figure 39* and outlined thereafter.

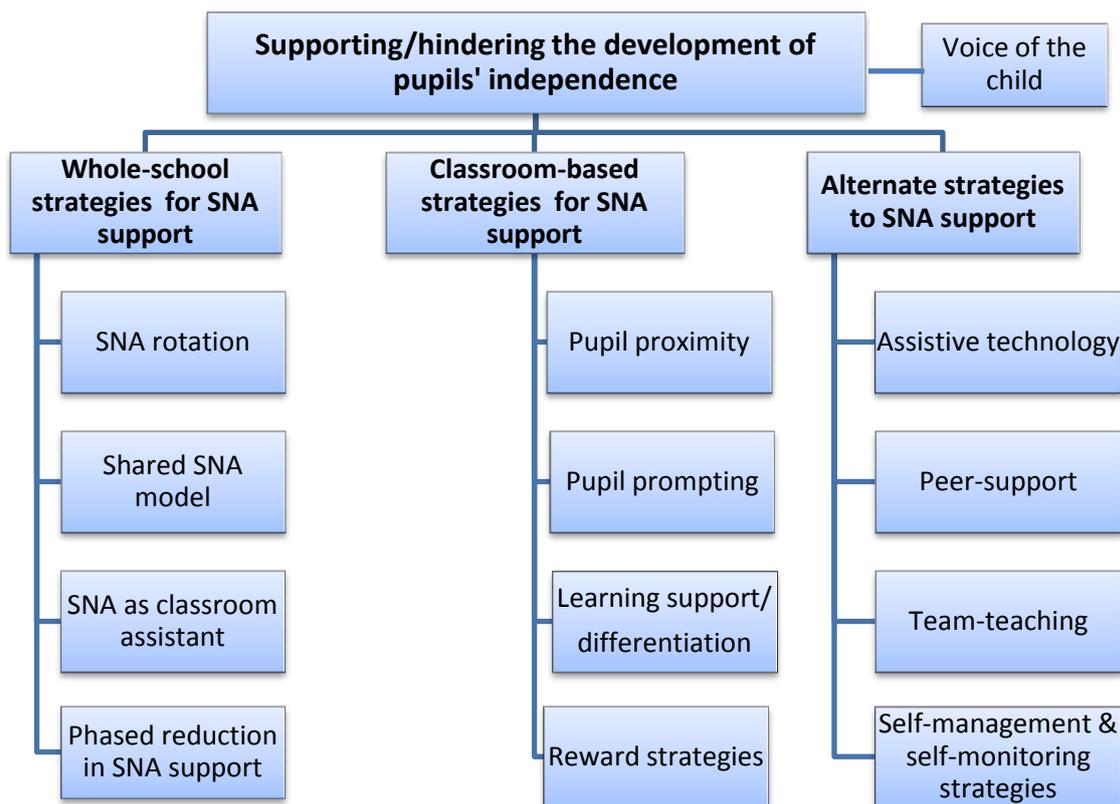


Figure 39: Considering SNA deployment: Strategies identified during case studies detailing means by which SNAs support/hinder pupil independence

6.4.1.1 Whole-school strategies.

At a whole-school level, findings showed that in over half of cases ($n = 11, 55\%$), SNA-pupil assignment was rotated on an annual basis across the school. This was perceived by adult participants as a positive means of reducing pupil dependency on one SNA over time. The remaining cases ($n = 9, 45\%$) did not engage in this strategy and rather, SNA-pupil assignment had remained constant over a number of years, ranging from one to seven years. Rather than viewing SNA-pupil linkage through the lens of ‘dependence’, participants alluded to the consistency this provides for pupils, particularly when transitioning across classes. With reference to one pupil with high emotional needs, his teacher stated, “Because the SNA’s been with him so long, she’s the only consistency for him”.

In almost all cases, SNA support extended beyond the target pupils, either to pupils in other classes ($n = 8, 40\%$) or to other pupils within the target pupils’ class ($n = 7,$

35%). Some cases ($n = 4$, 20%) also rotated SNA-pupil assignment on a daily or weekly basis, so that a number of SNAs were assigned to the same pupil. From an independence viewpoint, the strength of this shared-SNA model was recognised by SNAs and teachers alike. For example, one SNA stated, “When you are there for others, it does give them that little bit of independence”. Another SNA stated, “It means that he is not as dependent on one person. So if I go out sick or anything like that, someone else can cover him and it’s not a big deal to him”. Interestingly, seven SNAs (35%), who purposefully did not position their seats beside the target pupils perceived themselves as “an assistant to the class” rather than exclusive support for the target pupil. This was verified by three pupils (15%), with one stating, “She goes around helping other boys too”. In contrast, five target pupils (25%) had full-time SNA support, characterised by more one-to-one pupil assignment.

Considering the developmental nature of independence, some schools referred to the way in which SNA-pupil assignment had been reduced over time, in light of pupil progress. One teacher stated, “He’s in sixth class so he’s been weaned off it [SNA support]”. This reduction in SNA support over time was recognised by some teachers as a visible sign of pupils’ progress. Notably, this was not a feature of practice in all schools, with one school noting particular concern regarding a senior pupil who was still in receipt of full-time SNA support. His teacher stated, “I’d like her [the SNA] to be moving away from him but we still seem to be in the place where we were when he came in in September...He will come out and he will do things, if I’m making sense, but he will always go back to needing her, all the time”.

6.4.1.2 Classroom level strategies.

At a classroom level, findings showed that SNAs’ behaviours varied between supporting and hindering pupils’ development of independence. These spanned domains including pupil proximity, pupil prompting, learning support/differentiation and reward strategies. Notably, many of these sub-themes overlap with *Theme 2: SNAs’ support of behaviour*.

- *Pupil proximity*

As previously outlined, pupil proximity was used by all SNAs as a strategy for supporting target pupils' behavioural care needs. This pertained both to SNAs' seating position and physical proximity to the pupil. Data analysis showed that half the SNA sample ($n = 10$, 50%) expressed awareness of how their proximity to target pupils could impact on the pupil's level of independence. This awareness particularly pertained to the nine SNAs who were seated away from the target pupil and used intermittent pupil support throughout the day. These SNAs highlighted the need for strong observational skills to monitor the target pupil from a distance and intervene where required. For example, one SNA stated,

I would think sitting away from him is probably better because if you are sitting right next to him he could sit back...he'd hand you the book nearly...so I constantly would look over at him and I know when he needs me to go over, you know.

Sample SNA comments included the need to "stand back", to "move away from the child" and to avoid "being on top of him". The strategic movement of these SNAs to and from the pupil was verified by some teachers as a positive means of supporting target pupils' independence, with one teacher stating: "Now she is sort of in the background always. In terms of she is not on top of him telling him what to do. She is always watching...I think she is excellent at that you know". This was echoed by another teacher who stated: "She tries to get him on task but then she'll come away from him again and not be completely there all of the time". From a pupil perspective, five pupils (25%) provided positive feedback on the fact the SNA was not seated next to them, with one pupil stating, "I have my own space now".

In contrast, eight SNAs (40%) had their seat positioned directly beside the target pupil for the majority of the school day. As previously outlined, this one-to-one support was justified by some SNAs in terms of supporting target pupils' challenging behaviour, on-task behaviour and safety-related needs. For the most part, however, the need to sit directly beside the target pupil was justified by SNAs in terms of supporting curriculum access and providing learning support to the pupil, both as a preventative strategy for challenging behaviour but so too, to ensure the target pupil could keep pace with the class. For example, one SNA stated, "I noticed that since I consciously decided to sit next to him, he will put in more of an effort".

Target pupils' perspectives on the close SNA proximity were particularly insightful. In general, some of the younger pupils noted the benefit of this consistent support, particularly for academic tasks. In contrast, three pupils (15%) were described to react negatively to the one-to-one support. SNA comments included, "He just kind of doesn't like me sitting next to him. He feels like he is singled out then...he doesn't want the attention". Sample pupil comments, as reported by two SNAs included, "Go away, I'll do it myself", "Why are you always sitting here?" "Why can't you sit over with Pupil X again?" and "I don't need help on this". One senior pupil also expressed strong aversion to the close SNA support during his pupil interview. He stated, "I don't want anyone sitting next to me...it's like I'm getting babysat or something". Another younger pupil also described the way in which he had strategically moved his table away from the SNA to afford himself more space. He stated, "Like sometimes, I just want my own space...like she used to be sitting next to me but I moved my table and there was no space for her chair". In contrast to classroom support, yard observations showed that across all cases ($n = 20$, 100%), SNAs maintained a distance from target pupils during break time, where pupil support appeared contingent with target pupils' level of need.

- *Pupil prompting*

Across all case studies ($n = 20$, 100%), SNAs were observed to provide oral prompts to pupils to support their engagement in required classroom behaviours. The level of SNA-pupil prompting varied across cases, ranging from low level pupil reminders to very high levels of consistent pupil prompting. This pertained to a range of domains including on-task behaviour, compliance with classroom rules, following teacher directions, as well as academic-related prompting. During participant interviews, this was regularly referred to as "reminding", "encouraging", "directing" or "prompting" the pupil. The need for such high levels of prompting were described in terms of pupils' poor concentration levels, high distractibility, poor listening skills, poor receptive language skills, low levels of independence, self-regulation and self-management skills. As stated by one teacher, "He constantly needs to be reminded to do things, he constantly needs to be kept on top of doing things". This was echoed by one SNA who stated: "You have to direct him to take

out his school books, you have to direct him to sit down, you have to direct him to focus on the task that he has been asked to do”.

Across all case studies, only two participants made reference to the potential negative implications of this constant prompting on target pupils' level of independence. One teacher highlighted the verbal reminder as a particular area of concern for him, outlining it as “constant”. Similarly, one SNA highlighted her awareness of the need to control levels of pupil prompting, although juxtaposed this with the academic benefits of gently reminding pupils to attend in class.

And sometimes we might have to prompt him. I know we are not supposed to...That's what I find hard, because you are there to help a child - you're assisting them to learn, so like if they are not listening and looking out the window just need to give them a gentle reminder.

Notably, across all case studies, only two SNAs (10%) were observed to use visual cues as a low-prompt strategy. Such pictures included ‘sitting still’, ‘quiet’, ‘listening’ and ‘hand up’. Similarly, five SNAs (25%), who were seated away from the target pupils, were observed to engage in non-verbal gesturing to encourage the pupil to refocus on the task at hand. In contrast, the remaining SNAs ($n = 13$, 65%) did not express awareness of the negative implications of such incessant oral prompting.

In addition, only eight SNAs (40%) were observed to provide pupils with ‘wait time’ before providing pupil support. During SNA interviews, only two SNAs (10%) noted the negative implications of “intervening too soon” and rather, pointed to the importance of ‘wait time’. In addition, two teachers (10%) remarked on the strength of two other SNAs in engaging in this behaviour, with one teacher stating: “What I observe is she would sit back, she would give him the chance to make the right decision, to take out the book, to open the right page, before she jumps in and intervenes”. Although nine SNAs (45%) reported their use of short-term targets with pupils to support independent functioning for organisation and task completion, this was not observed across any case. In contrast, classroom observations pointed to the lack of wait time and the over-support of many SNAs when engaging with target pupils; an issue verified in three pupil interviews. For example, one pupil stated, “Like we do a circle time and I'm just trying to think of the answers...and [the SNA] tells me it”. In particular, the pace of classroom work and the lack of task differentiation were observed as mediating factors in this regard, with one teacher

stating, “I suppose we just get into the habit of providing assistance to the pupil to complete the task”.

- *Learning support/differentiation*

As previously outlined, findings revealed that 17 of the 20 case pupils (85%) presented with learning difficulties, particularly in terms of accessing the curriculum and keeping pace with the class. Although SNA circulars outline the non-teaching nature of the SNA role (DES, 2014), a range of practices were observed across classrooms which highlighted the stretched role of the SNA. In some cases ($n = 6$, 30%), SNAs were observed to support curriculum access for pupils, such as through note-taking or transcribing material from the blackboard. Beyond curriculum access, almost all SNAs ($n = 17$, 85%) were observed to engage in a learning support role with target pupils, whereby their duties clearly extended beyond the prescribed care role. This was typically observed in terms of the SNA seated directly beside the pupil, aiding the pupil to engage in the task by explaining the material and/or, providing academic prompts or talking the pupil through each stage of the learning process. Observations and semi-structured interviews highlighted the varying levels of pupil dependence on the SNA for such learning support, such that pupils' level of dependence appeared to correlate with pupils' level of academic difficulties and the degree to which the task was differentiated to align with the pupil's ability/attainment level. For example, one teacher, describing a target pupil with significant mathematical difficulties stated, “He wouldn't manage maths without [the SNA], I don't think he'd access the maths curriculum at all”. Another teacher described the generic learning support provided by the SNA to the pupil stating clearly, “I suppose for getting his work done, he is dependent on her...He will look to her for help”. In two cases (10%), the SNAs were observed to regularly take target pupils to a separate room off the main classroom, whereby the SNAs engaged in completely different academic material with the pupils than that of the class. This was rationalised in light of the pupils' low academic abilities, whereby they were reported, and observed, to operate at a significantly lower level than their classmates. One of the SNAs described her role with the target pupil stating, “It's kind of more of a teaching kind of role than an actual SNA kind of role really. Because he does a totally different level than the rest of the class”. With reference

to the pupil's level of independence, the other SNA stated, "He'd be very dependent on me because is he illiterate...so I've to read for him". This was verified by the class teacher when she stated, "He is dependent on the SNA for everything really. Everything is above him". In general, the researcher observed how the focus during such periods of SNA learning support predominantly related to task completion rather than pupil understanding, skill development or quality of work.

- *Reward strategies*

As previously stated, nine cases (45%) reported use of reward strategies to support target pupils' development of independence, including the use of tick charts, token systems and the 'first-then' strategy. Akin to reward systems for behavioural care needs, SNAs assumed an observational and monitoring role, and in some cases, also supported the target pupil during the reward period. For example, one SNA stated,

So we have a little chart for taking off his coat, putting his schoolbag on the back of his chair, saying his morning prayer. And he gets a smiley face for each one. And if he gets all three smiley faces we go up to the vegetable plot.

Across three cases (15%), a token system was used to reward target pupils for independent academic work, whereby each token equated to additional time during target pupils' movement breaks. Where rewards were offered for target pupils' engagement in independent academic tasks, the predominant focus appeared to lie on task completion rather than quality of work. This factor was observed on numerous occasions by the researcher during in-class observations, whereby the incentive to finish the task and receive the reward appeared to compromise the quality of pupils' work. This was remarked upon by one teacher who stated: "Sometimes they want the break straightaway, so they might fly through the work, and it might be all wrong...It's all about finishing the task rather than doing it right". In contrast, the remaining 11 cases (55%) did not utilise reward strategies to support pupils' development of independence.

6.4.2 Alternate strategies.

Across almost all cases, data highlighted an over-reliance on SNA support for target pupils. In this regard, very few alternate strategies were evident within classrooms to support pupils' development, beyond that of SNA support. For example, across all cases ($n = 20$, 100%), assistive technology was not observed in use, such as to support curriculum access for target pupils or transcription of material from the blackboard. Nonetheless, one school outlined their intention to introduce this the following year with one of the pupils. In-class peer support was only observed in two cases (10%) and team-teaching was not observed in any setting, although reported to occur across five cases (25%) at intermittent occasions during the week. The use of organisational supports for pupils were observed in only four cases (20%), including colour-coding of books, use of homework folders and use of a homework keyring attached to the pupil's bag. In contrast, the SNA was observed to support target pupils' organisation of materials across 12 cases (60%), with five teachers (25%) highlighting excessive SNA support in this regard. In terms of behavioural self-management, only two pupils (10%) had visual reminders adhered to their desks to support appropriate classroom behaviour. Although skill-based teaching was reported to be occurring with the target pupil during special education time, SNAs' support of pupils' skills in this area was not a feature of practice in any case, with one SNA outlining a lack of understanding of the self-monitoring strategy adhered to the pupil's desk. Interestingly, one SNA highlighted the need for explicit teaching and pupil support for using self-monitoring strategies with pupils to support independence development. With reference to an organisational checklist she stated, "It is not just magic – you can't just give him the thing and expect him to use it straightaway. You need to give it to him, remind him to use it, check in with him and then still make sure he has everything going home". Ultimately however, the use of alternate strategies across cases appeared the exception rather than the norm, with a general over-reliance on SNA support for pupils evident within almost all classes.

6.4.3 SNAs' support of independence: Focus on pupil voice.

An analysis of pupil interviews provided insight into target pupils' perspective on the impact of SNAs on their level of independent functioning. On one hand, four pupils (22%) highlighted the tendency of their SNAs to offer excessive support to them, described by one boy as, "offering help when I don't need help". Examples included the SNA over-prompting, providing the answer for the pupil, writing answers for the pupil in the pupil's handwriting or providing excessive levels of one-to-one assistance. As previously outlined, eight pupil interviewees (44%) shed light on the heightened levels of psychological dependence they had on their SNA. In contrast, three pupils (17%) expressed a desire for greater levels of independence from the SNA, with particular emphasis on physical space from the SNA and a desire to reduce optics of 'additional support' in the class context. Notably, only one pupil outlined the use of alternate forms of support within the classroom, with reference to peer-support. Similarly, only one pupil referred to the use of a reward chart to support the development of his independent functioning. In contrast, all other pupils did not refer to any alternate supports within the classroom, other than the SNA.

6.4.4 Summary of theme 3: Pupil independence versus dependence.

Case study data showed that target pupils' level of independence varied across cases. In all cases, pupils' independence lay below that of their typically-developing peers, whereby pupils showed varying levels of dependence on their SNA for support. At a whole-school level, strategies varied significantly across schools, with positive practices to support pupil independence including SNA rotation, a shared SNA model, the SNA as classroom assistant and the phased reduction in SNA support for the pupil. Nonetheless, these strategies were not common practice across all cases with a more continuous approach to SNA-deployment evident across many cases. At a classroom level, SNA practices were viewed to occur along a continuum, ranging from 'supporting independence' to 'hindering independence'. Such practices included pupil proximity, pupil prompting, SNAs' provision of learning support/differentiation and SNAs' support of reward strategies to promote pupil independence. In particular, the latter strategy appeared under-utilised with pupils across classrooms. Finally, case study data showed a lack of

alternate strategies in use within classrooms to support target pupils' development of independent skills, other than that of SNA support. Examples included assistive technology, peer-support, team-teaching and self-management and self-monitoring strategies. In general, an over-reliance on SNA support was evident across almost all schools and classrooms, leading to pupil dependence on SNA support and a lack of the voice of the child in relation to the level and type of support received.

6.5 Theme 4: SNA Relational Role with Pupil

6.5.1 SNA-pupil relationship.

Across case studies, semi-structured interviews provided insight into the specific and unique relationship between the pupil and SNA. This relationship was contrasted with that of the teacher-pupil relationship, whereby the pressures of whole-class teaching and upholding classroom management were noted to reduce teachers' opportunities to establish a comparable relationship with target pupils. Two teachers (10%) coined the difference between the SNA-pupil relationship and the teacher-pupil relationship in terms of "good cop – bad cop". Almost all teachers highlighted the caring and calm nature of those working as SNAs. This was verified in pupil interviews, with SNAs described in terms of being "nice", "patient", "kind", "fun", "she doesn't get mad" and "she makes me happy". In contrast, only two SNAs (10%) described themselves with reference to 'harder' personality traits, including being "a strong character" and one who is "tough".

The majority of SNAs and teachers emphasised the importance of a positive SNA-pupil relationship, whereby values such as "trust" and "respect" were repeatedly cited across case studies. Over half of SNAs ($n = 11$, 55%) referred to the time required to build this relationship with the pupil, such that the initial period working with a pupil with behavioural care needs can often be quite challenging. Across SNA interviews, the pupil-SNA relationship was likened to a number of models including that of "a friend", "a best friend" and "a best buddy". More maternal roles were also cited by SNAs including "the pupil's school Mom", "a mother figure", "an extension of the parent", "a detached parent" and "an aunt". The SNA role was also likened to more emotionally-supportive roles, including "a security blanket", "a guardian angel", "a safety net" and "a softer place to fall". From a pupil perspective, one pupil

referred to the SNA as a “friend” and six pupils (30%) described how they would feel “sad” if the SNA no longer worked with them. Although a strong SNA-pupil relationship was deemed positive by almost all participants, one teacher highlighted the potential negative implications that can occur for all parties when the SNA-pupil relationship becomes, as he coined it, “overly pally”.

6.5.2 SNA-pupil emotional support.

Building on the positive SNA-pupil relationship, teachers and SNAs referred to the emotional support that SNAs regularly provide for target pupils. Across almost all interviews, participants referred to the emotional needs of the target pupils, with sample comments including, “He has a very negative self-image”, “He gets upset quite easily” and “Emotionally, he’d be on par with a kid that is much younger than himself”. The majority of SNAs ($n = 13$, 65%) described the way in which the target pupil would regularly seek emotional support from them, particularly in cases where the pupil’s home life or background was troubled. This was noted to regularly occur during movement breaks, particularly when breaks occurred on a one-to-one basis. The provision of emotional support to pupils varied across cases, with some cases pointing to particularly high levels of emotional support. For example, one SNA stated, “He would tell you things you know he just wouldn’t tell others...He would confide in me”. Another SNA recalled how the pupil often states, “I have something to tell you, now please don’t tell anybody else”. On one hand, a few SNAs and teachers recognised the provision of such emotional support as particularly positive, with the SNA referred to as “a positive adult role” and “a pivotal role” in the child’s life. Two SNAs (10%) also recognised the strong link between emotional well-being and pupil learning with one stating, “Any child that is troubled, you know yourself, they cannot learn”. Of note, seven SNAs (35%) referred to the importance of ensuring the pupil’s happiness during the school day and ensuring that he/she “is going home happy”.

6.5.3 Pupil-SNA emotional dependency.

In contrast, a range of teachers and two SNAs (10%) queried whether an overly strong pupil-SNA relationship can result in the creation of an emotional dependency for the pupil on the SNA. With reference to the relationship between the SNA and pupil in her classroom, one teacher stated, "There is a real link, a dynamic between them, a link that I can't control". In addition, the impact of the SNA on pupils' social development was also highlighted across cases in both a positive and negative light. On one hand, some SNAs were viewed in terms of supporting target pupils' social development, such as supporting his/her socialisation with peers. In contrast, one pupil described the way in which the SNA typically is paired with him for peer-work. He stated, "[The SNA] is my team-mate. Like usually, when we go in a line I usually go next to her and sometimes, on the bus, I go next to her". This situation was observed by the researcher across three case studies (15%); two in which the SNA formed the target pupils' activity partner, in lieu of a classmate, and a further case, where the SNA sat a senior target pupil on her lap during computer time. Such social/emotional issues point to the potential for the SNA to work outside of his/her professional remit and impact negatively on the target pupil's development.

6.5.4 Summary of theme 4: SNA relational role with pupil.

Case studies highlighted the unique relationship between SNAs and target pupils; a relationship that differed to that between the teacher and pupil. On one hand, the SNA-pupil relationship was viewed as a positive means of providing social and emotional support to the target pupil, particularly in light of the social-emotional needs of many of these pupils. In contrast, the potential for this relationship to create an emotional dependency for the pupil on the SNA was highlighted, in addition to creating a social barrier for the pupil with his/her peers. Ultimately, the data points to the importance of SNAs working within their prescribed remit and ensuring that pupil support does not impact on positive pupil development.

Chapter Seven: Discussion

7.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to obtain a detailed and integrated account of the preparedness and deployment of SNAs when supporting target pupils' behavioural care needs and developing target pupils' independence in mainstream primary schools in Ireland. *Chapters Four, Five and Six* presented results from each of the three data collection methodologies, including the large-scale survey, systematic observations and case studies respectively. Based on such results, this chapter seeks to discuss the main research findings. Specifically, each research question will be presented and key findings from each of the three research methodologies synthesised and discussed, with reference to previous literature and theories in the field. Thereafter, a range of recommendations will be outlined with regard to each research question, providing direction for future policy and practice in the field.

7.2. Research Question 1:

To what degree are SNAs prepared to support target pupils' behavioural care needs and develop target pupils' independence in mainstream primary schools?

This study firstly sought to explore the degree to which SNAs are prepared to support target pupils' behavioural care needs and develop target pupils' independence in mainstream primary schools. Stemming from the research findings and the literature review, this issue of 'preparedness' is discussed across four related domains namely: *Training and professional development; knowledge and understanding of challenging behaviour; SNAs' self-efficacy in dealing with challenging behaviour; individualised pupil planning.*

7.2.1 Training and professional development.

Focusing firstly on training and professional development, findings showed variation across SNA qualifications, whereby over half of SNA survey respondents reported qualifications of between FETAC Level 3 and 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications. Such findings both align with, and exceed the current minimum

required educational standards for SNA appointment in Ireland, as per national policy guidelines (DES, 2011b). This finding is in line with previous Irish research which identified the range of qualifications held by SNAs, spanning from Junior Certificate level to post-graduate awards (Keating & O'Connor, 2012; Kerins et al., 2015). In general, participants across data sources expressed significant dissatisfaction with the quality of initial SNA training and the lack of opportunities for SNAs to engage in ongoing professional development. This finding is particularly important when data from the large-scale survey indicated that over 60% of SNAs had been working as an SNA for over six years. This lack of training was deemed to negatively impact on SNAs' knowledge and skills, whereby an overreliance on experiential, 'trial and error' learning was reported by the majority of case study SNAs. Findings also highlighted variances in the standard and quality of courses available to SNAs, with feedback predominantly negative in this regard. Such findings resonate with previous national research, whereby numerous studies have pointed to the "unacceptable" level of initial qualifications and CPD for SNAs (Daly et al., 2016, p. 98; Kerins et al., 2015). Similarly, international research has recognised inadequate training for TAs and paraprofessionals as a longstanding issue in the literature, spanning over 20 years of research (Giangreco et al., 2014b). In contrast, a few case study SNAs referred to some high quality CPD courses in which they had engaged, particularly in the area of behaviour management. The positive effect of such courses was noted in terms of increasing SNAs' knowledge, skills and use of evidence-based strategies with pupils, as well as reducing SNA stress levels. Nonetheless, such high quality training for SNAs was recognised as the exception among participants, rather than the norm.

Across cases, data identified a strong desire amongst SNAs for training on how to prevent and react to significant episodes of challenging behaviour. In particular, the lack of protocol in reacting to volatile behaviour was deemed a significant safety and litigation risk for all involved. This finding was verified by survey data which showed that less than half of SNA participants had completed training in behaviour management to date. This data also echoes recent national findings by Kerins et al. (2015) which showed that almost half of SNAs and three quarters of principals identified behaviour management as SNAs' most urgent training need, followed closely by that of understanding emotional disturbance as a category of SEN.

Considering the support of pupils' independence, data from the large-scale survey showed that only one fifth of SNA participants had completed training in this domain. Although case study SNAs recognised the need for training and skill development in this area, this was perceived to be less of a priority area than that of behaviour management. In fact, interview data highlighted how a number of SNAs showed limited awareness of their role in encouraging target pupils' independence, paralleled by a lack of strategies for supporting target pupils' skill development in this area. This is a concerning finding given that the development of pupils' independence presents as a core duty of the SNA role (DES, 2014). In contrast, many teacher respondents recognised the need for additional training for SNAs to address the 'support-independence dichotomy' when working with pupils with significant care needs. Sample topics for SNA skill development, as highlighted by case study respondents, included effective pupil prompting and scaffolding, appropriate levels of SNA-pupil proximity, observation and monitoring of pupils, as well as support of pupils' self-regulatory and self-monitoring skills. This resonates with findings from Kerins et al. (2015), whereby just under one third of SNAs in primary schools recognised their need for training in encouraging pupil independence. In contrast, over half of principals in the same research identified SNA training in strategies to encourage pupil independence as a priority area for their professional development.

Based on such findings, alongside that of previous research, the need for a national, formalised and structured approach to initial and ongoing professional development for SNAs stands clear. In fact, the *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development* (OECD, 2012) has emphasised the central role of staff knowledge, qualifications and professional development in supporting high-quality educational provision and positive outcomes for children's development. At a national level, recent NCSE reports (NCSE, 2015c, 2016b) verify the need for mandatory higher qualifications and CPD programmes for SNAs. In addition, the *NCSE policy advice paper no. 6* (NCSE, 2018) has recommended that a national training programme be introduced at Level 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications for existing SNAs who do not have the requisite level of relevant training, as well as for new ISAs on appointment. Based on findings from this study, coupled with that from previous research (NCSE, 2018), it is questionable whether a Level 5 qualification would be sufficient for SNAs. This is particularly when one considers the knowledge and skills

required of SNAs to effectively support the range of care needs with which children with SEN can present, coupled with the evidenced-based strategies that SNAs require to develop children's independent living skills.

Moving forward, it is recommended that a generic education programme for all SNAs should be devised to address the core skills required for SNAs to successfully engage in the role. As part of this training, SNAs need clear information on the range of SEN, strengths and needs with which a child can present, including professional frameworks for interpreting the same. Training must also focus on increasing SNAs' knowledge and understanding of the complex underpinnings of challenging behaviour, alongside the numerous means by which behavioural change can be supported. Thereafter, SNAs need to learn strategies and guiding frameworks for encouraging the development of all pupils' independence skills. Ultimately, high-quality training and CPD must be prioritised to ensure consistency of approach for all children, particularly those with additional care needs.

