

**Exploring Children's Views and Experiences of Having  
a Learning Difficulty and the Support They Receive at  
School**

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## **Abstract**

Few studies have focused on gaining the views and experiences of primary aged children with the highest level of SEN – those with Statements of SEN (SSEN) or Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). This exploratory study aimed to understand from the perspective of children with moderate or general learning difficulties what they think of school, the additional support they receive, and what they would change about it in the future. It also aimed to investigate the extent to which these children are involved in the decision-making process around their provision and whether their views are considered. Six children were interviewed using pictorial prompts and the data were transcribed and analysed thematically from a social constructivist standpoint. The study found that the pupils with SSEN or EHCPs held generally positive views of schools, preferred creative subjects, but experienced a range of difficulties at school. Friends and the support of a considerate adult were viewed as important elements of school. However, close TA support and appearing different from their learning-abled peers seems to promote physical isolation, a lack of agency and bullying. Pupils placed more value on support linked to developing their interaction skills rather than support that helped them to learn, or support related to changes in their environment. Overall, the most valued support was 'Working with different adults'. The most important change for children was a desire to have more opportunities to interact with their peers within the learning environment. The children showed mixed experiences of being involved with decision-making at the school, but generally findings showed that children were mostly left out of decision-making. These developments have the potential to inform schools, EPs and other professionals' practice. Additionally, this study highlights the difficulties that schools face over inclusion and provides readers with thoughts on the actual level of inclusion for some pupils with a SSEN or EHCP.

## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own. Other sources are acknowledged by explicit references in the text. A full reference list is included in the thesis.

Abigail Wilson

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## List of Abbreviations

<b>BPS</b>	British Psychological Society
<b>CoP</b>	Code of Practice
<b>DfE</b>	Department for Education
<b>DoH</b>	Department of Health
<b>EP</b>	Educational Psychologist
<b>EPS</b>	Educational Psychology Service
<b>EHCP</b>	Education, Health, and Care Plan
<b>GLD</b>	General Learning Difficulties
<b>IEP</b>	Individual Education Plan
<b>LA</b>	Local Authority
<b>MLD</b>	Moderate Learning Difficulties
<b>PCP</b>	Personal Construct Psychology
<b>SDT</b>	Self Determination Theory
<b>SEN</b>	Special Educational Needs
<b>SENCo</b>	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
<b>SSEN</b>	Statement of SEN
<b>TA</b>	Teaching Assistant
<b>UEL</b>	University of East London
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introduction to the current chapter

This chapter introduces the reader to the area of focus in the present research. It starts by explaining the terminology used in the study; a presentation of both the national and local context of initiatives related to children with SEN follows; the chapter then proceeds to an exploration of the philosophical perspective adopted in the study and finishes by stating the research purpose and related research questions.

## 1.2 Terminology

There is a range of different terms used within society in the area of children with learning difficulties and disabilities and it is important to understand what they mean before discussing the literature. Below are defined some of the terms used regularly within the current research.

### 1.2.1 Learning Difficulties

Often there is confusion in the terminology around learning difficulties. Different terminologies used include: 'learning disability', 'intellectual disability', 'developmental disability', and outdated terms such as 'mentally handicapped'. In America and Canada, the phrase 'intellectual disability' is widely used, whereas in the UK, the Department of Health (DoH) used the term 'learning disability' in their policy documents.

According to the DoH (2001), the term 'learning disability' is thought by some to reflect the wide and complex nature of disability, while 'learning difficulty' (LD) represents a specific area of need and is usually used in education legislation when referring to children. Both these are, however, often used interchangeably in the UK when in the context of adult health and social care (DoH, 2001).

The government released a White Paper for England about health and social care support for people with a learning disability (2001) called *Valuing People: a new strategy for learning disability for the 21st century*, which suggests that

many individuals with LDs say they prefer the term 'difficulties' rather than 'disabilities'. In 2014, the *Children and Families Act* was passed, followed by its statutory guidance for organisations in England which work with and support students who have SEN: *Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice 2015* (DfE, 2015). In this new legislation, the term LDs is used to refer to children with difficulties in the area of learning and cognition. For these reasons, i.e., current Government policy as well as preferences made by individuals, the current research will use the term 'LDs'.

### **1.2.2 Special Educational Needs**

The term 'SEN' is used as an overarching term to include LDs or disabilities, which are terms used interchangeably in the guidance. According to the revised Code of Practice (CoP), a student has SEN if they have a LD or disability which "calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her" (DfE, 2015:15). It defines students as having a LD or disability if:

he or she has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age, or has a disability which prevents or hinders him or her from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided for others of the same age in mainstream schools or mainstream post-16 institutions

(DfE, 2015:16).

The CoP categorises SEN into four broad areas of need: communication and interaction; cognition and learning; social, emotional, and mental health difficulties; and sensory and/or physical needs. LDs falls under the 'cognition and learning' area of need, which states that LDs can cover a wide range of needs. This includes specific LDs, moderate LDs (MLD), severe LDs (SLD), and profound and multiple LDs (DfE, 2015:97).

### **1.2.3 SSENs, EHCPs and Additional Support**

Additional support for LDs may be required when children learn at a slower pace than their peers, even with appropriate differentiation (DfE, 2015). The CoP states that: "Where a pupil is identified as having SEN, schools should take action to remove barriers to learning and put effective special educational provision in place" (DfE, 2015:100). This special educational provision can be

thought of as putting together tailored interventions and specific strategies to aid the child's learning. A SSSE or an EHCP is awarded when, despite the school having taken relevant and purposeful action to identify, assess and meet the SEN of the pupil, the pupil has not made expected progress (DfE, 2015). The purpose of a SSEN or EHCP is to name the child's complex and significant SEN, make special educational provision to meet the SEN of the pupil, to secure the best possible outcomes for them across education, health, and social care, and to prepare them for adulthood. Local Authorities (LAs) are in the process of transferring SSENs issued before 2014 into EHCPs.

### **1.3 National and International context**

Nationally, increasing emphasis is being placed upon the importance of involving children in decisions about their own life. Influential changes in the area of pupil voice began in 1989, when the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) provided a landmark in the development of rights for students. It refers to giving respect to the views of the child, by stating that every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously (UNCRC, Article 12, 1989). The Children Act of England and Wales 1989 states that any court making a decision about a child's life should 'have regard in particular to the ascertainable wishes and feelings of the child concerned' (Part 1, section 1).

The UNCRC talks about the right to express a view in terms of those "capable of forming views" and taking them into account as depending on "age, maturity and capability" (1989, Article 12). When advocating for pupil participation, this is also reflected in the previous SEN CoP (DfE, 1994) which suggests that children's views should be gathered based on "age, ability and past experience" (p. 124). However, for some, any provisos to participation can lead to the exclusion of a significant minority of those with SEN from participation (Rose, 1998). Researchers have shown that even the most severely disabled children can communicate their wishes and views to some extent (e.g. Davis, Watson, & Cunningham-Burley, 2000) and it is suggested that what is important is not eliciting children's preformed ideas and opinions, but enabling them to explore

the ways in which ‘they perceive the world and communicate their ideas in a way that is meaningful to them’ (Tolfree & Woodhead, 1999: 21).

The Children and Families Act 2014 set out the principles underpinning the legislation and guidance in the new CoP (DfE, 2015, section 19). The CoP places an even greater emphasis on pupil participation in discussions about their education and including the views, interests and aspirations of the child and their parents in the EHCP. It sets out a new system to help students with SEN. One of these principles states that LAs, in carrying out their functions under the Act in relation to disabled students and young people and those with SEN, must have regard to the views, wishes and feelings of the child or young person, and the child’s parents (DfE, 2015).

This principle is designed to support the participation of students, their parents and young people in decision-making. It explains that the principle can be put into practice successfully by LAs ensuring that students and their parents are involved in discussions and decisions about their individual support. The CoP also states that while gaining parental views are important in the planning for their child’s SEN, their views should not be used as a proxy for the student’s views, as the students will have their own perspective to contribute (DfE, 2015).

Historically, students with SEN have not taken an active role in the decision making involved in the educational planning for their SEN (Martin et al, 2006). Teachers and other professionals have tended to make decisions for students with disabilities (Allen, Smith, Test, Flowers, & Wood, 2001). One example that reflects the way that children’s voices are marginalised is in their SSENs, which detail a child’s LD and the help that will be given. Children’s views are sometimes omitted, or written by the school or the parent/carer or marginalised by the voices of stakeholders. This is despite the advantages that have been found for involving students with SEN in assessment, planning and review processes, such as increased motivation, perception of personal control, and independence (Roller, 1998).

Recent statistics released by the DfE in July 2016, show that 14.4% of pupils in schools in England were classed as having SEN. 2.8% of pupils, that is 236,805

pupils, have a SSEN/EHCP, and 11.6% are on SEN support (replacing categories previously known as 'School Action' and 'School Action Plus'). The figures also show that MLD remains the most common primary type of need overall, with 24.2% of pupils with SEN having MLD as a primary need. It is also the most common type of need for pupils on SEN support. For those children with a SSEN/EHCP, Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) remains the most common primary type. 13.4% of pupils with SEN who have MLD as a primary need have a SSEN/EHCP (DfE, 2016).

Statistics suggest that 89% of children with MLD are educated in a mainstream school rather than a special school (DoH, 2011). This may suggest the importance of differentiated support for these children in the mainstream classroom where they are educated alongside their 'typically' developing peers. It is also the area where LAs are continuing to move forward with inclusive developments.

Only a small percent of the population - 2.8% - currently require a SSEN/EHCP. Due to its small size maybe, relatively little research has been carried out with this particular group of children and very little is known about how best to support them, making it even more imperative to carry out research in this area.

### **1.3.1 Legislation**

In ensuring that the SEN of individuals are recognised and that equality of opportunity occurs, several important pieces of guidance and legislation have been written.

The report 'Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People' which was written collaboratively by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), the Department of Work and Pensions and the DoH, focused on participation, inclusion and empowerment for disabled people (Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, 2005). The government's vision is that: "By 2025, disabled people in Britain should have full opportunities and choice to improve their quality of life, and will be respected and included as equal members of society" (2005:4).

A few of the steps towards achieving this vision include support for families of young disabled children and support during transition into adulthood, with a key objective being that disabled people are kept at the heart of these initiatives. The aim of the initiative is to improve access for disabled pupils which has links to many other current initiatives and legislation, both within Children's Services and across partner agencies.

The Equality Act, 2010, which replaced the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 (DfES, 2005) demonstrated a commitment to equality of access and opportunity despite the change of government earlier in 2010. The Act placed emphasis on ensuring that vulnerable people are not discriminated against and will have equality of opportunity.

In 2011, a SEN Green Paper was published (DfE, 2011) which provided a basis for radically reforming the current system for identifying, assessing and supporting children and young people (CYP) who are disabled or have SEN, and their families. The SEN CoP (DfE, 2015) followed, which places great importance on the use of person-centred planning in order to empower the CYP, and their families through their involvement in the decision-making process.

## **1.4 Local Context**

The Educational Psychology Service (EPS) where the research was undertaken has embraced the new ways of working and has adapted the service delivery to a person-centred approach following the changes in legislation. It aims to listen to service users and take their views seriously to improve practices.

In the EPS' CYP Plan (2015-17), one priority was to *Listen to children, young people and their parents to shape services*. The plan states that the service will know they have achieved this goal when CYP contribute actively to the decisions that affect their lives; and when services they commission and those they provide are shaped and improved by the experiences and aspirations of children, young people and their parents. The EPS supported this exploration of

children's views about school and the SEN support they receive in order to help improve future practices when working with children with LDs.

## **1.5 Philosophical perspective**

It is important to consider the ontological and epistemological positions of the current research to help to contextualise the methodology used (Carter & Little, 2007). The researcher's ontology, described as the beliefs held about reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1998), falls within the social constructivism paradigm.

Constructivist ontology argues that reality is socially constructed by and between the people who experience it (Gergen, 1999). As a result, the constructivist position argues that there is not one objective reality but multiple realities or perspectives (Mertens, 2010). The researcher should attempt to understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it (Schwandt, 2000). However, the meanings of the research findings therefore are fundamentally interpretative (Mertens, 2010).

Taking this stance fits well with the current research which involved the researcher interviewing children in order to elicit their views and experiences, and then interpreting the research findings to create a socially constructed reality of what school and the support they receive is like in mainstream schools for these particular children. Additionally, social constructionists would argue that the concepts of both "impairment" and "disability" are socially constructed and would not exist in the absence of the social processes that create them (Dudley-Marling, 2004; Goodley, 2001). Therefore, many different perceptions of LDs exist rather than one objective reality. The research will aim to interpret the research findings to create a socially constructed reality of the LD experience for these children.

The epistemology of this research, which refers to how one might gain the knowledge about reality, adopts the view that the "inquirer and the inquired-into are interlocked in an interactive process, each influences the other" (Mertens, 2010:19). Therefore, the researcher used a qualitative approach to collecting the data which allows for a more personal, interactive mode of data collection.

The interactive mode of data collection and the social constructivist stance of this research allow the voice of the child to be at the heart of the investigation.

## **1.6 Purpose of research**

This current piece of research aimed to explore an under-researched area. Through completing the research, it was hoped that the views of children with LDs about school, the additional support they receive and their experiences of participating in the decision-making process, would help to improve future practices when working with this particular group of children in mainstream education.

The current research focused on interviewing children with MLD or GLD due to the move towards greater inclusion (e.g., Norwich and Kelly, 2004).

The research was undertaken in mainstream schools rather than special education schools because the researcher was interested in the views of children who are educated in a school where the class teacher and TA hold responsibility for their education and support, yet do not necessarily hold specialist knowledge that is available in specialist provisions. This is with the knowledge that nearly half - 42.9% - of pupils with SSEN/EHCPs attended a mainstream school in 2016 (DfE, 2016).

Additionally, the research hoped to help inform future practices for EPs, who have led the way: in assessing the student's perspective (Gersch, 1996); in conducting studies of the impact of participation on motivation and behaviour (Bennathan, 1996); and in advocating for participation (Davie & Galloway, 1996).

Finally, literature around children with LDs is not comprehensive, possibly due to the difficulty that exists in gaining the views of this particular group of children. When children's views are elicited, research has shown that often the child's voice is marginalised (e.g., Goepel, 2009) but that children are expressing preferences to have more involvement and individual choice in matters affecting them (e.g., Woolfson et al, 2006). The research aimed to give both a rich picture of children's views around SEN support and participation, as

well as cover a wide scope of the experiences and views around several matters affecting them at school. In order to gain the views of these children, the research aimed to address the question below.

## **1.7 Research question**

What are views and experiences of children with a SSEN or an EHCP for a LD, of:

- their LD?
- the additional support they receive in school?
- participating in the planning for their additional support?
- what else could happen to promote their progress at school?

In the next chapter the researcher proceeds to exploring the relevant literature in the area of listening to children with LDs educated in mainstream settings, critiquing the literature available to date and clarifying the need for the current research.

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction to literature review**

This chapter presents a critique of the research literature available in key areas related to the views of individuals with LDs about the SEN provision they receive. It starts with an overview of the systematic search and terminology used to identify relevant articles; it then performs a critique of the literature identified, following which the argument for the present research is being made. The chapter then finishes with an exploration of the theoretical underpinnings which were deemed fit for this research.

### **2.2 Details of systematic search**

Before proceeding to detailing the process of the systematic search carried out, it is important to remember that LD is an umbrella term which encompasses a range of terminologies. Because of this, the literature review has used the terminology as stated by the authors of the different articles and so the terms 'intellectual disability' (ID) and 'learning disability' are used interchangeably.

In order to explore the research question posed, the researcher examined the literature base to identify and explore related studies that have been previously undertaken. Three separate searches were carried out specifically in relation to children's views about:

- 1) their LD;
- 2) the additional support they receive in school; and
- 3) participating in the planning for their additional support.

The literature base around the last element of the research question which looks at children's views of '*what else could happen to promote their progress at school?*' was not specifically explored in the systematic search as the researcher feels the information provided by the participants in this study is focused on the future and is hence unique to their own views and experiences.

The systematic searches were carried out to address each of these three areas using a range of search terms within electronic databases. EBSCO Host with 'PsyInfo' and 'Academic Search Complete' databases were used. Numerous searches were run using a combination of the terminologies (see Appendix B for full process details). The first search was carried out on 31/05/2016 and focused on children's views of their LD. Eight research articles were finally produced.

The same process was applied for the second and third searches (i.e. children's views on the additional support they receive in school; and participating in the planning for their additional support). What differed was the search terms used and the number of articles deemed relevant. The second search was carried out on 06/06/2016 and produced 10 articles. The third search was carried out on 10/08/2016 and produced eight articles. The final number of papers reviewed summed up to 26 (see Appendix C for a summary of the articles that were selected).

### **2.3 Details of previous research findings**

Previous research has tended to focus on secondary school aged CYP. Very little research was found to focus on the voice of the child in primary schools. From the articles selected, a number of themes were identified, which were used as a framework for the articles' critique:

- Awareness and experiences of feeling 'different'
- Inclusion and children's experiences of school
- Additional support
- Pedagogy
- Support staff
- Service delivery models
- Participating in the decision-making process
- Increasing children's involvement and its challenges

### **2.3.1 Awareness and experiences of feeling 'different'**

Previous literature and research in the area of children's awareness and understanding of having a LD is both limited and varied in nature. The question of whether children are aware of having any difficulties, or of having been labelled as such remains an elusive one. Children's understanding of the labels that have been applied to them or of why they are treated differently is often queried by researchers and professionals alike (Kelly & Norwich, 2004).

Raskind, Margalit and Higgins (2006) examined children's presentations of the learning disability "experience" as expressed in online messages on a public website designed for children with learning and attention problems. The sample consisted of 164 children aged 9-18 years old. The difficulties shared by children included academic difficulties, emotional distress, and social isolation; children felt safe enough online to identify themselves as having a learning disability. While most children who sent e-mails on the site knew of, and were able to describe, their learning disability, several of them questioned the validation and identification of a learning disability. This suggests that despite children having an awareness of having a learning disability, there is still a lack of clarity around the nature of these difficulties for some children. However, the study only included children who identified themselves as "learning disability" and if the sample primarily consisted of learning disability children who already had a propensity toward self-disclosure then this may have biased the sample as it is unlikely to be reflective of the range of individual differences within the learning disability population (Raskind et al, 2006).

Kelly (2005) discusses perceptions and experiences of impairment and disability from the perspectives of learning disabled children, their parents, and their social workers. 32 'learning disabled' children aged 2-16, from Northern Ireland were selected and interviewed from active social work caseloads. When children discussed with researchers the impact of 'difference', it related to two layers of 'difference': 1) the experience of impairment, such as having a difficulty concentrating or not being able to do a particular activity; and 2) the impact of difference as a result of social barriers, such as being excluded from play activities and being teased or bullied. Children's ability to comment on their

experiences in the study illustrate their ability to articulate the experience of impairment and disability in their daily lives.

Kelly and Norwich (2004) studied 10-14-year-old children with SSENs for mild to moderate general LDs who attended either a mainstream school or a special school in England. The participants were interviewed about their perceptions of themselves and of the label of disability. 90% of the pupils expressed an awareness of their LDs and there were no notable differences between pupils in mainstream compared to those in special school. However, older pupils expressed more awareness of their own LDs than the younger ones. The term 'SEN' had been heard by only 12% of the pupils while 'LD' had been known by nearly half of pupils. The only label that had more positive evaluations than neutral or negative was 'has help'. 'LD' and 'SEN' had more neutral evaluations than negative or positive, and the more colloquial or historic terms had more negative evaluations. 'Stupid' was the most commonly known label (78%). Whilst only few pupils used these labels to describe themselves (between 0–16%), more reported that labels were used by others to describe them (1–51%), with 'Stupid' being the one most common (51%). The findings suggest that the pupils in both mainstream and special schools are sensitive to the negative connotations associated with some of the labels applied to them.

Additionally, varied emotional responses were reported in relation to the pupils' personal awareness of their LDs. For example, some pupils were reluctant to recognise their difficulties with learning, implying that a certain amount of selectivity and re-interpretation of what they internalise could exist within this group of children. Many children reported negative responses to having a LD (Kelly & Norwich, 2004). However, overall, mostly mixed perceptions were found in mainstream schools.

Overall, literature in this area suggests mixed findings and several possible factors that may affect the degree to which children understand and are aware of 'difference' (whether difference is in ability or social barriers). It is also important to consider the difficulties that are attached to the concept of 'awareness' which implies the existence of an objective reality (often regarding the reason the child is in special school, or the 'fact they are learning disabled').

Additionally, the studies assume a direct correspondence between what the child does or does not say, and their views or knowledge. Mostly mixed emotions are reported relating to how children with LDs feel about themselves.

### **2.3.2 Inclusion and children's experiences of school**

Inclusive education can be defined as the education of all children within their local community in their neighbourhood school (Sebba & Ainscow, 1996). Farrell (2000) emphasises that inclusion involves a focus on the quality of education provided for pupils. The 1981 Education Act (cited in Warnock & Norwich, 2010) gave parents of children with a SEN the right to have their child educated in a mainstream school. Following such changes in legislation, the number of CYP with SEN educated in mainstream UK schools has greatly increased over the last 30 years (Thomas & Vaughan, 2004). In order to include and meet the needs of a diverse range of pupils, schools have faced a wide range of challenges. Various debates have taken place in relation to these challenges, including the effective inclusion of pupils with a SEN, as well as effective use of pedagogical approaches (Norwich & Kelly, 2005; Warnock & Norwich, 2010).

Maxwell (2006) used personal construct psychology (PCP) methods to elicit the views of 13 junior aged children, who were on the SEN register, about school. A case study approach was taken, with findings suggesting that social activities were of greater importance for the pupils than formal learning experiences. Peer relationships were found to be paramount and defined the positive or negative experiences the pupils had of school in general. Maxwell (2006) concludes that PCP methods can be a useful approach for gaining the voice of the child with SEN, and emphasises the importance of developing teacher awareness of the importance of listening and responding to the views and opinions of their pupils.

Webster and Blatchford (2015) carried out a project called 'Making a Statement', which tracked the educational experiences of forty-eight 9- 10-year-old pupils with SENs for either MLD or behaviour, emotional and social difficulties, attending mainstream primary schools in England. The study involved the thematic analysis of forty-eight pupil case studies, drawing on

interviews with SENCOs, teachers, TAs and each pupil's parents/carers, as well as documentation and observation. Results indicated that children with SSEN experienced: both explicit and subtle forms of separation daily; a high level of pedagogical decision-making by TAs; an impoverished pedagogical diet compared to their peers; and finally, gaps in teachers' and TAs' knowledge concerning meeting the needs of pupils with SSEN.

In Norwich and Kelly's (2004) study mentioned earlier, pupil's views around their experiences of school, teaching, and learning in school were also sought. The results indicated that while most children expressed positive evaluations of their schools and the teaching they received, a significant minority expressed mixed views. Mainstream pupils reported receiving learning support in withdrawal settings (80%) and in-class (84%). Small group work and one-to-one support was also reported by more than half. A significant proportion of pupils in the mainstream preferred learning support in the form of withdrawal (40%); 33% preferred in-class support; while 30% preferred a mix of the two. The majority of pupils in both settings preferred their current school, however, a significant minority in special schools preferred to be in a mainstream setting. A high incidence of 'bullying' was reported and around half of pupils thought it was related to their LDs. However, as Norwich and Kelly stated, it is difficult to know whether this level of 'bullying' is higher or lower than for a sample of pupils not identified as having MLD because there are no apparent appropriate reference points for comparisons in the form of other research studies. The findings were suggested to reflect previous research findings relating to negative experiences associated with the stigma attached to 'difference' experienced by children with SEN.

Ryan (2009) aimed to seek the views of pupils about where in their school they feel included and excluded. Pupils with and without SEN from six different schools (primary and secondary mainstream and special schools) in Northern Ireland used cameras to create 'visual narratives' to express their views about the 'reasonable adjustments' mainstream schools might make to become more inclusive. The results found that some pupils had strongly-held views about some of the sensory aspects of the school environment including feeling

excluded from the dining hall or canteen due to the level of noise or an over-stimulated visual environment within the classroom. Other issues that arose included problems with toilets in relations to smells; and for a few pupils the head teacher's office space was associated with sanction rather than reward or a mix of both. Most importantly, Ryan emphasised that 'reasonable' adjustments may not fully be considered reasonable where the pupil at the centre of the need for adjustments has not had an input into the decision-making process.

Kerins (2014) explored the perspectives of a cohort of principals, teachers, parents, and pupils (over 12 years old) on differences in educational provision between mainstream and special schools through interviews. A multiple case study design was employed involving four special schools in Ireland for pupils with GLDs. Pupils had transferred from mainstream primary settings to special schools for pupils with GLDs. Differences relating to curricular provision, resource allocation and teacher expertise were highlighted. For example, while many of the pupils who had transferred would have preferred to remain in a mainstream setting, parents and teachers felt that special schools had greater levels of resources to support pupils. In terms of curriculum differences, principals and teachers emphasised difficulties experienced in trying to cater for diverse learning needs in the context of a regular curriculum in mainstream primary classrooms. Some of the pupils who had attended a secondary mainstream school before transferring also reported their difficulties accessing the curriculum. Additionally, many parents, teachers and principals in mainstream schools expressed the view that there was greater teacher expertise in the area of SEN available to pupils in special schools. While the pupil's views were elicited in this study alongside principals, teachers, and parents, it is difficult to gain a clear picture of their ideas as there were only a couple of direct references made of the pupil's views in the report.

Messiou (2002) used a range of drawing, observation, and interview techniques to listen to what children in one primary school class had to say about marginalisation with the hope to help improve future inclusive practices. From this, four children were identified as possibly experiencing marginalisation and

further more focused observations were carried out of these particular children. While the marginalisation seemed to relate to different factors for each child, there were some common themes including that the children's feelings and responses appeared to be closely related to how other children behaved towards them. The participants were from the same class in one school, questioning whether the findings relate only to that particular class which is likely to differ in many diverse ways including its inclusive practices to other classes and thinking more widely, to other schools.

In summary, the author identified mixed findings in this area. Some important findings include: pupils reporting friendships with peers as being the most important aspect of school life; experiences of both explicit and subtle forms of separation daily; a high level of pedagogical decision-making by TAs; a high incidence of 'bullying'; and a preference for receiving additional support in the form of withdrawal. Pupils have strongly held views about some of the sensory aspects of the school environment, though they generally have positive evaluations of their schools. The importance of including pupils in decisions that affect them was evident in all studies, although some were not necessarily successful at gaining the views of children directly.

### **2.3.3 Additional support**

SSEN and EHCPs are drawn up by LAs, and they are said to identify students with the most complex needs, outlining the support they require. The LAs subsequently monitor the progress the pupils make through Annual Reviews. Therefore, schools have some flexibility as to how they support pupils with a SSEN/EHCP. Additional support could be defined as being:

resources and strategies that aim to promote the development, education, interests, and personal well-being of a person and that enhance individual functioning

(Luckasson et al., 2002, p. 151).

This may be in the form of, for example, support from an adult, support from peers, and/or support through adaptations and aides/devices. They are a major part of the daily lives of children with SEN. However, very little attention has

been paid to how these pupils experience the supports. Yet to begin to understand the presence and potential impact of supports in the lives of children with SEN, it is essential to gain insights into their experiences and perspectives concerning this issue.

Mortier, Desimpela, De Schauwer, and Van Hove (2011) interviewed Belgian children attending mainstream schools aged between 9-18 years-old with a range of SEN and their peers to gain their views on the supports they experience at school. The SEN pupils were mainly positive about the supports in their school life because they felt supports removed restrictions in activities due to the impairment. The perspectives of the peers on supports were also positive because they recognised it helped their peer. However, the results also showed that a positive support can, at the same time, restrict the pupil's activities and negatively affect their psycho-emotional well-being, demonstrating the ambiguous nature of supports. The pupils also felt that they received too much support from adults and peers, rather than in terms of devices and adaptations, and expressed that they did not like appearing 'different' from their peers as a result of receiving additional support.

De Schauwer, Van Hove, Mortier and Loots (2009) examined the experience of inclusive education from the perspective of disabled children with a range of SEN in Flanders. 15 children aged between 5-17 years-old attending a mainstream school were observed and interviewed as part of a three-year research effort. The results indicated that being active and doing the things they like to do is more important than being able to master things; and that they were aware of being different from their peers. They were generally positive about their teachers and talked about school in terms of non-academic activities, emphasising the community aspect of school life as being most important. Additionally, friendships mattered to them. Support from peers and adults came in different forms and was seen positively, apart from when it meant they missed something that was fun. It was important for pupils to also do things independently; and they had many ideas about what was going to happen to them at school in the future.

In Sweden, Isaksson, Lindqvist, and Bergstro (2010) interviewed eight pupils aged between 12-14 years-old with SEN (ADHD or dyslexia) and their parents to explore the main concern of special support given to pupils with SEN and how pupils and parents experience this. A grounded theory approach found that pupils and parents were struggling for recognition and inclusion, which was a process that involved negotiations due to diverging interests of experts and strategies to deal with stigma, ambivalence, and special support measures. Additional support was observed to be mostly in the form of either individual support or small group support outside of the regular classroom. Pupils felt ambivalent towards the differentiated support measures due to mixed feelings around preferring to be supported outside the regular classroom due to the peaceful environment it brought, and feeling isolated from the other pupils at the same time. Labels derived from medical diagnosis were seen as restrictive in terms of the stigmatising effect it brought, as well as being a contributory factor in the provision of extra special resources. Aside from the limited sample size; one issue with this study is that children were interviewed with parents at their homes and one could question whether the views they expressed were a true reflection of their experiences and opinions.

In summary, the literature around additional support indicates that while children with SEN feel mostly positive toward the additional support they receive, they would like less support from adults and also report the negative emotional impact that 'appearing different' has as a result of the support. Pupils reported feeling ambivalent towards being taught inside the regular classroom and receiving in-class support versus pull-out. The following discussions around additional support touch upon more specific areas of research carried out around some of the different ways schools have supported pupils with SEN.

### **2.3.4 Pedagogy**

According to Norwich and Lewis (2001), pedagogy encompasses a wide range of variables about teaching, including sequencing of lessons, grouping arrangements, promotion of particular attitudes, and selection of content. It has been argued that while a subgroup of pupils has been identified as different from other learners (e.g. Pitta & Gray 1997, Jordan & Oettinger-Montani, 1997,

both concerning mathematics; Gresham *et al.*, 1996, more generally), it does not follow that effective teaching for those pupils is different from teaching other pupils.

