An exploration of parents' experiences of choosing special school

Submitted by David Satherley

to The University of Exeter

as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Educational Psychology

in Educational, Child and Community Psychology

June 2020

This thesis is available for library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

Acknowledgements

I would like to take the opportunity to thanks all those who have supported me through my doctoral training and the completion of this thesis.

Thanks to all of the parents who engaged so brilliantly with the research, taking the time to share their stories with me.

Many thanks to my wife Catrin for her constant support and understanding during my doctorate.

Thanks to my supervisors- Brahm Norwich, Margie Tunbridge and Lata Ramoutar- for the wonderful guidance, encouragement and enthusiasm for my project throughout.

And lastly, my fellow TEPs who have been a constant source of humour, peer support and encouragement throughout. I will miss training with you all.

Abstract

The UK coalition government's Green Paper (DfE, 2011) stated that the administration intended to "remove the bias towards inclusion and propose to strengthen parental choice by improving the range and diversity of schools from which parents can choose" (p.5). There has been an increase in recent years within the UK of pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) attending a state-funded special school (DfE, 2019b), with a pledge in March 2019 for 3,500 additional special schools placements to be made available across the UK (DfE, 2019a). Recent research in Australia has suggested that the complexity of deciding between regular and special schools is compounded by the influence of professionals and acessing reliable information, meaning that parents' choices do not reflect their actual preferences (Mann, Cuskelly & Moni, 2015). There is however limited research currently around the experiences of choosing special school for parents in the UK.

This research thesis examined the views of parents of pupils in UK special schools: to gain an understanding of the reasons behind parents choosing special school and the extent to which they feel they had an independent, informed choice of school. The research considers how these choices are facilitated in schools and supported by professionals. It also considers parents' views around high-quality, inclusive education.

The research employed a two-phase, mixed methods explanatory sequential design. Phase 1 employed the use of questionnaires in order to address the above aims (the questionnaire was adapted from that of Bagley et al, 2001). Participants were sampled across three local authorities in the South West of England and administered through special schools and via social media. The inclusion criteria stated that the children of the parents sampled had to have been attending a special school for at least 12 months. Phase 2 of the research employed semi-structured interviews, with a volunteer sample drawn from parents who participated in Phase 1 (purposively sampled to reflect a range of parental views, experiences and demographics). As per the explanatory sequential design, the interview schedule was devised based on an interim analysis from Phase 1 (using the Phase 1 data collected by October 2019).

Sixty-eight percent of participants suggested that they did not feel that they had a real choice between special school provision and other types of provision (e.g. more than one option that was good enough), with 49% indicating that mainstream school was completely inappropriate for their child (the modal response). 'Real choice' was explored as a multi-faceted concept for parents (related to the number of school choices, with appropriateness of mainstream school, and quality of facilitation and professional support- supporting parents to be aware of options- also being influential factors). The research also suggests that

parents experienced more of a difficult choice when they felt mainstream school was appropriate for their child, suggesting a dilemma.

The majority of parents indicated feeling well-informed and supported by professionals throughout the process. 76% of participants however felt that the system of parental choice of school should be improved. Finally, the parents in this research presented a clear view of inclusion which is contrary to the 'inclusion as all children under one roof' philosophy (Warnock, 1978). Accessing a shared academic curriculum was not considered to be effective inclusion for these parents. Instead, this was for their child to feel a sense of belongingness and acceptance in their setting, and to be accessing an appropriate curriculum for their needs. Parents felt that this was best achieved in separate, specialist provision.

This small-scale research provides a detailed insight into the views and experiences of parents of children with special educational needs (SEN) in the South West of England, who have made a choice between mainstream and special school, and an examination of the factors underlying both positive and negative experiences. The implications for national policy and for the practice of EPs are considered, as well as recommendations for future research.

Contents

Summary of figures and tables

Table 1.

Table of abbreviations

Abbreviation	Terminology
EP	Educational Psychologist
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
LDD	Learning Difficulties and Disabilities
ASC	Autism Spectrum Condition
EHE	Elective Home Education
SEBD	Social, Emotional Behaviour Difficulties
PPCT	Process Person Context Time

Chapter 1: Introduction

National context

Children in the UK can attend a range of school settings, referred to in the present research as 'mainstream' or 'special' schools. The DfE (2019b) refer to special schools as those which provide 'tailored provision for pupils with special educational needs' (p.4); these schools can specialise in one of the four areas of the SEND Code of Practice (2015)- communication and interaction, cognition and learning, social, emotional and mental health and sensory and physical needs. 'Mainstream' is used in the present research as a term which comprises state-funded and independent primary and secondary schools.

The coalition government's Green Paper (DfE, 2011) stated that the administration intended to "remove the bias towards inclusion and propose to strengthen parental choice by improving the range and diversity of schools from which parents can choose" (p.5), and aimed to prevent the "unnecessary closure of special schools" (p.51). The paper also states that it is the quality of provision rather than the type of school placement (full inclusion within mainstream, specialist units within mainstream or special school) which should be prioritised. In order to make an informed choice of provision, the green paper states that parents should have access to good quality information. This represents a major shift away from the inclusion agenda promoted by the previous Labour government as well as a greater emphasis on parent choice than before. This latter emphasis is reflected in the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015). The current administration's focus on parent choice of special schools has not been matched in terms of state-funded provision. The effect of this has been a shortage of state-funded special school places nationally, forcing councils to fund a rising number of independent placements (Staufenberg, 2017).

The Ofsted Annual report (Ofsted, 2017) reported that 45% of children and young people with an EHCP attend a state-funded special school; this figure was 40% in 2010 and 37% in 2007. The report stated that those without an EHCP "did not benefit as consistently from a coordinated approach between education, health and care as those with a plan" (p.19); parents therefore reported EHC plans as being like a "golden ticket" (p.19) to better outcomes for their child. The report also states that as of August, 2016, 94% of special schools are rated as 'good' or 'outstanding', as opposed to 79% of state-funded secondary schools. This philosophy of EHCPs acting as a gateway to improved outcomes, in combination with the high-quality provision which special schools are providing may be seen as contributing factors to this rise in special school placements. In addition to this, it is

noteworthy that a new academic curriculum was introduced in the UK in 2014, with an aim of increasing standards (DfE, 2014). It is likely that these increased expectations would have an impact within mainstream schools, on a rising number being highlighted by staff as working below 'age-related expectations'.