The examination of international models of professional development may offer avenues for renewed thinking in the field. Examples include the Finnish model of initial qualifications and CPD for SNAs (Mäensivu, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2012; Takala, 2007), the *Minnesota Curriculum for Job-Embedded Paraprofessional Development* (Ghere, York-Barr, & Sommerness, 2002) and the *Effective Deployment of Teaching Assistants Project* in the U.K (Webster, Blatchford, & Russell, 2013). Notably, the *Minnesota Curriculum* (Ghere et al., 2002) includes personal reflection as a core component of the training programme. This is deemed an important facet of training to encourage SNAs to reflect on any faulty attributions they may have in relation to pupils' (mis)behaviour and related means of supporting the same. Notably, Giangreco and Suter (2015) emphasise how international models of professional development should not be adopted in a prescriptive manner but rather used as, "an exemplar meant to...spur discussion, creative problem-solving, and action planning to explore model development suited to local contexts" (p. 115). Ultimately, the Irish education system must seek to adopt a distinct model of professional development that aligns with its national policy context. In this way, practitioners can be facilitated to acquire the knowledge, skills and ongoing supports needed to implement inclusionary practices effectively.

At a school level, principals must also seek to recruit staff with high levels of qualifications, knowledge, experience and expertise. The principal's role in supporting the professional development of all staff must also be emphasised, whereby CPD planning at a systemic level may serve to formalise processes across the whole school. Notably, the *NCSE policy advice paper no. 6* (NCSE, 2018) recommended that additional training be provided for the entire school community on supporting children with additional care needs. This aligns with findings from some case study interviewees who referred to the benefits of whole-school training and expertise-sharing across the school system. Clearly, the need for whole-school training is evident to facilitate a holistic approach to behaviour management and pupil support across the school system.

7.2.2 Knowledge and understanding of challenging behaviour.

In parallel to the focus on training and professional development, survey and case study data also provided insight into SNAs' 'preparedness' in terms of their level of knowledge and understanding of the complexities of challenging behaviour. On one hand, some SNAs showed strong awareness of the myriad of biological, psychological and social factors that can underpin complex challenging behaviours. Over half of case study SNAs recognised the role of the child's home environment in influencing pupils' behaviour, particularly in terms of significant life stressors experienced by the pupil. Similarly, almost half of case study SNAs demonstrated awareness of how school-based environmental factors can influence pupils' behaviour, such as structure, challenging school-work and ecological/sensory factors. Interestingly, the majority of SNAs also highlighted the psychological shortcomings of target pupils on their behavioural presentation, including pupils' low levels of concentration, self-regulation and self-management skills. In contrast, some SNAs demonstrated a more narrow, 'within child' understanding of challenging behaviour, whereby repeated reference to the medical model suggested a limited understanding of challenging behaviour amongst those SNAs. Interpreted through the broader construct of attribution theory (Weiner, 2000), previous research acknowledges that individuals are often more likely to attribute causes of challenging behaviour to factors within the child or family agent, rather than that of school factors (Croll & Moses, 1985; Hastings, 1997; Hastings et al., 1997; McGill,

Bradshaw, & Hughes, 2007). A look to literature highlights the tensions that sometimes exist when understanding the nature and development of behavioural, emotional and social difficulties in pupils, ranging from 'within child' biological and/or psychological factors to social/environmental factors (Cooper & Jacobs, 2011; DES, 2010). In contrast, recent literature points to the validity of adopting a 'bio-psycho-social' perspective (Hernandez & Blazer, 2006; Norwich, 1990), in terms of understanding the complexities of behaviour and developing related interventions. Using this approach, both aspects of nature and nurture are seen to interact in a constant, fluid and dynamic manner (Cooper & Jacobs, 2011). Although case study SNAs showed varying levels of awareness of the potential causal attributions of challenging behaviour, findings suggest a somewhat powerless viewpoint amongst the majority of this cohort in terms of supporting behavioural change for target pupils. This is evident whereby many SNAs referred to the biological, psychological and home-related attributions of pupils' challenging behaviour in a 'fixed' manner. This finding resonates with Dweck's *model of social motivation* (Dweck & Leggett, 1988), which highlights the link between one's theory, goals and behaviours. Specifically, Dweck and Leggett (1988) argue that an individual's social/personality attributes can be viewed as fixed traits (*entity mindset*) or as malleable qualities (*incremental/growth mindset*). In turn, this theoretical mindset can orient the individual towards different goals, orientations and behavioural patterns. Specifically, an entity mindset is deemed to be linked with a helpless behavioural pattern, whereby the basic attributes that influence outcomes are perceived to be uncontrollable. In contrast, an incremental mindset is deemed to be linked with a mastery-oriented behavioural pattern, whereby perceptions of control derive directly from a belief in the basic mutability of the attributes that influence outcomes.

Given that a core aspect of the SNA care role involves working as part of a collaborative team to support the reduction in pupils' behavioural difficulties through time-bound targets (DES, 2014), it is paramount that SNAs are encouraged to adopt a growth mindset in relation to understanding and supporting pupils' challenging behaviour. These findings provide further verification for the need for high-quality, comprehensive training for SNAs, with a focus on increasing their knowledge and understanding of the complex underpinnings of challenging behaviour, alongside the numerous means by which behavioural change can be supported. The need for

guiding frameworks to understand and support challenging behaviour would be beneficial in this regard, including the bio-psycho-social framework (Engel, 1977) and the IF framework (Frederickson & Cameron, 1999, as cited in Frederickson & Cline, 2015). In considering the IF framework, a recent development of the framework by Annan et al. (2013) presents as particularly relevant, whereby explicit focus is placed on the child's 'affect' as well as assessment planning. Use of this adapted framework may prove particularly relevant for use by the pupil's IEP team in supporting collaborative assessment and intervention planning across all levels of the framework. A sample template of the revised framework is presented in *Figure 40*, as modelled on that in Annan et al. (2013, p. 83).

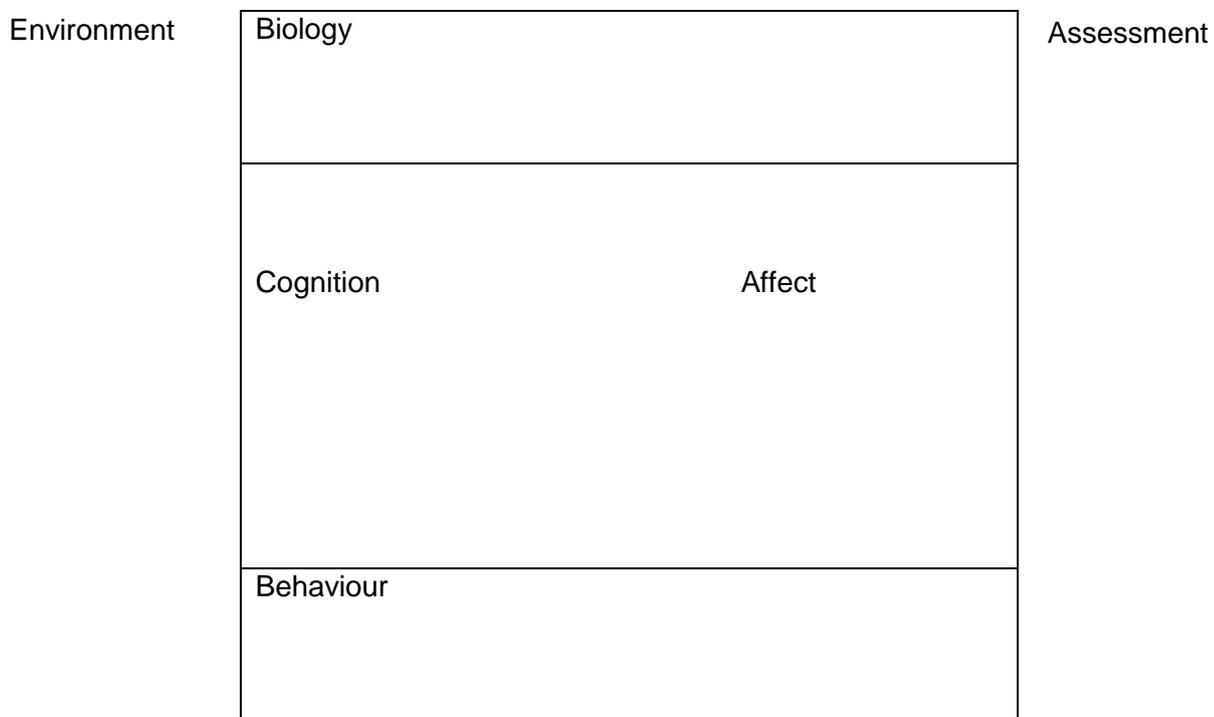


Figure 40: Revised 'Interactive Factors Framework' template, as modelled on that in Annan et al. (2013, p. 83)

In addition to the use of guiding frameworks, discrete training for SNAs in functional behaviour analysis would also appear beneficial, whereby SNAs could learn methods for gathering information about the antecedents, behaviours and consequences of behaviour. This would aid them to understand the function of behaviour and support the collaborative design and implementation of pupil interventions to reduce problem behaviours and facilitate positive behaviours (Witt, Daly, & Noell, 2000). Such training would align with the duties of the SNA, as outlined in *Circular 0030/2014* (DES, 2014), including reinforcing good behaviour and assisting staff with recording data in relation to pupil behaviour and behavioural development. In this way, SNAs could be facilitated to view target pupils' behavioural presentation as amenable to change rather than solely in terms of behavioural support or 'containment'; a finding previously identified in the *Value for Money* review (DES, 2011a).

Notably, research conducted in the U.K by Groom and Rose (2005) highlight key requirements of professional development programmes for TAs when working with pupils with challenging behaviour and SEBD. These include understanding the child's diagnosis, as well as understanding the range of strategies to support behaviour change. Subsequent research in this area, as conducted by Rose and Forlin (2010) with a cohort of TAs in Hong Kong, verified the positive impact of training on aiding TAs to better understand pupil behaviour. Based on such findings, the necessity to ensure SNAs are appropriately qualified and trained for their role must be given priority in an Irish context. In this way, this will ensure that high-quality support strategies are in place for some of the most vulnerable pupils within our schools.

7.2.3 Self-efficacy in dealing with challenging behaviour.

In addition to the interview data, the large-scale survey also shed light on SNAs' preparedness with respect to SNAs' perceived self-efficacy in dealing with challenging behaviour. Following completion of the 'Efficacy in dealing with challenging behaviours' scale (Hastings & Brown, 2002), findings indicated a medium to high mean score across survey and case study SNAs in terms of their perceived efficacy in dealing with challenging behaviour. In addition, data showed low variation in total self-efficacy scores across the sample in terms of standard

deviation from the mean. This finding suggests that in spite of the issues raised by this cohort in relation to 'preparedness', SNAs perceived their capacity to deal with episodes of challenging behaviour in a positive light. Further analysis, as revealed through a series of Pearson's *r* tests of correlation, suggested no significant relationship between years spent working as an SNA and total score on the self-efficacy scale. Rather, findings showed a significant positive medium correlation between SNAs' self-efficacy to work with challenging behaviour and their perceived quality of training to support challenging behaviour. Although correlation does not indicate causation, these findings suggest that additional SNA experience was not related to higher levels of perceived self-efficacy to deal with challenging behaviour. Instead, the higher the quality of training, as perceived by SNAs, the higher SNAs' self-efficacy beliefs to support challenging behaviour. Moreover, an independent samples t-test found that SNAs who completed training in behaviour management and/or, in supporting pupils' independence skills, also reported significantly higher self-efficacy scores than SNAs who had not undertaken such training. Again, this finding points to the positive impact of training on SNAs' perceived self-efficacy to support challenging behaviour. Such findings are in line with previous research which highlights how education can increase the self-efficacy of instructional assistants working in classes with disabilities (Weiniger, 2008).

These findings are particularly positive when one reflects on the way in which SNAs' self-beliefs of efficacy can affect their functioning with pupils across classrooms. Based on the work of Bandura (1994, 1997), efficacy beliefs can impact on a range of factors, spanning cognitive, motivational, affective and selection processes. Accordingly, SNAs' heightened self-efficacy ratings would suggest positive implications on their coping behaviours and the level of effort they expend in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences. It is also likely that such heightened self-beliefs of efficacy would relate to more positive emotional reactions of SNAs to challenging behaviour, as suggested through the previous work of Hastings and Brown (2002). Nonetheless, it is important to highlight that the source and accuracy of SNAs' feelings of efficacy remains unclear. Hastings and Brown (2002) note that staff feelings of efficacy may be related to their perceptions of their own skills or deficiencies, in addition to their perceptions of barriers or facilitating factors in their working environment. Moreover, the subjective nature of SNAs' self-ratings must

also be taken into consideration, whereby research findings lack an objective measure of this construct. Accordingly, further research is recommended to provide greater clarity in the area of self-efficacy, both in terms of the factors impacting on SNAs' self-efficacy beliefs and the accuracy of SNAs' self-ratings. Nonetheless, initial findings underscore the need for high quality training for SNAs, not only to improve SNAs' knowledge and understanding of pupils' care needs, support of independence development and challenging behaviour, but so too, to ensure they have high self-efficacy to deal with challenging behaviour and the additional needs of pupils presenting with behavioural care needs.

7.2.4 Individualised pupil planning.

The fourth and final aspect related to 'preparedness' focused on the degree to which SNAs are involved in individualised pupil planning to support target pupils' behavioural care needs and independence development. As based on governmental policy (DES, 2014) a team approach to the development, implementation and review of Personal Pupil Plans is strongly recommended, with 'good practice' outlined in terms of SNAs contributing to pupils' care plans, monitoring their progress and supporting pupils to voice their views on their Personal Pupil Plan. An analysis of survey responses, case study interviews and documentary analysis, where available, provided insight in this regard.

Data revealed that regular communication between the SNA and class teacher was a feature of practice in almost all case study settings; a practice verified by almost 50% of survey respondents. For the most part, this was reported to occur on an informal and ad-hoc basis. Although more formal planning and feedback meetings were also reported to take place, these were noted to occur on a less frequent basis, often during SNAs' personal, non-paid time, or during Croke Park hours. This finding resonates with national research conducted by Ware et al. (2011) who highlighted the lack of time for co-ordination between resource teachers⁹, class teachers and SNAs as a dominant factor in impacting on pupils' curriculum access. Similarly, findings from the international DISS study also points to the lack of planning time between teachers and support staff in the U.K context, with almost

⁹ 'Resource teachers' is the original title that was used to describe teachers that supported pupils with low incidence SEN (Department of Education and Science, 2005). Since September 2017, this term has now been replaced by 'SET' (DES, 2017a, 2017c).

two thirds of participants engaging in planning either before/after school, or during breaks (Blatchford et al., 2009b). Beyond the teacher-SNA dyad in the classroom, disparity was evident across case studies in relation to collaborative pupil support. In over half of cases, positive practice was recognised through regular communication between the class teacher, SNA, SET and pupils' parents. Such communication was recognised to support consistency of approach with the pupil across settings, aligning strongly with national policy recommendations (DES, 2014; NCSE, 2006). In contrast, the remaining cases described a more dis-jointed approach to pupil support, with a notable lack of collaboration evident between the SET and that of the class teacher and SNA. Feedback from interviewees suggested negative implications of this approach, whereby a lack of consistency between the classroom and special education settings was reported to result in mixed messages for the pupil and a lack of generalisation of pupil learning. Research highlights that for any learner, generalisation presents as the final and most difficult stage of acquiring new learning, whereby pupils regularly fail to transfer newly learned skills from one situation to another (Westwood, 2015). Accordingly, the need for clear lines of communication between key personnel, both within and external to the school, is paramount to support consistency of approach for target pupils and to aid their generalisation of learning.

Considering individual pupil planning, data verified IEPs to be a feature of practice in almost all settings, in line with governmental guidelines (DES, 2014; NCSE, 2006). Interestingly, only two cases employed use of an individual Behaviour Support Plan for target pupils, despite such planning forming a central component of policy advice for schools (DES, 2010; O'Leary, 2011). Similarly, no school had prepared a discrete Personal Pupil Plan, whereby all planning appeared to be subsumed within pupils' IEPs. Although a collaborative approach to IEP formulation was reported to occur in the majority of cases, data revealed that SNA attendance at IEP meetings was low, with almost 60% of survey respondents reporting non-attendance at pupils' meetings. Such findings align with and exceed data from previous national research in the field, with earlier studies reporting SNAs' non-attendance at IEP meetings to range from 35% to 53% respectively (Elliott, 2004; Lawlor & Cregan, 2003). Interestingly, findings from an independent samples *t*-test found that SNAs who had attended target pupils' IEP meetings reported significantly higher self-efficacy scores in dealing with challenging behaviour than SNAs who

had not, as rated on the *'Efficacy in dealing with challenging behaviours'* scale (Hastings & Brown, 2002). This finding points to the potential benefits of collaborative pupil planning for both the SNA and target pupil alike.

Although an IEP existed for all but four case study pupils, documentary review showed that IEP targets pertained mainly to target pupils' academic needs, with limited targets outlined in relation to target pupils' behavioural care needs and independent skill development. This finding aligns with data from Douglas et al. (2012) who highlighted the limited focus in schools on the 'informal' curriculum, including children's levels of independence, well-being and socialisation. Rather, the measurement of progress and outcomes on the 'formal curriculum', such as attainment-related outcomes in numeracy and literacy, is often seen to take precedence. Rose et al. (2015) argue for the inclusive assessment of progress for pupils with SEN, with a focus on happiness and independence-related outcomes, alongside measurements of academic attainment and curricular engagement. Findings of this study corroborate this argument, highlighting the need for a greater focus on independence-related outcomes of pupils, particularly those in receipt of SNA support.

Although the majority of SNA survey respondents reported medium to high levels of awareness of pupils' IEP targets, probing of SNA responses during semi-structured interviews cast doubt on this finding. Rather, data from semi-structured interviews indicated a more day-to-day approach to pupil support across almost all cases, with a significant lack of long-term, strategic planning, assessment or target-setting evident. Research findings also revealed a lack of specificity across almost all IEPs in terms of targets, monitoring and review procedures, such that targets did not adhere to the 'SMART' framework forwarded as best practice in national documentation (NCSE, 2006). Rather, targets appeared quite generic in nature, appearing problematic to measure and assess. Most notably, almost all IEPs failed to outline the role of the SNA in supporting pupil progress. Similarly, limited assessment, progress monitoring and/or record keeping was evident beyond that of the initial IEP, other than in the form of some incident reports following episodes of significant challenging behaviour. In contrast, positive practices, as evident across four cases, were recognised in terms of systematic target-setting, monitoring and review of pupils' progress, evident through simple monitoring charts recorded by the

SNA, and regular team meetings. This finding is in line with previous national research conducted by O'Neill and Rose (2008) who outlined that between 16% and 28% of SNAs were involved in assessment of pupil performance; the former figure on a daily basis. Such findings highlight the potential, yet clearly underutilised role of the SNA in supporting positive pupil progress as part of a collaborative team approach.

Finally, survey and case study data highlighted the significant lack of involvement of target pupils in their own personalised planning, with SNA survey respondents indicating less than 20% of target pupil involvement in the planning process. Moreover, across almost all case studies, the voice of the child was omitted from pupil planning, with only one case study pupil directly involved in contributing to his IEP targets. This finding is in direct opposition to recommended procedures in schools, whereby SNAs are encouraged to support the pupil to voice his/her views on the Personal Pupil Plan (DES, 2014). Moreover, data showed that across all case studies, pupils were not consulted in relation to the level of SNA support they received. This finding is consistent with previous international research in the field which highlights the lack of control that pupils regularly display in TA assignment (Egilson & Traustadottir, 2009). Again, this finding is contrary to national policy advice whereby the DES (2014) recommends that as far as practicable, the views of a child capable of forming his/her own views should be obtained and given weight, with due regard for the child's age and maturity level. Nonetheless, even for mature, older pupils across case studies, this practice was not evident in schools. This finding poses potential negative implications for target pupils' perceptions of personal control and self-determination within their school setting, whereby pupils' omission from personalised planning could result in negative cognitive and motivational consequences for such pupils (Abramson et al., 1978; DeCharms, 1968; Seligman, 1975).

Overall, findings point to the wide variances in practices across classrooms and schools concerning SNA involvement in collaborative planning, target-setting, progress-monitoring and review to support target pupils' behavioural care needs and independence development. On the whole, data highlights the need for greater adherence within schools to NCSE (2006) guidelines on the IEP process. While there is not yet a legal requirement for schools to provide IEPs for children in Ireland

(NCSE, 2006), research data highlights how almost all case study schools were engaging in this practice. It is therefore recommended that discrete time is assigned for collaborative pupil planning to ensure that all team members are involved in the individual pupil planning process, including the SNA and target pupil. Pupils' personalised plans must move beyond the formal curriculum, with comparable focus placed on the informal curriculum, particularly that of pupils' development of independence. As previously outlined, this is a matter that was strongly emphasised by Cosgrove et al. (2014) based on a study that explored the experiences and outcomes of nine year old children with SEN. It is also recommended that IEPs for pupils with behavioural care needs comprise a discrete Behaviour Support Plan to ensure that team members have a pre-planned, systematic approach to preventing, supporting and reacting to challenging behaviour. Targets outlined in the plan must stem from baseline assessment data and adhere to the SMART framework of being *Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic* and *Timed* (NCSE, 2006). It is also recommended that the IEP becomes a working document, informed by continuous monitoring and review. Strategies outlined in the plan must be evidence-based, with clear delineation of the care role of the SNA outlined, including time-bound targets for the development of the pupil's independence and for a reduction in the pupil's behavioural difficulties (DES, 2014; NCSE, 2006). Finally, the voice of the child must be central to the pupil planning process, with due regard for the child's age and maturity level. Creative, child-friendly approaches must be adopted for capturing the voice of the child to ensure that the child is appropriately facilitated to express his/her view. In light of theories of 'learned hopefulness' (Zimmerman, 1990) and self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2000), this can ensure that schools support pupils in their journey towards self-reliance and psychological empowerment.

Finally, findings based on the large-scale survey found a significant positive medium correlation between SNAs' perceived self-efficacy to deal with challenging behaviour and their involvement in the assessment and progress monitoring of pupils' IEP targets, as based on a series of Pearson's *r* tests of correlation. Similarly, a significant positive medium correlation was found between SNAs' perceived self-efficacy to deal with challenging behaviour and the extent to which SNAs felt their voices were heard in relation to pupils' personalised planning. Lastly, a significant positive medium correlation was found between SNAs' perceived self-

efficacy to deal with challenging behaviour and SNAs' awareness of pupils' IEP targets. Such findings again highlight the importance of involving SNAs in the assessment and progress monitoring process and ensuring that they are aware of pupils' target, whereby results suggest the potential positive implications that this can have on SNAs' self-efficacy to deal with challenging behaviour and thereafter, their subsequent behaviour.

7.3 Research Question 2:

What strategies do SNAs use to support target pupils' behavioural care needs in mainstream primary schools?

The study's second research question sought to ascertain what strategies SNAs use to support target pupils' behavioural care needs in mainstream primary schools. Case study data shed light on this question, spanning SNA, teacher and pupil interviews, naturalistic observations and documentary review. As outlined in *Chapter Six*, pupils' challenging behaviour was identified to span 11 of the 13 categories of challenging behaviour outlined in '*The Challenging Behaviour Matrix*' (Kelly et al., 2004). Such categories ranged from frequent forms of minor challenging behaviour to less frequent forms of significant challenging behaviour. Stemming from such displays of challenging behaviour, SNAs were identified to use both proactive and reactive strategies with pupils; aligning with, and expanding on that provided by LaVigna and Willis (2005). Findings will be discussed in turn, in light of the literature.

7.3.1 Ecological strategies.

7.3.1.1 Pupil proximity.

As defined by LaVigna and Willis (2005), ecological strategies involve altering the environmental context to smooth the fit between the environment and the individual. Interview data highlighted how changes to environmental factors in the pupils' learning environments, including classroom organisation, environmental supports and pupils' seating contexts, were predominantly controlled by the class teacher. In contrast, the use of SNA-pupil proximity as a proactive ecological strategy was

primarily under SNA control. Systematic observations showed that across cases, SNAs spent on average over 40% of their time seated on a one-to-one basis beside target pupils. Although there was wide variation across cases, this high level of SNA-pupil proximity was predominantly justified by adult participants in terms of academic-related support and preventing target pupils' display of challenging behaviour.

Interestingly, data from the OPTIC schedule shed light on the nature of the focused, one-to-one interactions between SNAs and pupils. Specifically, 37% of all SNA-pupil focused interactions were related to social/conduct issues. In contrast, over 55% of SNA-pupil focused interactions were academic-focused. This latter finding points to the intricate relationship between pupils' academic difficulties and challenging behaviour, whereby 17 of the 20 case study pupils were reported to present with learning difficulties. Herein, SNAs' close pupil proximity and support of academic needs was viewed as a preventative factor for challenging behaviour, aimed at reducing potential pupil frustrations and related displays of challenging behaviour. As previously outlined, this compelling relationship between academic and behaviour problems is presented in the literature as a longstanding phenomenon, whereby a reciprocal and interconnected relationship exists between academic achievement and behaviour (Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey, 1997; Kremer, Flower, Huang, & Vaughn, 2016; Nelson, Benner, Lane, & Smith, 2004). Based on the relevance of this topic to research question three (i.e. independence), SNAs' support of pupils' academic needs will be addressed in greater detail in *section 7.5.2*.

Beyond academic support, research findings also recognised close SNA-pupil proximity as a proactive strategy for preventing challenging behaviour across cases and lessons where academic difficulties did not pose issues for pupils. Herein, the one-to-one SNA-pupil seating arrangement was viewed through the lens of 'proximity control'. This behaviour management strategy comprises the adult using his/her physical presence to reduce inappropriate behaviours and increase appropriate ones (Quinn et al., 2000). Across almost all interviews, respondents referred to the strength of this close proximity in preventing minor forms of pupils' challenging behaviour, particularly passive challenging behaviour and non-compliance, and rather, ensuring that the pupil conforms to classroom rules. In

addition, proximity control was used as a reactive strategy, at times, to interrupt the behavioural chain for pupils and reduce the escalation of problematic behaviours (LaVigna et al., 2009). Conversely, some interviewees highlighted the contrary consequences of one-to-one pupil proximity on preventing challenging behaviour, whereby it was recognised to trigger or exacerbate pupils' challenging behaviour. This was evidenced through observed pupil behaviour and during pupil interviews, whereby a few pupils described their aversion to being overly monitored by their SNAs. This finding resonates with a range of international data which highlights how excessive paraprofessional proximity can result in the provocation of problem behaviours (Giangreco, 2010a; Giangreco & Broer, 2005).

Reflecting on such findings, the data verifies that SNA-pupil proximity can act as an effective preventative strategy for challenging behaviour. In contrast, excessive levels of SNA-pupil proximity can be counterproductive in nature, resulting in inadvertent negative effects on the pupil including the exacerbation of challenging behaviour. Moving forward, the need for SNA training is clear to ensure that pupil proximity is contingent with pupils' level of need. In particular, SNAs' work must be guided by evidence-based theories and frameworks for practice, particularly that of scaffolding theory (van de Pol et al., 2010) and positive behaviour support (Carr et al., 2002); aimed at ensuring SNAs' behaviours serve to support, rather than hinder, pupils' positive behaviour and overall movement towards self-management and independence.

7.3.1.2 Movement breaks.

Beyond SNA-pupil proximity, movement breaks were identified as the most common proactive strategy employed across case studies to support pupils with behavioural care needs. Almost all interviewees highlighted the benefits of removing the target pupil from the classroom environment for short periods throughout the school day, to prevent him/her from becoming over-stimulated, frustrated or agitated in the class context. This was endorsed by a range of pupils who outlined the benefits of the breaks on supporting their positive behaviour and well-being. This finding is in line with previous studies (Daly et al., 2016) which point to the strength of movement breaks in supporting pupils to self-regulate their behaviour. Similarly, the SESS

(2018b) endorse the use of relaxing periods or movement breaks throughout the school day as an effective strategy for teaching pupils with SEN.

Although movement breaks were predominantly viewed through a positive lens, variances in practices across classrooms highlighted an array of issues in this regard. These included a lack of pre-planning to guide the scheduling, nature and duration of movement breaks, the significant loss of teaching/learning time for some target pupils and the way in which breaks served as a work avoidance/escape strategy for some pupils. In addition, data highlighted that breaks predominantly occurred on a one-to-one basis between the SNA and pupil, which posed concerns in relation to the development of a social/emotional dependency for some pupils on their SNAs during such periods. Although positive practices were evident in some settings, such as through the use of pre-scheduled, focused, regular, short breaks, this was not the case across all classrooms. Rather, the intended proactive, positive nature of movement breaks regularly posed contrary implications for pupils. Based on such findings, the need for professional input to inform the nature of movement breaks appears pertinent, to ensure that any time spent out of the classroom serves to support, rather than hinder, pupils' overall development. Notably, the DES (2011a) cautions against SNAs managing or providing therapeutic services to pupils, as was previously identified in the *Value for Money* review. This is in light of the particular skill-set required to deliver such therapeutic interventions to children (DES, 2014). Rather, the circular sanctions SNAs to assist pupils in accessing therapy supports in schools, or to assist a therapist in providing support for a child (DES, 2014). Moreover, the most recent NSCE policy advice paper no. 6 (NCSE, 2018) has recommended that moving forward, ISAs may be deployed to mediate therapy programmes but only when the programme is carried out under the direction of qualified personnel and where the ISA has the appropriate training and skills. Accordingly, schools need to reflect on their use of movement breaks with pupils including the timing, duration and nature of the breaks. As recommended in the literature, movement breaks should be scheduled into a pupil's timetable and communicated to the pupil in advance of the teaching session. The use of a timer may also be useful to ensure pupils do not miss excessive teaching/learning time from the classroom (Horridge, Martin-Denham, & Murray, 2015). In addition, the use of group-based breaks may be positive to support pupils' social skill development and optimise use of the SNA resource. Ultimately, classroom breaks must be

purposeful in nature, serving to support the emotional, sensory and/or behavioural regulation of pupils. In cases where specific OT or sensory-based therapeutic interventions are required for pupils throughout the school day, schools need to ensure that these are designed and delivered by appropriately qualified personnel, such as an OT or a SET trained in such interventions, as per DES (2014) guidelines and NCSE (2018) recommendations.