There is limited research that has focused on the need for different pedagogy approaches for children with SEN (Norwich & Lewis, 2001). Moreover, even fewer studies looked at the views of children in relation to teaching approaches, particularly primary-aged children. In relation to research in this area focusing specifically on children with MLD/GLD, there appears to be few experimental studies in which pupils with MLD are identified and given selective teaching approaches or little evidence of a systematic attempt to develop a 'MLD pedagogy', but lots of evidence of multiple local initiatives (Norwich & Lewis, 2001). There is no 'MLD curriculum' as such except as a vague and/or narrow modified version of the 'mainstream curriculum' or a vague and broader version of the 'developmental curriculum'.

Griffiths (2009) used research diaries and small group-based interviews to gain the views of twenty Year 8 pupils all with a SSEN and their teachers, of a set of teaching approaches used during a three-week literacy project. One group of pupils attended a mainstream school and one group attended a special school and were taught together for the programme; half the time was spent in the special school and half the time in the mainstream school. The study found that a flexible approach to the curriculum to include a variety of tasks, content, and themes to allow for varied learning styles, and the provision of social learning opportunities in the context of inclusive pedagogies, quickly helped to break down any barriers to inclusion between the two groups of pupils that pupil attitudes to SEN can create. However, it is difficult to envisage how the suggested inclusive teaching approaches could be effectively applied in a context where both non-SEN and children with SEN attend.

Kubiak (2015) carried out an inclusive phenomenographic study undertaken with college students with intellectual disabilities (ID). Eighteen students with ID were interviewed by six co-researchers also with ID who undertook 11 weeks of training to gain a deeper understanding of the teaching and learning process. The results indicated that the strategies that promoted learner engagement and

autonomy include establishing a supportive learning climate or environment, and promoting self-regulated learning strategies. Pupils reported that they valued process-oriented instruction facilitated through the use of dialogue and discussion, as well as audio and visual stimuli in the form of PowerPoints, brainstorming and concept/mind mapping. Learners also appreciated teaching instruction that stimulated the learning process as a thinking activity, one that explicated the process of learning instead of conceiving it simply as the memorisation and reproduction of facts.

Despite the paucity of research that gains children's perspective on teaching and learning in the classroom, research by Morgan (2009) indicated CYP do want to have a say about these matters. Morgan investigated how teachers in a secondary school in the UK consulted pupils about teaching and learning in their classrooms and what pupils thought about this. Qualitative case-studies of four teachers were carried out over one academic year using lesson observation and semi-structured interviews with teachers, seventy-five Year 8 pupils and school management staff. Teachers were encouraged to consult at least one class a year to get feedback on teaching and learning. Pupils in five classes were interviewed on two occasions: after the consultations took place and later in the year to gather any views on perceived impact. Pupils welcomed consultation, had much to say about its benefits, valued feedback from teacher's post-consultation, and had concerns around issues of trust and anonymity.

The main implications for the research in the area of pedagogy for children with SEN are that they value many different teaching approaches from communal learning experiences to process-oriented instruction facilitated through the use of dialogue and discussion. Most importantly, the students showed that they had an opinion about what helps them learn best, and that they value their views being heard and taken seriously in matters that affect their education.

### **2.3.5 Support staff**

There has been a large amount of recent attention focused on the effectiveness that support staff have on supporting children with SEN.

A large-scale Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project by Blatchford et al (2009) was commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Welsh Assembly Government. Large scale surveys (Strand 1), followed by a multi-method and multi-informant approach (Strand 2), were carried out in primary, secondary, and special schools in England and Wales. Some of the key findings were as follows: TAs interactions with pupils, compared to teachers' interactions with pupils, tended to be more concerned with the completion of tasks rather than learning and understanding; TAs tended to be reactive rather than proactive, and at secondary level the more contact pupils had with support staff, the less individual attention they had from teachers. Also, while support staff had a positive effect on teachers' workload, level of job satisfaction and levels of stress, the more support pupils received, the less progress they made. They conclude by suggesting recommendations for the deployment of support staff; including the need for schools to examine the deployment of support staff to ensure that they do not routinely support lower attaining pupils and pupils with SEN.

Rutherford (2012) conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with ten students with disabilities, aged from 8 to 17 years, and eighteen teacher aides to explore disabled students' and aides' experiences of working together in New Zealand schools. The findings were consistent with those documented in existing international research (e.g., Angelides, Constantinou, & Leigh 2009), that "aides play a pivotal, complex and ambiguous role in both helping and hindering students' presence, participation and achievement in school life" (2012:770). Although in the minority, those who experienced inclusive contexts showed that the presence of aides, utilised in educationally sound ways and in partnership with teachers, can benefit all students and teachers. However, most of the students experienced school as being stuck somewhere on, or outside, the boundary that separates mainstream from 'special' education, as a result of being supported by a teacher aide.

Broer, Doyle and Giangreco (2005) interviewed sixteen young adults between 19-29 years-old with ID about their experiences attending mainstream classes with support staff. Apart from the youngest and oldest student, all students had

finished school within the last five years. The study found that there was a primacy and exclusivity of the relationships between the former students and the support staff assigned to support them. This was characterised by four interrelated themes regarding the student's perspectives of support staff as: mother; friend; protector (e.g., from bullying); and primary teacher. Students provided both positive and negative perspectives on these four descriptors, however, Broer et al state that each descriptor represents cause for concern.

Overall, research on support staff for children with SEN has indicated that they play a "pivotal, complex, and ambiguous role" in supporting SEN pupils (Rutherford, 2012:770). Those who experienced inclusive contexts showed that the presence of aides, utilised in educationally sound ways and in partnership with teachers, can benefit all students and teachers. However, the findings highlight the need for schools to examine the deployment of classroom or pupil based support staff more thoroughly, and to consider the social validity of support staff and importance of increasing teacher involvement.

### **2.3.6 Service delivery models**

Few studies have explored children's preferences for different types of service delivery models. That is, whether children with SEN prefer to be taught inside the regular classroom with additional support or be pulled out and taught in a resource room when being taught in mainstream schools. Additionally, their views have rarely been sought about who they prefer to be taught by (e.g., a regular teacher or special teacher) and the reasons behind this. Several studies previously discussed touched on this area amongst exploring other areas in relation to children's views (i.e. Norwich & Kelly, 2004; Isaksson et al, 2010).

Vlachou, Didaskalou and Argyrakouli (2006) interviewed ninety-five students with GLD aged between 7 to 13 years about their preferences for different service delivery models in several Greek schools. In Greece, in-class support for children with SEN does not exist and therefore, participants' views about this type of support was based on hypothetical thinking. The majority of the students preferred the resource room over the regular class, but almost one-third of the students preferred the regular classroom. These preferences were found to be

significantly influenced by their view of which setting provided more academic benefits. The most common reasons for preferring the resource room were that: there was less and easier work; learning and understanding things better; receiving more help; having more fun; and participating in more extra-curricular activities.

The large majority of students preferred receiving help from the learning support assistant, with those who preferred the resource room setting also preferring help from the learning support assistant (89.9%) rather than the class teacher (10.1%). This could be interpreted as being because the majority of these students were used to being taught in this way at the time of the study, and did not receive additional in-class support. Despite students not having any experience of in-class support, almost one-half of the students preferred to receive the additional support within the regular class. Interestingly, research previously mentioned found some similar findings; children prefer withdrawal support for a number of reasons, but felt isolated from peers as a result, and a significant minority preferred in-class support (i.e. Norwich & Kelly, 2004; Isaksson et al, 2010).

### **2.3.7 Participating in the decision-making process**

The literature on pupil voice suggests that disabled children are often restricted from opportunities to freely negotiate their self-identity (Priestley, 1999). For example, researchers have found that adults rarely consult disabled children or involve them in decision-making processes (Morris, 1998; Thomas, 1998; Burke & Cigno, 2000). Participation is generally acknowledged to be a relative term, dependent upon a context, and therefore, there is currently no universally agreed upon definition. Treseder (1997) described participation “as a process where someone influences decisions about their lives and this leads to change” (cited in Davey, 2010:6).

It is now acknowledged that increased participation of pupils is likely to impact on school improvement (Williams & Hanke, 2007) and Robinson and Taylor suggest that the use of student voice ‘empowers students to have the opportunity to participate meaningfully and collaboratively in school

improvement work' (2007:10). Despite this, there is a continuing presence of barriers in educational settings. Gibson (2006) suggests that these barriers are the result of an unconscious commitment to aspects of modernism leading to distortions in understandings. Previous research (Curtis et al. 2004; Soar et al. 2005; Spicer & Evans 2006; Lundy 2007; McLeod, 2001, 2007; Percy-Smith 2007) indicates the extent to which young people's voices are truly 'listened to' varies according to the extent to which young people with different needs, cultural and social contexts and backgrounds, may want to be included in decision-making, or indeed the extent to which they are allowed to participate. McLeod (2001) suggests that marginalised groups such as CYP with SEN may be more at risk of being overlooked.

Research that aims to explore whether children with SEN are consulted about all matters affecting them includes Kelly's (2005) study mentioned earlier which found adults often fail to take into account the views and experiences of learning disabled children resulting in children developing their own interpretations of impairment and disability based on their experiences and interactions with others.

Nordmann (2001) described two case histories of secondary school students with learning disabilities in America and attended polar opposite educational contexts: one a public institution that sees itself as mandated by public law to identify and address learning differences and fulfils this mandate aggressively; and one a private institution that sees itself as a mainstream cultural institution with no mandate to identify or accommodate individuals with learning differences. Both students experienced marginalisation in that their views and wishes for either no further SEN support (in the public school) or requirement for further SEN support (in the private school) were ignored in favour of institutional empowerment.

Norwich and Kelly (2006) conducted a study of the participation of children with SEN in decision-making about their needs in a sample of mainstream schools which were self-selected for having promising participation practices. They interviewed students and collected data from school professionals (12 SENCOs, 10 head teachers, five teachers, 20 teaching assistants (TAs) and 91

children across 18 primary and secondary schools; along with data collected from a SENCO questionnaire; LA questionnaire and LA officer interviews) about pupil participatory practices. The results found that schools were using both formal and informal participation processes; including use of Individual Education Plans (IEPs), talking about specific topics, using open questions and observations, and talking to a child in an informal setting such as a school trip, and giving the child the opportunity to record their views in writing through an adult acting as a scribe and by drawing pictures.

However, the study illustrates the complexity and challenge of consulting and sharing decision-making with CYP. Inconsistencies in practices were found, and many perceived barriers to eliciting pupil's views existed, including barriers to consulting with them and negotiating over decisions. The importance of a school participation ethos in creating a 'listening culture' was highlighted. Norwich and Kelly (2006) suggest that due to the systemic nature of their research, there are lessons to be learnt for professionals such as EPs, in supporting schools to implement effective participatory practices.

McKay's (2014) study explored the implementation of the previous SEN Code of Practice, with specific focus on relationships between service users and service providers. Interviews and observations were carried out with two secondary school students (12 years-old & 14 years-old), their parents and their educational professionals. The experiences of participating in the decision-making process for the two students, where one attended a specialist provision for young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties, and the other a mainstream school, both with LDs, were vastly different. The young person at the specialist provision had several advocates speak for him, and he was not invited to attend any meetings over the six-month period. The other participant who attended a mainstream setting was invited to share his views at each meeting. McKay comments that including young people's voices is something that is context dependent and influenced by individual relationships, both positive and negative. The author concludes by proposing that while children's voices may be heard, the mechanisms through which pupil voice is given

legitimacy and the extent to which they truly influence decision-making, requires further examination.

Pawley and Tennant (2008) gained the views of nineteen Year 8 pupils and the SENCOs in three schools to explore their understanding of IEPs. The findings were cross-referenced against an examination of their IEPs. Findings indicated that very few pupils were able to communicate a clear understanding of IEPs. The pupils reported targets that mostly reflected mainstream target-setting, and very few stated targets matched with those in their IEPs. Only two pupils were able to communicate an understanding of an IEP and IEP targets, and recalled discussions with teachers in which they were involved in target setting and review of the targets. SENCOs reported difficulties with the manageability of the IEP process, particularly in communicating with subject teachers in large schools, with staff differing in attitude and relevant training.

The purpose of Goepel (2009) study was to investigate to what extent there is common agreement between the teacher, parent and child with regard to the nature of the child's need. Additionally, they explored to what extent partnership is expressed through the targets shown on the IEP and in particular whether the voice of the child is heard. Four children receiving support for their SEN aged 10 and 11 in their final year at junior school, their parents, and teachers, answered a questionnaire and were interviewed about their views. Results indicated that differences in the perception of need occurred between the stakeholders. A lack of clarity meant that the writing of an effective and appropriate IEP that demonstrated effective partnership between all stakeholders was much less likely. Furthermore, partnerships that specifically exclude the child were least effective.

In summary, research has shown that adults often fail to take into account the views and experiences of learning disabled children, and stories of marginalisation in favour of institutional power exist. One consequence of this is that children develop their own interpretations of impairment and disability. Students appear to have varying experiences of participation, which can depend on the educational setting they attend and the extent to which they are allowed to participate, amongst other influences. Both formal and informal

participation processes were found to be used in schools. However, the complexity and challenge of consulting and sharing decision-making with CYP was highlighted.

### **2.3.8 Increasing children's involvement and its challenges**

Given that research has shown that children with SEN appear to have limited involvement in decision-making and the greater emphasis that has been placed on pupil voice in recent national and international initiatives, the question is raised about how this can be effectively achieved. A limited number of studies have explored ways that schools and outside agencies working with CYP with SEN can help to increase their level of involvement in all matters affecting them.

One example is Woods, Martin, and Humphrey's (2013) study which investigated the Self-Directed IEP. The Self-Directed IEP is 10-step program designed by Martin, Marshall, Maxson, and Jerman (1996) that teaches students to actively participate in their IEP meetings and to learn crucial self-determination skills, including goal setting, planning, self-advocacy, etc. This had been found to be effective in increasing student participation in the first IEP meeting (e.g., Allen et al, 2001; Arndt et al, 2006). A case-study approach was used with a student who has a learning disability in her first and second year of high school. Qualitative data was collected and analysed from two IEP meetings that took place, as well as data from post-meeting surveys, observer notes and 10-second momentary time sampling to triangulate the data.

The results indicated that when compared to the first IEP meeting, the student in the second meeting a year later had a marked increase in word count and speaking rate, a more focused post-school employment vision, and an increase in meeting leadership. The researchers suggest that the findings support the focus on early instruction in IEP leadership and engagement instruction, and that this process needs to be implemented year after year. It is important to note that this was an exploratory case study and therefore, it is difficult to come to any causal conclusions regarding the Self-Directed IEP and student participation and leadership.

Carter, Cameron, Walton, and Houghton (2012) propose that one way to enhance the involvement of young people with LDs is through the use of social pedagogy. Social pedagogy is described as an approach to working with children who see them as equals. They explored whether this method was an effective way to increase participation and focused on a group of six young people aged between 14 to 18 years with learning disabilities who used short break services. They found that social pedagogy helped to build trusting and equal relationships between young people and the adults who worked with them, increasing their involvement in the context of a person-centred approach. While the researchers could see the benefit of social pedagogy, they highlight the difficulty with getting a balance between 'head, heart, hands' for every activity and it is proposed that difficulties with the consumerist agenda in the UK affect its level of success. There also appears to be a limited amount of direct feedback from the participants themselves in the study, making it difficult to get a clear idea of how they felt about the method.

Woolfson et al (2006) explored young people's opinions in Scotland with and without SEN about *how* they would like to be consulted about the decision-making around their education. Four focus groups of young people aged 12 years and above (twenty-six participants in total) were held to address this question. The results indicated that not only did the young people want to be involved in decisions made about them, the factor they reported as being the most important in consultation was individual choice, i.e., they want choice regarding the nature of their involvement. The researchers conclude that the findings provide important advice for schools, EPs and other professionals who seek (or should seek) children's views when making decisions affecting their education.

Research that has explored ways to increase children's level of involvement in matters that affect their education has indicated that methods such as the Self-Directed IEP and Social Pedagogy can be effective. However, barriers still exist in using such methods. Importantly, research showed that not only did the young people want to be involved in decisions made about them, they want choice regarding the nature of their involvement.

Rudduck, Chaplain and Wallace (1996) argued that it is often the 'less effective learners' whose voices are 'least likely' to be heard and yet most important to be heard (1996:8). Additionally, Lundy (2007:927) suggests that 'voice is not enough' when seeking to fulfil our obligations under the UNCRC. In other words, those working with CYP need to take care not to make this process a tokenistic one, but rather one that is authentic and attempts to generate an element of change as appropriate.

This is not a simple undertaking, nor is it easy and straightforward (Kubiak, 2015). In the literature, several important issues are raised for those attempting to undertake this important process, which may help to shed some further light on why the views of children with SEN are still not routinely gained and taken seriously within the world of education and research. Flutter (2007) suggests that one issue about the use of pupil voice is that it may undermine teachers' authority and has the potential to change the power relationships that exist between students and their teachers; this in turn may also lead to 'unlocking a barrage of criticism of them and their teaching' (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004:75). Its perceived potential to undermine adult authority was a key reason why the United States did not ratify the Convention (Kilbourne, 1998).

Other concerns relate more specifically to research. MacBeath, Demetriou, Rudduck and Myers have criticised the flawed nature of research where only the 'more articulate . . . are more likely to shape the decisions of their peers and to be "heard" by their teachers – leaving others, ironically, feeling disenfranchised in an initiative specifically designed to empower them' (2003:42). Methodological and ethical challenges also exist for researchers interested in listening to children's voices, especially if the purpose is to build understanding of the experiences of children with substantial developmental and communication difficulties (Tangen, 2008). Further challenges will be addressed in the Methodology section of this paper when considering the ethical principles of the current research.

## **2.4 Issues arising from this review of literature**

In the introduction to this chapter, the researcher's commitment to improving outcomes for children with LDs was emphasised through aiming to listen to what they have to say about school life, the provision they receive and the changes they would like to make to improve their educational experience.

From this review of relevant literature, a number of gaps in knowledge are identified. These include:

- A paucity of studies which seek the views of children with SEN, particularly primary-aged children
- Unclear evidence about the impact of general measures to support children with LDs and about the concept of LDs
- The absence of evidence of significant or widespread participation of children in matters affecting their education

This research study aims to explore these issues.

## **2.5 Theoretical Underpinnings of this Study**

This research is based mainly upon self-determination theory and on personal construct theory. Both theoretical underpinnings fit within a constructivist epistemology (see chapter 1 for more detail on Constructivist epistemology).

### **2.5.1 Personal Construct Theory**

In the context of the literature review, the question of 'why should we listen to the views of CYP?' stands out. The importance of listening to the views of CYP in practice has been argued in view of Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) Theory (Kelly, 1955). Roller (1998) suggests that PCP provided a starting point to address this question. For instance, Kelly (1955) believed that the way in which people perceive themselves and view the world is based upon constructs that they develop due to their individual experiences. It is argued in the literature that has given consideration to PCP that when adults act without ascertaining the views and developing an understanding of the constructs of individual CYP,

conflict is likely to be created between them (Roller, 1998). In which case, if conflict is to be avoided, each CYP's perspective should be considered as unique and must therefore be obtained by adults for them to act appropriately on their behalf (Roller, 1998).

### **2.5.2 Relevance of Personal Construct Theory to this study**

Roller's (1998) argument for listening to the views of CYP is relevant in practice when working with and supporting CYP. The researcher suggests that ascertaining the views of individual CYP with SEN could contribute to the success of future decisions and plans, as their suggestions, agreement, or sense of being heard and understood may impact positively on their experiences of inclusion and learning. Due to the theoretical underpinnings of this study, it was decided that an adapted version of a PCP approach based on a mixture of drawing and discussion would be effective in eliciting the views of children with LDs and therefore applied here. This strategy will be discussed in more detail in the Methodology section.

It is important to note the distinction between gathering the views of CYP, and participation that is necessary for the current research. It is argued by the researcher that participation requires the views of CYP, however simply gathering their views should not be mistaken for participation. This is with the view that participation goes beyond the act of listening to children, to ensuring that their views influence a decision and bring about change for those children as defined by Davey (2010). The current research gathers the views of these children with the aim to improve future participatory and inclusive practices in schools in the future.

### **2.5.3 Determination theory**

Most of the theory underpinning the research in the area of children's views is self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Research suggests that the use of self-determination skills by pupils with LDs and other disabilities is positively related to desirable learning and transition outcomes (Martin, Mithaug, Oliphint, Husch, & Frazier, 2002; Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 2000). SDT

suggests that self-determined pupils make choices, act on those choices, experience the results, and then make new choices (Martin, Woods, Sylvester, & Gardner, 2005). These strategies enable pupils to regulate their behaviour independent of external control, and to become active participants in their learning and planning.

SDT emphasises the importance of school-based autonomy and belongingness to academic achievement and psychological adjustment and engagement in school is thought to act as a mediator in terms of the influence of autonomy and belongingness on these important aspects (Van Ryzin, Gravelly & Roseth, 2009:1). Van Ryzin et al (2009) state that a highly autonomous learning situation allowing for choice and self-direction will promote pupil motivation, engagement, and academic achievement. Therefore, it proposed that by promoting engagement in school through for example, having their views heard and taken seriously, and being involved in decision making, CYP will be provided with a sense of autonomy and belongingness in their education that leads to positive outcomes for them.

All children have a right to be self-determined, however, research suggests that educational professionals may restrict independence in choice-making for children with SEN and make all decisions for them in an atmosphere of 'knowing best' (e.g., Morgan, Bixler & McNamara, 2002).

#### **2.5.4 Relevance of Determination theory to this study**

By gathering the views and experiences of children about their understanding of their SEN, the support they receive at school and their involvement in decision-making, the researcher hopes the children's views will contribute to increasing the motivation, engagement, and academic achievement of CYP with LDs through improving professional practice in arranging additional support and participatory methods in the future.

## **2.6 Conclusions linking previous research to the current research aims**

As previously mentioned in Chapter one, this research aimed to explore an under-researched area. Currently, there are a limited number of studies that have effectively elicited the views of pupils, particularly studies that have been carried out in the UK. Even fewer have sought the views of those with LDs with the highest level of SEN (i.e., those with SSEN/EHCP) attending a mainstream setting. The few studies that have been carried out with pupils with SSEN/EHCPs have tended to include older pupils (e.g., Griffiths, 2009; Kubiak, 2015), involve participants with a wide range of ages and/or SEN (Webster & Blatchford, 2015), or did not gain a comprehensive picture of what life is like for this group of children including gaining their views of school, SEN support and their level of participation in decision-making (e.g., Norwich & Kelly, 2004). Some studies were unsuccessful at reporting children's views despite the research aiming to, adding to further marginalisation (e.g., Kerins, 2014).

By addressing these gaps in the research base, the current research aimed to improve future practices for schools when working with this particular group of children in mainstream education, as the move towards greater inclusion continues. The research base highlights that while little has been done to seek the views of these children and involve them in decision-making about their education, they do have opinions on these matters and value being consulted about them (e.g. Woolfson et al, 2006). The current study aimed to promote the importance of pupil voice and in involving children in decision-making about their SEN support.

The research also hoped to help inform future practices for EPs. The literature base currently suggests EPs and other professionals working with schools could help to engage in systemic work that helps to create a 'listening culture' within schools (Norwich & Kelly, 2006). Additionally, it is hoped that pupils with SEN can be better supported and included by EPs working in partnership with schools to implement appropriate support and involve CYP in this process by listening to children's views. By doing this, further information about what is

important to them will help to develop a more comprehensive evidence base that will help inform EP practice.

In the next chapter, the researcher describes the methodology used to address the research questions in the current study. It outlines the design, the sample, and method of recruitment. Additionally, a consideration of the ethical issues and how these have been addressed is given and finally, the author concludes with an outline of the methods of data analysis.

## **3 METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction to Methodology**

In this chapter, the researcher provides an outline of the methodology used to address the questions in the study. To begin with, the design including the participants and method of recruitment is discussed. This is followed by a consideration of the ethical issues and how these have been addressed. The chapter concludes with an outline of the methods of data analysis.

### **3.2 Design**

When a rich understanding of a participant's experience of particular conditions is sought, Willig (2008) suggests that qualitative methodology should be used. The current research involved gaining the views of a particular group of students (with LDs), and therefore the researcher decided a qualitative approach was appropriate to use in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the views of children with SSEN/EHCPs about the support they receive in school.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) propose that qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world, i.e., the research aims to collect naturalistic data (the voice of the child) and attempt to interpret it in terms of the meanings it brings people. By adopting this methodology, the researcher aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the child's view of his/her world rather than the adult's.

#### **3.2.1 Sampling method**

The current research involved children with SSEN/EHCPs for LDs attending a mainstream school. Because the researcher was interested in the views and experiences of this particular group of children, a purposive sampling methodology was used, as explored below. The author searched the LA's SSEN database for children for whom the primary SEN was listed as Moderate LDs (MLD) and attend a mainstream primary school. Based on assessment information, a panel defines the main disability at the time of statutory

assessment. The system also included general LDs (GLD) as an additional area of need at which to categorise pupil's primary need in. After reading the SSEN/EHCPs of pupil's with GLD, the researcher identified some pupils whose needs were similar to those of the pupils with MLD and therefore these pupils were also selected. Out of this group of children identified, four attended a mainstream primary school with their primary SEN listed as MLD, and eight attended a mainstream primary school with their primary SEN listed as GLD. After further exclusion criteria was applied (see below in section 3.2.2), and parental consent received, the total sample in the current research consisted of six children (see Table 3.1).

**Table 3.1: Demographic information about participants**

Gender	3 boys, 3 girls
Age (in years)	Between 9-11 years old
School year	Between 4-6
Primary disability as identified on SSEN/EHCP	GLD and MLD
Other descriptive features	Down syndrome, Global Developmental Delay  'Cognitive developmental delay'  'Moderate LDs'  Epilepsy, Tuberous Sclerosis complex, Poor motor control and coordination with 'Associated LDs'  'Needs in the area of learning progress and general development'

### **3.2.2 Participants**

The researcher applied a number of exclusion criteria when selecting potential participants for this study. As the views of younger children are not represented in the literature, pupils in Year 4, 5 and 6 were recruited for the purpose of this research. Additionally, the researcher was interested in children with the most complex needs in mainstream education, i.e., those who held a SSEN/EHCP and therefore children without a SSEN/EHCP were excluded. Another exclusion criterion the researcher applied was the type of disability. Only children whose primary need fell within the category of either MLD or GLD were considered. This was with the aim to create a more homogenous group of participants in order to understand and describe a particular group in more depth.

## **3.3 Method**

### **3.3.1 Semi-structured interviews**

Interviewing allows the researcher to look at individual perceptions of processes within a social unit (i.e. school). Sapsford and Jupp (2006) state that interviews can be highly structured, semi-structured or flexible, with semi-structured interviews allowing for open talks. Given that the aim of the interviews was to explore the view of pupils with SSEN/EHCPs about the ways in which they are supported at school, it was felt that a semi-structured format would provide the most appropriate framework for collecting this data. The researcher used open-ended questions driven by an interview framework (see Appendix D), which involved the researcher listening and attending to what is being said and asking questions to stimulate more elaborate responses, in order to encourage comprehensive accounts of the children's experiences and views (Willig, 2008).

The aim of using open-ended questions driven by an interview agenda was to create a balance between maintaining control of the interview and so the research question is answered, and allowing the interviewee to include their opinions and thoughts about the topics, without being restricted to a structured format (Willig, 2008). Given the exploratory nature of this research, it was felt that a less structured interview would have made it challenging to compare

ideas across different interviewees, whilst a structured interview would be too restrictive. A semi-structured format was adopted with the aim to allow the interviewee the space to redefine the topic under investigation and thus to generate novel insights for the researcher (Willig, 2008). It also facilitates rapport and produces richer data (Smith & Osborn, 2015).

However, there are a number of disadvantages to the semi-structured interview. For instance, it reduces the control the investigator has over the situation, and it is time consuming both to conduct and analyse (Smith & Osborn, 2015). The researcher acknowledged that the data collected would only represent the views of a small number of children to ensure that enough time was given to gather and analyse the data effectively. However, given that the researcher interviewed key informants of the study, i.e., children with SSEN/EHCPs in mainstream schools who are the key recipients of SEN support, it was felt that the sample size was adequate. Additionally, each child attended a different school within the same borough, and while their experiences are likely to be similar in some ways, they are also likely to differ in other ways, helping to represent the variation within the target population.

It is not the intention of the researcher, nor would it be advisable, to attempt to generalise the findings about the support given to particular children to the population of those with SSEN/EHCPs. However, the findings would allow the researcher to generalise to theories concerning SEN support and education. In summary, semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to gain rich, invaluable data that might be overlooked through more quantitative approaches.

According to King, semi-structured interview agendas should focus on “specific situations and action sequences in the world of the interviewee rather than abstractions and opinions” (1994:15). With this in mind, the agenda focused on four key areas relating to each of the four sub-questions of the research question under study:

- Section 1 aimed to establish rapport, explore how the child feels about and experiences school and included questions relating to the child’s understanding of their SEN.

- Section 2 included questions relating to the child's views and experience of SEN provision.
- Section 3 explored what else children wanted in relation to SEN support in the future. Given that children with different levels of needs were interviewed, the researcher modified the interview schedules to enable each interviewee to share their views and participate as fully as possible (e.g., through use of simpler, fewer questions, and visuals); however, the same topics were explored and finally,
- Section 4 included questions relating to pupil participation.

All interviews were audio-recorded to ensure that data remained meaningful and a high level of accuracy was maintained. The recordings were transcribed in full by a professional transcriber, and checked by the researcher for accuracy.

## **3.4 Procedures**

### **3.4.1 Research Timeline**

The overall study spanned an 18-month period from March 2016 to April 2017. After gaining ethical approval, letters were sent to potential participants in May 2016 and the data collection (semi-structured interviews) spanned a two-month period from June 2016 to July 2016. Qualitative analysis was undertaken in late 2016. Feedback of the findings of the study was given to schools and parents of participants in early 2017.

### **3.4.2 Interview Procedure**

After criteria defined above were applied, 10 potential participants were identified. Information letters and consent forms were sent to the parents of potential participants (See Appendix E), also including a child-friendly invitation letter for children (see Appendix F). Six parents replied and gave their consent for their child to participate. The head teacher's consent was then sought (see Appendix G) for permission to carry out the research at the pupil's school, and an initial visit was arranged through a phone conversation with the school's SENCO to meet the child. The reason for meeting the child on a separate

occasion prior to interviewing was two-fold: to have the opportunity to informally discuss the research and answer any questions the child might have with regards to the research; as well as an attempt to make the child feel more comfortable and prepared during the interview having met the researcher once before. Written informed consent was gained from each participant on the second visit before the interview commenced (see Appendix H). Once the interview was finished, each participant was given a certificate to thank them for their participation (see Appendix K).

