The Social Lives and Friendships of Children with Special Educational Needs Outside of School: Parent Perspectives

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Abstract

Whilst a considerable amount of research has explored the social opportunities of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) during school time, there has been relatively little focus on these opportunities outside of school. This is particularly the case in the UK. This exploratory study sought parents' perspectives on their children's social opportunities and friendships outside of school.

This study involved a mixed methods approach, incorporating two phases of data collection as well as background data from the Millennium Cohort Study. In phase 1, data was collected using a mixed, qualitative and quantitative survey for parents. In phase 2, semi-structured interviews were completed with parents. Phase 1 saw 229 parents of children and adolescents with a range of different SENs complete the survey. In phase 2, 5 mothers of children with SEN were interviewed.

Children with SEN saw other children less frequently outside of school and were less likely to have at least one good friend than children without SEN. Results from phase 1 found the majority of parents reporting their children as seeing others in informal settings, 'rarely or not at all'. A roughly equivalent number of parents reported their child as having (45%), as not having (41.5%), at least one good friend. The majority of children were found to be participating in at least one organised activity each week.

Phase 2 interviews saw parents raise issues related to their children's social opportunities. Issues related to both 'within child' factors and environmental factors were found to impact upon children's social participation outside of school. The implication of these findings is that children with SEN have few opportunities to socialise with other children outside of school. It will be important that professionals are aware of this risk, and potential interventions are discussed which bridge school and home settings.

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

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Glossary of abbreviations

ASD – autism spectrum disorder

BESD – behavioural, emotional and social difficulties

DS – down syndrome

HI – hearing impairment

ID – intellectual disability

KS – key stage

MLD – moderate learning difficulty

MSI – multi-sensory impairment

PMLD – profound and multiple learning disabilities

PD – physical disability

SEN – special educational needs

SLD – severe learning difficulties

TD – typically developing

SpLD – specific learning difficulties

SEMH – social emotional and mental health

SLCN - speech, language and communication needs

VI – visual impairment

Chapter 1 - Introduction

This chapter introduces the study, stating its rationale and research aims.

1.1 Rationale

The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015) represents the biggest change to provision for children with special educational needs (SEN) in 30 years. Replacing Statements of Special Educational Needs, Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) seek to create more streamlined assessments incorporating education, health and care provision. Furthermore;

‘*Children and young people and their parents will be fully involved in decisions about their support and what they want to achieve. Importantly, the aspirations for children and young people will be raised through an increased focus on life outcomes, including employment and greater independence.’* (DfE & DoH, 2015, p. 11).

Throughout my experience as a Trainee Educational Psychologist, I have seen the huge importance which children, their parents, teachers and other stakeholders place on children with SEN’s peer relationships and friendships. This importance is similarly born out in research findings. Overton and Rausch (2002), for example, observed parents in focus groups emphasising the importance of their child’s friendships for their happiness, self-confidence, and social competence and saw the development of these as an important social goal. Given the importance given to social opportunities by children and parents, and the protection of these views in the new legislation, there is a clear need to understand the social opportunities of children with SEN.

For peer relationships and friendships to develop, children must have access to others and one major place where this can happen is at school. Parents of children with SEN, and children themselves report making friends as being an important argument in favour of inclusion in mainstream schools (Scheepstra, Nakken & Pijl 1999), and the development of friendships is often a key goal within educational settings (Hamre-Nietupski, 1993). However the actual experiences of children with

SEN in mainstream schools may suggest that integration in these settings may not necessarily facilitate relationships with peers (Webster & Blatchford, 2013).

Webster and Blatchford (2013) observed that in the UK, children with statements of SEN spent over of a quarter of their time in locations away from the mainstream class and most of this time was spent interacting with an adult on a one to one basis. Furthermore, children with statement of SEN had far fewer interactions with peers than children without SEN (18% vs 32% of interactions). The result of this may be fewer opportunities to interact with other children in ‘horizontally’ organised relationships which allow for the development of cognitive, social and linguistic skills, as well as the formation of friendships (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2011; Grenot-Scheyer, Staub, Peck & Schwartz 1998).

Given that children with SEN may have different social experiences to those without SEN within school time, it is important to consider what their experiences may be outside of school. Some insight can be provided through studies conducted in other countries in the developed world. Solish, Perry, and Minnes, (2010), in a Canadian study, found that children with intellectual difficulties (ID) and autism spectrum disorder (ASD) had fewer opportunities to interact with peers outside of school than children without SEN. King, Shields, Imms, Black, & Ardern, (2013), in an Australian study, similarly found that children with SEN were less likely to participate in social and recreational activities with peers outside of school. Other studies have similarly suggested that young people with physical disabilities (PD) have limited social opportunities outside their family (Stevenson, Pharoah, & Stevenson, 1997), and children with cerebral palsy (CP) have reported being worried about not being able to make friends (Adamson, 2003).

There have been comparatively few studies which have explored this phenomenon in the UK, although those that have suggested a similar situation. In a British study exploring the social lives of adolescents with down syndrome (DS), Cuckle and Wilson (2002) found that much of the child’s social life was organised around family, extended family and community contexts, rather than peers. This relative lack of research in the UK suggests a need for further exploration within this country.

Further rationale for exploring children’s participation outside of school is the UK’s relative low ranking in recent international comparisons of child wellbeing (Ansell, Barker, & Smith, 2007). Positive social relationships with family and peers frequently appear as important aspects in children’s subjective conceptions of well-being (UNICEF, 2011). Participation in social activities is seen as an important component of children’s well-being (King, Shields, Imms, Black & Ardern, 2013) and can have a number of functions for positive adjustment for young people with disabilities (Larson & Verma, 1999).

Some authors have expressed concern at the impact the reduction of free movement within the community has had on children’s social lives. Layard and Dunn (2009) report the impact factors such as parental fears of abduction and volume of traffic have had on the opportunities which children have to play freely within the community. The result of this may be fewer opportunities to participate in ‘open’ settings, such as playing on the street or at the park, which provide children with the opportunity to meet and socialise with peers in their community.

The discussion above highlights the need to explore children’s social opportunities outside of school. Within school settings children with SEN seem to have qualitatively different social experiences to children without SEN and given the importance of these to child development it is important to understand what their experiences are outside of school. This need is occurring against a backdrop of a society which appears to be increasingly fearful of allowing children to roam freely in the community. Furthermore, recent legislative guidance is creating a more holistic approach to provision and incorporating parents’ views much more closely within this. Given this situation there is a need to explore what the social opportunities are for children with SEN outside of school and parents’ perspectives about these.

1.2 Research Aims

As is highlighted by the rationale for this study, limited research has been conducted into the social opportunities afforded to children with SEN in the UK. There has been little research to show what the opportunities of children with SEN are to take part in organised and informal activities and develop relationships and friendships with their peers. Not only are parent perspectives an important way of determining what children are doing outside of school, they are also paramount in the new legislation and central to the discussion.

Consequently, the aims of this research are to explore:

- The opportunities which children with SEN have to access organised and informal social activities outside of school. The activities which children participate in and how often do they do this.
- Parents' perspectives in relation to their child's opportunities to develop friendships and relationships with other children outside of school.
- From parents' perspectives, what are the factors which influence a child's opportunities to participate in formal and informal activities and develop relationships with their peers outside of school?

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

This chapter will examine the existing literature as it relates to the social opportunities of children with SEN outside of school. It will begin by providing a definition of SEN, before moving on to discuss relevant literature around children's peer relationships and friendships. This will explore the importance of these relationships within children's development, and what these can provide for children with SEN. The discussion will then progress to the social opportunities of children with SEN within school, followed by a more specific focus on the social opportunities children have to engage in organised and informal activities outside of school and their experiences of friendships.

2.1 Special Educational Needs

The SEND Code of Practice recognises a child as having SEN if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for a special educational provision to be made (DfE & DoH, 2015). By the Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015) a child or young person is considered to have a learning difficult or disability if;

- They have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children their age, or
- They have a disability which prevents them from making use of the education facilities which are typically provided.

There is a varied range of interrelated difficulties and disabilities which can result in children experiencing greater difficulties in learning. However, as is suggested by the definition above a child is considered to have SEN independently of the reason for the difficulties they experience (Hodkinson, 2009). Categories of SEN, or the substantiating reasons for a child's difficulty in learning, are often used however in a pragmatic manner by schools and local authorities (Frederickson, 2009).

SEN exist on a continuum, from children whose needs are of low severity which can be met easily within a typical education setting, to those who have more severe or complex needs which require a high degree of differentiation in a mainstream or specialist setting. Children with the most severe, or complex needs are likely to require an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) which is a statutory document recognising and protecting the child’s educational needs. EHCPs were introduced as part of the Children and Families Act (2014), with the aim of creating a more streamlined and holistic package of support for children and young people, incorporating the Education, Health and Care provision a child will need to succeed. Furthermore, EHCPs take an approach which borrows heavily from person centred planning so that the views of the young person and their family are embedded within planning and focus upon the desired outcomes and ambitions of the individual.

2.2 Peer Relationships

This research will conceptualise a child’s peers in a similar manner to (Howe, 2010), as “other children who are of similar age to the child under scrutiny and potentially also of similar standing or rank, and who are not members of the same family” (Howe 2010, p. 1). It is perhaps worth noting the reasons siblings are frequently not considered peers in the literature. Siblings’ lives are intertwined in a way which peers are not; siblings must share a living space, objects and most importantly parents (Shantz & Hobart, 1989). An inherent part of this intertwining is that children do not choose their siblings, as they might do their friends. Children are also often strongly committed to making relationships such as friendships continue. This can lead to prosocial behaviour which might not be shown towards a sibling who is there for life (Dunn, 2004).

The term ‘peer relations’ has been used in psychological research to refer to a number of different experiences, which can perhaps cause a degree of confusion. The two broad areas in which research has primarily been focused can be divided into studies of peer acceptance and studies of friendship (Berndt, 1989). Peer acceptance assesses the experience of being liked or accepted by members of one’s peer group, whilst friendship looks at the experience of having a close, mutual, dyadic relationship. Other notable areas of research into children’s peer relationships include studies exploring children’s peer networks and ‘cliques’ (Avramidis, 2013).

Rubin, Bukowski and Parker (2006) further subdivide children's experiences of peers, explaining them through successive orders of complexity of interaction, relationships and groups. Interaction refers to dyadic behaviour in which a participant's actions are both a response to and stimulus for the behaviour of the other. In comparison to this relationships refer to the meanings, expectations and emotions that derive from successive interactions. As individuals in a relationship are known to one another, each interaction is influenced by the history of past interactions and the expectation of those in the future. A group is understood as a collection of interacting individuals who each have a degree of reciprocal influence over one another.

Berndt's (1989) understanding of psychological studies at levels of peer acceptance and friendship can be understood within Rubin et al.'s (2006) conceptualisation of levels of complexity in peer experience. Berndt (1989) goes further to explain that conceptualising experience at different levels of experience is not unique to the literature on peers, and forms the central tenet of Bronfenbrenner's (2005) ecological model of human development. This is exemplified by Hartup and van Lieshout (1995) who explain developmental outcomes deriving from complex transactions among child attributes, close relationships and the broader social context. Rubin et al. (2006) point to features of relationships which determine the degree of closeness within them, which include qualities such as frequency and strength of influence, the length of time the relationship has endured and the commitment of partners to the relationship.

2.3 Friendships

One of the most studied forms of peer experience are friendships, however investigators are confronted with issues defining the construct of friendship and its meaning (Bukowski, Newcomb, & Hartup, 1996; Rubin et al., 2006). Dunn (2004) suggests that quickly reflecting on the children we know will highlight that there is not one type of friendship and one child can have relationships with a number of children which are quite different. Hartup (1996) notes that one tendency which can be made by researchers is to consider being, or not being, a friend as being dichotomous, whereas the reality are experiences which are more continuous and overlapping. This incorporates children who range from best friends, to occasional friends and those who are liked and have the potential to become friends. Meyer et al. (1998) expanded upon this idea further, identifying six ‘frames of friendship’ which characterise the relationships of children with SEN (see Figure 2). It is also important to recognise that the experiences of the individuals within a relationship are also likely to differ; whilst factors such as mutual interest, cooperation and sharing may be central to a relationship, this does not mean that they are experienced in the same way by both children (Dunn, 2004).

Bukowski et al. (1996), report three ways in which researchers seek to specify the construct of friendship, through what children and adolescents tell us about these relationships; what parents and teachers report; and what trained observers identify in social interaction. Despite the differences which are likely to be inherent from these alternate routes to the friendship construct, some commonalities have been identified marking the friendships of children and adolescents;

- Friendship is a reciprocal relationship that is affirmed and recognised by both parties.
- There is a reciprocity of affection which binds friends together.
- Friendships are voluntary, rather than being obligatory or prescribed.
- Friendship is a relationship which should be understood according to its place within the network of other relationships.

(Rubin et al., 2006)

Whilst there will be idiosyncrasies in particular relationships, there is general agreement that friendships are normative experiences, which develop in a consistent way for most children (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2011). The elements of friendship outlined above can be understood as the ‘deep structure’ which comprises the essence of friendship (Hartup & Stevens, 1997). Comparatively ‘surface structure’ refers to the social exchanges which characterise the relationship at any given time or situation (Hartup & Stevens, 1997). Whilst the essence, or deep structure, of friendship will remain the same throughout the child’s development, the activities of friendship, its actualisation or surface structure will change.

The characteristics of children’s friendships change and develop, with particular functions being more important at different stages (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2011). Whilst much could be written here regarding the development of friendships across childhood and adolescence, a general observation is that whilst young children’s dependence on friends is as a fun and reliable play mate, older children and adolescents may increasingly see friends as helpful in negotiating a complex social world (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2011). What is clear though is that whilst particular functions of friendships ebb and flow, they are important developmental resources across the lifespan (Hartup & Stevens, 1997).

Whilst there are evident idiosyncrasies in children’s individual relationships with their peers, some patterns have been observed. One oft cited difference in children’s relationships is linked to gender. Research on children in the playground at school and preschool shows that from a young age girls prefer to play with girls and boys with boys, and this pattern has been observed world-wide and cross culturally (Whiting & Edwards, 1988). Some theorists have posited that girls’ and boys’ relationships represent different ‘cultures’, with girls’ relationships placing priority on building interpersonal connections whilst boys’ interactions are more directed toward the enhancement of individual status (Maccoby, 1990).

2.4 The Developmental Significance of Peer Relationships

Much of children’s education in Western society is a measure of academic achievement, however children’s optimal development similarly requires the development of ‘social competence’ (Blatchford, Pellegrini & Baines, 2015). Blatchford et al. (2015) define the development of social competence as ‘children’s ability to coordinate affect, cognition, and behaviour in achieving personal social goals and accessing resources in their specific developmental niche’ (Blatchford, et al., 2015; p. 20). Importantly, social competence does not develop in a social vacuum, but instead children learn to skilfully interact with peers and form relationships through having the opportunities to do so.

2.4.1 The Importance of Play

For young children, play can be seen as essentially the method by which young children communicate with one another (Coplan & Arbeau, 2009). Piaget (1932) saw play to be the purest form of assimilation, whereby children learn to combine events, objects or situations into existing ways of thinking. In comparison to adult-child interactions, where the power balance tends to be vertically orientated, the power balance in child-child interactions is more horizontally orientated (Howe, 2010). Whilst children are more likely to take what adults have said as fact, in more equally orientated child-child relationships, children are more likely to compare and discuss the views of others with their own. The exploration of symbolic representation, for example, during shared pretence play may support the development of cognitive flexibility and the development of convergent and divergent problem solving skills (Coplan & Arbeau, 2009; Wyver & Spence, 1999).

2.4.2 The Development of Social Skills

Peer relationships similarly provide an important forum for the development of linguistic and interpersonal skills. Waters and Sroufe (1983) identify a number of subcomponents in the interaction of pre-schoolers which contribute to successful relationships. For example, children must learn to contribute to social situations by recognising opportunities to respond and selecting appropriate ways to do so, such as using questions for clarification, changing the topic or answering questions (Waters & Sroufe, 1983). Relationships with peers can also allow for the development of socio-cognitive skills such as theory of mind (Cutting & Dunn, 1999). Theory of mind refers to the understanding that mental states of others, such as thoughts, beliefs and desires can influence their behaviour. Sharing and creating narratives with another child, during interaction such as pretend play, likely contributes to the development of theory of mind abilities (Cutting & Dunn, 1999)

Social situations similarly provide children with the opportunity to develop skills of self-regulation which are important to develop positive future relationships, where individuals will need to be able to modify, monitor and evaluate their emotions (Walden & Smith, 1997). Relations with peers will inevitably involve varying levels of conflict. Whilst conflict can hinder friendships, it nevertheless promotes social understanding by providing opportunities for advances in communication, perspective taking and realisation that the goals and behaviours of others matter (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2011). Through interactions with their peers children learn about establishing and maintaining relationships with others, an important facet of social competence which is required for successful future adult relationships (Rubin et al., 1998).

2.4.3 Friends as an Emotional Resource

An important point which should not be overlooked is that friendships provide children with a huge source of enjoyment and when children are asked about what makes a good childhood, friendship is one of the things mentioned most often (Layard & Dunn, 2009). Close friendships can provide children with an important emotional resource, which can buffer some of life's stressors and changes as they get older, such as starting a new school (Ladd, 1999). Children who have friends are likely to be more popular, less bullied and less aggressive, whilst those who do not have friends are more likely to feel lonely and become depressed as adults (Berndt et al., 1999; Pelkonen, Marttunen, & Aro, 2003).

2.4.4 Negative Aspects of Peer Relationships

This discussion so far has considered the positive aspects of peer relationships, but it is also important to acknowledge that peer relationships can have negative outcomes for young people. In comparison with adults, anti-social behaviour committed by adolescents is more likely to occur in groups (Moffitt, 1993). Although the factors leading a young person to engage in anti-social behaviour are likely to be multi-faceted, 'peer pressure', or the desire to impress peers with deviant behaviour, is often central to the motivation (Moffitt, 1993). Mahoney and Stattin (2001) explored the association between attendance in community youth recreation centres and the later expression of anti-social behaviour. This study found a correlation between participation in these youth centres and the development of later anti-social behaviour, which the authors explain through 'selection', that the young people attending are more anti-social, and through 'socialisation' with other anti-social young people once they are there.

2.4.5 Social Media and Peer Relationships

One relatively recent change in the nature of children and adolescents' social relationships has been the expansion in the use of social media. In 2015 in the USA, 45 % percent of teenagers reported using social media everyday (Common Sense Media, 2015). Websites such as Facebook offer numerous daily opportunities for connecting with friends, classmates and other people with shared interests and this can provide individuals with a number of social benefits. For example, this platform can allow for community engagement, individual and collective creativity and expansion of one's online connections through shared interests with individuals from diverse backgrounds (O' Keefe et al., 2011). However, due to peer pressure and developing skills of self-regulation, children and adolescents may be at greater risk than adult users of social media. Furthermore, for young people there may be expressions of offline behaviours such as bullying and clique-forming which have introduced problems such as cyber-bullying (O'Keefe et al., 2011). Social media is likely to have considerable and continuing impact on children and adolescent's social lives, and whilst this is not an area of focus in this thesis, there is considerable research which can be completed in this area.

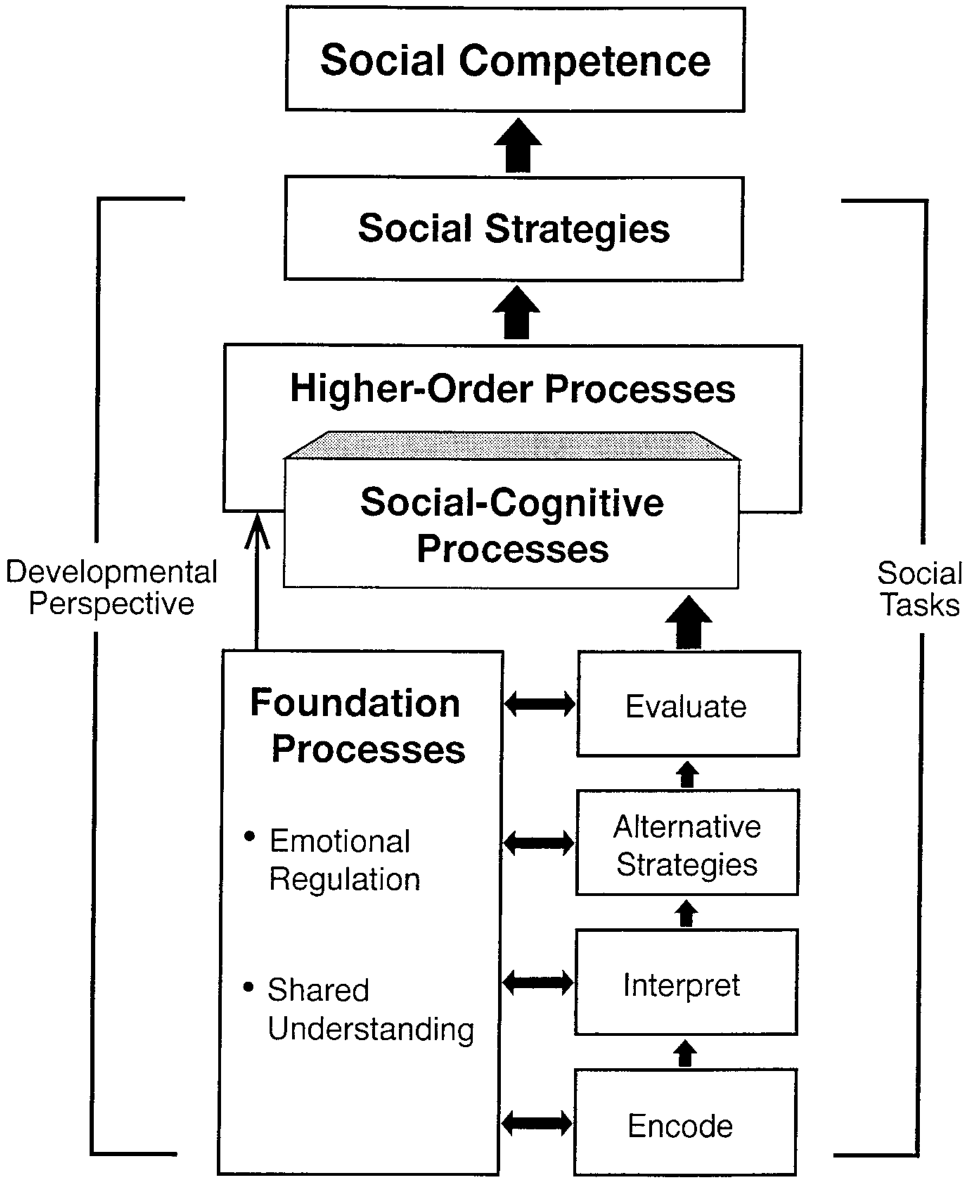
2.5 Peer Relationships of Children with SEN

2.5.1 Social Competence

As discussed above, social competence as a developmental construct occurs in the ecosystem within which the child develops, of which relationships with peers are a key component (Blatchford et al., 2015; Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Children with SEN are at risk of difficulties in developing relationships in comparison to their typically developing peers, and some of this can be understood as a result of aetiological difficulties associated with SEN (Asher & Coie, 1990).

Guralnick (1999) seeks to explain this through a conceptual model of social competence. As shown in Figure 1, emotional regulation and shared understanding are considered foundation processes within this. Social understanding refers to mutually understood social rules and expectations which govern social behaviour in a peer context, whilst emotional regulation refers to the child's ability to prevent emotional reactions such as anger and anxiety from interfering with the appropriate functioning of other processes (Guralnick, 1999). As these are foundation processes of the model, should these be affected by aetiological factors, such as deficits with executive functioning or understanding, then higher order processes will be affected and less competent social strategies are likely to emerge (Guralnick, 1999).

Figure 1 - Guralnick (1999) Conceptual model linking social competence and corresponding social strategies to hypothesised underlying processes.



The model above demonstrates numerous interactive ways in which foundation processes may interfere with social-cognitive processes. For example, a deficit in shared understanding may mean a lack of shared play scripts and consequently the child may miss cues allowing them to contribute to a shared pretence game (Guralnick, 1999). Similarly, emotional regulation difficulties may result in the interpretation of apparently benign social cues as provocative (Guralnick, 1999).

2.5.2 Contact Theory

Contact theory, originally postulated by Allport (1954), predicts that interaction can change attitudes of in-group members (children without SEN) to out-group members (children with SEN) and can reduce prejudice and stereotyping. Contact is predicted by Allport (1954) to reduce intergroup prejudice if four conditions are met; equal status between groups, common goals, no competition between groups and authority sanction for the contact.

Contact theory has been used to explore the implications of the policy of inclusion within mainstream schools (Lambert & Frederickson, 2015), and predicts that, where the four conditions outlined by Allport (1954) are met, there will be improved attitudes and relationships between children with and without SEN. Failure to meet these conditions though, may not improve relations between groups.

Newberry & Parish (1987) explored the attitudes of typically developing children before and after contact with children with disabilities in their scout group. Contact with children with disabilities resulted in improved attitudes of children in most cases, although interestingly, this was not the case where children had learning difficulties. Marom, Cohen and Naon (2007) found improved attitudes towards children with disabilities in a study which brought children together from a mainstream and special school in non-competitive activities such as music art and social games.

2.5.3 Peer Acceptance in school settings

Whilst Contact theory might predict better relationships for children in inclusive school settings, a number of studies have suggested that children with SEN may face difficulties developing relationships with other children (e.g. Avramidis, 2013; Meyer et al., 1998; Pijl, Frostad, & Flem, 2008; Frederickson & Furnham 2004; Tur-Kaspa, Margalit, & Most, 1999). Studies using sociometric approaches have found that children with SEN have fewer reciprocal relationships within school time, than children without SEN. Avramidis (2013) used a sociometric technique as part of his study to explore the social relationships of children with SEN in comparison to children without SEN. The social position of these children was determined through the number of nominations they received, whilst the number of friendships was observed through the number of reciprocal nominations. This study found that whilst children with SEN felt included within the class group, they had fewer friendships and a lower social participation, or acceptance from their peers. Furthermore, Avramidis (2013) found that children with behavioural, emotional and social (BESD) difficulties held lower social status than children who had SEN on account of physical difficulties. Pijl et al. (2008) similarly used a sociometric measure in a study of children with SEN in mainstream Dutch classrooms. This study saw children with SEN being rated less popular, receiving fewer nominations, as well as receiving less reciprocal nominations, indicating fewer friendships (Pijl et al. 2008).