Finally, schools need to consider means of supporting pupils' emotional and behavioural regulation within the class context, in lieu of constantly removing the pupil from the classroom. Notably across some cases, sensory toys were recognised by SNAs and pupils alike as a particularly positive proactive strategy. Such toys were used at the pupil's desk, for the main part, to support pupil attention and to de-fuse stressful situations. Previous studies have highlighted the benefits of providing pupils with access to sensory materials and relaxing spaces within the classroom to enable independent pupil self-regulation (Daly et al., 2016). Accordingly, the need for professional input to support the implementation of momentary breaks within the class content would be particularly useful, not alone for the target pupil but for all pupils. In this way, this would serve to facilitate pupil-led, proactive behavioural strategies, thereby reducing the need for high levels of SNA support or excessive time out of the learning context.

7.3.2 Skill development.

Beyond ecological strategies, findings also shed light on SNAs' involvement in 'positive programming' techniques for preventing challenging behaviour. As outlined by LaVigna and Willis (2005), positive programming involves changing a person's skills to enable him/her to cope better with that environment. Across almost all cases, data highlighted that any skill development undertaken with the target pupil, including skills related to learning, behavioural care needs or independence development, were delivered by the SET on a one-to-one or small group basis, often on a withdrawal basis. Although national policy does not sanction SNAs to deliver systematic instruction to pupils, the DES outlines the SNA's role in terms of "assisting to ensure the prevention of self-injurious or destructive behaviour [and] reinforcing good behaviour on the child's part and acting as a positive role model for the child" (2014, p. 12). In this regard, research findings revealed varying practices

across cases in terms of SNAs' support of pupils' skill development. On one hand, positive practices were recognised across some cases, whereby SNAs supported pupils to become aware of the physiological manifestation of stress in their bodies. In addition, a few SNAs described use of role modelling, social stories and role play techniques with pupils to support pupils' ability to self-regulate. In contrast, the majority of SNAs were not involved in the support of pupils' skill development but rather, operated on a moment-by-moment, day-by-day basis within classrooms. The focus of support appeared more on the containment of challenging behaviour rather than on long-term pupil progress.

This finding resonates with data from the *Value for Money* review (DES, 2011a), which at the time, found that many SNAs were being used to contain pupil behaviour, as distinct from pupils receiving appropriate interventions in school through individualised planning, whole-school pupil management strategies, additional psycho-educational programmes and psychiatric/medical interventions, as required. Moreover, these findings are in line with that of Bowles et al. (2017) in the U.K. Specifically, findings highlighted a distinct lack of knowledge and confidence amongst TAs in explaining the specific heuristic strategies required to scaffold pupils' learning and foster self-scaffolding amongst pupils. Data from this research points to a distinct divide between the special education classroom and the mainstream classroom. In general, SNAs lacked information regarding any skill instruction that may have occurred with pupils outside of the mainstream classroom, in addition to potential means by which SNAs could reinforce the same and encourage the pupil to self-manage his/her behaviour.

Moving forward, schools need to ensure that pupils with behavioural care needs receive appropriate interventions in school to equip them with skills and strategies to operate more autonomously, not alone in relation to challenging behaviour but so too in all other developmental domains. Recommendations of the NCSE (2018) are particularly positive in this regard, whereby they propose a 'new school inclusion model' to deliver the right supports at the right time to pupils with additional care needs. This recommendation is characterised by 10 NCSE regional support teams, aimed at building school and teacher capacity through CPD and in-school support. Such teams would comprise specialist teachers, Special Educational Needs Organisers, speech and language therapists, OTs and behaviour practitioners. With

reference to behaviour management, Cooper and Jacobs (2011) emphasise the importance of providing compensatory skills to individuals through the use of behavioural training. The need for systematic individualised pupil planning is vital, alongside the use of evidence-based programmes delivered by appropriately qualified personnel. A collaborative approach to pupil skill development is also paramount to ensure consistency of approach with target pupils and to support their generalisation of learning across environments (Westwood, 2015). In line with current policy guidelines (DES, 2014), the role of the SNA must be clearly delineated within this planning and implementation process, assisting to ensure the proactive prevention of challenging behaviour by reinforcing pupils' good behaviour and skill development. In addition, the SNA must be equipped with scaffolding strategies, spanning domains of support, repair and heuristic strategies (Radford et al., 2015), to support pupils' movement towards higher levels of self-scaffolding. Notably, several previous studies have highlighted the strength of paraprofessionals in delivering and supporting specific interventions for children when preceded by discrete training in the area (Mazurik-Charles & Stefanou, 2010; Miller, Lane, & Wehby, 2005).

7.3.3 Focused support.

Beyond ecological strategies and positive programming, case studies also shed light on SNAs' involvement in focused strategies to prevent target pupils' challenging behaviour, including antecedent control and use of reward strategies. As outlined by LaVigna and Willis (2005), the purpose of focused supports is to reduce the occurrence of behaviour as rapidly as possible in order to reduce risks and the need for reactive strategies. In terms of antecedent control, almost half of cases referred to the preventative role of the SNA in terms of controlling antecedents in the pupils' environment that may cause upset or anxiety. In particular, the observational skills of the SNA were recognised as being particularly important in watching for potential triggers or stressors that might impact negatively on the pupil and off-set some form of challenging behaviour. Cooper and Jacobs (2011) highlight the importance of identifying and managing contingencies directly related to pupils' behaviour, including antecedents and consequences. Although almost half of SNAs appeared aware of the behavioural triggers for individual pupils,

only one SNA highlighted understanding of the functional behavioural assessment process in systematically identifying triggers and consequences of overt behaviour. This finding highlights the lack of training and involvement of SNAs in such procedures in school, in spite of their prescribed role in aiding to prevent challenging behaviour (DES, 2014). Moreover, SNAs' lack of involvement in recording behavioural data was evident across almost all settings, despite this forming a central tenet of their role (DES, 2014).

In addition to antecedent control, case studies highlighted the varying levels with which SNAs were involved in pupil reward strategies. As outlined in key educational policy (DES, 2014), a central tenet of the SNA role is the reinforcement of pupils' positive behaviour. Findings from the OPTIC schedule were particularly positive in this regard whereby data showed that 84% of all focused interactions between SNAs and pupils were positive in nature, with only 8% negative in nature. Focusing specifically on reinforcement schedules, data showed that although the majority of cases employed use of reward strategies with target pupils, only five of these pertained to behaviour support, including tick-charts and token-reward systems. Positive collaborative practices were evident across all five cases whereby SNAs undertook an observational and monitoring role, with regular pupil updates reported to the class teacher, SET and in one case, the home. The individualised nature of these behavioural approaches was also notable, as evident through clear pupil targets and rewards. In line with findings from LaVigna and Willis (2005), the reinforcement schedules were also recognised to have motivational benefits for the pupils, aiding to minimise the occurrence of challenging behaviour.

Moving forward, schools need to consider the potential role of behavioural approaches to support positive behaviour and discourage negative behaviour in classrooms, particularly for pupils with behavioural care needs. In all cases, the need for collaborative practices and clear role delineation for staff in implementing and supporting behavioural approaches is vital, with due regard for the role of the SNA. Although numerous behavioural strategies can be implemented with pupils, schools must also be aware of the extrinsic nature of reward strategies, whereby rewards should be short-term in nature; aimed at breaking the negative cycle of events so that long-term, pupils begin to develop their own intrinsic motivation for displaying positive behaviour (Cooper & Jacobs, 2011; DES, 2010; O'Leary, 2011).

In this way, the strength of behavioural interventions must be viewed as a temporary solution to supporting pupils' behaviour, with a view to establishing more long-term permanent solutions (LaVigna & Willis, 2005).

7.3.4 Relational role with the pupil.

In addition to the range of preventative strategies aforementioned that align with LaVigna and Willis' (2005) '*Positive Behaviour Support Plan*', case study data also provided insight into the supportive relationship between the SNA and target pupil, reported to occur across almost all cases. The caring nature of the SNA role was particularly highlighted, whereby interviewees referred to the trust, respect and bond evident between SNAs and target pupils. This finding resonates with previous national research which pointed to the emotional support provided by SNAs to target pupils (Ware et al., 2011). In addition, findings from Bowles et al. (2017) in the U.K highlighted the emotional support often provided by the TA to the target pupil. Interestingly, interviewees likened the SNA-pupil relationship to a number of caring models, spanning categories of a friend, mother figure and an emotionally supportive role, such as that of a 'guardian angel'. These analogies were also verified in pupil interviews, particularly that of a 'friend'. These findings resonate with international research in the field whereby pupils with disabilities characterised the paraprofessional-pupil relationship in terms of a *mother, friend, protector* and *primary teacher* (Broer et al., 2005).

On one hand, the positive relationship and emotionally-supportive role of SNAs for target pupils can be viewed in a positive light. This is particularly given the positive correlation between pupils' emotional support and a range of factors, including their social competence, improved adjustment to school, display of fewer behavioural problems and academic learning (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Cooper & Jacobs, 2011; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Murray & Greenberg, 2000, as cited in O'Leary, 2011). Although teachers often present as that 'one caring adult' in a child's life (NEPS, 2015), this research suggests that for some pupils, the SNA, in fact, may assume that relational role. In contrast, schools must be mindful of the depth of vulnerability of some target pupils, particularly those with EBD/SEBD, and the expertise required in providing them with appropriate levels of emotional support.

The professional qualifications of SNAs must be considered, whereby current training standards for SNAs do not align with the magnitude of this role (DES, 2011b). In addition, some interviewees highlighted that when an overly-strong relationship forms between the SNA and pupil, this can result in the creation of an emotional dependency for the pupil on the SNA. Such findings point to the need for clear boundaries on the SNA role to ensure that SNAs work within their professional remit. This issue resonates with findings from the *Value for Money* review (DES, 2011a), which cautioned against SNAs' involvement in duties outside of their remit, including that of therapeutic duties. This is vitally important to ensure that neither pupils nor SNAs are placed in emotionally-vulnerable positions. In this regard, the focus of one-to-one classroom breaks requires consideration, particularly when interviewees highlighted this as a time during which pupils regularly off-load to their SNAs. Specifically, greater clarity is required into the purpose of the classroom breaks and the rationale for one-to-one engagement between SNAs and target pupils during such periods. In scenarios where the breaks are specifically focused on movement or relaxation, the inclusion of additional pupils during such sessions may be beneficial, with a focus on SNAs supporting multiple pupils in a socially-appropriate, inclusive environment. In addition, Ware et al. (2011) highlight the strength of rotating SNAs at a whole-school level to prevent an overly-strong emotional bond forming between the SNA and pupil. Nonetheless, the school cannot overlook the emotional needs of pupils with challenging behaviour whereby these must still be addressed for the pupil, but at a level beyond the role of the SNA. In this regard, regional support teams, as recommended by the NCSE (2018), may serve to provide the right supports to pupils with behavioural care needs by upskilling teachers and through appropriately qualified therapists. In this way, this may reduce the likelihood that SNAs/ISAs engage in work that resides outside of their prescribed remit.

7.3.5 Reactive strategies.

In addition to the range of preventative strategies evidenced across case studies, data showed SNAs' involvement in reactive strategies with target pupils; identified to occur on two main levels: (a) reactive strategies to address minor forms of challenging behaviour (b) reactive strategies to address more significant forms of

challenging behaviour. Focusing specifically on the former, observational data highlighted SNAs' frequent use of pupil prompting to support pupils' compliance with basic classroom rules. Further analysis, based on data from the OPTIC schedule, showed that 37% of the total focused interactions between SNAs and target pupils related to social/conduct issues. Of this figure, 30% were of a positive nature, with less than 7% constituting negative social/conduct-related interactions. This finding is positive whereby in general, SNAs' use of negatively-phrased corrective feedback with pupils was significantly less than their use of positively-phrased prompts or corrective feedback when related to their behaviour. In addition, SNAs were not observed or reported to be involved in implementing any sanctions or punishments with target pupils whereby a general positive approach to behaviour management was evident across all settings.

Overall, the high level of SNA-pupil prompting and corrective feedback could be viewed through a proactive lens, whereby regular SNA prompting can serve to address minor forms of pupils' challenging behaviour, thereby preventing their escalation to more significant forms of challenging behaviour (LaVigna et al., 2009). In contrast, however, the data highlights the intensity to which SNA behavioural prompting occurred for some target pupils, such that across a range of cases, SNA-pupil prompting appeared excessive and non-contingent with pupils' level of need. Reflecting on the literature review, it is clear that whilst the use of SNA prompting may support appropriate pupil behaviour in the classroom, constant adult prompting can pose many difficulties for pupils, particularly that of prompt dependence (Hume et al., 2009). This finding is concerning given the focus within the role of the SNA in developing pupils' independence. In addition, one must also question the degree to which *all* pupils need to conform to *all* classroom rules, whereby greater levels of flexibility may need to be considered for pupils with SEN, particularly in mainstream settings. In light of the overlap of pupil prompting with research question three (i.e. independence), the implications of prompt dependence will be addressed in *section 7.4.2.2*.

In addition to SNAs' use of prompting and redirection to react to minor forms of challenging behaviour, findings also highlighted SNAs' role in reacting to more significant forms of challenging behaviour, particularly during times of behavioural escalation. During such occasions, almost half of cases referred to SNAs' use of

facilitative strategies as a means of de-escalating the pupil, particularly through active listening and one-to-one communication. Feedback from teachers highlighted the benefits of SNA support at such times in reducing pressure on the teacher, ensuring that the teacher can continue to lead the class as the SNA addresses the problematic behaviour. Such findings are reflective of data from the DISS study in the U.K which showed that two thirds of teachers reported that support staff had led to a decrease in their stress levels (Blatchford et al., 2007).

Beyond minor forms of challenging behaviour, participants also outlined how temper tantrums and significant forms of challenging behaviour were characteristic of the majority of target pupils, albeit on a less frequent basis. Findings highlighted the lack of protocols and policies evident for dealing appropriately with such scenarios in almost all settings, whereby the responsibility for de-escalating the pupil and preserving the safety of all personnel appeared to fall predominantly on the SNA. During such scenarios, participants reported target pupil withdrawal as the main reactive strategy employed by SNAs, whereby the vulnerability and stress on SNAs and other school staff was particularly voiced. As aforementioned, the complexities of dealing with physically aggressive behaviour are emphasised in the literature (Cooper & Jacobs, 2011), with due regard for the potential legal implications for school personnel in cases of physical intervention or restraint. Accordingly, the need for inter-disciplinary communication and guidance from child and adolescent mental health workers is paramount so that appropriate procedures can be formalised and implemented in crisis situations of challenging or violent behaviour. This is particularly important given that two of the core duties of an SNA involve preserving the safety of the pupil and others with who the pupil is in contact, and assisting to ensure the prevention of self-injurious or destructive behaviour (DES, 2014). Whole-school training and guidelines for those working with pupils with behavioural care needs is also paramount, to ensure that systematic, evidence-based approaches to behavioural support are adopted and employed consistently by all school personnel, including SNAs. Notably, this is emphasised in recommendations by the NCSE (2018), whereby the NCSE have called on the DES to arrange for the immediate preparation and publication of guidance for schools on the management of extreme challenging behaviours and restrictive practices.

7.4. Research Question 3:

To what extent do SNAs support/hinder the development of target pupils' independence in mainstream primary schools?

The third research question sought to examine the extent to which SNAs support/hinder pupils' development of independence in mainstream primary schools, as based on data from the large-scale survey, systematic observations and case studies. Firstly, case study data revealed that all target pupils were perceived by teachers and SNAs to display lower levels of independence than that of their typically developing peers. Such difficulties ranged in degree and severity across target pupils, spanning an array of domains. These included organisation, self-care, learning, social skills, emotional skills, motor skills, and ability to conform to classroom rules. Data from the large-scale survey was in line with case study findings, whereby almost 80% of SNA survey respondents perceived their target pupils to have heightened dependence on them, as compared to other pupils in the same class level. This contrasted with less than 10% of SNA survey respondents who perceived their target pupil to have low dependence on them, as compared to other pupils in the same class level. Although all but one case study pupil was reported to have made progress in independent functioning over their time in school, case study teachers and SNAs viewed the continuation of SNA support for target pupils as paramount to facilitate their day-to-day functioning and inclusion in mainstream primary schools. In general, the developmental nature of independent skill development was recognised across the primary school system, whereby greater levels of support were perceived as necessary for pupils in younger classes.

7.4.1 Whole-school approaches.

Considering SNAs' role in supporting or hindering pupils' development of independence skills, factors at whole-school and classroom levels were identified within the case study data. At a whole-school level, data revealed the role of school leadership in ensuring that pupil-SNA dependency does not develop over time. Positive practices were recognised across an array of schools, particularly in terms of SNA rotation and use of the shared SNA model. In this regard, SNAs were rotated in some schools across pupils and classrooms on a daily, weekly and/or annual basis. This sharing of SNA resources was recognised to align with the most

recent DES circular on SNAs (DES, 2014) which provides schools with the autonomy to manage their allocation of SNA support in light of pupils' changing levels of need over time. This practice was noted as being particularly positive in reducing pupils' dependency on specific SNAs, as well as on SNA support in general. In contrast, almost half of case study schools did not engage in this practice, with SNA-pupil assignment reported to have remained constant over a number of years, ranging from one to seven years. This finding corroborated with data from the large-scale survey, which showed that over 50% of SNA respondents reported working with the same target pupil for more than two years, with 23% of SNAs working with the target pupil for five years or more. On one hand, this significant timespan of SNA-pupil assignment was perceived by some case study interviewees through a positive lens, such that SNAs can serve to provide consistency for target pupils over time, particularly during periods of transition and emotional instability. In fact, recent data from the NCSE (2015c, 2016a, 2016b) verifies the potential role of the SNA in supporting children's well-being, particularly during times of anxiety, stress and transitions. In contrast, the continuous pairing of the SNA and target child is questionable, whereby data suggested that in some cases, pupils had become dependent on one specific SNA, particularly at an emotional level. This was also evident in feedback from some pupils who referred to their SNA in a possessive manner. In accordance with national policy documentation (DES, 2014), school leaders need to ensure that the quantum of SNA support allocated to the school is deployed across the system in an appropriate manner, with due regard for the changing levels of pupils' needs over time. High levels of systemic planning and timely review are essential within schools to ensure that SNA support serves to increase, rather than decrease, pupil independence over time.

Beyond the whole-school level, a review of classroom-based practices shed light on the role of SNAs in supporting or hindering pupils' development of independence. In particular, this related to SNA-pupil proximity, SNA-pupil prompting and use of reward strategies.

7.4.2 Classroom-based practices.

7.4.2.1 SNA-pupil proximity.

As previously outlined, systematic observations showed that across cases, SNAs spent on average over 40% of their time seated on a one-to-one basis beside target pupils. Although there was high variation across cases in this behaviour, the data points to the significant time period that target pupils are in receipt of intensive one-to-one SNA support when viewed at a total level across cases. This finding was verified in case study interviews, where 50% of SNAs described how they position their seat directly beside the target pupil for the majority of each school day. In contrast, the other 50% of case study SNAs outlined how they seek to strategically move to and from the target pupil, as required, observing the pupil from a distance when direct pupil support is not required. This positive practice was verified in systematic observational data whereby beyond one-to-one pupil proximity, over half of SNAs were observed to rove and monitor the classroom, work with non-target pupils and engage in secondary care-associated tasks (DES, 2014). Such practices occurred at varying levels across cases whilst the SNA observed the target pupil from a distance. In two cases, SNAs were also observed to work with the target pupil and their peers in small group settings. The behaviour of these SNAs signified high SNA awareness of the potential negative implications of over-monitoring pupils through one-to-one assignment. Rather, positive practices included SNAs observing pupils from a distance and providing 'wait time' to pupils before intervening. Similarly, almost half of SNAs provided short-term targets for pupils to encourage independent functioning during academic work, which was coupled with positive reinforcement. Such observations were reflective of what Egilson and Traustadottir (2009) referred to as an 'invisible' assistant; a model of support that requires insight, knowledge and skills to recognise when and how to intervene appropriately with pupils.

In contrast, the high, consistent levels of SNA-pupil proximity, particularly the one-to-one SNA-pupil seating arrangements, were predominantly justified by teachers and SNAs in terms of academic-related support and preventing pupils' display of challenging behaviour, as aforementioned. In general, findings from case study data suggested a general trend between pupil dependence on SNA support, the pupil's level of academic difficulties and the degree to which the academic task was

differentiated to meet the pupil's needs. In this regard, pupils with greater academic difficulties appeared to be in receipt of higher levels of SNA support and concurrently, displayed higher levels of SNA dependence, particularly when academic tasks were not differentiated by the class teacher. Classroom observations showed how the academic-related interactions between the SNAs and target pupils predominantly spanned from task commencement to task completion, with some pupils also displaying high SNA dependence in terms of organising learning materials. With regard to pupils' academic work, observations suggested a dominant focus on SNAs' support of task completion with pupils, rather than the fostering of pupils' cognitive understanding or academic independence. This finding resonates strongly with previous data from Rubie-Davies et al. (2010) in the U.K, based on their comparison of TA-pupil interactions with that of teacher-pupil interactions.

Interview data highlighted discrepancy across case study pupils' behaviour in relation to dependence on the SNA. Specifically, there was a 60:40 split, as reported by target pupils' teachers and SNAs, between pupils deemed dependent on the SNA and pupils deemed to be more independent. In terms of the former, interviewees referred to target pupils' behaviour in terms of displaying 'learned helplessness', 'laziness' and a 'reliance on support', with pupil feedback verifying a perceived need for SNA assistance to support in-class functioning, particularly on an academic level. Such findings resonate with previous national and international data which highlight issues related to pupil learned helplessness, over-dependence, and overreliance on SNAs, TAs and paraprofessionals (Elliott, 2004; Giangreco, 2010a; Keating & O'Connor, 2012; Logan, 2006; Shevlin et al., 2008). In contrast, almost 40% of case study pupils were described in terms of rejecting SNA support, demonstrating an aversion to close SNA proximity and seeking to operate more autonomously. This was particularly relevant for more senior pupils in schools, whereby the consistent SNA support was perceived by a few pupils in a negative light. This resonates clearly with international findings, such that one of the inadvertent detrimental effects of excessive paraprofessional proximity can be that of feelings of stigmatisation and loss of personal control for pupils (Giangreco, 2010a).

7.4.2.2 SNA-pupil prompting.

In tandem with SNA-pupil proximity, case study observations also highlighted the level of prompting which all SNAs engaged with target pupils. This varied across cases ranging from low level pupil reminders to very high levels of consistent pupil prompting. As previously outlined, pupil prompting was used by SNAs to support pupils' behaviour, particularly aimed at ensuring pupils' compliance with classroom rules both as a preventative and reactive strategy. Systematic observational data, as coded using the OPTIC schedule, shed light on the nature of all of the focused interactions between SNAs and pupils. Findings revealed that over 55% of the total focused SNA-pupil interactions were academic-focused, with 37% constituting social/conduct interactions. Notably, many of the academic-focused interactions pertained to SNAs' support of pupils' learning and oral differentiation of academic material; a matter that will be discussed in further detail in relation to research question four. Nonetheless, classroom observations showed that many of the academic and behavioural interactions between SNAs and target pupils were prompt-related; a finding that resonates with previous national data. Specifically, research conducted by Ware et al. (2011) showed verbal prompting as the most common means by which SNAs acted as an agent of differentiation. In this regard, SNAs were observed to engage in academic prompting, including using a prompt to jog the pupil's memory or directing the pupil to a specific part of the task.

In contrast, non-academic prompting focused more on encouraging the child to pay attention, to stay on task, or to behave. Akin to Ware et al.'s findings (2011), numerous interviewees referred to the need for high levels of pupil prompting to support pupils' academic and behavioural needs, including academic engagement and task completion. Although systematic data was not collected in relation to pupils' on and off-task behaviour, naturalistic classroom observations and interviews suggested that SNAs' close pupil proximity, alongside regular pupil prompting, supported pupils' classroom engagement, on-task behaviour and work output. In contrast, during times when the SNA was not working with the target pupil, pupils' levels of off-task behaviour were often observed as being more pronounced. Such naturalistic observations align with previous research from the DISS project which pointed to the beneficial effect of the presence of support staff on pupils in terms of increased classroom engagement, as evident in increased levels of pupils' on-task

behaviour and in the reduction in pupils' off-task behaviour (Blatchford et al., 2009a).

Although pupil prompting can be facilitative in nature, research also points to the negative implications that adult prompting can pose for pupils, particularly in terms of prompt dependence, reduced levels of pupil participation, increased pupil passivity, loss of feelings of control and learned helplessness (Goodson et al., 2007). As previously outlined, this has been highlighted as a significant issue related to paraprofessional support (Causton-Theoharis, 2009). Interestingly, case study observations highlighted that verbal prompts appeared to occur more frequently than any other form of pupil prompting. In contrast, only two SNAs were observed to use visual cues as a low-prompt strategy and three SNAs observed to use non-verbal gesturing. Notably, Koyama and Wang (2011) outline that of all adult-delivered prompts, verbal cues are the most difficult to fade, whereby they can significantly impede independent performance of learners. In addition, case study data showed limited awareness amongst almost all SNAs in terms of the potential negative implications of constant pupil prompting on pupils' level of independence. Rather, it appeared that the focus on encouraging pupil engagement, compliance with classroom rules and task completion appeared to take precedence over encouraging autonomous pupil functioning in class.

Moving forward, SNAs require greater awareness of the potential negative implications of over-prompting pupils. SNAs must become familiar with the prompting hierarchy, ranging from full physical assistance right up to independent pupil functioning (Causton-Theoharis, 2009; Fields, 2013). SNAs need to ensure that the least intrusive prompts are employed with pupils, only as and when required, such that pupils are firstly given the opportunity to respond to natural environmental cues independently (Fields, 2013). Nonetheless, in all cases, the prompting technique must be tailored to the individual learner's needs. In addition, SNAs need awareness of the strategy of 'planned ignoring', particularly when prompts relate to inappropriate or attention-seeking behaviours. Moreover, as outlined by Hume et al. (2009), strategies that promote pupil independence must also be embedded in the acquisition and instructional phases. In this way, a shift can occur over time from SNA support to an alternative stimulus that provides the pupil with cues and information about expectations. Schools must also consider

alternate, evidence-based strategies to promote independent functioning for pupils, beyond that of the SNA, include video modelling, individual work systems, visual cues, activity schedules and self-monitoring procedures (Cooper & Jacobs, 2011; Copeland & Hughes, 2000; DES, 2010). For this to occur, strong collaboration is required between the SET, class teacher and SNA so that initial skill acquisition, as taught to the pupil by the mainstream teacher or SET, can be reinforced and supported by the SNA thereafter, with due regard for employing the strategies that promote pupil independence. Undoubtedly, involvement of the pupils' parents in such processes would be highly beneficial to ensure consistency of approach across settings.

Based on such findings, the need for explicit training for SNAs in this domain is paramount. Notably, Giangreco et al. (2011) highlight that when services are delivered by inadequately trained personnel, serious problems may arise, such as creating prompt dependency, evoking and escalating challenging behaviours and inhibiting academic and social progress. In contrast, a review of the literature shows a range of studies that have effectively implemented training programmes with paraprofessionals to promote pupil independence and decrease the level of pupil prompting required, predominantly based on principles of applied behaviour analysis. Examples include Hall et al. (2010), Schepis et al. (2001) and Robinson (2011). In all cases, the autonomous functioning of pupils is dependent on the gradual fading of prompts from the supervising adult. Notably, cues can relate to a range of domains, including prosocial behaviour, academic tasks, and/or social skills.

SNAs also must be provided with evidence-based frameworks for practice to guide the systematic fading of prompts towards independent pupil performance. Case study data clearly showed that in the current research, SNAs were operating in the absence of any evidence-based frameworks for practice. This was verified in SNA interviews through statements such as "going with your gut" and "trial and error learning". A review of the literature shows that the introduction of the conceptual model of scaffolding, as proposed by van de Pol et al. (2010), may prove particularly useful to guide SNAs' work in providing contingent support to pupils, and thereafter, aid them to fade the support and transfer responsibility to the pupil. The work of Radford et al. (2015) could also be particularly informative, whereby their focus on

'heuristic scaffolding' and related strategies, such as modelling, instructing, explaining, questioning, prompting and/or feeding back to pupils could aid to guide more effective interactions between SNAs and pupils. Moreover, the implementation of more behaviourist strategies, including chaining, time delay procedures, errorless learning, fading, cue redundancy, task analyses and correction procedures must also be considered (Alberto & Troutman, 1995; Snell, 1992, as cited in Giangreco et al., 1997). Focusing on such strategies, a review of case study data showed that less than half of SNAs engaged in time delay procedures, such that SNA prompting occurred before pupils had an opportunity to engage in the desired response independently (Libby et al., 2008). Again, the negative impact of such models of support on pupil independence cannot be overlooked, whereby SNA practices need to stem from theoretically and empirically-grounded foundations.