### **3.4.3 Pictorial cues**

The researcher drew on the work of Stash (2012) who developed 12 flash cards to aid the participation of children with SEN in mainstream schools in research interviews, which was originally based on O’Kane’s (2006) work with Looked After Children. Stash (2012) designed 12 pictorial cards that represented SEN support to aid the discussions between the researcher and the participants. These cards were adapted for the current research (see Appendix I). Each card had a picture representing the caption and a short statement. The pictures represented different types of support that the children were likely to have encountered including support relating to learning, interactions with others, and environmental modifications. These were printed in colour and laminated to keep the interest of the children. As with Stash’s research, the number of cards was limited to 12 as it was felt that more than 12 cards could be too challenging for children with MLD/GLD.

In the first few interviews, the cards were laid out and the interviewer read out each card, before asking participants to choose however many they wish to in order to answer the question. The interviewer noticed that the children found this decision too difficult, perhaps due to having too many choices to choose from at one time. After the first few interviews, the way in which the children were asked to participate in this part of the interview changed as a result: children were shown one card at a time and asked to either place it on a smiley face with a statement reading ‘This helps me and matters to me’ or a sad face reading ‘This does not help me’. There were no restrictions placed on the child in relation to the number of cards that they could place on each category. Once

the cards were placed on the faces, the researcher and the participant looked at the cards on each face and the child was asked to pick which one helped them the most and the least from the cards placed in each of the two categories.

Other visuals were also designed and used during other sections of the interviews including pictures of different lessons, a school, children, and adults, and pictures of cartoon faces representing opposites such as 'easy' and 'difficult' or 'happy' and 'sad'. These were used to aid communication between the researcher and child, and increase the child's level of participation. The visuals were used more often with some children than others depending on the child's level of need. For the more able of the participants, the visuals were available on the table if and when they chose to use them whereas for other children who had more difficulty communicating their ideas the visuals were used more often to support this.

#### **3.4.4 Drawing**

PCP (Kelly, 1955) suggests that we all behave in a way that makes sense to us across different contexts as a result of our own view of the world. It is suggested that PCP can be usefully applied as an approach to understanding the importance of listening to children (Williams & Hanke, 2007); additionally, if educational provision is specifically designed to account for the way in which pupils view the world and includes consideration of the elements most important to them, it is more likely that pupils will fully engage with the learning opportunities presented (Williams & Hanke, 2007).

According to Norwich et al (2006), a range of methods are used to elicit the voices of CYP in education such as listening to children talk informally, talking about specific topics, using open questions, observations, recording their views in writing through an adult acting as a scribe, and by drawing. Other methods include using picture prompts, the use of computer programs, and 'child friendly' questionnaires. Many of these methods, particularly with talking methods such as interviews or questionnaires, rely upon adult interpretation of what is relevant about a child's responses in a particular conversation or in using a certain tool, rather than being a vehicle through which a pupil may communicate their

construing in a way that is meaningful for them (Williams & Hanke, 2007).

Drawing can be used as a vehicle for pupils to generate constructs or elements that are meaningful for them rather than adults donating the constructs or elements that are deemed meaningful for the pupils to consider.

The current research aimed to use a mixture of methods to complement one another, including pictorial cues, semi-structured interviews, and drawing.

Drawing was selected as a method for eliciting pupil views because it is thought to be a tool that is practical and can make a genuine attempt to gain a true picture of pupils' views without pre-determining what these might be.

Williams and Hanke (2007) adapted the 'Drawing the Ideal Self' technique (Moran, 2001), based on PCP (Kelly, 1955) to seek the views of 15 mainstream pupils with ASD on what they felt were the most important features of school provision. The children were asked to draw the 'kind of school they would like' and the 'kind of school you would not like' and facilitated by the scribe, explored different aspects of these drawings with conversation. The children's experience of current provision and desires for the future, and their views of what is 'ideal' provision for them were sought. It was decided that due to the effectiveness of the 'Drawing the Ideal School' technique with children with ASD at mainstream schools, it could also be usefully applied when seeking the views of children with LDs at mainstream schools.

In order to gain the views of the children in the current study, an adapted version of the 'Drawing the Ideal' technique was used (see Appendix L). Instead of drawing two contrasting pictures of their 'ideal' and 'non-ideal' school, pupils were asked to draw their current school, as a tool for further exploration of current SEN support and their views of it. They were then asked if there was anything else they would like at school that they weren't already getting, and to add these ideas in picture form to the drawing in a different colour. This method was adapted to focus specifically on the children's views of SEN support. It was important for the researcher to place an emphasis on listening to the participant while they drew, instead of trying to analyse their drawings, as it is proposed that the children's narratives and interpretations of their drawings can give a

better picture than the adults' interpretations of the drawings (Punch, 2002; Clark, 2005; Veale, 2005).

### **3.4.5 Interviewing Children**

As the increasing interest in listening to the views of children and viewing children as active participants in research mounts, it is important to consider the children themselves as research subjects (Kyronlampi-Kylmanen & Maatta, 2011). However, in studies focusing on the lives and views of children, researchers can face a number of critical issues and challenges.

#### **3.4.5.1 *Addressing the power imbalance***

One challenge to overcome for researchers when working with children is the imbalance of power and status. Einarsdóttir (2007) highlighted that children are potentially more vulnerable to unequal power relationships with the adult researcher than other groups. In this study, the differences between the adults and the children's status are likely to be heightened given the fact that the participants had LDs, including communication difficulties. Therefore, the researcher felt that traditional interviewing formats were not appropriate for the participants.

To overcome the power imbalances, the researcher used child-friendly methods and techniques which built on children's competencies such as drawing, use of pictorial cues and talking informally with them. In the initial meeting with the child, the researcher and participants played games and spent time getting to know one another. On meeting the child twice, it was hoped that a rapport between the researcher and participant would develop. As a result, it may be more likely that the child feels more comfortable to talk openly about their views and experiences when interviewed, going some way to equalise the imbalance of power and status between interviewer and interviewee.

#### **3.4.5.2 *The interviewer's agenda***

In a bid to collect the necessary information that the researcher sets out to gather, led by the research questions, 'adult-centrality' may cloud some

researchers thinking (Kyronlampi-Kylmanen & Maatta, 2011). In other words, the researcher no longer becomes 'child-centred' but 'adult-centred'. This can lead a researcher to ignore the importance and value of placing the child at the centre of the research as a fully participating partner. For example, an enthusiastic researcher may forget to listen for a child's request to end the interview early (Kyronlampi-Kylmanen & Maatta, 2011). In order to address this issue, the researcher ensured that the participants took breaks during the research if and when the child felt it necessary.

### **3.5 Ethical Consideration**

The research study was carried out in accordance with the British Psychology Society (BPS) "Ethics and Code of Conduct" which sets out the principles of 'Respect', 'Competence', 'Responsibility', and 'Integrity' (BPS, 2009). For instance, the principle of respect was adhered to throughout the study through the acceptance of the views of all participants as valid and treating all involved with respect. This approach was reinforced by transparency in the setting up and implementation of the study, by commitments to confidentiality and security of information and by explicit allowance for withdrawal from the study.

The "Principles for Conducting Research with Human Participants" guidelines for Minimum Standards of Ethical Approval in Psychological Research (BPS, 2004) was also adhered to. In addition, the current research aims to move beyond these ethical principles, to empowering marginalised children with LDs by gaining the child's voice and taking their views seriously. Additionally, an application for ethical consideration was submitted and subsequently accepted to the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) at the University of East London who commissioned the research (see Appendix A).

#### **3.5.1 Gaining informed consent**

Parental consent was first gained from the parents of potential participants. An information sheet (see Appendix F) for children that explained the research in a 'child-friendly' language was also attached to the parental consent form, and allowed the child to register their interest in participating by signing their name.

Following this, consent from the school was sought in order to carry out the research at the school, and to reinforce the transparency in the setting up and implementation of the study to school staff members.

At the first meeting with the child, interest to participate was gained again, this time verbally, after further explanation of the purpose of the research and what was expected of them. Written informed consent was gained from each participant on the second visit before the interview commenced (see Appendix H). The researcher provided the child with a written consent form and explained it verbally. The child was asked to tick the 'yes' box if they consented or 'no' box if they didn't and signed their name. It was explained to the participants about their right to leave and to not participate. All six participants consented to participate in the study.

### **3.5.2 Confidentiality**

The researcher considered confidentiality carefully throughout each stage of the study. At the earliest possible stage, the data was anonymised and it was made clear to all parents and children that the names of individuals would remain unidentifiable. The researcher gave each child a consistent pseudonym (e.g., Child A, B). The interviews were recorded using a digital recorder, and the recordings and transcripts were password protected and stored on an encrypted memory stick.

## **3.6 Approach to data analysis**

Inductive thematic analysis was used to analyse the interview data (see appendix J) which has been described as a 'foundational method for qualitative analysis' (Braun & Clarke, 2006:78). Using an inductive approach allowed the development of themes to emerge from the interview data while taking into account the contextual aspects that were pertinent to the study. Thematic analysis was chosen to analyse the current data for a number of reasons. Firstly, for its independence of theory and epistemology constraints, as thematic analysis can be thought of as a method in itself, that can be guided by different theoretical frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is used to address most types

of research questions and to analyse most types of qualitative data including interviews (Hayfield & Clarke, 2012). The current research fits well with this method because the research does not stem from one particular theory, but is guided by several theoretical frameworks (namely PCP and Determination Theory).

Secondly, it is also compatible with a constructivist perspective, again fitting well the current research. According to Braun and Clarke, this is because it 'examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society' (Braun & Clarke, 2006:9). In other words, it adopts the perspective that meaning and experience are socially produced and reproduced, rather than inherent within individuals (Burr, 1995).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is another qualitative approach to data analysis, which is most commonly recommended for exploring how people experience a phenomenon (Willig, 2008). In other words, it is concerned with an individual's personal perception or account of an object or event. As the subject matter under investigation in the current research (children experiences of school and of having a learning difficulty, their views and experiences of additional support and participating in the planning of this) does not reflect a particular 'phenomenon' or 'event' and for this reason, it was felt that Thematic Analysis was the most appropriate method for qualitative data analysis.

The researcher drew on Braun and Clarke's (2006) process of thematic analysis to analyse the data. In-line with Braun and Clarke (2006), six phases to coding and theme development were followed:

1. *Familiarising yourself with the data*: each interview was played and then transcribed to produce verbatim transcripts. The researcher read and re-read the transcripts to become familiar with it.
2. *Generating initial codes*: initial codes were given to sections of text to represent interesting features of the data for each individual transcript. The transcripts were read again with a specific focus on identifying further

examples of the emerging codes. The codes were then reviewed as a whole and some were discarded, rearranged, or amalgamated.

3. *Searching for themes*: emerging codes were collated into potential sub-themes and themes, by gathering all data relevant to each potential theme. To capture the range of experiences and thoughts, codes that were only contained in one or two interviews were still included.
4. *Reviewing themes*: potential sub-themes and themes were reviewed and linked to the research question posed. Different ways of organising the sub-themes and themes were scrutinized before the final sub-themes and themes were consolidated. A thematic map was generated.
5. *Defining and naming themes*: individual potential sub-themes and themes were refined, which involved naming and re-naming themes. The main themes linked directly to the research question posed and the sub-themes encompassed a smaller cluster of codes within a main theme. Also, the data set as whole was considered to ensure that there was some level of coherency across the themes. This allowed the researcher to consider the overall story told and ensure that it reflected what was said in the interviews. The researcher utilised a peer debriefing approach to assist with validity, and a small number of comments led to minor changes in the naming and arrangement of the codes and sub-themes.
6. *Writing the report*: finally, the researcher selected rich, compelling extract examples to include in the current research report. These extracts were further analysed, linked back to the research question and literature, and included in the report.

### **3.7 Summary**

This chapter has outlined the design of the research study which included a description of the participants and of how they were selected. The methodology used to answer the research question was also discussed. Additionally, data gathering procedures adopted, alongside timeline, and ethical considerations were considered. The chapter concluded with an overview of the method adopted to analyse the data. The following chapter provides readers with the findings from the semi-structured interviews.

## **4 FINDINGS**

### **4.1 Introduction to Findings**

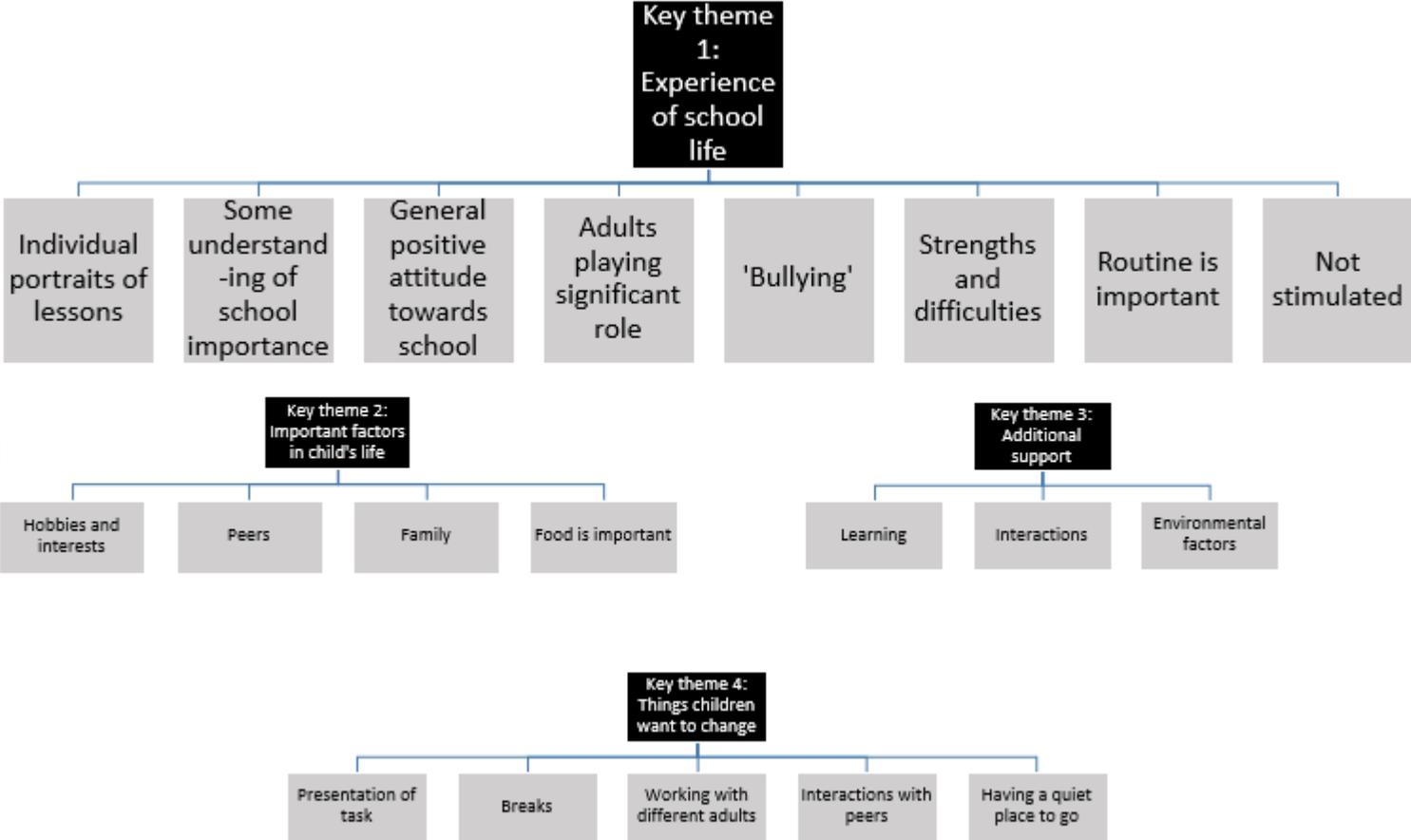
This chapter highlights the key findings of the semi-structured interviews. Thematic Analysis was used to analyse the data. The outcome of the analysis is discussed with reference to four key themes. Implications of the outcomes of this analysis in relation to the research question are discussed in Chapter Five.

### **4.2 Overview of the data**

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with six children. The Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) that followed the data collection identified 4 key themes and 20 subthemes. The key themes, namely Experience of school life, Important factors in child's life, Additional support, and Things children want to change are discussed below. In the introduction to each key theme, reference to which part of the Research Question each key theme answers is made.

An overview of the key themes and sub-themes developed from the interviews is provided in Figure 1. In this figure, the black squares represent the key themes and the grey squares represent the subthemes.

Figure 4.1: Summary of key themes & sub-themes from interviews



The first theme that emerged from the data was 'Experience of school life' which comprised of eight sub-themes: Individual portraits of lessons; Some understanding of school importance; General positive attitude towards school; Adults playing significant role; 'Bullying'; Strengths and difficulties; Routine is important; and Not stimulated. This theme related to different experiences children had of school.

The second theme was 'Important factors in child's life'. This theme consisted of four sub-themes: Hobbies and Interests; Peers; Family; and Food is important. As suggested by the sub-themes, the focus of this theme was related to the things that children spoke about that appeared important to them in general.

'Additional support' was the third theme that emerged from the data. This theme consisted of three sub-themes: Learning; Interactions; and Environmental factors. These sub-themes related to the different types of school-based support the children received, which were discussed during the interviews. The comments made within this theme highlighted the complex nature of managing the needs of a child with a SSEN/EHCP from several different positions including from a whole class level to an individual child level.

The fourth theme was 'Things children want to change'. This theme was comprised of five sub-themes: Presentation of task; Working with different adults; Interactions with peers; Having a quiet place to go; and Breaks. The focus of this theme related to the elements of school they would like to change in general as well as things they would change about the additional support they receive.

### **4.3 Key theme 1: Experience of school life**

*"...Oh no...they are listening but um they are listening...the boys are not...they look and stare" (Child B, line 80)*

In answering the first part of the research question – What are the views and experiences of children with a SSEN/EHCP for a LD, of:

- their LD?

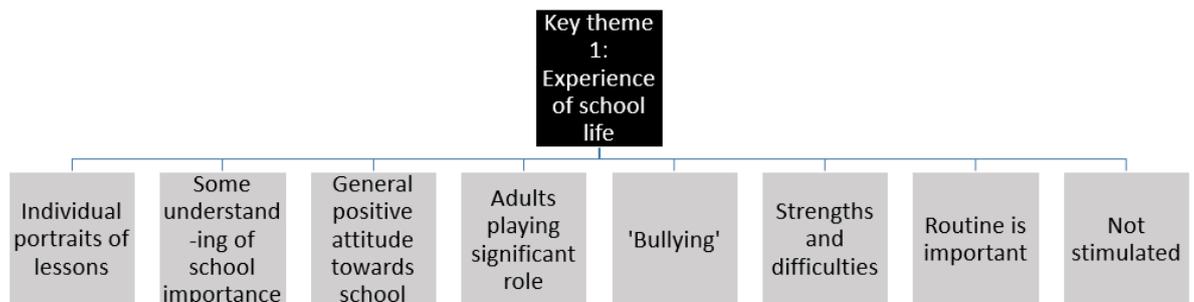
The researcher focused on one main area: how the children felt about and experienced school in relation to having LDs. The first key theme: Experience of school life is the most comprehensive theme, and it naturally emerged via the information gathered through discussion with the children about what school was like for them, what they enjoyed about school, and what they found easy or difficult. Questions were also asked to explore their understanding of their LD and if their difficulty had impacted on their lives in any way. Additionally, their experience of school was explored through drawing a picture of what school was like for them. The findings discussed in sections 4.3.1 to 4.3.7 describe each of the sub-themes that established this key theme.

The last section 4.3.8 discusses the sub-theme: Adults playing a significant role. This sub-theme discusses the important role adults play in the daily lives of children at school in general. It also answers the third part of the research question – What are the views and experiences of children with a SSEN/EHCP for a LD, of:

- participating in the planning for their additional support?

Figure 4.2 below illustrates Key theme 1 and the sub-themes that it encompassed.

**Figure 4.2: Key theme 1: Experience of school life**



### 4.3.1 Individual portraits of lessons

*“...make a ‘brumm, brumm’ I can make lots of...I make lots of racket (drumming sound made on table)” (Child D, lines 78-80)*

All six children were able to show some awareness of ‘lessons’ at school, and most children described various activities that took place during a typical school day. The subjects indicated by children included ‘core’ subjects (English, maths, and science), as well as ‘foundation’ subjects (art, PE, RE, and music). Each child expressed whether they found the subjects ‘easy’, ‘Okay’ or ‘hard’ and it became apparent that the children’s experience of and preference for each subject were unique to the child.

Interestingly, the only subjects identified as challenging were two of the core subjects: English and maths. Three children found maths difficult. English was described by one child as ‘a bit hard’, and ‘Okay’ by another, with particular aspects of English noted to be difficult by two children. One child mentioned that using columns when writing was difficult, and another child indicated that writing as much as two pages was a challenge:

Child: Yes...but we done this writing earlier though and we finished it but it was like...it was huge. I am not talking about one page...It was like about that big and only when I was finished all I needed to do is fit in the last...I had to use two pages

(Child C, line 177)

He also explained that when he is asked to use a pen to help him edit, rub out, and re-read his writing, he found this ‘annoying’, boring and tiring.

Children held positive views of subjects. Maths was described by two children as being easy, and one child explained that he finds English easy, and that he does not mind if he is required to write large amounts. This child also held a positive view of handwriting. One child thought science was easy, and another referred to art and PE as ‘Okay’ but enjoyed RE. Several children referred to art as being easy and one child explained that although he finds drawing difficult, he finds painting easy. PE was referred to as being easy by one child.

One child repeatedly referred to RE, RE books, and music throughout the interview. Whilst this child seemed to have difficulty evaluating her experience of school, it was clear that both RE and music were of particular interest and importance to her. She also added these particular interests to her drawing of what school was like for her.

Music appeared to be particularly important for four out of the six children for several reasons. Firstly, music appeared to be used in learning, in the form of individual music lessons - for example one child explained that he found piano lessons easy and was keen to demonstrate what he has learnt during the interview, as well as group sessions, such as in 'music therapy'. One child referred to playing musical instruments at school, indicating that adults use music and practical learning to support her learning:

Researcher: Okay. You told me that there is Mr Adams, Mrs Smith and Mr Richards who help you in class with your learning

Child: With drums

Researcher: They help you with drums. What else to they help you with?

Child: With cones... For you to bang with the canes

(Child A, lines 211-216)

Secondly, music was of interest to children, and they enjoyed it. This was reflected in the passionate way children talked about it. For example, when asked about what he thought about his music therapy sessions, one child commented that he gets to 'make a 'brumm, brumm' I can make lots of...I make lots of racket (*drumming sound made on table*)' (Child D, lines 78-80).

Other forms of practical learning were also favoured, for example, children made spontaneous references to cooking cakes, watching a school dance performance, and playing with play dough. Children also had individual preferences for the 'type' of work or activity they engage with at school. For example, one child appeared to prefer simple writing activities such as writing peer feedback over longer pieces of writing, which were referred to as 'boring' and 'tiring'. Giving peer feedback was described as being easy:

Child: sometimes we just mark in other people's books to put stars in and write what they want...not write what they wrote but the comment um what they wrote

Researcher: And how do you find that?

Child: Um...really easy. You have to do... just get like a note now on it and just write a star um...two stars and um whatever your signature is and then you write about what they done

(Child C, lines 81-85)

This child also preferred short project work because longer pieces of project work are 'boring' and he struggles to remember what he is doing and why (Child C, line 163-166).

Overall, the findings suggest that the children had specific views about school and they were able to express these views. Also, that they had preferences for different subjects and types of work at school which were unique to the child.

### **4.3.2 General positive attitude towards school**

*"... [school is] fun" (Child E, line 99)*

Five children spoke positively about school in general. For example, one child said they found learning at school 'Okay' (Child A, lines 134-137), and another child said that 'working' was what made school 'good' (Child B, lines 54-59). School was described as 'fun' and 'great' by one child (Child E, lines 98-101) and another child said she felt 'happy' at school (Child F, line 14). Another child expressed that he liked doing 'work' at school, although he did not always feel this way. This might suggest that overall, the children feel positively about school and that they gain some enjoyment out of the school work they complete.

### **4.3.3 Not stimulated**

*"...We have to um...it was really good at the first point but then it felt a bit boring...then I don't even know why I was doing it...I forgot..." (Child C, 165)*

Some comments suggest that there are times during the school day when children are less engaged. For a specific child, the issue seemed to occur during both break-times and lessons. For example, when describing what break-times were like for him, he explained that sometimes he does not do anything: ‘... sometimes I just walk around and sometimes I am just...not doing nothing...just sit down’ (Child C, line 43).

Nevertheless, he prefers to spend time outside then inside during break-times, commenting that it is ‘boring’ when it is raining and consequently he must spend break-time indoors (Child C, line 47). When describing what lessons are for like for him, the child appeared to express boredom:

Researcher: ...is it good in class...is it bad, is it okay?

Child: Sometimes I just get pulled out of class and sometimes we just do work on um a project...and something about sugar, but um...we are still doing it today...but I think my friends did it... I don’t know

(Child C, lines 48-49)

Additionally, the child notes that he sometimes gets pulled out of class, which could explain why he was not sure what the project was about and that his friends may have already finished it. His preference for shorter project work to avoid the possibility of boredom and forgetting what it is he is doing is reflected in the extract below:

Child: We have to um...it was really good at the first point but then it felt a bit boring...then I don’t even know why I was doing it...I forgot. Then like I remembered and I just kept on carrying on until it was um nearly at the end of the day...like I finished it in one day.

(Child C, line 163-166)

#### **4.3.4 Some understanding of school importance**

*“...I will write what I have to write because this is working properly...and that’s how to do it” (Child B, lines 72-73)*

Four of the children showed some understanding of the importance of school. The extent of this understanding varied from child to child, and the elements of school that the children considered as being important also varied.

An application of the skills one child has acquired at school was eagerly and spontaneously presented on several occasions throughout the interview. This usually involved the child taking care to write and spell her name correctly, writing numbers, drawing shapes, and using grammar, as exemplified below:

Researcher: I wonder what else you could add to your classroom? ...  
What is school like for you? What are you drawing now?

Child: A circle...I am doing a circle

Researcher: And now?

Child: Do 5

Researcher: Ah...good. Okay, ready for the next question?

Child: Okay. This is 7. Da Da!

(Child A, lines 178-183)

All children took time and effort to write their names carefully and correctly, and use neat handwriting, suggesting there are elements of school that children place great importance on. Two children indicated that they understood the importance of learning was to be 'right'. When the researcher asked one child why he thought he was receiving help from a learning support assistant, he said: 'so I can get my learning more...correct' (Child D, lines 479-483). A sense of understanding of school rules and expectations was also reflected in these children's comments. For example, another child said:

Researcher: ...What do you like about literacy lessons?

Child: Writing...and of course...I will write what I have to write because this is working properly...and that's how to do it.

(Child B, lines 72-73)

The same child showed a good understanding of how to do things 'properly' when describing school assemblies, and explaining that: 'to go school assembly...I look at people and I listen to them...that's how to do it...and you need to listen...you need to focus' (Child B, lines 114-119).

The pupil also commented, 'I am happy because I know what I am doing' (Child B, lines 178-180), highlighting not only the understanding that this child has of the school rules and expectations placed upon him, but also the importance he attaches to following these rules. Several of the children showed a good knowledge and understanding of the reward system that operates at their school, for example, one child explained that he received 'two house points' for 'working so hard' (Child D, lines 511-515). Another child associated receiving rewards with being happy at school; when asked, what made him happy at school, the pupil said:

Child: You need to behave don't you to be happy?

Researcher: Tell me more about that.

Child: If you are happy then what will you do? You will do piano lesson X

(Child B, lines 175-177)

For one child, he viewed not being able to do the work at school particularly negatively. The extract below could suggest that this child has little understanding of the true importance of school, and instead attaches great importance to being able to 'do work' or 'not do work' at school:

Researcher: Okay. So what do you think its like having some difficulties with learning? Do you think its good or a bad thing?

Child: Bad

Researcher: Why is that?

Child: It...umm... is a good thing actually

Researcher: It's a good thing. Why is that?

Child: But not doing your work is a bad thing

(Child E, lines 86-92)

The themes in relation to what children thought was important about school typically involved: following school rules, getting things 'right' and 'doing your work'. This suggests that the children showed some understanding of the importance of school, but perhaps lacked an authentic understanding of its

importance; which could be a function of their LD, or could highlight the factors that *schools* emphasise to pupils as being important about school.

### **4.3.5 Routine is important**

*“... You need to get a learning time, you could um playtime, do um a Play-Doh...we need to play with all objects...” (Child A, line 129)*

The routine of the day seemed important to several of the children. They had good knowledge and understanding of routines at school, for example, when the researcher in response to their comment queried why the child sometimes did PE and sometimes did not do PE, they said:

Child: But normally its either on a Wednesday or on a Monday

Researcher: And why do you not sometimes do it?

Child: Um when we ask the teacher and she says no...but sometimes she says yes

(Child C, lines 71-73)

Routine appeared particularly important to one child, who often answered questions by describing routines of the day, which could indicate that knowledge of school routines is one way that helps her to learn and to participate in daily life at school. The same child indicated that routines were also important to her once she returned home from school:

Child: Um yes...so we need to do X and to get books and get back, go home and watch cartoons and go to sleep then I go to my room, then you can watch cartoons and X

(Child A, line 68)

### **4.3.6 Strengths and difficulties**

*“...I like try and get all the stuff right getting done at work” (Child D, line 24)*

The skills children showed during the interviews ranged in nature and ability. For example, one child who had difficulty accessing the verbal conversation was able to demonstrate the application of learning skills once the interview

commenced by writing the letters in her name and drawing animals. Several children were able to use good verbal communication skills to demonstrate a good understanding and awareness of their individual profile of strengths and difficulties, while also giving examples of these.

The initial part of the interviews explored what the children knew about the term 'LD', and what their knowledge and awareness of their own difficulties with learning were. None of the pupils had heard of the term before. Once the concept was explained to them, two children thought they did have a 'LD'. One of these pupils showed an awareness of having a LD by commenting that the learning support assistants that support her 'have only teaching learning people' (Child A, line 199).

However, despite the children not being aware of the 'label' placed upon them, almost all children identified difficulties they experienced in a range of areas, as well as some strengths. What was surprising was how open and honest the children were about talking about the difficulties they experienced at school and how these difficulties made them feel.

One child thought that a LD could be to do with needing help: 'I think when you need help...X' (Child E, line 13). When another child was asked if he thought he had any difficulties with learning once the term was explained to him, he answered; 'I like try and get all the stuff right getting done at work' (Child D, line 24). This comment suggests that the pupil was keen to do well at school. He also shared that he has always had difficulties with math and English, and that he found out he had these difficulties by himself.

One pupil who said he had not heard of the term 'LD' responded with 'I don't know' when asked what he thought it might be (Child C, lines 36-38). However, this pupil showed a very good knowledge and awareness of his own strengths and difficulties. For example, he could identify which elements of PE he was good at, and what elements he was not so good at:

Researcher: And you find English a bit harder. What do you think about PE?