2.5.4 Peer Interactions in School Settings

The MaST project (Webster & Blatchford, 2013) aimed to develop an understanding of the support and interactions which were received by children with a statement of SEN within mainstream schools. The authors in this study note that whilst there has been significant interest from researchers into appropriate pedagogies for children with SEN, there has been little systematic review of the actual experiences of these children within education. This study conducted systematic observations of children with moderate learning difficulties (MLD) or BESD and supplemented these with interviews with teachers and support staff, comparing these with observations of a control group without SEN. A major finding of this study was that children with SEN have a qualitatively different experience in the classroom in comparison to children without SEN, with notably much of the child's teaching being provided by a teaching assistant, rather than a qualified teacher (Webster & Blatchford, 2013).

This study found that children with statements of SEN spent over of a quarter of their time in locations away from the mainstream class, and most of this time was spent interacting with an adult on a one to one basis (Webster & Blatchford, 2013). Furthermore, children with a statement of SEN had far fewer interactions with peers than children without SEN (18% vs 32% of interactions). The result of this may be fewer opportunities to interact with other children in 'horizontally' organised relationships which allow for the development of cognitive, social and linguistic skills, as well as the formation of friendships (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2011; Grenot-Scheyer et al., 1998).

2.5.5 Friendships in School Settings

According to contact theory, the increased contact between children with and without SEN created by inclusive educational practices would be thought to improve peer relationships. Some studies though have suggested qualitative differences between the relationships of children with SEN integrated within mainstream classrooms and children without SEN. Tipton, Christensen and Blacher (2013), found qualitative differences in the friendships of young adolescents with and without intellectual disability (ID) in a study conducted in the USA. The friendships of children with ID were characterised by lower levels of warmth/closeness and positive reciprocity than their typically developing peers, they were less likely to see others outside of school and to have a cohesive group of friends. A similar finding has been made within a UK population. Laws, Taylor, Bennie, & Buckley (1996), observed children with Down Syndrome (DS) to be as popular as other children during school time in sociometric measures and were as likely to play with others in the playground; however these children received fewer friendship nominations and were less likely to see other children outside of school. What this may serve to show is that whilst children with SEN may have contact with others in the classroom, the nature of this contact may not be sufficient to foster relationships.

Meyer et al. (1998) used a four strand, mixed methods participatory research approach to explore the relationships of adolescents both with and without SEN from five schools in the USA. This study explored the experiences of eleven students with severe learning difficulties (SLD), pervasive and multiple disabilities (PMLD), ASD and DS, taught in mainstream school settings. This study incorporated; observations of young people interacting in school and community settings, family interviews, a survey with young people and focus group interviews with young people. From the broad data obtained, Meyer et al. (1998) describe six distinct ‘frames’ that categorise the social relationships of students with and without severe disabilities. These ‘frames’ are outlined in the figure below.

Figure 2 - Description of six 'frames of friendship' adapted from Meyer et al. (1998)

Ghosts and guests: This frame ranges from invisible social status to one where the student’s presence is acknowledged but they are seen as an outsider within the group.

The inclusion kid/different friend: This frame saw differential treatment being displayed towards the child and was viewed both positively and negatively by the stakeholder groups.

I’ll help: The children who were identified as the child with SEN’s friends in the class took on a caring role.

Just another kid/student: Even though the child with SEN was not nominated as a friend by other children in the class they were not treated any differently to other children.

Regular friends: Children in the child’s social circle but not best friends.

Best friends/friends forever: Other children with whom the child is closest, they see most often and see each other after school and at the weekends.

Meyer et al. (1998) describe that children may experience each of these frames to differing degrees, however, unanimous positive responses were given by stakeholders to the value of regular friends, and the need for one or more best friends in the child’s life. The social experiences of some children in Meyer et al.’s

(1998) study were most frequently characterised frames such as 'Inclusion Kid/Student', a child who appears included and is not treated differently in the class but who does not have close friendships with other children. Green and Schleien (1991) refer to this phenomenon as 'facades of friendship', whereby a child may appear to be included within the classroom, however in reality their relationships do not possess all of the qualities which would be expected of a close friendship.

If children with SEN have reduced peer acceptance and friendships in comparison to other children then this is problematic. Firstly, social competence does not develop in social isolation and opportunities with friends and peers are needed to develop these skills (Gruralnick, 1999; Blatchford et al., 2015). Secondly, friendships provide an important emotional resource. Just as children without SEN, children with SEN have a basic need for relatedness with others, and are likely to feel lonely if the perceived quality and quantity of desired relationships do not match up to reality (Cassidy & Asher, 1992). Older adolescents with learning difficulties perceive friends as being an important support to their mental health needs (Williams & Heslop, 2006). Without these children with SEN are at a greater risk of social isolation, feeling lonely and of developing depression as the reach adulthood (Berndt et al., 1999; Pelkonen et al., 2003).

2.5.6 What children, their peers, parents and teachers report about friendships

Webster and Carter (2013), in a study conducted in Australia, used interviews to explore the relationships between children with, and without SEN in inclusive pre-school and primary school settings. Webster and Carter (2013) completed interviews with pupils, teachers and parents, asking them about their child's relationships with their three closest friends. The researchers interview schedule used questions which directly related to the descriptors of the six 'frames of friendship' characterised by Meyer et al. (1998). Findings from this study showed that whilst many of the children were involved in relationships characterised by the 'regular friend' frame (see Figure 2), few had more intimate relationships with their peers. Furthermore, few of these relationships extended to outside of school.

Matheson, Olsen, and Weisner (2007) explored the conceptualisations of friendship amongst adolescents with a disability using an ethnographic approach and semi-structured interviews. Matheson et al. (2007) observed adolescents in their study to mention fewer characteristics of friendship than have been reported by typically developing teenagers. When asked about their notions of friendships, the teenagers often focused on the notion of companionship, which included being able to engage in activities with peers in a range of contexts, having peers with similar interests and being available on a long term basis. Matheson et al. (2007) note that these characteristics would be characterised as less 'mature' in the literature than friendships characterised by reciprocity, loyalty, support, disclosure and conflict management.

Whilst all participants in the study were found to be engaging with others and have satisfying friendships, differences were found between adolescents who were higher and lower functioning. Matheson et al. (2007) found that adolescents with higher scores on communication and IQ tests were more likely to report more features of their friendships, but also report less satisfaction with them. In comparison to this, teens with lower scores on these tests were more likely to report fewer features of friendship and higher satisfaction. The researchers in this study explain this through both the social desirability of reporting satisfaction in friendships, and the differences between being included in a mainstream classroom and less inclusive contexts. However, some of this difference may also be the result of the interview measures used. The researchers used ethnographic approaches which have a number of advantages for this population, however the lack of communication supports during interviews may have reduced the capacity of children to access these and share their views fully. Matheson et al. (2007) report that the adolescents in their study had satisfying relationships with others, even if the way in which they classified them and the way they appeared to others was non-typical. This observation has also been made in the relationships between children with ASD and their typically developing peers (Hurley-Geffner, 1995; Bauminger et al., 2008).

Approaches which take a teacher's, or parent's view are likely to hold advantages in that they take an outsider's perspective to the dyadic relationship between peers with and without SEN. However there is also the risk of taking an 'adultomorphic' perspective which may miss the value which a child's relationship holds to them (Rubin et al., 1998). Whilst the friendships of children with SEN may appear differently to those of their peers, where there is warm, caring companionship there is likely to be benefits to both parties (Grenot-Scheyer et al., 1998). Parents in a study in the USA reported that whilst they want their child with disabilities to have as normal life as possible, they recognise that this is likely to look quite different to their siblings (Harry, 1998).

2.5.7 Difficulties experienced by children with SEN in forming peer relationships

Guralnick's (1999) model of social competence demonstrates that the development of social communication skills requires the integration of language, cognitive, affective and motor skills. Children are often likely to be considered as having SEN because they have these 'within child' difficulties. Where children with SEN have deficits in these areas, these are likely to impact upon their development of peer relationships. In keeping with this children with ASD may be at particular risk of lower quality friendships due to the ASD-related deficits in communication and social interaction (Smith & Matson, 2010). Furthermore, as the child gets older increasingly sophisticated skills are required to maintain friendships, and discrepancies in their abilities in comparison to their peers may become increasingly apparent (Matheson, 2007). Where a child experiences physical disability (PD) this may affect their ability to access environments in which children are playing and join in in physical games which children play. Similarly, the need for medical interventions or hospital stays may affect the amount of time a child can spend with peers and the continuity they can develop in their relationships.

Contact theory (Allport, 1954) would predict that inclusion within mainstream settings would improve relationships between children with and without SEN, although certain conditions are required for this to happen. If children spend much of their time during school in the company of an adult or being taught outside of the classroom, it may be that these conditions are not being met.

2.6 Social Opportunities Outside of School

2.6.1 Formal and Informal Activities

Prior to discussing the opportunities which children with SEN have to develop peer relationships outside of school time it is important to make a distinction around the settings which children are involved in. An important distinction can be made between participation in 'formal' and 'informal' everyday activities (Law, 2002). Formal activities are those which involve rules or goals and have a formally designated leader or instructor. In contrast to this informal activities have little or no planning and are often initiated by the individual themselves (Law, 2002).

2.6.2 Participation in Formal Activities

For children, formal outside of school activities might be understood as organised activities with adult supervision, that involve 'learning activity outside school hours which children take part in voluntarily' (Law, 2002). These include activities such as music lessons, sports clubs, after-school clubs and groups such brownies or cubs. Participation in formal activities can provide children with SEN with a range of important opportunities. Formal activities may give children the opportunity to acquire skills, and experience achievement in a manner which does not emphasise the differences between individuals as it may do within school time (Eccles, 1999). These activities may develop children's feelings of confidence and self-belief. Furthermore, the more similar these activities are to academic subjects the more direct the influence of these on academic self-belief, although there may also be an indirect effect from self-belief from non-academic subjects (Valentine, DuBois & Cooper, 2004). Participation in outside of school activities is also associated with positive emotional adjustment (Posner & Vandell, 1999).

Studies have found similar benefits of participation in formal activities for children with SEN. Formal activities can give children with SEN the chance to develop new skills and broaden existing skills across a range of environments (Buttimer & Tierney, 2005). This includes the opportunity to practise social skills, the chance to express creativity and develop a sense of self-identity, and develop a sense of self-worth through accomplishment (Murphy & Carbone, 2008).

Participation in these outside of school activities may also be structured in a way which allows children more opportunities to interact socially with their peers than may be possible in traditional classroom contexts (Fredricks & Simpkins, 2013). As such they may allow the development of certain social skills in a manner not possible within school time. Focus theory would also suggest that organised activities would facilitate friendships by bringing together children with similar interests (Feld, 1981). These benefits would seem to be dependent upon the nature of the individual activity though. Whilst activities such as girl guides or cubs might place more focus on the development of soft skills such as working as a team or problem solving, an individual music lesson or a homework club is unlikely to offer the same transference of skills, or environment for open peer interactions.

2.6.3 Participation in Informal Activities

In contrast to organised out of school activities, informal social activities are being considered as those which are not adult structured, with interactions which are child initiated and directed; examples of these include playing or 'hanging out with friends' (Law, 2002). The horizontal, child-directed organisation of these activities means that unlike formal activities they allow for the development of social skills in a manner which may not be possible in adult directed situations (Howe, 2010). Whilst a unique setting within school time, research into school break times provides a useful insight into the role of informal group contexts which can be easily transferred to settings such as play at the park outside of school.

School break times are a time during the school day where children have a recreational break which are typically in an outside playground and compulsory (Blatchford et al., 2015). Children themselves see the value of break time as allowing the opportunity 'to be with friends' and 'to do what they want' (Blatchford & Baines, 2006. p. 5). For the purposes of this discussion, research conducted regarding school break times can provide a useful illustration of the value of informal activities to children's peer relationships.

Blatchford and Baines (2010), identify a number of social roles for break time activities in developing peer relationships for primary school aged pupils. Of particular relevance to this discussion is the role of games in acting as a 'social scaffold', giving children an arena in which they are able to meet and develop new relationships with peers. Games can draw children into interaction with one another, providing a reason and motivation for getting to know one another. Furthermore, games play a role in consolidating and maintaining peer networks and friendships. Children may be more likely to play games together and as these become consolidated friendships may form within these (Blatchford & Baines, 2010).

As alluded to in the previous chapter, it is important to note that the landscape of children's social lives has changed considerably in recent years. There has been a decline in children's free movement, an increased fear of traffic and 'stranger danger' and a reduction in the opportunities for informal peer contact outside of school (Layard & Dunn, 2009). Formal activities play an important role in children's lives for a number of reasons, and allow for socialisation with peers. However, a key factor of these is that they are often adult mediated and dependent on parents to arrange financially and logistically. Language, cognitive, social and motor difficulties associated with SEN which impact on social competence are likely to also affect participation in outside of school formal and informal activities.

2.7 The Social Participation of Children with SEN Outside of School

Whilst there has been relatively little analysis in the UK, researchers in different parts of the developed world have conducted studies looking at the patterns of children's social activity outside of school. These studies have taken a range of different approaches in exploring the social activities of children with SEN. These have included interviewing parents (e.g. Geisthardt et al., 2002; Abells Burbidge & Minnes, 2008), interviewing parents, a school based keyworker and children or adolescents (e.g. Cuckle & Wilson, 2002), or using a survey with parents (Solish et al., 2010).

In a Canadian study, Solish et al. (2010), sought to compare the participation of typically developing children, children with ASD and those with ID in social, recreational and leisure activities. The researchers were interested in the involvement of each of these groups in these activities, as well as with whom they did these activities, and this information was gathered through a questionnaire completed by parents. It is important to note the ages of the children involved in this study, which ranged from 5 to 17. Whilst there were no significant differences between the mean ages of the participants in each of the comparison groups, the social activities of children across this age range will vary significantly. Adolescents' social activities are likely to revolve more around peers than they do around family, and whilst it is these activities which the study is seeking to measure, it nevertheless poses the question whether parents are best placed to be answering questions regarding older adolescents social lives, rather than the adolescent themselves.

The 'recreational activities' in the Solish et al. (2010) study are formal, structured activities, whilst 'social activities' are those engaged in informally with peers, and 'leisure', more passive activities. Grouping activities together into social, leisure and recreational activities allows for useful analysis, allowing for greater comparison to be made between the groups. However, there can be considerable differences between the activities in these groups; for example, participation in a team sport requires a greater degree of social competence than a swimming lesson, but both are considered 'recreational' activities by Solish et al. (2010). Closer consideration of the study shows that there is a greater disparity in the proportion of children taking part in team sports between typically developing (TD), ASD and ID children (e.g. ice hockey 31.1%, 6.2% and 3.3% respectively) and more individual sports (e.g. swimming lessons 62.2%, 27.7% and 43.3%). Solish et al. (2010) do not provide information regarding the differentiation and inclusive practice of activity providers. It may be that children with ASD and ID in their study attended swimming lessons which were specifically for children with SEN, whilst similar inclusive options were not provided for ice hockey.

Overall, the researchers found that typically developing children took part in more social and recreational activities than children with ASD or ID, whilst there was no difference in the number of leisure activities participated in. When considering 'with whom' these activities were done with, Solish et al. (2010) also found that children with ASD and ID were doing fewer 'social activities' with peers than typically developing children. These social activities include informal activities such as play in the park or play dates, which are horizontally organised in comparison to formally organised activities.

Solish et al.(2010) also asked parents how many mutual friends their child had, who were defined as '*child(ren) their child wants to play with and who want(s) to play with their child/friends their child plays with outside of school'* (Solish et al., 2010, p. 230). Whilst understandably a subjective issue such as friendship can be difficult to pinpoint, this definition nevertheless asks parents to comment upon the 'wants' of other children. Furthermore, whilst the term 'play' may be appropriate for younger children in their study it is unlikely to capture the notion of friendship for older adolescents. Despite these apparent difficulties in assessing the numbers of reciprocal friendships, it is interesting to note that typically developing children were reported as having more friends than the ID and ASD groups. Comparisons between these two groups showed the ID group to have more reciprocal friendships than the ASD group. Given the difficulties which children with ASD are likely to have in achieving age appropriate social competence, it is perhaps not surprising that children with ASD have fewer friendships.

King et al. (2013) explored the activities participated in by typically developing children and children with ID in an Australian sample. Whilst the age range of 7 – 17, was as comparatively large as that in the study by Solish et al. (2010), the researchers matched participants by age, sex, residential location and socioeconomic status. This study used the Children's Assessment of Participation and Enjoyment (CAPE) and Preferences of Activities of Children Questionnaire (PAC) (King et al., 2007). The CAPE has elements which explore the recreational, active physical, social, skill based and self-improvement activities which children participate in (King et al., 2007). In this particular study, King et al. (2013) also analysed children's participation in these by diversity, intensity, companionship, location and enjoyment.

In comparison to the questionnaire used by Solish et al. (2010), the CAPE is a measure which is given to the young person. King et al. (2013) state that prior to giving a questionnaire to the young person they discussed with the child's parents their ability to answer the questionnaire. If it was deemed that the young person would find it difficult to access the written elements of the questionnaire, they were excluded from the study. Whilst methodologically this allows for comparisons to be made with typically developing children, this would appear to exclude some very relevant information. This questionnaire also asks children to remember the activities they have taken part in over the last four months, placing a burden on their long term memory and consequently implicating the accuracy of their evidence.

King et al. (2013) found that children with ID and typically developing children take part in an equivalent number of activities outside of school, however closer analysis of these reveal subtleties in this participation. Children with ID took part in more 'recreational', but fewer 'skill based' and 'active physical' activities than typically developing children. The differences in questionnaire terminology between Solish et al. (2010) and King et al. (2013) make it difficult to draw comparisons between these studies. For Solish et al. (2010), some of the 'skill based' and active physical' activities are likely to have been subsumed under the heading of 'recreational' activities. Whilst King et al. (2013) suggest that the reasons for the discrepancy between the two studies is due to societal differences between Canada and Australia, subsuming 'skill based' and 'active physical' activities under a broader 'recreational' label may have altered this result.

Matheson (2010), when interviewing children with special needs regarding their friendships, found that children with more severe SEN reported a greater level of satisfaction with their peer relationships in school, than did children with less severe SEN. Matheson (2010) provides some explanation for their findings through children perhaps having a less 'mature' conceptualisation of peer relationships, or the social desirability of reporting peer relationships. A similar process may explain the differences between Solish et al. (2010) and King et al.'s (2013) results. By asking children, rather than parents about the activities they have taken part in, children may have provided more socially desirable responses. Consequently this may have created fewer differences between the results of children with and without SEN in King et al.'s (2013) study.

King et al. (2013) also examined the activities which children took part in with another person. The researchers found that children with ID took part in more ‘recreational’, ‘active physical’, ‘skill based’ and ‘self-improvement’ activities with another person, than typically developing children did. Children with ID were also more likely to take part in social activities in the home. The authors explain these findings through children with ID requiring support from adults such as family members to help them to access activities.

The findings that children with SEN might experience more activities with family rather than peers has similarly been found in studies of young people with ID (Abells Burbidge & Minnes, 2008); PD (Engel-Yeger, Jarus, Anaby, & Law, 2009) and young people with DS (Sloper, Turner, Knussen, & Cunningham, 1990; Cuckle & Wilson 2002). King et al. (2013) explain children experiencing social activities with parents due to the extra support which will be required as a result of cognitive and social skills deficits. This has similarly been given as an explanation by caregivers as a reason for reduced involvement in social activities (Abells, Burbidge & Minnes 2008).

Children with physical disabilities may similarly need additional support from adults on account of their physical needs. Engel-Yeger (2009), found that children with CP in their study participated in more recreational activities in the home or accompanied by adults. This may be due to the requirements of environmental adaptation or assistance from adults needed to complete tasks. Furthermore, as children become older, and typically developing children experience more activities individually and in community settings, this difference between children with disabilities and typically developing children may become more accentuated.

When considering the impact of the particular aetiology of SEN on a child’s participation in social activities, it is important to consider how it is experienced for that individual. For instance Raghavendra, et al. (2011), found that whilst children with PD in their study didn’t experience differences in participation, those with PD and complex communication needs did, and were more likely to experience activities either alone or with a family member. For children in this study, whilst PD itself didn’t necessarily reduce participation, it did when combined with communication needs.

In a qualitative study, Geisthardt et al. (2002) used family interviews and home observations to explore the nature of friendships of children with disabilities at home. This study was conducted in urban and rural districts of an American mid-western state and involved twenty eight children, with a mean age of 6. Twenty of the children in the study had moderate to severe physical disabilities, whilst eight children had moderate to severe learning disabilities.

Using ‘constant comparative method’ of data analysis, the researchers coded parents’ responses into four themes; contact with peers, attitudes influencing friendships, parents’ focus on friendship and physical environment influencing friendship (Geisthardt et al., 2002). On the first of these themes, it was observed that children with disabilities spent significantly less time with friends than their siblings; however the amount of time spent with peers in informal play situations varied greatly. Three of the children played with other children in their neighbourhood on a daily basis, with this predominantly occurring in their own homes. Seven of the children had other children over to play occasionally, ranging from a few times a month, to less than once a month, whilst fourteen of the children saw other children rarely or not at all outside of school.

Geisthardt et al. (2002) found that fewer children played at other neighbourhood children’s homes than had other children over to play. Four children went to other children’s homes to play and these parents discussed that they took measures such as walking to the house with their child, and only left them when they were confident that the other parent was willing and would provide supervision for them. Three of the children in the study had contact with children of family friends outside of the neighbourhood and eight children had irregular contact with children from their school or day care setting.

There were differences in the perceived attitudes of others amongst the parents interviewed. Five parents felt that their child was accepted by their peers, and they attributed this to the exposure which they have to their child. However six parents felt that other children did not understand their child and this impacted upon social opportunities. Several parents appeared to accept peer rejection as inevitable, with one commenting; '*They just don't know what to do with her, so I kind of gave that up'* (Geisthardt et al., 2002, p.245). This sentiment echoes that commented on by Meyer et al. (1998), where there can be a concern that adults do not have high expectations for the social opportunities of children with SEN.

Some of this discrepancy in informal play opportunities could be explained through the attitudes of the child's parents themselves, as well as the perceived attitudes of others. One mother commented '*I think the only reason why mothers don't ask her over is because they are assuming she is going to require more [support]*' (Geisthardt et al. 2002, p. 245). This emphasises the importance of not just the nature of the child's disability but how this interacts with societal factors in impacting upon the young person's social opportunities. In this example the societal factor is the perceived opinion of other parent's views.

In Geisthardt et al.'s study (2002) parents discussed ways in which they supported their children's friendships. This included involving their child in organised activities, inviting other children around to their house and arranging parties for other children at their house. Five parents in this study specifically mentioned their disappointment in the number of invitations which their child received to play with others. One parent reported that their child never received invitations; *'I guess I just wish she'd get invited to other people's homes'* and in another interview *'I pray every night that Melissa would make just one long term friend'* (Geisthardt et al., 2002, p.245).

The type and severity of the child's disability influenced their opportunity for contact with friends. Whilst the severity of PD did not seem related to contact with friends, children with behavioural or learning difficulties were less likely to spend time with other children. This finding is comparable to that of Raghavendra et al. (2011) and Abells et al. (2008). Similar findings have also been observed in school time, with Avramidis's (2013) study of children with SEN's social networks suggesting children with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties having a lower social status in the class.

Just as the environment within school can impact upon a child's social activities, to understand how children are able to develop peer relationships and friendships outside of school, societal implications must also be considered. If children are more likely to experience social activities with an adult, these are likely to be participated in in a qualitatively different manner than if no adult were in attendance, perhaps precluding aspects such as child-directed play, which foster opportunities for the development of friendship. In Canada, Solish, Minnes and Kupferschmidt (2003) explored both participation in social activities and peer relations of children with SEN. This study found that whilst a very high proportion of caregivers reported children with SEN being integrated in activities (97.1%), when asked about the friendships of their child, nearly half reported that they did not have any close friends (45.7%). This may be the result of the manner in which these children experience social activities, and given the importance of the interrelation between individual and societal factors, it is important to consider whether this is similarly the case in the UK.

2.8 Research Questions

Children's relationships with their peers hold a number of important developmental roles. It is important that throughout their development children become 'socially competent', which requires the synthesis of a range of differing social abilities which are organised towards the achievement of social goals. Importantly social competence is not a process which occurs within a vacuum, but is dependent upon opportunities to practice skills and develop alternative approaches to social situations.

Peer relationships and in particular friendships, are also a huge emotional resource for both children and adults. Not only do children and their parents want friendships, they can play a supportive role at difficult times in a child's life, such as transition to a new school. Where children do not have friendships, they may feel lonely and be at risk of being depressed as adults.

Given some of the aetiological, or ‘within child’ difficulties which children with SEN experience, it may mean that it is harder for them to achieve age appropriate social competence. Consequently they may be at risk of not forming the relationships with peers which firstly foster their social skills and also are fundamental to their wellbeing. Studies within school time have suggested that children with SEN may have fewer relationships with their peers and therefore there is an important role to explore the situation outside of school time. Whilst there has been some exploration of children’s social lives outside of school in other developed countries, most notably in Canada and Australia, there has been relatively little research in this country. This study seeks to address this situation through the following research questions.

- What are the opportunities which children with SEN have to access organised and informal social activities outside of school? What types of activities do children participate in and how often do they do this. Are there any differences by demographic variables such as the type and severity of SEN or age?
- What are parent’s perspectives in relation to their child’s opportunities to develop friendships and relationships with other children outside of school? Do children have friendships, how many friendships do they have and where are these initiated. Are parents satisfied with their child’s social opportunities outside of school?
- From parent’s perspectives, what are the factors which influence a child’s opportunities to participate in formal and informal activities and develop relationships with their peers outside of school?

Chapter 3 – Methodology

3.1 Research Design

3.1.1 Epistemological Approach

The epistemological and methodological approach taken within this research is one of pragmatism (Johnson, & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Rather than seeing the value of research as its ability to correspond to some true condition within the real world, pragmatism judges the value of research in its *effectiveness* in addressing problems (Maxcy, 2003). That effectiveness is judged in this way, requires the pragmatist to value addressing the research questions over and above adherence to any particular method or paradigm which underlies it (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998).