The House of Commons Education Committee (2019) undertook an inquiry into the 2014 Education reforms. The committee felt that the reforms were appropriate, but that their 'implementation has been badly hampered by poor administration and a challenging funding environment' (p. 3). The committee indicated that the Department of Education was taking enough responsibility to ensure the reforms were enacted. The report states: 'For children who receive SEN Support, they rely primarily on their school to get their support needs right. If, for whatever reason, a school fails to provide high quality SEN Support, the child is failed' (p.16).

This pressure on mainstream schools to provide adequate support for those with SEN may be compounded by the delays reported (up to 90 weeks) in issuing EHCPs (Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, 2019) meaning that many children with SEN are not getting the required support when needed. In terms of the present topic, I would argue that this is likely to have an impact on the self-efficacy of mainstream schools in meeting complex needs, which may in turn impact on the child's continued attendance to that school.

Rationale

There has been little UK research regarding parents' choice of schools since the coalition government of 2010, and the shift away from inclusion (DfE, 2011), the increased marketisation of the school system (Angus, 2015) and the increased focus on parental choice in recent legislation (Children and Families Act, 2014). Recent research regarding the issue of parent choice of choice will be review in the literature review (Chapter 2) with gaps in this research identified.

One of the driving forces behind the present research was to investigate whether the current legislative focus on optimising parent choice operates as intended - examining the parental experience of this decision-making process in-depth, the underlying views informing the choices and how these views are presently facilitated by schools.

Researcher's background and interests

I previously have been a teacher (and prior to that a teaching assistant) in a special school for children with moderate to severe disabilities. Many of the children I worked with had both physical disabilities and learning difficulties. The school had a Ofsted rating of 'Outstanding' and provided highly specialised and adapted curricula for its children and young people, with a range of therapeutic support available onsite (such as Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists and Speech and Language Therapists) and purpose built resources and spaces (including a hydrotherapy pool). Working at this school instilled a belief in me at the time that such facilities were highly necessary for the children and young people there- many of them had needs that were so profound that an option for them to attend mainstream school did not seem appropriate. The school provided a kind of education which I felt was incomparable to a mainstream education.

As a trainee educational psychologist, I am presently interested in parents' views around what high-quality education should look like for a child with SEN. Within this, I am interested in how parents' perceptions of mainstream education - what it can and cannot provide and whether parents feel this could be appropriate for their child - inform a decision in favour of special school. Although in the example of the school above, the profound needs of the children often made the decision of school choice clearer for parents, there were still many children attending who had been through the system of mainstream schooling and had had poor experiences there. This has led to my interest within the current project around whether parents feel they have a 'real choice' between mainstream school and specialist provision.

Relevance to the field of Educational Psychology

The topic of parent choice is highly relevant to the professional practice of educational psychologists (EP). The SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) outlines a legal obligation for all education providers (based on the stipulations of the Equality Act, 2010) to make reasonable adjustments 'to ensure that disabled children and young people are not at a substantial disadvantage compared with their peers' (DfE, 2015, p. 17). Although EPs are not involved in deciding specific schools for children and young people, they have responsibility to ensure that schools are meeting expectations for inclusive provision (sometimes referred to as 'Universal provision'). Each local authority will have guidance as to what these expectations for inclusive provision are. Given the high numbers of children that attend special school having previously found mainstream was unable to meet their needs, EPs have an important role in supporting schools to have an understanding of inclusive practices, and the

responsibility for schools to apply a graduated response to provision through a plan-do-review cycle. Similarly, working with parents is an important part of the work of an EP (for example, consultations, training, child assessment and informing interventions and provision). In order to support parents effectively, it is important that EPs have a thorough understanding of not only the decision-making systems which parents will use, but also the emotional process which special school choice can represent.

Aims of this research

The overarching aim of this research is to investigate whether the current legislative focus on optimising parent choice operates as intended. More specifically, the aims are:

1. To examine the views of parents of pupils in special schools in the South West of England: their reasons behind choosing special school, the extent to which they feel they had an independent choice and their views on alternative provision.
2. To examine whether parent ideology and constructs of high-quality inclusive education informs special school selection and to examine in-depth how choices are facilitated in schools, according to parental experience
3. To examine differences in parent experiences in greater detail in Phase 2 of the research and identifying possible underlying reasons for these variations.

Chapter 2. Literature review

In this literature review, I will start with a broad critical review of experiences of those with SEN transitioning between schools within mainstream education. I will then focus more specifically on the topic of parental choice with a critical consideration of; the legislative context, parents' reasons for choosing special education, the concept of forced or limited choice, parents' awareness of alternative provision for their child and literature pertaining to the role of schools as key facilitators of parent views. The research outlined will then be contextualised within theoretical frameworks which I consider relevant to the present discussion. Firstly, I will consider models of disability and approaches to inclusive practice, and how parents' values (interpretations of inclusion and what high-quality education looks like for their child) shape their decision-making. Secondly, I will consider how ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and the updated process-person-context-time model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) is of relevance to the topic of parent choice and special education.

Literature search strategy

A literature search was conducted using Google Scholar and University of Exeter library database (including access to PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, JSTOR, EBSCO, PubMed, ScienceDirect and SCOPUS). My initial literature searches focused on pupils transitioning between mainstream settings (primary to secondary). Keywords and variations of these searches included: 'school transitions', 'primary secondary transfer' and 'secondary transition'. These searches yielded a very large amount of literature; for example, an initial search for 'primary secondary transfer' using Google Scholar yielded over 4 million results. Due to this abundance of extant research, my search was then narrowed to focus only on children with SEN and their experiences of transferring between primary and secondary school. The same keywords as previously were used ('school transitions', 'primary secondary transfer' and 'secondary transition'), in combination with the terms 'SEN', 'special educational needs' and 'disability'.