Child: Well I have to do um... PE but its really hard. I have to do cricket and um... I am good at um bowling; I am good at hitting but not go out the front um...getting people out properly. Sometimes I get them out, sometimes I don't

(Child C, lines 76-77)

Most children identified specific aspects of learning that they found difficult. For example, the same pupil talked frankly about his difficulty with attending and listening; he explained that he found school work much harder when he struggled to concentrate. He also said that he was able to concentrate when he really had to. In the extract below, the child was asked if he enjoyed making models during project work:

Researcher: And do you like making things like that?

Child: Um sometimes...sometimes I don't...sometimes I don't really want to

Researcher: Why not?

Child: Because um sometimes we um...we just...I just...sometimes when I am not like focusing I don't like...work properly...I just don't feel like it sometimes

Researcher: Oh, okay. So you said sometimes when you are not focusing and you don't feel like it. So work is hard when you are not focusing?

Child: Um its harder when I don't focus but when I have to focus I like concentrate

(Child C, lines 172-175)

This pupil also identified a difficulty he had with writing- he explained that he found it difficult when the teacher's pace is too fast for him to write down what he is expected to. Another child commented that he found writing difficult, "When I try and write ...Yes, when...and I keep getting it wrong" (Child D, lines 26-28). He also appeared to have some difficulties with his fine motor skills; he told the researcher that when he tries to use a ruler in math lessons, he struggles to hold it in place and it always slips. He expressed frustration with this: 'Because every time I try and use the ruler and line it up it always get wrong' (Child D, line 46).

Several of the children associated negative feelings with the difficulties they experienced at school. For example, feelings of frustration and annoyance were apparent in children's reports of being seen differently to peers (for Child B), or in their experiences of friendships (or lack of interaction with peers in the classroom). One child said he feels annoyed and upset when he finds lessons difficult:

Researcher: So I wondered, what is it like having some difficulties with lessons? You told me you find some of your lessons difficult...what's it like to find it hard?

Child: It's not so easy then

Researcher: It's not so easy. Okay...what else? How do you feel about finding it difficult...how does it make you feel?

Child: So annoyed and upset

(Child D, lines 83-86).

The pupil also commented that when he first realised he was experiencing difficulties with English and Maths, it upset him: 'Well it just...it did upset me' (Child D, line 184). He expressed a great deal of frustration about not being able to get things 'right': 'Well, I hate getting it wrong' (Child D, lines 200).

Overall, some children identified some specific strengths in the area of learning, showing a good level of knowledge and awareness of their own abilities. One child expressed that he found focusing and listening 'easy' (Child B, line 144). Another child who found writing difficult, told the researcher that he found more simple writing tasks that involved writing peer feedback (commenting on what their peer had written) 'easy' (Child C, lines 77-81). Some specific subjects were also referred to as being 'easy' (see section 4.3.1). The view children had about difficulties and / or strengths was also expressed in their views about their wellbeing.

#### **4.3.7 Bullying**

*"...They always tease me" (Child D, line 10)*

Another theme emerging from the analysis was the experience of bullying at school, which was regular and greatly impacted on their day to day life at school and general well-being.

One child spontaneously commented on incidences of teasing on many occasions during the interview, despite there being no questions about this in the interview schedule. For example, when the pupil was asked at the beginning of the interview if he was happy to stay and talk to the researcher, he responded: 'Well yep...if they don't tease me' (Child D, line 8). He also implied that this teasing happens often: 'They always tease me' (Child D, line 10). In fact, it happens 'Every Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday...and all the days' (Child D, line 514). Bullying seemed to be mostly verbal in nature. The child explained, honestly and frankly, that he gets teased about being himself, and for example, told that his 'breath stinks' (Child D, lines 515-522). The pupil shared that the 'bullying' made him feel 'very angry' (Child D, line 512) and 'bullying' was the most difficult aspect of school for him. He was also able to recognise factors that affect his learning, and bullying was one factor that impacted negatively on his learning:

Researcher: Is there anything that doesn't help your learning...that you find not helpful?

Child: When I get bullied

(Child D, lines 443-445)

Another child commented that he finds it difficult when boys in his class are not listening, and instead 'stare at us', as referenced in the extract below. He expressed that he found this 'annoying':

Researcher: Oh okay. So tell me what you find....let me find my...pictures here look. What do you find hard at school?

Child: When nobody is listening

Researcher: Children or adults?

Child: Adults

Researcher: So the adults aren't listening?

Child: Oh no...they are listening but um they are listening...the boys are not...they look and stare X

Researcher: Oh okay. So sometimes the other children in the class...did you say boys aren't listening?

Child: No, they are just looking at us

Researcher: So ...how does that make you feel when they are not listening, and are just looking at you?

Child: They are annoying

(Child B, lines 72-83).

In both cases, it seemed that 'bullying' incidences could be related to their LDs. For Child D, it appeared that his LD made him potentially more vulnerable and therefore likely target of verbal bullying. For Child B, who got stared at by his peers (along with possibly other peers who may have similar additional needs), appeared to highlight an awareness of 'difference' between himself and his peers.

#### **4.3.8 Adults playing significant role**

*"...Miss Ball is the one who always helps me..." (Child D, line 271)*

All of the children showed some knowledge and awareness of the various adults who were involved with their learning, and the different roles that they had at school. When asked whether he had art lessons, one pupil provided detailed information about the adult: 'He is downstairs in Cheshire class' (Child B, lines 77). Another child explained that there were two teaching assistants that she could name in her class and a teacher, who all helped her with her learning. Another pupil commented that there was an adult *outside* of the classroom who was important to him who helped him at school, however he could not remember her name or what exactly she supported him with. It was apparent that she was a significant adult in his life at school through his insistence on drawing her in his picture of his classroom, despite the adult not being present there: 'She is not in my class...but I am still drawing her' (Child D, line 257).

Several of the children expressed a positive attitude towards the adults who supported them at school. One pupil affectionately referred to a specific LSA as 'good', 'soft' and 'kind' (Child E, line 169; 177; 181). Another pupil said that he liked his art teacher, and one of the reasons for liking him was that he also taught PE lessons too. One child made a negative comment about his TA, stating that 'She can be quite bossy' (Child D, line 281).

Most children showed awareness that some adults in their school helped with individual learning. These adults were usually differentiated from teachers or general classroom TAs, e.g., 'They have only teaching learning people' (Child A, line 199) or the children indicated that the adult was assigned to support them on an individual basis, for example, 'Miss Ball is the one who always helps me and that's what I was telling you about' (Child D, line 271).

Adults played a significant role in supporting the children's learning mostly in core subjects such as maths and English. One pupil commented that he only received support from a LSA in the morning, and did not receive additional adult support in the afternoon. This could be because core subjects are usually taught in the mornings in schools in England and tend to be the lessons that children with SEN receive individual adult support in. Several children explained that they received additional adult support to help them with school 'work', e.g., 'She helps me with my work' (Child B, line 278). More specifically, one child received adult support for 'Um like Maths, English um Science...kind of like that stuff' (Child C, line 260). Another pupil explained that the LSA helped him with 'maths and Literacy' (Child D, line 275). Another child said the LSA helped her with 'maths' (Child E, line 165). Interestingly, when asked how her LSA helped her, this pupil commented that she supported her with play as well as learning: 'She plays with me'(Child E, 172-175).

Additionally, there was evidence that adults played an important role in practical learning for several of the children. In particular, adults were mentioned in relation to supporting children's learning through music, and often appeared to be actively involved in this type of learning, as in the example below:

Researcher: Okay. You told me that there is Mr Adams, Mrs Smith and Mr Richards who help you in class with your learning

Child: With drums

Researcher: They help you with drums. What else do they help you with?

Child: With cones

Researcher: Cones?

Child: Yes

Researcher: What are cones?

Child: For you to bang with the canes

(Child A, lines 209-216)

Only one pupil commented that the teacher also supported her learning, but it seemed apparent that the LSAs/TAs were her main source of adult support. Close adult support by a LSA/TA was apparent for most of the children, for example, one child commented when drawing a picture of what school was like for him, that the LSA who supports him would usually 'always' be sitting next to him:

Researcher: Okay. You told me that your teacher sometimes helps you

Child: No...sometimes...sometimes she does and...sometimes I help...um I have a helper...Um...Shelly

Researcher: Shelly. Can you draw her? Where will Shelly be in your classroom?

Child: She will be probably with me...might have Vicky or...oh no I can't even

Researcher: Vicky or Shelly...excellent. And how often does Shelly help you...all the time or sometimes?

Child: All the time

Researcher: All the time. So is she always next to you?

Child: Um...yes...yes she is always next to me

(Child C, lines 230-246)

The pupil commented later in the interview that 'Um no, I don't work with the teachers' (Child C, line 334). The lack of interaction with the teacher suggested

in the pupil's comments, coupled with the LSA 'always next to' him, indicates that the child may have far less interaction with the class teacher than he does with the LSA. Another pupil appeared to be reliant on adults for school activities, for example, the pupil explained that at break-times 'You need to run around' because 'that's what Mr O'Dochlan told me what to do' (Child B, lines 122-124).

A sense of reliance on adults for support with learning was also present for several of the other children. For one child, in particular, it seemed that close adult support may have indirectly caused the pupil to act as a passive receiver of school support and the strategies implemented to support his difficulties at school. This was reflected in the lack of agency the pupil took for his actions, for example, in the extract below the pupil is unclear about his preference for activities at break-times:

Child: Yes...um sometimes um I just like play...sometimes I like playing, sometimes I don't...and sometimes when X we have to go back up and do some more work and then when its night time we get even more

(Child C, line 107)

The child does not appear to have a meaningful understanding of what is happening to him at school. His preferences are unclear throughout the interview, and it seemed as if he was going through the motions of school routines and activities, without any real sense of purpose or independence.

The author explored areas related to children's SSEN/EHCP, including if they had seen it before, and if they had been involved in the planning/writing of it.

One child said adults did explain to him why he was receiving extra help, and commented that it was to help him with 'work' (Child B, line 346). Another child showed some knowledge and awareness of why he received additional help with reading, 'To help um...learn to help and write and read' (Child C, line 414) and commented that it was his teacher who had told him this. However, he did not appear to know why he received additional help from the LSA who supported him in class. Another child commented that no adults at school had explained to him why he was receiving additional support; instead he made his own assumption for the reason for support:

Researcher: Why do you think you have help from Miss Ball?

Child: So I can get my learning more...

Researcher: So you can get your learning...?

Child: Correct

(Child D, 574-577)

However, it was apparent that his older brother was a great source of information and support for him, and was the person to provide him with a reason for why he attended music therapy sessions: 'I said, "Why am I going to music therapy one?" and "[Brother] So you can make lots of noise"' (Child D, line 565).

Two children said they were not asked what type of support they find most helpful, despite receiving additional support. Nor had they seen their SSEN/EHCP before, or remembered being involved in making it. One of these pupils, who showed passivity in the way he received support at school throughout the interview, also commented that adults had not asked him about what he wanted in the future, but that he preferred not to be asked because he didn't know anyway: 'Um...no...I just...I don't know what I am going to do in the future so....' (Child C, line 426). The ambiguity in his comments about the future, coupled with not being consulted about his views and opinions, highlights the passive position he had adopted at school.

However, some children were more involved in the decision-making process. One child said he did get asked what type of help he wanted by his LSA, although it was unclear if this information was used to inform his SSEN/EHCP. Another child said 'Emma' had asked her what help she wanted at school (Child E, line 277), and said she had seen her SSEN/EHCP before but she was not able to comment on what it was about. Another child said she had been consulted about what support she wanted by her teacher and the SENCO. When asked if they did anything about this, the child said they helped her with maths. When showed her SSEN/EHCP, she commented that she had seen it before, and referred to needing it for a 'moving day' and 'a meeting', suggesting

that she may have moved schools and attended a meeting that involved discussion about her SSEN/EHCP:

Researcher: This is your Statement

Child: X

Researcher: Have you seen it before?

Child: Um, yes, I have got to get for my...for my moving day. While I was at school Mrs Smith did that...they do a meeting

Researcher: So you have looked at that at one of your meetings before?

Child: Yes, for meeting

Researcher: For meeting...and who was the meeting with?

Child: With Mrs Smith, with Miss Gleeson, Mrs Fen

(Child A, lines 372-379)

Several different adults appeared to be involved in these meetings where it was possible her SSEN/EHCP was discussed: 'With the tutors. You need to check in the meeting...lots of people X' (Child A, line 393).

#### **4.3.9 Summary**

Children had individual preferences for different lessons. Maths and English (particularly writing) lessons were noted to be the most challenging lessons amongst the children. Music tended to be the most popular lesson. Reports from children about school were generally positive, describing school as 'fun' and 'great'. Several children seemed to view school work positively. However, some lessons could be 'boring' and one child seemed to experience a lack of stimulation in many areas of school life. The pupils showed some understanding of the importance of school, but an authentic understanding seemed to be missing. These understandings ranged from placing great importance on following school rules and expectations, getting things 'right' and 'doing your work'.

Routines at both home and school seemed an important aspect of the day for several of the children, perhaps helping them to learn, feel prepared and

participate fully in school life. None of the children had heard of the term 'LD' before. The pupils were open and honest about the difficulties they experienced at school, and these were individual to the child. Some children could name strengths and skills they found easier. Difficulties included problems with writing, motor skills and attention and listening.

Two children reported experiences of bullying at school and it seemed that these experiences negatively impacted on their lives significantly. For example, feelings of 'difference', anger and annoyance were reported. The adults in the school played a significant role in the lives of the children in different ways including in practical learning such as music, individual learning, and as a sympathetic adult. The children spent more time being supported by LSAs than by the teacher. They showed mixed experiences of being involved with decision-making at the school, but generally findings showed that children were mostly left out of decision-making, did not recognise their SSEN/EHCP, and did not appear to have a clear idea of why they received additional support.

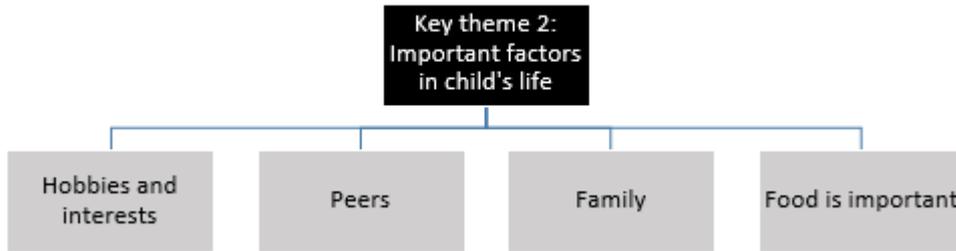
#### **4.4 Key theme 2: Important factors in child's life**

*"...I want to make a train super mat" (Child B, line 189)*

This theme was developed from four sub-themes and refers to examples from the children's responses about important factors in their lives. This theme did not relate specifically to the research question but emerged from the data as a result of taking an inductive approach to thematic analysis. It was included because it reflected what was important to the children from their perspective.

Figure 4.3 illustrates Key theme 2 and the sub-themes that it encompassed.

**Figure 4.3 - Key theme 2: Important factors in child's life**



#### **4.4.1 Hobbies and Interests**

*“...I can hit it hard and low and yes.... I can probably hit it all the way up into the big building” (Child C, line 127)*

Five of the children appeared to have strong interests and hobbies, involving interests in animals, trains, television programs and culturally related activities, sport, swimming and music. One child showed an interest in animals by choosing to draw pictures of different animals including an elephant once the interview commenced. Another child appeared to have involvement in culturally related activities such as the Queen's Birthday: 'Do you know um the England? Do you know when the Queen's birthday is? Its...Queen's birthday' (Child A, lines 383-387).

Another child appeared to have a special interest in trains, and regularly commented about trains and train maps throughout the interview. He was keen to draw a 'train super map' in the interview (Child B, line 189), and asked on several occasions if the researcher had brought a train map to give him. Another child showed interest in playing tennis and felt that he was good at the sport: 'I can hit it hard and low and yes.... I can probably hit it all the way up into the big building' (Child C, line 127). He commented that he does sometimes get to play tennis at school, and that he would like to play more basketball but he has not been able to because the basketball hoops were broken.

Another child expressed excitement about going swimming with his friends: 'After tomorrow...on Friday...Venessa and me and my friends X and Brody can goes...swimming!' (Child D, line 142). He also had an interest in the TV show 'Scooby Doo', and shared several phrases with the researcher he had learnt from the show, such as 'Hubba Hubba!' and 'Wumba Wumba!' (Child D, line 208; 212). He appeared to enjoy sharing a humorous moment with the researcher.

Music appeared to be particularly important for the majority of the children. In the extract below, a child was shown a picture depicting a music lesson and she was asked if she found these lessons easy or hard. The child began drumming her fingers on the table, and continued to imitate playing each of the different instruments she saw in the picture while we named together the instruments she was pretending to play. She followed this by saying 'your turn' after pretending to play the flute, implying that it was my turn to play the flute. This child had particular difficulty accessing the verbal discussion in the interview, yet was able to initiate and share the experience of a musical role-play and showed great enjoyment in doing so. This made the following extract an excellent example of how highly valued music was for the children in the current research:

Researcher: So music...playing instruments...do you find music easy or hard?

Child: No (sound of drumming noise on table)

Researcher: Drums...yes

Child: And guitar

Researcher: Guitar

Child: (sound of singing) (inaudible spoken words)

Researcher: Which one?

Child: (inaudible)

Researcher: Oh, keyboard

Child: Keyboard

Researcher: Keyboard...yes. So music...easy or hard? Does (Child E) find music easy or hard?

Child: (inaudible word...then singing)

Researcher: Flute (laughter)

Child: Your turn

Researcher: (singing) ...

(Child F, line 66-80)

#### **4.4.2 Peers**

*“...When I was sitting with Brody...I wanted to work with Brody but Miss Ball said, ‘No’” (Child D, line 341)*

Unsurprisingly, friendships were of great importance to the children. Five of the children named friends that they had at the school and for most of the children ‘best friends’ featured heavily in their accounts of school life. One of the children chose to draw his best friend as the first person in his classroom when drawing a picture of what school was like for him.

Sharing similar interests and enjoying similar games appeared to be an important basis for friendships. One pupil said he sometimes played on an iPad with his friend Cameron during break-times, and together they shared an interest in trains; the pupil commented that they ‘play trains... He even has a train map’ (Child B, line 134). When describing what he liked to do with friends, another child said that they sometimes like to ‘chat’ (Child C, line 115).

Although, this child also admitted that sometimes he does not feel like spending time with his friends: ‘I like doing...when I feel like it...when I feel like it I feel like playing with one of my friends but sometimes I feel like not playing with my friends’ (Child C, line 113). Another pupil enjoyed playing ‘IT’ with his ‘best friend Venessa’ (Child D, line 122), and a different child said she played games such as ‘Tic-Tac-Toe, give me a high give me a low...’ (Child A, line 115) with her friends. One pupil expressed that she felt ‘excited’ about break-times, and she enjoyed playing ‘hide and seek’ (Child E, line 57-59). Two of the children

added a drawing of the playground onto their picture of what school was like for them, implying that play and the social side of school life was important to them.

While friendships and play were viewed positively most of the time by most pupils, one child appeared to experience difficulties with friendships at break-times. When asked if she thought having difficulties with learning at school made break-time harder or not, the pupil responded: 'It not helps when x doesn't play with me' (Child E, line 61). She explained that her friend did not want to play with her or be her friend any longer: 'Yes, she wasn't playing with me. She never wants to be my friend any more' (Child E, line 65).

Children showed interest in their peers in different ways in interview. For example, one pupil explained that he had asked the teacher why his peers were in trouble: 'What did they do and what did they say?'. He seemed frustrated with the response he received from the teacher; he said that he got told to 'Shush' and that it was 'not any of your business' (Child D, line 289-293).

Another way that children appeared to show interest in their peers was through the animated way they talked about working with their peers in a learning environment, enjoying the social aspect of working with peers. A few children referred to incidents of working with peers, for example, during a written peer feedback experience or helping with RE books. One of these pupils had a mixed experience:

Researcher: Yes. Okay...and what do you think about geography?

Child: Um geography is okay. Sometimes I do it, sometimes I don't...but sometimes we just mark in other people's books to put stars in and write what they want...not write what they wrote but the comment um what they wrote

(Child C, line 80-81)

The pupil reported that he found writing peer feed-back easy, enjoyable, and helpful for his learning. However, his involvement with peer supported learning appeared to be limited to this activity, and it was not a significant aspect of his school life for him. For example, when the pupil was asked if he worked with peers at other times, and if they helped each other with their learning, he

reported 'Um no...no, because they don't help me they just um should be carrying on' (Child C, line 264). He commented that he did not think other children could help him with his learning.

Another pupil indicated that when he had sat with a friend previously, he was told that he was not allowed to work with him: 'When I was sitting with Brody...I wanted to work with Brody but Miss Ball said, 'No'' (Child D, line 341). This pupil felt that working with his friend would help him with his learning: 'Because Brody and me could work together' (Child D, line 345). He commented that peers do not help him, suggesting that he did not engage in peer supported learning.

One child added her friend to her drawing of what school was like for her as someone who could help her to feel happy at school, indicating that her friend played an important role in supporting her emotional wellbeing. Another pupil was shown a picture of an adult supporting a child, and a picture of three children working together. The pupil pointed at the picture of the adult supporting a child on a one-to-one basis and said 'these are bad' (Child F, line 97). She then pointed at the picture of the children working together unsupported and said 'these are good' (Child F, line 99). This could suggest that the pupil showed a desire to work with her peers, and enjoyed the social aspect of learning rather than the one-to-one support of an adult. It was not clear whether this was something that happened or not, however, an assumption could be made that due the child's complex difficulties, it may not occur.

#### **4.4.3 Family**

*"...Because Sean... I say, 'Sean can you check my temperature?'"(Child D, line 395)*

Three children talked about their family either spontaneously or when asked about who helps them with different aspects of their lives. One child reported an upcoming family activity she was excited about: 'Me and mummy is going to go to a wedding day' (Child A, line 103). Another child reported that his older brother checks he is Okay and helps to make him feel better: 'Because Sean...

I say, "Sean can you check my temperature?" (Child D, line 395). This pupil also added his brother to his drawing of how school was for him, as the person who checked he was feeling Okay.

Another pupil added both her brothers to her drawing as people who help her at school, and reported that her older brother helps her to feel better. She spontaneously commented 'He is fit and well' and 'He is...well...and fun' when referring to her older brother (Child E, lines 145; 273). Siblings in particular appeared to play a vital role in helping several of the pupils to feel happy and healthy.

#### **4.4.4 Food is important**

*"...These are sausages ...Because they're good...and yummy" (Child E, line 119-121)*

Three children spoke spontaneously about food, and their like or dislike for certain food. One pupil said she liked cake, and also suggested that the researcher joined her for lunchtime to have 'a nice sandwich' (Child A, line 74). Another pupil indicated he hated chicken, and that chicken was for lunch that day. He commented that he asked for cheese, 'but there was no cheese' (Child D, line 499). When asked what he thought of the school lunches normally, the pupil responded: 'Well I like the pizza, sausages and X and meat roll and bread...but not chicken!' (Child D, line 503). A different pupil shared her love for sausages because there were 'good...and yummy', and was keen to draw these as the first element in her classroom depicting what school was like for her (Child E, line 121).

#### **4.4.5 Summary**

The analysis suggests that the children appeared to have strong interests and hobbies, including animals, trains, television programs and culturally related activities, sport, swimming, and music. Friendships were of great importance to the children. Five of the children named friends that they had at the school and for most of the children, 'best friends' featured heavily in their accounts of

school life. Sharing similar interests and enjoying similar games appeared to be an important basis for friendships.

However, relationships with peers were not without their difficulties; several children spoke about the difficulties they experienced with friends at break-times. Family was another important factor that children spoke about spontaneously, acting as a significant support for them. Three children spoke spontaneously about food, and their like (i.e., cake, sausage) or dislike (i.e., chicken) for certain food.

#### **4.5 Key theme 3: Additional support**

*“...it gets really annoying when I have to do it and they keep on saying it over and over and over” (Child C, line 272)*

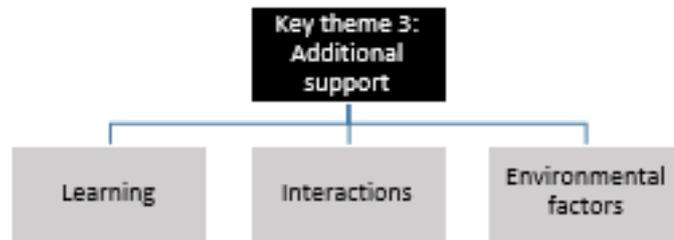
This section answers the second part of the research question – What are the views and experiences of children with a SSEN/EHCP for a LD, of:

- the additional support they receive in school?

The following findings describe each of the three sub-themes that established this key theme. The findings in this section are based on the answers the pupils gave during a discussion which involved the children being shown 12 pictorial cues. The pupils were asked to place each card on a location that was marked ‘This helps me and matters to me’ or ‘This does not help me’. A picture of a sad or happy face helped to differentiate the statements from one another. As the interview progressed with one participant, it became clear to the researcher that due to complex learning and communication difficulties, she would not be able to access this part of the interview and therefore the table below refers to responses from the five participants who did.

Figure 4.4 illustrates Key theme 3 and the sub-themes that it encompassed.

**Figure 4.4: Key theme 3: Additional support**



The table below shows which type of support the pupils found helpful, most helpful, unhelpful or felt indifferent towards. The key for the table can be found at the top of the table.

**Table 4.1: In-school support children find helpful**

Key: Helpful = ✓ Most helpful ✓✓ Unhelpful = ✗ Indifferent = ⇔					
Support	Child A	Child B	Child C	Child D	Child E
<b>Learning</b>					
'Having a break'		✓	✓		
'More help in some lessons than others'	✓		✓	✓	
'Instructions being repeated to you'		✓	✗		
'Not being given too much to do in one go'	✓		⇔	✓	
'Not so much writing'			✓	✓✓	✓✓
'Reminding me of what I am good at, my strengths'					
<b>Interactions</b>					
'Working with different adults'	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓	✓
'Adults making sure I am okay'		✓	✓	✓✓	
'Help with making friends'		✓	⇔		
'Having a learning support worker'			✓		✓
<b>Environmental Factors</b>					
'Where or who you sit with'			⇔	✓✓	
'Having a quiet place to go'	✓	✓			✓

### 4.5.1 Learning

*"...Oh, yes...and not so much writing" (Child D, line 385)*

Three children each thought that 'Not so much writing' and 'More help in some lessons than others' were helpful, receiving the most positive reviews in the area of 'learning'. Two of the children rated that 'not so much writing' was the *most* helpful aspect of their learning support at school. One child seemed to find writing a large amount and reading back over it a challenging task. He explained that when he is writing, he 'gets to a point' when he feels 'a bit annoyed', and sometimes he is asked to read back over it when he does not want to:

Child: Because it just...when I do it...like when I have finished, I get to a point...I am getting a bit annoyed and I sometimes um the teacher tells me to read back it and sometimes I don't want to...sometimes I have to do it

(Child C, line 338)

The three children who commented that they found 'More help in some lessons than others' helpful, felt they required more help with a range of lessons and skills. One child felt that more help with social support was good, specifically 'with groups' (Child A, 299), as well as more help with things related to her interests: 'Yes and with the music' (Child A, line 303). Another child felt receiving more help with handwriting was useful:

Child: Um I have...sometimes when I am like stuck...like if its like an 'o' or an 'a' because sometimes when Miss um...that writes like that...when its all the way at the end of the page...if its an 'o' or an 'a' joining up to something else...I don't know

(Child C, line 306)

The last child who found this type of support helpful said he found more help with core subjects useful, including literacy, maths, handwriting, reading and science (Child D, line 333-338). Two children each thought 'Having a break' and 'Not being given too much to do in one go' were helpful types of support. One of these children said that he does get breaks as such but 'sometimes when we are like finished we just stop and um well we ask and say we are finished and then we just sit there and just read sometimes for something to do' (Child C, line 318). One child appeared indifferent to not being given too much to do in one go, and commented that 'sometimes' he does and 'sometimes' he does not, therefore it was somewhere 'in the middle' (Child C, line 278).

One child said that 'Instructions being repeated to you' was helpful, indicating that he found additional support with language useful. Another child expressed irritation with instructions being repeated, and commented that this was only 'sometimes' helpful because '...it gets really annoying when I have to do it and they keep on saying it over and over and over' (Child C, line 272).

Several of the children referred to the learning support in place at their school, including music therapy sessions and additional reading support. For example,

one child explained that he received additional support outside of the classroom for reading: 'Well when I have to do reading I have to go out a bit sometimes' (Child C, line 15). When asked for his opinion on this, the child commented that he found it 'Okay'.

#### **4.5.2 Interactions**

*"... So um I get my morning teacher finish when my afternoon comes. It helps me" (Child C, line 358)*

'Working with different adults' was not only the most popular type of support falling under the 'Interactions' group, but it was also the most popular support overall. Additionally, two of these children chose it as the *most* useful support. The children seemed to enjoy working with LSAs and find it helpful. One child noted that it helps to have one LSA in the morning, and a different LSA in the afternoon. Another pupil said he has one LSA in the morning, and wanted a different one in the afternoon (see section 4.6.2). Another pupil commented that there were two TAs in her classroom that she works with. The opportunity to work with different adults who are engaged with their learning seemed to be of great importance to the pupils.

Three pupils considered 'Adults making sure I am okay' helpful. It seemed that the engagement of *considerate* adults was of high importance to the children. One pupil said he gets asked if he is Okay and that he finds this helpful.

'Having a learning support worker' was judged to be helpful by two children. One child said that he receives 'Help with making friends', and that he felt that he needed it. He found this help useful. Another pupil seemed indifferent to this support and 'friends' did not appear to be significant to him. He commented that he had received help with making friends before but that he didn't need this support anymore: 'No, but sometimes I just made friends...sometimes I just...I got bored with them so I just left them' (Child C, Line 302).

#### **4.5.3 Environmental factors**

*"...I sit on my own" (Child C, line 216)*

Three pupils considered 'Having a quiet place to go' to be helpful at school. One child commented 'Um...boys...listening' (Child A, line 307) when discussing things that are not helpful at school, suggesting that this pupil may think that her classroom is noisy. Another pupil gave the researcher directions to the 'quiet room' in the school, which he appeared to know well: 'But the quiet room is just up there. You can just turn left' (Child B, line 294). He said he liked visiting there. Another pupil referred to the library as a quiet place where you 'get books' (Child F, line 223).

Finally, 'Where or who you sit with' was considered by one child as being important. This pupil considered it to be one of the *most* helpful supports for him. He commented that he had sat with a friend before, but that he was told that he was not allowed to work with him: 'When I was sitting with Brody...I wanted to work with Brody but Miss Ball said, 'No'' (Child D, line 341). This pupil felt that working with his friend would help him with his learning: 'Because Brody and me could work together' (Child D, line 345). He commented that peers do not help him, suggesting that he did not engage in peer supported learning during the day.