Pragmatism provides a useful middle way which negotiates the implied methodological difficulties of the 'paradigm wars' (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Its outcome focus entails a rejection of the dichotomy in research approach dictated by post-positivist and constructivist epistemologies, and the incompatibility of quantitative and qualitative methods (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). What is achieved is a paradigmatic approach allowing the complementary use of quantitative and qualitative methodologies (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The pragmatist is free to "study what interests you and is of value to you, study it in different ways that you deem appropriate, and utilise the results in ways that can bring about positive consequences within your value system" (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003. p. 30).

3.1.2 Mixed Methods

Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) advocate a contingency approach to the selection of quantitative and qualitative approaches within a mixed research methodology, which considers the costs and benefits of different approaches in relation to the research question. This should be done in a manner which adheres to the *fundamental principle of mixed research;* that methods should be mixed in a way which has complementary strengths and non-overlapping weaknesses (Johnson & Turner, 2003).

A consequence of the ongoing ‘paradigm wars’ is that it can be difficult for researchers to find advice within the literature about how logical relations between qualitative and quantitative research results can be developed, and form the basis for theory (Erzberger & Kelle, 2003). A metaphor of triangulation has been used to refer to the use of multiple methods and data sources to mutually support the strength of interpretations and conclusions (Mertens, 2010). There are however difficulties with this metaphor, most notably that the epistemological and methodological concepts are not sufficiently linked to the empirical phenomena under investigation. This can entail difficulties in making claims that the data collected using different methods refer to the same thing, which would seem to create concerns for a model of triangulation which seeks the mutual validation of data (Erzberger & Kelle, 2003). The complementarity model of triangulation draws attention to this difficulty, and instead sees information from multiple sources as providing different pieces to a puzzle, albeit one which has a rough theoretical outline (Erzberger & Kelle, 2003).

3.1.3 Structure of the Study

The aim of this research is as an exploratory study, seeking to develop novel hypotheses to be elucidated through further research (Jaeger & Halliday, 1998). The study will do this by incorporating three separate strands of data, with the intention not for the mutual validation of each, but as providing different pieces to a theoretically outlined puzzle (Erzberger & Kelle, 2003). These strands are:

- Background data from the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS)
- A self-administered, mixed qualitative and quantitative questionnaire for parents of children with SEN
- Semi-structured interviews with parents of children with SEN

Mixed method approaches can be categorised by both the order and dominance which is given to each aspect of the methodology (Creswell, 2014). In this research, each strand will be analysed independently, before any parts of the ‘puzzle’ are brought together at the end of the research. As such this represents a ‘parallel databases’ variant of mixed method design (Creswell, 2011).

Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) suggest three areas where mixed methods are superior to single approach designs where they can;

- Answer questions which other methodologies cannot
- Provide stronger inferences
- Allow the opportunity to present a greater diversity of divergent views

The three strands in this research will allow for exploration of the research questions which could not be achieved through the use of one strand alone. An example of this is the manner in which qualitative elements allow for a greater illustration of the experiences of an individual, than might be possible from quantitative strands alone (Creswell, 2011). Simultaneously, the greater breadth of response afforded by the quantitative elements of the background data from the MCS and Phase 1 allows for the inclusion of a greater diversity of parents’ views.

3.1.4 Considerations for a sample within SEN.

In UK schools, 15.4 % of pupils are identified as having SEN, and of these 2.8 % have had an assessment of SEN resulting in their local authority issuing a Statement of SEN or EHCP (DfE, Statistical First Release, SEN in England Jan 2015). A statement of SEN or EHCP is issued to a pupil where there is an assessed level of need to access education and this statement or plan outlines the duty of the local authority in meeting their needs. In the UK a child has SEN if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for them. A child is considered to have a learning difficulty if they have a greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age, or they have a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of usual learning facilities (DfE, 2015).

In 2003, the Department for Education and Skills introduced a monitoring system in the UK, characterising eleven categories of SEN. Whilst these categories may play an important role for differing reasons, such as administrative purposes, they are not clearly defined and are problematic (Norwich, 2014). Firstly, the diagnostic – intervention model does not apply to many developmental conditions. Some conditions, such as ASD, are by their definition very broad and encompassing of a range of diverse functioning. Furthermore, perhaps as a result of this, there is significant heterogeneity between these categories (Mertens, 2010; DfE, 2015).

Disability categories do not define an individual's educational needs and they are likely to have some needs which are common with others in the group and others which will be unique to the individual. However, there are some categories which are particularly 'fuzzy', such as MLD, within which disability is not clearly delineated, or separated from social disadvantage and varies between schools and local authorities (Norwich, Ylonen, & Gwernan-Jones, 2014). This broad conceptualisation of SEN has important implications for creating a representative sample.

3.1.5 Considerations following Year 1 Pilot Study

A pilot to the present study was completed in 2014, which compared the time spent in organised and informal activities outside of school and the friendship experiences between children with and without SEN. This information was gathered using the 'Children's Social Lives Survey' a questionnaire which was specifically devised for the purposes of this research. The questionnaire used in this pilot was initially piloted amongst colleagues and nine parents. Following the completion of the pilot study, feedback was sought from parents and this, along with critical appraisal of the results of the study, informed the methodology and survey materials in the current study.

This questionnaire in this pilot was predominantly distributed through mainstream schools and via the internet forum 'Mumsnet', with nineteen parents of children with SEN and thirty-six without SEN completing the survey. The relatively few parents completing the survey, and in particular the low number of parents of children with SEN, entailed difficulties in drawing comparisons between children with and without SEN. It was felt that these difficulties were predominantly as a result of the sampling method, which did not suitably access parents of children with SEN. The lessons from this pilot were taken into the present study, and consideration was given to the methodological approach which was to be used, with a focus on how to maximise the access of parents of children with SEN.

3.2 Background Data from the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS)

3.2.1 Rational for the use of MCS Data

The MCS (MCS) is a UK wide, longitudinal birth cohort study of c. 19,000 children born between September 2000 and January 2002. Data from five waves of the study have been published to date, when the children were aged 9 months, 3, 5, 7 and 11 years old. This study has used information which has been collected from wave four. As a result of sample attrition, the total number of completed surveys in wave four is 13,857. The rationale for using data just from wave four is that from wave five onwards data regarding children's peer relationships has been collected in surveys with the children themselves, rather than their parents. Whilst information from wave five would be more recent, it was felt that this was not in keeping with the aims of this study which is exploring parents' perspectives.

The rationale for using elements of the MCS is to set the scene for Phases 1 and 2 of the data collected in this study. As this study is exploratory in nature and does not use a comparison group, the MCS provides a useful departure point for the more detailed analysis and discussion of data in Phases 1 and 2. Given the breadth of the data in the MCS there are myriad analyses which can be completed, which have not been explored here. The author acknowledges that there is plenty of further work which can be completed with this data and this is discussed further in Chapter 5.6.

3.2.2 Sampling and Participants

The MCS is clustered geographically and stratified to over-represent areas with high proportions of ethnic minorities, areas of high child poverty and the three smaller countries of the UK (Hansen, 2012). The sampling frame used to cluster and stratify the sample was based upon the electoral wards of the UK. The data which has been used to inform this present study has been collected from the fourth wave of the survey, with 13, 457 participants providing data for the relevant questions in this study.

The parent interview of the MCS was carried out using computer assisted personal interviewing (CAPI). In wave four the main respondent was typically the child's mother; however this was not always the case. The main parent interviews were completed with families by interviewers trained to carry out the household interviews as part of the MCS.

3.2.3 Data Analysis

The responses to two questions were analysed from the MCS; '*Cohort member has at least one good friend'* and *'How often does the cohort member see other children outside of school'.* These data were cross-tabulated with information provided by the child's teacher reporting whether or not the child had been identified as having SEN. The data was analysed using the software package SPSS, data being tested for statistical significance using Chi Square.

3.3. Phase 1 Questionnaire

A self-administered questionnaire for parents of children with SEN was used for Phase 1 of this study. The questionnaire used in this study is a 'mixed' questionnaire, containing closed questions, with fixed response choices, as well as open ended questions, with no pre-existing response categories, allowing the respondent latitude in the answer they provide (Rea & Parker, 2014). This 'mixed' questionnaire represents a form of intra-method mixing (Johnson & Turner, 2003). Closed questions can provide quantifiable elements within questionnaires, allowing comparability between respondents, which provide an insight into relationships between participants' attitudes and demographic information (Robson, 2011). Open-ended questions can provide the respondent with the opportunity for greater flexibility in their response and the opportunity for more in depth answers.

Self-administered questionnaires can be useful in providing a relatively large amount of information in a time and cost effective manner (Robson, 2011), and can provide a frankness from respondents which is not always possible in face to face data collection (de Leeuw, 2008). Given the diversity of the population in this exploratory study, a mixed questionnaire allowed for a greater coverage of the views of parents than could be achieved through the use of an interview based approach alone. Furthermore, quantifiable elements allow for examination of parent's views which are not covered in the MCS, and parents also have the opportunity to express their views through open ended questions. Given the breadth of the population, qualitative elements of the questionnaire similarly allowed for the expression of pertinent factors to the individual parent.

The survey was distributed to participants in a 'mixed mode' manner, using both paper and online questionnaires. Mixed mode surveys are frequently used in social research, often with the aim of multiplying strengths whilst offsetting weaknesses in approach (de Leeuw, 2008). Web-based surveys have been noted for their potential to inexpensively reach a very wide audience and to receive rapid replies (Cook, Heath & Thompson, 2000). Web based surveys can also be particularly useful to recruit samples from groups with rare or particular characteristics (Couper & Bosnjak, 2010). Whilst there are evident advantages in using the internet in survey research, the implications of using this media form need to be considered. An initial consideration is regarding coverage, as not all of the population will have access to the internet (Manfreda & Vehovar, 2008); however it is perhaps important to note the rapid rise of the use of the web to the extent that in 2015, 86 % of the UK population had been online between Jan and March (ONS,2015).

3.3.1 Sampling

Social research can be beset by practical challenges in obtaining a representative sample (Mertens, 2010). In an earlier unpublished study (Higley, 2013) a low response rate entailed difficulties in drawing conclusions from the study. It was felt that this low response rate was the result of difficulties making contact with the sample unit. In this earlier study parents had been predominantly identified through mainstream schools and the internet forum 'Mumsnet'. This meant that the numbers of parents of children with SEN was relatively limited. Lessons from this pilot study were incorporated into the sampling strategy of the present study in an effort to avoid these difficulties.

To maximise the response rate of parents of children with SEN, a *stratified probabilistic sampling method* was employed (Mertens, 2010). This approach seeks to broaden the sample through targeted sampling across a range of participants, identified via a particular characteristic. In this study, this stratified sample was achieved via targeted recruitment through organisations catering for children with a specific SEN, as well as targeted recruitment through mainstream schools with a resource provision for a particular type of SEN. Alongside this, parents were contacted through mainstream schools, parent partnership services and parent carer forums. As these services are open to provide a service to all parents of children with SEN, it was thought this would allow contact to parents across the range of SEN categories. The organisations who distributed surveys are described below.

In keeping with the emphasis of this exploratory study, and following difficulties in earlier studies experiencing small response rates (Higley, 2013), data was collected from parents of children of a range of ages. Similarly data were collected from parents who lived in both urban and rural areas. The implications of this broad approach to data collection are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.6.

The practical implications of survey distribution affected the sample. Some organisations did not respond to requests for involvement, or for organisational or practical purposes were not able to participate. Also, an open-access survey approach was used to promote access to the survey; this involves the advertisement of the survey URL where individuals interested in answering can access the survey (Couper &Bosjnak, 2010). As the survey was advertised online, respondents often used social media to invite others to take part, representing a form of ‘snowball sampling’ (Mertens, 2010). This similarly created issues in estimating the response rate to the survey, as it was not possible to tell how many parents had seen the survey via social media. These issues are discussed in Chapter 5.6.

Table 1 - Distribution of the survey

Organisation	Number involved	How survey was distributed	Estimated number of surveys distributed
Parent Partnership Services	**5** 3 London Boroughs 1 E Midlands* 1 NE England	Survey url emailed to parents	N/a *
Parent Carer Forums	**7** 3 London boroughs 2 SE England 2 SW England	Survey url emailed to parents or advertised via social media (Facebook)	N/a*
Charities for children with SEN	**2** National	Advertised via social media (Facebook, Twitter)	N/a*
Charities for children with a specific disability	**2** National (1 HI, 1 SLCN)	Advertised via website	N/a*
Mainstream schools	**5** 1 London borough	Paper questionnaire	140
SEN unit in mainstream schools	**5** 2 London boroughs	Paper questionnaire	99
Special Schools	**4** 1 London borough 1 SW England 2 SW England**	Paper questionnaire	452

*Number of surveys distributed and/or website views not obtained.
** Two schools contacted by a third party from parent partnership.

The total number of responses to the survey was 229. 139 online surveys and 90 paper surveys completed. Due to the difficulties outlined above, in particular resulting from the use of an online survey and advertising this using social media, a total response rate could not be estimated. It is also important to note that the number of paper copies distributed through schools is based on the estimates provided by staff at the school. The response rate for the paper surveys was 13.0%. Efforts to increase the response rate were made by reminding schools and other organisations verbally and via email. Relevant characteristics of the children discussed by parents are presented in the table below.

Table 2 - Characteristics of respondent's children in Phase 1

Boy	Girl	Total
147	75	222

EYFS & KS 1	KS 2	KS 3	KS 4	Total
33	93	46	39	211

Mainstream Primary	Unit in Mainstream Primary	Primary Special School	Mainstream Secondary	Unit in secondary	Secondary special	Home School	Total
50	8	45	35	13	61	13	225

SpLD	MLD	SLD	SEMH	ASD	VI	HI	SLC	MSD	PI	Other	Total
14	24	34	9	91	1	12	14	1	1	10	211

N.b. not all respondents provided information regarding all demographic variables.

3.3.2 Questionnaire Construction

Initial Pilot

As there has been relatively little research into this area and I wanted to get some insight into possible views of parents, two pilot interviews were conducted This approach can help to avoid survey questions which prove peripheral or tangential to the aims of the research (Rea & Parker, 2014; Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). When designing research interviews it is important to consider the purpose of these (Wengraf, 2001). As the purpose of these interviews was exploratory, aimed at exploring concepts which could be further analysed through the questionnaire, the structure of the interview was kept broad using an 'interview guide' of areas to be addressed (Johnson & Turner, 2003).

Survey Construction & Procedure

Robson (2011) advises that variables upon which information is being sought should be determined through pilot work, reviews of previous research and consideration of any theoretical frameworks. As there were no previous survey materials available relating to children's peer relationships outside of school, it was necessary to construct a questionnaire for this study. Mertens (2010) sets out twelve general directions to follow when devising survey research, and similar considerations are discussed in greater detail by Rea and Parker (2014); these principles were adhered to in the construction of this questionnaire. This included principles such as avoiding negative wording, avoiding leading questions and keeping items short (Mertens, 2010).

The questionnaire included both closed and open-ended questions. Concepts had been coded into closed questions through critical appraisal of the literature, evaluation of a questionnaire used in a previous unpublished study (Higley, 2013) and exploration in pilot interviews. Closed questions can provide quantifiable elements within questionnaires, allowing comparability between respondents, which provide an insight into relationships between participant attitudes and demographic information (Robson, 2011). Open-ended questions can provide the respondent with the opportunity for a greater flexibility in their response and the opportunity for more in depth answers. As the peer relationships of children with SEN outside of school are a relatively under-researched area, the decision was made to include a number of open-ended questions to maintain the exploratory nature of this research. Similarly this heterogeneous group entails the exploration of views from as wide a selection of parents as possible.

The questionnaire was split into four sections which included questions about informal activities, organised activities, friendships and demographic information (an example questionnaire can be found in Appendix E). Rea and Parker (2011) suggest including introductory questions at the beginning of the questionnaire which either derive a factual or uncomplicated opinion, whilst more sensitive questions be included towards the end. Consequently the first section discusses the opportunities which children have to meet friends outside school, and aspects of these such as the role taken by adults during these times and how these are organised. The second section asks about the organised activities children take part in, where and with whom these are done with and perceived benefits. The third section asks parents their views about their child’s friendships. Friendship is an individual and particular construct, which is likely to be in some degree idiosyncratic to the children involved. Consequently a deliberate effort was made to keep these questions as broad as possible. The fourth section of the survey asks parents demographic information including the type of school their child attends, whether they have SEN and the category this would fall into, their child’s school year group, sex, ethnicity and where they live.

3.3.3 Data Analysis

A mixed approach was used in the data analysis of the questionnaire. Quantitative data were analysed using the statistical software SPSS. Frequencies were generated and cross-tabulated by demographic variables of whether or not the child had an EHCP, the key stage they were in and the type of school they attended. This data was tested for statistical significance using Chi-Square.

Qualitative data from the questionnaire were analysed using applied thematic analysis (ATA) supported by the statistical software Nvivo. As this analysis is similar to that used to analyse interview data, this procedure can be found in 3.4.4.

3.4 Phase 2 - Qualitative Interviews

The rationale for using interviews as a second phase of data collection was to explore parents’ views in a greater depth than was possible through the questionnaires alone. Interviews have a utility in ‘following up interesting responses and investigating underlying motives in a way that postal and other self-administered questionnaires cannot’ (Robson, 2011). The combination of questionnaires and interviews in a mixed-methods design can lead to a more interesting and complete depiction of samples, and help researchers to better understand quantitative findings (Johnson & Turner, 2003). This insight can go beyond what might be available from open-ended questionnaire answers. One reason for this is that one to one interviews allow for probing by the interviewer and a lower ‘dross rate’ than might be expected from open responses in questionnaires (Johnson & Turner, 2003).

3.4.1 Sampling and Participants

Five parents in total took part in the interviews. Four of the participants in the interview phase were selected from parents who had previously completed the questionnaire, whilst one parent had not previously completed the questionnaire. This cannot be considered a representative sample; however in keeping with the exploratory nature of the study these interviews represent the opportunity for greater exploration of *some* of the issues experienced by *some* parents of children with SEN. All the parents who took part in the interview were mothers of children who attended mainstream schools in London (one attended a SEN unit in a mainstream school). Four of these children were of primary school age and one of secondary school age. These interviews were deliberately broad, questions were kept as open as possible and in keeping with this, parents were not asked to categorise their children's SEN but instead asked to describe their difficulties.

Four interviewees had provided their contact details when completing the Phase 1 questionnaire. One parent was recruited through a colleague. Whilst a number of parents provided contact information during Phase 1, a relatively small number accepted the invitation to take part in an interview when contacted. Each of the parents lived in London, and one criterion for invitation to interview, was that the parent lived within a convenient location to travel to. Information about the parents who took part in the interviews can be found in the Table 3.

Table 3 - Characteristics of participant's children in Phase 2

Parent	Child Gender	School attended	Year Group	Child’s SEN	EHCP
P1	Male	Mainstream	6	Down syndrome, learning difficulties, communication difficulties	Yes
P2	Female	Mainstream (SEN Unit)	4	Learning difficulties	Yes
P3	Male	Mainstream	4	Down Syndrome, Learning difficulties	Yes
P4	Female	Mainstream	5	Angelmans Syndrome, Learning Difficulties	Yes
P5	Male	Mainstream	9	ASD	Yes

3.4.2 Design of the Interviews

The rationale of the interviews was to help parents to further express their views about their children’s social lives. In keeping with this, the questions were kept as open as possible so that parents did not feel constrained and were able to fully express their views. A semi-structured interview schedule was used which was based on information provided from the two pilot interviews, the literature review and a previous unpublished study (Higley, 2013). I felt that it was extremely important that parents felt at ease and were able to tell their stories about what is a potentially emotive topic.

Each interview began with questions which asked parents to give a descriptive account of what their child does after school during the week and at weekends. Following this there were questions which asked about their child’s relationships with peers, anything the parent does to help their child with peer relationships, whether other people understood about their child’s SEN and finally whether they were happy with their child’s social opportunities (an example interview schedule can be found in Appendix F). A list of prompts and follow up questions was prepared to help to elicit parents' views whilst remaining non-directive within the interview. The interview schedule was piloted with two parents, who were asked to provide feedback at the end of the interview about how they experienced the interview questions and whether there was anything which they felt could usefully be included. Only minor changes were made to the interview schedule following the pilot interviews, and this is likely owing to the 'open' nature of the interview schedule.

3.4.3 Interview Procedure

Parents were asked where they would like the interview to take place. At the parents' requests; one interview took place at a university building, one in the parent's home, one at their place of work and two in coffee shops. At the beginning of each interview the purpose of the interview was explained to the interviewee. The interviewees were informed that the interview would ask about their child's social opportunities and relationships with peers outside of school, that the interview would be informal and that whilst there was an interview schedule the aim of this was to be as 'open' as possible. Interviewees were informed that the interview would remain anonymous and confidential. They were asked to provide consent to take part as well as for the interview to be audio recorded. All interviewees were asked if they had any questions about the process and that they had the right to withdraw at any point.

A flexible approach to the interviews entailed that a certain degree of flexibility was given to the sequence in which the topics were covered and the time which was given to each of these (Robson, 2011). Taking the parent's lead helped the interviews to flow in a logical manner, which I felt helped to put the interviewee at ease and more naturally express their views.

3.4.4 Data Analysis

Applied Thematic Analysis (ATA) was chosen as an appropriate method of exploring the qualitative data which was obtained through open ended questions from the questionnaire as well as the interview data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2013; Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). The ATA approach is a '*rigorous, yet inductive set of procedures, designed to identify and examine themes from text in a way that is transparent and credible'* (Guest et al., 2012. p. 20). Qualitative analysis can be theoretically driven and/or data driven, with themes arising out of the data such as in grounded theory. A major advantage of ATA is its theoretical freedom, and ability to sit between these two camps providing a research tool which can potentially provide a rich and complex account of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). ATA was chosen as an appropriate technique in this study in comparison to alternative qualitative analyses due to its ability to complement and add analytic depth to quantitative techniques (Guest et al., 2012).

Braun and Clark (2006) outline six phases of data analysis. How these relate to the process of data analysis is this study is outlined below. I was, however, also influenced by the theory as outlined by Guest et al. (2012), who view some aspects, such as phases 2 and 3, as overlapping. Returning to look at my running log which I kept as I was coding, for instance, shows that ideas about possible themes began to emerge through engagement with the data during coding.

Table 4 - Process of Thematic Analysis

Phase	**Process in this study**
Phase 1: Familiarisation with the data	• One interview was transcribed verbatim by the author. The other four interview transcripts were sent away to be transcribed verbatim. • Reading and rereading of survey data and transcripts. Initial notes made.
Phase 2: Generating initial codes	• Once familiar with the data, I began segmenting the text into codes using the Nvivo software programme (Guest et al., 2008). • Codes refer to '*the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon'* (Boyatzis, 1998).

	• I worked systematically across the data set, giving attention to both aspects which were repeated within the text and items of interest to the research questions. • Following the advice of Braun and Clarke (2006), a large number of initial codes was created and context was included around each code to ensure that no vital information was lost. • Using Nvivo, a codebook was created which created a hierarchy of codes and sub-codes. I also kept a running log of notes of reflections about the data as the analysis was progressing.
Phase 3: Searching for themes	• Once all codes had been created I then began to identify where codes were repeated and how these could be grouped into sub-themes and over-arching themes. • At this stage I used thematic maps within the Nvivo software to help to organise the themes and subthemes. • At this point I discussed both codes and early themes during peer supervision sessions with colleagues and with my supervisors.
Phase 4: Reviewing themes	• At this phase I returned to and reviewed the themes and sub-themes. Some themes were discarded where it was felt there was insufficient data to support them, or were tangential to the research questions. • Themes and codes were again discussed during supervision. • An example of a discarded subtheme from this stage was ‘impact upon parent’s social life’. Whilst this was a consistent idea which was repeated in both the survey data and the interview data, it was felt that this did not suitably address the research questions regarding children’s social lives.

Phase 5: Defining and naming themes	• Suitably precise theme names were developed so that these were informative, but also accurately described the data. • In discussion with my supervisor, it was felt that initially these names were too concise and not descriptive enough. Consequently these were adapted to provide a better, stand-alone description of the data.
Phase 6: Producing the report	• The following chapter provides a description of each of the themes and sub-themes. Quotations have been provided from both the survey and interviews where these provide a good illustration of the theme.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The methodology of this study was guided by the BPS's Code of Ethics and Conduct (2009). Prior to data collection during pilot interviews, Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the study, an ethics form was completed and approved by the departmental ethics board at the UCL Institute of Education. Following consideration of the data from the MCS an updated ethical approval form was submitted. A copy of the completed ethics form can be found in Appendix G.

Chapter 4 – Results

This chapter outlines relevant background data from the MCS, as well as key findings from Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the study. The data from the MCS is presented first to provide context, before findings from quantitative elements of the questionnaire. This will be followed by central themes from the qualitative aspects of the questionnaire, before finally the key themes from qualitative interviews with parents. These key results will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

4.1 Background Data from the Millennium Cohort Study

Information was obtained from the MCS wave 4 to gain an insight into parents' perspectives of their children's social lives in comparison to parents of children without SEN. Parents' answers were cross-tabulated with whether or not the child's school identified them as having SEN.

Table 5 - Frequency and proportion of cases that reported SEN in relation to having at least one good friend

Child has at least one good friend	**Child's school has reported SEN**		**Total**
	Yes child has SEN	**No** reported SEN	
Not True	75 (22.3) **6.7 %**	194 (246.7) **1.6 %**	269
Somewhat True	186 (95.0) **16.7 %**	960 (1051.0) **7.8 %**	1146
Certainly True	820 (988.3) **73.5 %**	11097 (10928.7) **89.9 %**	11917
Can't Say	35 (10.4) **3.1 %**	90 (114.6) **0.7 %**	125
Total	1,116 **8.3%**	12,341 **91.7%**	13, 457

N.b. Data in brackets show expected counts

As can be seen in Table 5, 8.3% of the parents had been informed by their child's school that their child had SEN. The table shows that a greater proportion of parents of children with SEN reported that it was 'not true' or 'somewhat true' that their child has a good friend. More parents of children without SEN reported that it was 'certainly true' that their child has a good friend. There was a significant relationship between parent reports of friendships and SEN; $\chi^2 = 325.720, (3), p = 0.000$, *Cramer's V = 0.156*. Examination of counts suggests that this is due to parents of children with SEN reporting fewer good friendships than parents of children without SEN. There is a moderate effect size associated with this relationship.