As a more specific interest in parents and their decision to choose special school provision developed (for example, Bagley et al, 2001; Mann et al, 2015), my literature search became more tightly focused on this. Keywords (and variations of) used in various combinations included: 'SEN', 'special educational needs', 'disability', 'school choice', 'special school choice' and 'parent choice'. Part of my strategy for finding relevant sources within this

smaller field, was to cross-reference bibliographies of recent research. The literature search was not limited to studies within the UK.

Transitions of pupils with SEN within mainstream education

Parents of children with SEN attending mainstream primary schools will often make a choice between mainstream and special school at the point of transition to secondary school. Literature regarding the transitions of pupils with SEN within mainstream schools, is important for the present research in order to contextualise the arguments and research pertaining to the idea that mainstream schools are often unable to provide an inclusive education for those with SEN , resulting in special school choice (see Reindal, 2010; Lauchlan & Greig, 2015).

That lower-attaining pupils and those with SEN experience difficulties during transitions is a robust finding (Galton et al, 1999; Anderson, 2000; Hodson et al, 2005; West et al, 2010). Those with SEN have been identified as an 'at risk' group in terms of making progress (along with those receiving free school meals, pupils less fluent in English and those from particular ethnic backgrounds) in the primary years, based on Key Stage 1 assessments and follow-up assessments across years 3, 4 and 5 (Minnis et al, 1998). Although they did not research SEN children specifically, West et al (2010) found that pupils with lower ability, lower self-esteem and low preparedness for secondary school were vulnerable to poorer transition to new schools systems (for example, managing teacher changes and increased workloads), as well as poorer transitions amongst peers (for example managing mixing with different children and encountering bullying).

The identified attributes can be seen to have an effect on both the academic and social inclusion of the child or young person. Gibb et al (2007) make the distinction between these types of inclusion; 'academic inclusion' as ensuring the child is accessing an appropriate curriculum (through for example, a higher level of differentiation and adapted teaching strategies) and 'social inclusion', referring to the development of social relationships (not experiencing forms of social exclusion, such as rejection and bullying). Gibb et al (2007) argue that both academic and social inclusion would need to be facilitated for the placement of a child with SEN in a mainstream school to be considered successful.

Bailey and Baines (2012) examined the sources of resilience available to primary pupils during transfer to secondary school, and suggest that the high level of support from familiar staff received by pupils with SEN in the primary years may lead to greater levels of pre-

16

transfer dependency than non-SEN pupils in mainstream settings; the lack of this support post-transfer, at an individual and small group level, means that these pupils must "negotiate bigger changes" (p. 61), leading to lower levels of post-transfer adjustment. Indeed, within year 7, children on the SEN register rated their experiences around friendships, bullying, availability of clubs, homework and making progress less positively than their non-SEN counterparts (Hodson et al, 2005).

This research by Hodson et al (2005) was carried out in order to develop an intervention led by EPs to support secondary schools to be more inclusive of year 7 pupils with SEN. A key conclusion of this work was that in promoting inclusion, schools need to consider the social experience for SEN pupils. There is a distinction again between social and academic inclusion. Although not mutually exclusive, there can be a tendency for schools to prioritise one whilst neglecting the other; as stated by Lauchlan and Greig (2015), "even those children with SEN who attend mainstream schools can in a very real sense be 'excluded' when teachers make use of withdrawal 'units', streaming or within-class grouping." (p.80). Lauchlan and Greig (2015) refer to this as a form of 'partial segregation', which could be interpreted as a compromise measure in terms of offering an individualised curriculum whilst allowing for a degree of social interaction.

This research presents a negative picture of the transfer of pupils with SEN across mainstream settings; however, there is research which suggests it can be highly successful (Maras & Aveling, 2006; Evangelou et al, 2008). The research of Evangelou et al (2008) suggests that successful transition consists of five key aspects; new friendships and improved self-esteem and confidence, no concern caused to parents, an increasing interest in school and school work, getting used to routine and school organisation, and experiencing continuity of curriculum. Across these factors, Evangelou et al (2008) found that pupils with SEN experienced greater curriculum continuity between years 6 and 7 and overall, and experienced transitions which were no less successful than non-SEN children. Conversely, SEN pupils were more likely to be bullied, which the authors cite as a "key inhibitor of a successful transition" (p.55). This suggests that SEN pupils in mainstream settings may experience greater difficulties around social inclusion than academic.

In terms of interventions to support pupils identified as vulnerable during transition (children in care, young carers, those excluded from school, those with SEN), Bloyce and Frederickson (2012) found evidence that pupils receiving a Transfer Support Team (TST) intervention in Year 6 showed reductions in their levels of school concern, emotional symptoms and peer relationship problems into Year 7, with the intervention being equally

17

effective for SEN and non-SEN pupils. The TST intervention was designed to support vulnerable pupils with social, institutional and curricular adjustments, to facilitate new relationships in school and to develop realistic expectations of their new school. This suggests that social inclusion issues such as those identified in Evangelou et al (2008) can be supported through pro-active intervention.

In terms of supporting a successful transition for SEN pupils into mainstream, Lightfoot and Bond (2013) found that parents of children with Down Syndrome highly valued the role of support assistants as integral to inclusion; working in partnership with schools and being included by professionals was also important to these parents during transition. Indeed, it is argued that pupils with SEN and their families are not primarily concerned with issues around 'inclusion' and 'exclusion' specifically, but instead around ensuring continuity to the next setting and addressing a pupil's individual needs, not assuming a 'one-size-fits-all' in offering the same services to all pupils with identified SEN (Maras & Aveling, 2006). Despite Ofsted (2015) reporting that nationally, the quality of teaching and the rate of pupils' progress and achievement were deemed as not good enough at Key Stage 3 level, ensuring effective, personalised support for vulnerable pupils and those with SEN was considered a high priority by senior leaders (based on a sample of secondary schools nationally). Mainstream schools with their curriculum flagged as a weakness were commonly reported as having too 'narrow' a curriculum (Ofsted, 2017); despite these positive findings regarding transfer of SEN pupils, I would argue that the breadth and flexibility of curriculum is of high importance, in addition to staffing and parent partnership.