Another pupil seemed indifferent about this environmental factor. During the child's drawing of their classroom, it became apparent that his seating position in the classroom suggested that he was physically isolated from his peers; he was sat on his own at the back of the classroom, while his peers were sat with each other:

Researcher: Is this the front of the class or the back of the class?

Child: Back

Researcher: You sit at the back of the class?

Child: Yes it's this one

Researcher: Okay...and do you sit on your own or do you sit next to people?

Child: I sit on my own

Researcher: Okay. Do other children sit on their own?

Child: Um...no

(Child C, line 209-218).

Later in the interview the pupil expressed that he did not appear to mind this and was not inclined to sit with his peers. Another pupil commented that he also sat on his own and that he thought it would 'be nice to sit with other children' (Child B, line 324).

#### **4.5.4 Summary**

The participants placed more value on support linked to developing their interaction skills rather than support that helped them to learn, or support related to changes in their environment. 'Not so much writing' and 'More help in some lessons than others' were highly valued as support that helped them to learn. 'Having a quiet place to go' was considered very important to the children as support related to changes in their environment. 'Adults making sure I'm Okay' was highly rated as support linked to developing their interaction skills, highlighting the importance of a considerate adult in school. Overall, the most valued support was 'Working with different adults', as support linked to developing their interaction skills, which was rated important by all children who took part in this activity.

#### **4.6 Key theme 4: Things children want to change**

*"...If I had a magic wand I could make everyone be nice to me!" (Child D, line 460)*

This section aims to answer the last part of the research question – What are the views and experiences of children with a SSEN/EHCP for a LD, of:

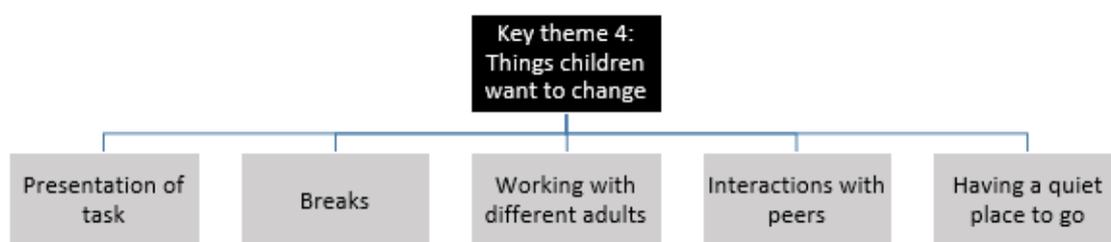
- what else could happen to promote their progress at school?

The following findings describe each of the five sub-themes that established this key theme. The children were asked questions that explored their ideas about things that they would like to change about school in general, for example, 'If

you had a magic wand, what would you change to make school better?’ Also, more specific questions relating to additional support were asked. To support the children’s thinking about changes they might want to make about additional support, the visual representations of different types of additional support were referred to by the researcher as prompts. For example, the children were asked if they could see any of the supports from the pictures that they were not receiving at the time, that could help them with their learning. The children added what they wanted to change about school to their drawing of what school was like for them in a different colour to represent change.

Figure 4.5 illustrates Key theme 4 and the sub-themes that it encompassed.

**Figure 4.5: Key theme 4: Things children want to change**



#### 4.6.1 Presentation of task

*“...sometimes we just mark in other people’s books to put stars in and write what they want...not write what they wrote but the comment um what they wrote” (Child C, line 81)*

Several children referred to how the presentation of the task made things more difficult for them. These references involved the skill of writing, specifically, having to write a great deal, read back over it, or use a pen to write over pencil after editing. Writing was regularly mentioned as a skill the pupils found difficult in general. ‘Not so much writing’ was considered one of the more popular forms of support amongst the children (see Table 4.1), and appeared to be something that children would welcome in the future.

#### **4.6.2 Breaks**

*“...I can have more of a break and then I can get... do the work and have a break and then do more and then have a break” (Child D, line 369)*

One child explained that she would like to have more breaks during the school day. When asked when she would like more breaks, she commented ‘With learning’ (Child A, 2328). Another child, who said he does not get breaks from his learning, wanted to have more breaks while ‘reading’ so that his time was broken up with more breaks: ‘Because then I can have more of a break and then I can get... do the work and have a break and then do more and then have a break’ (Child D, line 369).

#### **4.6.3 Working with different adults**

*“...Yes, but not Miss Ball” (Child D, line 381)*

One child, who said he received additional adult support in the mornings only, wanted support from a LSA in the afternoon too. He commented that he would like the afternoon adult to be different: ‘Yes, but not Miss Ball’ (Child D, line 381). He named another adult he knew at school, as someone he would like support from in the afternoon, and added her to his drawing as something he would like to change. With this support being the most important and helpful type of support overall as indicated by five children, it is not surprising that it was raised as being something this pupil wanted in the future. He appeared to be the only child who expressed he found it helpful but was not benefiting from it at the time.

#### **4.6.4 Interactions with peers**

*“...It would be nice to sit with other children” (Child B, line 332)*

Three children wanted more interaction with their peers, and wished to experience the social aspect of learning to a greater degree, making this the most desired aspect of school children wanted to change. This was communicated by comments made during the interview about sitting with or working with peers. For example, one child commented that he is sat on his

own in the classroom. He thought it would 'be nice' to sit with his peers, and he would like to sit with other children 'all the time' (Child B, line 328).

Another pupil expressed strong desire to sit with his friends: 'When I was in school I was sitting with Brody but then people wouldn't let me work with him' (Child D, 427). He added a drawing to his picture which showed him sitting with two friends, and commented: 'Yes that's me...and I have two friends' (Child D, line 421). This pupil also had a wish for peers to be nicer to him and not 'bully' him. He said, 'If I had a magic wand I could make everyone be nice to me!' (Child D, line 460). He thought that in the future, peers could help with his feelings, and help to calm him down: 'They would be able to calm me down when I get angry at boys and girls' (Child D, line 462).

Finally, another pupil referred to a picture of several children sitting around a table with an adult, and commented that she would like to work 'with the girls' and 'the worker' (Child A, lines 319; 321). Her comments could suggest that she would like more interaction with her peers and her peers to be more involved with her learning.

#### **4.6.5 Having a quiet place to go**

*"...sometimes I can't work properly and sometimes they keep on yelling..." (Child C, line 354)*

For one child, being able to leave a noisy classroom where 'people scream and shout' at him was something he wished for in the future. He explained that the noise affects his learning, and he sometimes 'can't work properly':

Researcher: Okay. What about this one, 'Having a quiet place to go'...so it might mean for example leaving lessons and going somewhere quiet to do my work

Child: Put it over there

Researcher: So do you have a quiet place to go?

Child: Nope

Researcher: Would you like to...or not?

Child: Yes, I would like to but I don't have a quiet place

Researcher: Okay, so you would like to go...?

Child: All I have to do is just stay in the classroom all the time and just work...sometimes it's really irritating when people like scream at me and scream and shout

Researcher: In class?

Child: Yes

Researcher: So they are being too noisy?

Child: Yes, and sometimes I can't work properly and sometimes they keep on yelling sometimes they don't

(Child C, line 343-354)

It was not clear whether the 'people' the pupil referred to were other children or adults. It appeared that the pupil found the busy and noisy learning environment 'irritating' and that he would prefer to spend less time in the classroom and more time in a quieter environment.

#### **4.6.6 Summary**

The findings suggest that while children seemed to view school generally positively, there were things that they would like to change to improve their experience of school and help them to learn. A reduction in the amount of writing seemed important. Children enjoyed working with different adults, and found it helpful. One pupil who only worked with an LSA in the mornings, expressed that he not only wanted additional support in the afternoons too, but that it was important that it was a different adult. Several children referred to noisy classrooms and one preferred to have a quiet place to go. Several pupils wanted to have more breaks from their learning or reading to help them. The most important change for children was a desire to have more opportunities to interact with their peers, as peers could help with their learning. A few children referred to having opportunities to work with peers, however, these incidences appeared to be limited, and stories of physical isolation were reported.

## 4.7 Overview

At this stage, the analysis has shown that:

- Children held positive views of school, and possessed individual portraits of subjects. Music was viewed most positively and maths and english (specifically writing) were viewed least favourably.
- A lack of stimulation at school featured heavily in one pupils school life and incidences of 'bullying' is a recurring theme
- Routine was an important factor in children's lives
- The pupils' understanding of the importance of school included following school rules and expectations, getting things 'right' and 'doing your work'
- Whilst the participants had a good awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses, they had no awareness of having a 'LD'
- Adults played a significant role in the children's lives as valuable supports for learning and emotional wellbeing
- The children showed mixed experiences of being involved with decision-making at the school, but generally they were mostly left out of decision-making,
- Important factors that featured heavily in children's lives included hobbies and interests, family, and food. Friendships were also of great importance.
- Pupils valued more support for developing their interaction skills rather than support for learning, or support related to changes in their environment. The most valued support was 'Working with different adults'.
- Children preferred less writing, to work with different adults, a quiet place to go to do their learning, and more breaks from learning. The most important change for children was to have more opportunities to interact with their peers within the learning environment.

In the next chapter the researcher proceeds to reiterate the main themes and context of this study and discusses the key outcomes in relation to the research question, the literature review and wider relevant literature.

## **5 DISCUSSION**

### **5.1 Introduction to current chapter**

The chapter provides a summary of the main findings and how they relate to key psychological theories. The unique contribution of the current study is considered, followed by an exploration of the perceived strengths and weakness of the study. A description of the method of feedback to participants is given and then possible directions for further research are considered. Finally, the researcher reflects on the findings from this study and the implications that they may have for school staff, EP practice and pupils. The chapter finishes with final concluding remarks.

### **5.2 Interpretation of results**

The study aimed to address the following question:

What are views and experiences of children with a SSEN or an EHCP for a LD, of:

- their LD?
- the additional support they receive in school?
- participating in the planning for their additional support?
- what else could happen to promote their progress at school?

In the following sections, the study's findings are explored with regard to wider relevant literature.

#### **5.2.1 Views & experiences of having a LD – labels & feeling different**

Interestingly, no children referred to labels or showed an awareness of the 'LD' label that had been assigned to them. This lack of knowledge and awareness of the labels placed upon them could suggest that parents and teachers may have protected them from knowing the labels that have been applied to them, or that they were aware of labels and the stigma attached to it and were reluctant to talk about it.

Despite the children seeming unaware of their learning 'label', most children expressed a sense of feeling 'different' from others and could articulate difficulties they experienced at school. The pupils' descriptions of their difficulties at school is in line with the existing literature, which describes children's awareness of their difficulties (Raskind et al, 2006; Kelly, 2005; Kelly & Norwich, 2004). De Schauwer et al (2009) found disabled children were aware of being different from their peers and talked about their difficulties as being part of who they are. Additionally, one child seemed to report that being different from his peers is difficult for him, and this is in line with Mortiera et al's (2011) study, where pupils expressed that they did not like appearing 'different' as a result of receiving additional support.

Overall, children's lack of awareness of their 'labels' could suggest that they have been given insufficient information about their 'LD' status and had therefore developed their own explanations for differential treatment, in line with Kelly's (2005) research. However, the children appeared to still express an awareness of 'difference' that related to learning or social barriers. Both findings fit well with Kelly and Norwich's (2004) study that found most pupils expressed an awareness of their LDs but few pupils used labels to describe themselves.

In the current study, the finding that the children had not heard of the label or applied it to themselves could indicate that the term was simply not known to the pupils. However, Kelly and Norwich (2004) found that almost half of pupils had heard of the term 'LD' before. A sense of feeling 'different' from their peers could suggest that schools in this instance have not effectively managed to subvert the social processes that give rise to notions of 'impairment'. Perhaps the schools have struggled to create a context in which differences in ability are unremarkable and instead led to difficulty for several of the children.

### **5.2.2 Views and experience of school**

Most children spoke positively about school, with general descriptors including 'fun', 'great' and 'happy'. This finding is reflected in the existing literature base (e.g., Norwich & Kelly, 2004). Relations and interactions with others was another theme identified and this fits with an important aspect of SDT:

relatedness. The theory of relatedness is described as the universal want to interact, be connected to, and experience caring for others (Deci & Ryan, 2000). It would suggest that the children in the study had an intrinsic psychological need to experience interactions with and feel connected to others at the school, and therefore, one reason for why they held positive views of school could be related to having this need met. Furthermore, this mirrors Maxwell's (2006) research who found that social activities were of greater importance for the pupils than formal learning experiences, and peer relationships were found to define the positive or negative experiences the pupils had of school in general. SDT maintains that, when students' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are supported in the classroom, they are more likely to internalise their motivation to learn and to be more autonomously engaged in their schoolwork (Niemi & Ryan, 2009).

On the other hand, the study indicated times during the school day when children were less engaged, with boredom and / or under stimulation suggested in various degrees in descriptions of school life. This is consistent with Norwich and Kelly's (2004) study, which found that while most children expressed positive evaluations of their schools and the teaching they received, a significant minority expressed mixed views. Boredom in this case may have been related to lack of stimulation, but could also be interpreted as a defence against other feelings such as inadequacy or frustration at demands. This said, many children in primary schools without identified SEN reported boredom, suggesting that this is a common school experience for children rather than it being related to a 'LD' status (Christensen & James, 2001).

The importance of school is another area that merits some discussion. Whilst the majority of children in this study seem to know that school is important, the extent of this understanding and the elements of school that the children considered as being important varied, with common themes typically involving following school rules, getting things 'right' and 'doing your work'. These opinions are indicative of 'traditional' views of school. The National Curriculum together with its associated assessment system appear to have acted as barriers to teaching and learning that fosters pupil voice, creativity and the

building of character and resilience (e.g., English, Hargreaves & Hislam, 2002). This complements the report by the All Party Parliamentary Group that teachers do not see 'character' and 'resilience' as core elements of their school's strategy (Paterson, Tyler & Lexmond, 2014). Such findings are concerning, considering evidence from the British Cohort Study in 1970 which suggested emotional health and conduct in childhood are the most powerful childhood predictors of adult life-satisfaction, whilst child's intellectual development seems to be least powerful predictor (Layard, Clark, Cornaglia, Powdthave, & Vernoit, 2013).

If the children viewed achieving academically and doing things 'correctly' as the main reasons for attending school, then we might expect that they experience feelings of inferiority when compared to their peers in this way. Hence the feelings of 'difference' discussed above, coupled with negative feelings about learning (discussed in the section below), could indicate that the children may have felt inferior to their learning-abled peers. This fuels the debate that schools need to do more to ensure a greater emphasis is placed upon building character and resilience in children and less on academic achievement to ensure that every young person can reach their full potential. It is important to note nonetheless that the researcher did not ask the participants a question about the purpose of school directly and it may be possible that if it had been asked, it may have yielded perhaps somewhat different results.

Lastly, the routine of the day seemed important to children and this fits well with attachment theory, which is described as 'the propensity to make strong emotional bonds to particular individuals' being a 'basic component of human nature' (Bowlby, 1988). Routines are said to help promote attachment in infants and adults, as a predictable routine helps the infant to anticipate what will happen next. Attachment theory would argue that the children in the study found routines important because the presence of consistent, predictable, and clear routines provided them with a sense of security while at school. Feeling safe at school is thought to lower anxieties because what happens next is clear, enabling children to engage more effectively in their learning (Geddes, 2006).

Additionally, it could be suggested that the existence of routines help to create a sense of belongingness for the students at school. The need to belong is

considered a fundamental human motivation; human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and important interpersonal relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). According to research, the need for belonging is one of the most important needs of all students to function well in all types of learning environments (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 1991; Osterman, 2000).

### **5.2.3 Individual portraits of lessons**

Mixed views were expressed about different lessons and school activities, which were very much unique to each child. However, the 'core' subjects maths and English were identified by children as being challenging, with maths being difficult in general, whereas in English, only particular aspects were a problem such as quantity of writing, using columns, and editing work.

Children also identified some specific strengths in learning, such as attention and listening skills, simple writing tasks (giving peer feedback), and positive evaluations of maths, English, handwriting, Science, RE, Art and PE were expressed. Practical and creative subjects were favoured over 'academic' based subjects, including Art, PE, cooking cakes, watching a school dance performance, and playing with play dough. Music was the most favoured subject and it was used in individual learning in the form of 'music therapy'. These findings appear to be in line with De Schauwer et al's (2009) research where students felt that being active and doing the things they like to do is more important than being able to master things.

Additionally, Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983; 1993) seems to also fit with current findings. Verbal-linguistic and logical-mathematical abilities have been typically valued in schools whereas 'personal intelligences' and those associated with the arts (Gardner, 1999: 41-43) might be more suitable to the study participants. Hence one possibility that music was favoured by the participants was because musical intelligence might be an ability better developed than the others. In the literature, it is argued that music makes a difference if used in other subjects, because it makes learning easier (Zinar, 1987). Furthermore, Jellison's (2000) review of music research with

disabled CYP identified that when comparisons were made there was often no significant difference in the musical abilities of children deemed to have disabilities and those who were not. There is a new thought that music-making can contribute to affective education, by being motivating, flexible, and enjoyable while also providing opportunities to practice important life skills that will benefit students' social and emotional development - as well as their music development (Darrow, 2014).

Additionally, there is evidence that when art is effectively integrated with student learning, rather than taught as a separate discipline, it can positively impact other academic outcomes including both academic and social/emotional domains (e.g., Hillier et al. 2011; Kempe & Tissot 2012). The importance of integrating art into children's learning was highlighted in DeMoss and Morris' (2002) research which found effective arts integration fostered increased learning, particularly for lower-achieving students.

The participants in this study favour creative and practical subjects such as music and art and this mirrors the current literature base, helping to support the argument that if used to enrich educational programs, music and art can contribute to the academic, social, emotional and cognitive development of these children. Therefore, it seems that subjects such as music and art are likely to appeal to children with SEN because they support social and emotional development by promoting features such as intrinsic motivation, and feeling intrinsically motivated in a particular subject is likely to provide a natural like for it.

Another interesting finding is related to how children viewed themselves and the difficulties they encountered at school. Most children identified things they were good at, although these tended to only relate to educational abilities rather than general characteristics, as did the difficulties. Several children reported negative responses to having a LD, which supports Norwich and Kelly's (2004) findings. It also fits with Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) which postulates that humans have a natural drive to gain accurate self-evaluations through comparing themselves to others. The current analysis suggests that such emotions may be the result of a process in which their recognition of having a

difficulty is judged against personal and social values about cognitive functioning (Kelly & Norwich, 2004). Additionally, Crabtree & Rutland (2001) argued that placing CYP in a school without others of similar abilities (i.e., mainstream settings) can hinder their formation of positive self-concepts, as they are not able to make social comparisons with CYP of similar abilities. While the pupils identified some strengths, the findings in this study would suggest that this is pertinent for several of the children. It is not clear however if the children with more complex needs had similar feelings or not as they did not express how they felt about difficulties they experienced at school.

#### **5.2.4 Relationships with peers – friendship and bullying**

Friendships and opportunities for social interactions were valued highly, as De Schauwer et al's (2009) found. Friends appeared to play an important role in supporting children's emotional wellbeing and sharing common interests (e.g., 'hide and seek' and 'Tic-Tac-Toe', or sharing an interest about trains). Nonetheless, while friendships were viewed positively most of the time, some had difficulties in maintaining friendships, which was clearly upsetting.

Bullying was a major feature, manifested in verbal teasing, nonverbal behaviour, or physical isolation, and creating affective reactions such as anger, annoyance, and emotional detachment. Reports of children with LD labels being bullied has been previously documented (e.g. Norwich & Kelly, 2004; Raskind et al., 2006). Messiou's (2002) study also highlighted the impact that peers have on the way that pupils who were identified as possibly experiencing marginalisation felt and acted. As seems to be the case with the current study, the children's feelings and responses appeared to be closely related to how other children behaved towards them, highlighting not only the importance of friendships but also the link between marginalisation and peer behaviour.

These findings raise the important question of why some children with LD experience difficulties with friendships and 'bullying'. Research has indicated that students with SEN or disabilities were found to be twice as likely to be identified as bullied targets and as bullies when compared to peers without disabilities (Rose, Monda-Amaya, & Espelage, 2011). Being bullied by peers

has been linked with several negative affects including poor physical health (Gini & Pozzoli, 2013) and poor school adjustment, including performing poorly (Konishi, Hymel, Zumbo, & Li, 2010).

According to pupils themselves, a common reason for being bullied is that the victim is different in some way (e.g., Mooij, 2011; Thornberg & Knutsen 2011). Additionally, poor social supports, being a part of a particular culture, lack of parental/familial involvement, and as previously mentioned, having a disability, are risk factors (Rigby & Smith, 2011). Conflict Theory is one theory that guides our thinking around why bullying occurs. Hutchinson (2011) states that Conflict Theory suggests that bullying behaviour occurs because of inequality, imbalance of power, and instances of oppression. It raises issues of status in considering human diversity.

If this is the case, then the question is whether labels such as 'LD' or 'SEN' are helpful, or whether labels just add to the stigmatisation of these pupils. The advantages (e.g. greater access to resources, specialised teaching methods, etc.) and disadvantages (e.g. shape teacher expectations, perpetuate the notion of 'difference') of labelling have been debated for many years (e.g. for research in area see Isaksson et al, 2010). The current study highlights that 'difference' could have led to incidences of 'bullying' and segregation for some of the children with LDs, whether 'difference' is created by stigmatisation through labelling, or receiving differential treatment from adults, or an environment whereby CYP with different learning abilities/styles experience 'impairment' (difficulties with learning) or 'disability' (barriers to opportunities).

### **5.2.5 Other important factors in the children's lives**

While participants talked mostly about the adults at school, peers, and schoolwork during the interviews, there were several other factors that appeared important to them: hobbies and interests; family; and food.

Participants' interests and hobbies ranged from animals, trains, television programs and culturally related activities, as well as physical activities such as sport and swimming and markedly, music, suggesting that being active and

creative were valued aspects of the children's daily lives. This is reflected in Erikson's (1963) view of middle childhood as a phase of 'industry', as well as in findings that happiness is linked with activities for seven- and nine-year olds (Borland et al, 1998).

Unsurprisingly, family was another important factor for children. Siblings especially appeared to play a vital role in helping several of the pupils to feel happy and healthy. This is consistent with previous research, which found that family is the second most commonly cited source of happiness for children aged eight to fifteen after friends (Ghate & Daniels, 1997) and that children of this age express that parents and family are important to them (Borland et al., 1998). Food was also considered important, with cake and sausages named as much loved foods, and chicken as being unpopular.

The finding that hobbies, interests, family and food were found to be important aspects of children's daily lives, is consistent with De Schauwer et al (2009) finding that children talked about school in terms of non-academic activities. It emphasises that school should not just be for learning.

### **5.2.6 Views and experiences of additional support**

Interestingly, children placed more value on support linked to developing their interaction skills rather than support that helped them to learn, or related to changes in their environment. The finding that two pupils thought having TA support was helpful, falls in line with De Schauwer et al (2009) study which found adult support was seen positively, apart from when it meant they missed something that was fun. The opportunity to work with different adults who are engaged in their learning seemed to be of great importance to the pupils, suggesting that while children found TA support helpful, they preferred opportunities to work with different adults.

Special relationships with adults were further highlighted as being significant by half of the children, who also judged 'Adults making sure I'm Okay' as being helpful to them. This highlights the importance of having a considerate adult in school, and the significant role they play in helping to support children's

emotional wellbeing, in line with Webster & Blatchford's (2015) study which found that TAs had a role in supporting children's emotional development and building their self-confidence.

#### **5.2.6.1 Relationship with teaching assistant**

A sense of closeness and support with TAs was evident, and it was clear that adults played a significant role in the daily lives of children at school in different ways. Other research has found that children can view their TA as a 'mothering figure', as well as friend and protector (Broer et al, 2005), suggesting that adults take the place of a key person who demonstrates availability, sensitivity, and warmth. This might be especially true for children who experience more difficulties at school than their peers, such as children with LDs, who may require additional support emotionally as a result of experiencing these difficulties.

Whilst adults supported the children's learning mostly in core subjects such as maths, English, and science, their role in providing social support for children with LDs was also emphasised, e.g. 'Help with making friends', or playing with the child. This is in line with previous research studies (Rutherford, 2012; Broer et al, 2005). Howard and Ford (2007) and Mansaray (2006) also found TAs use their knowledge of, and relationships with, pupils to support social inclusion in school life.

Additionally, De Schauwer et al (2009) stated that support from peers and adults came in different forms. One child in this study expressed a positive view of TA support and how he would like this to be organised by stating that he would like adult support in the afternoon as well as in the mornings. Only one child expressed a less than positive view of his TA, stating that 'She can be quite bossy' (Child D, line 281). One might suggest a view like this would not be uncommon for children who work with an adult who is likely to be directing and instructing the child closely.

While children spoke mostly positively about their TAs, there were some indications that children wanted more opportunities to work with peers, raising the question of whether close TA support reduced the opportunities for this to

occur. Isaksson et al (2010) found that additional support was observed to be mostly in the form of either individual support or small group support outside of the regular classroom. Previous research has shown that individualised instruction does little to improve attainment, attitude towards learning, or increase children's self-esteem (e.g., Hattie, 2009; Blatchford et al, 2009).

Schauwer et al (2009) highlighted the importance of independent working. It was not possible to obtain information regarding the proportion of time the participants spent working independently or with peers in the current study. However, comments made by some of the children suggested that a TA supported them most of the time and were rarely supported by the teacher, e.g., 'Um no, I don't work with the teachers' (Child C, line 334). This finding, consistent with previous research (e.g., Webster & Blatchford, 2015), is concerning, considering previous evidence suggested TA interactions with pupils, compared to teachers' interactions with pupils, are more concerned with the completion of tasks rather than learning and understanding (Blatchford et al, 2009).

Children showed a great deal of interest in their peers and appeared to enjoy the social aspect of working with their peers. Nonetheless, physical isolation from peers was also apparent for a few of the children, and this is similar with Broer et al's (2005) study. Despite evidence related to effective inclusive practice (Florian, 2009) and the positive impact of social learning opportunities on breaking down barriers to inclusion (Griffiths, 2009), the participants appeared to have few opportunities to work in groups, likely to be related to the ever-present TA who reduces opportunities for peer interactions and autonomy.

Overall, the TAs are significant adults in pupils' lives, who provide them with support in different forms including with individual learning, and social and emotional support. Rutherford (2012) demonstrated that pupils who experienced inclusive contexts showed that the presence of TAs utilised in educationally sound ways and in partnership with teachers, can benefit all students and teachers. However, as proposed by Broer et al (2005), it is important for schools to consider the social validity of supports, as well as the importance of increasing teacher involvement. Schools need to ensure a careful

balance between both TA support and opportunities for independence and peer interaction are achieved. Even when children feel competent (which could be said for a few of the children in the current study who found some aspects of learning/lessons 'easy'), SDT argues that satisfaction of both autonomy and competence is essential to maintain intrinsic motivation for learning (Deci, Koestner & Ryan, 1999). It could be argued that constant TA presence reduces a child's autonomy and therefore, will lead to a lack of intrinsic motivation for learning and ultimately, disengagement with schoolwork.

#### **5.2.6.2 Learning**

Most children judged having both a task (or outcome) differentiated as well as mediation through language, helpful. Additionally, working 'with groups' 'with the music', handwriting, and core subjects, including Literacy, math, handwriting, reading and science were also areas of identified help. Other learning support approaches that were deemed useful by children included 'Having a break' and 'Not being given too much to do in one go'.

These findings suggest that there are some teaching approaches that children with LDs find helpful. The higher valued approaches tended to focus on a reduction in the quantity of information given at one time, the quantity of written work that was expected of them, or the quantity of help provided in particular lessons/areas of learning. These findings appear to somewhat reflect Kubiak's (2015) research which found that children with intellectual disabilities valued process-oriented instruction facilitated through the use of dialogue and discussion, and appreciated teaching instruction that stimulated the learning process as a thinking activity instead of conceiving it simply as the memorisation and reproduction of facts. Like Kubiak's study, it could be suggested that high quantities of information given at one time or large quantities of work expected of them relied on memory-based learning which seemed arduous for the participants.

The paucity of research that gains children's perspective on teaching and learning in the classroom makes it difficult to compare the current findings to other research. However, it does provide some interesting insights about the

type of teaching approaches that cater for children with LDs that go beyond individualised instructions via a TA.

Additionally, music therapy sessions and a 'quiet room' were viewed positively whilst outside class reading support was judged 'Okay'. Withdrawal support (in the form of reading support and music therapy in the current study) was also viewed positively by students with GLD in Vlachou et al's (2006) study. The most common reasons for this were that: they were doing less and easier work; receiving more help; learning and understanding things better; having more fun, and participating in more extra-curricular activities, and in Isaksson et al's (2010) study, the peaceful environment it brought. In relation to the latter, one child expressed a wish to spend more time learning outside of the regular classroom. The children did not refer to being engaged in other types of interventions outside of the classroom or visiting rooms outside of the regular classroom to complete their learning. This could be because the children were taught inside the regular classroom for the majority (if not all) of the time, or because the question was not directly asked in interview to all the children.

Webster and Blatchford (2015) found children with SSEN experienced both explicit and subtle forms of separation daily. The current findings suggest that the participants experienced a high level of TA support and therefore potentially a high level of pedagogical decision-making by TAs (similarly to Webster & Blatchford's (2015) study), as well as physical isolation from peers within the classroom. Therefore, this indicates that while the children did not appear to experience a high level 'explicit' separation, the children did appear to experience the more 'subtle' forms of separation as reported by Webster and Blatchford (2015) within the classroom.

### **5.2.6.3 Environmental factors**

Having a quiet place to go at school was described as helpful, with references to 'the quiet room', and the library as being quiet areas the children visited. One child spoke about his difficulty concentrating because of the noise level in his classroom. This is in line with Isaksson et al's (2010) findings where pupils expressed feeling ambivalent towards withdrawal support, due to preferring the

peaceful environment it brought, but disliked feeling isolated and excluded from peers. The impact of the environment on children's development has been argued by several theories, including social learning theory (Rotter, 1982), which suggested that personality represents an interaction of the individual with his or her environment. Previous research has also indicated the importance of the environment on children's learning, with noisy conditions having direct negative effects on learning, particularly language and reading development, as well as causing indirect problems to learners through distracting or annoying them (e.g., Shield & Dockrell, 2003; Haines et al, 2001).

Additionally, as previously mentioned, there were several reports of physical isolation from peers within the classroom, close TA support, and one report of sitting at the back of the classroom. Constant TA presence could have contributed to the creation of barriers between the children and their peers. Physical isolation is likely to render the children more visibly different from their peers and this could lead to stigma and bullying. Therefore, one might question the pupil's sense of belonging to the class and their perception of themselves as good learners. Having a sense of belonging is considered vital to reaching self-actualisation and without it, learning and development is likely to be restricted (Maslow, 1943).