Table 6 – Frequency and proportion of cases that reported SEN in relation to frequency of time spent with other children outside of school

How often does child spend time with friends outside school	**Child's school has reported SEN**		**Total**
	Yes child has SEN	**No** reported SEN	
Every day or almost everyday	243 (262) **21.4 %**	2922 (2903) **23.2 %**	3165
Several times a week	199 (240.4) **17.5 %**	2705 (2663.6) **21.5 %**	2904
Once or twice a week	296 (354.6) **26.0 %**	3987 (3928.4) **31.6 %**	4283
Once or twice a month	141 (141.8) **12.4 %**	1572 (1571.2) **12.5 %**	1713
Less than once a month	77 (57.6) **6.8 %**	619 (638.4) **4.9 %**	696
Not at all	182 (81.5) **16.0 %**	802 (902.5) **6.4 %**	984
Total	1, 138 **8.3%**	12,607 **91.7%**	13, 745

Examination of the frequency counts in Table 6 shows that where children have SEN, the proportion of children seeing peers at least once a month or more, is less than children who have not been reported as having SEN. The proportion of children with SEN seeing others less than once a month is higher than those without SEN. It is interesting to note that the greatest differential between scores is where peers are seen 'not at all', where this is the case for 16.0% of children with SEN, almost 10% more than those without SEN.

There was a significant relationship between the number of times children saw others outside of school and SEN; $\chi^2 = 162.121, (5)$, *Cramer's V = 0.109*. Examination of counts suggests that children with SEN see other children slightly less frequently than those without SEN. There is a small to moderate effect size associated with this relationship.

4.2 Phase 1 Results – Quantitative Survey

4.2.1 Informal activities outside of school

The analysis will now turn to consider the data from this study. Parents' reports of their child's social activities outside of school were established by generating counts from responses from the parent questionnaire. These counts are presented in the tables below. It should be noted that not all parents answered every question and therefore there are subtle differences in the total respondents reported for different variables.

These counts were cross-tabulated by child gender, whether or not they have a statement of SEN or EHCP, the type of school the child attends type of SEN and Key Stage. Due to constraints on space, these cross-tabulations have been presented where they hold direct interest to the research questions, or provide significant or interesting results.

Table 7 - Frequency and proportion of cases where children with SEN are seeing other children outside of school in informal settings

	Sees other children 2/3 times a month or more	**Sees other children rarely or not at all**	**Total**
Total across all informal settings	154 **22.4 %**	532 **77.6 %**	686
In own home	45 **19. 7 %**	184 **80.3 %**	229
In other child's home	60 **26.2 %**	169 **73.8 %**	229
In community settings	49 **21.5 %**	179 **78.5 %**	228

Table 7 shows the frequency parents report their child seeing other children outside of school. A greater frequency of parents reported their child seeing other children ‘rarely or not at all’ than ‘2/3 times a month or more’ across all three settings that they were asked about. This was the case for play dates at the child’s own home, in other children’s homes and seeing other children in community settings. Interestingly, children were reportedly more likely to meet with other children in other children’s homes than in their own homes, or community settings; however it was not possible to statistically analyse this information as it was requested via three separate questions. This information was cross tabulated with the independent variables of child gender, whether they have a statement of SEN or EHCP, type of school attended, type of SEN and age. Cross-tabulation for whether or not the child has an EHCP, type of school attended and age can be seen in the table below, whilst the cross-tabulation by child gender can be found in Appendix C

Table 8 - Frequency and proportion of play dates in the child's own home

		Sees other children 2/3 times a month or more	**Sees other children rarely or not at all**
EHC*	EHC	24 (28.3) **14.2%**	145 (140.7) **85.8%**
	No EHC	11 (6.7) **27.5%**	29 (33.3) **72.5%**
Type of School	Mainstream	15 (14.3) **17.9%**	69 (69.7) **82.1%**
	Unit	6 (3.6) **28.6%**	15 (17.4) **71.4%**
	Special	15 (18.1) **14.3%**	91 (87.9) **86.7%**
Key Stage	KS1 & EYFS	11 (6.6) **33.3%**	22 (26.4) **66.7%**
	KS2	20 (18.5) **21.5%**	73 (74.5) **78.5%**
	KS3	6 (9.2) **13.0%**	40 (36.8) **87.0%**
	KS4 & FE	5 (7.8) **12.8%**	34 (31.2) **87.2%**
Category of SEN	SpLD	5 (2.3) **35.7%**	9 (11.7) **64.3%**
	MLD	4 (4.0) **16.7%**	20 (20.0) **83.3%**
	SLD	3 (5.6) **8.8%**	31 (28.4) **91.2%**
	SEMH	1 (1.5) **11.1%**	8 (7.5) **88.9%**
	ASD	13 (15.1) **14.3%**	78 (75.9) **85.7%**
	VI	0 (0.2) **0.0%**	1 (0.8) **100.0%**
	HI	6 (2.0) **50.0%**	6 (10.0) **50.0%**
	SLCN	2 (2.3) **14.3%**	12 (11.7) **85.7%**
	MSI	0 (0.2) **0.0%**	1 (0.8) **100.0%**
	PD	0 (0.2) **0.0%**	1 (0.8) **100.0%**
	Other	1 (1.7) **10.0%**	9 (8.3) **90.0%**

* Indicates statistical significance, $p < 0.05$

As can be seen in Table 8, comparisons across demographic variables show that aside from children with HI, the majority of parents report their children as seeing others ‘rarely or not at all’. It is notable that children with an EHCP were more likely to see other children ‘rarely or not at all’ than children without an EHCP, and there was a significant relationship between this finding; $\chi^2 = 4.103, (1), p < 0.05$; *Cramer’s V = 0.41*. It is interesting that the proportion of children who attended a unit in a mainstream school and saw other children at least 2/3 times a month, was higher than those attending mainstream or special schools. This finding was also observed where children saw others in other children’s homes and in community settings. A greater proportion of children with HI or SpLD saw other children at least 2/3 times a month than children with other types of SEN. Comparatively a smaller proportion of children with MLD, SLD, SEMH, SLCN and ASD saw other children at least 2/3 times a month in their own homes.

The pattern of participation in other children’s homes and in community settings is very similar to that found in children’s own homes, as depicted in Table 8 (this information can be found in Appendix B). There was one further significant relationship between the child having a statement of SEN/EHCP and the frequency they saw other children in community settings; $\chi^2 = 4.114, (1), p < 0.05$; *Cramer’s V = 0.43.* In this case the children with a statement/EHCP were seeing other children less frequently than children without a statement/EHCP. There were no other significant relationships observed between frequency of seeing others in informal settings and type of school attended, or age (key stage).

Table 9 - Frequency and proportion of children with SEN having a close/good friend

		Yes	**No**	**Don't Know**	
Total		**103** 45%	**95** 41.5%	**26** 11.4%	**224**
EHC	EHC	66 (71.3) **39.5 %**	79 (76.2) **47.3 %**	22 (19.5) **13.2 %**	167
	No EHC	22 (16.7) **56.4%**	15 (17.8) **38.5%**	2 (4.5) **5.1%**	39
Type of School	Mainstream	41 (36.5) **49.4 %**	35 (36.9) **42.2 %**	7 (9.6) **8.4 %**	83
	Unit	10 (8.8) **50.0 %**	8 (8.9) **40.0 %**	2 (2.3) **10.0 %**	20
	Special	40 (45.7) **38.5 %**	49 (46.2) **47.1 %**	15 (12.1) **14.4 %**	104
Key Stage	KS1 & EYFS	17 (14.9) **51.5%**	14 (14.8) **42.4%**	2 (3.3) **6.1%**	33
	KS2	43 (40.7) **47.8%**	37 (40.2) **41.1%**	10 (9.1) **9.0%**	90
	KS3	18 (20.8) **39.1%**	24 (20.6) **52.2%**	4 (4.6) **8.7%**	46
	KS4 & FE	16 (17.6) **41.0%**	18 (17.4) **46.2%**	5 (3.9) **12.8%**	39
Category of SEN	SpLD	8 (6.1) **57.1%**	6 (6.4) **42.9%**	0 (1.5) **0.0%**	14
	MLD	16 (10.5) **66.7%**	3 (11.0) **12.5%**	5 **2.5%**	24
	SLD	13 (14.4) **39.4%**	18 (15.1) **54.5%**	2 (3.5) **6.1%**	33
	SEMH	4 (3.9) **44.4%**	4 (4.1) **44.4%**	1 (1.0) **11.1%**	9
	ASD	32 (39.8) **35.2%**	49 (41.6) **53.8%**	10 (9.6) **11.0%**	91
	VI	1 (0.4) **100.0%**	0 (0.5) **0.0%**	0 (0.1) **0.0%**	1
	HI	6 (4.4) **60.0%**	2 (4.6) **20.0%**	2 (1.1) **20.0%**	10
	SLCN	6 (6.1) **42.9%**	7 (6.4) **50.0%**	1 (1.5) **7.1%**	14
	MSI	0 (0.4) **0.0%**	0 (0.5) **0.0%**	1 (0.1) **100.0%**	1
	PD	1 (0.4) **100.0%**	0 (0.5) **0.0%**	0 (0.1) **0.0%**	1
	Other	4 (4.4) **40.0%**	6 (4.6) **60.0%**	0 (1.1) **0.0%**	10

Table 5 shows parents' responses when asked whether they considered their child to have at last one close/good friend. A roughly equivalent number of parents did, as did not, feel that their child had at least one close/good friend. A minority of parents answered that they did not know if their child had at least one close/good friend. It can be seen above that a greater proportion of parents of children with an EHCP rated their children as not having a close/good friend. Where children did not have an EHCP a greater proportion of parents reported that they had at least one close/good friend. Where children attended a special school, a greater proportion of parents reported that they did not have a close/good friend. It is also worthy of note that a greater proportion of parents of children in KS3 reported that their child did not have at least one close friend. A greater proportion of children with HI, SpLD and MLD were reported as having at least one close/good friend. The lowest proportion of children with a close/good friend was reported amongst children with ASD. Comparisons of the friendships of boys and girls can be found in Appendix C. A greater proportion of girls than boys were reported as having a close/good friend.

Table 10 - The number of friendships reported by parents

		0	1 – 2	3 – 4	5 +	Total
Total		11 **8.0 %**	79 **57.2 %**	29 **21.0 %**	19 **13.8 %**	138
EHC	EHC	7 (8.2) **7.6 %**	60 (53.9) **65.2 %**	15 (17.2) **16.3 %**	10 (12.7) **10.9 %**	92
	No EHC	4 (2.8) **12.9 %**	12 (18.1) **38.7 %**	8 (5.8) **25.8 %**	7 (4.3) **22.6 %**	31
Type of* School	Mainstream	6 (5.0) **10.7 %**	27 (32.5) **48.2 %**	12 (11.7) **21.4 %**	11 (6.8) **19.6 %**	56
	Unit	1 (1.2) **0.7 %**	5 (5.0) **36.0 %**	5 (5.0) **36.0 %**	3 (1.7) **21.4 %**	14
	Special	4 (4.8) **0.7 %**	40 (31.4) **74.0 %**	9 (11.3) **16.7 %**	1 (6.5) **1.9 %**	54
Key Stage	KS1 & EYFS	0 (1.4) **0.0 %**	10 (11.4) **50.0 %**	6 (4.3) **30.0 %**	4 (2.9) **20.0 %**	20
	KS2	7 (4.0) **12.5 %**	28 (31.8) **50.0 %**	10 (12.1) **17.9 %**	11 (8.1) **19.6 %**	56
	KS3	0 (1.9) **0.0 %**	18 (14.8) **69.2 %**	7 (5.6) **30.0 %**	1 (3.7) **3.8 %**	26
	KS4 & FE	2 (1.7) **8.7 %**	15 (13.1) **65.2 %**	4 (5.0) **17.4 %**	2 (3.3) **8.7 %**	23
Category of SEN	SpLD	1 (1.0) **9.1%**	5 (6.7) **45.5%**	5 (2.3) **45.5%**	0 (1.0) **0.0%**	11
	MLD	0 (1.2) **0.0%**	12 (8.6) **85.7%**	1 (2.9) **7.1%**	1 (1.2) **7.1%**	14
	SLD	1 (1.6) **5.6%**	15 (11.0) **83.3%**	1 (3.8) **5.6%**	1 (1.6) **5.6%**	18
	SEMH	1 (0.5) **16.7%**	4 (3.7) **66.7%**	0 (1.3) **0.0%**	1 (0.5) **16.7%**	6
	ASD	5 (4.3) **10.2%**	31 (30.0) **63.3%**	9 (10.3) **18.4%**	4 (4.3) **8.2%**	49
	VI	0 (0.1) **0.0%**	0 (0.6) **0.0%**	1 (0.2) **100.0%**	0 (0.1) **0.0%**	1
	HI	0 (0.8) **0.0%**	3 (5.5) **33.3%**	3 (1.9) **33.3%**	3 (0.8) **33.3%**	9
	SLCN	1 (0.7) **12.5%**	3 (4.9) **37.5%**	4 (1.7) **50.0%**	0 (0.7) **0.0%**	8
	MSI	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a
	PD	0 (0.1) **0.0%**	0 (0.6) **0.0%**	1 (0.2) **100.0%**	0 (0.1) **0.0%**	1
	Other	2 (0.6) **28.6%**	3 (4.3) **42.9%**	1 (1.5) **14.3%**	1 (0.6) **14.3%**	7

* Indicates statistical significance, *p < 0.05*

The parents who reported that their child had a close/good friend were asked how many friendships their child has, with frequencies shown in Table 10. Of the parents reporting their child as having a close/good friend, the majority reported that this was ‘1-2’ friends. The number of friendships children have is cross-tabulated with the independent variables of age, Statement/EHCP, type of school and category of SEN. Results cross-tabulated by child sex are presented in Appendix C. A significant relationship was observed between the type of school attended by the child and the number of friends reported by parents; $\chi^2 = 15.179, (6), p < 0.05$, *Cramer’s V = 0.247.* Examination of these counts suggests more children in special schools as having 1-2 close/good friends, but by contrast a higher number of children attending mainstream schools had 5 or more friends. A smaller proportion of children in KS3 and KS4 were reported as having a close/good friendship than younger children, although this finding did not meet assumptions for chi-squared statistical analysis. Comparison by type of SEN shows that an equivalent proportion of parents of children with SpLD reported their child as having 1-2 as 3-4 close/good friends. For each other SEN category the majority of parents reported their child to have 1-2 close/good friends.

Table 11 - The location where friendships have started

	School	**Neighbours**	**Family Friend**	**Family member**	**Outside school club**	**Community**	**Other**
No. friendships	103 **74.6 %**	20 **14.5 %**	36 **26.1 %**	34 **24.6 %**	13 **9.4 %**	7 **5.1 %**	13 **9.4 %**

Parents who reported that their child had at least one good/close friend were asked where these friendships had begun. Parents were able to select up to three options, and Table 11 depicts the frequency each option was selected. The vast majority of friendships began in school whilst a relatively small number of parents reported friendships starting in community settings.

4.2.2 Formally organised activities outside of school

In question seven of the survey parents were presented with a table which asked various questions regarding their child’s participation in organised activities outside of school. For up to three activities, parents were asked what the activity was, how often and where it took place, and three main benefits they saw the activity providing. It should be noted that due to constraints on space not all of these results will be presented here.

__Table 12 - The average number of organised activities participated in__

		Total number of activities recorded		Number of activities taken part in each week	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Total		1.61	1.222	1.29	1.17
EHC	EHC	1.53	1.230	1.18	1.144
	No EHC	1.78	1.165	1.64	1.175
Type of School	Mainstream	1.71	1.168	1.5	1.160
	Unit	1.86	1.315	1.47	1.328
	Special	1.43	1.195	1.1	1.106
Key Stage	KS1 & EYFS	1.73	1.232	1.51	1.122
	KS2	1.71	1.203	1.39	1.122
	KS3	1.57	1.186	1.35	1.145
	KS4	1.74	1.163	1.24	1.125
Category of SEN	SpLD	2.07	1.328	2.08	1.379
	MLD	1.42	1.283	1.21	1.250
	SLD	1.56	1.211	1.24	1.091
	SEMH	1.44	1.130	1.38	1.302
	ASD	1.49	1.214	1.01	1.116
	VI	3.00	0.000	3.00	0.000
	HI	2.25	0.122	2.18	1.250
	SLCN	1.08	1.082	1.00	0.913
	MSI	3.00	0.000	3.00	0.000
	PD	3.00	0.000	2.00	0.000
	Other	1.40	1.075	1.20	0.919

Parents were asked to provide information of up to three activities which their child is taking part in outside of school. Of the total sample, 73.4% were engaged in at least one formal activity outside of school. Table 12 shows the mean number of activities participated in by children, as well as the mean number participated in each week. From the table it can be seen that children with an EHC participated in fewer activities on average, and the differential between children with and without an EHC was greater when number of activities participated in was considered on a weekly basis. Whilst neither difference was statistically significant, this was approaching significance for weekly activities (P=0.06). Children attending a special school attended the fewest total activities, as well as the fewest on a weekly basis. Whilst the oldest children in this study, those in KS4, attended on average a similar number of total activities, they attended fewer activities on a weekly basis. Comparison by category of SEN found children with SpLD on average attending the most activities (n.b. there was only one respondent in each of the VI, PD and MSI groups). Children with SLCN attended the fewest total number of activities and children with SLCN and ASD attended the fewest on a weekly basis. Results cross tabulated by child gender can be found in Appendix C.

Table 13 - Types of organised activities being participated in

	Music lesson	Individual Sport	Team Sport	Dance	Scouts/ Girl Guides
No. participated	26 **11.4 %**	73 **31.9 %**	27 **11.8 %**	24 **10.5 %**	32 **14.0 %**
	Multi-activity afterschool club	Additional Tuition	Art/Design/Cookery	Computer	Other
No. participated	49 **21.4 %**	15 **6.6 %**	24 **10.5 %**	9 **3.9 %**	20 **8.7 %**

Table 13 shows the types of activities which parents reported their children taking part in. Participation was most frequent in individual sport activities, with 31.9 % of parents surveyed reporting their child taking part in these. Comparatively, 11.8 % reported their child taking part in team sports. Some of the activities recorded by parents as ‘other’ included Sunday School and horse riding.

4.3 Other Quantitative Analyses

Due to the constraints on space and absence of clear findings the following information gathered through the survey has not been included (* indicates where information is provided in Appendix B):

- How often an adult would be present during children’s informal play.
- How often the parent makes arrangements for informal play opportunities with other parents.*
- How often children use different media sources to communicate with other children.*
- The location, who else is present and benefits of organised activities.
- Organised activities the child would like to attend.
- Outside of school time diary.

4.4 Phase 1 Results – Qualitative Survey Data

As well as closed questions, the mixed method survey employed in this study asked parents to provide qualitative information about their perspectives on their child’s social life. This included whether they were happy with their child’s social opportunities, further information about their child’s friendships and any information which had not been covered in other parts of the study. This information was analysed using the ATA approach outlined in Chapter 3.

4.4.1 Parent’s happiness regarding their child’s social lives outside of school

The open ended question ‘to what extent are you as a parent happy about the quality of your child's relationships with other children, and his or her social life outside of school?’ was coded as a broadly positive or negative attitude about their child’s social life. Answers have not been coded in relation to this question where parents have provided an ambiguous answer which does not directly address their satisfaction, or if they have not answered the question. The table below demonstrates the number of responses coded in each category. As a result of the number of responses which could not be coded, these results have not been cross-tabulated by independent variables.

Table 14 – Parents' happiness with their child's social life

Response	**Frequency**
Parent is happy about their child's social life outside of school	39 **17.0 %**
Parent is unhappy about their child's social life outside of school	94 **41.0 %**
Response coded between happy and unhappy	16 **7.0 %**
Response not codable in relation to question	64 **27.9 %**
Non-response	16 **7.0%**

Below are some examples of responses coded in each of the categories presented in Table 14. Parents explained their satisfaction in relation to a number of different factors. Whilst some examples are provided below these are explored in greater detail in the following section. In the quotations below, and similarly in the sections that follow, clear spelling or grammatical errors have been corrected, and these can be identified by the inclusion of square brackets.

Some parents who were happy with their child's social life reported that they were happy because they felt that their child was happy; *'I'm happy because my son is happy. He is happy not to have a social life' (R125).* Other parents reported that the attitudes of other children help to facilitate friendships and provide benefits for their child's social life; '*They're really great kids who are super accepting of his quirks … [I] am super proud of him and his friends' (Respondent 10); 'I like that the kids have a shared history' (R16).*

The following themes were identified in the reports of parents whose responses were coded between being happy and unhappy. Some parents reported that whilst they were happy to an extent with their child's friendships and socialisation, they would like to see greater involvement; *'He has some lovely friends but I would like him to have more involvement outside of school. His sister who is a year older is out all the time with her friends' (R 25).* Similarly other parents reported that whilst they were happy with their child's current social opportunities, they were concerned about the future; *'We are happy our child's social life is so far fine but when [they start] secondary school – we are not sure, [it] might change differently, who knows' (R228).*

Some parents unhappy with their child's social life felt that their child was not included; *'it's awful that she doesn't have friends and doesn't get to make friends/join in activities' (R98).* Other parents felt that their child is seen differently by others, which impacts upon their social opportunities; *'Find it heart wrenching that he is clearly seen differently by his peers & struggles to talk to others on a social level'* (*Respondent 26).*

4.4.2 Themes from open ended questions

A number of themes were identified from parents' answers to three of the open ended questions in the survey.

- In your view, do you feel your child has at least one close/good friend?
- To what extent are you as a parent happy about the quality of your child's relationships with other children, and his or her social life outside of school?
- If you have any further comments or concerns about your child's opportunities to spend time with other children, access to activities, or opportunities to develop friendships which have not been covered elsewhere in this survey, please include these here.

The subject matter of this survey and its sample are both broad; consequently there was a variety in the responses provided by parents. As a result some themes were identified from parents' responses which do not have direct relevance to the research questions and have consequently not been included in the discussion below. An example of one such theme is 'Independence'.

The themes presented below occurred across multiple responses and with pertinence to the research questions. Where names are used in examples these are pseudonyms. Four main themes and a number of sub-themes were identified from the open-ended questions:

Theme 1 – Attitudes of others influence the social opportunities of children with SEN.

Theme 2 – Parents hold an important role in shaping the social lives of children with SEN.

Theme 3 – Relationships with other children in school do not necessarily translate to outside of school time.

Theme 4 – There are practicalities which influence children's social lives as a result of SEN.

Theme 1: Attitudes of others influence the social opportunities of children with SEN.

One theme identified within the answers to open ended questions is that the attitudes of other children and adults can influence the social opportunities of children with SEN. Having continuity with others can facilitate relationships; '*He has a few kids he's known since nursery who live in the street who have grown up with his quirks and just see him as him'. (R16).* Being seen as 'different' is associated with greater obstacles to participation with peers; *'…because of his needs the other children see him as different. I'd like him to be included in their chat' (R58).* This can also be an obstacle to participation if adults see the child as different. One respondent explained that whilst other children were accepting of their child, adults' attitudes could create obstacles.

'My child has Down's syndrome. The prejudices and misconceptions of the adults are the problem. The children [have] no trouble accepting her for who she is, and make allowances naturally without being asked most of the time'. (R73)

An inclusive attitude can also facilitate participation in organised activities. One parent explained how a 'can do' attitude adopted by activity organisers helped to facilitate their son's involvement;

'My son has mostly developed some proper friendships over the last year due to the brilliant hard work put in by the school, the Church and Boys Brigade as they struggled with me to try and help understand him and do activities/things he would like (eg: not sports!). In particular the Church and Boys Brigade have done research into child development and used their findings of when children start to really bond (eg: the Church put him in a small group of kids only his age).' (R67)

Theme 2: Parents hold an important role in shaping the social lives of children with SEN.

Another theme observed was the important role played by parents in shaping the social lives of children with SEN. In both cases where parents are happy and unhappy with their child's social life, there is a sense that a lot of effort is being put in to actively facilitate social opportunities;

'It is hard and a struggle, very draining and tiring as I always have to be on hand supporting him, unlike his twin that I can leave at a party (should he rarely get invited)[.] It alienates you as a person and as a family, my only friends are other parents with SEN children.' (R39)

'…the complexity of arrangements and adjustments that parents make to ensure their children have social interaction and … how hard this is to negotiate.' (R41)

Some parents feel that whilst they are working hard to facilitate social opportunities, their child's school could, or should be doing more to facilitate social relationships; *'In my experience both sets of parents need to work hard to make it happen. I think school could do more to promote friendships.' (R1)*

Theme 3: Relationships with other children in school do not necessarily translate to relationships outside of school time.

A third theme identified within the responses to open ended questions was that whilst children might have relationships with other children during school time this did not necessarily mean that they would have relationships with these children outside of school.

'My daughter is very friendly and good fun to be with so lots of children like to play with her. There are plenty of children at school that she would consider as friends as

well as other children outside of school. However, she does not have one close friend, which for girls I feel is significant at age 10. None of the friendships at school or outside translate into invitations to others homes to play. Parents are happy for me to invite their children over but they rarely reciprocate the invitation. Some of my friends with children invite me and with her together to their homes but never just my daughter on her own. She rarely gets invited to birthday parties and again, we invite other children to her parties but get no reciprocal invitations. She goes to high school next Sept and I am worried about how she will manage to make friends there.' (R32)

In the quote above the parent identifies that whilst their child has relationships with children in school and outside of school, this does not translate to a close friendship and she is rarely invited to another's house or birthday party. This experience of few invitations is similarly noted by some other parents; *'I feel his relationships are very shallow… jovial, but the other kids will not invite him to things.' (R133).* For some parents factors related to their child's SEN mean that they would not feel comfortable letting their child go to another child's house without them accompanying them;

'He almost never gets invited to friends' houses. Because he can be inappropriate sexually we worry that his friends parents won't supervise as well as we do as at age 11 most children require little supervision, but he does. This impacts on friendships. If we invite friends here or to his parties they often don't come which upsets him and puts us off inviting them'

(R108)

Theme 4: There are practicalities which influence children's social lives as a result of SEN

Another theme identified within parents' responses is how disability can influence children's participation in different ways. An example of this is that children may attend a special school or unit located a considerable distance from their home, which can impact upon their social opportunities. For example, it may be harder to maintain relationships outside of school with classmates; *'Now he goes to a special school which is over 20 miles away, playing with children from his school simply* *doesn't happen. The children come from a wide area all over [the] county.' (R87).* Going to school a considerable distance away may also make it harder to create continuity with local children;

'I feel he is isolated in our village as he attends a specialist school and the local children go to the local primary school. They don't understand him so he isn't able to join in in a meaningful way with their playing at the park for example.' (R66)

Some parents reported how grateful they were for specialist activity provision; *'We are very lucky to have a special needs holiday play scheme which gives Walter access to play and socialize with other children in school holidays, although this usually limited to one day per week.' (R12).* Other parents felt that such specialist provision was lacking or that there was inadequate funding for this;

'My son attended another weekly club for young people with additional needs but [the] County restricted all participants to one club only per week. There wasn't even the option to choose, you had to take the one nearest to your home address or not at all. This meant my son's options were restricted and he had to leave friendships behind.' (R109)

4.5 Phase 2 Results – Qualitative interviews

The themes below have been presented where they hold direct interest to the research questions. As with the data presented in section 4.4 parents discussed information which did not directly address the research questions and some themes were identified which have not been included due to their lack of direct relevance to the research questions. An example of such a theme is 'Child's Independence'. Pseudonyms are used in place of all children's and parents' names in quotations.