Parent Choice

For the remainder of this literature review, I will focus more specifically on the processes and experiences of parents choosing specialist education for their child. This topic emerged from reading more broadly around transitions for pupils with SEN as an area which, whilst strongly promoted in national policy (see subsection 1- 'Parent participation and national policy'), can be a challenging experience with inadequate support provided to make an informed choice. The following will be divided into 6 sections concerning parent choice:

- Parent participation and national policy
- 'Removing the bias towards inclusion'
- Reasons behind school choice
- Forced choice (effectiveness of provision and parental support)

- Alternatives
- School facilitation of views

Parent participation and national policy

There have been legislative changes at a national level supporting parent involvement in identifying and assessing the needs of their child (through EHCPs), and within the process of school choice. The revised SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) states that children and young people with SEND and parents should be involved in planning, publishing and reviewing the local offer. The Code states that:

> Effective parent participation can lead to a better fit between families' needs and the services provided, higher satisfaction with services, reduced costs (as long-term benefits emerge), better value for money and better relationships between those providing services and those using them (p. 63).

Parent partnership can be seen as a central thread running through the Code.

The SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) states that the name and type of placement to be attended by a child or young person should be specified within their EHCP. The Children and Families Act (2014) stipulates that the parent or young person has the right to request a particular school to be named on their EHCP and that the local authority must comply with this preference; exceptions to this are when the institution is considered "unsuitable for the age, ability, aptitude or special educational needs of the child or young person" (p. 33), does not represent an efficient use of resources or it has a negative impact on the education of others. The legislation states that this last exception only applies in the event that there are not "reasonable steps" (p.28) that can be taken to overcome the incompatibility.

'Removing the bias towards inclusion'

The coalition government's Green Paper (DfE, 2011) stated that the administration intended to "remove the bias towards inclusion and propose to strengthen parental choice by improving the range and diversity of schools from which parents can choose" (p.5), and aimed to prevent the "unnecessary closure of special schools" (p.51). The paper also states that it is the quality of provision rather than the type of school placement (full inclusion within mainstream, specialist units within mainstream or special school) which should be prioritised. In order to make an informed choice of provision, the green paper states that parents should have access to good quality information. This represents a major shift away from the inclusion agenda promoted by previous Labour governments as well as a greater emphasis

on parent choice than before. The current administration's focus on parent choice of special schools has not been matched in terms of state-funded provision; the effect of this has been a shortage of state-funded special school places nationally, forcing councils to fund a rising number of independent placements (Staufenberg, 2017). The plans announced in March 2019, to build 37 special free schools nationally- with six of these to be in the South West (DfE, 2019a)- whilst looking to improve this state-funded provision, represent a further shift towards increased choice and diversity of placements.

This increased autonomy and competition between schools can be seen as in keeping with neo-liberal thinking; that being responsive to market forces will produce better outcomes than being responsive to government regulation, encouraging a climate whereby schools are "competing to be chosen" (Angus, 2015, p.396). School choice is an important part of marketised systems. Increased marketisation of schooling has been criticised in terms of favouring middle-class parents who have developed advanced strategies for finding schools and enabling their child's enrolment (Rowe & Windle, 2012), as well as fostering "backward-looking assessment, curriculum and pedagogy" (Angus, 2015, p. 408). It is argued that increasing diversity of schools is a great threat to equity and inclusion, with increased powers of parent choice adding to this potential segregation (Alexiadou et al, 2016). In reference to the emergence of converter academies (former maintained schools that have voluntarily opted for academy status) in the UK in recent years, Gorard (2014) argues that "the poverty gap will be reduced by reducing differences between schools, opportunities and treatments, not by celebrating them. There should be no state-funded diversity of schooling." (p.281). Gorard (2014) presents an argument advocating inclusion by way of complete equality of state-funded opportunities; I would agree that the conversion to academies nationally has allowed something of a partial privatisation (with increased school selectivity over pupils) which may to serve to widen inequalities in opportunity.

Reasons behind school choice

There is a body of research which indicates the underlying motives behind parents' choice of school, for children with SEN. A UK study by Bagley, Woods & Woods (2001) explored the views of parents with a child transferring from primary to secondary education, and their reasons for school choice. The three areas surveyed represented a wide range of family incomes, across urban and semi-rural localities. Whereas factors such as the child's happiness, proximity to school and the child's own school preference were consistent across those parents with SEN pupils and those with non-SEN pupils, there were clear differences between the two groups. Among parents of pupils with SEN, the child's special educational

needs took on primary importance, with convenience for travel also rated highly in more rural areas. Whereas convenience remained of high importance for parents of non-SEN pupils in rural areas, academic standards and examination results were generally considered to be of greater importance to this group. This study was published 17 years ago, in a time when education in the UK looked very different in terms of curriculum design, school autonomy and the degree to which parent choice was prioritised.

Similarly, Jenkinson (1998) studied the motives of parents with children with disabilities in mainstream or special schools respectively. Parents of those in special schools valued the smaller class sizes, the superior qualifications of the teachers and programmes in independent living, more so than parents of children in mainstream. Conversely, academic skills and the attendance to the school of the child's siblings and friends was rated as more important by parents of children in mainstream. More recently, a systematic review by Mawene and Bal (2018) found that the most common factor for parents of children with disabilities was the availability of an appropriate (specialist) education programme to meet their child's needs.

These motives are consistent with more recent research in Australia regarding the reasons behind parents' decision to transfer their children from mainstream to special schools. Mann, Cuskelly & Moni (2018) found that the child missing out on specialist teaching and resources, the difficulty of the work, lack of teacher aide, the need to provide input as a parent and missing out on learning life skills were cited as key reasons behind the transfers.