7.4.2.3 Reward strategies, pupil self-regulation and self-management.

Beyond the varying practices in SNA-pupil proximity and SNA-pupil prompting, case study data highlighted the high-usage of reward strategies with target pupils, particularly to support independence development. Positive practices, as described by the NBSS (2006), were deduced in five cases where individualised, pupil-friendly reward systems were in place, as based on clear, measurable targets. In such cases, the targets were outlined and communicated to the pupil both in written and oral format. Thereafter, the SNA monitored the pupil's behaviour through a token-economy system, with regular results communicated to the pupil, class teacher, SET and in one case, the home. Pupil involvement in such strategies highlighted their benefits on pupil motivation, independent functioning, positive behaviour and application to learning tasks, with pupils observed to regularly check in with the SNA to verify progress. Similarly, use of the 'first-then' strategy was also observed to be used with some pupils with comparably positive outcomes. Nonetheless, as per previous findings by Radford, Blatchford, and Webster (2011), in cases where the focus was placed solely on task completion, this was observed to compromise the quality of work produced by the pupil.

Although pupil reward strategies were observed to be effective across cases, the over-use of reward strategies in classrooms has been subject to criticism. As previously outlined, this can result in an adult-controlled view of the learning

environment, with negative implications for pupils' intrinsic motivation. The need to increase pupils' levels of personal and psychological control over their own behaviour is paramount, particularly given the strong emphasis within the SNA *Circular 0030/2014* on supporting pupils' development of independent skills (DES, 2014). From a theoretical and pedagogical viewpoint, this involves principles of pupil self-regulation and self-management, whereby the aim is to move the child along a continuum from adult-control (external authority) to pupil control (internal evaluation), with the ultimate goal of realising pupil-managed independent learning and behaviour (O'Leary, 2011; Westwood, 2015).

A review of case study data shows that across all cases, limited strategies were evident to support pupils' self-regulatory or self-management skills. Positive practices were reported across four cases involving the use of organisational supports with target pupils. In addition, one pupil was observed to have a self-monitoring strategy adhered to his desk to support self-regulation of behaviour. Conversely however, pupils' usage of these strategies was only observed in one class context, whereby in the remaining cases, the strategies appeared neglected by pupils, SNAs and teachers alike. Although self-management strategies may have potentially been part of teaching/learning for target pupils in the special education context, there was no evidence of their implementation, generalisation or support within the mainstream class context. Rather, observations pointed to an SNA-directed classroom environment for the majority of target pupils, with limited opportunities for the pupil to influence his/her own self-regulation. For example, in cases where sensory-based toys were used within the classroom, these were retained by the SNA and given to the pupil when the SNA deemed it appropriate and necessary. With regard to movement breaks, no pupil had the facility to request a break, when required. Rather, these were pre-scheduled or decided by the teacher or SNA. Similarly, an analysis of learning environments showed limited visual reminders for pupils regarding appropriate classroom behaviour or de-escalation strategies, other than a generic list of class rules, often presented in text-format only.

Such findings point to the need for greater support for pupils with behavioural care needs at the 'classroom support level' (DES, 2010) beyond that of SNA support. Use of Westwood's (2015) five-step procedure for teaching self-management to

pupils with SEN would be particularly relevant, as previously presented in *Chapter Two*, whereby SNAs could support pupils' maintenance and generalisation of learning to the mainstream class context. Ultimately, schools need to place greater focus on the continuum of support framework, as emphasised by NEPS (DES, 2010) and the NCSE (2018), to ensure that pupils' additional care needs are met in an appropriate manner to promote pupil autonomy and reduce the need for one-to-one support.

7.5 Research Question 4:

To what extent do the classroom experiences of pupils with behavioural care needs in receipt of SNA support differ to that of their average-attaining peers?

The fourth and final research question sought to ascertain the extent to which the classroom experiences of pupils with behavioural care needs in receipt of SNA support differ to that of their average attaining peers. This question focused predominantly on the systematic observational data, in addition to the qualitative findings from the semi-structured interviews. To obtain a broad picture of the classroom experiences of pupils with behavioural care needs, data analysis was undertaken across all cases. Nonetheless, due regard was given to variances across individual cases, whereby the researcher was cognisant of the impact of an array of interacting factors on pupils' experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Frederickson & Cline, 2015).

7.5.1 Seating context.

An analysis of target pupils' seating contexts showed that across cases, target pupils were observed to occupy the usual class seating context for 76.7% of all observations. In contrast, target pupils were separated from their peers during almost one quarter of the total observation time (22.5%). An initial review of such findings may appear concerning, such that almost one quarter of target pupils' time was spent away from their peers. However, data analysis at an individual case level provides greater insight in this regard. Specifically, findings show that 15 of the 20 target pupils were seated in their usual class seating arrangements on a full-time basis, with the remaining five target pupils fully separated from their peers (case #2, #3, #5, #6, #7). This separate seating arrangement constituted a desk positioned at

the side or back of the classroom, away from the pupils' peers. Qualitative feedback from teachers and SNAs vindicated such exclusionary practices on a number of grounds, including the support of pupils' on-task behaviour, work rate, attention and positive behaviour. For three of these five pupils, this was reported to be in line with pupils' preferences, whereby the usual class seating context was reported as being 'over-whelming' for them.

As previously outlined, research shows individual work-stations to pose both positive and negative implications for pupils; the former, in terms of minimising distractions and aiding concentration (Briggs, 2016; Daly et al., 2016), whilst the latter constituting a subtle form of segregation for pupils (Webster & Blatchford, 2015). Reflecting on case study data, it is clear that for the most part, individual pupils' needs guided their seating contexts within classrooms, whereby interviewees across almost half of cases described how numerous alternate seating arrangements had been tried with target pupils in an effort to support their learning and behaviour. Nonetheless, the implementation of full-time pupil segregation within classrooms remains questionable, particularly in light of the social and emotional implications of such practices (Hornby, Atkinson, & Howard, 2013). It is also notable that total findings across cases showed that target pupils were observed in group settings in less than 1% of observations. These findings are reflective of data from the DISS study (Blatchford et al., 2008) and more dated observation studies (Tizard, 1988), which point to the limited overall time that pupils spend in group work settings. This finding is particularly concerning given the focus on collaborative learning in the *Primary School Curriculum* (GOI, 1999) and the positive implications that group work can pose for inclusionary practices (Winter & O'Raw, 2010). Moving forward, the need for more flexible and creative seating arrangements in classrooms may be beneficial for all, including an array of individual workstations and group tables. Winter and O'Raw (2010, p. 24) highlight how the successful development of inclusive schools involves "creating learning environments that respond to the needs of all learners and have the greatest impact on their social, emotional, physical and cognitive development". In this way, the individual work setting could be used on a more temporary basis, where required, by a range of pupils, facilitating the needs of target pupils and their classmates in a more inclusive, yet flexible learning environment.

7.5.2 Academic tasks.

With regard to academic tasks, data focused on the degree to which target pupils' classroom tasks were in line with, or different to that of their average attaining peers. It is important to note that as per previous observational studies (Webster & Blatchford, 2013a), the data only examined differentiation in terms of the physical task in which pupils were engaged (i.e. product). The author recognises that this presents as a very narrow view of differentiation, whereby systematic data was not collected on any other forms of differentiation occurring within classrooms. In particular, the absence of data related to the nature of talk between adults and pupils is recognised, as conducted in previous international studies (Radford et al., 2011). Accordingly, it is likely that findings present as an underestimation of the extent of differentiation that took place in classrooms. Nonetheless, total findings across cases showed that in almost all lessons (87%), target pupils completed the same classwork as their average attaining peers. In contrast, only 2.6% of overall lessons involved differentiated classwork for target pupils, with 10.4% of overall lessons involving the target pupil undertaking a different topic/subject than that of his/her peers. These findings are in line with data from the MaSt study in the U.K (Webster & Blatchford, 2013a), whereby 81% of all tasks given to pupils with statements were the same as that given to comparison pupils. Similarly, differentiated and different tasks were observed to occur at minimal levels; 12% and 5% of all tasks respectively.

As previously highlighted, these findings are particularly concerning given that 17 of the 20 target pupils were identified as having learning difficulties. Rather, across all cases, the dominant means of differentiation appeared to be through SNA support. This finding resonates with data from previous national research, whereby Ware et al. (2011) deduced minimal evidence of differentiation in practice in Irish classrooms other than that of SNA support. Interestingly, case study findings align with that of Ware et al. (2011), whereby verbal prompting was identified as the most frequent form of differentiation used by SNAs. Furthermore, a focus on individual case study data showed that in two cases (#5 & #6), SNAs were used exclusively for task differentiation for target pupils, such that in both cases, target pupils were taken to a separate room off the main classroom to engage in alternate academic material with the SNA, as pre-planned by the SNA. This finding clearly points to the stretched role

of the SNA, whereby such duties extend significantly beyond the prescribed care role (DES, 2014).

On one hand, SNAs' support of pupils during academic work can be viewed through a positive lens, such as in terms of enabling curriculum access for pupils. In contrast, however, Ware et al. (2011) suggest an over-reliance on SNAs as agents of differentiation within classrooms; a finding also verified in this study's data. In addition, the strong reliance of SNAs for oral differentiation of material with pupils, including prompting and 'stereo-teaching' (Webster & Blatchford, 2015) requires serious consideration, given that findings from Radford et al. (2011) highlight the limitations of TAs' oral interactions with pupils over that of teacher-pupil interactions. Although this study did not gather systematic data in relation to SNAs' oral interactions with pupils, naturalistic observations pointed to SNAs' dominant use of closed questions and their focus on task completion with pupils rather than on pupil understanding, skill development or quality of work. Ultimately, international findings in this regard cannot be dismissed, given the similarity between U.K and Irish findings on numerous other grounds. Moreover, it must be acknowledged that oral differentiation of material clearly stretches SNAs' role into the teaching/learning-support domain; an area that exceeds their prescribed care remit (DES, 2014).

Moving forward, priority must be given to differentiated teaching and learning in classrooms to ensure the effective inclusion of all learners. Schools must look beyond the role of the SNA, particularly considering the previous findings from the U.K that revealed the negative relationship between the level of TA support and the academic progress of pupils (Blatchford et al., 2011). In this regard, several researchers and educational bodies have queried the assignment of the least qualified staff to pupils with highly complex needs, particularly in cases where the paraprofessional support relates to pupil instruction (Giangreco et al., 2005). Although some research has pointed to the potential positive impact of support staff on pupil attainment, this appears predominantly in cases where staff are trained and prepared for specific curricular interventions (Alborz, Pearson, Farrell, & Howes, 2009; Slavin, Lake, Davis, & Madden, 2010). Accordingly, schools must seek to overcome any potential barriers to differentiation in classrooms, as identified in the literature, including the lack of time for collaborative planning and any lack of

expertise or access to relevant professional development for teachers (Farrell, Dyson, Polat, Hutcheson, & Gallannaugh, 2007; Shevlin et al., 2009; Ware et al., 2011).

Differentiation should seek to ensure that all pupils are academically challenged within their zone of proximal development, rather than in the 'frustration zone' (Vygotsky, 1978). Possibilities for differentiation must be considered across all three levels, including content, process and product (Westwood, 2015). Moreover, where additional educational support is required for pupils, this must be provided by sufficiently qualified personnel. This will ensure that the quality of pupil tuition correlates with pupils' level of need. With regard to differentiation, Ryan (2015) also argues for greater reflection regarding the hidden messages inherent in such practices, whereby differentiation can often present as synonymous with a deficit model of discourse. Rather, Ryan (2015) argues for greater use of a *Universal Design for Learning* approach in classrooms, as underpinned by more flexible methods of planning and teaching (CAST, 2018). This includes multiple means of presenting new material to pupils, multiple means of supporting pupils' learning and multiple means for pupils to express their learning. In this way, the teacher can become focused from the outset on "designing lessons in cognisance of the range of learner differences in their class, such that modifications facilitate educational success not only for children with particular SEN but for all children in the class" (Ryan, 2015, p. 86).

The revised allocation process for SETs to mainstream primary schools, as introduced by the DES in September 2017, presents a range of positive options for schools (DES, 2017a). This process, alongside alternate models of paraprofessional support, will be explored in greater detail in *Chapter Eight*. Nonetheless, greater clarity is required for SNAs in terms of their role in "enabling curriculum access" and "assist[ing] to ensure the delivery of both class teaching and additional teaching" (DES, 2014, pp. 6-8), as outlined in *Circular 0030/2014*. Most notably, research conducted in the U.K may offer direction in this regard, both in terms of the scaffolding framework presented by Radford et al. (2015) and the 'Planning and Assessing for Independence' model (Bosanquet et al., 2016) which spans domains of correcting, modelling, clueing, prompting and pupil self-scaffolding. Although framework adaptations are likely to be required for application within an Irish

context, the model offers strong direction for informing future training and research in Ireland, alongside *support*, *repair* and *heuristic roles* within the scaffolding framework (Radford et al., 2015). With an explicit focus on evidence-based practice informed by theory and research, the merits of these scaffolding frameworks require acknowledgement within an Irish context, particularly in terms of fostering independence in pupils.

7.5.3 Interactions.

Lastly, data analysis shed light on the significant difference between target pupils' classroom experiences and that of their average attaining peers with regards to teacher, SNA and peer interactions. Firstly, overall findings across cases showed that target pupils experienced a high degree of interactions with SNAs. Such interactions were observed to occur at the expense of interactions with the class teacher at a whole-class level. In general, SNAs were seen to engage in high levels of focused, one-to-one interactions with target pupils, whilst class teachers were observed to predominantly lead the class at a whole-class level. In this regard, average attaining peers spent significantly more time as part of the class audience with the teacher leading the class, whilst target pupils were in receipt of focused individual interactions from the SNA. Such findings are in line with previous international studies, including the DISS and MaSt studies (Blatchford et al., 2008; Webster & Blatchford, 2015). Webster and Blatchford (2013a) point to the typically passive role assumed by control pupils in teaching and learning, whereby they outlined how over one third of all control pupils' observations in their U.K study concerned class-level interaction with the teachers (35%). Interestingly, data from this study showed that comparison pupils spent over 60% of their time as part of the class audience; a finding which contrasts with that of target pupils (36%).

Secondly, there was a large and significant difference between the numbers of SNA interactions with target pupils than that of comparison pupils. In fact, overall findings showed that SNAs rarely supported average-attaining comparison pupils. Rather, findings showing that across case studies, SNAs spent 13.2% of their time with a non-target individual pupil who often required academic or behaviour support. This was observed to occur in classrooms where the SNA was shared between pupils, or

where the SNA operated more at a classroom level rather than an individual pupil level. In contrast, SNAs spent over 40% of their time with target pupils on a one-to-one level. Findings from the OPTIC schedule showed that the focused interactions between the SNA and target pupil were predominantly positive in nature, with almost double the amount of *positive academic* interactions observed over that of *positive social/conduct* interactions. In contrast, comparison pupils were observed to receive significantly less individual interactions from the SNA. Again, this finding resonates with findings from the MaSt study which showed that only 5% of interactions with control pupils were from TAs (Webster & Blatchford, 2013a).

Thirdly, data showed that although target pupils experienced a high level of focused interactions from the SNA, target pupils also received significantly more focused interactions from the class teacher than that received by comparison pupils. This finding is in line with data from the MaSt study (Webster & Blatchford, 2013a), which showed that statemented pupils had, overall, twice as many interactions with teachers in group and one-to-one contexts compared with control pupils. A review of data from the OPTIC schedule shows that this predominantly varied between *positive academic* and *positive social/conduct* interactions, with more interactions of the former. In general, however, focused interactions from the class teacher for both target pupils and comparison pupils were particularly low, with teachers placing significantly greater emphasis on whole-class teaching over individual interactions. Instead, in cases where target pupils required one-to-one support, this was predominantly provided by the SNA rather than that of the class teacher. This was verified in semi-structured interviews, whereby some teachers noted the benefits of SNA support in ensuring that target pupils' individual needs can be met, whilst the teacher can continue to engage with the main class cohort. Nonetheless, such findings highlight that in spite of the SNA support, class teachers continue to afford significantly more focused time to target pupils than that of their average-attaining peers. This issue is outlined in the literature, which shows that teachers often spend additional time interacting with pupils whose behaviours are not focused on the lesson being presented, resulting in less time available for other pupils (Pierangelo & Giuliani, 2008).

Fourthly, findings revealed a small yet significant difference between the number of interactions that target pupils had with their peers when compared with interactions between comparison pupils and their peers. Specifically, target pupils were observed to interact significantly less frequently with their peers (8.66%) than that of interactions between comparison pupils and their peers (14.35%). This finding is in line with data from the MaSt study which showed that pupils with statements tended to experience far fewer interactions with peers than that of control pupils; 18% vs. 33% respectively (Webster & Blatchford, 2013a). Notably, a review of overall findings points to the particularly low level of peer interactions that occurred across classrooms, both for target and comparison pupils. The low figure is even more apparent when compared with data from the U.K, as aforementioned. This finding reflects the limited amount of paired and group work that was observed across classrooms, whereby whole-class teaching was observed to be the dominant teaching methodology employed.

Considering the difference between peer interaction figures for target and comparison pupils, a review of the data suggests that the level of one-to-one interactions between SNAs and target pupils may have presented as a mediating factor in this regard. Herein, comparison pupils were observed to engage in more informal interactions with their peers than occurred for target pupils, whereby the SNA appeared to present as a barrier/buffer for such informal interactions. In addition, analysis at the individual case level showed that during paired work in classrooms, two target pupils were paired with their SNAs in lieu of a classmate. This observation was also verified in one pupil interview as typical classroom practice. Such findings are in accordance with national and international research in the field which highlight how excessive paraprofessional proximity can lead to interference with peer interactions, such that paraprofessionals can create physical or symbolic barriers between a pupil with disabilities and his/her classmates (Carrig, 2004; DES, 2011a; Giangreco, 2010a; Giangreco & Broer, 2005). Observation data also highlighted the negative implications for target pupils when they were seated away from their peers. Specifically, data showed significantly less peer interactions for four of the five pupils that were physically separated from their peers, when compared to the peer interactions of their comparison pupils. Again, this resonates with previous data in the field, whereby separation from classmates can have

negative implications on peer interactions (Giangreco et al., 2005). Such findings are particularly concerning, given the fact that research highlights that pupils with challenging behaviour can often be rejected by their peers (Cooper & Jacobs, 2011). This issue was noted across a range of semi-structured interviews whereby teachers and SNAs described the social isolation of some target pupils within the class. In light of this finding, schools must ensure that SNA support of target pupils is always positive in nature, such that it does not pose concomitant negative implications for pupils' social interactions. Notably, recommendations from the *Value for Money* review (DES, 2011a) include the use of alternative models of support within classrooms that promote pupils' socialisation, such as peer-support.

Finally, data highlighted how target pupils and comparison pupils differed significantly in terms of the number of 'no interactions' that occurred over the observation period. Specifically, data showed that comparison pupils spent almost double the amount of time not interacting in the classroom when compared with target pupils (21.72% versus 10.30% respectively). Interestingly, international findings showed control pupils to have only slightly more 'no interactions' than statemented pupils (26% versus 24% respectively) (Webster & Blatchford, 2013a), contrasting with that of Irish findings. Such periods of 'no interaction' generally constituted times when pupils were engaging in independent written tasks. Observations showed that whilst comparison pupils' interactions were minimal during independent work, target pupils, on the other hand, regularly interacted with their SNA. The level of target pupil-SNA interactions varied across cases, ranging from almost consistent academic and behaviour-related interactions, to less frequent, intermittent interactions. This finding resonates with interview data which highlighted the central role of the SNA in preventing minor forms of challenging behaviour and providing both behaviour and academic-related prompts to target pupils, particularly during 'independent' tasks. This finding also highlights the limited amount of time that target pupils spent engaging in self-scaffolded, independent work in the classroom without some form of academic or behavioural support. This finding is particularly concerning given the fact that the SNA role is intended to develop rather than inhibit pupils' independence (DES, 2014). Again, this points to issues regarding the lack of task differentiation for pupils and the potential lack of contingent levels of support provided by SNAs to target pupils.

In summary, a reflection on the cumulative interaction data across all case studies shows both the strengths and limitations of SNA deployment in mainstream classrooms. On the positive, SNAs' support of target pupils resulted in increased levels of one-to-one support for target pupils in the mainstream class context, superseding that received by comparison peers. In contrast, this one-to-one support was viewed to occur at the expense of target pupils' interactions with the class teacher at a whole-class level, in addition to peer-interactions and opportunities for 'no interactions' during assigned independent work. On reflection, one must query the quality of the one-to-one interactions received by target pupils from SNAs and specifically, their impact on target pupils' progress, independence and holistic development. This matter is particularly relevant given the minimal training standards of SNAs (DES, 2011a) and the level of focused interactions that were coded in terms of SNAs providing pupils with academic support. This issue becomes even more salient when such focused interactions were seen to interfere with target pupils' interactions with the class teacher, peers, as well as opportunities for independent work. Although focused interactions from the SNA may have supported target pupils' on-task behaviour (a finding surmised from naturalistic observations alone), this is only relevant if the nature and quality of the focused interactions superseded that of the alternative. Given the fact that naturalistic observations suggested a dominant focus on SNAs' support of task completion with pupils rather than the fostering of pupils' cognitive growth or movement towards academic independence, the value of this high level of individual SNA support for target pupils is questionable. This is further compounded by the fact that SNAs' provision of academic support lies outside of their prescribed remit (DES, 2014).

In addition to focusing on target pupils' classroom experiences, the interaction data is also highly informative with regard to generic classroom practices and the classroom experiences of target pupils' average-attaining peers. Specifically, cumulative interaction data highlighted the limited number of focused interactions received by comparison pupils across lessons and settings, whereby teachers tended to operate predominantly at a whole-class level and SNAs generally worked on a one-to-one basis with target pupils. Moreover, group work was particularly low across class settings, minimising the level of peer interactions experienced by all pupils. Moving forward, it is clear that the organisational frameworks and

arrangements for teaching, learning and related pupil support in primary school classrooms requires consideration to facilitate optimal learning and inclusive practices for all children. This is particularly relevant given the focus within the *Primary School Curriculum* (GOI, 1999) on collaborative learning, use of guided activity and discovery methods, learning through language and the importance of one-to-one teacher-pupil conferencing in pupil assessment (NCCA, 2007). This matter will be further explored in *Chapter Eight*, with particular focus on the revised allocation process for SETs to mainstream primary schools, as introduced in September 2017 (DES, 2017c).

7.6 Voice of the Child

Reflecting on findings from the four research questions, it is clear that target pupil interviews provided strong insight into pupils' perspectives regarding SNA support. On one hand, pupils recognised the merits of SNA support, particularly in aiding them to regulate their behaviour in class. In this regard, pupils described SNAs' strengths in terms of providing oral differentiation of class material and using calming talk as a means to de-escalate and prevent behavioural outbursts. In addition, all pupils recognised the SNA as a means to avail of movement breaks from the classroom and escape the confines of classroom life. Such findings are in line with previous research in the field, both in terms of differentiation (Ware et al., 2011) and behavioural support (Daly et al., 2016; DES, 2011).

With regard to independence, older pupils, in particular, recognised the tendency for their SNA to provide them with excessive levels of one-to-one support. This was noted by a few pupils to reduce their level of effort and autonomous functioning in the classroom. Notably, interviews with over 40% of target pupils suggested their heightened level of psychological dependence on their SNA, particularly to ensure they could keep pace with the class content. This finding points towards the need for greater levels of differentiation in the class, beyond that of the SNA, particularly for pupils with academic difficulties. Again, this finding resonates with previous research conducted by Ware et al. (2011) who noted the over-reliance on the SNA within class contexts as an agent of differentiation.

Akin to previous international research (Broer et al., 2005), the majority of pupil interviewees referred to their SNA in a positive light, with pupils regularly referring to the kind nature of the SNA and recognising her as a 'friend'. In contrast, a few older pupils expressed strong rejection of SNA support, particularly in cases where the SNA provided excessive support for the pupil. In this regard, pupil interviewees referred to the SNA as a symbol of difference; a physical representation of their additional needs in the classroom and a barrier to inclusion with their classmates. This finding aligns with and extends on previous international research, whereby studies have shown the limited control many pupils experience in relation to when and how paraprofessional support is provided, as well as the means by which paraprofessional support can impede social interactions (Hemmingsson et al., 2003; Malmgren & Causton-Theoharis, 2006).

Overall, pupil interviews point to the strengths and limitations of SNA support, both in terms of behavioural support and impact on pupils' independent functioning. Moving forward, it is clear that pupils' voices need continued prominence in the planning and deployment of SNA support, such as in relation to the level and nature of support required. This is particularly important whereby previous research has shown the strong link between pupils' participation in decision-making and their sense of self-efficacy (Hemmingsson et al., 2003). In this way, pupils' voices can become more central to the discourse of inclusionary practices within schools.

7.7 Conclusion

Overall, findings from the online survey, observations and case studies highlight an array of positive practices and points for development across schools and classrooms in relation to the preparedness and deployment of SNAs, both in terms of supporting target pupils' behavioural care needs and developing target pupils' independence. Based on such findings, *Chapter Eight* will seek to conclude the research project. A summary of the research will be provided, with brief reference to the research rationale, questions, methodology and findings. Following this, overall recommendations for policy and practice will be outlined, with the aim of improving inclusive practices for *all* pupils in mainstream primary schools in Ireland, including those pupils with behavioural care needs. Although the proposed recommendations are particularly pointed towards an Irish context, it is envisaged that some of the recommendations may inform practices in international jurisdictions, with due regard

for the distinct ecological and cultural contexts of each educational setting. Thereafter, limitations of the research will be acknowledged, providing clear avenues for future research.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

Having presented and discussed the findings from this research, this final chapter seeks to reflect on the study as a whole. In particular, focus will be placed on what has been learned from the research and how the study contributes to research, theory, policy and practice. In addition, the limitations of the study must be acknowledged, offering avenues for future research. The aim of this study was to obtain a detailed and integrated account of the preparedness and deployment of SNAs in supporting target pupils' behavioural care needs and developing target pupils' independence in mainstream primary schools in Ireland. In particular, the study sought to interrogate the tensions that exist between SNAs' provision of care support for pupils with behavioural care needs and SNAs' development of pupils' independence in light of the current non-teaching role of the SNA (DES, 2014). Central to this research process, the author also sought to gain insight into target pupils' views of the SNA support and to compare and contrast the classroom experiences of the target pupils to that of their average-attaining peers. Notably, this was the first Irish study to examine the SNA role using a systematic observation component as part of a mixed-methods research design. In particular, the study's design and findings are deemed to make a significant contribution to the dearth of research that currently exists in the Irish context related to SNA support of pupils with behavioural care needs. Moreover, the mixed-methods approach aided to interrogate the quintain of 'behaviour support' and 'independence' across data-sources, thereby ensuring that a detailed and multifaceted account of such phenomena was deduced.

Whilst many findings of this study are in agreement with existing research in the field, particularly in terms of SNA preparedness, the contribution of this study lies in the depth of information gleaned from the mixed-methods approach and the unique contribution of the systematic observations to the overall dataset. In this regard, the findings related to SNAs' concurrent support of pupils' behavioural care needs and independence development, coupled with the comparison of target pupils' classroom experiences with that of their average-attaining peers, are of particular

note. In addition, the central focus on participants' voices in the data collection process is significant, including the voices of the target pupils. Such data aids to bring a richness, authenticity and depth to the research and ensures that all quintain are underpinned by the voices of those at the heart of the research process.

8.2 Thesis review

A review of the thesis highlights the scope and depth of this research project and related findings. *Chapter One* detailed the context, rationale, focus and guiding theoretical framework of this thesis. The chapter positioned the research within the historical and current policy context related to inclusive education in Ireland 2018, with specific focus on the SNA scheme. A clear rationale for the research was provided and the positionality of the author was described. Finally, the research aims, questions and context of the applied research were outlined.

Chapter Two provided a review of the literature related to SNAs and the wider context of paraprofessionals in educational contexts. Based on the four research question, the Irish educational policy context was presented, followed by a critique of relevant national and international research in the field. A range of underpinning educational and psychological theories were then presented, particularly those related to the constructs of 'behaviour', 'care' and 'independence', with the aim of linking theory, research and practice. Based on the literature review and the related gaps identified in the Irish research base, a clear rationale for this study's research questions and methodology were presented.

Chapter Three involved a detailed description of the research methodology that guided this study. This included the research framework, comprising the philosophical underpinnings of the research, the research design and research methods. Specifically, a mixed-methods approach was adopted for this study, including a large-scale survey, systematic observations and case studies. Under each research methodology, a description of the data collection process was provided with reference to the research tool design, sampling strategy, pilot study, procedure and ethical considerations. Following this, an in-depth section on data analysis was presented, both in terms of quantitative and qualitative data. Finally, the chapter concluded with acknowledgement of some of the methodological

limitations of the research and defence of the quality procedures inherent in the study in terms of reliability and validity.