Table 15 – Parents' role in facilitating attendance at clubs and activities

Theme	**Subtheme**	**No. Respondents Discussed**
Parents' role in facilitating attendance at clubs and activities	Activities specifically for children with SEN: positives and considerations	4
	The importance of differentiating activities to enable participation	4
	Parent/adult attends activity to facilitate child's participation	4
	Attitudes of activity providers influences participation in mainstream activities	3
	Questioning the inclusive practice of organised activity providers	4

n.b. figures reported refer to the number of respondents mentioning this subtheme at least once during the interview.

Activities specifically for children with SEN: Positives and considerations

Four out of the five parents interviewed discussed their child's attendance at activities specifically arranged for children with SEN. The parents discussed how these can provide excellent opportunities for their children. One parent, for example, discussed a club which helps children to develop their social skills, run specifically for children with Down Syndrome; *'… he really enjoys it, he looks forward to it … it's very focused and it has clear aims' (P 1).* Another parent discussed the merit of two cycling clubs; *'Both of them, we think are fantastic. We really think they're brilliant … Lots of staff, very supportive and helpful, nice people, kids with different abilities and they literally don't turn you away' (P 4).* This parent also valued clubs which the child's sibling could also attend; *'…the other thing which*

… is super-important and can be an obstacle, but when it's supported can be wonderful: clubs that you can bring a sibling to.' (P4).

Two parents however, discussed how the level at which activities were pitched at SEN specific clubs did not always suit their children. One parent discussed her son's attendance at a cycling club for children with SEN (it is not clear if this is the same club discussed by parent 4);

'…he can ride a bike [and] but he had to slow right back down and go back to the basics on this and I think he found that quite frustrating. Really he just wanted to get on the bike and go off cycling ..., so after a few weeks John could clearly say "I just don't want to go"' (P1)

Another parent discussed how their child, who attends a mainstream school, initially did not want to attend a club at their school run jointly with children from a nearby special school; '*Luke wouldn't go to that for a long time, because I think he didn't want to be thought of as special, like the [name of school] boys. But now he's into it and he goes,' (P 5)*

Two parents felt that there was an insufficient provision of organised activities suitable for their children. One parent explained that she was not sure how to help her daughter access more activities; '*With her I'm a bit stumped. I'm not really sure where to look. That is in full knowledge of what's available locally.' (P2)*

The importance of differentiating activities to enable participation

Four of the five parents discussed why their child would find it difficult to participate in mainstream formal activities outside of school, and the qualities of differentiation which would be required to allow them to take part. Two parents discussed how understanding instructions and the pace of the class would make it difficult for their child to participate.

One parent discussed how instructions would need to be delivered to their child during a football club; *'…there's no point in saying to him the instructions. You've got to actually take his hand and say, "come on let's run. This is the red cone."' (P3)*
One parent discussed difficulties with understanding instructions in ice skating

lessons, which meant that their child wasn't able to access a fun, group activity as they would have liked.

'And although they're very inclusive and positive they said no, it was clear she wouldn't be able to cope with the classes because the classes were just moving much too fast for her … and she wouldn't be able to understand the instructions. … Private lessons was the only way that we could … teach her skating but she didn't want, didn't care about that, she wanted to do something fun with a group of children.' (P2)

Two of the five parents spoke about how training and understanding of staff facilitated their child's participation in activities. One parent spoke about how she and other local parents wanted more mainstream activities to be offered for children with SEN; *'They need staff to be trained up and maybe just a little bit of understanding and sympathy' (P4).*

Parent or another adult attends an activity to facilitate the child's participation

Four of the five parents reported that they or a support worker had attended an organised activity to support their child's participation. Three parents had attended activities themselves, one had attended and had a support worker attend and one had a support worker who attended activities. All these parents felt that this involvement enabled their child to access the activity which they would not be able to do without this support. One parent discussed how they had arranged a one to one support worker to help their son at a drama club:

'I employ somebody to be his one-to-one at that session, to keep him in the building and to keep him motivated and occupied … prior to that, he would sit under the piano, he'd run off stage, someone else chasing him … he wouldn't, and couldn't, sort of, sit still for any length of time ... but with a one-to-one, he manages it, because they've got a very good rapport' (P3)

This parent continued to explain how the support worker facilitates his understanding of instructions and participation in the club; '*she can actually take him aside, and they can practice it and practice it, while the other group go on to do something else. The more repetition he gets, the better he gets at things'. (P3).*

Ultimately involvement in this club, facilitated by one to one adult support, has enabled her child to make real achievements and develop his skills; *'…the drama, singing, acting, really has built his confidence'. (P3)*

Attitudes of activity providers influences participation in mainstream activities

Three of the five parents felt that attitudes of mainstream activity providers could negatively influence a child's opportunity to participate. For one parent this was the result of a lack of understanding on the part of the activity provider. Two parents felt that a lack of confidence and over-cautious approach to health and safety could curtail opportunities. One parent felt strongly about this issue;

'They're not confident and they're fearful, so a lot of the time, they just don't want the hassle. They don't want to have to differentiate what they do in order to support that young person being there … after-school clubs run by the school and run by outside organisations aren't that accessible, it's as much to do with their attitudes and fearfulness as it is to do with not being quite set out to be honest'. (P4)

This parent commented that their daughter's disability did not prevent them from doing any activities as a family, and consequently they did not see why this should not be the case for outside of school activities;

'When we go out as a family at the weekend we go everywhere. We go and walk in parks and we go to the theatre with Lauren. We go to restaurants all the time because we feel that we have to go because we're part of society and she's part of society. We can make it work. We're sad that providers of activities after school and children's clubs don't feel that way, because actually it is possible. All you need is the right attitude. You need to want to make it work, but if you're worried and you don't want to make it work you can always find an excuse.' (P4)

Questioning the inclusive practice of organised activity providers

Four of the five parents discussed how they have intervened to suggest to activity providers how they might differentiate their provision to include their child. For example, one parent discussed how they went to their child's football club to discuss autism with all of the children there. Another parent discussed with activity organisers at an afterschool drama club how their child could be involved in a drama production. P3, whilst happy with the manner in which their child was included in a drama class, felt that unlike other children, they were not being given the opportunity to progress through the classes; *'Adam stayed in Emeralds for three years, which is the lowest group, sort of, with 4-year-olds, 5-year-olds … Then I had a word with the people who run it and said, "Can he not progress like everyone else?"' (P3).* With this intervention their child moved up to a class with older children. Similarly this parent also provided materials to support staff at the drama class to learn Makaton signing for their Christmas concert; '*So I found lots of YouTube clips and wrote down my own … his one-to-one taught it to Adam and Adam sort of taught her the words that he would choose as well' (P3).* This parent then explained how staff at this club taught this to other associated clubs in the local area.

Table 16 - Theme 2 parent's role in shaping informal aspects of children's social lives

Theme	**Subtheme**	**Respondents**
Parent's role in shaping informal aspects of children's social lives.	Active management of informal social activities.	5
	The importance of knowing other parents to facilitate informal social opportunities.	4

<u>Active management of informal social activities</u>

All five of the parents interviewed discussed ways in which they actively manage informal social situations for their child. For two parents this meant inviting other children on family events which could be structured together such as camping trips, or days out such as fruit picking.

One parent spoke about the importance of going out together with another child's parents, or structuring the activities of a playdate. Both children in this friendship had SEN and structuring activities was essential to enable both children to enjoy and develop their friendship; *' … so we work out lots of activities for them to do together because they don't really know quite how to – they love each other but they don't really know what else to do… ' (P2).*

Another parent spoke about how she, and her partner, supported their child to take part in informal football matches in their local park. She explained how she, and her partner (Michael), would aim to allow their son to sort out any disagreements and negotiate social situations associated with this;

'… Michael still takes the same tactics, stand on the back line, see how it's working out and whether it needs some intervening or not and then he sort of steps in. He's much better at it than I am … if I see there's a tricky situation I'm more inclined to take John away from it. I think Michael works a bit better.' (P1)

Another parent discussed the considerations they would have before arranging an outing for their son and his school friend who also has SEN; *'you also would need, in this outing, to have probably, me and my husband, or another adult you know. You're responsible for a child whose parents you don't really know and this child has needs and you don't know what they are.' (P5)*

Knowing other parents to facilitate informal play opportunities

Four parents spoke about knowing other parents to facilitate play opportunities between their children. One parent (P5), spoke of the importance of contacting the other child's parents to arrange a play date. As this family are from a different cultural background she felt that this may affect these play date arrangements. P2 spoke of a friendship which she had developed with a parent from her child's school and how this had facilitated informal social opportunities for the children through joint days out.

Two parents (P1, P3) spoke of the importance of other parents knowing their child well, and that parents who did not know them may not feel confident looking after their child. These parents similarly felt that they would not feel confident or comfortable about their child going to a friend's house who they did not know well.

Table 17 - The nature of friendships of children with SEN

Theme	**Subtheme**	**Respondents**
The nature of friendships of children with SEN	Continuity and contact	4
	Inclusion in school time does not necessarily lead to friendships outside of school time	3
	Friendships with other children with SEN	3
	The importance of contact with other children	3

<u>Contact and Continuity</u>

Four parents spoke about the importance of continuity and contact with other children to their child’s relationships with other children. Three parents spoke about the importance of the familiarity engendered by their child growing up with the other children in their class. One parent (P1) explained that her son’s communication can be difficult to understand; his class-mates’ familiarity with his communication and ability to understand him facilitates their friendships and gives him confidence in his social skills. Making new friends can be more difficult for this child and his parent is concerned about his move to secondary school;

‘John’s friends that he has in school are such good friends because they’ve spent since Reception together so they can understand him but actually to make new friends … people don’t always understand … when other people don’t understand [that’s when] John says “oh don’t worry about it”, he gives up’ (P1)

Two other parents explained that they felt that because of the amount of time they had spent in the class with other children, they were not seen as being different to the other children. One parent expressed the thinking she felt other children had and how this might benefit them;

'They're very, "Lauren is Lauren. She's not a disabled child. She's one of the girls in our class. She's not different. She's not special." … it's given them that. Hopefully they'll take that through their lives now'. (P4)

Two parents spoke about how they were currently happy about their child's social relationships, but were concerned about school transitions they were due to make. For one parent this was the transition to secondary school (mentioned above) whilst for another this was the transition to adulthood; *'…you can manage a child environment. When you're 19 and 20, you're with your mates playing football then going to the pub. What happens then?' (P5).* This parent went on to say that whilst it might be that they were unaware of opportunities for this age group they were concerned about it; *'…is it because, I don't know, because we're not in that stage of his life I haven't started to look for it? Does it exist? But it frightens me, all those things. And the availability of those things, for him to continue to develop socially.' (P5)*

Inclusion in school time does not necessarily lead to friendships outside of school

Three parents felt that whilst their child was included and had relationships with other children during school time, this did not necessarily translate to friendships outside of school. One parent discussed some of the relationships her child has with other children in school;

'She has special friends in school and teachers tell me who her special friends are. I see who her special friends are that look after her and take a maternal role. They're usually girls, but there are some boys as well.' (P2)

Another parent discussed a similar situation for her son at his school; '*He's got most of the girls. All of the girls will cling round him, mother him, trying to help him, trying to dress him for P.E.' (P 3).* This parent explained that her son might see a couple of these children outside of school; *'He sees a couple, but mainly because they've got siblings with special needs, or the parents are very, very, very nice and very understanding. But normally not without me.' (P3)*

One parent felt that other parents have a different attitude regarding the relationship between the children in comparison to other friendships; *'I also think*

Lauren is very visible at school, but she's invisible to the parents. They're aware she's there but she's not on their radar as being in their child's social circle' (P4)

This parent also felt that other parents were less inclined to invite her daughter over to their house for a play date, or that their thinking around this would be different;

'Busy parents, if a child isn't talking about One Direction and hair accessories … parents can be, don't think "we'll get Lauren over for a chat for tea." It's more that if they were to get her over for a play date they would probably feel that they were doing me a favour or Lauren a favour.' (P4)

Friendships with other children with SEN may be non-typical but are important

Three parents spoke of their child's friendships with other children with SEN. Each of these parents spoke of the value of these relationships to each child, despite not appearing typical for a child of their age. One parent spoke about how her 14 year old son who has a diagnosis of ASD has more recently formed a friendship with another child in his class with ASD. Whilst the manner in which they communicate is idiosyncratic it means a lot to him, and a lot to her as a parent.

'… their text messages are hilarious. I mean, the way they find a way to communicate, but it is, you know, it's very interesting. It's like, "Are you there?" "Yes" "What did you have for tea? I had this. What are you doing now? Can I facetime you?" I laughed out loud the other day. The phone rang and Luke answered it with "What's up?" So they're trying to have this 14-year old relationship with each other which is fantastic actually, because Luke often voices about having friends, wanting friends, everybody is his friend. And it's the most heart-breaking thing, I think, for me.' (P5)

Parent 2 similarly spoke of how much they value a friendship which has developed between her child and another child with SEN; '*Both of them, it's the first time they've ever really had a friend, it's just wonderful to see that … she loves him very much but in an unstructured environment she doesn't really know what to do with him.' (P2)*

The importance of contact with other children

Three (P1,P2,P4) parents spoke about the value that they and their child gained from contact with other children outside of school. One parent spoke about how their child enjoyed being part of informal games of football at their local park; *'…he may not always kick the ball but he just likes to be there as part of the group.' (P1)* This parent similarly spoke about how her son likes to be involved in games when they are at the local swimming pool, or during family holidays; however she described how it can be difficult if other children do not want him to play or he is not able to keep up with the game.

One parent described an afternoon out with friends and family. During this afternoon, her daughter went off with a group of children who did not have SEN. This parent explained she was pleased to see her daughter being included within this group of children;

'I was really happy to see that. You think that children can't enjoy or get anything out of being mixed up together like that, but we're all on the same spectrum and there's no reason why. Just because she can't speak and she probably can't understand much of what they're saying … she can laugh. She gets a joke. She can be included. Even if, let's say, she was in a wheelchair and couldn't move much, someone could wheel her around. She's still listening. She's still with everyone. She's a human being and she's a kid. Just give children a chance. They give as much as they take, socially being part of a gang.' (P 4)

4.6 Summary of Key Findings

The results from the MCS, Phase 1 and Phase 2 identify consistent trends across the data corpus, although there are also some differences in the views expressed. Below are some of the key findings from the study.

Background data from the MCS found children with SEN seeing others less frequently outside of school than children without SEN. Phase 1 of the study found most children with SEN to see other children in informal settings outside of school 'rarely or not at all'. This finding was consistent in play dates in the child's own home, at other children’s homes and in community settings. More parents reported their children seeing other children at least once a month in other children’s homes, than in their own homes.

Cross-tabulating the data by different independent variables showed children with an EHCP and those who attended a special school seeing other children less frequently in informal settings. Comparison by type of SEN showed children with MLD, SLD, ASD, SLCN and SEMH seeing other children less frequently than children with other types of SEN. The older the child in the study, the more often parents reported that they saw other children ‘rarely or not at all’.

Background data from the MCS found parents of children with SEN more frequently reporting their child not to have a close/good friend in comparison to children without SEN. Phase 1 of this study observed roughly equivalent numbers of children with SEN having, as not having a good friend. The most frequent location where parents reported friendships being formed was in school. Some themes were recorded from qualitative elements of the study which provide insight into the nature of friendships of children with SEN, such as the importance of continuity with others and the role of friendships with other children with SEN. These are discussed further in the following chapter.

Data from Phase 1 found the majority of children taking part in organised activities outside of school. Children were participating in various different activities, with the most prevalent being individual sports. Some children were also taking part in activities specifically organised for children with SEN. Children with an EHCP attended fewer organised activities than those without an EHCP. Children attending a special school also attended fewer activities. Themes from qualitative elements of the study suggested factors which influenced participation in organised activities, which included the attitudes of activity providers, the manner in which children were included in these and the active role taken by parents in facilitating attendance. Whilst many parents were positive about the opportunities provided by mainstream formal activities the need to differentiate these was highlighted.

Chapter 5 – Discussion

This study examined the opportunities which children with SEN have to socialise with their peers outside of school. This was achieved by asking parents about what their child does outside of school and their views about their child's peer relationships, friendships and social activities. This was accomplished using background information from the MCS, a mixed quantitative and qualitative survey for parents and in depth interviews with five mothers of children with SEN.

5.1 Contact with peers in informal situations outside of school

The results from the MCS found that parents whose children had been identified as having SEN were seeing other children outside of school less frequently than children who had not been identified as having SEN. These findings were also in keeping with the results from Phase 1 of this study, with the majority of parents reporting that their child sees other children 'rarely' or 'not at all' in informal settings. Furthermore, this pattern was consistent across three informal settings; play dates at the child's own home, play dates at other children's homes and seeing other children in community settings. This is in line with observations in earlier studies. Solish et al. (2010) observed children with SEN to take part in fewer social activities with other children outside of school than children without SEN did. King et al. (2013) found children with SEN to take part in fewer 'skill based' and 'active physical' activities than children without SEN and social activities were more likely to take place within the home. Geisthardt et al. (2002) similarly found that children with SEN spent less time outside of school with peers than their siblings without SEN, and similar findings have also been found in studies focusing on social activities of children with particular types of SEN (Abells, Burbidge & Minnes, 2008; Cuckle & Wilson, 2002; Engel-Yeger, Jarus, Anaby & Law 2009; Sloper, Turner, Knussen, & Cunningham, 1990;).

One explanation for these findings are the 'within child' factors which are inherent within the notion of SEN and which make it more difficult to achieve age appropriate social competency. Where children experience difficulties with communication, cognitive, affective and motor skills, they are likely to find it harder to form relationships with peers (Guralnick, 1999). Aetiological, or ‘within child’ difficulties, may have made it more difficult for children to develop relationships in school and other settings, resulting in fewer invitations or opportunities to socialise outside of school during activities such as a child coming to their house or parties. However, there are further factors indicated by this study which may interact with these ‘within child’ aspects which result in greater difficulties in socialising with others outside of school.

5.1.1 Play dates in the child’s own home and other children’s homes

More parents reported their child as seeing other children at least once a month in other children’s homes than in their own homes. This finding is intriguing and does not necessarily correspond with what would be expected from qualitative answers in Phase 2, or reflect the findings of previous studies. For example, Solish et al. (2010), found that slightly more children with ASD and ID had friends over to their own homes, than were invited over to other children’s homes.

The reasons for these results are not clear; however one explanation is that it may represent the difficulties and complexities which some parents have reported in organising activities for children with SEN. Inviting another child over to play may be more difficult and mean increased responsibility when the parent is already fully occupied with looking after their own child. For parents of children without SEN, having a child over to the house to play may provide entertainment for their child, allowing them time, for example, to do jobs around the home. For a child with SEN who may require support from the parent to socialise with their peers, having another child over to play may represent more work for their parent. Comparatively going to another child’s house may provide the parent with informal respite.

Geisthardt et al. (2002) interviewed parents of children with SEN who felt that other parents thought that their child would need a greater level of supervision and support, and consequently they were less frequently invited over for play dates. Some parents in Phase 1 and 2 of this study similarly felt that this influenced the invitations which were provided to their children. Some respondents and interviewees thought that other parents felt differently regarding the relationships between their children, than they would do in a relationship between two children without SEN. Consequently they felt that other parents would feel they were doing the child or parent a favour if they invited them over for a play date.

Some respondents in this study also felt that other parents did not feel confident to invite their child over to their house on their own without their parent in attendance. This is particularly likely to be the case where children experience behavioural difficulties or challenging behaviour. Children with learning difficulties, ASD or SEMH may be more likely to display challenging behaviour in comparison to children whose primary SEN is as a result of a sensory impairment or physical disability. This may be one reason for a greater proportion of children with learning difficulties, ASD and SEMH reporting that they see other children ‘rarely or not at all’ in other children’s homes.

Parents of children with SEN themselves, similarly may not feel confident allowing their child to go to another child’s house. There may be concerns about the supervision which the other parent may provide for the children, leading them to only go over to another child’s house to play where their parents are confident that supervision will be provided. Again, these concerns and feelings of responsibility may be greater where the child with SEN experiences behavioural difficulties. This may lead to a greater likelihood of seeing other children in their homes ‘rarely or never’, or lead parents to accompany their child to all the informal activities which their child attends.

This observation was also made by Geistdhardt et al. (2002), where parents only left their child at a neighbour’s house where they were confident that the children would be supervised. In the current study, some parents reported that they would only allow their child to go to another’s house if they accompanied them. There may be very clear concerns which the parent has to ensure their child’s safety within informal situations. However when a parent is accompanying their child, this may lead the child to experience these situations in a qualitatively different manner to their peers. In school time the presence of a TA accompanying a child with SEN has been observed to reduce the interaction they have with other children within their mainstream classes (Webster & Blatchford, 2013). A similar process may affect the interaction of children with SEN where they are attended by adults in informal situations outside of school, such as play dates at their own or other children's homes, children's parties or play in community setting. Parent's presence may be off-putting to other children, or mean that interactions become more 'vertically' organised.

Knowing other parents was highlighted in Phase 2 as a factor helping to facilitate informal play arrangements between children. Family friends, for example, who have known the child and family since a young age are likely to have a greater confidence in looking after the child for a play date arrangement. Similarly, the child's parents themselves are likely to have a greater confidence that the child's needs are understood and that they will be suitably supervised. Knowing other parents may also allow for joint family outings. However, there may be a limit to the number of family friends a parent has with children or they may not be the children with whom their child chooses to play. Furthermore, for children who attend a special school this may not be in their local area, perhaps reducing the opportunity which they have to interact with family friends or children who live in their neighbourhood.

In Phase 1 and 2, some parents felt that whilst they might invite other children over for a play date, these invitations were not always reciprocated. Where children do not respond to requests to attend play dates, this can be upsetting for the child with SEN, as well as their parents. Reciprocity is an important concept within the notion of friendship (Rubin et al., 2006) and seeing others outside of school is linked to the concept of 'best friendships' (Meyer et al., 1998). A lack of reciprocity may result in children falling out of friendship, or the perception of the quality of these relationships to change. Furthermore, if parents are attempting to arrange play dates with other parents, and these become fruitless enquiries or are not reciprocated, they are unlikely to persevere with these arrangements.

In Phase 1 the majority of children's friendships were reported to have begun within school settings. Where children live a considerable distance from their school, this can create logistical difficulties for informal play opportunities. For children with SEN's educational needs to be met, they may be educated in a special school or unit, which is a greater distance from their home than their local primary school. This may mean that it is harder to arrange informal play opportunities with friends from school, whilst simultaneously reducing contact and continuity with children in their local area.

5.1.2 Contact with peers in community settings

As with play dates, play opportunities in the community for children with SEN are likely to be affected by within child factors. As there is an increased perception of danger in today's society in allowing children to play on their own in the community (Layard & Dunn, 2009), these aetiological difficulties may represent a compounding factor. Given difficulties with communication, cognitive, affective and physical skills, children with SEN may be more vulnerable than other children. For example, a child may be at greater risk crossing the road if they do not have a clear understanding of road safety or have difficulties with executive functioning.

5.1.3 Factors affecting informal contact with peers

In Phase 1, where comparisons were made across independent variables, more parents of children with EHCPs reported that their child sees other children 'rarely or not at all' than parents of children without EHCPs. For play dates at the child's own home, and seeing other children in community settings this difference was statistically significant. Children with EHCPs are likely to have a higher level of need than children without EHCPs, and consequently this may represent children with a greater degree of SEN seeing other children less frequently. This finding is similar to parents' views in Geisthardt et al.'s (2002) study, who observed that children with a higher level of SEN saw others less frequently outside of school than those with a lower level of SEN. Whilst degree of physical difficulty did not influence frequency of participation in social activities, where children experienced a higher level of behavioural or learning difficulties, their participation was reduced. This finding has also been observed during school time (Avramidis, 2013).

Phase 1 similarly found that children with MLD, SLD, ASD, SLCN and SEMH saw other children less frequently than children with other types of SEN. These findings are consistent with what would be expected from Guralnick's (1999) model of social competence. Children within these categories of SEN are likely to have a higher level of difficulty related to the foundation processes subsumed within social competence, shared understanding and emotional regulation (see chapter 2.5). Children with difficulty in these areas may have more problems with social skills and therefore find it harder to form reciprocal relationships with peers, and have less informal contact outside of school. As discussed above, issues around supervision may also lead to a reduction in play opportunities. It seems likely that both sets of parents will be less confident with supervision arrangements where the child has behavioural difficulties and this may consequently lead to fewer play dates and informal play with others only in the company of adults. A greater number of parents of boys than girls reported that their child participated in informal activities rarely or not at all. This finding may be explained through a greater number of responses from parents of boys with ASD.

Parents of children who attended a SEN unit within a mainstream school, more frequently reported their child as seeing other children ‘2/3 times a month or more’ outside of school. This was consistent across all three settings - in their own homes, the homes of other children and in the community, although this did not meet statistical significance. Some parents attending special schools reported that they needed to travel a considerable distance to their child’s school, which had consequences for seeing other children outside of school. Alternatively there may be factors related to education within a unit in a mainstream school which promotes the development of social relationships for children with SEN. It may be that these schools are better equipped to actively promote friendships amongst the child’s peers both within the SEN unit and wider school community.

Across each of the settings observed, at each successive age group from KS 1 – KS 4, an increasing proportion of parents reported their children as seeing others in informal settings ‘rarely or not at all’. Whilst not statistically significant, this trend is interesting. This trend may represent a greater discrepancy in social competence with typically developing peers as children reach adolescence. Furthermore, the informal social activities of adolescents are less likely to be arranged by or involve adults; where parents are required to help make these arrangements, or support participation, this may be increasingly off-putting to other adolescents. It should be noted that, similarly to previous studies which have explored the experiences of a range of age groups (e.g. Solish et al. 2010), the survey questions were not equally applicable to all age groups, for instance ‘play date’ is unlikely to be a term used by typically developing adolescents.