The findings support the claim that students with a SSEN are socially excluded in mainstream schools (Warnock & Norwich, 2010). Warnock and Norwich (2010) suggested that students who interacted less often with their peers during the school day were likely to have been more socially isolated than their peers. The barriers that 'Velcro' TAs inadvertently place on effective inclusive practices is not new, and these results lend further support to researchers invested in improving TA impact on learning (Giangreco, Suter, & Hurley, 2013).

### **5.2.7 Changes to additional support for the future**

The participants had many ideas about what they would like to happen at school in the future, similar to De Schauwer et al's (2009) findings in that children in their study were also able to identify several changes to school that could be made in the future.

*The presentation of the task* appeared to contribute to learning and was communicated by the children in several ways. Tasks that require a writing element and last for a long time acted as barriers to learning for the children with LDs. This suggests that when children with LDs are required to write less, or are given less information in one go, they find the task easier to access. This was not surprising considering English and writing were reported to be challenging. Differentiation of the task itself (e.g. setting a different task for different students) or differentiation by outcome (e.g. all students undertake the same task but a variety of results is expected and acceptable) are a few of the common ways teachers cater for different abilities in the classroom. The findings emphasise that by differentiating in this way to include 'less writing', breaking down tasks into smaller chunks to avoid the child becoming overwhelmed and including short breaks, the differences between learners can be accommodated so that all pupils in the class have the best possible chance of learning.

*A quiet place to go* to 'work properly' is consistent with Ryan's (2009) study which found some pupils had strongly-held views about some of the sensory aspects of the school environment including noise levels and smells, which led to the children feeling excluded from certain areas in the school. The detrimental effects of a noisy learning environment were touched on earlier.

*Working with different adults* was judged to be the most helpful form of support for all children. SDT suggests that satisfaction of the need for relatedness facilitates the process of internalisation. In the classroom context, it is thought that relatedness is connected with a pupil feeling that the teacher genuinely likes, values and respects him or her (Niemic & Ryan, 2009). According to Niemic and Ryan (2009), pupils who report such relatedness are more likely to exhibit identified and integrated regulation for the more arduous tasks involved in learning. Children may highly value working with different adults because working with more than one adult may provide children with greater opportunities to satisfy this need, as it could increase the likelihood of feeling liked and valued.

*Interaction with their peers* was another area participants wanted more of. The experience of the social aspect of learning, sitting with peers and engaging in peer supported learning appeared to be the most desired aspect of school children would change. The importance of children engaging in the social element of learning is reflected in Vygotsky's Social Development Theory. Vygotsky theorised that social learning precedes development (Vygotsky, 1978), with social interaction playing a fundamental role in the process of cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978).

Research has demonstrated better academic outcomes for a wide range of students in inclusive classrooms (e.g., Cosier, Causton-Theoharis, & Theoharis, 2013), including those students with LD (Salend & Duhaney, 2007). The importance of including opportunities for collaborative working with peers in order to support participation and achieve an inclusive classroom was highlighted by Schalock et al (2012). However, previous research has found that classrooms that utilised peer-supports less frequently tended to adopt a one-to-one support model (Morningstar, Shogren, Lee & Born, 2015). Similar findings appear to be indicated in the current study, as previously suggested, close TA support could be related to restricted opportunities for peer-supported learning, further limiting their level of participation and inclusion within the classroom. It is essential that effective interventions for TAs to promote learning of all students are further developed and examined.

The findings in the current study highlight the difficulties that schools face in relation to 'using' other pupils to support the learning of pupils with SEN, despite the evidence base suggesting it would be useful (Higgins, Kokosaki & Coe, 2011; Hattie, 2009). Perhaps a decision to reduce the time that SEN pupils are involved in activities with peers could be linked to the needs of the majority. If this is the case, some would argue that it does not reflect inclusive practice for all children. Developing cooperative learning (McMaster & Fuchs, 2002) and interventions that engage peers in learning together will be an essential direction in future research (Carter, Cushing, Clark, & Kennedy, 2005).

### **5.2.8 Involvement and participation in decision-making**

This study showed *mixed experiences of being involved with decision-making* at the school, though consistent with Nordmann's (2001) results, children's 'meaningful' participation in decision-making and in sharing their views was limited. This indicates that marginalised groups such as CYP with SEN, may be more at risk of being overlooked, as suggested by McLeod (2001). Children's limited awareness or knowledge of their SSEN/EHCP mirrors previous research which found that few pupils could communicate a clear understanding of IEPs (Pawley & Tennant, 2008). This is concerning given that research has shown partnerships that specifically exclude the child are least effective (Goepel, 2009). Children's limited experience of being meaningfully included in decision-making is surprising considering the positive impact increased participation has been found to have on school improvement (e.g., Robinson & Taylor, 2007; Williams & Hanke, 2007).

However, the current findings further highlight the complexity and challenge of consulting and sharing decision-making with CYP and it raises the question of whether pupils should be involved in the decision-making process, and how this can be achieved in both a meaningful and effective way that attempts to generate an element of transformative action as appropriate (Lundy, 2007:927). Previous research emphasising some of the challenges in listening to children's views and involving children in decision-making included concerns relating to a perceived potential that pupil voice could undermine adult authority in schools (Flutter, 2007). Also, there are concerns more specifically relating to research involving only the 'more articulate' children in studies (MacBeath et al, 2003:42). There are methodological and ethical challenges involved in including children with substantial developmental and communication difficulties in research (Tangen, 2008).

While gaining the views of the participants who had severe communication difficulties in the current sample did not come without its challenges, the findings show that all children have views about the school support they receive. Therefore, research around pupil voice as well as educational settings

should not include only the 'more articulate' pupils, because all children can share these views with appropriate provision.

Research indicated that children's views can be sought effectively through different means, including the Self-Directed IEP using self-determination principles (Woods et al, 2013), social pedagogy as a person-centred approach (Carter et al, 2012), and giving choice regarding the nature of their involvement (Woolfson et al, 2006). This research suggests that these methods are not being effectively utilised, if at all, in schools. SDT argues that the principle of autonomy suggests that all children can be and should be involved in this process. If this basic need is supported in the classroom, for example through their participation in sharing their views and in planning and agreeing decisions in matters affecting them, they are more likely to internalise their motivation to learn and to be more autonomously engaged in their schoolwork (Niemi & Ryan, 2009).

PCP would argue that because adults have appeared to act without ascertaining the views and developing an understanding of the constructs of the individual CYP in this study, conflict is likely to be created between them (Roller, 1998). CYP's perspective should be considered as unique and must therefore be obtained by adults for them to act appropriately on their behalf if conflict is to be avoided (Roller, 1998). More needs to be done to devise appropriate and effective ways to seek these children's views.

Secondly, a sense of reliance on adults for support with learning was present, alongside a *lack of agency*. This finding is in line with Christensen and James' (2001) study which highlighted that having control over how and with whom they spend their time at primary school was highly valued by the children, and a lack of control or choice can lead to boredom. It is possible that the constant presence of a TA for some children could be limiting their opportunities to structure their own time, combined with a lack of participation in decision-making in general. SDT would argue that the basic need of autonomy is not being fulfilled for this pupil.

The finding also links with the theory of Locus of control, which is the concept that refers to how strongly people believe they have control over the situations and experiences that affect their lives (Rotter, 1966). Students with an “internal locus of control” attribute their success or failure to the effort and hard work they invest in their education. Students with an “external locus of control” attribute successes or failures to factors beyond their control. Research suggested that pupils with LDs are more likely to develop an external locus of control, at least in part due to negative experiences they may have had in school (e.g., Pearl, 1982; Valas, 2001). If their disabilities have made learning difficult or challenging, blaming other people and external factors can develop into a psychological coping mechanism known as ‘learned helplessness’ where a person has learned to act as if they are helpless even when they actually have control over their situation or the power to change a circumstance or outcome (Seligman, 1972). Learned helplessness is likely to lead a child to complete work for external reward or to please an adult, rather than for their own gain (Shield, 1997), leading to a lack of intrinsic motivation.

### **5.3 Distinctive Contribution**

This study adds insight into the nature of the support received by six pupils with SSEN/EHCPs for MLD or GLD from their perspective. A small number of studies have attempted to gain children’s views in this key area. Some of these studies did not seek children’s views directly, or marginalised their voices in favour of more ‘powerful’ voices. Additionally, studies tended to involve older children or young people. Little research has also been carried out with learning disabled children. The distinctive contribution made by this study is that it provides further evidence of the importance of seeking children’s views, particularly the views of young children with the highest level of need whose views are often overlooked, to inform and provide further evidence for a number of significant changes made in recent government publications. This research highlighted that this group of children possessed views about school and the support they received, were eager to and able to share these views, and had ideas about what they wanted to change.

It aimed to inform future practices in seeking children's views, in informing SEN provision based on these views, and promoting children's involvement in decision-making. This aim has only been partially achieved because while the research has been successful in gaining the views of this group of marginalised pupils, the impact on professional practice and on children contributing actively and directly to the planning of their SEN support is yet to be achieved. However, the findings of this study will give impetus to this aim.

The findings cannot be generalised to all pupils with SSEN/EHCPs or even to all pupils with a SSEN/EHCP for MLD/GLD. Nonetheless, the findings highlight some of the challenges relating to inclusion of these pupils, and in providing effective individualised support. It reopens the debate on whether this group of pupils are truly included within mainstream settings.

The findings emphasised the importance of peer interactions and the need for schools to provide children with SEN with opportunities that go beyond formal learning experiences. These experiences appeared to link with levels of inclusion, motivation and engagement, and general feelings for school. The findings are pertinent given the existing education system which is debatably designed and assessed purely upon its ability to have all children achieve a certain academic level as presented through a system of testing. As schools continue to move towards greater inclusion of children with SEN, the number of opportunities given to children to engage in different types of learning (including peer-supported) and the value placed on these by educators must be reviewed if SEN pupils are to be fully included within mainstream schools.

Additionally, the findings support previous research that has highlighted the important but complex role support staff play in both helping and hindering students' presence, participation, and achievement in school life. The unique contribution here is that no research has focused on the perspective of young children with LDs of this type of support (support staff) in mainstream schools in England.

The revised SEN CoP (DfE, 2015) emphasises a strong drive to ensure that the perspectives of CYP and parents/carers are sought and that pupils can

contribute at the individual and planning levels. The findings from this study touch on the extent to which this is being carried out in schools, as well as upon current SEN provision in the context of one LA. The study also contributes to our understanding of what children want to change about the support they receive in the future, helping to inform future practice. Its evidence and recommendations provide a justification for children's participation.

Finally, these findings give substance to the underpinning theoretical models of SDT and PCP. It has shown that it is possible to capture the views of children with LDs on key issues about school, and provides a basis for addressing those issues.

## **5.4 Evaluating the methodology and limitations of the study**

### **5.4.1 Sample selection and generalisability**

This research required particular participants and hence purposive sampling was used. Out of ten parents contacted, six returned consent forms. Compared to the children of parents who did not return consent forms, the final sample of six children may have been different in some systematic way.

Furthermore, while the group of participants were a homogeneous group in that they were of similar ages (between Year 4-6), all had SSEN/EHCPs in which their primary need fell within the category of either MLD or GLD, and attended mainstreams schools, some differences in the variety of LDs and communication ability still existed amongst the group. For these reasons and because of the qualitative nature of this study, it is questionable how representative the children in this study were of children with 'LDs' in their schools, and of children with 'LDs' more generally. The extent to which the findings might overlap the experiences of children with more severe LDs, those without formal language systems, or those with other disability labels is unknown.

Even so, the findings from this study are linked to theories on inclusion, additional support, and effective pedagogy and the concluding comments in this

chapter demonstrate how these can subsequently be linked to the practice of EPs. The aim of this research was to provide an exploratory account of the views of pupils with a SSEN/EHCP for MLD/GLD and despite some limitations the researcher feels that this has been achieved.

### **5.4.2 Data collection**

The use of semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to use open-ended questions driven by an interview agenda to create a balance between maintaining control of the interview in a way that ensures data is collected to answer the research question, and allowing the interviewee to include their views about the topics (Willig, 2008). While the design of the research study can be judged to have broadly achieved its aims, several factors may have affected the findings and consequently the conclusions that can be drawn.

One limitation is the reduced sample size. Limitations on establishing validity and reliability in qualitative data must also be considered. Issues with trustworthiness of qualitative research by use of reflexivity by the researcher together with an emphasis upon completeness and accuracy of data collection, methodological triangulation, and peer debriefing (Robson, 2002), were addressed to an extent in the present study. An example of a complete transcript (Appendix J), a detailed description of the thematic analysis process (see chapter three), adopting a consciously reflective approach (see Reflection section below), and utilising peer debriefing and Director of Study supervision to assist with trustworthiness, goes some way to addressing these issues. However, methodological triangulation was not used.

The aim of the research was to gain the views of the main stakeholders of SEN provision, and avoid the marginalisation of the children's voices by more 'powerful' or 'articulate' stakeholders. However, it may have been useful to hear the views of others involved in supporting and agreeing SEN provision for these pupils.

The research did not account for the recency of the issuing of the children's SSEN/EHCPs. Therefore, the involvement the child had in the process of

issuing an EHCP, or in transferring from a SEN to an EHCP, would have been more recent than for children who currently have SENs that were issued perhaps much earlier. This could account for some variances in perspectives. However, good practice would dictate that for all pupils, regardless of having a SEN or EHCP, and regardless of when it was issued, their involvement in the SEN/EHCP process should have been no longer ago than a year prior to the interviews taking place through the annual review process.

In interviewing children, particularly those with SEN, researchers can face several critical issues and challenges. Smith (2006) and Einarisdóttir (2007) both refer to individuals with LDs wanting to please those who asked them questions. Some children are not accustomed to adults who are interested in their views and who ask for their opinion (Einarisdóttir, 2007). Therefore, their answers are not always a reflection of their true feelings but of what they believe they should say (Smith, 2006). As previously mentioned in chapter three, the researcher attempted to empower the children and minimise the power differential by using child-friendly methods and techniques, but it is difficult to know whether the children's answers were a true reflection of what they felt.

Additionally, some children had significant communication difficulties and had difficulty answering questions that went beyond single word answers and understanding the question. Similarly, it was not always clear what the child intended. For example, in one interview, the child responded mostly with simple single words- repeating words the researcher had used. It was not clear whether her answers were true reflections of how she thought or felt, or whether she had simply repeated what she had heard.

The use of pictorial cues, interview questions, and style were adapted according to the needs of the child to enable the participants to share their views. These strategies to some extent determine what participants say. It has been argued that while pictorial cues aid children's communication in many ways and help to avoid an affirmative bias, they can lead participants to give more closed, and/or more biased responses (Lewis, 2004). The author considered the use of drawing techniques only (which could offer a more open exploration). Nonetheless, the ability level of the children would not have allowed for

exploring relevant answers. Pictorial cues were used to obtain some information.

Additionally, it highlights the complex nature of adults being able to tailor questions adequately to the skills of the child, and provide them with appropriate opportunities to express their views. The researcher wondered how well school staff are able to do this, particularly if they do not know the child well, and whether this leads to the child having or not having their needs met. Perhaps the finding that adults had a significant role in the lives of children at school indicates that children value the support of adults who know them well, and because of this they would be more skilled at interpreting their communications and tailoring questions adequately to enable children with communication difficulties to fully participate in mainstream schooling.

Furthermore, children's lack of familiarity with the researcher coupled with a few of the participants not being fluent in formal language, often led to prompting and asking questions spontaneously, leading to some lack of consistency across interviews as to what the researcher asked. Also, when the researcher interviewed the first couple of pupils, the children were shown the pictures and asked to use them if they needed to. However, in doing this with the initial participants the researcher noted that this was confusing, and therefore, the method was changed slightly for the other interviews. The pupils were shown instead, one visual at a time, and asked to place it on a location that was marked 'This helps me and matters to me' or 'This does not help me'. There was therefore an inconsistency across the six interviews of this aspect.

The interactions with some children (and therefore the findings) were limited because of the level of familiarity with the children, despite having an earlier familiarisation meeting. The researcher failed to elicit the perspectives of the least articulate child and in doing so, largely perpetuated a common research problem. However, time constraints of the research limited the amount of time spent with each child. The findings highlight the complexity of eliciting the views of children with the highest level of need (i.e., those with SSEN). The researcher would have liked more sessions with each of the children to enable

a greater depth of understanding and to be able to trial different and effective ways of gaining their views.

Finally, none of the participants chose the pictorial card representing 'Reminding me of my strengths' as being helpful support for their learning. It is possible that the children did not genuinely find being told what they are good at helpful for them at school. The other possibility is that they did not understand the visual, and therefore did not identify this type of support as being helpful. The latter is the more likely explanation as one child indicated confusion over the picture which depicted a cartoon figure lifting weights, commenting 'That you X sit ups' when asked to explain her choice. The cards used had been utilised successfully in a previous research study by Stash (2012) and only adapted slightly for use in the current study. However, a pilot study would have avoided the possible confusion caused by this particular card.

### **5.4.3 Ethical issues**

Consent was gained from the head teacher of each school, the children's parents and from the children themselves. The child-friendly information letter and consent form (see Appendix F & H) allowed the children the opportunity to understand what would be expected of them, and explained they could leave when they wanted to. However, the degree to which the children understood what it meant to give their consent, and whether it was truly informed, is debateable. The consent letter was however reinforced verbally too and their understanding of this was checked by the researcher. Nevertheless, it is difficult to ascertain the extent of the children's understanding of their participation in the study.

Another ethical dilemma that should be acknowledged involves whether involving children in discussions about their own difficulties and needs could foster a deficit and passive view of the child, as suggested by Quicke (2003). The researcher was transparent about the purpose of the research in order to gain authentic views of children about the provision they receive. The children appeared to show an awareness that they received extra help and therefore, it could be argued that it was unlikely that by obtaining the children's views on

these matters, that the researcher was reinforcing the idea that these children were somehow 'different', but instead, empowered the children by listening to their views.

#### **5.4.4 Analysis**

The researcher coded the participant's data and drew out themes. Then these themes were discussed with colleagues to ensure integrity and gain clarification and consensus on the emergent themes. One limitation of qualitative analysis of interview-generated data is that it does not pay attention to context. The researcher cannot state with certainty if the school culture or other contextual variables have influenced participant responses (Willig, 2008).

Additionally, part of the interviews involved the children producing a drawing of their views of school and the support they receive (see Appendix L). A similar 'draw and write' technique has been found to facilitate children who are less verbally able to communicate their perceptions as the method lets them draw and then seek adult help to express their thoughts in writing (Pridmore & Lansdown, 1997). This finding was consistent with the current research - the drawing technique was used as an effective vehicle to access children's thoughts and feelings about their experiences, and facilitate discussions around important issues. However, they were not analysed as separate pieces of data, as it was not the original aim to do this.

Furthermore, the author considered the disadvantages and advantages of using formal language and academic terms in the thematic map (i.e. the labels given to represent themes/sub-themes) rather than the participants' language. The disadvantage of using more formalised language here is that the authenticity of children's voices is somewhat lost. However, while the language was simplified to an extent in the thematic map, it was not simplified for the purpose of being read and understood by children and therefore the language retains a level of formality. Instead, the research was aimed at an academic audience in order to improve future practices for those supporting children with complex needs.

## **5.5 Feedback to stakeholders**

A letter was sent to the participants, their families, and the schools, summarising the findings and thanking the children for their participation in the study. The researcher felt it was important to share the results with the main stakeholders with the aim to help inform professional practice when planning, implementing, and reviewing SEN support, and highlight the importance of actively involving children in decisions around their learning.

Additionally, the researcher fed back informally to the Educational Psychology team at the LA in which the research was carried out. Due to the focus on person-centred approaches and seeking and involving the views of children and their families in recent legislation, it was hoped that the person-centred approach taken in the current research will help to inform EP practice. The views of the children gained in the research about what is important to them will also help to inform effective inclusive practices and promote participatory activities in the future by informing EPs (including the researcher) who work in partnership with the schools to support children with SEN.

## **5.6 Implications for practice**

### **5.6.1 Implications for Educational Psychologists and schools**

The current research highlights the challenges that schools face in including pupils with the highest level of SEN in the mainstream classroom and supporting them in the most effective way. There is a statutory role for EPs in relation to providing accurate and comprehensive information about the provision required to enable a child with a SSEN/EHCP to succeed in a mainstream classroom. In later stages of the statutory process, EPs may only be involved if their presence at an annual review meeting is considered important. Thus, responsibilities delegated by the LAs are given to the school, with the aim that the pupil will eventually receive personalised support in some form.

Previous research has shown that TAs work most closely with pupils with SSEN/EHCPs (e.g., Blatchford et al, 2009). The current findings have shown the important role TAs play in supporting children's learning, and social and emotional development, and the limited contact children had with the teacher. It is not within the scope of this thesis to discuss the limitations of the TA role or the responsibilities of the teachers or SENCO in relation to this. However, it is proposed that EPs and other professionals should remain involved in the education of these children for a longer length of time to support children with a SSEN/EHCP. Given this it may be appropriate to consider whether EPs should have more direct contact when it comes to supporting both TAs and teachers so that they can develop their pedagogical skills.

The consultation model proposed by Wagner (2008) suggests that EPs should work with the 'problem holder', i.e. the person who holds the concern about the student. Wagner (2008) argues that by doing this, it is more likely that positive change will be achieved because people working most closely with the student are involved in problem-solving conversations. Given current and previous findings, it seems imperative that both TAs and teachers are involved in these consultations. The findings suggest that the TAs may have been the primary educators of the child they support, and given this, it is very important that they are given the skills to enable them to effectively support pupils with complex needs.

Additionally, previous research has indicated that the act of labelling children with SEN can influence teacher expectations (e.g., Florian, 2009; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2010) and consequently the opportunities that these children are given to engage with the curriculum. It can be argued that EPs are well placed to challenge this by acting as a 'critical friend' to school. EPs can then refer schools to evidence of more inclusive methods of teaching, and support them to effectively implement these. This can include supporting schools to consider more effective ways to promote the inclusion (including social inclusion), autonomy, and locus of control of these children and removing the practice of 'Velcro' TAs for good.

Solution-focused techniques are being gradually adopted by EPs and applied in schools (e.g., Berg & Shilts, 2005; Stobie, Boyle & Woolfson, 2005). This approach has been effectively applied to help the 'problem-holder' to consider the child's strengths and future aspirations. Therefore, EPs can apply solution-focused techniques to help to change the perceptions of those working with children with complex needs by helping to shift the focus on deficits to conversations about possible solutions. This is with the aim to empower and support teachers and TAs to draw on their knowledge and skills in planning and adapting the curriculum to meet the needs of all children. Furthermore, given that EPs have led the way: in assessing the student's perspective (Gersch, 1996); in conducting studies of the impact of participation on motivation and behaviour (Bennathan, 1996); and in advocating for participation (Davie & Galloway, 1996), they are ideally situated for the further promotion and continuation of such practices.

### **5.6.2 Implications for CYP**

The children were selected due to all having SSEN/EHCPs in which their primary need fell within the category of either MLD or GLD, and attended mainstream schools. Despite the participants not being selected as a representative sample, the implications of the findings can be applied to future practice and generalised to theories concerning SEN support and education.

The current research highlights the challenges that those working with CYP with SEN face in gaining their views and involving them effectively in decisions around SEN provision. The ways of working with the children and the different methods that were used will influence the researcher's future practice with CYP with LDs. The research has shown the importance of using visual aids and of not overwhelming the child with too many visuals at one time, and the importance of spending time with the child to get to know their way of communicating to enable the EP to support them to share their views in the best possible way. The research has also shown that children with SEN can and want to share their views about school and SEN support, and have opinions and preferences on these matters, which can help inform inclusive practices and promote achievement for these children in mainstream schools.

Gersch (2016) argues that there are robust arguments for encouraging children to shape and critique decisions involving them through giving their views. Yet, it seems that often children are asked if they like or dislike an event or experience without being asked their opinion on how to change the situation. The children in the current research gave their critical opinions on the additional support they received, and were given the opportunity to share what they wanted to change about it. It is hoped that from this experience the children felt empowered to be able to share their views in other situations and that adults supporting them ensure appropriate communication methods and support are supplied to enable them to do this. It is hoped that from this research in the future, the significance of hearing the perspectives of the children themselves will be acknowledged and more CYP with LDs will be able to receive appropriate additional support.

## **5.7 Further Research**

The current research has made advancements in this under-researched area of exploring the experiences of students with a SSEN/EHCP for MLD/GLD in mainstream schooling. It would be valuable to increase the research base in this area as there are currently a limited number of studies that have explored the experiences of these children, resulting in few opportunities to compare the findings. This would allow researchers to be more confident that theoretical assumptions about the views and experiences of pupils with SSEN/EHCPs are in fact evident in practice.

A larger sample could be examined in future studies, which is more likely to be representative. Future research to explore the barriers to peer-supported learning for children with LDs will be useful. Additionally, research could explore the finding that children placed more value on support linked to developing their interaction skills rather than support that helped them to learn, or support related to changes in their environment further. It would be particularly interesting to identify what it is about working with different adults that children find helpful.

The richness of the findings regarding the views of children with LDs about a whole range of issues around approaches and provision suggests that there

would be value in extending the comparison of views and perspectives of different populations. For example, it would be interesting to elicit the views of TAs and teachers, and parents of children with SEN, especially given the emphasis placed upon seeking parents' views and involving them in decision-making in the revised CoP (DfE, 2015). This will also allow the opportunity to triangulate the data.

The researcher agrees with McKay's argument that while children's voices may be heard, the mechanisms through which pupil voice is given legitimacy and the extent to which they truly influence decision-making, requires further examination (McKay, 2014). Research could consider how EPs can use their knowledge of psychological theories to improve the practice of those working with children with complex needs. For example, schools could be supported to plan and implement learning activities for pupils with the highest level of need more effectively by focusing on creating more opportunities to work in groups/pairs, and to work with different adults (including the teacher), as well as greater opportunities for independent working to promote autonomy and competence.

## **5.8 Reflections**

Throughout this research reflexivity has been an essential element. The researcher kept a reflective log which helped to expand understanding and knowledge of the research area, processes and of her own learning. Within this research the researcher took on several different roles of researcher, practitioner, and trainee EP. The school positioned the researcher as a member of the EPS and as one of the many outside agencies which regularly visit the school. Within the EPS, the researcher was viewed as a member of the team. As a practitioner, the researcher wanted to use her prior experience working within schools and working with children with SEN to enable these children the opportunity to share their views and be empowered by the experience. As a researcher, the researcher aimed to collect useful information that will help inform future practice when working with children with SEN.

As mentioned, it was surprising how open and honest the children were; they appeared to view the researcher as a trustworthy adult and they felt at ease to share their opinions and talk frankly about matters affecting them. Although the researcher believed that she was a reflective practitioner, on reflection she has developed a greater understanding of the importance of reviewing what she is doing by questioning herself and constantly trying to improve her practice. After reading previous research that discussed the challenges of gaining the views of children with LDs about complex matters, it was not obvious whether it was going to be possible and what the outcome of this type of research may be. However, the researcher was made more determined by an argument proposed by Ruddock et al, that it is often the 'less effective learners' whose voices are 'least likely' to be heard and yet most important to be heard (1996:8). Additionally, prior experience led the researcher to note that children with SEN often feel that learning and additional support is something that is 'done to' them rather than 'done with', and without seeking the views of the children themselves, the researcher feels it is impossible to gain a true understanding of how to support children with SEN in mainstream schools effectively.

The findings tell us what is important to these children from their own perspective and this is both informative, and beneficial. From the lessons that the researcher has learnt, the knowledge she has gained, she has hopefully increased her own proficiency in this area. The researcher also gained a great insight into the children's lives and what their future aspirations are in terms of SEN support. Hopefully this information will be used appropriately to support children with LDs in the future.

## **5.9 Conclusion**

This research explored the views of children with LDs about school and the additional support they received at mainstream schools. In conclusion, children identified supports that were helpful and some that were not. Children do not seem aware of their LD labels, yet a sense of 'difference' appeared to still be present. This could be linked to the difficulties children experienced with learning; they appeared very much aware of the barriers they faced at school, and this sometimes led to feelings of frustration for them. They experienced

greater difficulties with the 'core' subjects, and music and creative learning were valued more highly. Preferences for music and other creative subjects can be explained by Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983; 1993), and previous research has suggested that music makes learning easier (Zinar, 1987). Music has been linked with a wealth of positive outcomes for children at school (e.g., Zinar, 1987; Jellison, 2000; Çadır, 2008; Kırşehirli, 2011).

As has been discussed earlier, the concept of 'awareness' implies the existence of an objective reality and therefore, this line of thinking would suggest that for a child to be 'aware' of their LD, it must exist independent of context. Yet it is argued that difficulties or differences cannot exist independently of context and many 'difficulties' are only identified in the context of mainstream schooling. The research adopts this view; constructivist ontology argues that reality is socially constructed by and between the people who experience it (Gergen, 1999). It is promising that children did not seem 'aware' of the labels placed upon them. However, the finding that the pupils felt a sense of 'difference' and experienced a range of difficulties at school implies that perhaps schools are not doing enough to create an environment where there is no need for any particular differences to be constructed as "impairment" or for individuals with particular differences to experience difficulties as a result of either those differences or people's responses to them. The researcher has attempted to understand the complex world of the lived experiences of children with LDs from the point of view of those who live it (Schwandt, 2000). However, it is also important to acknowledge that the meanings of the research findings therefore are fundamentally interpretative (Mertens, 2010).

A significant finding is the key role of TAs in these children's lives. This was mainly positive, in terms of the children's closeness with and liking of TAs. This said, consistent TA presence, as well as negative experiences of school including experiences of repeated failure and 'bullying', may have created barriers for peer interaction, autonomy and developing an internal locus of control. The limited (or even negative) impact that individualised instruction has on student's attainment, independence, and social development has been documented in previous research (e.g., Hattie, 2009; Blatchford et al, 2009).

The findings highlight the importance for schools and those working with CYP to increase the level of intrinsic motivation for children with SEN to overcome the feeling of helplessness (Keller, 1987).

These findings and previous research suggest that this can be achieved through creating greater opportunities for children with SEN to work meaningfully and collaboratively with peers as well as opportunities to work independently. Secondly, it highlighted that with the appropriate support children with LDs can share their views about important matters affecting them, but in practice, they appear to be mostly left out of decision-making. SDT suggests that children with SEN are likely to have increased levels of autonomy, competence and relatedness when actively involved in what happens to them and their learning. Therefore, it is suggested that schools and professionals working closely with children with SEN need to think carefully about creating opportunities for children to be involved in decision-making that is meaningful, but does not create further marginalisation as indicated by McKay (2014).