Forced choice

The following quote from Mary Warnock in parliament in 2006 highlights the concept of 'forced' or absent choice for parents of those with SEN, prior to the major legislative changes: "parent choice… the great good which is going to come with educational reform, but I think that produces a hollow laugh on the part of parents with children with disabilities because they have no choice" (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2006, para 12). This concept of 'forced choice' will be examined under the subheadings of 'Effectiveness of provision' and 'Parental Support'.

   Effectiveness of provision. Reindal (2010) argues that "the radical proponents of inclusive education are consistent in regarding the enterprise of special education as 'a necessary evil' because of the inability of general education to accommodate and include the full diversity of learners" (p. 2); the author is arguing that mainstream schools are

ineffective in their provision for children with complex needs, resulting in a 'forced choice' favouring special schools. Indeed, it is suggested that selection of special schools over mainstream can be principally informed by negative experiences of mainstream schooling and high expectations of specialist provision (Mann et al, 2018). The authors acknowledge the difficulty of the decision-making process, in part due to regular schools not being a 'real option' (p.191) for many parents.

In contrast to this, there is research which suggests that mainstream school are able to provide high-quality education, even to those with a high level of need. Ofsted (2006) suggest that the quality of provision (rather than the type) was key to promoting successful outcomes with those with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD)- the research found that mainstream schools (with additionally resourced provision) were the most successful in achieving good outcomes (academically, socially and personally). The paper suggests that specialist teaching, strong assessment, appropriately tailored work and a commitment from school leaders are key to good progress for all pupils, and that those with the highest level of need are able to make outstanding progress is all setting types.

School belongingness may partly inform a parent's decision to favour special school. Hagerty et al (1992) identify belongingness as a) feeling valued and accepted and b) feeling that one's characteristics fit within the system. Research suggests that students (with and without additional needs) who pursue 'effort-goals' within mainstream secondary are more likely to feeling a sense of belonging in their secondary school (Vaz et al, 2015); the authors suggests that an effort-goal motivational culture (which focuses on the process of learning and the strengths of students) is important for those with disabilities, as consistent failure to perform at the expected levels can have a negative impact, reducing feelings of belonginess. Similarly, Hughes (2011) advocates the use of ipsative assessment- this is a process of assessing students by comparing their current performance against their previous performances, rather than against a nationally-recognised standard. This is typically used in informal learning, such as having a 'personal best' in sport. Hughes (2011) argues that 'ipsative feedback has the potential to enable learners to have a self-investment in achievable goals, to become more intrinsically motivated … and to raise self-esteem and ultimately performance.' (p. 366). Hughes (2011) is arguing for the effectiveness of such approaches in higher education, however I would argue that the concept is applicable to any educational stage. I would also argue that increasing standards and competition in mainstream provision (with the introduction of the new curriculum) would likely mean that an effort-goal motivational culture and ipsative approaches are more challenging to promote for school staff.

22

The literature may suggest that ineffective mainstream provision present parents with a forced choice by way of avoidance, and that special schools are necessary for many pupils with SEN. However, the literature not only suggests that transfer to mainstream secondary schools can be effective for SEN if the appropriate planning and provision is put in place (Maras & Aveling, 2006; Lightfoot & Bond, 2013), but it also suggests that special school placements can result in 'devaluation' of social roles and isolation from previous friendships; Mann (2016) details a case study of one parent who enrolled their child in mainstream school, transferred them to special school and then back to mainstream. During their special school placement, the child experienced a deterioration in social relationships, as well as an increasing number of suspensions due to a lack of a behaviour management plan. Mann (2016) draws upon social role valorization theory (Wolfensberger, 2013) to explain this effect on the child's social functioning, which details the importance of members of society holding valued social roles in order to thrive within that society. Becoming 'devalued' in society, which is more likely to happen to those with a disability, can result in individuals being rejected by society, cast into negative social roles, segregated, having negative language and images attached to them, and/or becoming the subject of abuse (Osburn, 2006). Whereas I would argue special school can be seen to provide social inclusion within an institution, these potential effects of segregated schooling on a child or young persons's wider role in society need to be considered. The argument indicating the presence of 'forced' choice, by way of avoiding ineffective mainstream provision that is not inclusive of SEN, therefore needs to be treated with some caution.

   Parental Support. Whereas research studies (Bagley et al, 2001; Jenkinson, 1998) demonstrate that parents are proficient in naming the reasons behind their choice, there are several factors impacting on their capacity to make independent, informed decisions. Mann et al (2015) refer to a "a lack of information, misinformation and selective information being provided by educators/professionals" (p. 1423); within a sample of parents who had the option of choosing special school for their child, many felt that they were not supported, some parents feeling that there were "attempts to sabotage their liberty to choose a school" (p.1423). In relation to this, Mawene and Bal (2018) make the point that 'not all parents have the capacity (i.e., knowledge, time, network, and financial support) even to explore and choose among the many options of available schools' (p. 326). There is also literature which suggests parents of those with SEN face a limited choice of school and do not receive enough help during the selection process (Tobin et al, 2012; Parsons et al, 2009). Lightfoot and Bond (2013) argue that ensuring that parents are included and valued may not always be the "primary goal for professionals" (p.175).

However, the research report into parents' and young people's experiences of EHCPs (DfE, 2017) suggests that a majority of parents (82%) reported that the staff they were dealing with were knowledgeable, with a majority of parents (74%) and young people also reporting that different services worked together to make the EHC plan. This heavy reliance on professionals could be argued to be over-emphasised however; it is suggested that parents will consider other sources of information to be of use when choosing between mainstream and special school, such as the perspectives of other parents (Mann, et al, 2015). I would also argue that social media sites (generic sites such as 'Facebook' as well as more parent-specific sites such as 'Mumsnet') have become an important source of information and advice for parents when considering special school for their child.