5.2 Contact with peers in formal settings

Nearly three quarters of the parents in this study reported that their child takes part in at least one organised activity. This is less than the number reported by Solish et al. (2003) who observed 97.1% of parents reporting their child as being socially integrated in activities outside of school. This smaller proportion participating in organised activities may be due to cultural differences between the UK and Canada, which may mean potentially greater opportunities for inclusion in outside of school activities. These differences may also be due to the particular sample in this study, or differences in research methodology in comparison to Solish et al. (2003). Whilst the previous study used interviews with parents, the information in this study was captured through a self-completion web and paper survey. This may have resulted in fewer parents fully completing questions within the survey, such as the total number of activities their child was participating in.

The mean number of organised activities which children with SEN took part in in this study was 1.61. This is slightly more than the mean number of ‘recreational’ activities participated in by children with ASD (1.16) and intellectual disability (1.48) in Solish et al.’s (2010) study. It is important to recognise methodological differences between the current study and Solish et al. (2010), with one factor being that their survey allowed parents to report more recreational activities, than the maximum of three in this study. However it is interesting that the mean number of recorded recreational activities is approximately similar between the two studies. Whilst there is no comparison group in the current study, typically developing children in Solish et al.’s (2010) study took part in more recreational activities (3.10).

Future research could usefully make a comparison with typically developing children. This may find that as a consequence of greater difficulties in arranging and managing informal activities, that there is a preference for parents of children with SEN to compensate for this through greater involvement in organised activities. Alternatively, it may be that children with SEN take part in fewer activities due to greater difficulties in accessing these. In this study, children with an EHCP participated in fewer activities on average than children without an EHCP, and this difference was greater where comparisons were made with activities completed on a weekly basis. This could be explained with children with an EHCP taking part in fewer activities on a regular basis, and those which they do attend taking the form of more specialist respite services. Participation in organised activities provides children with SEN opportunities to develop and broaden their skills and opportunities to develop self-esteem and feelings of self-worth through achievement (Buttimer & Tierney, 2005; Murphy & Carbone, 2008). If children with SEN have fewer opportunities to take part in organised activities, then they will have a reduced opportunity to take advantage of some of the benefits offered by this participation.

Inclusive practice in outside of school activities is likely to be a factor which influences the participation of children with SEN and this was commented upon by parents during Phases 1 and 2. Given that differentiation of instruction during school time is important to include children with SEN, it is understandable that this is also the case for organised activities outside of school. Some parents explained how their children would not be able to participate if they were given instructions verbally, and would require greater support to understand directions. Similarly where children find it difficult to maintain their attention or engage in activities this is likely to form a barrier to their participation in potentially rewarding activities. Some parents gave examples of good practice in both mainstream clubs, and those which have been specifically designed for children with SEN where these had been differentiated to include children with SEN. The most frequently participated in activity by children in this study was individual sport. This finding may represent the value and enjoyment which is gained from these activities by children with SEN, although these may also be activities which can be more easily differentiated by activity providers.

Some parents felt that the attitudes of formal activity organisers in mainstream activities can hamper the opportunities which the child has to participate. Reasons cited by parents included a lack of understanding amongst activity organisers, a lack of confidence or an overly cautious approach to health and safety. It is important to remember that a relatively small number of parents answered the questionnaire in this study and a small number of interviews were held. Their views may have been formed through experiences with a limited number of activity providers, or be representative only of a small region of the UK. However, these attitudes are in keeping with concerns that increasing fearfulness and preoccupation with health and safety is curtailing children's social opportunities (Layard & Dunn, 2009).

Of the total of five interviewed, four parents discussed how they had attended an organised activity to question the inclusive practice of activity organisers. This included questioning opportunities for participation, how understanding of instructions was being supported and the opportunities to progress through classes with same age peers. Some parents in Phase 1 and 2 also discussed how they had arranged themselves for a support worker to attend the activity with their child to support their participation. Whilst this active involvement from parents helped to include these children, one is aware that without this parental involvement these children may have not have had the same opportunities to succeed. Through no fault of their own many parents may not be able to advocate for their children in the same manner that the parents in this study were able to; however it is the opinion of the author that they should not need to.

Analyses of data in Phase 1 showed differential participation amongst children with different types of SEN in formal activities. Children with SLCN and ASD on average took part in the fewest activities, whilst in comparison, children with HI and SpLD took part in a greater number of activities on a weekly basis. This may represent activity providers being less able to include children with ASD or SLCN, consequently limiting their participation in organised activities. If fewer organised activities are able to include children with SEN then this will mean the range of activities which these children can choose from will be smaller. Clubs which are especially designed for children with SEN may allow for participation, however the specialist nature of these means that children’s activity options may be limited. When logistical difficulties, such as travel, are introduced, as well as children’s individual activity preferences, the options available to children with SEN may be reduced further still.

5.3 Friendships

Responses from the MCS show parents of children with SEN more frequently reporting that their child does not have at least one close/good friend. These findings are consistent with studies within school time using sociographic approaches showing children with SEN having fewer reciprocated friendship nominations than children without SEN (Avramidis et al., 2013). Social competence requires the integration of language, cognitive, affective and motor skills (Guralnick, 1999). These are important skills in the development of peer relationships and where children with SEN experience difficulties with these skills they may find it harder to develop relationships and friendships with their peers.

Phase 1 of this study saw roughly equivalent numbers of parents reporting their child as having a good friend, as not having a good friend. A small proportion of parents reported that they did not know whether their child had a good friend or not. This lack of knowing may be the response to some of the difficulties of defining friendships amongst children with SEN outlined in the literature in Chapter 2 (e.g. Webster & Carter, 2013). There was also a deliberate effort not to define friendship in the survey, for two reasons; firstly, due to economy of time in completing the questionnaire and secondly, to avoid constricting parents’ conceptualisation of friendship in a survey focusing on parents’ views. Not providing a definition as some researchers have done (e.g. Solish et al., 2010) may have resulted in parents responding that they did not know. Parents were asked to provide further information if they responded that they did not know, to explore their answer further and avoid casting friendship as a dichotomous construct (Hartup, 1996; Dunn, 2006).

Fewer parents of children with SEN in this study reported their children as having at least one good friend than parents of children with SEN in the MCS. This may be a result of the particular sample in this study, such as a greater proportion of children with ASD or a larger age range. Meyer et al. (1998) saw all stake holders in their study reporting the importance of, and need for, one or more best friends in one's life. Having friends has positive mental health implications and older adolescents with learning difficulties perceive friends as being an important support to their emotional wellbeing (Williams & Heslop, 2006). If as many as 45.0 % of children with SEN do not have a good friendship not only are they missing an important factor in their life, but they could also be at greater risk of adverse mental health experiences.

A greater proportion of children with an EHCP were described as not having a close/good friend (47.3 %), in comparison to children without an EHCP (38.5 %). In keeping with the similar trend found in the question of informal social activities, this may represent children with a greater degree of SEN finding it harder to develop relationships with other children. In keeping with this finding a smaller number of parents of children attending a special school reported their child as having at least one good friend.

Comparisons within Phase 1 by the type of SEN reported by parents showed more children with MLD as having a good friend (66.7%) than the average across the data set, whilst fewer children with SLD did (39.4%). Fewer parents of children with ASD (35.2%) reported their child as having a good friend with this lower score perhaps being explained through social skills deficits experienced by children with ASD. Solish et al. (2010) made a similar observation, with approximately half of the children with ASD in their study and 80% of the children with ID having at least one good friend. A greater proportion of boys than girls were reported as not having at least one good friend. It is thought that this is the result of the greater prevalence of ASD amongst boys, which was also reflected in the sample in this study.

As young people with SEN reach adolescence, the discrepancy between their social skills and those of their peers may have implications for forming relationships. In this study more children in KS1 (51.5%) and KS2 (47.8%) reported their children as having a close/good friend than in KS3 (39.1%). As young people reach this age group, peer relationships outside of school are likely to be more self-directed and less mediated by adults. If there is a widening gap between social competency of SEN and their typically developing peers, this may mean that these children are less able to maintain relationships. Parents' perceptions of what a friendship, or relationship, is with a peer may also change by the time the young person reaches this age group. Younger children's friendships are often characterised through joint play, whereas older children and adolescents increasingly see friends as supporters in negotiating an increasingly complex social world (Bagwell, 2009). Where children with SEN have relationships with other children which are less 'mature' these may be less frequently recognised as close friendships.

In Phase 1 of this study, of the parents who responded that their child had at least one good friend, the most frequently reported number of friendships was 1 – 2. Without a comparison group it is not possible to compare this to children without SEN; however this would seem to generally agree with studies which observe children with SEN having smaller friendship groups than children without SEN. In a study examining parents' views, Solish et al. (2010) observed children with SEN to have fewer reciprocal friendships than children without SEN. This finding has similarly been found in studies of children's social networks within school settings (Avramidis, 2013).

A greater proportion of children attending special schools were reported to have 1-2 friends than children who attended SEN units or mainstream schools. Children attending special schools are likely to be those with a greater degree of SEN, which could impact upon their ability to form friendships. In addition to this, class sizes in special schools are likely to be smaller. Smaller class sizes may entail more individual and tailored input from teachers; however they may also mean that there will be fewer peers with whom potential relationships can be formed. Having just one good friend can provide a number of developmental advantages for children, but there are also risks associated with this if the friendship ends, if, for example, the child moves away.

Friendships should not be considered as confined to particular environments, such as in, or outside of school. Whilst this study has focused on opportunities outside of school, this information should be viewed as informing a more general picture of children’s friendships, accumulated through previous research. What this picture appears to suggest, is that children with SEN are at greater risk of developing fewer friendships than children without SEN. Children and adolescents with SEN report that they want friendships with other children, although the manner in which they describe these can be idiosyncratic (Cassidy & Asher, 1992; Matheson et al., 2007). Parents of children with SEN are similarly concerned about their child developing friendships with other children and socialisation is often a reason cited for parents choosing mainstream schools for their children (Tipton et al., 2013; Geisthardt, 2002). Consequently there is a need to support children with SEN to develop friendships.

In phase 2, three parents spoke of their child’s friendships with other children with SEN. As Matheson et al. (2007) observed in their study, these relationships may be not be typical, and appear ‘less mature’ than relationships which might be observed between typically developing peers. However, despite the idiosyncratic nature of these relationships, children can gain huge value from their friendships, even though they may not contain all the qualities which constitute friendship from an ‘adultomorphic’ perspective (Rubin et al., 2008).

5.4 Parent satisfaction with children’s social life outside school

Seventeen per cent of parents responded that they were happy with their child’s social life outside of school. Some parents responded that they were happy because their child had positive social experiences, whilst others were happy because despite having limited social opportunities their child was ‘happy not to have a social life’. Children with ASD in particular may not have the same social motivation as typically developing children; it is important that a balance is struck between empowering children with the skills to make and sustain friendships should they desire to, and respecting the fact that they may want less social contact with others (Calder, Hill & Pellicano, 2013).

The number of parents reporting dissatisfaction with their child’s social opportunities is a cause for concern. Parents of children with disabilities feel that it is important that their children develop friendships (Grenot-Scheyer, Coots & Falvey, 1989), and furthermore parents are concerned about the impact a lack of friendships can have upon their children's lives (Hanley-Maxwell, Whitney-Thomas & Pogoloff, 1995). New legislation gives parents' views a more central role in planning for their children's holistic support within EHCPs. That a large number of parents are unhappy about their children's friendships and social opportunities outside of school is important information for education professionals supporting families and children with SEN.

For some parents there was an apparent feeling of resignation that a lack of friends was inevitable for their child, and similar observations were made by Geisthardt et al. (2002). The reasons for these views may be numerous and interrelated, including those discussed above such as the attitudes of others. However it will be important for both children with SEN, and their parents, that a feeling of optimism is created and that rewarding peer relationships can be obtained. There is an important role for professionals supporting children with SEN and their families to foster this optimism.

5.5 General Discussion

The discussion above has highlighted a number of issues and considerations for the social lives of children with SEN outside of school. The category of SEN is broad and heterogeneous, and the situation for particular children is likely to be individual and dependent upon their environment. However, the results from this study suggest that children with SEN are at risk of social separation from their peers outside of school and it is important that this situation is recognised by stakeholders.

The 'horizontally' organised nature of informal activities, such as play dates or hanging out with friends, may allow children the opportunity to develop social skills in a manner which is not possible in vertically organised, adult-directed activities (Howe, 2010). Informal play, for example, allows opportunities to encode and interpret different patterns of behaviour of others and the trialling of different social strategies (Guralnick, 1999). With fewer opportunities to practice these outside of school, children have less chance to develop age appropriate social competence. For children with SEN this problem is compounded, as it may be the foundation processes which are required for social competence, shared understanding and emotional regulation, which reduces their informal opportunities (Guralnick, 1999).

Where parents were positive regarding their child’s relationships with other children, one theme identified in both Phase 1 and Phase 2 was the importance of continuity with other children. Continuity between consistent peers may support reciprocal relationships through greater understanding of the child’s needs and preferred communication style. Furthermore, this continuity may help children to understand diversity amongst their peers, helping them to see the child as just another pupil in their class or community, rather than a child characterised by their disability. This is in keeping with contact theory which predicts the reduction of stereotyping through increased contact between groups.

Children knowing each other from a young age may support relationships, as the discrepancies in social competency between children with SEN and those without SEN may not be as apparent as those in older children. Consequently it may be easier for children with SEN to initiate friendships with other children when they are younger and these bonds mean that these close relationships continue, even if discrepancies in social competence become more apparent. The development of social relationships within school settings is a major argument in favour of inclusive education; however it also seems important that children with SEN are included in a similar manner outside of school. If children with SEN are not participating in social activities in the same manner as other children outside of school then it is likely that other children will see the social role of children with SEN differently to other children, both inside and outside of school.

5.5.1 Inclusion in school time may not lead to inclusion outside of school

The discussion above presents some key arguments for inclusion within school time, allowing greater access to peers which can foster social relationships and friendships. Given the apparent reduction of free rein of children to see others in ‘open’ community settings, there is perhaps a greater onus on inclusion within school time. However, whilst school may be where the majority of children's friendships begin, relationships with others in school time do not necessarily translate to friendships outside of school.

Some parents' descriptions of the relationships between their child and classmates did not equate with those characteristically seen within close friendships. Parents reported relationships where other children took on a maternal role or that their relationships seemed superficial and non-reciprocal. These relationships would appear to be characterised by the 'I'll help' frame presented by Meyer et al. (1998) (see chapter 2.5). Whilst these children might be included within their school classes and have relationships with peers, these may not be horizontally orientated or reciprocal relationships, which transcend the end of the school day.

There are likely to be a number of factors which influence children's social opportunities within school time, such as teaching in separate classes or frequently being accompanied by a teaching assistant, which may impact upon the child's ability to form relationships with their peers. Indirectly these may also impact on the social opportunities which children have outside of school. Other children's parents may be less aware of children with SEN, or that they may be within their child's social circle. When this is coupled with other parents potentially feeling less confident caring for a child with SEN, the result of this may be fewer invitations to attend play dates or birthday parties.

Where children are being taught separately to other children, or have a teaching assistant in attendance, the result may be a feeling of social separation which is communicated to other children more, or less overtly. Contact theory predicts that four conditions are necessary for the improved relationships between in-groups and out-groups. Whilst the conditions fostered within socially integrated classrooms may facilitate certain relationships, these may not develop reciprocal relationships and close friendships.

On one hand, the results of this study may show that integrated classrooms are not functioning effectively to facilitate the four conditions postulated by Allport (1954) which improve relationships between groups. However, equally, the results may suggest that contact theory is not sufficient to address issues of friendship in mainstream schools. Whilst contact with peers with and without SEN may improve *attitudes* and *relationships*, these may not necessarily lead to the best friendships which are valued and sought after by young people. An awareness of these issues may help school staff to recognise ways they can actively mediate, through approaches such as facilitating group working and joint social enterprises, to foster reciprocal relationships between children within school. Importantly, it will be essential that these approaches are considered in a manner which bridges home and school contexts. These implications are considered in greater detail in section 5.7.

5.5.2 The Active Role of Parents

Parents of children with SEN in this study went to great lengths to 'actively manage' informal social situations for their child. This included structuring activities to promote participation, intervening to help resolve conflicts and accompanying their children to birthday parties to facilitate their participation. Similar findings have been observed in previous studies (e.g. Geisthardt, et al., 2002). This intervention may be extremely beneficial for children with SEN, allowing them social opportunities which would otherwise be inaccessible. However, it is important that the lengths at which parents go to ensure their child has social opportunities is recognised by schools, professionals, other parents and the wider community.

It is extremely commendable that parents go to such lengths to support their children, but with additional demands, such as work or looking after the child's siblings, parents could easily become over-stretched. Some parents may have informal support structures, such as their own friends or family, who may be able to help them to care for their child; however many will not. One important implication of this study is how parents can be supported in developing their child's social opportunities outside of school. Where parents do not have adequate support structures to facilitate their child's relationships, there may be a role for professionals in facilitating these. These could function not only to provide friendship opportunities for children, but also to give informal respite.

5.5.3 Inclusion in formally organised activities

Activities which are specifically designed for children with SEN hold a number of benefits for them; however they are not without difficulties. The population from whom they would draw their membership is smaller than for mainstream clubs, and this can create issues of financial viability. There are also likely to be fewer of these clubs, meaning that there is less choice for children with SEN and potentially further to travel. Addressing these difficulties would be a useful measure; however in the view of the author it is also important that mainstream clubs are inclusive to children with SEN. During school time huge effort is put into making education accessible to children with SEN, and given the value which can be gained from organised activities it is important that children with SEN have equal access to these.

The most important factor when including children with SEN is likely to be the development of a ‘can do’ attitude. Just as during school time there may be situations where ‘reasonable adjustments’ cannot be made to incorporate children with SEN, but as a general rule there should be an expectation that children with SEN can be included in organised activities. Supporting organised activities to engage in inclusive practice is likely to be an area where professionals can support activity organisers.

5.5.4 Inclusion in a community context

One of the major aims of inclusive education is to create environments which optimise the social opportunities for children with SEN. The findings from this study suggest that whilst this may occur during school time, children are not necessarily included in a sense which transcends the school day, including home and community environments. Predominantly research has focused on inclusion within school time and the opportunities which children have to develop friends during the school day. If children are not seeing others outside of school then this is an indicator that these children are perhaps not making close friendships in school but also that they are not being included within the wider community beyond the school day. This has implications for professionals, schools and policy makers in terms of how children are being included not only in school, but also in a wider community sense.

5.6 Strengths and Difficulties of the Research

Through exploring the social opportunities of children with SEN, this study provides an insight into a relatively unexplored topic. Whilst some studies have explored this area in other parts of the developed world, there has been little focus in the UK. With current legislative changes placing a greater onus on holistic planning to meet the needs of children and young people with SEN, developing a greater understanding of how these needs are being met outside, as well as inside, school is essential. That many parents are dissatisfied with their child's social opportunities provides further justification for the importance of the study.

In this exploratory study the use of three differing strands of data collection provided a breadth to the analysis. The MCS data enabled information to be examined from a very large number of responses. Furthermore, the use of this data allowed comparisons to be made with children without SEN which facilitated useful insight. In Phase 1, the mixed survey gathered the views of a large number of parents of children with SEN. Furthermore, the views were gathered of parents of children and adolescents of different ages, different types of SEN and from different regions across England. Qualitative elements of the survey allowed parents freedom to elaborate on elements of the questionnaire and highlight issues which were prevalent for their child. Phase 2 saw a more in depth exploration of parents' views through the use of semi-structured interviews with five parents. The use of mixed-methods in this study allowed for the small number of interviews to be off-set by the larger number of responses in the questionnaire. This consequently helped to create a fuller exploration than could be achieved through either approach in isolation, through 'triangulation' of the data as defined in Chapter 3. Schulz (2004) provides arguments for generalisability through comparative literature analysis. Whilst there is a relative lack of evidence within this country, the findings here are in accordance with studies conducted in other parts of the Western world (e.g. Solish et al., 2010; King et al., 2013).

There are, however, a number of limitations of the present study. Firstly, in Phase 1 and Phase 2 there was no comparison group used. Whilst this is in keeping with the notion of an exploratory study, it nevertheless means that comparisons cannot be made between the participation of children with and without SEN. No study was found exploring the social opportunities of children without SEN in the UK, and as such no comparisons could be made with this population. Whilst the MCS data suggests that children without SEN see other children more frequently outside of school in informal settings, this does not provide information regarding parent's satisfaction. With apparent reductions in the free movement of children outside of school in today's society (Layard & Dunn, 2009), it may be that parents of children without SEN similarly feel that they would like their child to have more social opportunities outside of school. Future research should aim to gather the broad views of parents without SEN using an approach such as a survey, as well as more in depth understanding using interviews.

The purpose of including data from the MCS in this research was to provide some comparison with typically developing children and provide a background to the study. It is important to be aware though that the data provided by parents' referring to social activities of children within the MCS is nearly ten years old at the time of writing. It is reasonable that changes in social opportunities could have occurred in the intervening near decade. The age of the MCS data was one reason why it was not analysed further. Whilst further analysis could provide additional insight, additional research may be better focused on collecting new data, or analysing later waves of the MCS (although these do not focus on parents' views on friendships).

A shortcoming of the study is that it is difficult to say how representative the sample is. Information has been collected about children from a broad range of ages, types of SEN, boys and girls, and from different parts of England. Parents were asked to provide information about where they lived, however this was not always completed consistently, with some providing very broad geographical areas. This meant it was not possible to make comparisons between experiences in urban and rural areas or different regions of the country. The parents who answered the survey may be those who are very proactive or feel they have a particular point to make about their child's social opportunities. Furthermore, as the survey was distributed online it was not possible to generate a response rate, as it could not be estimated how many times the survey advertisement was viewed.

Considerable efforts were made to obtain a sample which was representative of as many children with SEN as possible. One method of achieving a broad sample would be to write to every parent of a child with SEN in one local authority to invite them to take part in the study. Unfortunately, when I applied to do this in the local authority in which I have access, I was told that this was not permitted for reasons of data protection. Consequently a 'stratified probabilistic sampling' method was employed in an attempt to gain as comprehensive a sample as possible. This stratified sampling approach saw a number of different organisations approached, which cater for children with different types of SEN. However, whilst many organisations were interested in taking part, others for various reasons were not able to assist with the research.

Practical problems are an inevitable difficulty with even well-funded and resourced social research; creating a representative sample in survey research with limited time and financial resources is particularly challenging (Mertens, 2010). Due to some of the difficulties outlined above, the sample in this study is likely not to fully represent the views of all, or the average of parents with SEN. Consequently findings in this exploratory study should be seen as indicative of the views of some parents of children with SEN; whilst the attitudes of all are not represented, I feel that the views shown here are suitably important to warrant considerable attention from stakeholders and justify future investigation.

Whilst there were differences observed in this study by types of SEN, it should be noted that there was not an even distribution of respondents amongst these categories. This is due to the difficulties associated with gaining a sample outlined above. There was a greater proportion of children with ASD in the study which should be born in mind when considering findings. There are some general difficulties with categories of SEN, some of which are 'fuzzy' (Norwich, 2014) and may not be meaningful to young people and parents. Whilst parents might be clear that their child has a diagnosis of ASD or VI, the distinction between SpLD, MLD, SLD and PMLD may be less clear. Furthermore, in many cases the child may have several SEN labels.

Future research could address these issues in different ways. As this research has highlighted issues within the social lives of children with SEN which would benefit from further investigation, future work may usefully look more closely at issues which impact children with a particular type of SEN. Whilst not removing sampling difficulties, narrowing the sample in this manner could help to improve its representativeness. Similarly, narrowing the age range and geographical residence could assist with this.

The breadth of the sample meant that some of the questions within the survey were not so applicable for some children. For example, the term ‘play date’ used in some questions is not frequently used to apply to the peer relationships of typically developing adolescents. The survey was trialled with a number of parents and edited to promote engagement with it. However, the exploratory nature of the questionnaire and qualitative elements of it make it relatively in depth, which may have been off-putting to some parents. Due to ‘survey saturation’ and the number of surveys which parents are often asked to complete online, this may have reduced the number of responses. Some parents also did not complete all aspects of each of the questions. For example, whilst a parent may have provided information about the types of activities their child took part in, they may not have reported how frequently these were participated in.

In Phase 2 of the study a small number of parents were interviewed, and this would have been improved through a greater number of interviews. Four of the five participants were recruited through parents who responded to the survey, whilst one parent was recruited through a colleague. The parents who responded may be those who more proactive in actively managing, or are concerned about, their child’s social lives and this is a similar criticism which can be made of the survey. An interesting next step to the study may be to conduct further work to collaboratively explore with parents what they feel would help to improve their children’s social lives. Focus groups could prove an extremely good way of doing this as parents would be able to share ideas with one another.

Gathering pupils’ views would similarly represent an important next step to further the understanding of children’s social lives outside of school. Obtaining the views of children with SEN will require careful consideration of preferred methods of communication and how children can be engaged within the research process. One approach which could be taken might be through an ethnographic approach such as that used by Matheson et al. (2007).

5.7 Implications of findings for EPs, schools, parents and professionals

The first implication from this study is to raise awareness amongst EPs, schools, parents and professionals that children with SEN need further support to develop active social lives and friendships outside of school. This support could usefully begin within school time, focusing on the social inclusion of children within the school and the development of their relationships with peers. This could include the setting of discrete targets, the development of particular social skills or participation in play time games for children with SEN. Furthermore, the clear communication with parents of emerging friendships or social interests of children with SEN could help to raise awareness of potential playmates or social interests outside of school.

Predominantly due to a lack of affordable childcare, there have been increasing demands on schools to extend the length of the school day. Given the reduction in informal play opportunities in today’s society, this time could be usefully used to promote children’s social opportunities and given the findings of this study this could be particularly important for children with SEN. Whilst adult-led activities provide children with various opportunities, where these can be more ‘horizontally organised’ there may be greater opportunities for children to develop their social skills and relationships with their peers. Meyer et al. (1998) have suggested a similar approach to extend the social opportunities of children with severe learning difficulties beyond the end of the school day through relatively less structured activities such as a ‘supper club’.