Additionally, a truly inclusive environment in which children with different levels of ability do not experience difficulties or barriers to learning, will help to remove the need for labelling and stigma. This approach, that would see all children educated in mainstream schools, would help staff and students see difference as normal and unremarkable. A carefully planned and appropriately differentiated curriculum, as well as opportunities for learning in groups that are fluid so that children would have the opportunity to learn alongside peers of mixed abilities as well as peers of similar abilities to themselves, is essential. The children in this study did not appear to indicate that they were educated outside of the regular classroom for any significant amount of time. However, stigma and difference were still present within the regular classroom, suggesting that a delivery model that ensures all children are educated together in one physical room is not enough to achieve an inclusive environment. A shift from focus on ability and achievement, to effort and other qualities, such as creative abilities or building 'character' and 'resilience' would also help reduce stigma.

This raises the question of whether a truly inclusive environment is achievable. The vision of all children being educated together, including those with so-called profound and multiple disabilities, would require substantial changes to occur in relation to availability of resources and the current structure of schooling. Such change and investment is unlikely to occur in the current financial climate. However, a greater effort should be made to listening to the views of children and in taking them seriously, ensuring children have a greater number of interactions with *different* adults (as opposed to one TA), and greater opportunities for both independent and peer-supported learning.

The current research utilised a mixture of methods to complement one another, including pictorial cues, semi-structured interviews, and drawing. It has demonstrated that this qualitative design can yield information that is valid and useful, as well as highlighting future adaptations that can be made to the use of pictorial cues in the way they are presented, to enable even greater validity.

Finally, with subsequent improvement in the researcher's awareness, skills in research methodology, and confidence undertaking this research has shed light on the potential role of EPs in the contribution to a research-based/reflective practice approach across Children's Services aimed at developing professional practice based on partnership and enhancing outcomes for children.

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## 7 APPENDIX A – UEL ethical approval

### School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

### NOTICE OF ETHICS REVIEW DECISION

**For research involving human participants**  
BSc/MSc/MA/Professional Doctorates in Clinical, Counselling and Educational  
Psychology

**REVIEWER:** Mark Holloway

**Course:** Professional Doctorate in Educational Psychology

**STUDENT:** Abigail Wilson

**SUPERVISOR:** Helena Bunn

**Title of proposed study:** 'Exploring children's views and experiences of having a learning difficulty and the support they receive at school'

#### DECISION OPTIONS:

1. **APPROVED:** Ethics approval for the above named research study has been granted from the date of approval (see end of this notice) to the date it is submitted for assessment/examination.
2. **APPROVED, BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED BEFORE THE RESEARCH COMMENCES** (see Minor Amendments box below): In this circumstance, re-submission of an ethics application is not required but the student must confirm with their supervisor that all minor amendments have been made before the research commences. Students are to do this by filling in the confirmation box below when all amendments have been attended to and emailing a copy of this decision notice to her/his supervisor for their records. The supervisor will then forward the student's confirmation to the School for its records.
3. **NOT APPROVED, MAJOR AMENDMENTS AND RE-SUBMISSION REQUIRED** (see Major Amendments box below): In this circumstance, a revised ethics application must be submitted and approved before any research takes place. The revised application will be reviewed by the same reviewer. If in doubt, students should ask their supervisor for support in revising their ethics application.

#### DECISION ON THE ABOVE-NAMED PROPOSED RESEARCH STUDY

*(Please indicate the decision according to one of the 3 options above)*

Approved but minor amendments are required before the research commences

**Minor amendments required** *(for reviewer):*

No changes needed to the proposed procedure but the form needs some minor changes:

The supervisor's tracked comments appear on the form

The supervisor hasn't signed or dated the form

The student cites visuals to support the interview questions but these are not included in the form

**Major amendments required** *(for reviewer):*

**ASSESSMENT OF RISK TO RESEACHER** *(for reviewer)*

If the proposed research could expose the researcher to any of kind of emotional, physical or health and safety hazard? Please rate the degree of risk:

- HIGH
- MEDIUM
- LOW**

*Reviewer comments in relation to researcher risk (if any):*

**Reviewer** *(Typed name to act as signature):* Mark Holloway

**Date:** 9th February 2016

*This reviewer has assessed the ethics application for the named research study on behalf of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee*

**Confirmation of making the above minor amendments (for students):**

I have noted and made all the required minor amendments, as stated above, before starting my research and collecting data.

Student's name (*Typed name to act as signature*): Abigail Wilson  
Student number: 1430395

Date: 10<sup>th</sup> February 2016

*(Please submit a copy of this decision letter to your supervisor with this box completed, if minor amendments to your ethics application are required)*

## 8 APPENDIX B – Summary of the literature review process

Systematic literature search 1 relating to LDs	
Search date	31/05/2016
Databases	Academic Search Complete  PsyInfo
Primary search terms	“Special Educational Needs” OR “Learning Disabilities” OR “LDs” OR “Intellectual Disabilities”
Secondary search term	“Child attitude* OR Understand  View OR Perspective OR Voice OR Experience OR Perception
Number of results	N = 18,668
Exclusion criteria applied	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Items pre-dating the year 2000</li> <li>• Duplication of results</li> <li>• Written in languages other than English</li> <li>• Sources other than Academic Journals (e.g. magazines, book reviews, books, etc)</li> <li>• Articles relating to age of child other than ‘childhood’ or ‘school age’</li> </ul>
Number of results	N = 959
Articles selected after title and abstracts were viewed	N = 5  Hand search N = 3  Total N = 8

Systematic literature search 2 relating to the additional support children receive in school	
Search date	06/06/16
Databases	Academic Search Complete PsyInfo
Primary search terms	"Special Educational Needs" OR "Learning Disabilities" OR "LDs" OR "Intellectual Disabilities"
Secondary search term	"Individual Education Plan" OR Statement OR "Educational Health Care Plan" or "Educational Program" OR "Additional support" OR "Additional educational support" OR "Special needs support" OR "Special needs provision"
Number of results	N = 1,131
Exclusion criteria applied	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Items pre-dating the year 2000</li> <li>• Duplication of results</li> <li>• Written in languages other than English</li> <li>• Sources other than Academic Journals (e.g. magazines, book reviews, books, etc)</li> <li>• Articles relating to age of child other than 'childhood' or 'school age'</li> </ul>
Number of results	N = 79
Articles selected after title and abstracts were viewed	N = 8 Hand search N = 2

	Total N = 10
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Systematic literature search 3 relating to participating in the planning for additional support	
Search date	10/08/16
Databases	Academic Search Complete PsyInfo
Primary search terms	“Special Educational Needs” OR “Learning Disabilities” OR “LDs” OR “Intellectual Disabilities”
Secondary search term	Participate OR “Pupil voice”
Number of results	N = 750
Exclusion criteria applied	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Items pre-dating the year 2000</li> <li>• Duplication of results</li> <li>• Written in languages other than English</li> <li>• Sources other than Academic Journals (e.g. magazines, book reviews, books, etc)</li> <li>• Articles relating to age of child other than ‘childhood’ or ‘school age’</li> </ul>
Number of results	N = 35

Articles selected after title and abstracts were viewed	N = 4 Hand search N = 4 Total N = 8
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## 9 APPENDIX C– Summary of the selected articles

No.	Date Pub'd	Authors	Title	Country	Participants	Methodology of the study	Results and implications
1	2006	Raskind, Margalit and Higgins	My LD: Children's Voices on the Internet.	United States	164 children (9-18 years-old) who were "self-identified" as having an LD on website	Reviewed 4,903 e-mails sent from the 164 self-identified LD participants to other users on the site and four animated fictionalized characters; looked for expressions of "LD self-presentation"	Content analysis used  Children felt safe-enough to self-disclose and share difficulties online (academic difficulties, emotional distress and social isolation). Still a lack of clarity around the nature of these difficulties for some.
2	2005	Kelly	Chocolate ... makes you autism': impairment, disability and childhood identities	Northern Ireland	32 learning disabled children (2- to 16-year-olds), their parents, 16 social workers	Semi-structured interviews	Adults often fail to take into account the views and experiences of learning disabled children; children developed their own interpretations of impairment and disability based on their experiences and interactions with others.
3	2004	Kelly and Norwich	Pupils' perceptions of self and labels: Moderate LDs in	UK	101 children with MLD/GLD (special & mainstream) (10–12 & 13–14 year-old)	Semi-structured interviews	Most children were aware of their LDs and felt mainly negative about their difficulties. Academic self-perceptions more positive in special

			mainstream and special schools				school. Self-perceptions of general characteristics were a mixture of positive and negative with no differences by placement. Mostly positive views of schools; significant minority had mixed views. In mainstream, children preferred receiving support in withdrawal setting; most preferred attending own school; high rate of bullying reported.
4	2006	Maxwell	Researching into Some Primary School Children's Views About School: Using Personal Construct Psychology in Practice with Children on the Special Needs Register	UK	13 children (junior aged) on the SEN register	Personal Construct Psychology - case studies (conversation and drawing)	Social activities of greater importance than formal learning experiences; Peer relationships were paramount and defined the positive/negative experiences the pupils had of school; pupils were able to describe a range of problem solving strategies for resolving peer group difficulties.
5	2015	Webster and Blatchford	Worlds apart? The nature and quality of the	UK	48 children (9- and 10-year-old) with SSENs for either MLD or	Case studies (interview, documentation and field note data)	Children experienced explicit and subtle forms of separation daily; a high level of pedagogical

			educational experiences of pupils with a Statement for special educational needs in mainstream primary schools,		BESD at mainstream school  interviews with SENCOs, teachers, TAs and each pupil's parents/carers		decision-making by TAs; an impoverished pedagogical diet compared to their peers; and gaps in teachers' and TAs' knowledge concerning meeting the needs of pupils with Statements were found.
6	2009	Ryan	Inclusion is more than a place: exploring pupil views and voice in Belfast schools through visual narrative	Northern Ireland	Children with and without SEN (six primary, secondary mainstream and special schools)	Cameras to create 'visual narratives'	Some pupils had strongly-held views about: sensory aspects of school environment; problems with toilets in relations to smells; the head teacher's office space.
7	2014	Kerins	Dilemmas of difference and educational provision for pupils with mild general learning disabilities in the Republic of Ireland	Northern Ireland	principals, teachers, parents and pupils (over 12 years old) transferred from mainstream primary to special school	Semi-structured interviews	Differences relating to curricular provision, resource allocation and teacher expertise were highlighted between mainstream and special schools. Pupils preferred to have stayed at mainstream setting.

8	2002	Messiou	Marginalisation in primary schools: listening to children's voices.	UK	children in one primary school class; followed by more focused observations of 4 children identified as experiencing marginalisation	Drawing, observation and interview techniques	the children's feelings and responses appeared to be closely related to how other children behaved towards them
9	2011	Mortier, Desimpela, De Schauwer, and Van Hove	I want support, not comments, children's perspectives on supports in their life	Belgium	6 children (between 9-18 years-old) with SEN and their peers	Semi-structured interviews and focus groups	Children with SEN appreciated supports because they remove restrictions in activities due to the impairment; but supports also had negative psycho-emotional repercussions.
10	2009	De Schauwer, Van Hove, Mortier and Loots	I need help on Mondays, it's not my day. The other days, I'm ok. Perspectives of disabled children on inclusive education.	Brussels	15 children (between 5-17 years-old) at a mainstream school	Semi-structured interviews and observations	Children felt that being active and doing the things they like to do is more important than being able to master things; they were aware of being different from their peers and talked about their difficulties as being part of who they are; were generally positive about their teachers and talked about school in terms non-academic activities, emphasising the community aspect of school life as being most important; friendships mattered to them; and support from peers and adults came in

							different forms and was seen positively apart from when it meant they missed something that was fun; it was important for pupils to also do things independently;
11	2010	Isaksson, Lindqvist, and Bergstro	Struggling for recognition and inclusion parents' and pupils' experiences of special support measures in school	Sweden	Eight pupils aged between 12-14 years-old with SEN (ADHD or dyslexia) and their parents.	Semi-structured interviews - grounded theory approach	Additional support occurred outside of the regular classroom; children felt ambivalent towards the differentiated support measures due to mixed feelings around preferring to be supported outside the regular classroom but feelings excluded and isolated from the others.
12	2009	Griffiths	Asking how instead of why: exploring inclusive approaches to teaching and learning through pupil and teacher responses to a school link project	UK	20 young people (Year 8) pupils with a SSEN and their teachers at one mainstream and one special school	Research diaries and small group-based interviews	Pedagogical approaches were successful in breaking down some barriers to inclusion between the two groups of pupils, but significant changes would need to be brought about for there to be longevity to the removal of barriers to inclusion.
13	2015	Kubiak	Using 'voice' to understand what college	Ireland	6 co-researchers with an intellectual disability and 18	Semi-structured interviews	Strategies that promoted learner engagement and autonomy include establishing a supportive

			students with intellectual disabilities say about the teaching and learning process		students with an intellectual disability.		learning climate or environment, and promoting self-regulated learning strategies.
14	2009	Morgan	I think it's about the teacher feeding off our minds, instead of us learning off them, sort of like switching the process around: pupils perspectives on being consulted about classroom teaching and learning	UK	4 teachers; 75 young people (Year 8); & school management staff in one secondary school	Qualitative case-studies - lesson observation and semi-structured interviews	Pupils welcomed consultation; had much to say about its benefits; valued feedback from teachers post-consultation; and had concerns clustered around issues of trust and anonymity.
15	2009	Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Martin, Russell & Webster	The impact of support staff in schools. Results from the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff	England and Wales	primary, secondary mainstream and special schools	Large scale surveys (Strand 1), followed by a multi-method and multi-informant approach (surveys, systematic observations,	TAs interactions with pupils, more concerned with completion of tasks rather than learning and understanding; TAs reactive rather than proactive; at secondary level the more contact pupils had with

			project, (Strand 2 Wave 2)			interviews, etc.) (Strand 2)	support staff the less individual attention they had from teachers; the more support pupils received, the less progress they made
16	2012	Rutherford	In, out or somewhere in between?, Disabled students' and teacher aides' experiences of school.	New Zealand	10 young people with disabilities (between 8-17 years-old); 18 teacher aides.	Semi-structured interviews	Teacher aids play a pivotal, complex and ambiguous role in both helping and hindering students' presence, participation and achievement in school life
17	2005	Broer, Doyle and Giangreco	Perspectives of Students With Intellectual Disabilities About Their Experiences With Paraprofessional Support	United States	16 young adults (between 19-29 years-old) with intellectual disabilities	Semi-structured interviews	Student's perspectives of support staff characterised by four interrelating themes as: mother, friend, protector (e.g., from bullying), and primary teacher. Students provided both positive and negative perspectives on these four descriptors.
18	2006	Vlachou, Didaskalou and Argyrakouli	Preferences of students with general LDs for different service delivery modes.	Greece	95 young people (between 7-13 years-old) with general LDs	Semi-structured interviews	Majority of students preferred the resource room over the regular class; preferred receiving help from the special education teacher; all had not experienced in-class additional support
19	2001	Nordmann	The Marginalisation of	United States	2 young people (1 at mainstream, 1 at private school)	Case histories	Both students experienced marginalisation in that their views and wishes for either

			Students with Learning Disabilities as a Function of School Philosophy and Practice		with learning disabilities		no further SEN support (in the mainstream school) or requirement for further SEN support (in the private school) was ignored in favour of institutional empowerment
20	2006	Norwich and Kelly	Evaluating children's participation in SEN procedures: lessons for educational psychologists	UK	91 children with SEN, 12 SENCOs, 10 head teachers, 5 teachers, 20 teaching assistants across 18 schools	Semi-structured interviews; data collected from a SENCO Questionnaire; Local Education Authority (LEA) questionnaire and LEA officer interviews	Schools were using both formal and informal participation processes; a child protection principle was sometimes seen as coming into opposition with the participation principle
21	2014	McKay's	Young people's voices: disciplining young people's participation in decision-making in special educational needs,	UK	2 young people (12 and 14 years-old) with learning disabilities, their parents and their educational professionals. 1 at mainstream and 1 at special provision.	Interviews and observations	Student at specialist provision had several advocates speak for him, and was not invited to attend any meetings over the 6-month period. The student at mainstream setting was invited to share his views at each meeting. Including young people's voices is something that is context dependent and influenced by individual relationships, both positive and negative
22	2008	Pawley and Tennant	Student Perceptions Of Their IEP Targets.	UK	19 young people (Year 8) in three schools and the SENCOs	Interviews, with the findings cross-referenced against an examination of their	Very few pupils were able to communicate a clear understanding of IEPs; they reported targets that mostly

						individual education plans (IEPs)	reflected mainstream target-setting, and very few stated targets matched with those in their IEPs
23	2009	Goepel	Constructing the Individual Education Plan: confusion or collaboration ?	UK	4 children (10 & 11 years old) in their final year at junior school, their parents and teachers	Questionnaire and interviews	Differences in the perception of need occurred between the stakeholders; lack of clarity meant that the writing of an effective and appropriate IEP that demonstrated effective partnership between all stakeholders was much less likely; partnerships that specifically exclude the child are least effective.
24	2013	Woods, Martin and Humphrey	The Difference A Year Makes: An Exploratory Self-Directed IEP Case Study.	United States	1 young person with a learning disability (in first and second year of high school)	Case-study approach	Following self-directed IEP instruction, when compared to the first IEP meeting, the student in the second meeting a year later had a marked increase in word count and speaking rate, a more focused post-school employment vision, and an increase in meeting leadership
25	2012	Carter, Cameron, Walton and Houghton	Never mind what I like, it's who I am that matters: an investigation into social pedagogy as	UK	6 young people between 14-18 years-old) with learning disabilities; and their parents	Participatory action research; interviews with parents	Social pedagogy helped to build trusting and equal relationships between participants and adults, increasing their involvement in the context of a person-centred approach. Some

			a method to enhance the involvement of young people with learning disabilities.				difficulties in delivering method discussed.
26	2006	Woolfson, Harker, Lowe, Shields, Banks, Campbell and Ferguson	Consulting About Consulting: Young people's views of consultation	Scotland	26 young people (12 years-old and above) with and without SEN	Focus groups	Not only did the young people want to be involved in decisions made about them, the factor they reported as being the most important in consultation was individual choice.

## 10APPENDIX D - Prompts for Semi-Structured Interviews

- Introduction
  - *Introduce self again and explain purpose of research* - Hi, do you remember me? We have met once before. I am interested to find out what school is like for you and what helps you to learn at school.
  - *Verify consent and right to withdraw* – Are you happy to talk to me today about school? You can leave at any point. (If yes, ask pupil to sign consent form).
  - *Explain anonymity* – I just want to let you know that if I use what you say to me for my project, I will not use your name.
  
- Participants awareness and understanding of their LD
  - What do you think a LD is? (*Help pupil come to a definition if needed, e.g., some pupils find it harder to learn than others, we say that they might have a LD.*)
  - Do you think you have a LD? (*if response is No* - Do you have any difficulty with learning?
  - (*if response is yes*) – What is your LD?
  - How is it for you to have these difficulty(ies)?
  - How are lessons for you (with specific examples of core English and Maths, and others such as Art, PE, DT)? Which ones are better? Which ones are more difficult? <sup>1</sup>
  - How are break times for you? How does have a difficulty with learning help or not help you at break?
  - What about friends at school, do you have any friends? What do you like doing with them?
  - When did you know you had some difficulties with learning? How did you find out? Who told you? How did you feel to find out? Was it good, was it bad (explore)? So, is it generally a good or a bad thing to have a LD? why?
  - What is school like for you, generally speaking? How do you feel about school?

### Children's drawing:

- 
- <sup>1</sup> Other visuals were available to support children's communication, including pictures of different lessons, a school, children, and adults, and pictures of cartoon faces representing opposites such as 'easy' and 'difficult' or 'happy' and 'sad'.

- 'Current picture' of school **USE ONE COLOUR (black)**: You have told me some really interesting things about how school is for you. would you like to draw this?
- I will do the writing today, and you can do the drawing. You can just make quick drawings or sketches (rather than detailed drawings). It doesn't matter if a mistake is made. There is no right or wrong answer.
- Draw how school is for you now. (A3 Paper). Maybe you could draw a big school, fill the page. Then you could draw the classroom here...a few children...adults...where are you? What else could you add? What else?
- Participants views on the additional support they receive in school
  - Is there anyone who helps you at school? Can you draw them?
  - Tell me about what they are like.
  - What about other children? Are they helpful? Why? Can you draw them?
  - Is there anything that helps you at school? I have some pictures here of things that you may or may not be finding helpful with your learning. Let's look at the first one (read it out). Can you place it on either the smiley face that says 'This helps me and matters to me' or the sad face that says 'This does not help me' (repeat with each visual representing supports).
  - Can you draw some of these things (point to the supports that have been placed on 'This helps me and matters to me' location) in the classroom you find helpful?
  - What helps you most? Why?
  - Is there anything that doesn't help?/makes your learning more difficult?
- Participants views on what else could happen to promote their progress at school

Children's drawing:

- 'Future picture' of school **USE DIFFERENT COLOUR**. Now we are going talk about things that you would like to happen at school – things that would help you.
- Imagine you had a magic wand and that you could change things in school for you.
- What do you think could help you at school – something that is not already happening? Why don't you choose a different colour to use, and add these to your drawing? (Or, if students are negative about lots of the current picture, start again on new sheet: shall we put a big cross through this and start again?).
- Is there anyone else who could help you?
- What else could help you in lessons? Can you add them?
- Are there other children who could help you? How?
- Are there other people outside of the school who could help you? In learning / in feeling well at school / being happy at school?
- Participants views on participating in the planning for their additional support

- Now thinking about you (*draw pupil as stick person and write their name on new a4 sheet*), because you are very important, did anyone ask you about what help you want? Who? What did they do about it?
- *If pupil answers No*, did your parents ask you what help you need? Teacher? LSA when making targets for you?
- Did they tell you why you have this group...help for...?
- Did they ask you whether you like it? ...Got better at it?
- Has anyone asked you if you want anything else?
- Have you seen your Statement/EHCP before? Do you know what this is? (show them) did you help to make it in any way, such as give your ideas about what you want?... how you want to be in the future? ....what helps you most at school?

# 11 APPENDIX E - Information letter and consent form for parents/carers

## Information letter and consent form for parents/carers

### **‘Exploring children’s views and experiences of having a LD and the support they receive at school’**

Dear.....

My name is Abi Wilson and I am a trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of East London. As part of my training, I am looking to explore children’s views about their special educational needs (SEN) and the support they receive at school within the Royal Borough of Greenwich. I hope the information collected in this study will help Greenwich to better support children who have an SEN at school. I am looking to explore what children have to say about SEN and what support is/isn’t helpful to them, giving them an opportunity to share their thoughts.

#### ***Why is this study being done?***

Few studies have contributed to exploring the views and experiences of children with LDs at primary school. The study aims to find out what children understand about their LD, and their views on the additional support they receive at school and the involvement they have in the decisions made that contribute to the support they receive.

#### ***Which children will be involved?***

I will be inviting primary school children who have a Statement or an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) for a LD and attend a mainstream school.

#### ***What does the study involve?***

1. I will meet the child at the child’s school for an informal discussion about the study and to answer any questions they might have.
2. The child will be invited to talk about their SEN and the support they receive. I would think this will last between 20 to 45 minutes and the interview will take place at the child’s school.

#### ***Confidentiality***

On meeting the child the second time, I will record what they say using a tape recorder to ensure their thoughts are recorded accurately. The only time that I would break confidentiality would be if they tell me something that means either themselves or somebody else is in danger.

When I have gathered all of the children’s thoughts about SEN, I will write about what I have found out, and I might also be using the findings to write journal articles or inform practices in schools or other services. If I do so, I will not use the child’s name and I will also make sure that nobody can work out who said what. The children’s response will not be linked to their name, school or any personal details.



If you are happy for your child to take part in this study, please read and ✓ the following Statements, and sign below:

	✓
I have read this letter, which explains what participation will involve	
I understand that my child's involvement in this study is voluntary and that he/she can withdraw their participation at any time before the data is analysed.	
I am happy for my child's responses to be audio taped	
I understand that Greenwich Psychology Service and the University of East London will receive a copy of the research, and that no one will be able to identify the participants involved	
I understand that the findings might be published, but no one will be able to identify my child. I am happy for the data from my child to be used for this scope.	

I agree to  
 .....  
 .....taking part in Abi's study if  
 they wish to.

Signed  
 .....  
 Date.....

# 12APPENDIX F - Invitation Letter for Children

To .....



Hello. My name is Abi Wilson. I am training to be an Educational Psychologist.



I am trying to find out more about what children think about learning difficulties and the help they get at school.

I would like to ask you about what you find easy and hard at school. I would like to find out what support you have found helpful, and what you think would help you even more.



There are no right or wrong answers. I'd like to hear what you have to say. What you tell me might help other children.

I will record everything that we say so that I can remember it later on.



You can stop at any time and not take part if you do not wish to. If there are any questions that you do not want to answer then you do not have to.

I will not use your name or school name when I tell other people about our talk, unless you are at risk.



**Now what?**

if you are happy to be part of my study, I will arrange a time to come and tell you a bit more about it at school. I'll answer any questions you have and talk to you about getting your written permission.



if you are happy to be part of my study after we meet, we can arrange a good time for me to come and meet you again, and have our conversation about learning difficulties and the help you get at school.

if you are happy to talk to me about my study, then put your name below and circle **YES**  
 if you do not want to take part, that's okay, just circle **NO**

My name is ..... and I'm happy to talk to Abi about her study **YES / NO**  
 Thank you for taking the time to read this!

# 13 APPENDIX G - Information letter & consent form for Head Teachers



## Information letter and consent form for Head Teachers

### **‘Exploring children’s views and experiences of having a LD and the support they receive at school’**

Dear.....

My name is Abi Wilson and I am a trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of East London. As part of my training, I am looking to explore children’s views about their special educational needs (SEN) and the support they receive at school within the Royal Borough of \*\*\*. I hope the information collected in this study will help \*\*\* to better support children at school who have SEN. I am looking to explore what children have to say about SEN and what support is/isn’t helpful to them, giving them an opportunity to share their thoughts.

#### ***Why is this study being done?***

Few studies have contributed to exploring the views and experiences of children with Learning Difficulties at primary school. The study aims to find out what children understand about their LD, and their views on the additional support they receive at school, what else might help them, and the involvement they have in the decisions made that contribute to the support they receive.

#### ***Which children will be involved?***

I have invited primary school children who have a Statement or an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) for a LD and who attend a mainstream school, to take part in an interview. I sent the child an invitation letter explaining what the study involves and I have received written parental consent for the child to participate.

#### ***What does the study involve?***

1. The researcher will meet the child at their school for an informal discussion about the research and to answer any questions they might have.
2. The child will be invited to talk about their SEN and the support they receive lasting no more than 45 minutes at the child’s school in a room. The child will be asked to give their written consent before the interview takes place.

#### ***Confidentiality***

On meeting the child the second time, I will record what they say using a tape recorder to ensure their thoughts are recorded accurately. The only time that I would break

confidentiality would be if they tell me something that means either themselves or somebody else is in danger.

When I have gathered all of the children’s thoughts about SEN, I will write about what I have found out, but I will not use their name and I will also make sure that nobody can work out who said what. The children’s response will not be linked to their name, school or any personal details.

If you are happy for the children at your school to take part in this study, please read and ✓ the following Statements, and sign on the next page:

	✓
I have read this letter, which explains what participation will involve	
I understand that the children’s involvement in this study is voluntary and that he/she can withdraw their participation at any time before the data is analysed.	
I am happy for the children’s responses to be audio taped	
I understand that *** Psychology Service and the University of East London will receive a copy of the research, and that no one will be able to identify the participants involved	
I understand that the findings might be published, but no one will be able to identify the children or the schools involved.	

If you agree to the participation of the children at your school in this study, please sign below:

Signed..... Date .....

**Name in CAPITALS** .....

***What if I would like to find out more about this study?***

If you have any questions about the study or if you would like to discuss this further, please feel free to contact me on:

Email: [Abigail.wilson@\\*\\*\\*.gov.uk](mailto:Abigail.wilson@***.gov.uk)

Contact number: 020 \*\*\*

Thank you for taking the time to consider this piece of research ☺

# 14APPENDIX H - Consent form for Children

## CONSENT FORM FOR CHILDREN

**‘Exploring children’s views and experiences of having a LD and the support they receive at school’**

1. I understand what Abi’s study is about:

Yes

No (I would like to discuss this further)

Signature: .....

2. I would like to take part in the study and tell Abi what I think about my LD and the support I get at school:

Yes

No (I would like to discuss this further)

Signature: .....

3. I am happy for Abi to record what I say so she can make sure she can remember what I tell her:

Yes

No (I would like to discuss this further)

Signature: .....

Thank you ☺

# 15APPENDIX I - Participatory cards

## Participatory cards

Where/Who  
you sit with



Having a break  
(when? why?)



Having a Learning Support  
Worker (LSA)



Help with  
making friends



Working with  
different adults



Remind me of  
my strengths



Having a quiet  
place to go



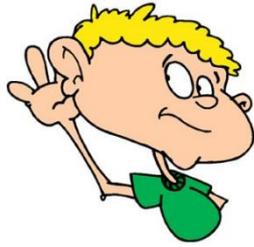
More help in  
some lessons (which?)



Not being  
given too much  
to do in one go



Instructions  
being repeated for you



Adults making  
sure I'm ok



Not so much  
Writing



## 16APPENDIX J – Example of Thematic Analysis for Child D

INTERVIEW BETWEEN A (INTERVIEWER) AND Child D (INTERVIEWEE)

Code	Speaker	Transcript	Sub-theme	Theme	Line
	A	We are going to leave it there...in the middle			1.
	Child D	I can...beeping and...flashing			2.
	A	So do you remember my name Child D?			3.
	Child D	Um			4.
	A	Don't worry if you have forgotten. Its Abi			5.
	Child D	Abi...ah...			6.
	A	So we have met once before, haven't we?			7.
	Child D	Yes			8.
	A	Yes. So umm...I am interested today to find out what school is like for you. So that's why I am here...and to find out what helps you to learn at school as well. So...are you happy to talk to me today?			9.
	Child D	Um			10.
	A	Remember you can leave at any point...so you don't have to stay if you don't want to			11.
	Child D	Um...yes I am happy to talk			12.
	A	Okay...brilliant. So here I have got a consent form that asks a couple of questions, and you can say 'Yes' or 'No'. So the first one says, 'I understand what Abi's study is about'. So you can tick 'Yes' or 'No, I would like to discuss this further'. This one is 'Yes'...this one is 'No'.			13.
	Child D	But...um...no			14.
	A	So no, you don't know what its about?			15.
	Child D	No			16.