Alternatives

When considering parents who have opted for special school education for their child, it is important to assess their views on the alternatives, one of which could be for their child to attend a mainstream provision with a resource base. Tobin et al (2012) found that parents of children with autistic spectrum condition (ASC) showed a preference towards specialist provision (ASC units) within a mainstream setting and suggested that future research should be conducted around the merits and effectiveness of such units, given their popularity. Similarly, Dann (2011) found that parents, staff and pupils valued the specifically assigned space afforded by specialist units within mainstream and felt that these units allowed for greater continuity around transition, reducing anxiety. The author suggests that future research should focus on comparisons between such units and special schools to determine how specific needs are met by these different support structures.

With reference to elective home education (EHE) as another alternative to special schools, Kendal and Taylor (2016) found that parents cited the decline of health and wellbeing of the child, a lack of understanding by staff around their child's needs and an unwillingness of educators to engage with the parents, as reasons for withdrawing their children. The authors argue that effective communication should be a priority for professional educators; indeed, the concept of 'forced choice' is represented here through the consistent parent narrative of an inability to accommodate diverse need, reflective of Reindal (2010).

School facilitation of views

Continuity of support has been cited as key to a successful transfer for those with SEN (Maras and Aveling, 2006). The authors argue that support structures cannot be universally applied to those with similar needs, and that having SEN does not guarantee that mainstream transition will be difficult. Similarly, support being put in place cannot guarantee an improved transition. When considering the aforementioned research suggesting those with SEN and lower ability pupils are more likely to experience difficulties in transition (Galton et al,1999; Anderson, 2000; Hodson et al, 2005; West et al, 2010), these complex individual differences need to be considered rather than applying an overgeneralised definition of SEN. These arguments suggest that communication and the elicitation of the parent and child or young person's voice is important in order to provide an individualised and pragmatic transition package. Taylor-Brown (2012) studied the experiences of Year 9 boys with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD)- this category has now been renamed as 'social, emotional and mental health' in the more recent SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015)- and their experience of person-centered reviews, through semi-structured interviews. One of the key themes to emerge was around power dynamics; the author states that "visual representations and jargon free language helped break down power imbalances and contributed towards increased feelings of inclusion and participation" (p. 60).

Although the study used a school sample as opposed to the present focus on parent views, I consider the power dynamics between professionals and service users as central to the current research. The professional pressure on parents and parental difficulties in accessing information (Mann et al, 2015; Tobin et al, 2012; Parsons et al, 2009) may be exacerbated by the environment setup in professional contexts: the research report into parents' and young people's experiences of EHCPs (DfE, 2017) reports that children and young people are not always asked if they want to take part in meetings regarding EHCPs (only 44% of those surveyed), with just 19% of those interviewed indicating they are given choices of how to take part. In addition to this, only 47% of parents and young people felt that communication about the child or young person's EHCP was clear (most or all of the time) throughout the process. Despite the centrality of parent and child voice enshrined in recent legislation (Children & Families Act, 2014; SEND Code of Practice [DfE, 2015]), I would argue that person-centered planning and communication around statutory-level involvement is a widespread area for development.

Theoretical frameworks

Within this review, two theoretical frameworks will be covered which I consider to be useful in understanding parent choice, in particular how parent views are informed and the systemic interaction between parents and others. These areas are models of disability and ecological systems theory.

Models of disability and approaches to inclusive practice

As well as examining the broad motives behind parents' school choice, it is also important to assess how models of disability inform their selection. A traditional social model stance would be to consider 'disability' as something which is imposed by society on top on physical impairment, resulting in isolation and oppression (UPIAS, 1974), whereas within the traditional medical model, 'disability' emerges as a result of impairment within a person, caused by a health condition or injury (Haegele & Hodge, 2016). The social model has been significant in terms of engendering the political movement in Britain, as an instrumental tool for understanding societal barriers to disability, creating more enabling environments, and building self-esteem by relocating the problem away from the individual (Shakespeare, 2006).

Runswick-Cole (2008) argues that parents leaning towards a more individualised (medical) model of disability are more likely to opt for a special school placement, however those focused more on the barriers their child faces (social model) will opt for mainstream education. This is supported by Jenkinson's (1998) finding that parents of children with disabilities in mainstream schools favour an 'inclusionary stance'- giving their child opportunities to mix with non-disabled children- and those with children in special schools put greater emphasis on quality of learning provision.

However, this view around fixed ideologies can be considered an oversimplification. Firstly, an 'inclusionary stance' is difficult to define, as some teachers may argue that withdrawing pupils to a separate space is inclusion as it may allow equitable access to the shared curriculum (Laughlan & Greig, 2015). As mentioned, inclusion can take very different forms in terms of meeting academic needs and/or social needs of a child in school (Gibb et al, 2007), the above example prioritising academic over social inclusion.

The literature also suggests that parents' views can be more complex than suggested by Runswick-Cole (2008). Lightfoot & Bond (2013) cite the example of a parent of a child with

Down Syndrome, who had a 'commitment to inclusion' but were concerned that 1:1 support would de-skill her child and deny her key life skills and social opportunities. This social model thinking was contrasted by the parent's acceptance of the label of Down Syndrome in helping her to understand her child. The expectations of schooling can also be changeable over time, informed by a child's capability. Tobin et al (2012) cites the example of a parent who had to 'change the goal posts' having realised post-transition, that her child (who had autism) was not as academically able as she had previously believed, but maintaining the (medical model) view that he may catch up with his peers.

I consider these models, and how they are represented within parents' underlying views around what high-quality education and inclusion means for their child, as central to the topic of parent choice. Denison et al (2006) argue that the dominant, socially constructed discourse of medical model language implies the need for outside, multi-agency teams. Professional teams which, the literature suggests, can apply significant pressure towards parents in decision-making (Mann et al, 2015). It is also possible that parents may not identify with the concept of 'disability', rejecting both definitions when applied to their child's individual needs. Shakespeare (2006) argues that both models are problematic and represent disability as 'adversity'. Within the social model, disability has connotations of isolation and oppression, whereas the medical model implies it is a deficit or limitation

Ecological systems theory

The ecological systems theory of Bronfenbrenner (1979) is also particularly relevant to the topic of parent choice in special education. I would argue that the issues around parent choice are less concerned with the microsystem the child or young person finds themselves within- his/her immediate environment such as their classroom or peer groups- and more concerned with the interaction of systems more remote to them. These include those at the mesosystemic level- this is the level concerned with the interaction between different microsystems. For example, the interactions between the home and school microsystems. In addition to this, I would argue that parent choice is influenced by events occurring at the macrosystemic level, which concerns the wider cultural and political influences on a child or young person. This pertains to the current field in terms of how the values and culture of the parents, and the constraint of local authorities, informs the choice of school placement.