An approach aimed at improving the social relationships of children with SEN within school time is the ‘Circle of Friends’ intervention. The aim of this intervention is to create a network of relationships around the child at the focus of the intervention. Whilst this approach has been shown to facilitate relationships within school time, these do not necessarily transfer to outside of school (D’Haem, 2007). Meyer et al. (1998) may perhaps view this as being the result of these relationships taking on more of an ‘I’ll help’, rather than a ‘good friend’ role. In an effort to develop adolescents’ social lives outside of school, D’Haem (2007) trialled a ‘community circle of friends’ approach, reporting a positive impact in creating a network of social relationships outside of school. Setting up a ‘community circle of friends’ could be a useful way in which children and adolescents with SEN are supported in developing peer networks outside of school; however these could perhaps go further by bridging the boundary between school and community contexts. By considering how a ‘circle of friends’ intervention can extend beyond the school day, through play dates or after school activities, this may help to develop the continuity which a child has with their peers across different settings.

In a study using a randomised control trial, Kasari et al. (2012) demonstrated the benefit of working with children with ASD’s peers in promoting social inclusion during school. This intervention was aimed at teaching children to support the social interaction of those with ASD, using approaches such as modelling, role-playing and rehearsing, and was shown to improve children with ASD’s social involvement. Direct teaching of children with SEN’s peers could be combined with a Circle of Friends approach, to help strengthen relationships which could go beyond the end of the school day. In addition to this, this form of social skills training for peers could also help to include organised activities outside of school.

Through this research the extent to which parents go to support their child’s social opportunities has become apparent. An implication of this for all stakeholders is that parents also need support in developing their child’s social opportunities. One manner of doing this could be through social networks and activities for families of children with SEN. Not only could this allow opportunities for children with SEN, this could also develop friendships, social networks and respite for parents. Whilst groups such as this do exist (e.g. the parent carer forums), one implication of this research is to highlight the importance of these in developing the social opportunities of children with SEN.

Some parents felt that some mainstream activities providers did not have inclusive, ‘can do’ attitudes, when it came to meeting the needs of children with SEN within formal activities; this should change. There will inevitably be times when genuine health and safety concerns mean a child cannot take part in an activity, but in the opinion of the author, just as in school time, ‘reasonable adjustments’ should be expected to be made as the norm. For children to gain enjoyment and fulfilment from organised activities it may mean that adjustments need to be made to include children; this may mean additional staff similar to a TA during school time, differentiated instructions or resources. Just as with academic achievement, high expectations should be expected within children’s social lives and with EHCPs taking a more holistic view of children’s support this should also consider how this can be achieved outside of school.

One recent change to EP services which has had considerable impact upon service delivery has been the advent of traded services (Allen & Hardy, 2013). Whilst there are a number of factors entailed by the move to a traded service model, one is that it potentially allows for a greater flexibility in service provision. Whilst traditionally schools have predominantly occupied the vast majority of EP time, ‘trading’ means that EP services can be flexible in responding to requests for applied psychology in a range of contexts and communities (Allen & Hardy, 2013). This flexibility could allow EPs to give greater support to activity providers, or support social interventions which bridge home and school contexts.

5.8 Conclusions

In comparison to studies within school settings, there has been comparatively little research examining the social lives of children with SEN outside of school. This study has provided an exploratory insight into the perspectives of parents about their children’s social opportunities and friendships outside of school. Findings have indicated that children with SEN see other children less often outside school than typically developing children and they are less likely to have a close friendship with another child. Phase 1 of the study saw the majority of parents reporting their children as ‘rarely or never’ seeing other children outside of school in informal social situations. This included play dates in their own home, play dates at other children’s homes and play in community settings. Generally, children with a greater level of SEN and those with ASD saw other children least frequently. There are a number of issues which may be contributing to children’s reduced participation outside of school which have been explored through this study. There may be a greater concern about the safety and supervision which children require, logistical issues or children may not have formed close relationships during school time which then transfer to play outside of school. Whilst the reasons for children’s participation may be manifold and interrelated, what is clear is the importance of peer relationships within children’s development and the need to support their enjoyment of social activities.

The majority of children in this study were taking part in organised activities outside of school and parents praised particular activity providers and their children’s participation. However, there are still cases of barriers to children’s participation in mainstream activities. Improving access to mainstream activities will not only increase opportunities for participation and enjoyment amongst children with SEN, but also contact between those with and without SEN. If children are included only in discrete situations, the message which is being given to children with and without SEN is still one of difference. Inclusion should not be an ideal which occurs only in school time, but should permeate all aspects of the community.

More parents of children with SEN were unhappy about their child’s social opportunities outside of school than were happy (40% and 17% respectively). It is the view of the author that 40% is far too high a proportion. This study has highlighted issues in an area of research which is still in its infancy in the hope that future study will help to further uncover the social opportunities for both children with and without SEN.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Organisations contacted for participation

Organisation	**Number contacted**	**Number involved**	**How survey was distributed**	**Estimated number of surveys distributed**
Parent Partnership Services	**15** Boroughs contacted: 13 London, 1 SE England	**5** Boroughs involved: 3 London, 1 E Midlands* 1 NE England*	Survey url emailed to parents	N/a
Parent Carer Forums	**29** Boroughs contacted: 17 London 12 SE England	**7** Boroughs involved: 3 London, 2 SE England 2 SW England	Survey url emailed to parents or advertised via social media (Facebook)	N/a
Charities for children with SEN	**10** 3 London 7 National	**2** 2 National	Advertised via social media (Facebook, Twitter)	N/a
Charities for children with a specific disability	**4** 1 ASD 1 VI 1 SLCN 1 HI	**2** 1 HI 1SLCN	Advertised via website	N/a
Mainstream schools	**16** 16 London	**5** London	Paper questionnaire	140
SEN unit in mainstream schools	**11** 11 London	**5** 5 London	Paper questionnaire and survey url emailed to parents	99
Special Schools	**8** 8 London	**4** 1 London 1 SW England 2 SW England*	Paper questionnaire	452

* These organisations were not approached but distributed the survey (an example of ‘snowballing’).

Appendix B – Additional Quantitative Data from Phase 1

Play Dates at other children's homes

Play Date at others home		**Sees other children 2/3 times a month or more**	**Sees other children rarely or not at all**
EHC	EHC	34 (38) **20.1%**	135 (131) **79.9%**
	No EHC	13 (9) **32.5%**	27 (31) **67.5%**
Type of School	Mainstream	19 (19.9) **22.6%**	65 (64.1) **77.4%**
	Unit	7 (5) **33.0%**	14 (16) **67.0%**
	Special	24 (25.1) **22.9%**	82(80.9) **78.1%**
Key Stage	KS1 & EYFS	12 (8.6) **36.4%**	21(24.4) **63.6%**
	KS2	26 (24.2) **28.0%**	67 (68.8) **72.0%**
	KS3	11 (12) **23.9%**	35 (34) **76.1%**
	KS4 & FE	6 (10.2) **15.4%**	33 (28.8) **84.6%**
Category of SEN	SpLD	6 (3.2) **42.9%**	8 (10.8) **57.1%**
	MLD	5 (5.5) **20.8%**	19 (18.5) **79.2%**
	SLD	7 (7.7) **20.6%**	27 (26.3) **79.4%**
	SEMH	1 (2.0) **11.1%**	8 (7.0) **88.9%**
	ASD	16 (20.7) **17.6%**	75 (70.3) **82.4%**
	VI	0 (0.2) **0.0%**	1 (0.8) **100.0%**
	HI	7 (2.7) **58.3%**	5 (9.3) **41.7%**
	SLCN	2 (3.2) **14.3%**	12 (10.8) **85.7%**
	MSI	0 (0.2) **0.0%**	1 (0.8) **0.0%**
	PD	1 (0.2) **100.0%**	0 (0.8) **0.0%**
	Other	3 (2.3) **30.0%**	7 (7.7) **70.0%**

Seeing other children in community settings

Community setting		**Sees other children 2/3 times a month or more**	**Sees other children rarely or not at all**
EHC*	EHC	27 (31.5) **16.1%**	141 (136.5) **83.9%**
	No EHC	12 (7.5) **30.0%**	28 (32.5) **70.0%**
Type of School	Mainstream	21 (16.4) **25.0%**	63 (67.6) **75.0%**
	Unit	6 (4.1) **28.6%**	15 (16.9) **71.4%**
	Special	14 (20.5) **13.3%**	91 (84.5) **86.7%**
Key Stage	KS1 & EYFS	11(6.9) **33.3%**	22 (26.1) **66.7%**
	KS2	22 (19.5) **23.7%**	71 (73.5) **76.3%**
	KS3	8 (9.6) **17.4%**	38 (36.4) **82.6%**
	KS4 & FE	3 (8) **7.9%**	35 (30) **92.1%**
Category of SEN	SpLD	3 (2.5) **21.4%**	11 (11.5) **78.6%**
	MLD	4 (4.2) **16.7%**	20 (19.8) **83.3%**
	SLD	5 (6.0) **14.7%**	29 (28.0) **85.3%**
	SEMH	3 (1.6) **33.3%**	6 (7.4) **66.7%**
	ASD	15 (15.9) **16.7%**	75 (74.1) **83.3%**
	VI	0 (0.2) **0.0%**	1 (0.8) **100.0%**
	HI	3 (2.1) **25.0%**	9 (9.9) **75.0%**
	SLCN	3 (2.5) **21.4%**	11 (11.5) **78.6%**
	MSI	0 (0.2) **0.0%**	1 (0.8) **100.0%**
	PD	0 (0.2) **0.0%**	1 (0.8) **100.0%**
	Other	1 (1.8) **10.0%**	9 (8.2) **90.0%**

Frequency parents make arrangements with other parents

	Arrangements made once a month or more	**Arrangements made 'rarely or not at all'**	**Total**
Parent contacts others to arrange informal play	72 **31.4%**	157 **68.6%**	229

Frequency children use different media to contact peers

	Communicates with other children more than once a month	**Communicates with other children 'rarely or not at all'**	**Total**
Speaking on the telephone	35 **15.3%**	193 **84.3%**	228
Sending Text messages	27 **11.8%**	201 **87.8%**	228
Using the internet	57 **24.9%**	172 **75.1%**	229

Appendix C – Comparisons by Gender

Frequency and proportion of children seeing others in their own home by gender

Play Date at own home		**Sees other children 2/3 times a month or more**	**Sees other children rarely or not at all**
Boy/Girl	Boy	27 (29.1) **18.4%**	120 (117.9) **81.6%**
	Girl	17 (14.9) **22.7%**	58 (60.1) **77.3%**

Frequency and proportion of children seeing others in other children's homes by gender

Play Date at others home		**Sees other children 2/3 times a month or more**	**Sees other children rarely or not at all**
Boy/Girl	Boy	35 (37.7) **23.8%**	112 (109.3) **76.2%**
	Girl	22 (19.3) **29.3%**	53 (55.7) **70.7%**

Frequency and proportion of children seeing others in community settings by gender

See other children in community		**Sees other children 2/3 times a month or more**	**Sees other children rarely or not at all**
Boy/Girl	Boy	28 (29.7) **19.2%**	118 (116.3) **80.8%**
	Girl	17 (15.3) **22.7%**	58 (59.7) **77.3%**

Frequency and proportion of children with SEN having a close/good friend cross tabulated by gender

		Yes	**No**	**Don't Know**
Boy/Girl	Boy	59 (66.1) **41.0%**	69 (62.8) **47.9%**	16 (15.2) **11.1%**
	Girl	41 (33.9) **55.4%**	26 (32.2) **35.1%**	7 (7.8) **9.5%**

Number of Friendships cross-tabulated by gender

		0	**1-2**	**3-4**	**5+**
Boy/Girl	Boy	8 (6.9) **9.5%**	44 (48.6) **52.4%**	21 (17.1) **25.0%**	11 (11.4) **13.1%**
	Girl	3 (4.1) **6.1%**	33 (28.4) **67.3%**	6 (9.9) **12.2%**	7 (6.6) **14.3%**

The average number of organised activities being taken part in by each child and average being taken part in each week cross-tabulated gender

		Total number of activities recorded		Number of activities taken part in each week	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Boy/Girl	Boy	1.599	1.23	1.235	1.16
	Girl	1.693	1.20	1.479	1.18

Appendix D – Additional Demographic Data

Ethnicity as reported by participants

	Frequency	Percentage
White British	157	79.3%
Mixed heritage – Asian/White British	3	1.5%
Black British	5	2.5%
Mixed Heritage	7	3.5%
Mixed Heritage Chinese/White British	1	0.5%
Middle Eastern	4	2.0%
Asian	4	2.0%
White European	3	1.5%
Black African	3	1.5%
Other	11	5.6%

Child's Position within the family

	Frequency	Percentage
Only Child	41	18.7%
Eldest Child	52	23.7%
Middle Child	34	15.5%
Youngest Child	92	42.0%

Respondents' Relationship to the child

	Frequency	Percentage
Mother	204	92.7
Father	8	3.6
Foster Parent	6	2.7
Grandparent	2	0.9

Category of SEN cross-tabulated by gender

		Boy	**Girl**	**Total**
Category of SEN	SpLD	9 (8.6) **69.2%**	4 (4.4) **30.8%**	13
	MLD	9 (15.9) **37.5%**	15 (8.1) **62.5%**	24
	SLD	20 (22.5) **58.8%**	14 (11.5) **41.2%**	34
	SEMH	3 (6.0) **33.3%**	6 (3.0) **66.7%**	9
	ASD	76 (60.2) **83.5%**	15(30.8) **16.5%**	91
	VI	1 (0.7) **100.0%**	0 (0.3) **0.0%**	1
	HI	6 (7.9) **50.0%**	6 (4.1) **50.0%**	12
	SLCN	8 (9.3) **57.1%**	6 (4.7) **42.9%**	14
	MSI	0 (0.7) **0.0%**	1 (0.3) **100.0%**	1
	PD	0 (0.7) **0.0%**	1 (0.3) **100.0%**	1
	Other	7 (6.6) **70.0%**	3 (3.4) **30.0%**	10

Appendix E – Example Survey

Institute of Education

UCL

Children’s Social Lives Survey

Dear Parent/Carer,

I am writing to invite you to take part in a piece of research which is being conducted through the school. This questionnaire is investigating the opportunities which children have to access social activities and develop relationships with other children outside of school, and we are particularly interested in hearing from parents of children with Special Educational Needs. This research is being carried out by Simon Higley, a student currently enrolled on the Professional Doctorate in Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology, in conjunction with Dr Ed Baines and Dr Karen Majors.

Developing good relationships with other children is linked with a number of positive outcomes for young people, and as such gathering a full understanding of children's social lives outside of school is highly important. Your information will be extremely helpful in understanding an area which is very important in young people’s lives, and has had little investigation in this country.

This short questionnaire should take no more than 10 – 12 minutes to fill in. There is also a ‘time diary’ on the last page of this questionnaire. This should take no more than three minutes to fill in, and if you could spare the time to complete this, your information will be very beneficial to this research.

This research has met the ethical guidelines set by the British Psychological Society and all information collected will remain anonymous and confidential. ***When you have completed this questionnaire please return it to the school office using the envelope provided or give it to your child to pass to their class teacher***.

Thank you so much for taking part in this survey!

If you would be interested in hearing about the results from this survey, or if you would be interested in taking part in an interview to discuss your experiences further, there is a space for you to indicate this at the end of the questionnaire. If you have any questions or would like to request more information please do not hesitate to contact Simon Higley, by emailing simon.higley.14@ucl.ac.uk.

Kind Regards,

Simon Higley

1. How often does your child go to another child's home to play?
(Please tick one)

☐ Daily ☐ 2/3 times a week ☐ Once a week ☐ 2/3 times a month ☐ Rarely ☐ Not at all

2. How often would another child come over to your home to play? (Please tick one)

☐ Daily ☐ 2/3 times a week ☐ Once a week ☐ 2/3 times a month ☐ Rarely ☐ Not at all

3. How often does your child meet up with other children in their neighbourhood? (e.g. meet up with friends at the park/on the street)
(Please tick one)

☐ Daily ☐ 2/3 times a week ☐ Once a week ☐ 2/3 times a month ☐ Rarely ☐ Not at all

3 a) How often is an adult likely to be present? (Please tick one)

☐ Always ☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

3 b) If an adult is present, how often would they join in with children's play?
(Please tick one)

☐ Always ☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

4. How often do you make arrangements with other parents for your child to meet up with their children?

☐ Daily ☐ 2/3 times a week ☐ Once a week ☐ 2/3 times a month ☐ Rarely ☐ Not at all

5. Does your child make their own arrangements to meet up with other children? (Please tick the response and provide a brief explanation of this).

☐ Yes - *they usually make these arrangements by*

☐ No – *they do not make these arrangements because*

6. How often does your child communicate with other children by:

a. Talking on the phone (Please tick one)

☐ Daily ☐ 2/3 times a week ☐ Once a week ☐ 2/3 times a month ☐ Rarely ☐ Not at all

b. Sending a text message (Please tick one)

☐ Daily ☐ 2/3 times a week ☐ Once a week ☐ 2/3 times a month ☐ Rarely ☐ Not at all

c. Using the Internet (i.e. Social Networking Sites, online computer games) (Please tick one)

☐ Daily ☐ 2/3 times a week ☐ Once a week ☐ 2/3 times a month ☐ Rarely ☐ Not at all

7. Please tell us about **up to three organised activities** which your child is attending this term (e.g. *after school clubs, outside of school clubs*)?

	Type of Activity (tick one)	How often does this take place? (tick one)	Who else is present? (tick all that apply)	Where does this happen? (tick one)	In your view what are the **three** main benefits? (tick up to three)
Activity 1	☐ Music Lesson ☐ Individual Sport ☐ Team Sport ☐ Dance ☐ Scouts/Girl guides ☐ Multi-activity afterschool club ☐ Additional tuition ☐ Art/Design/ Cookery ☐ Computer ☐ Other……………………	☐ More than once a week ☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly ☐ Less than once a month	☐ Alone ☐ With siblings ☐ With family (e.g. parents) ☐ With other relatives ☐ With peers ☐ With other adult	☐ At school ☐ Community setting (e.g. leisure centre, local park) ☐ Home ☐ Other ……………………	☐ Learning a skill ☐ Fitness ☐ Build confidence/self-esteem ☐ Socialising with peers ☐ Resilience/team spirit/discipline ☐ Developing independence ☐ Enjoyment ☐ Developing social skills ☐ Other ….............................
Activity 2	☐ Music Lesson ☐ Individual Sport ☐ Team Sport ☐ Dance ☐ Scouts/Girl guides ☐ Multi-activity afterschool club ☐ Additional tuition ☐ Art/Design/Cookery ☐ Computer ☐ Other……………………	☐ More than once a week ☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly ☐ Less than once a month	☐ Alone ☐ With siblings ☐ With family (e.g. parents) ☐ With other relatives ☐ With peers ☐ With other adult (e.g. instructor, teacher)	☐ At school ☐ Community setting (e.g. leisure centre, local park) ☐ Home ☐ Other	☐ Learning a skill ☐ Exercise ☐ Build confidence/self-esteem ☐ Socialising with peers ☐ Resilience/team spirit/discipline ☐ Developing independence ☐ Enjoyment ☐ Developing social skills ☐ Other ….............................
Activity 3	☐ Music Lesson ☐ Individual Sport ☐ Team Sport ☐ Dance ☐ Scouts/Girl guides ☐ Multi-activity afterschool club ☐ Additional tuition ☐ Art/Design/Cookery ☐ Computer ☐ Other……………………	☐ More than once a week ☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly ☐ Less than once a month	☐ Alone ☐ With siblings ☐ With family (e.g. parents) ☐ With other relatives ☐ With peers ☐ With other adult (e.g. instructor, teacher)	☐ At school ☐ Community setting (e.g. leisure centre, local park) ☐ Home ☐ Other	☐ Learning a skill ☐ Exercise ☐ Build confidence/self-esteem ☐ Socialising with peers ☐ Resilience/team spirit/discipline ☐ Developing independence ☐ Enjoyment ☐ Developing social skills ☐ Other ….............................

8. Are there organised activities which you feel your child would like to attend but is not able to? (e.g. *after school clubs, outside of school clubs*)

☐ Yes – please complete questions a & b ☐ No – please move to question 9.

a. What activity/activities do you feel your child would like to attend?

……

……

b. Are there things which make it difficult for your child to attend these activities?

……

……

9. In your view, do you feel your child has at least one close/good friend?

☐ Yes ☐ No - please go to qu. 12. ☐ Don't know – please go to qu. 12

Please tell us more about this:

………

………

10. How many close/good friendships does your child have which have lasted for over one year? (Please tick one)

☐ 0 ☐ 1-2 ☐ 3-4 ☐ 5+

11. Where have these friendships started? (Please tick up to three boxes)

☐ School
☐ Neighbours
☐ Friends of the family
☐ Family (e.g. cousins)
☐ Club outside of school
☐ Community setting (e.g. at the park)
☐ Other ……………….
…………………………

12. To what extent are you as a parent happy about the quality of your child's relationships with other children, and his or her social life outside of school?

………

………

………

………

13. What type of school does your child attend? (Please tick one)

☐ Mainstream primary

☐ Additional resource provision in a mainstream school

☐ School for children with Special Needs

☐ Other (*Please specify*) ……

14. Which year group is your child in?	**15.** Are they a boy or girl?
16. What is your child's ethnicity?	**17.** What is your child's position in the family? (Please tick one)
	☐ Only child ☐ Eldest Child ☐ Middle child ☐ Youngest Child
18. What is your child's nationality?	

19. What is your relationship to your child? (i.e. mother , father, carer etc.)	**20.** Which town, city or rural area do you live in? (If London please include which borough)

21. Does your child's school consider your child to have a Special Educational Need?

☐ Yes – please complete a & b ☐ No – please turn to the next page

a. Does your child have a Statement of Special Educational Needs or Education, Health and Care Plan?

☐ Yes ☐ No

b. Which of the following best describes your child's primary area of need:

☐ Specific Learning Difficulty

☐ Moderate Learning Difficulty

☐ Severe Learning Difficulty

☐ Social, Emotional and Mental Health Difficulty

☐ Autistic Spectrum Disorder

☐ Visual Impairment

☐ Hearing Impairment

☐ Speech, Language and Communication

☐ Multi-sensory Impairment

☐ Physical Disability

☐ Other ……………….. ……………………………

If you have any further comments or concerns about your child's opportunities to spend time with other children, access to activities, or opportunities to develop friendships which have not been covered elsewhere in this survey, please include these here.

………

………

………

………

………

………

………

The next phase of this research will involve interviews with parents regarding their children's social lives and friendships. If you would be happy to participate in an interview please supply a contact email address.

Email address …….

If you would be interested in being sent a summary of the research findings please supply a contact email address.

Email address …….

Time Diary

The time diary below should take no more than three minutes to complete. If you could spare the time to complete this your information will be very beneficial to this research.

- Please complete the diary for your child for the **last week day and last Saturday**. For example if competing this on a Thursday, fill in information for Wednesday and last Saturday.
- For each approximate time slot please provide a brief written description of the activity they did. For example 'piano lesson', 'football club', 'at home'. Please give information about the main activity which has occurred during this approximate time.
- Put a tick in the appropriate box to indicate if the activity was done with other children, and whether family or another adult was present.

Day and Time	**Describe activity**	**With 1 other child**	**With more than 1 other child**	**With sibling/s**	**No other children present**	**With parent/family**	**With another adult**	**No adult present**
		(Tick one)				**(Tick one)**		
Last weekday **7 a.m. – 9.a.m.**								
9 a.m. – 12 p.m.	**Leave blank if school time**							
12 p.m. – 3 p.m.	**Leave blank if school time**							
3 p.m. – 5 p.m.								
5 p.m. – 7 p.m.								
Last Saturday **7 a.m. – 9.a.m**								
9 a.m. – 12 p.m.								
12 p.m. – 3 p.m.								
3 p.m. – 5 p.m.								
5 p.m. – 7 p.m.								

Thank you for completing this survey!

Appendix F – Example Interview Schedule

<u>Parent's Perspectives about their Child's Social Activities Outside of School</u>

Interview Schedule

This questions in this schedule to be structured using the interviewees completed questionnaire as a prompt. For example, you say your child has x friendships etc. can you tell me more about this.

Take me through a usual week after school and at weekends. What sorts of things does your child do?

Does your child attend organised activities? Are these especially for children with SEN? / Does your child require support to access activities? What is this? If not what support would they need? / Does your child do these activities with other children? Does your child meet up with these children at any other times? / Does your child meet up with other children in informal settings?

Tell me about your child's relationships with their peers

Are you satisfied about the number and quality of your child's friendships? / Are there things which make forming and sustaining friendships difficult for your child? / Where does your child know these children from? / What does your child do with these children? / How long have they known these children? / What makes the relationship work? / Do these children also have SEN?

Are there ways which you try to help your child with his/her peer relationships?

Are there things which you do to increase the opportunities your child has to socialise with other children? Are these in formal or informal settings? / If you were with your child in a social situation are there things you might do to help them develop relationships with other children? / Do you feel your child needs extra help on account of their SEN?

Do you think that other children, parents and other adults are understanding about your child's Special Educational Need?

What are the views held by others which have an impact on your child's social life? / How do these affect your child's social opportunities? / Do these make forming peer relationships easier/more difficult?

Are you happy about your child's peer relationships?

How do you feel about your child's social relationships in the ST/LT future? / What would you like your child's social life to look like in the future?

Appendix G – Ethics Form

Ethics Application Form:
Student Research

All research activity conducted under the auspices of the Institute by staff, students or visitors, where the research involves human participants or the use of data collected from human participants are required to gain ethical approval before starting. *This includes preliminary and pilot studies.* Please answer all relevant questions responses in terms that can be understood by a lay person and note your form may be returned if incomplete.

For further support and guidance please see accompanying guidelines and the Ethics Review Procedures for Student Research http://www.ioe.ac.uk/studentethics/ or contact your supervisor or researchethics@ioe.ac.uk.

Before completing this form you will need to discuss your proposal fully with your Supervisor/s. Please attach all supporting documents and letters.

For all Psychology students, this form should be completed with reference to the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Human Research Ethics and Code of Ethics and Conduct.