The findings of the research were presented across three chapters. *Chapter Four* comprised quantitative data from the large-scale survey, including respondents' demographic information and closed-question responses related to topics of 'preparedness' and 'independence'. *Chapter Five* comprised quantitative data from the systematic observations, as obtained across the 20 case study settings. Frequency and percentage data were outlined for the 20 target pupils and 20 average-attaining comparison peers across the range of criteria on the observational schedule. In addition, a series of independent samples *t*-tests and paired samples *t*-tests were conducted to compare observational data both across and within pupil cohorts respectively. *Chapter Six* presented case study findings, stemming from the semi-structured interviews, documentary review and field notes. Based on a rigorous within-case and cross-case data analysis process, as based on the IPA qualitative analytical methodology (Smith et al., 2009), results were presented across four super-ordinate themes and related sub-ordinate themes.

Finally, *Chapter Seven* sought to synthesise and discuss the main research findings. This was undertaken with reference to each of the four research questions in addition to previous theories and literature in the field. Thereafter, a range of recommendations were outlined related to each of the research questions, serving to provide initial direction for future policy and practice in the field.

At this point in the project, it is both appropriate and necessary to focus on the overarching conclusions gleaned from this research, with reference to research, theory, policy and practice. Thereafter, a number of key recommendations will be outlined both in terms of policy and practice, aimed at supporting inclusive educational practices for all pupils. Placing the child at the centre of the system, *Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems model* (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) has been adopted as an organisational framework, whereby key recommendations will be proposed at all levels of the system, spanning the macrosystem, exosystem, mesosystem and microsystem. Finally, the limitations of the study must be acknowledged, offering avenues for future research.

8.3 Overarching Conclusion: The Education-Care Divide

In an effort to draw over-arching conclusions from this study, a return to the initial impetus for this research is warranted. Specifically, from the outset, the author sought to interrogate the tensions that exist between SNAs' provision of care support for pupils with behavioural care needs and SNAs' development of pupils' independence, in light of the current non-teaching role of the SNA (DES, 2014). Reflecting on the cumulative findings from this study, the significant difficulties experienced by SNAs in this dual-purpose role must be acknowledged, whereby SNAs' efforts to provide care support for target pupils presenting with behavioural care needs regularly extended beyond the boundaries of 'care' to involve academic, psychological, social and emotional support. In addition, many of the strategies employed by SNAs were not guided by 'best practice' or evidence-based theories/frameworks but rather, were selected on a moment-by-moment basis in response to pupils' observed needs. Moreover, many of the supportive practices executed by SNAs with target pupils were at odds with the development of pupils' independent living skills. Specifically, high levels of one-to-one SNA support and pupil prompting were recognised to have both positive and negative implications for pupils' development, with particular concerns highlighted in relation to pupils' development of dependence on the SNA and a lack of self-management skills.

Reflecting on this matter, it appears that for the vast majority of SNAs, their role has shifted beyond the bounds of 'care' to occupy a 'third space' within the current organisation of the education system; a space that exists along a continuum between care and education (see *Figure 41* for a visual representation). This notion of the 'third space' is forwarded by Whitchurch (2008), with reference to the changing remit and identities of professional roles in U.K higher education. Whitchurch (2008) argues that such 'third spaces' are colonised primarily by less 'bounded' forms of professions and are regularly characterised by issues related to identity and clarity. Undoubtedly, such sentiments are reflected in the applied SNA role whereby this research, alongside numerous previous studies (DES, 2011a; Logan, 2006; NCSE, 2018) have pointed to the ambiguity and confusion that continue to constitute the care role of the SNA. On reflection, it appears as though the applied role of the SNA in educational contexts has expanded and diversified since its original inception to meet the demands of our ever-changing,

contemporary, inclusive educational settings. Nonetheless, on paper, the SNA role has arguably remained fixed in the Ireland of 1998.

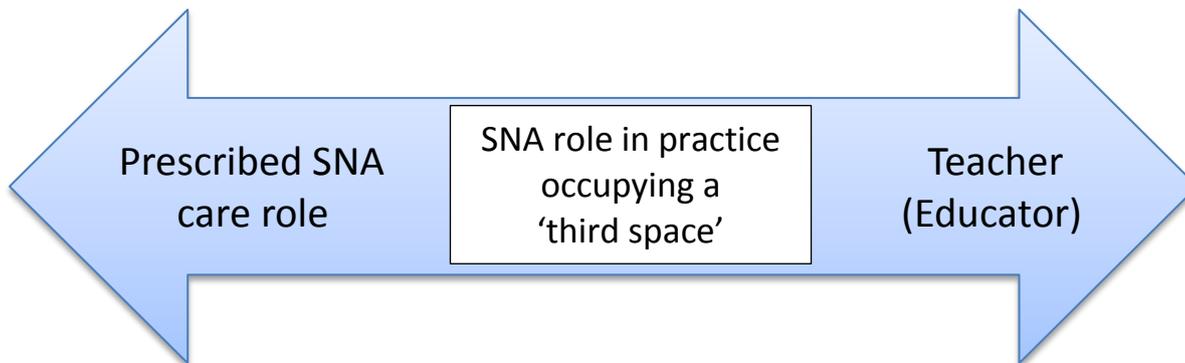


Figure 41: Visual representation of the SNA role in practice occupying a ‘third space’ between care and education

In light of such findings, the discrete separation of pupils’ educational needs and care needs, as characterised within the prescribed remit of the SNA, must be questioned. Specifically, can a child’s educational needs and care needs be completely divorced, given the holistic nature of a child’s development and the reciprocal relationship between education and care, particularly in an educational context? In a previous publication by the current author (Griffin, 2014), it was postulated that the arbitrary separation of these constructs may present as one of the core factors to explain the continued incongruity between the *prescribed* role and the *actual* role of the SNA for over a decade, as evidenced in an array of national studies (DES, 2011a; Logan, 2006). Notably, policy and research documents from the *early childhood education and care* sector have begun to interrogate this education-care divide, whereby the concepts of ‘care’ and ‘education’ have been described as “inseparable”, despite being treated independently within that sector for years (Kaga, Bennett, & Moss, 2010, p. 9). The importance of a holistic view of education is forwarded that equally balances children’s learning needs and care needs. Van Laere, Peeters, and Vandebroek (2012) argue that the division of education and care represents a hierarchy, whereby the concept of ‘education’ is viewed as superordinate to that of ‘care’. Through this viewpoint, children’s cognitive and language development is deemed to supersede children’s social and emotional development, leading to a narrow focus and lack of continuity between both concepts. In contrast, Hayes (2007, p. 14)

argues that the holistic development of children must take precedence, “where concepts of care and education meet, integrate and become one”. *Figure 42* presents a visual depiction of the intricate relationship between the principles of ‘care’ and ‘education’ in supporting a child’s holistic development.

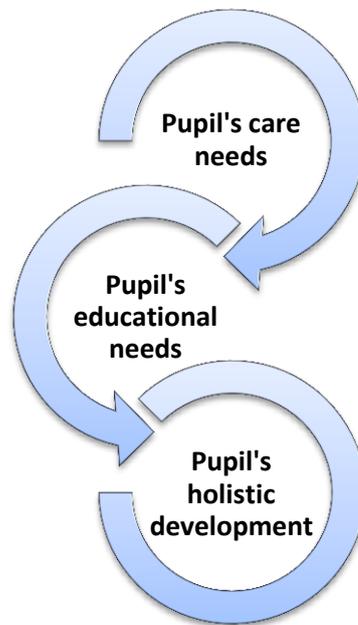


Figure 42: Intricate relationship between principles of ‘care’ and ‘education’ in supporting a child’s holistic development

8.3.1 From SNA to ‘edu-carer’.

Ultimately, findings from this current research corroborate previous studies which highlight how the concept of ‘care’ extends beyond a physical dimension to encompass multiple aspects of the child’s development, particularly that of behavioural, social and emotional domains (Hayes, 2007; Kaga et al., 2010; Van Laere et al., 2012). In light of such findings, it is proposed that for SNAs to effectively execute their prescribed care role with children and concurrently, develop children’s independence, a specific role is required that surpasses the ‘care’ domain alone. This role is envisaged in terms of a paraprofessional ‘edu-carer’. Distinct to the edu-care role in early childcare settings (Caldwell, 1989), this paraprofessional edu-carer would constitute a ‘bridging role’ between the teacher’s educational input

and the target child's autonomous functioning through a contingent and scaffolded approach. This role would move beyond pupil 'support' alone and rather, aim to facilitate the child's movement along the continuum from 'most-to-least' support towards the end goal of autonomy, independence and self-scaffolding. Nonetheless, due regard would need to be given to the child's level of (dis)ability, such that the ultimate aim is that the child would reach his/her potential in terms of autonomous functioning and independence. In this regard, SNAs' work would need to be guided by appropriate, evidence-based theories and frameworks to effectively support pupils' movement along the support-independence continuum. Examples include scaffolding theory (van de Pol et al., 2010), the scaffolding framework (Radford et al., 2015), the 'least-to-most' prompting hierarchy (Libby et al., 2008) and particularly, the '*Planning and Assessing for Independence*' model (Bosanquet et al., 2016). In addition, philosophical and theoretical concepts of independence would need to underpin SNA practices, such that the development of pupil independence would extend beyond the physical domain to encompass cognitive, motivational and emotional domains (Abramson et al., 1978; Seligman, 1975; Zimmerman, 1990). Concepts of 'control', 'psychological empowerment' and 'pupil voice' would also need to feature strongly in the overall scaffolding process, whereby the SNA/ISA would operate as part of the pupil's overall educational/care team. In this way, the key tenet of the EPSEN Act (GOI, 2004) would be central to the SNA/ISA role in enabling children with significant care needs to "...leave school, with the skills necessary to participate, to the level of their capacity, in an inclusive way in the social and economic activities of society and to live independent and fulfilled lives (GOI, 2004, p. 5). This edu-carer role is depicted in *Figure 43*.

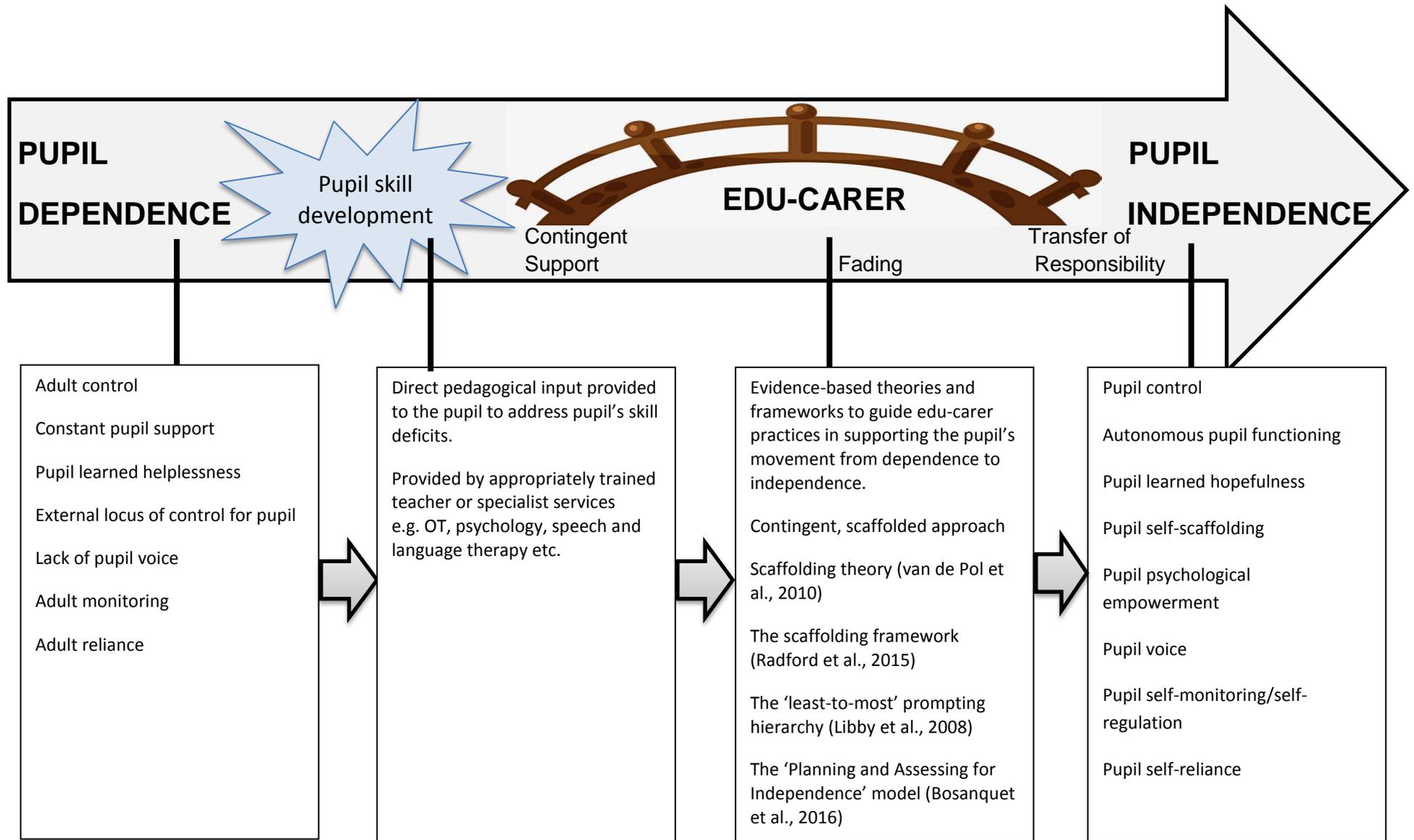


Figure 43: Visual representation of the edu-carer role

8.3.2 Pupil intervention over assistance/care.

Although this edu-carer role can be clearly envisaged for pupils presenting with traditional care needs, including those with significant medical needs or a significant impairment of physical or sensory function (DES, 2014), findings from this research highlight how the support of pupils presenting with behavioural care needs is particularly complex. Accordingly, the appropriateness of a care, or edu-carer role for pupils with behavioural care needs, and particularly, those with EBD/SEBD, requires serious consideration. Reflecting on the findings of this study, the complex needs of pupils with behavioural care needs stands clear, whereby such pupils may present with a range of cognitive, psychological, behavioural, academic, social and emotional needs. Although many pupils within the current study were in receipt of some form of support at *school support or school support plus* levels (DES, 2010), this study highlights the need for additional, targeted and more specialised interventions for pupils with behavioural care needs. Based on such findings, the relevance and appropriateness of the SNA/‘edu-carer’ role in constituting the dominant support structure for such pupils is questionable. This matter is further compounded when one considers the current minimum training standards for SNAs (DES, 2011b) and the complex skill-set required to effectively support and include pupils with behavioural care needs in mainstream school settings (Lane, Menzies, Bruhn, & Crnabori, 2011).

In light of such matters, the need to think beyond SNA provision for pupils with behavioural care needs is strongly recommended. This thinking parallels that of Giangreco and Suter who in recent years have questioned the reactive, add-on approach of expanding the number of paraprofessionals in school systems. They deem this to be, “...at best, a temporary solution fraught with well-documented practical, ethical, and instructional challenges” (2015, p. 112). Similarly, in an Irish context, Rix et al. (2013, p. 72) referred to the SNA scheme in terms of “filling the gap” in professional services for children with SEN, such as in cases where a child requires access to psychology, behavioural services or speech and language therapy. Notably, findings from the most recent comprehensive review of the SNA scheme corroborate such findings, highlighting that the behaviour of students with SEBD was “being contained but not being therapeutically addressed” (NCSE, 2018, p. 52). Accordingly, recommendations from the NCSE (2018) have pointed towards the need for specialist support from appropriately trained personnel to bring about

meaningful changes in such pupils' behaviour. In particular, the NCSE (2018) have recommended the need for ring-fenced funding to build schools' capacity through CPD and to provide in-school therapy services to schools, alongside a specified level of multidisciplinary support to school-aged children who require clinical support, including behavioural therapy, psychology and psychiatry.

Based on findings from this research, alongside that of the NCSE (2018), it appears timely that a shift in thinking occurs in terms of inclusive education. Specifically, it is recommended that the SNA scheme and particularly, its focus on the support of pupils with behavioural care needs, is reconsidered such that resources are redeployed towards purposeful models of inclusive education delivery that address the increasing range of diversity and need within our mainstream classrooms. Rather than deploying SNAs as a top-down, 'add on' approach to existing models of education, it is proposed that pupils with behavioural care needs would benefit more from directed intervention, delivered by relevant professionals and appropriately trained teachers, through a 'wraparound' team-based approach. Foxell and Cooper (2015) emphasise the importance of *evidence-based policy-making*, whereby the focus is placed on 'what works' in applied settings, as informed by research and practice. In this regard, findings from the NCSE-funded *Altered Provision Pilot Project* are particularly relevant, as recently reported as part of the NCSE comprehensive review of the SNA scheme (Casserly, Deacy, McDonagh, & Tiernan, 2017, as cited in NCSE, 2018). This project involved the provision of additional teaching hours, in lieu of SNA hours, to support pupils with EBD in 13 post-primary schools. The rationale for the project was that pupils with EBD require additional teaching in the self-management and self-regulation of behaviour from qualified teachers, rather than SNA care support. Findings highlighted a range of perceived benefits of the project, including positive pupil engagement, behaviour and academic success and attainment. Although the important role of the SNA was highlighted for many pupils, particularly at transition times, the project pointed towards the overreliance within schools on SNA support and the negative impact of SNA support on pupils experiencing alienation and stigma. In contrast, pupils reacted positively to the *Altered Provision Pilot Project*, with particular focus on matters related to independence (Casserly et al., 2017, as cited in NCSE, 2018). Based on such findings, alongside findings from the current research study, it is recommended that looking forward, emphasis is placed on intervention and skill

development for students with EBD and behavioural care needs rather than SNA support (NCSE, 2018). Although the SNA role may still aid to provide care support for such pupils within the class context, particularly in terms of bridging the gap between teacher input for skill development and autonomous pupil functioning, SNA support should not be viewed as an alternative to appropriate and necessary intervention for such pupils.

8.4 Macro System Recommendations

8.4.1 Policy changes.

To support proposed changes to the SNA scheme and the wider provision of resources, it is recommended that national policy changes take place as soon as possible, aimed at supporting and re-envisaging inclusionary practices in mainstream educational settings. In this regard, findings from this study support recommendations from the comprehensive review of the SNA scheme (NCSE, 2018) in terms of re-envisaging a new school inclusion model to deliver the right supports at the right time to students with additional care needs. In this way, the focus would be on bridging the education-health divide and providing greater levels of intervention and skill development for pupils with additional care needs.

Thereafter, it is recommended that the role of the SNA must be re-stated and clarified. In light of the negative implications that one-to-one paraprofessional support can pose for pupils, it is suggested that policy changes could focus on assigning schools with a small pool of SNAs. Guided by the *revised allocation process for Special Education Teachers to mainstream primary schools* (see DES, 2017c), the allocation of SNAs could be based on the school's educational profile. The *continuum of support* model (DES, 2010) would be particularly useful in guiding schools' practices thereafter whereby a staged approach to pupil support could be implemented. This would ensure that alternates to SNA provision would be firstly considered, particularly for pupils with behavioural care needs, guided by a philosophy of prevention and skills-teaching at each stage of the continuum. In particular, the NBSS (2009, 2018b) model of support, as currently implemented in a range of post-primary schools in Ireland, would be particularly relevant in this

regard. This model offers a whole-school behaviour support framework for promoting positive behaviour and for preventing pupil difficulties, aligning with and building on that outlined by the DES (2010).

This model places strong focus on a three-tiered, multi-level preventative system, namely *Level 1: school-wide for all students; Level 2: targeted intervention for some students; Level 3: intensive individualised support for a few students* (see Figure 44). Guided by two evidence-based frameworks, including the *Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports* framework (Sugai & Horner, 2002) and the *Response to Intervention* framework (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006), the aim of this approach is to maximise pupil achievement and reduce behavioural problems across the school system (NBSS, 2018b). By developing pupils' skills across a range of domains, including *behaviour for learning skills, social and emotional skills, academic literacy, learning and study skills* and *positive health and wellbeing skills* (see Figure 45), the NBSS (2018b) emphasise how pupils can be supported to achieve and succeed at school. In this way, the application of the continuum of support framework to mainstream primary schools, grounded in evidence-based approaches, would ensure that skills-teaching and intervention would take precedence over that of 'care', as currently inherent in the SNA scheme.

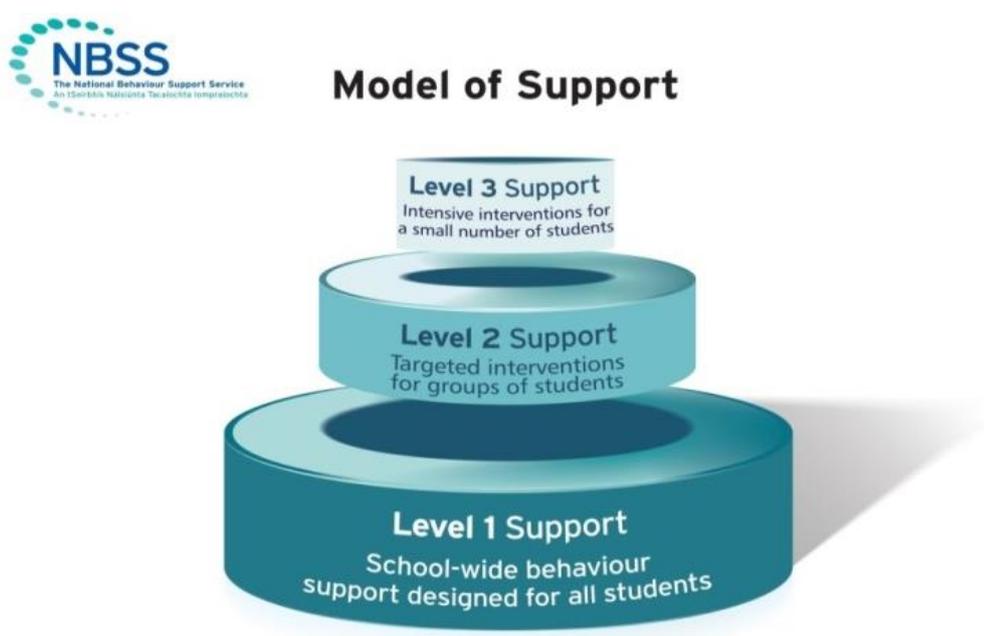


Figure 44: NBSS Model of Support, as sourced from NBSS (2018b)

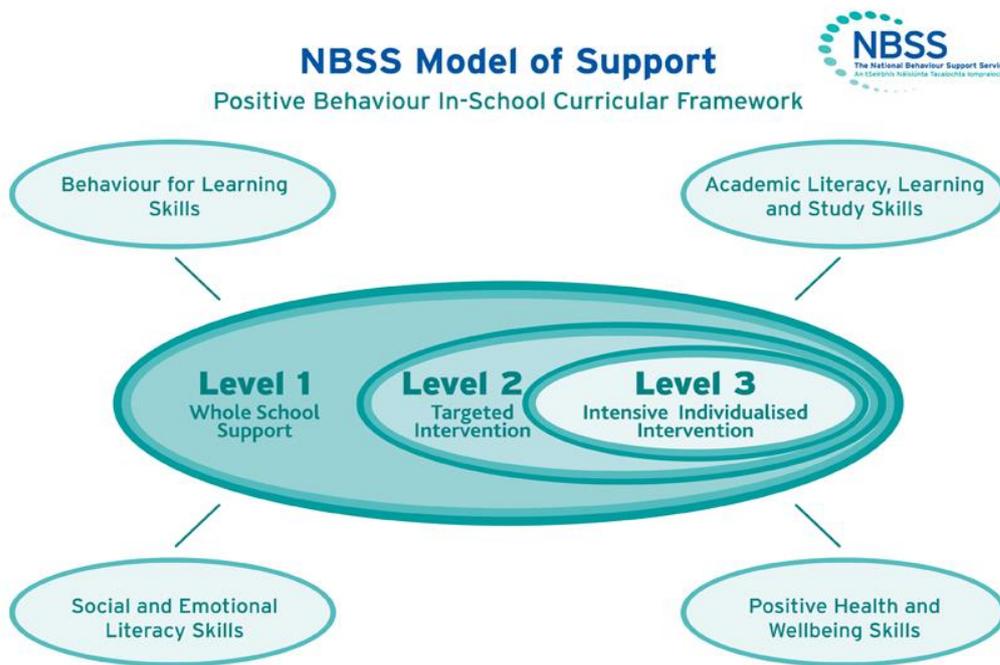


Figure 45: NBSS Model of Support, highlighting its in-school curricular framework (as sourced from NBSS, 2018 (NBSS, 2018b))

Based on such changes, clear policy guidelines are required to outline the role of all members of the school team, including that of the school principal, SET, class teacher and SNA. Based on SNAs' current training standards, coupled with the skill-set required to appropriately support pupils with challenging behaviour (Lane et al., 2011), it is suggested that SNAs only work at a whole-class level in a non-teaching 'classroom assistant' and 'edu-carer' capacity. Such roles would form part of a collaborative, systemic team approach, using appropriate frameworks for practice. This would reflect *Level 1* of both the NBSS (2018b) *Model of Support* and NEPs' *continuum of support* (DES, 2010). Thereafter, in cases where *Level 2* and *Level 3* support is required for specific children, this would be provided by appropriately trained teachers and professionals, given the specialised nature of targeted intervention and intensive individualised intervention respectively. Nonetheless, schools and SNAs would require detailed policy guidelines and related training on the specifics of the 'classroom assistant' and 'edu-carer' role.

The introduction of any policy changes, however, must be viewed through a cyclical lens, whereby policy implementation must be characterised by a continuous and unending sequence of reflection and evaluation. Foxell and Cooper (2015) emphasise the importance of a feedback loop, whereby applied research and evaluation serve to support policy adaptation and change (where required), with the aim of supporting ongoing best practice in the field. A sample Policy Cycle strategy is presented in *Figure 46*, as proposed by Knill and Tosun (2008, p. 10).

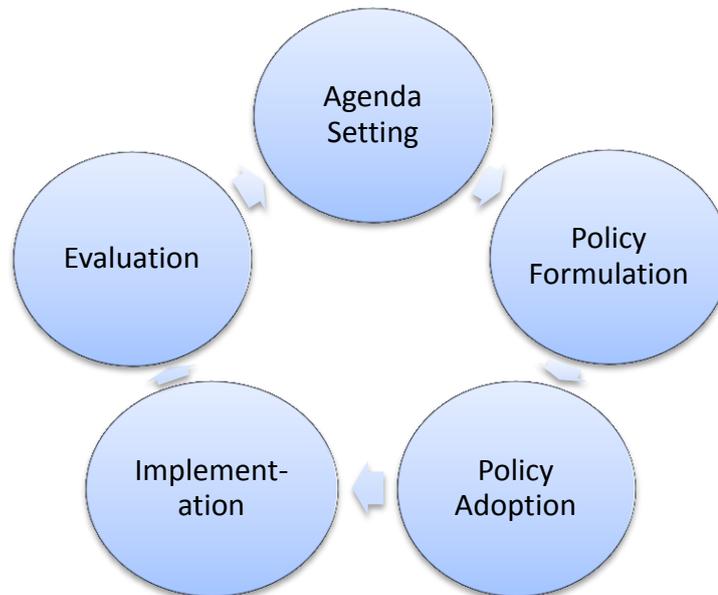


Figure 46: *The Policy Cycle, as proposed by Knill and Tosun (2008, p. 10)*

8.4.2 Training and qualifications.

Coupled with policy changes, additional training and professional development is recommended across the school system to build the capacity of all team members and ensure that they can appropriately support the diverse range of pupils within our school systems. As previously outlined, educational standards for SNA appointment in Ireland require immediate attention to ensure that SNAs are adequately prepared to engage in their role; be it that of a 'care', or 'edu-carer' role. As previously outlined, the NCSE (2018) recommended that a national training programme be introduced at Level 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications for existing SNAs who do not have the requisite level of relevant training and for new ISAs on appointment. This is in addition to further focused training and whole-school training, aimed at meeting the needs of specific students being supported. Nonetheless, findings from this research query whether Level 5 training would be sufficiently high for SNAs/ISAs, given the range of pupils presenting with various SEN in inclusive educational settings and the skill-set required to adequately support pupils' needs and independence development. Rather, it is suggested that minimum training standards would be positioned at Level 6 on the National Framework, supported thereafter by on-going CPD and whole-school training. Although international models of professional development may offer avenues for renewed thinking in the field, ultimately, the Irish education system must seek to adopt a distinct model of professional development that aligns with its national policy context. In this way, practitioners can be facilitated to acquire the knowledge, skills and ongoing supports needed to implement inclusionary practices effectively.

8.4.3 National support services.

Beyond the SNA, it is recommended that the Irish government extends the range of national support services available to schools, particularly that of the SESS and the NBSS. This is necessary to increase the knowledge and skills of school staff and facilitate a whole-school approach to inclusion and behaviour management. This recommendation aligns with that of the NCSE (2018) who have recommended the development of 10 fully staffed regional support teams to build school and teacher capacity through CPD and in-school support. These teams would comprise specialist teachers, special educational needs coordinators, speech and language

therapists, OTs and behaviour practitioners. Notably, the NBSS (2009) outline how effective whole-school policies and practices which promote a whole-school approach to positive behaviour should meet the needs of 85-90% of pupils. Thereafter, targeted group interventions and intensive, individualised interventions are often required for the remaining 10-15% of the pupil population, such as the target pupils at the focus of this research. Currently, the NBSS (2018b) provides expertise and CPD to specific post-primary schools on issues related to behaviour. In parallel with the NCSE (2018) recommendation of regional support teams, it is recommended that the NBSS is extended to support mainstream primary schools. In this way, the professional development of school staff would have a cascading positive impact on pupils' social, emotional, academic and behavioural needs, couched in a systemic, collaborative, staged approach.