	A	Okay...so do you want to find out a little bit more about it?			17.
	Child D	Um...yes			18.
	A	Okay. So what I am going to do is I am going to ask you questions about what school is like for you...whether its good, whether its bad, what you like doing, what lessons you find easy, what lessons you find hard...and I am going to ask you questions about what helps you at school, what makes lessons easier and what actually makes lessons hard. Um...and then I am going to ask you questions about the future...what you would like to change about school.			19.
	Child D	Mm			20.
	A	Have you got any questions about that?			21.
	Child D	No			22.
	A	Okay...so do you still feel that you don't understand the study or you do?			23.
	Child D	I do now			24.
	A	Okay. Can you write your name underneath? You can just put your first name			25.
		(sound of writing on paper)			26.
	A	The next one says, 'I would like to take part...' <i>(sound of children in background and door being closed)</i> 'I would like to take part in the study and tell Abi what I think about school'. That says, 'Yes, I do want to take part', or 'No, I don't'			27.
		(sound of writing on paper)			28.
	A	And then you can write your name underneath again please			29.
		(sound of writing on paper)			30.
	A	Wow, you have got really neat handwriting			31.
	Child D	Thank you			32.
	A	The next one says, 'I am happy for Abi to record what we say so she can remember what I tell her'. That is what this is, it is a recorder that records what we talk about to help me remember.			33.

		(sound of writing on paper)			34.
No knowledge and awareness of learning difficulty	A	Wonderful. So if I use anything that we talk about for my project, I just want to let you know I am not going to use your name and I am not going to use your school's name. So that means its completely anonymous...so nobody will know its you who is saying it...okay? Right...shall we get started? Okay, so have you heard of a learning difficulty before?	Strengths and difficulties	Experience of school life	35.
	Child D	No			36.
	A	What do you think it might be?			37.
	Child D	I don't know			38.
	A	We could say that some children find learning more difficult than others...and we could say that they might have a learning difficulty. So do you think you have a learning difficulty?			39.
	Child D	Um...no			40.
English is hard	A	Do you find any learning difficult?	Individual portraits of lessons		41.
	Child D	Oh um...English is a bit hard			42.
	A	English is a bit hard...okay. So what lessons do you find easier?			43.
		(interruption by someone briefly entering/leaving room)			44.
Maths and Science easy	A	So what lessons do you find easier?	Individual portraits of lessons	Experience of school life	45.
	Child D	Um...Maths...and um...Science			46.
	A	Maths and Science you find easier?			47.
	Child D	Yes			48.
Enjoyment for doing work at school	A	So how is school for you?	General positive attitude towards school		49.
	Child D	Um...okay		50.	
	A	Okay? And what do you like about school...what's good about school?		51.	
	Child D	When I...um...get to...when I get to have um...do work		52.	
	A	When you get to do work...that's good about school? What do you mean by that...when you get to do work? Do you like doing work?		53.	
	Child D	Um...yes...I like doing work. Well...I like doing work...but		54.	

		sometimes um I don't...but sometimes I do			
Difficulties to understand	A	Sometimes you like doing work and sometimes you don't? Okay. So tell me about those times that you like doing work	Strengths and difficulties		55.
Awareness of difficulties	Child D	Its like when its not um...its not like English or anything that um...not like English but just um...just um the teacher tells me to write something or I have to like write it down but sometimes he does it too quick			56.
	A	Okay...thank you for sharing that. So you said that the times that you like doing work...you like doing work most of the time...but the times you don't like doing work is usually during English or when you have to do writing, and sometimes its because the teacher does it too quickly. Is that right?			57.
	Child D	Yes			58.
	A	Okay. So tell me what lessons you go to. What lessons do you do?			59.
		(music and talking starts in the background)			60.
Awareness of lessons	Child D	Umm I do...well umm...English, Maths, Science umm and...	Individual portraits of lessons	Experience of school life	61.
	A	You do English, Maths and Science...do you do Art?			62.
	Child D	Yes, Art sometimes			63.
	A	Sometimes			64.
	Child D	Umm...geography			65.
	A	Ah...geography			66.
	Child D	Geography...and I think that's it...yes, that's it			67.
	A	Do you do PE?			68.
Good knowledge of lesson routines	Child D	Yes I do PE sometimes...sometimes I don't	Routine is important	Experience of school life	69.
	A	Okay, so why...?			70.
	Child D	But normally its either on a Wednesday or on a Monday			71.
	A	And why do you not sometimes do it?			72.
Passive receiver	Child D	Um when we ask the teacher and she says no...but sometimes she says yes	Adults playing significant role	Experience of school life	73.

	A	Okay, and um out of all those lessons that you mentioned um...you said that you find Maths and Science a bit easier			74.
	Child D	Yes			75.
Knowledge of his own abilities	A	And you find English a bit harder. What do you think about PE?	Strengths and difficulties	Experience of school life	76.
	Child D	Well I have to do um... PE but its really hard. I have to do cricket and um... I am good at um bowling; I am good at hitting but not go out the front um...getting people out properly. Sometimes I get them out, sometimes I don't			77.
	A	Is that in cricket?			78.
	Child D	Yes			79.
Enjoy simple writing	A	Yes. Okay...and what do you think about geography?	Individual portraits of lessons	Important factors in child's life	80.
	Child D	Um geography is okay. Sometimes I do it, sometimes I don't...but sometimes we just mark in other people's books to put stars in and write what they want...not write what they wrote but the comment um what they wrote			81.
Involvement with peers in learning	A	Ah...so you are commenting on somebody else's work in their book?	Peers	Important factors in child's life	82.
	Child D	Yes			83.
Giving peers feedback easy	A	And how do you find that?	Strengths and difficulties	Experience of school life	84.
	Child D	Um...really easy. You have to do... just get like a note now on it and just write a star um...two stars and um whatever your signature is and then you write about what they done			85.
Receiving peer feedback helpful	A	Ah			86.
	Child D	Really good			87.
	A	Oh right... so somebody talks about your work and writes what you have done really good?			88.
	Child D	Um...yes. When we have finished work we stick it in their book and pass it over back to the other person			89.
	A	And do you find it helpful to have somebody else to tell you what you have done good and what you need to improve?			90.
	Child D	Yes			91.

Passive receiver	A	Yes? Okay...brilliant. So do you go out to break times?	Adults playing significant role	Experience of school life	92.
	Child D	Break times?			93.
	A	Do you go outside?			94.
	Child D	Um...yes, we do...but I don't know what that um...well sometimes we do rehearsals and sometimes we don't...but sometimes we just stay in...stay in for the whole session and then um...sometimes um once in a X we go outside and play. Well if its like a sports day out there then um...when its a sports day then we sometimes um we have to go X back to school and play X			95.
	A	Do you like it when you go into the big playground?			96.
	Child D	Yes			97.
	A	Okay. And what is break time like for you? Is it good, is it bad, is it okay?			98.
	Child D	Its okay			99.
	A	Its okay...alright. What sort of things do you like doing at break time? Do you play with friends?			100.
	Child D	Mm...sometimes			101.
	A	Sometimes			102.
	Child D	Sometimes I don't X sit down and sometimes I don't			103.
	A	Sometimes you sit down and sometimes you don't?			104.
	Child D	Well yes			105.
A	Okay. So you say that break time, sometimes you sit down and sometimes you don't, sometimes you play with friends, sometimes you don't	106.			
Unclear preferences	Child D	Yes...um sometimes um I just like play...sometimes I like playing, sometimes I don't...and sometimes when X we have to go back up and do some more work and then when its night time we get even more	Adults playing significant role	Experience of school life	107.
Passive receiver	A	Even more?			108.
	Child D	Play...			109.
	A	Playtime?			110.
	Child D	Yes, but um when it comes to lunch time we um...like when we			111.

		come out we just go and we play for half an hour and just do whatever we want and sometimes we just relax and sometimes we don't			
	A	Okay. So when you said to me sometimes you feel like playing and sometimes you don't feel like playing...when you do feel like playing what to do you like doing?			112
Playing with friends	Child D	I like doing...when I feel like it...when I feel like it I feel like playing with one of my friends but sometimes I feel like not playing with my friends	Peers	Important factors in child's life	113
Chatting with friends	A	Okay...and when you play with them what do you do? Do you chat, do you play chess, do you run around?			114
(Interacting with friends)	Child D	No, we just chat sometimes and sometimes we don't			115
	A	Sometimes you chat, sometimes you don't. And what about those times when you don't feel like it...what's happening then?			116
	Child D	Then I just like um...just play with um...I just play tennis sometimes, sometimes I don't	Hobbies and interests		Important factors in child's life
	A	Oh, you play tennis at school sometimes?			118
	Child D	Yes			119
	A	What outside of school?			120
	Child D	Um...outside of school			121
	A	Outside of school?			122
	Child D	And I just play it until I just get bored			123
	A	Until you get bored...and you told me yesterday you are really good at tennis			124
	Child D	Mm			125
	A	Yes...brilliant			126
	Child D	I can hit it hard and low and yes....I can probably hit it all the way up into the big building			127
	A	Oh wow!			128
	Child D	When its like...you know you have like this fence but sometimes I can hit it so hard it just goes in there...sometimes...sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes it just goes			129

		like...over there and just like on the roof, rolls down			
	A	Do you get to play tennis at school at all?			130
	Child D	Um yes...sometimes			131
	A	Sometimes. Would you like to play more tennis at school?			132
Interested in Basketball	Child D	No, but I just...sometimes I just feel like um playing basketball sometimes	Hobbies and interests	Important factors in child's life	133
	A	Oh...do you get to play basketball at school?			134
	Child D	Um...yes...but sometimes I am just...there was hoops...there used to be hoops but I don't play basketball any more			135
	A	Are there not hoops here anymore?			136
	Child D	No...they used to be and they um they was like um each day we kept on um...each month we kept on breaking them. Some people kept on breaking them and some people didn't...um the basketball ball hoops...but um I haven't played basketball...that's why			137
	A	Oh, okay			138
Don't do anything	Child D	Sometimes I just don't really do anything...	Not stimulated	Experience of school life	139
	A	Okay, sometimes you just don't do anything. Okay...and why is that?			140
	Child D	Um, if there's like one um...when its like sometimes raining I just don't do anything but just sit down and just go like and sit down until I might fall asleep			141
	A	Sit down until you fall asleep? And are they good times or bad times? Do you like doing that...or not?			142
	Child D	No, sometimes I just walk around and sometimes I am just...now doing nothing...just sit down			143
	A	Sometimes you want to go to sleep and sometimes you don't want to do any...			144
	Child D	But watch the football sometimes...sometimes I just watch football			145

Prefers stimulation outdoor	A	Oh, okay. That's really interesting. So what's it like in class for you Child D ...is it good in class, is it bad, is it okay?	Not stimulated	Experience of school life	146
	Child D	When its like...when its raining I have to like...sometimes when its like really heavy raining we have to go inside but its like boring sometimes			147
Times when school is not interesting / boring (not stimulated)	A	So what about in lessons...in class when you are doing lessons...is it good in class...is it bad, is it okay?	Adults playing significant role	Experience of school life	148
	Child D	Sometimes I just get pulled out of class and sometimes we just do work on um a project...and something about sugar, but um...we are still doing it today...but I think my friends did it... I don't know			149
	A	Okay...so you said to me sometimes you get pulled out of class and you said something about a project that you are also working on at the moment about sugar. Can you tell me more about the times you get pulled out of class...when does that happen?			150
	Child D	Well when its like rainy outside and you have to go in...that's when we just...or I just do nothing and just sit there			151
	A	At break times?			152
	Child D	Sometimes I sit there reading and sometimes I don't			153
	A	Is that during break times or is that during lesson times?			154
	Child D	Sometimes break times			155
Learning support	A	Oh, okay. What about during lesson times? Do you stay in the class or do you go out of the class sometimes during lessons?	Learning	Additional support	156
	Child D	Well when I have to do reading I have to go out a bit sometimes. You have to stay in but sometimes we have to work on something...but I don't know what it is...it's a dinosaur project but we finished it ages and ages ago			157

	A	Oh, okay. So sometimes you go out of the class to do reading?			158
	Child D	Yes			159
	A	And then other times you stay in the class, and sometimes you have got a project to work on. What do you think about the times you go outside to do reading...good, bad, okay?			160
	Child D	Okay			161
Preference for short project work	A	Okay. And what about when you work on a project...is that good, bad, okay?	Not stimulated	Experience of school life	162
	Child D	Okay, but sometimes I just don't feel like working on project work. We have to um...what was it...um...	Individual portraits of lessons		163
	A	About the project			164
	Child D	We have to um...it was really good at the first point but then it felt a bit boring...then I don't even know why I was doing it...I forgot. Then like I remembered and I just kept on carrying on until it was um nearly at the end of the day...like I finished it in one day			165
	A	Oh, well done			166
	Child D	Then all we had to do is um...to crate it and like paint it and all that...but um we had to do it tomorrow...um we done it and then we um finished it...but we forgot to add in the trees and then we had...			167
	A	Forgot to add the...?			168
	Child D	Trees and um...we done the sun and all we needed to do is stick the dinosaur down right, but it was a little bit too big so we needed um a bigger box...so we got like one (like that) that big and we just like camouflaged it...then we made it and we finished and that was it			169
	A	And do you like making things like that?			170
	Child D	Um sometimes...sometimes I don't...sometimes I don't really want to			171
A	Why not?		172		

Knowledge of his abilities	Child D	Because um sometimes we um...we just...I just...sometimes when I am not like focusing I don't like...work properly...I just don't feel like it sometimes	Strengths and difficulties	Experience of school life	173
	A	Oh, okay. So you said sometimes when you are not focusing and you don't feel like it. So work is hard when you are not focusing?			174
	Child D	Um its harder when I don't focus but when I have to focus I like concentrate			175
	A	Mm			176
	Child D	Yes...but we done this writing earlier though and we finished it but it was like...it was huge. I am not talking about one page...It was like about that big and only when I was finished all I needed to do is fit in the last...I had to use two pages			177
	A	Wow			178
	Child D	Two			179
	A	Two pages...so did you have to concentrate a lot for that?			180
	Child D	Yes...sometimes it was um...we had to do it in pen and that was really annoying			181
	A	In pen?			182
	Child D	Yes, in pen...and it was really annoying			183
	A	What was annoying about using a pen?			184
	Child D	Because we had to copy it by felt tip and rub it out and then read it and...but it took for like an hour...and I just got bored and got like my finger was hurting and doing X			185
	Knowledge of his abilities	A			Mm...okay
Child D		I just stopped then...I just stopped and felt a bit tired	187		
A		Oh okay. I wonder if you could help me with some drawing? Can you choose a colour?	188		
Child D		Can I use red?	189		
	A	Yes, okay. Now I wonder if you can draw for me HO, what school is like for you...okay? So I want you to draw what school is like for you at the moment. They can	190		

		just be quick drawings...they don't have to be detailed...and it doesn't matter if you make a mistake...there is no wrong or right answer. So why don't you draw how school is for you. Draw maybe a big school, filling the page		
		(sound of drawing on paper)		191
A		Do you wear glasses Child D?		192
Child D		No		193
A		Wonderful...what a great drawing Child D ...that's really good. I wonder, in this part of the building could you draw a really big building here and inside it can you draw your classroom? Perhaps you would draw a big outline of a building like this one over here...and inside draw a big classroom		194
Child D		Its not that big though...I can't draw a big classroom		195
A		Well it could fill the building couldn't it? So you could have a building like this over here and then you could draw a big classroom inside but do it over here. So a big building and a big classroom inside		196
A		Can you tell me about what you have drawn there?		197
Child D		I am drawing the tables and then I am drawing the house...the building		198
A		Oh, brilliant. So you have got some table and chairs...and now you are drawing the building		199
Child D		X the buildings		200
A		Excellent. What else could you add to your classroom?		201
		(sound of drawing on paper)		202
A		Wonderful...so you have got lots of table and chairs here. I wonder if there are some children you could add?		203
		(sound of drawing on paper)		204
A		Can you tell me what this is?		205
Child D		Tables		206

Physical isolation in lessons	A	Why are these tables different from these tables? This looks bigger	Interactions	Additional support	207
	Child D	That's because some of them are big and some of them are small			208
	A	Oh, so there's some big tables in your class and some small tables. Where do you normally sit?			209
	Child D	There			210
	A	Is this the front of the class or the back of the class?			211
	Child D	Back			212
	A	You sit at the back of the class?			213
	Child D	Yes its this one			214
	A	Okay...and do you sit on your own or do you sit next to people?			215
	Child D	I sit on my own			216
	A	Okay. Do other children sit on their own?			217
	Child D	Um...no			218
		A			Wonderful...you have drawn some table and chairs. I wonder if you could draw some adults...maybe here...some children over here? Who is in your class?
		(sound of drawing on paper)			220
	A	Brilliant...tell me about what you have drawn now?			221
	Child D	People			222
	A	People...excellent. So you have drawn some extra children... Now I wonder which one is Child D? Can you show me which one is Child D or are you going to draw him now?			223
	Child D	Just normal people			224
	A	Where is Child D then? Can you write his name? Oh, so there is Child D			225
	A	It's a fantastic drawing Child D ...excellent. How come you started writing Child D up here and crossed it out?			226
	Child D	Mm...I couldn't fit it in			227
	A	Oh you couldn't fit it in. Shall I write it underneath for you?			228
	Child D	Mm...no			229
	A	No...okay. Wonderful. So now Child D ...I wonder...after your fantastic drawing if you	Adults playing	Experience of school life	230

Adults support learning		could...tell me, is there anybody that helps you in class with your learning?	significant role	
	Child D	No		231
	A	There's no one that helps you?		232
Little interaction with teacher	Child D	X ...its like...don't copy but I just like...sometimes when she wants me...so I have to say it sometimes...but other days		233
	A	So is this your teacher?		234
	Child D	Yes, my teacher		235
	A	This is your teacher...and what's her name?		236
	Child D	(inaudible)		237
	A	Would you like a break Child D? Yes, okay		238
		(break in interview)		239
	A	How do you feel after that break?		240
	Child D	Okay		241
	A	Yes (laughter). Right...so you told me this was Mrs...your teacher		242
	Child D	Um...Mrs...oh yes Mrs um Conner		243
	A	Okay...Mrs Conner ( <i>sound of writing on paper</i> )...and this is Child D up here?		244
	Child D	Yes		245
	A	Okay. You told me that your teacher sometimes helps you		246
	Child D	No...sometimes...sometimes she does and...sometimes I help...um I have a helper		247
	A	Oh who is your helper?		248
	Child D	Um...the lady who um...		249
	A	What's her name?		250
	Child D	Um...Shelly		251
	A	Shelly. Can you draw her?		252
	A	Where will Shelly be in your classroom?		253
	Child D	She will be probably with me...might have Vicky or...oh no I can't even		254
	A	Vicky or Shelly...excellent. And how often does Shelly help you...all the time or sometimes?		255
	Child D	All the time		256
	A	All the time. So is she always next to you?		257
	Child D	Um...yes...yes she is always next to me		258

	A	And what does Shelly help you with? What sort of things?		Important factors in child's life	259	
	Child D	Um like Maths, English um Science...kind of like that stuff			260	
	A	Okay. Is there anybody else that helps you in class?			261	
	Child D	No, just that			262	
Peers not supporting learning	A	Are there any children that help you?	Peers		263	
	Child D	Um no...no, because they don't help me they just um should be carrying on			264	
	A	They just carry on			265	
	Child D	Yes			266	
Repeating instructions annoying	A	Okay. Now, I now wonder if you can help me with choosing and telling me what things help you in class most. So I have got some pictures here to help as well, if we need them, and I have got here two sheets...one says, 'This helps me and matters to me'...over here...can you see with the smiley face? 'This helps me with my learning and matters to me'. This one says, 'This does not help me'...with a sad face. Shall we go through each one and then the ones that you find 'help me' with your learning you can add them to your class if you like...to your drawing. So this first one says, 'Instructions being repeated for me'. So when your teacher tells you a few times what you need to do or when Shelly tells you a few times	Learning	Additional support	267	
	Child D	No				268
	A	That doesn't help you?				269
	Child D	No				270
	A	Does anybody repeat instructions?				271
	Child D	Well sometimes, but it gets really annoying when I have to do it and they keep on saying it over and over and over				272
Amount of work given not significant	A	And you just find it annoying, so it doesn't help. 'Not being given too much to do in one go'...does that help you...not being given too much to do? So what that	Learning	Additional support	273	

		means is when a teacher or Shelly...or somebody else gives you lots of work to do at one time and it can be a bit too much, a bit confusing		
	Child D	Mm...it doesn't help me		274
	A	So do you ever get too much work to do at one time?		275
	Child D	Um, well sometimes...sometimes I don't		276
	A	Sometimes you do, sometimes you don't		277
	Child D	So its kind of in the middle		278
	A	Okay... so you find that it doesn't matter too much to you?		279
	Child D	No		280
Adults support learning	A	Okay. So you put this one there under "this doesn't help me". This one says 'having a learning support assistant' so that's like Shelly	Interactions	281
	Child D	Yes		282
Considerate adult	A	So you put that 'this helps me and matters to me'. What about this one...'adults making sure I am okay'...does that happen? Do adults check that you are okay?	Interactions	283
	Child D	Um yes		284
	A	Yes? Who checks that you are okay?		285
	Child D	Um...Shelly		286
Location in class not significant	A	Shelly checks...and that helps you? Okay. What about this one...'Where and who I sit with in the classroom'?	Environmental factors	287
Sitting with peers not significant	Child D	It doesn't help me	Interactions	288
	A	Tell me more about that		289
	Child D	I don't sit with anybody		290
	A	You don't sit with anybody?		291
	Child D	No		292
	A	And would you like to?		293
	Child D	No, not really		294
	A	No...okay. So it doesn't matter to you where you sit?		295
	Child D	No		296
Friends not significant	A	Or who you sit with. Okay. What about this one, 'Help with making friends'...do you want help with making friends or have you had help with making friends before?	Interactions	297

	Child D	I had help			298
	A	You have ...okay...did it help you?			299
	Child D	No, not any more			300
	A	Not any more? Okay.			301
	Child D	No, but sometimes I just made friends...sometimes I just...I got bored with them so I just left them			302
More help needed in handwriting	A	Oh, okay. This one says, 'More help in some lessons than others'...so	Learning	Additional support	303
	Child D	Yes			304
	A	Ah...tell me more about that			305
	Child D	Um I have...sometimes when I am like stuck...like if its like an 'o' or an 'a' because sometimes when Miss um...that writes like that...when its all the way at the end of the page...if its an 'o' or an 'a' joining up to something else...I don't know			306
	A	Oh			307
	Child D	And then um I need to ask			308
	A	So you need to ask for help with certain things? Okay...and you talked about sort of handwriting, joining letters up and if you get to the end of the page and its and 'o' or 'a' you are not sure how to then carry on the word			309
	Child D	Yes			310
Breaks	A	What about this one, 'Having a break from my learning'...so having a break...does that help...? So stopping your learning, having a break and then carrying on after.	Learning		311
	Child D	No			312
	A	So a break doesn't help you			313
	Child D	Oh, yes			314
	A	It does help having a break?			315
	Child D	Yes			316
	A	Yes. Do you have a break during lessons...like an extra break...like we just did?			317
	Child D	No. No, we don't get breaks, but sometimes when we are like finished we just stop and um well we ask and say we are finished and then we just sit there and just			Additional support

		read sometimes for something to do		
Strengths not significant	A	Okay. What about this one, 'Reminding me of my strengths'. So what that means is telling me what I am good at school helps me	Learning	319
	Child D	No		320
Different adults significant  Little interaction with teacher	A	No...it doesn't help you? 'Working with different adults' not just the same adult but different adults...	Interactions	321
	Child D	Yes		322
	A	Do you work with different adults?		323
	Child D	Yes		324
	A	You have got Shelly in the morning		325
	Child D	And um...		326
	A	Is it Vicky?		327
	Child D	Yes, Vicky		328
	A	In the afternoon		329
	Child D	Yes		330
	A	So you like working with different adults?		331
	Child D	Yes		332
	A	And sometimes you work with the teacher, or not?		333
	Child D	Um no, I don't work with the teachers		334
	Too much writing difficult	A		Okay. What about this one, 'Not so much writing' so making sure I don't have too much writing to do helps me...or doesn't help me?
Child D		It doesn't	336	
A		What do you mean by that?	337	
Child D		Because it just...when I do it...like when I have finished, I get to a point...I am getting a bit annoyed and I sometimes um the teacher tells me to read back it and sometimes I don't want to...sometimes I have to do it	338	
A		And you told me earlier that you don't like writing so much and you find writing difficult...having too much writing to do	339	
Child D		Yes, that's a little bit...that's a bit difficult	340	
	A	Do you think we need to put that on there then...because it says		341

		not so much writing...so by having less writing to do helps me and matters to me?			
	Child D	Yes			342
Noisy classroom	A	Okay. What about this one, 'Having a quiet place to go'...so it might mean for example leaving lessons and going somewhere quiet to do my work	Having a quiet place to go	Things children want to change	343
	Child D	Put it over there			344
	A	So do you have a quiet place to go?			345
	Child D	Nope			346
	A	Would you like to...or not?			347
	Child D	Yes, I would like to but I don't have a quiet place			348
	A	Okay, so you would like to go...?			349
	Child D	All I have to do is just stay in the classroom all the time and just work...sometimes its really irritating when people like scream at me and scream and shout			350
	A	In class?			351
	Child D	Yes			352
	A	So they are being too noisy?			353
	Child D	Yes, and sometimes I can't work properly and sometimes they keep on yelling sometimes they don't			354
	A	Okay. So on here you have got, 'This helps me and matters to me' and you have chosen, 'working with different adults', 'having a learning support assistant', 'adults making sure I am okay', 'more help in some lessons with some work', 'having a break' and 'not having so much writing to do'. All those things help you. What's the most helpful thing for you with your learning? What makes learning easiest for you out of those things?			355
Working with Different adults most helpful	Child D	Um having different teachers	Interactions		356
	A	Having different adults...			357
	Child D	So um I get my morning teacher finish when my afternoon comes. It helps me			358
	A	Okay. So having a morning adult helps you and afternoon adult help you?			359

	Child D	Yes, they both do		360
	A	They both help you...excellent. Okay. I wonder...lets get another piece of paper. I wonder...now...we are going to talk about things that you would like to happen in school that aren't happening right now? If you had a magic wand, what would you change to make school better? You have talked about a few things that you would like to happen that aren't happening already. I wonder if you can add these to your drawing with a different colour? Choosing black?		361
	Child D	Yes		362
	A	Okay. You have talked about a few things, for example already you have talked about you would like somewhere quiet to go because you find the classroom a little bit too noisy. So maybe you could add that to the drawing. You can draw it any way you like		363
	Child D	Where will I do it? I haven't got a X		364
	A	How are you going to draw it?		365
	Child D	I haven't got any room		366
	A	You can just draw...yes...you can do that		367
	Child D	(inaudible)		368
	A	Oh okay...do you want a new page? Here we go. If you have a magic wand Child D, and you could change anything at school...that's what I would like you to draw		369
		(sound of drawing on paper)		370
	A	Tell me about what you are drawing now		371
	Child D	My classroom...and a box there...X		372
	A	What's the box for?		373
	Child D	The box um...is where I keep my stuff in there...and there's just a piece of paper so I X		374
	A	So in your box you have got things that you need for lessons have you?		375
	Child D	Yes		376

	A	You have a piece of paper			377
	Child D	A piece of paper and X			378
	A	Okay, great. So this is your dream school isn't it? These are things that you are going to add to it that you want to happen in the future, to make school even better. What do you want to change? What could you add to your drawing?			379
	Child D	Mm...I don't know			380
	A	So we have got some pictures here			381
	Child D	X			382
	A	Okay. We can just talk about it if you want			383
	Child D	No X			384
	A	So you have already talked about having a quiet place to go. Is there anything else that you think will help you...that's not already happening?			385
	Child D	No			386
	A	You don't want anything to change at all at school?			387
	Child D	No			388
	A	Okay, we had another break...do you feel better now?			389
	Child D	Yep			390
Passive receiver	A	Right...now...this is Child D (sound of drawing on paper)	Adults playing significant role	Experience of school life	391
	Child D	That's a big me			392
	A	This is tall Child D ...big smile. Shall I put your name at the top 'Child D' because you are very important Child D ...that's you. I wonder...if anybody has asked you what you would like to happen at school?			393
	Child D	Um no...nobody has asked um me			394
	A	Nobody has asked you. What about Shelly or Sally...have they asked you what help you would like?			395
	Child D	No			396
	A	No? What about your parents...have they asked you what help you would like at school?			397
	Child D	Um no, they haven't um asked me			398

	A	What about your teacher?			399
	Child D	Nope			400
	A	This here Child D is called your Statement. So this is ...information about the types of help that you might need and ways to help you. Have you seen it before?			401
	Child D	No...I don't think so			402
	A	Don't think so?			403
	Child D	No		Additional support	404
	A	So, do you remember at all helping to make it?			405
	Child D	Mm no...no I don't remember that...no. Hello...testing...testing...one two. Do you copy? Oh...the batteries are dead			406
Peer supported learning not significant	A	The last question...I am just wondering if there is anybody else that you think would be able to help you at school...anybody...any adults?	Interactions		407
	Child D	No...no			408
	A	What about children? Do you think they could help you at school?		Experience of school life	409
	Child D	No			410
	A	No?			411
	Child D	Nope			412
Some knowledge of reason for extra reading given by teacher	A	Has anybody told you why you get extra help with reading? You told me that you leave class sometimes to do some reading...has anybody told you why you get extra help with reading Child D?	Adults playing significant role		413
	Child D	To help um...learn to help and write and read			414
	A	Mm...so has somebody told you that then?			415
	Child D	Yes			416
	A	Who was that?			417
	Child D	Um my teacher			418
	A	Your teacher?			419
	Child D	Yes			420
Passive receiver	A	Has somebody told you why you get help from Sally and Shelly?			421
	Child D	No			422
	A	Do you know why you do?			423

	Child D	Nope			424
	A	I see. Has anybody asked you if you want help from them?			425
	Child D	Um no			426
	A	Okay			427
	Child D	Testing, testing, testing			428
	A	Has anybody asked you about what help you want in the future...how you want to be in the future?			429
	Child D	Um yes...no, nobody has asked me			430
	A	Nobody has asked you. Would you like them to ask you?			431
	Child D	Um no, I wouldn't			432
	A	No...why not?			433
	Child D	Um...no...I just...I don't know what I am going to do in the future so....			434
	A	Okay. You don't know what you are going to do in the future. Thank you very much for helping me Child D ...you have been really, really helpful...and I have got here a certificate I would like to give you to take home...for being an absolute star			435
	Child D	Yes!			436
	A	You can take it home...it says 'Abi thanks Child D for helping her with her project. You have helped adults to understand what type of help you find most useful at school'.			437



18APPENDIX L - Drawing completed by a participant