Section 1 Project details

a.	Project title			The Social Lives and Friendships of Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) Outside School: Parent's Perspectives
b.	Student name and ID number (e.g. ABC12345678)			Simon Edward Higley – HIG12104785
c.	Supervisor/Personal Tutor			Ed Baines, Karen Majors
d.	Department			Psychology and Human Development
e.	Course category (Tick one)	PhD/MPhil	☐	EdD ☐
		MRes	☐	DEdPsy ☒
		MTeach	☐	MA/MSc ☐
		ITE	☐	
		Diploma (state which)	☐	
		Other (state which)	☐	
f.	Course/module title			Professional Doctorate in Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology
g.	**If applicable,** state who the funder is and if funding has been confirmed.			

h.	Intended research start date	01/03/15
i.	Intended research end date	31/07/16
j.	Country fieldwork will be conducted in *If research to be conducted abroad please check www.fco.gov.uk and submit a completed travel risk assessment form (see guidelines). If the FCO advice is against travel this will be **required** before ethical approval can be granted: http://ioe-net.inst.ioe.ac.uk/about/profservices/international/Pages/default.aspx*	UK

k.	Has this project been considered by another (external) Research Ethics Committee?	
	Yes ☐	External Committee Name:
	No ☒ ⇨ *go to Section 2*	Date of Approval:

If yes:

- Submit a copy of the approval letter with this application.
- Proceed to Section 10 Attachments**.**

Note: Ensure that you check the guidelines carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the National Research Ethics Service (NRES) or Social Care Research Ethics Committee (SCREC). In addition, if your research is based in another institution then you may be required to apply to their research ethics committee.

Section 2 Project summary

Research methods (tick all that apply)

Please attach questionnaires, visual methods and schedules for interviews (even in draft form).

☒ Interviews
☐ Focus groups
☒ Questionnaires
☐ Action research
☐ Observation
☐ Literature review

☐ Controlled trial/other intervention study
☐ Use of personal records
☐ Systematic review ⇨ ***if only method used go to Section 5.***
☒ Secondary data analysis ⇨ ***if secondary analysis used go to Section 6.***
☐ Advisory/consultation/collaborative groups
☐ Other, give details:

Please provide an overview of your research. This should include some or all of the following: purpose of the research, aims, main research questions, research design, participants, sampling, your method of data collection (e.g., observations, interviews, questionnaires, etc.) and kind of questions that will be asked, reporting and dissemination (typically 300-500 words).

This research aims to explore the opportunities which children with SEN have to participate in social activities outside of school. Previous research in other developed countries has suggested that this group may have fewer opportunities to socialise with peers outside of school than children without SEN (Solish, Perry & Minnes 2010). Furthermore studies have suggested that children in the UK score lower in scales of child-wellbeing than children in some other developed countries (UNICEF 2007). Therefore there would appear to be a need to explore the situation within a UK context and the opportunities children with SEN may have to participate in social activities outside of school.

This research will seek to address the following broad research questions:

- What is the pattern of participation of children with SEN in social activities outside of school?
- Does this involvement in social activities differ from that of children without SEN?
- What are some of the factors which influence participation in social activities outside of school for children with SEN?

These research questions will be explored via data collection in three phases. A background phase will incorporate secondary data from the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS). Phase 1 a mixed quantitative/qualitative questionnaire for parents of children with SEN and Phase 2, semi-structured interviews with parents of children with SEN.

The questions to be analysed from the MCS will be those which relate to the frequency which parents report their child has seen other children outside of school time and whether parents consider their child as having a close/good friend. This information will be cross-tabulated by whether the child's school considers them to have SEN.

Phase 1 employs a self-administered survey-questionnaire for parents of children with SEN. The design of this questionnaire, and the content included within it will be based upon information provided by the initial semi-structured interviews, a pilot survey completed prior to this study and examples from previous studies. The second, qualitative phase comprises interviews to further explore some of the factors influencing participation which have been highlighted during the quantitative phase. The precise focus of these interviews would be dependent upon issues raised during the quantitative phase.

The quantitative stages of this study will involve parents of children with SEN, who will be recruited through schools and online through parent's groups. The interview stages of this study will involve parents of children with SEN.

Section 3 Participants

Please answer the following questions giving full details where necessary. Text boxes will expand for your responses.

a. Will your research involve human participants? Yes ☒ No ☐ ⇨ *go to Section 4*

b. Who are the participants (i.e. what sorts of people will be involved)? Tick all that apply.

- Quantitative phases of this study will involve parents of children with SEN.
- These parents will be of children aged between eight and eleven (NC years 4 – 6).
- Qualitative phases of the study, initial interviews and follow up interviews, will involve parents of children with SEN.

☐ Early years/pre-school
☐ Ages 5-11
☐ Ages 12-16
☐ Young people aged 17-18

☐ Unknown – specify below
☒ Adults *please specify below*
☐ Other – specify below

NB: Ensure that you check the **guidelines** (Section 1) carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the National Research

Ethics Service (NRES).

c. If participants are under the responsibility of others (such as parents, teachers or medical staff) how do you intend to obtain permission to approach the participants to take part in the study?

(Please attach approach letters or details of permission procedures – see Section 9 Attachments.)

- In qualitative phases of the study parents will be interviewed.
- Parents will be asked to consent for their own participation in the study. At the beginning of the interviews participant's involvement and right to withdraw will be explained.
- Adult participants will be asked to sign a consent form for their involvement in the interviews.

d. How will participants be recruited (identified and approached)?

- Parents will be identified through contacting schools, special schools, parent's groups and support services for children with SEN who will advertise participation within the study. Through these contacts parents will be provided with information regarding the study, what their involvement would entail and how they can consent to be included within the study.
- Parents who would like to take part in the study will be directed to access the study questionnaire online, or they will be provided with a paper copy of this.
- The questionnaire will also ask parents if they are happy to be contacted to discuss taking part in any qualitative phases of the study.

e. Describe the process you will use to inform participants about what you are doing.

- Participants will receive initial information about the study when it is initially advertised to them through contacts in schools, special schools, parent's groups and support services for children with SEN.
- Information regarding the study will also be provided at the beginning of the questionnaire and participants will also be able to request to receive summary information of the study's findings.
- There will be a brief explanation of the interview phase of the study in the questionnaire and parents will be able to indicate whether they would be happy to be contacted to discuss involvement in this.
- Full information regarding the interviews will be provided at the beginning of them and parents will be able to request to receive summary information of the study's findings.

f. How will you obtain the consent of participants? Will this be written? How will it be made clear to participants that they may withdraw consent to participate at any time?

See the guidelines for information on opt-in and opt-out procedures. Please note that the method of consent should be appropriate to the research and fully explained.

- Parent participants will be given information regarding the study, and how their information will be used, when it is initially advertised to them and at the beginning of the questionnaire.
- This will include an explanation that completion of the questionnaire will represent the individual consenting to their information being used anonymously towards the research aims of the study.
- Consent will be assumed from parents completing the questionnaire if, having read this explanatory information they then go on to complete the questionnaire. Explanatory information at the beginning of the questionnaire will also clearly explain to participants that they will be able

	to withdraw their information at any stage during the study. - During the interview stage of the study, information will be provided for participants when they are asked whether they would like to participate in the questionnaire. - The process of the interviews, how the information will be used and their right to withdraw at any stage will also be fully explained to parents at the beginning of the interview.
g.	**Studies involving questionnaires:** Will participants be given the option of omitting questions they do not wish to answer? Yes ☒ No ☐
	If **NO** please explain why below and ensure that you cover any ethical issues arising from this in section 8.
h.	**Studies involving observation:** Confirm whether participants will be asked for their informed consent to be observed. Yes ☐ No ☐
	If **NO** read the guidelines (Ethical Issues section) and explain why below and ensure that you cover any ethical issues arising from this in section 8.
i.	Might participants experience anxiety, discomfort or embarrassment as a result of your study? Yes ☒ No ☐
	If **yes** what steps will you take to explain and minimise this? Both questionnaire and interview elements of this study will ask participants about the social activities of young people, which can potentially be emotive subjects. The researcher will be mindful of this in designing questionnaires and delivering interviews. It will be important that the researcher liaise with the school SENCO to discuss potential measures which could be implemented, or services suggested if a parent feels that there are difficulties in the young person's social life. If **not**, explain how you can be sure that no discomfort or embarrassment will arise?
j.	Will your project involve deliberately misleading participants (deception) in any way? Yes ☐ No ☒
	If **YES** please provide further details below and ensure that you cover any ethical issues arising from this in section 8.
k.	Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation (i.e. give them a brief explanation of the study)? Yes ☐ No ☒
	If **NO** please explain why below and ensure that you cover any ethical issues arising from this in section 8. This is not an experimental study and participants will have been given full information about the study at the beginning of interviews or the questionnaire.

l.	Will participants be given information about the findings of your study? (This could be a brief summary of your findings in general; it is not the same as an individual debriefing.) Yes ☒ No ☐ Parents will be able to request a research briefing which will outline the main findings of the research.
	If **no**, why not?

Section 4 Security-sensitive material

Only complete if applicable

Security sensitive research includes: commissioned by the military; commissioned under an EU security call; involves the acquisition of security clearances; concerns terrorist or extreme groups.

a.	Will your project consider or encounter security-sensitive material?	Yes ☐ *	No ☐
b.	Will you be visiting websites associated with extreme or terrorist organisations?	Yes ☐ *	No ☐
c.	Will you be storing or transmitting any materials that could be interpreted as promoting or endorsing terrorist acts?	Yes ☐ *	No ☐

** Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues***

Section 5 Systematic review of research

Only complete if applicable

a.	Will you be collecting any new data from participants?	Yes ☐ *	No ☐
b.	Will you be analysing any secondary data?	Yes ☐ *	No ☐

** Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues***

*If your methods do not involve engagement with participants (e.g. systematic review, literature review) **and** if you have answered **No** to both questions, please go to **Section 10 Attachments.***

Section 6 Secondary data analysis Complete for all secondary analysis

a.	Name of dataset/s	Millennium Cohort Study (Wave 4)	
b.	Owner of dataset/s	UK Data Service, University of Essex.	
c.	Are the data in the public domain?	Yes ☐ No ☒ ***If no,** do you have the owner's permission/license?* Yes ☒ No* ☐	
d.	Are the data anonymised?	Yes ☒ No ☐ *Do you plan to anonymise the data?* Yes ☐ No* ☒ *Do you plan to use individual level data?* Yes* ☐ No ☒ *Will you be linking data to individuals?* Yes* ☐ No ☒	
e.	Are the data sensitive (DPA 1998 definition)?	Yes* ☒	No ☐

f.	Will you be conducting analysis within the remit it was originally collected for?	Yes ☒	No* ☐
g.	**If no,** was consent gained from participants for subsequent/future analysis?	Yes ☐	No* ☐
h.	**If no,** was data collected prior to ethics approval process?	Yes ☐	No* ☐

** Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues***

*If secondary analysis is only method used **and** no answers with asterisks are ticked, go to **Section 9 Attachments.***

Section 7 Data Storage and Security

Please ensure that you include all hard and electronic data when completing this section.

a.	Confirm that all personal data will be stored and processed in compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA 1998). *(See the Guidelines and the Institute's Data Protection & Records Management Policy for more detail.)*		Yes ☒
b.	Will personal data be processed or be sent outside the European Economic Area?	Yes ☐ *	No ☒

*** If yes,** please confirm that there are adequate levels of protections in compliance with the DPA 1998 and state what these arrangements are below.

c. Who will have access to the data and personal information, including advisory/consultation groups and during transcription? N/a

During the research

d. Where will the data be stored?

Personal and University computer system. Interviews will be recorded on digital voice recorder.

e. Will mobile devices such as USB storage and laptops be used? Yes ☒ * No ☐

*** If yes,** state what mobile devices: Personal laptop computer, digital voice recorder.

*** If yes,** will they be encrypted?:

Personal laptop computer will be password protected and data files encrypted. The digital voice recorder cannot be encrypted. Information will be stored on this device for a short amount of time before transferring to personal/university computer.

After the research

f. Where will the data be stored? Data will be stored on personal and university computer system.

g. How long will the data and records by kept for and in what format? Data will be stored in encrypted file formats and kept for no longer than 5 years

h. Will data be archived for use by other researchers? Yes ☐ * No ☒

*** If yes,** please provide details.

Section 8 Ethical issues

Are there particular features of the proposed work which may raise ethical concerns or add to the complexity of ethical decision making? If so, please outline how you will deal with these.

It is important that you demonstrate your awareness of potential risks or harm that may arise as a result of your research. You should then demonstrate that you have considered ways to minimise the likelihood and impact of each potential harm that you have identified. Please be as specific as possible in describing the ethical issues you will have to address. Please consider / address ALL issues that may apply.
Ethical concerns may include, but not be limited to, the following areas:

- Methods
- Sampling
- Recruitment
- Gatekeepers
- Informed consent
- Potentially vulnerable participants
- Safeguarding/child protection
- Sensitive topics
- International research
- Risks to participants and/or researchers
- Confidentiality/Anonymity
- Disclosures/limits to confidentiality
- Data storage and security both during and after the research (including transfer, sharing, encryption, protection)
- Reporting
- Dissemination and use of findings

Use of Secondary data:
Point 6d – I will not plan to anonymise any data from the MCS because it is already anonymised.
Point 6e – There is potentially sensitive data contained with the MCS however this is all entirely anonymised.
Sensitive topics Due to the potentially sensitive nature of the topics being explored in this study, children with SEN's social lives, it is possible that these may potentially be emotive subjects for participants. For example if a child with SEN does not have a rich social life, involving social activities, this may result in feelings of guilt on behalf of parents.
Addressed though: addressing questions sensitively in both questionnaire and interviews; the initial phases of the interview can be open ended, addressing activities more generally which the young person enjoys within the home or at the weekend without assuming social participation; being able to provide practical information regarding appropriate social activities which a young person might like to engage with (e.g. signposting towards parent partnership service); ensuring that all participants are aware that they can withdraw at any time during the study.

Data storage individual's data from questionnaires and interviews will be anonymised and stored electronically. It will not be possible to encrypt interviews on the voice recording device.
Addressed through: ensuring that online questionnaires and paper questionnaires can be completed anonymously; ensuring that data is encrypted when stored on computer systems; ensuring that as far as possible devices used for recording data are password protected (this will not be possible on digital voice recorder); where digital voice recorder is used, which cannot be password protected, that information is stored on this device for as little amount of time as possible; care to be taken to ensure safe keeping of all devices.

Online Questionnaires There may be some anxiety on the behalf of participants completing questionnaires in entering potentially sensitive data online. There may be concerns regarding security of the data and not personally having contact with the researcher.
Addressed through fully explaining on the questionnaire how the information will be used and that it will be used anonymously; providing full contact details of the researcher should the participant seek further reassurance as to how their information is being used; researcher to speak with survey website administrators to discuss security of data.

Sampling this study aims to create a broad representation of the views of parents of children with SEN. This means that participants will need to be recruited from a range of settings. If participants are recruited

just through one particular source (e.g. out of school activity groups for young people with special needs) then this may have the result of misrepresenting this population.
Addressed through ensuring that the sample for this study comes from as broad a population as possible and that the sources of this are clearly explained.

Informed Consent it is essential that throughout the study participants are fully aware of the purpose of the study and how their information will be used.
Addressed through thoroughly explaining the purpose of the study and how participant's information will be used.

Section 9 Further information

Outline any other information you feel relevant to this submission, using a separate sheet or attachments if necessary.

Section 10 Attachments Please attach the following items to this form, or explain if not attached

	Information sheets and other materials to be used to inform potential participants about the research, including approach letters	Yes ☒	No ☐
	Consent form	Yes ☐	No ☐
	If applicable:		
	The proposal for the project	Yes ☐	No ☐
	Approval letter from external Research Ethics Committee	Yes ☐	No ☐
	Full risk assessment	Yes ☐	No ☐

Section 11 Declaration

	Yes	**No**
I have read, understood and will abide by the following set of guidelines.	☒	☐

BPS ☒ BERA ☐ BSA ☐ Other (please state) ☐

I have discussed the ethical issues relating to my research with my supervisor.	☒	☐
I have attended the appropriate ethics training provided by my course.	☐	☐

I confirm that to the best of my knowledge:

The above information is correct and that this is a full description of the ethics issues that may arise in the course of this project.

Name	Simon Higley
Date	25.04.16

Please submit your completed ethics forms to your supervisor.

Notes and references

Professional code of ethics

You should read and understand relevant ethics guidelines, for example:

British Psychological Society (2009) *Code of Ethics and Conduct*, and (2014) *Code of Human Research Ethics*

or

British Educational Research Association (2011) *Ethical Guidelines*

or

British Sociological Association (2002) *Statement of Ethical Practice*

Please see the respective websites for these or later versions; direct links to the latest versions are available on the Institute of Education http://www.ioe.ac.uk/ethics/.

Disclosure and Barring Service checks

If you are planning to carry out research in regulated Education environments such as Schools, or if your research will bring you into contact with children and young people (under the age of 18), you will need to have a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) CHECK, before you start. The DBS was previously known as the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB)). If you do not already hold a current DBS check, and have not registered with the DBS update service, you will need to obtain one through at IOE. Further information can be found at http://www.ioe.ac.uk/studentInformation/documents/DBS_Guidance_1415.pdf

Ensure that you apply for the DBS check in plenty of time as will take around 4 weeks, though can take longer depending on the circumstances.

Further references

The www.ethicsguidebook.ac.uk website is very useful for assisting you to think through the ethical issues arising from your project.

Robson, Colin (2011). *Real world research: a resource for social scientists and practitioner researchers* (3rd edition). Oxford: Blackwell.

This text has a helpful section on ethical considerations.

Alderson, P. and Morrow, V. (2011) *The Ethics of Research with Children and Young People: A Practical Handbook.* London: Sage.

This text has useful suggestions if you are conducting research with children and young people.

Wiles, R. (2013) What are Qualitative Research Ethics? Bloomsbury.

A useful and short text covering areas including informed consent, approaches to research ethics including examples of ethical dilemmas.

Departmental use		
If a project raises particularly challenging ethics issues, or a more detailed review would be appropriate, you **must** refer the application to the Research Ethics and Governance Coordinator (via researchethics@ioe.ac.uk) so that it can be submitted to the Research Ethics Committee for consideration. A Research Ethics Committee Chair, ethics department representative and the Research Ethics and Governance Coordinator can advise you, either to support your review process, or help decide whether an application should be referred to the REC. *Also see 'when to pass a student ethics review up to the Research Ethics Committee':* *http://www.ioe.ac.uk/about/policiesProcedures/42253.html*		
Student name		
Student department		
Course		
Project title		
Reviewer 1		
Supervisor/first reviewer name		
Do you foresee any ethical difficulties with this research?		
Supervisor/first reviewer signature		
Date		
Reviewer 2		
Second reviewer name		
Do you foresee any ethical difficulties with this research?		
Supervisor/second reviewer signature		
Date		
Decision on behalf of reviews		
Decision	Approved	☐
	Approved subject to the following additional measures	☐
	Not approved for the reasons given below	☐
	Referred to REC for review	☐
Points to be noted by other reviewers and in report to REC		
Comments from reviewers for the applicant		
Recording – supervisors/reviewers should submit all approved ethics forms to the relevant course administrator		
Recorded in the student information system		☐

Appendix H – Example Excerpts from one Interview

Interview with P2. (n.b. due to the considerable length of each interview transcript, excerpts have been included only)

(Page.1)

Interviewer: so the first question is really quite broad, are you able to just take me through your usual week after school and at weekends for A and the sorts of things she does?

Respondent: Nine times out of ten I pick her up from school and then we make our way home on the bus via usually – we like walking through the market or sometimes we might go to a café, and then we might get home and then have a snack, if we haven't been to a café, and then she might play on her iPad or we might read a story. She likes looking at photographs; we might look at photographs on the computer.

It's mainly me and her until say on a Monday she has a babysitter who comes at half past four, because I go to college, and then they might go off to the library or they might go off to an afterschool club that this particular babysitter helps to run in --, so they might go and do something like that.

I: Ok

R: Then she'll have supper about half past six and then she'll have a bath and bedtime with lots of stories.

I: The afterschool club which she goes to, that's with the babysitter?

R: Yes, because it's just run by a friend of hers in --. It's not anything – she just goes to it informally as a drop-in and she really enjoys it when she does.

I: Ok. What sort of club is it?

R: It's just an afterschool club. I don't really know that much about it. It's just for children that can't be collected until 5:00 or 5:30 or something, just a regular afterschool club that kids go to. It's a real shame she can't do that at her own school. I think there's lots of room for them to run around and because she's got the babysitter there, doing one-to-one with her, she's more than able to join in. She doesn't really need one-to-one in that sort of a situation, only needs one-to-four.

(Page 4)

I: Does she ever meet up with any other children in more informal kinds of settings?

R: Yes, her best friend at school, we meet up after, not afterschool so much, but we go out. For example in the summer we went out fruit picking. We went to Milton Keynes to visit a former classmate of theirs who had moved. We go to the park. Several times we've been to the park, been to picnics. They're very fond of one another. He's non-verbal but you wouldn't really know, he's very expressive. He uses Makaton, a bit. He sees her and he goes… (Laughter) He's absolutely lovely, lovely little boy and I really like his mum, so that's been a really lovely friendship that they've developed.

I: That sounds nice.

R: Both of them, it's the first time they've ever really had a friend, it's just wonderful to see that. Really try hard to nurture that friendship. It can be hard because she loves him very much but in an unstructured environment she doesn't really know what to do with him. (Laughter) It's best when we go and do something rather than if they come round and they've just got ages, so we work out lots of activities for them to do together because they don't really know quite how to – they love each other but they don't really know what else to do apart from-

I: How to sort of play together?

R: Yes, and when we're at home she sometimes wants to withdraw and play on her iPad or he wants to go on the trampoline and she doesn't, and then they'll both only want to go on the trampoline if I'm singing or something. "The idea is when we have play dates is that I get to stay in the kitchen and not interact with you all the time." Yes, but it's also bitter sweet because it brings out what she doesn't have, and he doesn't have, and also what I don't have. I mean, the great thing about your children having friends is that you develop relationships with other mums or other dads. I've got two children, my oldest one is – has no SEN and when he was at primary school I had so many friends, because we would look after each other's kids, go to birthdays, there was always a birthday party, or they'd be off playing football or something, "Who's got which kid?" I'd go home with a gang of three kids or four kids. None of that, none of that happens at all.

Appendix I – Example coding

This is an example of coding from the Parent 2 interview excerpt presented in Appendix H. Due to the length of each interview this represents just some of the coding from one interview.

Please see section 3.4.4 for discussion of the process of thematic analysis. Codes have been included in brackets and numbered. Where a code is highlighted in grey this indicates that following consideration it was not grouped into a subtheme. Where a code has been highlighted in colour this indicates where it has been grouped into a subtheme.

Excerpt from Interview 2	**Initial Code**	**Subtheme**
1.(Nine times out of ten I pick her up from school and then we make our way home on the bus via usually – we like walking through the market or sometimes we might go to a café, and then we might get home and then have a snack, if we haven't been to a café, and then she might play on her iPad or we might read a story. She likes looking at photographs; we might look at photographs on the computer. It's mainly me and her) until say on a Monday she has a babysitter who comes at half past four, because I go to college, and 2.(then they might go off to the library or they might go off to an afterschool club that this particular babysitter helps to run in) --, so they might go and do something like that.	1. - It's mainly me and her 2. - Support in afterschool club	Parent/adult attends activity to facilitate child's participation.

1.(It's just an afterschool club. I don't really know that much about it. It's just for children that can't be collected until 5:00 or 5:30 or something, just a regular afterschool club that kids go to. It's a real shame she can't do that at her own school. I think there's lots of room for them to run around and because she's got the babysitter there, doing one-to-one with her, she's more than able to join in. She doesn't really need one-to-one in that sort of a situation, only needs one-to-four.)	1. • Scaffolding social situations • Support in afterschool club • Opportunities	Parent/adult attends activity to facilitate participation.
	1. • Differentiation • Frustration at school provision • Structure	The importance of differentiating activities to facilitate participation.
1.(Yes, her best friend at school, we meet up after, not afterschool so much, but we go out. For example in the summer we went out fruit picking.) We went to Milton Keynes to visit a former classmate of theirs who had moved. We go to the park. Several times we've been to the park, been to picnics. 2.(They're very fond of one another. He's non-verbal but you wouldn't really know, he's very expressive. He uses Makaton, a bit. He sees her and he goes… (Laughter) He's absolutely lovely, lovely little boy and I really like his mum, so that's been a really lovely friendship that they've developed)	1. • Scaffolding social situations • Learning social skills • Effort put in by parents	Active management of informal social activities.
	2. • Friendship doesn't have to be just one thing • School friends	Friendships with other children with SEN.
	2. • Developing friendships with family	The importance of knowing other parents to facilitate informal social opportunities.

1. (Both of them, it's the first time they've ever really had a friend, it's just wonderful to see that.) 2.(Really try hard to nurture that friendship. It can be hard because she loves him very much but in an unstructured environment she doesn't really know what to do with him. (Laughter) It's best when we go and do something rather than if they come round and they've just got ages, so we work out lots of activities for them to do together because they don't really know quite how to – they love each other but they don't really know what else to do) apart from-	1. • Friendship doesn't have to just be one thing. • 'It's the first time they've ever really had a friend'	Friendships with other children with SEN.
	2. • Scaffolding social situations • Differentiation • Effort put in by parents	Active management of informal social activities.
Yes, and when we're at home she sometimes wants to withdraw and play on her iPad or he wants to go on the trampoline and she doesn't, and 1.(then they'll both only want to go on the trampoline if I'm singing or something. "The idea is when we have play dates is that I get to stay in the kitchen and not interact with you all the time.") Yes, but it's also bitter sweet because it brings out what she doesn't have, and he doesn't have, and also what I don't have. I mean, the great thing about your children having friends is	1. • Scaffolding social situations • Differentiation • Effort put in by parents	Active management of informal social activities.

that you develop relationships with other mums or other dads. 2.(I've got two children, my oldest one is – has no SEN and when he was at primary school I had so many friends, because we would look after each other's kids, go to birthdays, there was always a birthday party, or they'd be off playing football or something, "Who's got which kid?" I'd go home with a gang of three kids or four kids. None of that, none of that happens at all.)	2. • Parent missing community	

Appendix I – Literature Search

The literature search for this research began with work undertaken as part of my Year 1 research project. Literature was searched for between January and April 2014, and September 2014 and March 2015. Literature was searched for using electronic databases such as The British Education Index, ERIC, PsychINFO, PsychARTICLES and Google Scholar. Library Catalogues at the UCL Institute of Education and Senate House Library were also searched. Literature included books, journal articles, dissertations and government publications. Keywords in the search included: special educational needs/SEN, peer relations/relationships, friendships, outside school, home, community, learning difficulties. In April 2016 further literature searches were completed using Google Scholar to ascertain if any authors who have written in this field had produced any further work and key texts were revisited.