Moreover, it is recommended that therapeutic support services are also provided to mainstream schools; both to support professional intervention for pupils with SEN and to support parents and teachers working with such pupils. This recommendation is in line with that of the NCSE (2018), the *Focused Policy Assessment* report (IGEES, 2016) and research conducted by Rose et al. (2015) who highlighted how additional funding in areas such as the NEPS scheme, HSE multidisciplinary therapy teams and school-age interdisciplinary teams could lead to better outcomes for pupils with disabilities who require professional intervention over that of assistance. This is particularly relevant for pupils with EBD and SEBD, whereby findings from this study and other research (Cooper & Jacobs, 2011; Rose et al., 2015) have highlighted the particular emotional, psychological and mental health needs of this cohort, alongside the limited capacity of schools to respond appropriately to their needs. Although therapeutic intervention forms a regular feature within special schools in Ireland, this is not the case in mainstream Irish schools. Rather, in such cases, children must access therapies outside of the education system within their local health service. Reflecting on this matter, previous studies have pointed to the difficulties experienced by parents in accessing therapeutic services for their children, the uneven nature of provision throughout Ireland, and the negative impact on pupil progress when specialist services are not integrated within the pupils' learning context (Daly et al., 2016; NCSE, 2013; Rix et al., 2013; Rose et al., 2015). Rix et al. (2013) outline how this issue is underpinned by the divide between health and education within the Irish system, whereby

parents are often left to mediate between the two systems. In contrast, several international studies have pointed to the benefits of an *inclusive partnership* model that works both with the 'at risk' pupils and their families and teachers (Kourkoutas & Giovazolias, 2015), aimed at enhancing parenting and pedagogical skills and supporting positive relationships with the child. Similarly, the provision of therapy within schools has been shown to have widespread benefits to children, school staff and the ethos of a school (Department for Education, 2011; Mayer, Van Acker, Lochman, & Gresham, 2009). In light of such findings, it is recommended that the Irish government assigns funding to provide the delivery of an integrated model of service for pupils within mainstream schools that supports intervention and skill development over that of 'care'.

Notably, this recommendation aligns with recent Irish developments whereby in May 2018, the NCSE launched the Government of Ireland *In-School Therapy Support Project* (NCSE, 2018). This initiative concerns the provision of speech and language therapy and OT support to 75 schools and 75 pre-school settings for the 2018/2019 school year, aimed at supporting pupils with SEN to achieve better outcomes. Based on this recent development, the future potential for integrated services in an educational setting appears more probable.

8.5 Key Recommendations: Exosystem

8.5.1 School Level: Whole-school approach and leadership.

Although national policy changes are essential to instigate positive changes in applied settings, one must be mindful that policy commitments to inclusion do not automatically guarantee paralleled proceedings in working practices. Accordingly, a look towards the child's exosystem and mesosystem highlight the role of the wider school system in supporting inclusionary practices and enabling each child to reach his/her full potential. Based on the findings of this study, it is recognised that to facilitate inclusion and positive behaviour support at a class level, school leaders must foster an inclusive philosophy and positive school culture at a whole-school level. Kinsella and Senior (2008) emphasise how an inclusive school has a commitment to inclusion incorporated in its ethos, its philosophy, its admission

procedures and its practices. Rather than focusing on the surface structures within schools, such as the magnitude of SNA support available for certain pupils, schools need to examine the underlying ethos, culture and practices that are required at the deep structural level of the school for the effective inclusion of all. A whole-school approach to inclusion and PBS is required to ensure that practices are underpinned by a school ethos which emphasises care, respect and a shared, collaborative approach to supporting positive behaviour for all (INTO, 2004). This will likely require the professional development of all staff, whereby CPD-planning at a systemic level may serve to formalise professional development across the whole school and facilitate related expertise-sharing. As per previous research (Daly et al., 2016) this has been recognised as a positive means to facilitate a holistic approach to inclusion, behaviour management and pupil support.

8.5.2 School self-evaluation and resource allocation.

Thereafter, it is recommended that schools engage in a process of self-evaluation regarding their current practices to inclusion. This aligns with the DES' focus on school self-evaluation, which is defined as a "collaborative, inclusive, reflective process of internal school review" (DES, 2016b, p. 10). In this way, schools could take ownership of their own inclusive practices through an evidence-based process of reflective enquiry. Use of the Giangreco and Broer (2007) 16-item screening tool entitled '*Overreliance on paraprofessionals?*' may act as a stimulus for engaging in this process, whereby school teams determine the extent to which they may be over-reliant on SNAs or be using them inappropriately. Notably, field testing in 27 schools in the U.S has highlighted this tool as a practical and effective way for schools to engage in this self-evaluative process and bring awareness to important inclusionary issues (Giangreco & Broer, 2007). Although this tool is not culturally transferable to an Irish context, it may serve as a framework to spur reflection, conversation and debate within Irish schools in relation to their reliance, or overreliance on SNAs.

Following this, it is recommended that guided by the *continuum of support* model (DES, 2010) and the NBSS (2009) three-tiered *model of support*, schools engage in a process of considering alternatives to SNA support for pupils with behavioural care needs at whole-school and classroom levels. As previously outlined, a range of

alternatives to paraprofessional support have been proposed by Giangreco and Broer (2003) and Giangreco (2013) which could serve to stimulate alternative thinking within schools. Nonetheless, within an Irish context, the *revised allocation process for Special Education Teachers to mainstream primary schools* (DES, 2017a) must be viewed as central to this process. This new model, aimed at fostering inclusion and effective teaching and learning for all, provides schools with a greater level of autonomy than that previously in how to manage and deploy additional teaching supports across their school, based on the individual needs of pupils (DES, 2016a).

Stemming from the findings of this research, schools need to consider flexible models of SET deployment across the school system, including team-teaching, in-class support, station teaching, peer-tutoring, small group support or individual tuition. Notably, in the pilot study of the revised model of allocating teaching resources in mainstream schools (DES, 2016a), findings showed the revised model as particularly useful in supporting pupils' academic and behavioural needs, such as through short-term interventions as well as in-class support. Moreover, improvements were noted across an array of areas including greater collaboration amongst teachers, improved whole-school approaches, better differentiation by class teachers, more team-teaching and more station-teaching approaches. Such findings are particularly positive, whereby they highlight the potential of the new model in aiding to improve teaching, learning and overall pupil support across mainstream primary schools beyond the need for SNA-pupil assignment. In this regard, the emotional needs of target pupils must be considered across all stages of the continuum (DES, 2010). Whilst professional, psychological or psychiatric intervention may be required for highly vulnerable pupils at *Level 3* of the continuum, the need for more consistent, daily emotional support may be necessary for a range of pupils, such as in the form of that 'one caring adult' (NEPS, 2015). Given the skill-set required to appropriately support pupils' emotional and mental health needs, it is recommended that vulnerable pupils are provided with a teacher mentor who can facilitate formal and informal check-ins with the pupil on a regular basis. In addition, a peer-buddy system could also be useful, whereby previous research has highlighted the social and emotional benefits of peer-buddy systems on pupils with disabilities (Foster, 2011). Ultimately, schools need to ensure that by using SET resource hours in a flexible and creative manner, pupils with behavioural

care needs receive appropriate interventions in school, as based on evidence-based programmes, to equip them with skills and strategies to operate more autonomously, not alone in relation to challenging behaviour but so too in all other developmental domains.

8.5.3 Whole-school SNA deployment.

Based on this new model of inclusive thinking and related resource allocation, school leaders must support the appropriate deployment of SNAs across the school system. As previously outlined, it is recommended that SNA deployment occurs at a whole-class level rather than an individual pupil level. Mainstream class groupings that require highest levels of assistance would be given precedence firstly, such as in the infant classes or in classes with a diverse range of needs. Nonetheless, SNA deployment to any class should be viewed on a short-term basis and contingent with the class' needs, with SNAs regularly rotated at a whole-school level, where required.

8.5.4 Collaborative pupil planning.

Finally, collaborative pupil planning must be prioritised at a systemic level within schools. Recommendations related to individual pupil planning were previously outlined in *Chapter Seven*, with reference to collaborative planning, assessment, target-setting, progress-monitoring and review of pupils' targets. Stemming from the new model of resource allocation within schools (DES, 2017c), schools need to ensure that individual pupil planning reflects the continuum of support provided within the school, such that planning occurs at the *classroom support*, *school support* and/or *school support plus* levels (DES, 2010, 2017a). In addition, school leaders must ensure that discrete time is assigned to individual pupil planning, including time and creative, age-appropriate means of capturing the voice of the child (NCSE, 2006). Moreover, the need for strong home-school links is vital to support consistency of approach for the child at all levels of the system.

8.6 Key Recommendation: Mesosystem (Classroom level)

Focusing specifically on the classroom level, it is recommended that priority is firstly given to effective teaching, learning and skill-building for all pupils, in line with the revised model of allocating teaching resources (DES, 2017a). Based on the findings of this study, effective differentiation must be prioritised within the mainstream setting, in addition to UDL approaches, with greater focus placed on collaborative, pupil-centred methods of teaching and learning. The use of in-class support and co-teaching could be particularly useful, whereby teachers aim to engage in high-quality interactions with pupils on a regular basis. Notably, findings from the pilot study of the new model for allocating teaching resources to mainstream schools (DES, 2016a) showed positive implications on pupils' learning and behaviour as a result of such alternate teaching approaches, including better pupil engagement in mainstream settings, higher quality teacher-pupil interactions and better differentiation by class teachers. Based on the findings of this study, the physical organisation of the classroom and the use of flexible seating arrangements are also encouraged to support pupils' individual learning styles and inclusionary practices. The use of peer-supports within classrooms is also recommended, involving both class-wide and school-wide peer-tutoring arrangements. Notably, previous research highlights the benefits of peer-tutoring programmes in improving rates of academic responding and in reducing rates of competing behaviours for both tutors and tutees, including those with and without SEN (McDonnell, Mathot-Buckner, Thorson, & Fister, 2001). Ultimately, pupils must be equipped with skills across a range of domains, including *behaviour for learning skills, social and emotional skills, academic literacy, learning and study skills* and *positive health and wellbeing skills* (NBSS, 2018b) to support their ongoing development and movement towards self-management.

Thereafter, it is recommended that the SNA operates at the classroom level in a non-teaching capacity, but only in classrooms where assistance is deemed necessary. With regard to the classroom assistant role, this may include secondary care-associated tasks (DES, 2014) including preparing and tidying workspaces and classrooms, preparing and displaying teacher-based resources, and supporting the organisation of teaching materials. In terms of the 'edu-carer' role, it is recommended that the SNA works alongside the teacher to support positive

behaviour for all and to support all pupils' movement towards self-scaffolding and independence. It is paramount that SNAs' work is guided by evidence-based frameworks and theories, as previously outlined. SNA-pupil support must be contingent with pupils' needs and fade appropriately to ensure that responsibility is transferred to the pupil in as timely a manner as possible (van de Pol et al., 2010). As previously detailed in *Chapter Seven*, consideration must be given to matters related to pupil proximity and pupil prompting, as well as the potential use of behavioural reward strategies to provide temporary, extrinsic support for pupils. In this way, and through a collaborative, systemic approach, pupils can be supported to develop self-management and self-regulatory skills related to learning, emotions and behaviour in their overall journey towards independence. A summary of these recommendations at each level of the system is presented in *Figure 47*.

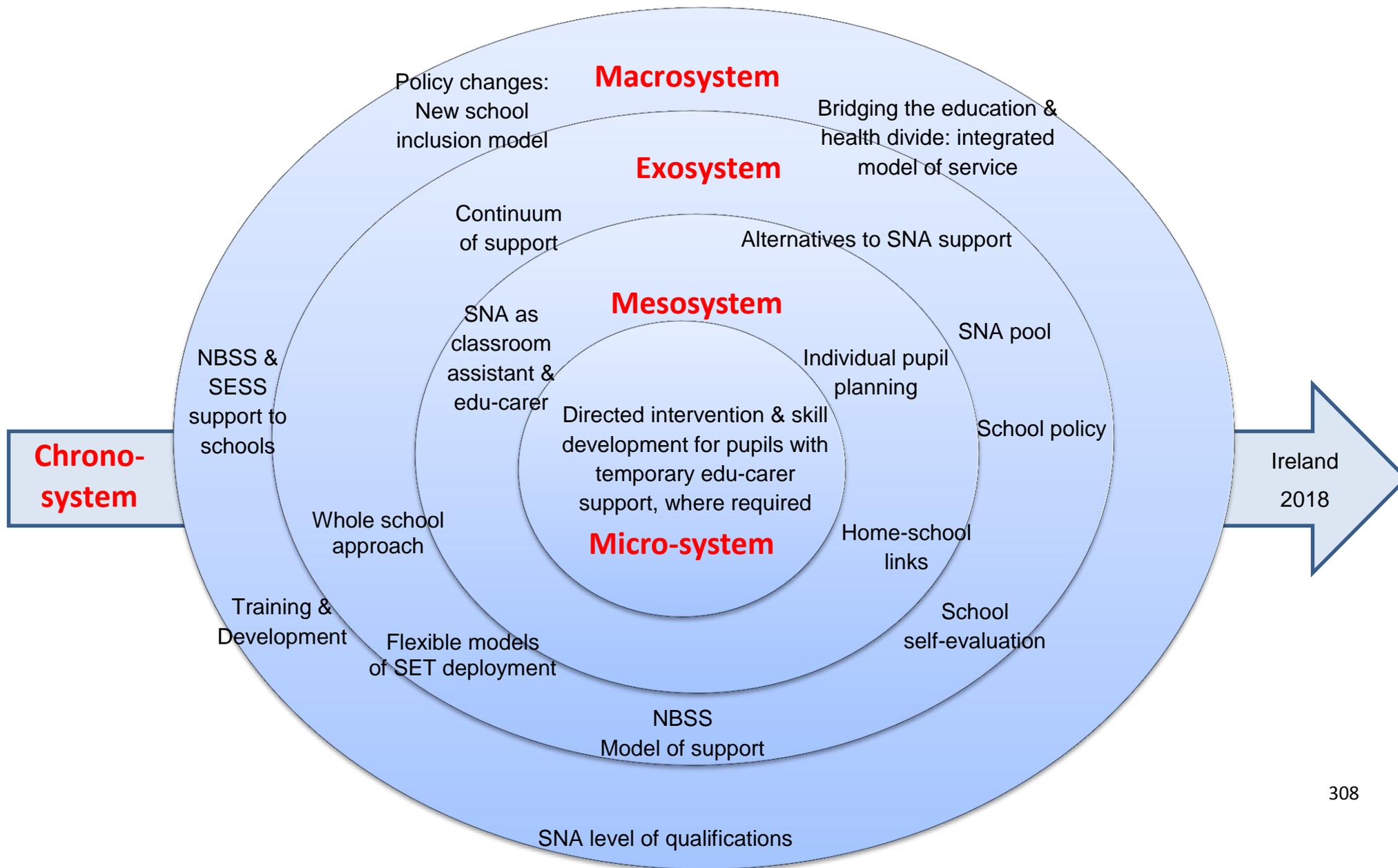


Figure 47: Summary of the recommendations at each level of the system

8.7 Limitations of the study and future research

The design and execution of a 'perfect' study free from limitations is deemed to be impossible (Howe, 2012). Although the researcher ensured that matters of validity, reliability and fidelity were at the heart of this study, a number of limitations were inherent in the research process, as detailed in *Chapter Three* (see *section 3.9*). Such limitations related to the sampling strategy, the selection process, the social desirability of participants and observer influence. These limitations must be considered when interpreting the study's findings, whereby together, they offer clear avenues for future research. In addition, a number of further avenues for future research have been identified. These relate to the duration and breadth of the case studies, the voice of the child, the use of audio-recordings and the context of the research. Each of these will be presented in turn, with additional comments outlined in relation to future scope for the presentation of findings from this research project.

8.7.1 Duration and breadth of the case studies.

Firstly, this study served to provide a snapshot of the educational provision for pupils with behavioural care needs in mainstream primary schools in Ireland across a range of settings. Although an array of data was gathered in each case study setting, the voices of some additional school personnel were omitted from the study due to time constraints. Such voices included that of the school principal, SET and target pupils' parents. Accordingly, future research is warranted that involves more in-depth study of the educational experiences of pupils with behavioural care needs. Akin to the studies in the U.K (Webster & Blatchford, 2013a, 2017), it is recommended that comprehensive, pupil-centred data is collected across one full school week to provide greater clarity on the nuances of target pupils' everyday experiences and support they receive.

8.7.2 Voice of the child: Research methodologies.

Secondly, the voice of the child needs continued prominence in the research process. Although this research included pupils' voices, the use of the semi-structured interview alone could be deemed a limitation of the study. Einarisdóttir

(2007) emphasises the importance of mastering a variety of methods for gaining insight into children's perspectives. She notes that children can have different ways of expressing their views whereby differing research methods can shed light on diverse aspects of children's views. In addition, a child's age can influence his/her preference for different research methods. Accordingly, future research needs to consider utilising more age-appropriate data collection methodologies with children beyond the interview. Examples may include the use of toys, paper and crayons, sand, clay, pictures, photographs, dolls and puppets (Brooker, 2001). In addition, the use of group interviews may be considered, whereby Einarsdóttir outlines children as being more "powerful when they are together" (2007, p. 200).

8.7.3 Use of audio-recordings.

Thirdly, it is recommended that future research considers the use of audio-recordings to provide greater insight into the nature of SNA-pupil interactions within the classroom. Whilst a range of factors were observed and coded during the systematic observations, the dialogue, or nature of talk between SNAs and pupils was not a feature of data-gathering. As revealed in the U.K context, the nature of TA-pupil talk can significantly differ to that of teacher-pupil talk (Radford et al., 2011; Radford et al., 2015). Although the inclusion of the OPTIC criteria (Merrett & Wheldall, 1986) on the observation schedule allowed the nature of some of the focused SNA-pupil interactions to be captured and analysed, the 'bin' category had to be used on numerous occasions. This occurred when focused SNA-pupil interactions were difficult to categorise or when an interaction did not align with one of the four criteria. In addition, inter-rater reliability checks showed the lowest similarity in scores between *R1* and *R2* for the OPTIC schedule data, highlighting some of the difficulties experienced in accurately coding the nature of the focused interactions through live observations alone. In light of this finding, future research would benefit from the inclusion of audio-recordings of SNA-pupil interactions, particularly in terms of focusing on SNAs' use of oral differentiation, behaviour-support strategies and pupil prompting. This information could aid to inform ensuing training for SNAs, where required, and allow comparisons to be drawn between the Irish SNA system and that of TAs in the U.K.

8.7.4 Expansion of research contexts.

Fourthly, it must be acknowledged that this research focused explicitly on one group of pupils in one school-type i.e. pupils with behavioural care needs in mainstream primary schools. It is recommended that future research is expanded to consider SNAs' support of pupils with alternative care needs across a range of educational settings. Sample settings include special schools, special classes, early years' settings, post-primary settings and July Education Provision¹⁰ settings. Notably, a review of findings from Daly et al. (2016) highlights significant differences across educational settings with regard to SNAs' support of pupils with ASD. Accordingly, the need for future research in this area is warranted to expand the findings of Daly et al. (2016) by engaging in research in other educational settings and with a range of pupil-related care needs.

8.7.5 Presentation of findings.

As previously outlined in *Chapter Three*, the case study data analysis process involved a lengthy, rigorous, within-case analysis of each case study, followed by cross-case analysis across the 20 case studies. Specifically, by adopting the IPA data analysis approach, each case study firstly underwent a detailed examination and analysis process before moving to the cross-case analysis. This is evident by examining the researcher's codebook which depicts the commitment and rigour that underpinned the data analysis phase. However, in the presentation of findings, it was beyond the scope of this thesis to tell the 'story' of each case study. Rather, Stake (2006) argues that by using multiple case studies across several sites, the focus is placed more on the collection; on how the quintain is exhibited across cases, with reference to both converging and diverging perspectives. Accordingly, the depth of the individual case study data and the related analysis process may be under-reflected in this thesis. Nonetheless, by including individual voices within the final write up of the data, in addition to examples of 'positive practices' and diverging perspectives within and across themes, this served to ensure that the individual experience and individual case could be represented within the wider context of the entire dataset. Moving forward, the researcher is aware of the potential to present

¹⁰ July Education Provision is a DES scheme that provides funding for an extended school year for children with a severe or profound general learning disability or children with autism (DES, 2018a).

more information on the individual case study data during the dissemination of research findings, in addition to that of the 'bigger picture'.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that the SNA scheme in Ireland appears to be approaching a time of change. This is anticipated in light of the recommendations from the NCSE (2018) following the comprehensive review of the SNA scheme, whereby the NCSE has called for a new school inclusion model to deliver the right supports at the right time to students with additional care needs. Accordingly, it is necessary that any future research related to SNAs/ISAs is strongly informed by the findings of the NCSE review process and any subsequent changes that are made to the SNA scheme. As previously outlined, changes to policy and practice must be viewed through a cyclical lens, whereby policy implementation must be characterised by a continuous and unending sequence of reflection and evaluation. This is depicted in the Policy Cycle strategy (Knill & Tosun, 2008, p. 10), as previously presented in *Figure 46*.

8.8 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to obtain a detailed and integrated account of the preparedness and deployment of SNAs when supporting target pupils' behavioural care needs and developing target pupils' independence in mainstream primary schools in Ireland. In particular, the author sought to interrogate the tensions that exist between SNAs' provision of care support for pupils with behavioural care needs and their development of pupils' independence, in light of the current non-teaching role of the SNA (DES, 2014). A review of this thesis highlights the comprehensive research journey that was undertaken by the author over a four year period. This thesis presents a rich, valid and reliable account of the SNA scheme in supporting pupils with behavioural care needs in mainstream primary schools in Ireland 2018, with due regard for the larger national context, the diverse classroom settings and the individual pupil voice. Based on the findings of this research, it is clear that the SNA scheme presents various strengths and limitations for pupils with behavioural care needs, as well as the wider school community. Undoubtedly, the relevance of this research is particularly salient in Ireland 2018, whereby changes to the current status of the SNA scheme are an impending reality in light of the comprehensive review of the SNA scheme, as recently completed by the NCSE

(2018). In this regard, the findings of this research must be used to inform research, policy and practice. Those operating at all levels of the eco-system must strive towards optimising inclusive practices in our education system, with the aim of supporting the holistic development of *all* children. Ultimately, the relevance and appropriateness of the SNA scheme must constantly be critiqued, as informed by a continuous cycle of research, to ensure that schools' resources are optimally utilised in the journey towards inclusive education for all. In this way, the original tenets of the SNA scheme can be realised, allowing children with SEN, "to participate fully in the education system...and to enable them to reach their potential" (DES, 1998, as cited in DES, 2011a, pp. 127-128).

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List of Appendices

Appendix	Title	Page
A	Online SNA Survey.....	345
B	Survey information sheet and consent for participants.....	351
C	Observation schedule.....	352
D	Information letter for Principal.....	357
E	Consent form for Principal	360
F	Information letter for class teacher.....	361
G	Consent form for class teacher.....	364
H	Information letter for SNA.....	365
I	Consent form for SNA	368
J	Information letter for parents.....	369
K	Consent form for parents	372
L	Semi-structured interview schedule teacher.....	373
M	Semi-structured interview schedule SNA.....	375
N	Semi-structured interview schedule pupil.....	376
O	Guiding template for documentary review.....	377
P	Guiding template for field notes.....	379
Q	Information letter for pupils.....	381
R	Pupil letter of assent.....	382
S	Overview of initial noting and coding phase, as sourced from the researcher's NVivo codebook.....	383
T	Overview of sub-ordinate themes, as sourced from the researcher's NVivo codebook.....	385
U	Sample case study report.....	387
V	Sample 'Interactive Factors Framework', completed in light of SNA interview for case no. 12.....	394
W	Sample 'Interactive Factors Framework', completed in light of all case study data for case no. 12.....	395

X	Superordinate themes and sub-ordinate themes, as sourced from the researcher's NVivo codebook.....	396
Y	In-case and cross-case analysis matrix.....	398

Appendix A: Special Needs Assistant: Survey

Demographic Information

Gender

Male	
Female	

Age Range

20 – 30 years	
30 – 40 years	
40 – 50 years	
50 – 60 years	
60 years +	

School Type

Urban DEIS band 1	
Urban DEIS band 2	
DEIS rural	
Non-DEIS	
Other (please state)	

School Level

Pre-school (early years)	
Primary	
Post-Primary	
Special School	
3 rd Level education	
Other (please state)	

Number of years working as an SNA _____

Length of time working with the target child (child with challenging behaviour):

< 1 year	
1 – 2 years	
2 – 3 years	
3 – 4 years	
5 years +	

Planning/Preparation: Training

What is your highest level of qualification?

Junior Certificate	
Leaving Cert Applied	
Leaving Certificate	
Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) level 3 or above	
Post-Leaving Certificate/Higher Certificate (PLC: Level 6)	
Ordinary Bachelor Degree (Diploma: Level 7)	
Honours Bachelor Degree (Level 8)	
Post-Graduate Award e.g. Higher Diploma, Masters or Doctorate (Level 9/10)	
Other (please state)	

Please indicate what job-specific training you have undertaken for working as an SNA, if any?

20 hour introductory course for SNAs	
60 hour certificate course for SNAs	
FETAC accredited programme (Level 3 or higher)	
School-based training	
Online course	
Local education course (e.g. afternoon/day course)	
Other (please state)	

Have you undertaken any specific training in relation to behaviour management?

Yes	
No	

Please provide details:

Has the school provided any training in relation to behaviour management?

Yes	
No	

Please provide details:

Have you undertaken any specific training in relation to supporting pupils' development of independence skills?

Yes	
No	

Please provide details:

What do you feel are your greatest training needs, in light of your role as an SNA working with a child with challenging behaviour. Please be as specific as possible

To what extent are you satisfied with the availability of training opportunities to support your role as SNA working with a child with challenging behaviour?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Very dissatisfied	<input type="radio"/>	Very satisfied						

To what extent are you satisfied with the quality/standard of any training that you may have received to date for your role as SNA working with a child with challenging behaviour?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Very dissatisfied	<input type="radio"/>	Very satisfied						

Planning/Preparation

Do you engage in planning and feedback meetings with the class teacher?

Regularly	
Sometimes	
Rarely	
No	

How do these meetings usually occur?

Planning and feedback meetings rarely/never occur	
Liaison usually occurs on an informal basis (e.g. at break time, during the school day etc.)	
Meetings are mainly planned and pre-scheduled, time is set aside for teachers/SNA to meet	
A combination of both planned and informal meetings take place regularly	
Communication occurs between the SNA and teacher through written notes	
Other (please state)	

If formal/scheduled meetings take place, when do usually they occur?

During the school day (teaching time)	
During personal, non-paid time (e.g. before/after school)	
During Croke Park hours	
Other (please state)	

Do you attend individual pupil planning meetings for the target pupil (e.g. IEP meetings, meeting for the Personal Pupil Plan)?

Yes	
No	

Please rate the degree to which you feel your voice is heard in relation to goal-setting for the child's personalised planning, in light of his/her challenging behaviour and care needs

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
My voice is not heard	<input type="radio"/>	My voice is strongly heard						

Please rate your level of awareness of the targets outlined in the child's personalised planning, in light of his/her challenging behaviour and care needs

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Unaware	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly aware						

Please rate your level of involvement in the **assessment and progress monitoring** of the child for his/her personalised planning, in light of his/her challenging behaviour and care needs

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not involved	<input type="radio"/>	Highly involved						

Is the target pupil involved in his/her personalised planning?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not sure	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please rate the degree to which you feel the pupil's voice is heard and included in his/her personalised planning

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Child's voice not heard or included	<input type="radio"/>	Child's voice highly heard and included						

Please rate the degree to which you feel the pupil is dependent on you, in comparison to that of other children in his/her class

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Minimal SNA dependence	<input type="radio"/>	High SNA dependence						

Staff perceived self-efficacy in relation to challenging behaviour: Hastings & Brown (2002)

On a scale of 1-7, please rate your feelings in relation to the following statements:

I feel confident when dealing with challenging behaviour

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not confident	<input type="radio"/>	Very confident						

I feel in control when dealing with challenging behaviour

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not in control	<input type="radio"/>	Highly in control						

I feel satisfaction in dealing with challenging behaviours

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Minimal satisfaction	<input type="radio"/>	High satisfaction						

I feel that I have a positive impact on the challenging behaviours with which I deal

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Minimal positive impact	<input type="radio"/>	High positive impact						

I find it difficult to work with challenging behaviours

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Low difficulty level	<input type="radio"/>	High difficulty level						

I feel stressed when I work with challenging behaviours

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Minimal stress	<input type="radio"/>	High stress						

Appendix B: Survey information sheet and consent for participants

My name is Claire Griffin and I am an Educational Psychologist, working as a lecturer in Educational Psychology at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. You are invited to complete a questionnaire as part of my PhD research, conducted under the supervision of Professor Peter Blatchford, University College London. Before you provide consent, it is important that you understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve.