It is also appropriate to refer to the revision of this model, the 'bioecological model of human development' (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), particularly the incorporation of the 'process-person-context-time' (PPCT) Model. Changes around a child or young person over the

course of time, at the chronosystemic level, are relevant to the current study, in terms of assessing how parent views regarding inclusion and their priorities for education may have changed. Although these models are not explicitly referred to within the literature on parent choice, mesosystemic and macrosystemic interactions can be seen throughout the literature, the former concerning 'ground-level' communications between home and school systems, the latter concerning the local and national policy context of parent choice and how personal values of the parent inform where their child may be placed. Similarly, research referring to parents whose views of their child's ability change (Tobin et al, 2012), parents that may change their preference over special or mainstream school (Mann, 2016), or even parent ideology as changeable (Landsman, 2005) are all changes which can occur over time (at the level of the chronosystem) and can, I would argue, have a significant impact on school choice.

A gap in the research

This review has explored the research concerning parents choosing special education for their child; the arguments for and against mainstream provision as inadequate to provide for a broad range of needs in an inclusive manner and an examination of the concept of 'forced choice', arising from research concerning a lack of support in decision-making, a lack of realistic options for alternatives to special education and poor facilitation of parent views at a school level.

The extant literature has highlighted a number of gaps and avenues of potential future research. Since that of Bagley et al (2002), there has been little UK research regarding parents' choice of schools. This is particularly significant with the shift since 2010, with the national agenda focused on increasing choice and diversity of school, the increased marketisation of the school system and the centrality of the voice of parent and child or young person, as enshrined in legislation.

There is research in Australia which suggests that the complexity of deciding between regular and special schools is compounded by pressure from professionals and difficulty in accessing reliable information, meaning that parents' choices do not reflect their actual preferences (Mann et al, 2015). Somewhat in contrast to this more recent imperative driving the direction of the UK education system, there has been a 'widespread moral and legislative commitment to inclusive education' (Mann et al, 2015, p 1414) in Australia in recent years.

These two research papers are particularly influential in informing the direction of the present research; why parents choose special schools under present legislation and systems, and whether the barriers to informed choice observed in research in Australia are relevant to parents in the UK. The overarching aim of the present research is to investigate whether the current legislative focus on optimising parent choice operates as intended. It is my hope that these findings will have significance in terms of informing systemic change if necessary, working towards the accurate elicitation of parents' choices. Given this rationale and background research (as well as the practical considerations), this research is focused on parents who have opted for special school only.

As stated, the current research is informed by Bagley et al (2001). The surveys in their research looked at overall reasons for choosing a particular school, sources of information, whether parents considered it a 'real choice' and ways in which they believed the system of parental choice could be improved. Although this research similarly looked into these areas, it is distinct from this in a number of ways, for example:

- It was focused specifically on parents in special schools.
- It considered how parent views were facilitated (given this is now a core part of the SEND Code of Practice, [DfE, 2015]).
- The research examined parents' views on alternative provision (and the appropriateness of mainstream school)
- It examined parents' ideologies and underlying views around education

Restating the aims of the research

The overarching aim of this research is to investigate whether the current legislative focus on optimising parent choice operates as intended. More specifically, the aims are:

1. To examine the views of parents of pupils in special schools in the South West of England: their reasons behind choosing special school, the extent to which they feel they had an independent choice and their views on alternative provision.
2. To examine whether parent ideology and constructs of high-quality inclusive education informs special school selection and to examine in-depth how choices are facilitated in schools, according to parental experience
3. To examine differences in parent experiences in greater detail in Phase 2 of the research and identifying possible underlying reasons for these variations.

Phase 1 research questions

The review of the literature informed the following Phase 1 research questions:

1) What do parents consider high-quality inclusive education to be for their child?
2) Why did parents choose special school?
3) Do parents feel that mainstream school could have been appropriate for their child?
4) Were alternative forms of education considered during the selection process?
5) To what extent do parents feel that they had a 'real choice' of schools (more than one option that was good enough)?
6) Did parents experience a dilemma concerning school choice?
7) Did parents feel well-informed in their decision and supported by professionals?
8) How were parents' views facilitated and taken into consideration?
9) Do parents feel that their preferences were listened to and taken into consideration?

Chapter 3: Methodology

Philosophy underpinning the research (ontology and epistemology)

The current research is informed by a critical realist paradigm. Maxwell (2011) describes critical realism as an approach which retains an 'ontological realism (there is a real world that exists independently of our perceptions, theories, and constructions) while accepting a form of epistemological constructivism and relativism (our understanding of this world is inevitably a construction from our own perspectives and standpoint)' (P.5) Within this paradigm, theories are used to guide this research process, with a recognition that such knowledge can be an incomplete view of reality (Shannon-Baker, 2016).

Key to the critical realist paradigm then is the idea that the 'social reality is defined from persons in society' (Mack, 2010, p.9). In the context of the present research, my view is that the nature of reality is defined by the systems and structures within which all parents are required to work, and we can assume is generalisable across similar circumstances (to the extent that national policy is enacted in a uniform manner). But it is also seen as constructed by the individual experiences of parents, who have their individual circumstances, beliefs and backgrounds which affect their perception of similar situations.