Purpose of the Study:

The main focus of my research pertains to children who are in receipt of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support and present with behavioural care needs. This study aims to examine the role of the SNA within an Irish context, with a particular focus on the preparedness and deployment of SNAs when working with such pupils. It is intended that research findings will be used to inform policy and practice within an Irish context and support the enhancement of inclusive practices within schools.

Full ethical permission has been granted for this study. If you agree to participate in this research, you will be invited to tick the 'I agree' box below. The survey will take approximately five minutes to complete. Participation in this study is voluntary and you will be free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. The researcher will ensure that no school, teacher, SNA or pupil will be identifiable from the data whereby all participating schools will be assured full anonymity.

For further details please contact Claire on claire.griffin@mic.ul.ie

Please read the following statements before ticking the 'I agree' box to continue.

- I understand what the study is about and what the results can be used for.
- I know that participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any stage without giving reason.
- I am aware that my results will be kept confidential.
- I am over 18 years of age.
- I agree to take part in the above study.

Appendix C: Observation schedule

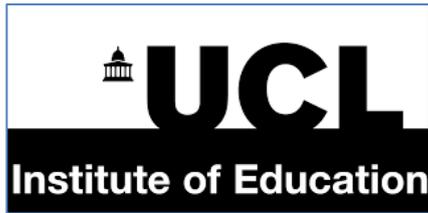
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Time interval (min)	Target Child														Comparison Child						Additional Notes									
	INTERACTION WITH... (tick one column)					FOCUS (tick one column)			AUDIENCE		OPTIC Schedule					Seating Context	Adult Context		INTERACTION WITH... (tick one column)					FOCUS (tick one column)		AUDIENCE				
	Teacher	SNA	Peer	No interaction	Bin	Individual	Part of group	Part of class	Part of group	Part of class	Academic	Social/Conduct	Positive	Negative	Bin		Teacher	SNA	Teacher	SNA		Peer	No interaction	Bin	Individual	Part of group	Part of class	Part of group	Part of class	
17																														
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Time interval (min)	Target Child															Comparison Child										Additional Notes					
	INTERACTION WITH... (tick one column)					FOCUS (tick one column)			AUDIENCE		OPTIC Schedule					Seating Context	Adult Context		INTERACTION WITH... (tick one column)					FOCUS (tick one column)			AUDIENCE				
	Teacher	SNA	Peer	No interaction	Bin	Individual	Part of group	Part of class	Part of group	Part of class	Academic	Social/Conduct	Positive	Negative	Bin		Teacher	SNA	Teacher	SNA	Peer	No interaction	Bin	Individual	Part of group		Part of class	Part of group	Part of class		
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Environmental Analysis/Additional Notes:

Appendix D: Information letter for Principal



University of London, Institute of Education,
Department of Psychology and Human Development,
University College London
25 Woburn Square
London WC1H 0AA

Letter of Information to Principal

Dear Principal,

My name is Claire Griffin and I am an Educational Psychologist and lecturer in Educational and Developmental Psychology at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. I am currently undertaking part-time Doctoral studies at the University of London, Institute of Education under the supervision of Professor Peter Blatchford (Professor of Psychology and Education). The main focus of my research pertains to *children in receipt of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support who present with behavioural care needs*.

I would like to invite your school to partake in this research project. Before deciding however, I wish to outline some details on why the research is being conducted and what it will involve.

Purpose of the research

The SNA Scheme commenced in Ireland in 1998 to assist school authorities to make suitable provision for pupils with special care needs. Over the years, the role of the SNA has evolved, particularly in light of changing policies and practices within education. Over the same time period, however, a significant lack of research has occurred within the Irish context to support the work of SNAs, particularly those working with pupils with behavioural care needs.

This study aims to address this research gap by examining the role of the SNA within an Irish context, with a particular focus on the preparedness and deployment of SNAs when working with such pupils. In addition, the study seeks to focus on the educational experiences of pupils with behavioural care needs in receipt of SNA support. It is intended that research findings will be used to inform policy and practice within an Irish context and support the enhancement of inclusive practices within schools.

What will happen if I agree for my school to partake in the research?

If you agree for your school to partake in this research, you will be asked to identify a pupil with behavioural care needs in receipt of SNA support. With your permission, information letters (as compiled by the researcher) will be distributed to the relevant class teacher, SNA and parents of the specific child. All parties will be asked to provide written consent to partake in the study. Where appropriate, the pupil will also be invited to give written assent.

Classroom Observation: Once all consent forms have been signed and returned, the researcher will spend two days within the child's classroom. Some of this time will be spent observing in the classroom and engaging in systematic note-taking. Data logged will pertain to the child's behaviour, his/her interactions with peers/adults, the support patterns used by staff with the child etc. Data will also be collected on a randomly selected number of average-attaining pupils within the classroom to serve as a comparison for logged information. Where permission is granted, the researcher will also review the child's Individualised Education Plan and/or Behaviour Support Plan to gain insight into the documented plan within the school to support the child's needs.

SNA Questionnaire/Interview: Following the observation period, the SNA will be invited to complete a questionnaire. This will seek information regarding his/her preparedness for the SNA role and the model of support used with the child. Following completion, the SNA will be invited to engage in a short interview with the researcher during which further information will be sought in relation to the aforementioned themes.

Teacher Interview: The class teacher will also be invited to partake in a similar interview. This will again focus on supporting the pupil with behavioural care needs and the work of the SNA and teacher in this regard.

Pupil Interview: Where parental consent has been provided, the pupil will also be invited to partake in a short interview. This interview will take the form of an informal chat with the researcher and will seek information pertaining to the child's likes/dislikes in schools, as well as the supports he/she receives.

Each interview should take between 20-40 minutes and will occur in a quiet location at a time convenient to the school staff. Where permission is granted, all interviews will be audio-recorded to support data analysis at a later date.

What are the potential benefits of engaging in this study?

To date, minimal research has occurred within an Irish context to support the day-to-day practices of the SNA and his/her work with pupils with behavioural care needs. By allowing your school to engage in this research, you will aid to provide greater insight into the strengths and needs of the current SNA Scheme in Ireland in supporting pupils with behavioural care needs. This applied research will allow SNAs, teachers and schools to voice any strengths and/or difficulties with the current SNA Scheme. This information will be used to inform both national policy and practices with an overall aim of improving inclusive practices within mainstream schools.

What will happen to the information?

All information collected within the school will be kept completely confidential and will not be released to any third party. The researcher will ensure that no school, teacher, SNA or pupil will be identifiable from the data whereby all participating schools will be assured full anonymity. All raw data will be stored in a secure location and on password protected computers and only available to the research team. The researcher will comply at all times with the Data Protection Act.

Following data collection and analysis, information gathered across a number of schools and participants will be compiled together to form a set of aggregated results. This data will be used to create a report on the findings of the study. It is intended that this report will be presented as part of the Doctoral thesis submission, at conferences and in published written format. During such times, individual quotes from participants may be used to support points made. However, no names or identifiers will be revealed whereby confidentiality and anonymity will be assured at all times for all parties.

Following completion of the overall study, participating schools will be provided with a summary copy of the main findings of the report. This may serve to support future planning within the school in relation to inclusive practices.

Summary

Participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without giving any reason.

Having read this information sheet, I would really appreciate if you would consider allowing your school to become involved in this important research project. If you have any queries about the study, please feel free to contact me directly to discuss it.

Email: claire.griffin@mic.ul.ie

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. If you are happy to become involved in the study, please sign the attached consent form.

Kind regards,

Claire Griffin

Claire Griffin

Educational Psychologist.

Appendix E: Consent form for Principal

Consent Form: Principal

Researcher: Claire Griffin

Supervisor: Professor Peter Blatchford

If you wish for your school to become involved in this research study, please read the following statements, place a tick in the boxes and sign the consent form.

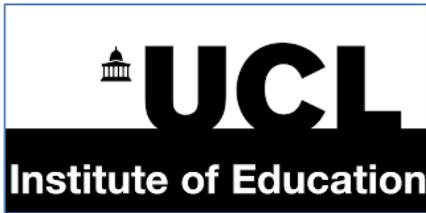
- I have read the letter of information and I understand what the project is about and what the results will be used for
- I know that participation is voluntary
- I know that my school can withdraw from the study at any time
- I am aware that results will be kept confidential
- I agree to allow this study to be conducted in my school
- I agree to allow the researcher to review planning paperwork related to the child with behavioural care needs, such as the child's Individual Education Plan and/or Behaviour Support Plan

Name of Principal: (PRINTED): _____

Name of Principal: (Signature): _____

Date: _____

Appendix F: Information letter for class teacher



University of London, Institute of Education,
Department of Psychology and Human Development,
University College London
25 Woburn Square
London WC1H 0AA

Letter of Information: Teacher

Dear Teacher,

My name is Claire Griffin and I am an Educational Psychologist and lecturer in Educational and Developmental Psychology at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. I am currently undertaking part-time Doctoral studies at the University of London, Institute of Education under the supervision of Professor Peter Blatchford (Professor of Psychology and Education). The main focus of my research pertains to *children who are in receipt of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support and present with behavioural care needs*.

I would like to invite you to partake in this research project. Before deciding however, I wish to outline some details on why the research is being conducted and what it will involve.

Purpose of the Research

The SNA Scheme commenced in Ireland in 1998 to assist school authorities to make suitable provision for pupils with special care needs. Over the years, the role of the SNA has evolved, particularly in light of changing policies and practices within education. Over the same time period, however, a significant lack of research has occurred within the Irish context to support the work of SNAs, particularly those working with pupils with behavioural care needs.

This study aims to address this research gap by examining the role of the SNA within an Irish context, with a particular focus on the preparedness and deployment of SNAs when working with such pupils. In addition, the study seeks to focus on the educational experiences of pupils with behavioural care needs in receipt of SNA support. It is intended that research findings will be used to inform policy and practice within an Irish context and support the enhancement of inclusive practices within schools.

What will happen if I agree for my school to partake in the research?

If you agree to partake in this research, you will be asked to identify a pupil with behavioural care needs in receipt of SNA support in your class. With your permission, information letters (as compiled by the researcher) will be distributed to the SNA and parents of the specific child. All parties will be asked to provide written consent to partake in the study. Where appropriate, the pupil will also be invited to give written assent.

Classroom Observation: Once all consent forms have been signed and returned, the researcher will spend two days within your classroom. This time will be spent observing in the classroom and engaging in systematic note-taking. Data logged will pertain to the child's behaviour, his/her interactions with peers/adults, the support patterns used by staff with the child etc. Data will also be collected on a randomly selected number of average-attaining pupils within the classroom to serve as a comparison for logged information. Where permission is granted, the researcher will also review the child's Individualised Education Plan and/or Behaviour Support Plan to gain insight into the documented plan within the school to support the child's needs.

SNA Questionnaire/Interview: Following the observation period, the SNA will be invited to complete a questionnaire. This will seek information regarding his/her preparedness for the SNA role and the model of support used with the child. Following completion, the SNA will be invited to engage in a short interview with the researcher during which further information will be sought in relation to the aforementioned themes.

Teacher Interview: You will also be invited to partake in a similar interview. This will again focus on supporting the pupil with behavioural care needs and your work with the SNA in this regard.

Pupil Interview: Where parental consent has been provided, the pupil will also be invited to partake in a short interview. This interview will take the form of an informal chat with the researcher and will seek information pertaining to the child's likes/dislikes in schools, as well as the supports he/she receives.

Each interview should take between 20-40 minutes and will occur in a quiet location at a time convenient to you. Where permission is granted, interviews will be audio-recorded to support data analysis at a later date.

What are the potential benefits of engaging in this study?

To date, minimal research has occurred within an Irish context to support the day-to-day practices of the SNA and his/her work with pupils with behavioural care needs. By engaging in this research, you will aid to provide greater insight into the strengths and needs of the current SNA Scheme in Ireland in supporting pupils with significant behavioural care needs. This applied research will allow SNAs, teachers and schools to voice any strengths and/or difficulties with the current SNA Scheme. This information will be used to inform both national policy and practices with an overall aim of improving inclusive practices within mainstream schools.

What will happen to the information?

All information collected within the school will be kept completely confidential and will not be released to any third party. The researcher will ensure that no school, teacher, SNA or pupil will be identifiable from the data whereby all participating schools will be assured full anonymity. All raw data will be stored in a secure location and on password protected computers and only available to the research team. The researcher will comply at all times with the Data Protection Act.

Following data collection and analysis, information gathered across a number of schools and participants will be compiled together to form a set of aggregated results. This data will be used to create a report on the findings of the study. It is intended that this report will be presented as part of the Doctoral thesis submission, at conferences and in published written format. During such times, individual quotes from participants may be used to support points made. However, no names or identifiers will be revealed whereby confidentiality and anonymity will be assured at all times for all parties.

Following completion of the overall study, participating schools will be provided with a summary copy of the main findings of the report. This may serve to support future planning within the school in relation to inclusive practices.

Summary

Participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without giving any reason.

Having read this information sheet, I would really appreciate if you would consider becoming involved in this important research project. If you have any queries about the study, please feel free to contact me directly to discuss it.

Email: claire.griffin@mic.ul.ie

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. If you are happy to become involved in the study, please sign the attached consent form.

Kind regards,

Claire Griffin

Claire Griffin

Educational Psychologist.

Appendix G: Consent form for class teacher

Consent Form: Teacher

Researcher: Claire Griffin

Supervisor: Professor Peter Blatchford

If you wish to become involved in this research study, please read the following statements, place a tick in the boxes and sign the consent form.

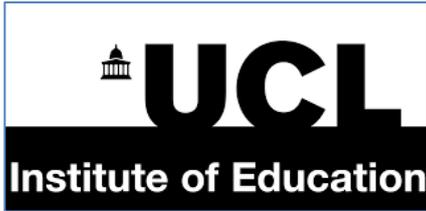
- I have read the letter of information and I understand what the project is about and what the results will be used for
- I know that participation is voluntary
- I know that I can withdraw from the study at any time
- I am aware that results will be kept confidential
- I agree to allow this study to be conducted in my class
- I agree to allow the interview to be audio-recorded
- I agree to allow the researcher to review planning paperwork related to the child with behavioural care needs, such as the child's Individual Education Plan and/or Behaviour Support Plan

Name of Teacher: (PRINTED): _____

Name of Teacher: (Signature): _____

Date: _____

Appendix H: Information letter for SNA



University of London, Institute of Education,
Department of Psychology and Human Development,
University College London
25 Woburn Square
London WC1H 0AA

Letter of Information to the Special Needs Assistant

Dear Special Needs Assistant,

My name is Claire Griffin and I am an Educational Psychologist and lecturer in Educational and Developmental Psychology at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. I am currently undertaking part-time Doctoral studies at the University of London, Institute of Education under the supervision of Professor Peter Blatchford (Professor of Psychology and Education). The main focus of my research pertains to *children who are in receipt of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support and present with behavioural care needs*.

I would like to invite you to partake in this research project. Before deciding however, I wish to outline some details on why the research is being conducted and what it will involve.

Purpose of the research

The SNA Scheme commenced in Ireland in 1998 to assist school authorities to make suitable provision for pupils with special care needs. Over the years, the role of the SNA has evolved, particularly in light of changing policies and practices within education. Over the same time period, however, a significant lack of research has occurred within the Irish context to support the work of SNAs, particularly those working with pupils with behavioural care needs.

This study aims to address this research gap by examining the role of the SNA within an Irish context, with a particular focus on the preparedness and deployment of SNAs when working with such pupils. In addition, the study seeks to focus on the educational experiences of pupils with behavioural care needs in receipt of SNA support. It is intended that research findings will be used to inform policy and practice within an Irish context and support the enhancement of inclusive practices within schools.

What will happen if I agree for my school to partake in the research?

If you agree to partake in this research, you will be asked to identify a pupil with behavioural care needs that you are supporting. Information letters (as compiled by the researcher) will also be distributed to the child's class teacher and parents. All parties will be asked to provide written consent to partake in the study. Where appropriate, the pupil will also be invited to give written assent.

Classroom Observation: Once all consent forms have been signed and returned, the researcher will spend two days within the child's classroom. These days will be spent observing in the classroom and engaging in systematic note-taking. Data logged will pertain to the child's behaviour, his/her interactions with peers/adults, the support patterns used by staff with the child etc. Data will also be collected on a randomly selected number of average-attaining pupils within the classroom to serve as a comparison for logged information. Where permission is granted, the researcher will also review the child's Individualised Education Plan and/or Behaviour Support Plan to gain insight into the documented plan within the school to support the child's needs.

SNA Questionnaire/Interview: Following the observation period, you will be invited to complete a questionnaire. This will seek information regarding your preparedness for the SNA role and the model of support used with the child. Following completion, you will also be invited to engage in a short interview with the researcher during which further information will be sought in relation to the aforementioned themes.

Teacher Interview: The class teacher will also be invited to partake in a similar interview. This will again focus on supporting the pupil with behavioural care needs and your work with the teacher in this regard.

Pupil Interview: Where parental consent has been provided, the pupil will also be invited to partake in a short interview. This interview will take the form of an informal chat with the researcher and will seek information pertaining to the child's likes/dislikes in schools, as well as the supports he/she receives.

Each interview should take between 20-40 minutes and will occur in a quiet location at a time convenient to the school staff. Where permission is granted, interviews will be audio-recorded to support data analysis at a later date.

What are the potential benefits of engaging in this study?

To date, minimal research has occurred within an Irish context to support the day-to-day practices of the SNA and his/her work with pupils with behavioural care needs. By engaging in this research, you will aid to provide greater insight into the strengths and needs of the current SNA Scheme in Ireland in supporting pupils with behavioural care needs. This applied research will allow SNAs, teachers and schools to voice any strengths and/or difficulties with the current SNA Scheme. This information will be used to inform both national policy and practices with an overall aim of improving inclusive practices within mainstream schools.

What will happen to the information?

All information collected within the school will be kept completely confidential and will not be released to any third party. The researcher will ensure that no school, teacher, SNA or pupil will be identifiable from the data whereby all participating schools will be assured full anonymity. All raw data will be stored in a secure location and on password protected computers and only available to the research team. The researcher will comply at all times with the Data Protection Act.

Following data collection and analysis, information gathered across a number of schools and participants will be compiled together to form a set of aggregated results. This data will be used to create a report on the findings of the study. It is intended that this report will be presented as part of the Doctoral thesis submission, at conferences and in published written format. During such times, individual quotes from participants may be used to support points made. However, no names or identifiers will be revealed whereby confidentiality and anonymity will be assured at all times for all parties.

Following completion of the overall study, participating schools will be provided with a summary copy of the main findings of the report. This may serve to support future planning within the school in relation to inclusive practices.

Summary

Participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without giving any reason.

Having read this information sheet, I would really appreciate if you would consider becoming involved in this important research project. If you have any queries about the study, please feel free to contact me directly to discuss it.

Email: claire.griffin@mic.ul.ie

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. If you are happy to become involved in the study, please sign the attached consent form.

Kind regards,

Claire Griffin

Claire Griffin

Educational Psychologist.

Appendix I: Consent form for SNA

Consent Form: Special Needs Assistant

Researcher: Claire Griffin

Supervisor: Professor Peter Blatchford

If you wish to become involved in this research study, please read the following statements, place a tick in the boxes and sign the consent form.

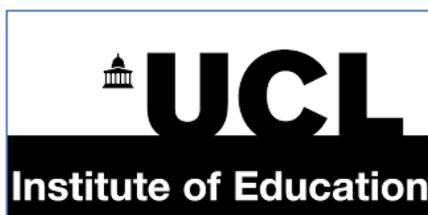
- I have read the letter of information and I understand what the project is about and what the results will be used for
- I know that participation is voluntary
- I know that I can withdraw from the study at any time
- I am aware that results will be kept confidential
- I agree to allow the interview to be audio-recorded

Name of Special Needs Assistant: (PRINTED):

Name of Special Needs Assistant: (Signature): _____

Date: _____

Appendix J: Information letter for parents



University of London, Institute of Education,
Department of Psychology and Human Development,
University College London
25 Woburn Square
London WC1H 0AA

Letter of Information to Parents

Dear Parent,

My name is Claire Griffin and I am an Educational Psychologist and lecturer in Educational and Developmental Psychology at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. I am currently undertaking part-time Doctoral studies at the University of London, Institute of Education under the supervision of Professor Peter Blatchford (Professor of Psychology and Education). The main focus of my research pertains to *children who are in receipt of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support and present with behavioural care needs*.

I would like to invite your child to partake in this research project. Before deciding however, I wish to outline some details on why the research is being conducted and what it will involve.

Purpose of the research

The SNA Scheme commenced in Ireland in 1998 to assist school authorities to make suitable provision for pupils with care needs. Over the years, the role of the SNA has evolved, particularly in light of changing policies and practices within education. Over the same time period, however, a significant lack of research has occurred within the Irish context to support the work of SNAs and their work with pupils.

This study aims to address this research gap by examining the role of the SNA within an Irish context, with a particular focus on the preparedness and deployment of SNAs when working with pupils. In addition, the study seeks to focus on the educational experiences of pupils in receipt of SNA support. It is intended that research findings will be used to inform policy and practice within an Irish context and support the enhancement of inclusive practices within schools.

What will happen if I agree for my school to partake in the research?

If you agree for your child to partake in this research, an information letters (as compiled by the researcher) will be distributed to your child's class teacher and SNA. All parties will be asked to provide written consent to partake in the study. Where appropriate, your child will also be invited to give written assent.

Classroom Observation: Once all consent forms have been signed and returned, the researcher will spend two days within your child's classroom. These days will be spent observing in the classroom and engaging in systematic note-taking. Data logged will pertain to your child's behaviour, his/her interactions with peers/adults, the support patterns used by staff with your child etc. Data will also be collected on a randomly selected number of other pupils within the classroom. Where permission is granted, the researcher will also review your child's Individualised Education Plan and/or Behaviour Support Plan to gain insight into the documented plan within the school to support your child.

SNA Questionnaire/Interview: Following the observation period, the SNA will be invited to complete a questionnaire. This will seek information regarding his/her preparedness for the SNA role and the model of support used with your child. Following completion, the SNA will be invited to engage in a short interview with the researcher during which further information will be sought in relation to the aforementioned themes.

Teacher Interview: The class teacher will also be invited to partake in a similar interview.

Pupil Interview: If you are happy to provide parental consent, your child will also be invited to partake in a short interview. This interview will take the form of an informal chat with the researcher and will seek information pertaining to your child's likes/dislikes in schools, as well as the supports he/she receives at school.

This interview should take less than 20 minutes and will occur in a quiet location in your child's school. Where permission is granted, this interview will be audio-recorded to support data analysis at a later date. Similarly, teacher and SNA interviews will also be audio-recorded.

What are the potential benefits of engaging in this study?

To date, minimal research has occurred within an Irish context to support the day-to-day practices of the SNA and his/her work with pupils with behavioural care needs. By allowing your child and his/her school to engage in this research, you will aid to provide greater insight into the strengths and needs of the current SNA Scheme in Ireland in supporting pupils. This applied research will allow SNAs, teachers and schools to voice any strengths and/or difficulties with the current SNA Scheme. This information will be used to inform both national policy and practices with an overall aim of improving inclusive practices within mainstream schools.

What will happen to the information?

All information collected within the school will be kept completely confidential and will not be released to any third party. The researcher will ensure that no school, teacher, SNA or pupil will be identifiable from the data whereby all participating schools will be assured full anonymity. All raw data will be stored in a secure location and on password protected computers and only available to the research team. The researcher will comply at all times with the Data Protection Act.

Following data collection and analysis, information gathered across a number of schools and participants will be compiled together to form a set of aggregated results. This data will be used to create a report on the findings of the study. It is intended that this report will be presented as part of the Doctoral thesis submission, at conferences and in published written format. During such times, individual quotes from participants may be used to support points made. However, no names or identifiers will be revealed whereby confidentiality and anonymity will be assured at all times for all parties.

Following completion of the overall study, participating schools will be provided with a summary copy of the main findings of the report. This may serve to support future planning within the school in relation to inclusive practices.

Summary

Participation in this study is voluntary and you and/or your child are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without giving any reason.

Having read this information sheet, I would really appreciate if you would consider allowing your child and school to become involved in this important research project. If you have any queries about the study, please feel free to contact me directly to discuss it.

Email: claire.griffin@mic.ul.ie

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. If you are happy to allow your child and school to become involved in the study, please sign the attached consent form.

Kind regards,

Claire Griffin

Claire Griffin

Educational Psychologist.

Appendix K: Consent form for parents

Consent Form: Parents

Researcher: Claire Griffin

Supervisor: Professor Peter Blatchford

If you wish for your child to become involved in this research study, please read the following statements, place a tick in the boxes and sign the consent form.

- I have read the letter of information and I understand what the project is about and what the results will be used for
- I know that participation is voluntary
- I know that the school and my child can withdraw from the study at any time
- I am aware that results will be kept confidential
- I agree to allow this study to be conducted within my child's class
- I agree to allow the researcher to review planning paperwork related to my child, such as the child's Individual Education Plan and/or Behaviour Support Plan
- I agree to allow my child to engage in a short interview with the researcher
- I agree to allow the interview to be audio-recorded

Name of Parent(s): (PRINTED): _____

Name of Parent(s): (Signature): _____

Date: _____

Appendix L: Semi-structured interview schedule teacher

Teacher Interview

A. Deployment

1. Why do you feel the child requires SNA support?
What do you view as the SNA's role in supporting the child with challenging behaviour?
2. What strategies does the SNA mainly use to support and manage the child's challenging behaviour? (preventative or reactive)
3. What strategies are used at a classroom level to support and manage the child's behaviour (environmental accommodations, skills teaching, preventative/reactive strategies)?
4. How do you find the pupils' level of independence in comparison to his/her peers?
5. Do you feel the pupil is dependent on the SNA? How do you know? (Learned helplessness)
6. One of the roles of the SNA is to promote the child's independence skills. What do you understand by this (autonomy, self-regulation, psychological empowerment and self-realization)?
7. Does the SNA (and/or class-teacher) use any strategies to try and promote the child's independence (self-management/self-determination/self-regulation/skill-teaching)?
8. Are any alternate supports used within the school for the pupil, other than SNA support?
9. Is there a plan in place to promote the child's independence? (fading plan) Please give details
10. To what degree is the SNA involved in supporting the child's development in this area?

B. Planning/Preparation: Individual Pupil Planning

11. Can you describe individualised planning for the pupil with challenging behaviour?
 - a. Attendance at meetings (SNA involvement?)
 - b. Assessment
 - c. Target setting
 - d. Progress-monitoring
 - e. Review procedures

12. Are there specific targets outlined in the IEP in relation to:
 - a. Challenging behaviour
 - b. Independence

13. What do you feel are the SNA's greatest training needs, in light of his/her work with the pupil with challenging behaviour?

14. Is the student involved in his/her own personalised planning?
 - a) In what way?
 - b) To what degree?

Appendix M: Semi-structured interview schedule SNA

SNA Interview

1. What do you think are some of the main reasons for the target child displaying challenging behaviour?
2. What strategies do you mainly use to support and manage the child's challenging behaviour? (consider preventative and reactive)
3. How do you find the pupil's level of independence in comparison to his/her peers?
4. Do you feel the pupil is dependent on you? How do you know? (Learned helplessness)
5. Do you use any strategies to try and promote the child's independence (or management of his/her behaviour) (self-management/self-determination/self-regulation)?
6. Are any alternate supports used within the school for the pupil, other than SNA support?
7. One of the roles of the SNA is to promote the child's independence skills. What do you understand by this (autonomy, self-regulation, psychological empowerment and self-realization)?
8. Is there a plan in place to promote the child's independence? (fading plan) Please give details
9. Are there specific targets outlined in the IEP in relation to:
 - a. Challenging behaviour
 - b. Independence
10. Do you feel you would benefit from training in strategies to support challenging behaviour, in light of your role as an SNA?
11. Do you feel you would benefit from training in strategies to support pupil independence, in light of your role as an SNA? (contingent responsiveness)
12. What is the most challenging aspect of your job?
13. What is the most rewarding aspect of your job?

Appendix N: Semi-structured interview schedule pupil

Semi-Structured Pupil Interview Schedule

Modelled on that employed by Broer, Doyle & Giangreco (2005) and Mortier, Desimpel, De Schauwer & Van Hove (2011)

Pupil Orientation & Rapport Building

1. Can you introduce yourself? (Age, hobbies, preferences)

Experiences in school

2. Can you tell me some things about school
 - a. What do you like?
 - b. What do you not like?

School-based supports

3. Can you tell me some things/people that help you in school?
4. In what way does she/he help you?
 - a. Does she help you with your work?
 - b. Does she help you if you are getting upset/angry?
 - c. In what other ways does she/he help you?
5. Can you tell me what you find good about the support?
6. What do you find most helpful?
7. Is there anything you don't like/don't find good about the supports?
8. What do you find least helpful?

Potential areas to explore: proximity, impact on peer relations/interactions
*e.g. Where does **** sit?*
Do you like when she/he sits near you?
What do your friends think/say?
9. Are there other supports at school that help you?
10. Are there any times that you don't need the support?
11. If there was something you could change about the support, what would it be?
12. Do you get a say in how much support you get? When/how?

Appendix O: Guiding template for documentary review

Focus on the following documents:

- Target child's IEP
- Target child's behaviour support plan
- Target child's Personal Pupil Plan

Availability of Documents

- Are the above documents available?
- Standard/clarity of the documents? (Provide details)
- Who was involved in creating the child-specific documents?
- Had the SNA a discrete role in this regard?
- Is the child's voice evident in his/her documentation?
- Has the child a voice in terms of the extent of SNA support required/available to him/her?

Assessment

- Do the target child's plans provide detail on assessments related to behaviour and independence (both external and school-based assessments)?
- Does pre-assessment occur to establish a base-line?

Target Setting

- Are there clear, SMART targets set for the child, both in relation to behaviour management and independence?
- Is the SNA role clearly outlined?
- Has the school documented how it intends to actively reduce, and, if possible, eliminate dependency on SNA support within a reasonable timeframe?
- Does this plan include time-bound targets for the development of independence skills?
- Does this plan include time-bound targets for the reduction in behavioural difficulties?
- What strategies are outlined for supporting the child's behavioural care needs:
 - Ecological
 - Preventative
 - Reactive
 - Withdrawal
 - Other
- Are the strategies evidence-based?

Progress-Monitoring

- Are there clear progress-monitoring procedures outlined, both in relation to behaviour management and fostering independence in the child?
- Is the SNA involved in this process?
- Is the child involved in this process?

Review Procedures

- Are there review procedures in place in terms of pupil progress and support?
- Is the SNA involved in this process?
- Is there a timeframe outlined in terms of how long this SNA resource is expected to be required?

Additional Comments

- Is there a balance between a strengths-based versus a needs-based approach?
- Is the voice of the child included?
 - How?
 - In what way?
 - Are the views given due weight?
 - Is the voice of the child included in reviewing the level of access to SNA support required?
 - Is the child aware of his/her targets to increase independence?

Appendix P: Guiding template for field notes

School Level Data-Gathering Sheet

A. Demographic Information

1. School type:

Urban DEIS band 1 Urban DEIS Band 2 DEIS Rural Non-Deis

2. Total number of students in the school: _____

a. Number of boys: _____

b. Number of girls: _____

3. Total number of teaching staff: _____

B: Planning/Preparation

Additional information regarding planning/preparation for supporting challenging behaviour

- Whole-school
- Class-level
- Individual pupil

Additional information regarding planning/preparation for supporting the development of pupils' independence skills

- Whole-school
- Class-level
- Individual pupil

C. SNA Deployment

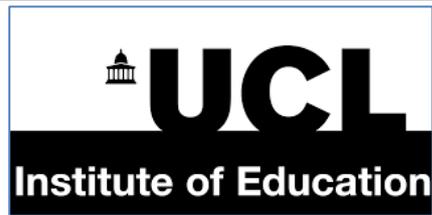
1. Is there evidence of a staged-approach to behaviour management within the school?
Details.

2. To what degree is the SNA responsible for managing the pupil's behaviour? (Sole responsibility, part of a classroom/whole-school approach?)

3. Is there evidence of alternate approaches to pupil support within the school, beyond that of the SNA? Please provide details.

4. To what level is pupil independence supported within the school/class?

Appendix Q: Information letter for pupils



Information Letter: Pupil

Dear _____,



My name is Claire Griffin and I am doing a project for college.

This project hopes to look at how some children learn in school and what helps them in the classroom.



As part of this project, I would like to have a short chat with you.

I will be asking you about school such as things you like, things you don't like and what helps you in school.

This will only be a short chat and will take place in your school.



This information will be really helpful for me.

If you have any questions about this, you can ask me or your teacher.



You don't have to get involved in this project. If you start and then change your mind, you can stop.

At the end of the project, Claire will write a report for College. She will not write the names of any of the people who talked to her.



Appendix R: Pupil letter of assent

Assent Form: Pupil

Please read and tick:



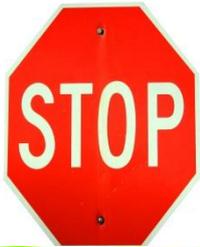
I read about Claire's college project.



I understand what the project is about.



I am happy to have a short chat with Claire about school



I know that I can stop being in the project if I want to at any time, and that it will be no problem.



I would like to be part of Claire's project

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix S: Overview of initial noting and coding phase, as sourced from the researcher's NVivo codebook

Phase 1 - Initial Noting & Coding - 43 initial codes developed	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
Alternate strategy	10	19
Basic care needs	8	10
Breaks from classroom	35	90
Cause of CB	19	33
CB - impact on teacher's time	22	58
Classroom rules take precedence	16	43
Collaboration between SNA and teacher	19	33
Collaboration with others	28	77
Creating new rules	1	1
Defining challenging behaviour	31	134
Emotional dependence - relationship	33	131
inappropriate strategy	7	12
Justifying the role	11	25
Learning needs	14	33
Learning support	10	14
Observational, monitoring role	22	44
On-task behaviour	6	7
Organisational dependence	26	60
Physical (in)dependence	17	28
Preventative strategies	16	42
Pupil involvement in planning	7	8
Pupil stress...well-being	9	23
Pupil's perspective on the role	20	106
Reactive strategies	19	23
Reinforcing teacher directions	6	10
Relieving stress	1	1
Reward system	23	60
Safety role	2	4
Satisfaction with the role	3	4

Self-monitoring strategies	9	18
Sensory needs	8	23
Social dependence	13	21
Stifling independence	13	33
Stress working with CB	13	24
Supporting independence	9	16
Targets - CB	7	8
Targets - Independence	6	13
Training - CB	22	57
Training - Independence	6	11
Training - other	11	32
Transition to sec. school	6	6
Turn-taking	1	1
Updating plans	10	17

Appendix T: Overview of sub-ordinate themes, as sourced from the researcher's NVivo codebook

Phase 2 - Developing Subordinate Themes - 43 initial codes mapped to 12 categories of codes	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
Adherence to classroom rules	22	93
Classroom rules take precedence	16	43
Creating new rules	1	1
Stifling independence	13	33
Supporting independence	9	16
Ecological awareness	19	50
Memorable quotes	32	128
Perspectives on challenging behaviour	31	217
Cause of CB	19	33
CB - impact on teacher's time	22	58
Defining challenging behaviour	30	122
Perspectives on independence	37	347
Basic care needs	8	10
Emotional dependence - relationship	33	131
Learning needs	14	33
Organisational dependence	26	60
Physical (in)dependence	17	28
Social dependence	13	21
Planning - perspectives	30	139
Collaboration between SNA and teacher	19	33
Collaboration with others	28	77
Pupil involvement in planning	7	8
Updating plans	10	17
Progress noted	25	74
Role of the SNA	38	194
Justifying the role	11	25
Observational, monitoring role	22	44
Pupil's perspective on the role	20	106
Reinforcing teacher directions	6	10
Safety role	2	4

Satisfaction with the role	3	4
Strategies deployed	40	290
Alternate strategy	10	19
Breaks from classroom	35	90
Sensory needs	8	23
inappropriate strategy	7	12
Learning support	10	14
On-task behaviour	6	7
Preventative strategies	16	42
Reactive strategies	19	23
Reward system	23	60
Self-monitoring strategies	9	18
Turn-taking	1	1
Stress	18	48
Pupil stress...well-being	9	23
Relieving stress	1	1
Stress working with CB	13	24
Targets	25	47
Targets - CB	7	8
Targets - Independence	6	13
Transition to sec. school	6	6
Training	27	118
Training - CB	22	57
Training - Independence	6	11
Training - other	11	32

Appendix U: Sample case study report

Case Study 1	
School Profile	
School type	Non-DEIS
School size	180
Class size	25
Pupil Profile	
Pupil Gender	Male
Class level	5 th class
Pupil SEN	Behavioural care needs
Pupil Age	11 years
Target child involved in personal planning	No
Child's voice heard in IEP	1
SNA Profile	
SNA Gender	Female
Age range	30 – 40 years
No. of years working as an SNA	9
Length of time working with target child	2 years
Training	
Highest level of qualification	FETAC level 6
Job specific training	School based training for behaviour management
Training related to behaviour management	Yes
Training related to independence	No
Satisfaction with availability of training/development opportunities	3
Satisfaction with the quality of training/development received	7
Planning/Preparation	
Planning/feedback meetings	Sometimes
How do they usually occur	Combination of both planned/informal
Formal	Croke park hours
Attendance at IEP	No
SNA voice is heard for IEP	5
Awareness of targets	5
Involvement in the assessment/monitoring	7
Independence/Dependence	
Pupil dependence on SNA	4

Deployment	
Level of SNA Access	Full time
SNA positioning in classroom	Mainly 1-1, SNA mainly seated next to the child
Child positioning in classroom	Front of the room, usual classroom seating pattern
Yard support	Observational; at a distance

Staff perceived self-efficacy	
Confidence	5
Control	5
Satisfaction	5
Positive impact	6
Difficulty	1
Stress	1

Deployment	
Type of CB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The child shows significant frustration with independent written work • Has previously engaged in physical attacking incidents • Reputation of being “troublesome” • High frustrations with tests • Throwing objects when frustrated. • Hates Irish and ball games • Over-reacts if hit by a ball • Could storm off during a PE lesson (flight risk) • Often low-level behavioural issues e.g. sulking/arguing • ‘Outbursts’ have decreased over time. • Hates group work – needs to develop tolerance for working in teams • Teacher outlined how the pupil gives the SNA a lot of “abuse” • Frustrations with work appear to be the biggest trigger for challenging behaviour. • Challenging behaviour referred to as a “strong force”
Approach with CB (teacher support)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SNA must organise the child in the morning to prevent disruption of the whole class • “He would immediately disrupt whatever was going on in the room” • Teacher outlined that without the SNA, it would set him off for the day; he wouldn’t get started into work • SNA serves to support the target child in keeping pace with the class • SNA reasons with the child when the teacher does not have the time; uses a different approach than the teacher (“calm, soothing approach”) • Child can be “quite stubborn” so needs support in this area • SNA needs to talk to the child to calm him down

<p>SNA support in other areas</p>	<p><u>Organisation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child reported to be quite dependent on the SNA in the mornings to organise himself for school. The child often comes to school late and requires support to settle him for class, organise his books etc. Otherwise, this would impinge on teacher-time. • Child deemed to require a lot of verbal prompts from the SNA to get organised. During the interview, the teacher became aware that this prompting was probably at a very high level, with minimal progress being made towards making the child more independent. Teacher aware that the child needs to move more towards self-management, particularly in light of secondary school. This awareness was not outlined by the SNA. <p><u>In-class observations</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SNA organised books on child's desk • SNA scribing for the child • SNA documenting the child's homework • Resource teacher reported to be practicing organisation skills for secondary school with the pupil – however, the SNA is unaware of such strategies and does not support this skill-learning in class • Poor organisation skills demonstrated by the pupil • Teacher stated, "If she wasn't organising him in the little details, I'm not so sure that he'd be learning" <p><u>Learning support</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SNA prompting on what to write from the board • SNA took pencil from child to write for him • SNA demonstrated constant oral prompting for academic work • Teacher outlined that the child often needs the SNA for the "initial push" • Teacher and SNA outlined how the SNA is needed to support the pupil to persevere with difficult tasks <p><u>Social support</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although paired with other children, the child constantly consulted with the SNA during paired work • The child described that on the bus, he is sometimes paired with the SNA rather than his peers <p><u>Additional needs</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupil reported to have issues with gross/fine motor skills. None identified during observation.
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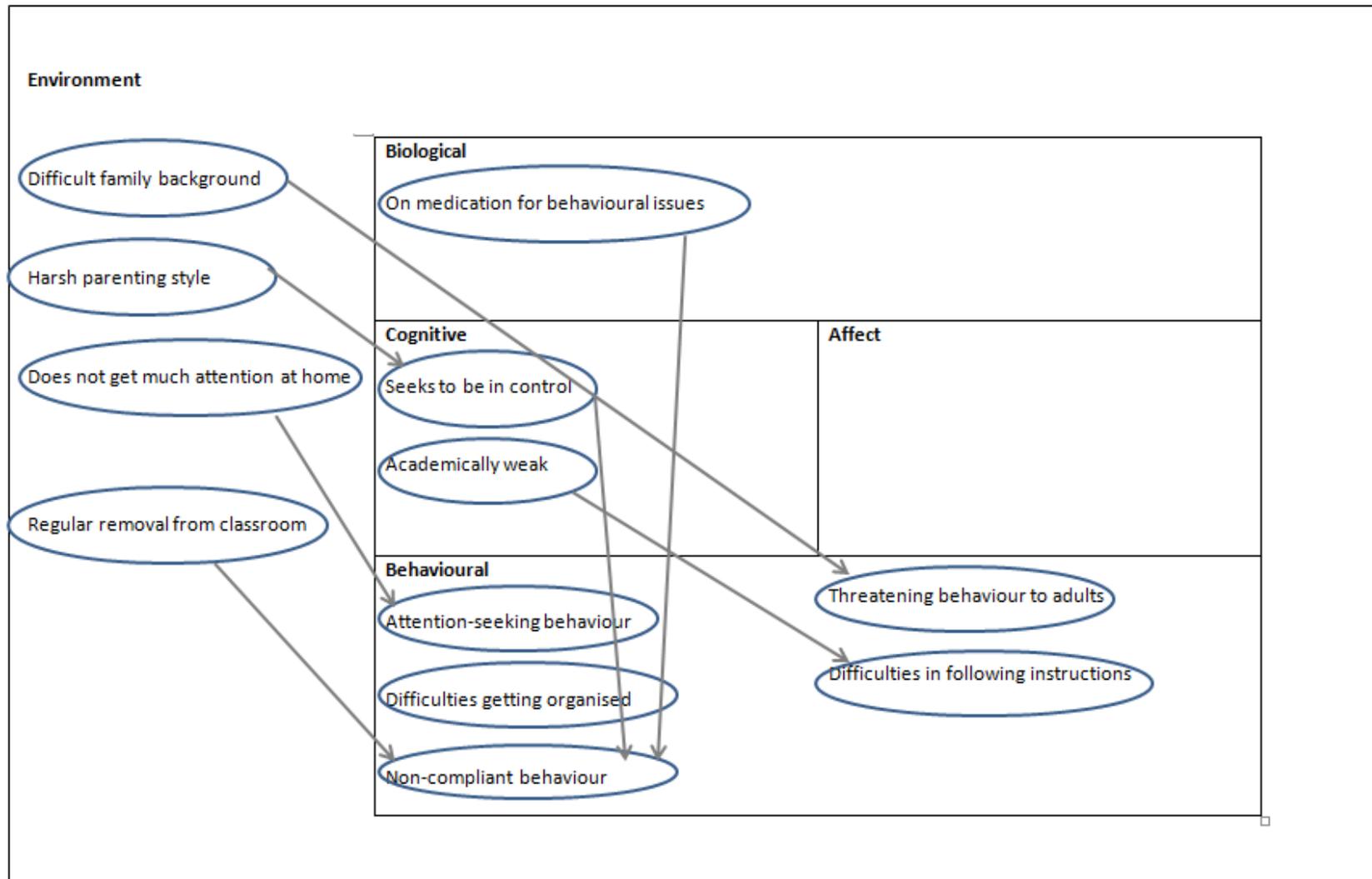
Physical support in the classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SNA seated next to the child. In September, this was reported as not being the case. However, since the school work has become more challenging since January (5th class), the SNA has needed to sit closer to the child to reduce frustrations with work and provide more learning support.
Independence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teacher recognised that the pupil, “Hasn’t made much progress in relation to independence” since commencing in the school. • The teacher outlined confusion as to why the pupil hasn’t made more progress in relation to independence. She stated, “He clearly is capable of doing more. He is not as helpless as we might make him out to be” • Teacher noted that the child can verbalise to the SNA when he does not require the help. • The teacher described the pupil-SNA dependence as a “link that I can’t control”. Teacher trying to reduce this dependence – “for me I certainly would just be trying to progress the area out of that independence and moving away from that little link. It’s very strong for a fifth class boy, I think”. • “Almost like a learned helplessness at this stage” (Teacher) • Teacher very aware of the child’s need to move towards independence: “When I see [the pupil], I only see moving towards independence. I only see that”. • Pupil quite dependent on the SNA in terms of organisation skills • Teacher aware of an over-dependence on verbal reminders for the child, something she feels they must work on. • SNA shows strong awareness of the potential limitations of sitting next to a child. However, she justified this in relation to the increased pace of work: “work is getting tougher”
Emotional connection/relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher describes the different relationship that the child holds with the SNA in comparison to her relationship with him. • She outlined how the SNA is able to “soothe” the child, has a calming influence, is more flexible with the child. • The child presents with high levels of emotional needs. • “[The SNA] and myself are quite disjointed in some way, we represent different sides, we merge sometimes but there is definitely, it’s as if he sees us as two different sides”. • “Her personality is of course, is beautiful, for him. He is very lucky in

	<p>that way”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher queries whether the child ‘manipulates’ the SNA; the SNA is flexible with him • The pupil stated; “She is like my sister...I can speak to her” • SNA highlights how the child talks to her about his weekend; what is going on in his life, off-loads to her when he is feeling emotional or overwhelmed.
Breaks from classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The SNA brings the child for a walk/break from the classroom on a regular basis. • These are unplanned/unscheduled breaks. • The SNA reported that the child can sometimes use this as an avoidance strategy to get out of Irish. • Breaks used as a means to de-escalate the frustrations and to talk to the SNA. • Child highlighted the walks as “one of the best things” that the SNA does.
Whole-school approaches to SNA deployment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SNAs are viewed as a whole-school resource. • Resources aimed at junior end of the school. • Strong awareness in the school of children moving on to secondary school. • Reported emphasis in the school on building independence. • “Sometimes the kid’s greatest obstacle is us – we just don’t get out of their way” (Principal) • The SNA can be a “double-edged sword” (Principal) • “SNA has a good balance between giving him a push and standing back” (Resource teacher) • The child has had full-time SNA access for two years
Pupil perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Pupil displayed high levels of insight into the role of the SNA and dependence. Highlighted that the SNA can engage in too much support and make him “lazy” and “not learn anything”. In contrast, also highlighted that the SNA supports his levels of frustrations and reduces the amount of ‘bumps’ that he incurs.</i> • Child aware of the physiological signs of frustration and anger • Child outlines the SNA as being patient • Child describes the strategies that the SNA uses with the child to de-escalate him including talking to him and encouraging him to breathe.

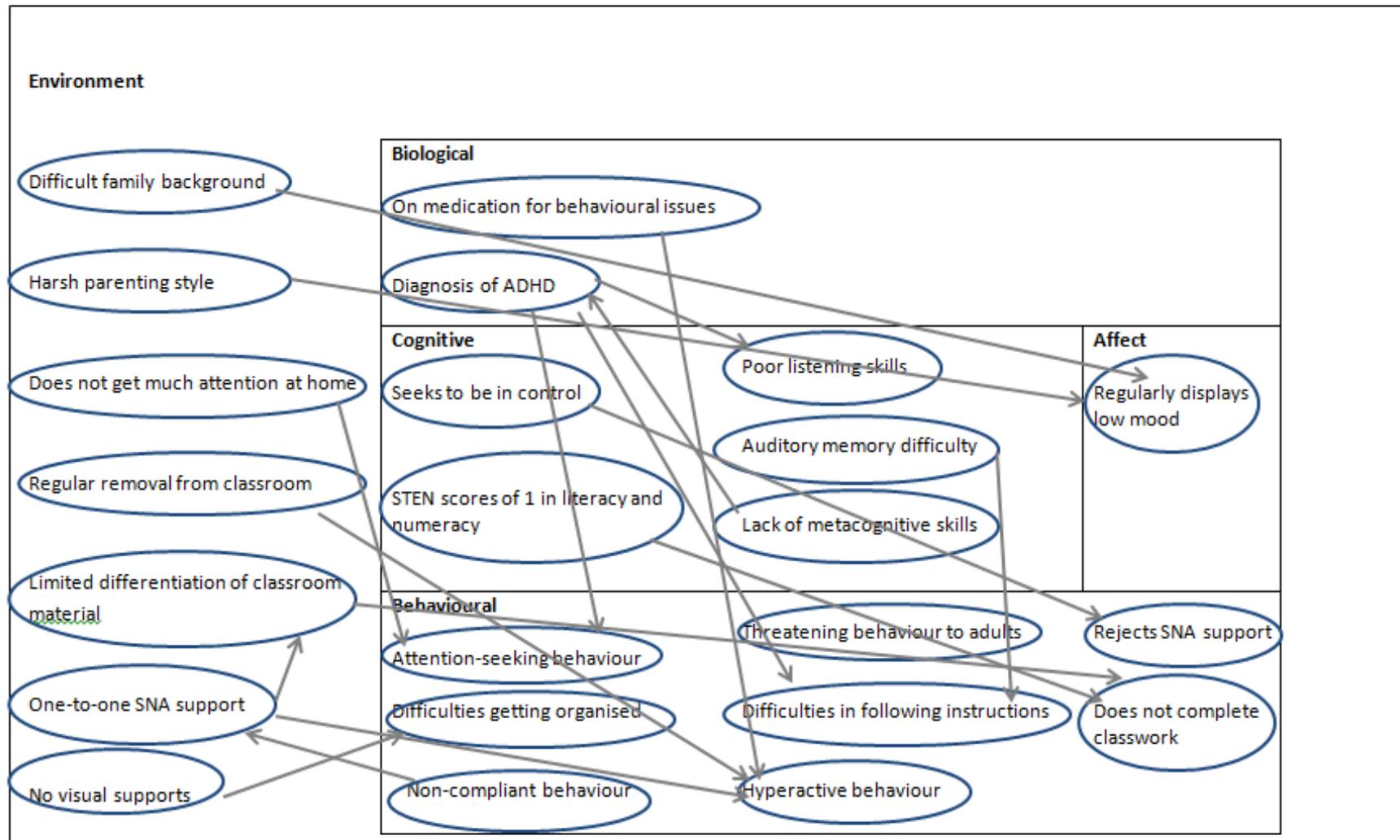
Additional information from school visit	
Preparedness	
Collaborative planning approach (Communication)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SNA attends generic staff meetings within the school. • SNA does not attend pupil's IEP meetings. • SNA informed of what occurred during the IEP meeting by the class teacher, where appropriate. At times, the SNA's input for the IEP meeting is sought before the formal meeting. • The resource teacher works separately from the class teacher and SNA. Minimal interaction between both settings with limited generalisation of skill learning from the resource setting to the main class context. • SNA keeps a daily diary related to the target pupil. However, this relates to incidents that occur for the pupil rather than any assessment or progress monitoring of IEP targets. • High levels of informal conversations between the SNA and teacher on a daily basis. • Croke park hours also used for the same. • Strong home-school links through informal meetings between the child's mother and class teacher. SNA not involved in the same.
Planning/ Documentation and target setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentation is predominantly related to the pupil's academic skills. • One priority learning need: "To improve his social, adaptive and communication skills". All strategies relate to 1-1 teaching in the resource setting. No mention of the SNA in the IEP. • The teacher and SNA referred to their collaborative aim to avoid and prevent behavioural triggers for the pupil. However, this is an 'oral target' rather than anything documented. • When the pupil becomes upset, the SNA tries to calm him down through 1-1 talking and breathing techniques. Breaks also used (see below). • The teacher referred to the child's need to become more organised in advance of moving to secondary school – finding books, pens, timetables. He also needs to learn how to deal with losing in a game. However, these targets were not outlined in the child's planning and no clear strategies for supporting skill development were outlined. <p><i>Although documentation showed some reference to teaching skills for improving challenging behaviour and independence, these were all related to the resource teaching setting. The SNA did not show awareness of these targets or means of supporting the same.</i></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teacher, with reference to the pupil’s IEP targets stated: “Now they tend to come up with the same targets a lot so I don’t know about progression of those targets really”. • SNA awareness of the need to work on organisation skills in advance of moving to secondary school. However, the SNA did not appear too clear on what strategies could be used to support the same.
Ecological perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SNA and teacher commented on the interacting factors impacting on the child, particularly his home environment. • Child may come to school tired; red circles on eyes, up late playing his Xbox • School keep the home involved through informal meetings between the teacher and mum. The SNA is not involved in the same.
Classroom environmental accommodations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom arranged with all children requiring additional supports positioned at the same desk. • SNA works with the children in this section of the classroom and is seated beside the target child.
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong focus on training and CPD within the school. • The SNA feels “very supported” by the school principal in this regard – if she requests to attend training, this is supported by the principal. However, the SNA cannot attend courses during school time. • The SNA attended very good training in the locality in relation to FBA. The SNA showed clear awareness of how to use ABC charts, as learned at the course. However, the SNA does not document any ‘ABC’ behaviours but rather, uses it on a personal level to try to identify the child’s triggers. • SNA still recognises the need for more training, particularly for working with adolescents with CB.

Appendix V: Sample 'Interactive Factors Framework', completed in light of SNA interview for case no. 12



Appendix W: Sample 'Interactive Factors Framework', completed in light of all case study data for case no. 12



**Appendix X: Superordinate themes and sub-ordinate themes,
as sourced from the researcher's NVivo codebook**

Name	Sources	References
T1 - SNA preparedness	31	341
T1.1 - SNA training and CPD	28	92
T1.2.1 - Training previously undertaken	12	27
T1.2.2 - Desire for training and CPD	25	65
T1.2 - School-based preparation	30	108
T1.2.1 Individual pupil planning	0	0
T1.2.2 Collaborative practice	0	0
T1.3 - SNAs' understanding of challenging behaviour	31	141
T1.1.1 - Life experience	4	11
T2 - SNAs' support of behaviour	42	405
T2.1 - Type of challenging behaviour	30	122
T2.2 - SNAs' use of proactive strategies	41	160
T2.2.1 - Ecological strategies	38	83
T2.2.1.1 - Pupil proximity	0	0
T2.2.1.2 - Movement breaks	38	83
T2.2.2 - Positive Programming	15	30
Self-monitoring strategies	9	14
Skills teaching	7	16
T2.2.3 - Focused support	22	47
T2.2.3.1 - Antecedent control	8	11
T2.2.3.2 - Reward strategies	18	36
T2.3 - SNAs' use of reactive strategies	33	123
T2.3.1 - Pupil prompting	21	48
T2.3.2 - De-escalation techniques	12	20
T2.3.3 - Pupil withdrawal	22	55
T3 - SNAs' role in supporting or hindering independence	42	356
T3.1 - Pupil's level of independence	36	132

T3.2 - Level of SNA support	16	75
T3.3 - SNA deployment	36	149
T3.3.1 - Whole-school strategies	0	0
T3.3.1.1 - SNA rotation	0	0
T3.3.2 - Classroom level strategies	36	149
T3.3.2.1 - Pupil proximity	0	0
T3.3.2.2 - Pupil prompting	21	48
T3.3.2.3 - Learning support or differentiation	14	33
T3.3.2.5 - Alternate strategies	18	32
T3.3.3.4 - Reward strategies	18	36
T4 - SNAs' relational role with pupils	39	332
T4.1 - SNA-pupil relationship	35	93
T4.2 SNA-pupil emotional support	30	71
T4.3 - Emotional dependency	24	43

Appendix Y: In-case and cross-case analysis

Please note: The numbers in the grid show the frequency with which the super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes occurred within each case (columns) and across cases (rows)

Superordinate and sub-ordinate themes	Case Number																			
	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
1 : T1 - SNA preparedness	32	27	25	30	21	11	11	18	22	14	14	37	17	31	16	18	58	27	14	10
2 : T1.1 - SNA training and CPD	10	5	12	5	3	1	1	1	8	4	6	6	6	11	6	8	33	15	9	2
3 : T1.2 - School-based preparation	10	10	9	11	10	4	4	5	5	6	6	6	3	9	7	7	7	5	6	7
4 : T1.3 - SNAs' understanding of challenging behaviour	13	13	6	16	8	6	6	12	9	4	2	25	8	11	5	3	24	13	5	1
5 : T2 - SNAs' support of behaviour	21	15	22	39	29	13	11	19	27	25	35	26	25	11	11	24	160	71	11	13
6 : T2.1 - Type of challenging behaviour	8	8	6	8	9	5	5	6	16	15	9	10	9	5	5	3	2	1	10	6
7 : T2.2 - SNAs' use of proactive strategies	6	6	10	19	13	6	4	6	11	10	24	8	9	4	3	15	126	55	3	5
8 : T2.3 - SNAs' use of reactive strategies	11	5	8	18	9	2	2	9	7	5	8	12	11	3	5	10	59	30	2	2

9 : T3 - SNAs' role in supporting/hindering independence	16	11	8	27	14	19	19	14	24	17	16	12	26	14	10	20	29	21	7	6
10 : T3.1 - Pupil's level of independence	13	6	3	17	12	3	3	8	13	7	5	6	8	9	10	12	7	5	5	2
11 : T3.2 - Level of SNA support	13	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	11	8	19	12	0	0	8	1	7	5
12 : T3.3 - SNA deployment	4	5	6	15	3	17	17	9	14	11	12	6	20	6	2	13	30	21	8	8
13 : T4 - SNAs' relational role with pupils	11	4	6	9	5	2	3	8	7	4	10	19	15	16	11	4	14	4	5	7
14 : T4.1 - SNA-pupil relationship	7	2	2	6	2	2	3	8	5	3	9	14	12	11	6	2	2	0	2	2
15 : T4.2 SNA-pupil emotional support	6	0	1	4	4	2	1	2	2	4	5	12	8	11	8	2	8	1	0	1
16 : T4.3 - Emotional dependency	1	0	1	4	0	2	1	3	2	0	5	6	5	6	6	2	5	2	5	5