Educational research within a critical paradigm is also concerned with emancipation and transformation (Mustafa, 2011) and should challenge the reproduction of social inequalities (Mack, 2010). Within the literature review, I have drawn upon research concerning parent choice, particularly that which highlights the difficulties of professional pressure and in accessing reliable information (for example, Mann et al, 2015). This research is reflective of a market-driven system, which I would argue, whilst endorsing the values of independent decision-making, does not often work to elicit it in an accurate or fair manner. Mustafa (2011) also draws attention to the fact that critical realists are concerned with instigating institutional change. My aim for this research is that is should reflect the social reality of parents of children in special schools, and can be of use in informing systemic change as necessary, at a school-wide level.

Research design

A mixed methods design was used for this research, utilising both quantitative and qualitative data. It is argued that mixed methods approaches are appropriate to use within a critical realist paradigm: Maxwell and Mittapalli (2010), endorsing a critical realist approach,

31

argue that mixed methods designs allow researchers to understand "the processes by which an event or situation occurs, rather than simply a comparison of situations involving the presence and absence of the presumed cause" (p. 156). Similarly, Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) also argue in favour of a mixed methods approach due to the opportunity for participants to express divergent viewpoints (highly valued within critical realist research), but also due to the depth and breadth in which the research questions can be assessed and the scope to answer confirmatory and exploratory questions.

An explanatory sequential design was also employed. Creswell and Clark (2011) describe this as a design in which the quantitative data (collected first) is analysed and used to refine the qualitative questions, informing data collection protocols and participant selection for Phase 2. The qualitative data is then analysed individually before a cross-analysis of Phases 1 and 2 (examining areas and convergence and divergence and the extent to which the qualitative results explain the quantitative results). The methodological rationale behind this design, (fitting within a critical realist approach), is the concept of 'complementarity'. Creswell & Clark (2008) explain that this is the use of different methods to explain different parts of a phenomenon, the data from one method elaborating on the other; the weakness of one method can be overcome by combining it with another. In terms of the present research, the mixed methods approach allowed for broader research questions to be addressed by a larger sample, with further research questions (based on Phase 1 findings) addressed by a smaller sample.

Phase 1 data, with an interim analysis of results part-way through data collection, informed the Phase 2 research questions and construction of data collection materials. Although the design was intended to be sequential, this meant that Phase 1 data collection could then continue for the maximum time frame.

The incompatibility thesis

The research is driven by a critical paradigm which endorses a mixed methods design; it is also appropriate to discuss literature which contests the appropriateness of mixing quantitative and qualitative research. Proponents of the 'incompatibility thesis' (Howe, 1988) would argue that quantitative and qualitative paradigms and related methods are incompatible and should not be used in tandem. This ongoing division between the two paradigms within the literature has been referred to as 'the paradigm wars' (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Johnson (2017) argues in favour of a multi-paradigmatic approach. The author acknowledges that there is quantitatively-driven mixed methods research,

qualitatively-driven mixed methods research and *equal status* or *interactive mixed methods* research- the latter in which the respective epistemologies are both regarded equally in order to produce a 'superior whole' (Johnson, 2017, p.159). Johnson (2017) argues that *equal status mixed methods* research, such as this research, must rely on more than one paradigm.

Two of the fundamental ideas of the 'dialectical pluralism' proposed by Johnson (2017) as a (meta)paradigm for mixed methods research are 1) to dialectically listen to and consider different paradigms, theories and perspectives and 2) to combine ideas from competing values into a new workable whole. Although this may be interpreted as an attempt to combine paradigmatic positions which may not be complimentary of one another, I would agree that a multiparadigmatic approach has potential to generate 'collaborative knowledge that represents multiple perspectives' (Johnson, 2017, p. 159).

Ethical considerations (across both parts of the research)

This research adheres to the principles of the Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2014). For the current research, particular attention is drawn to the elements of risk involved with this study (as outlined in the Code), namely the involvement of vulnerable groups (children with SEN, albeit not directly), the involvement of potentially sensitive topics, with the discussion of these topics being a potential source of psychological stress. Parents were informed by an information sheet about what their participation would involve and what would be done with the data that they supplied (as well as fulfilling all other stipulations to meet the criteria for informed consent as referred to in the Code of Human Research Ethics, BPS, 2014). They were made aware that the information they provided would remain confidential, with the exception of any information pertaining to illegal activities. They were informed of their right to withdraw, up to a given time frame. Separate information sheets and consent forms were provided for Phase 1 and Phase 2. Approval for this research was granted by the ethics committee of the University of Exeter (see Appendix 1 for certificate of ethical approval and Appendix 2 for the application form to the ethics committee, which includes the participant information sheets and consent forms for both Phase 1 and 2).

Chapter 4: Phase 1 Method

The following chapter will outline the Phase 1 method, followed by the results and discussion. The method, results and discussion of Phase 2 will then be outlined in subsequent chapters before an overall discussion synthesising finding of the two phases.

Participants and sampling

The inclusion criteria for Phase 1 were parents of children who have been attending special school within the three local authorities surveyed, for at least 12 months. This timeframe was to increase the likelihood that any ongoing issues around school placement had been resolved. As parent/carer names are kept confidential by schools and it is not possible to contact them directly, a probability sample was not possible. Therefore, opportunity sampling was used. The decision to conduct the study across multiple local authorities was due to these reasons; firstly, the special schools across these three local authorities represent a range of rural, semi-rural and urban areas. This is an important factor given previous research indicates that proximity to the school is a significant factor in parental choices, particularly in more rural areas (Bagley et al, 2001). Secondly, the inclusion of three local authorities was more representative of parent views across special schools within the region, including parents of children and young people with different categories and different levels of need (moderate to more complex).

The primary sampling strategy was through direct contact with special schools. Headteachers of all special schools within these local authorities were contacted by email, inviting them to discuss the project by phone/skype. It was recognised that the proposed research may be a sensitive topic for head teachers, given the nature of the retrospective discussions around parent choice and how this has been facilitated (please see Appendix 3 for the letter sent out to headteachers). Headteachers were asked to distribute consent forms to all parents.

This sampling strategy did not generate a sufficient sample for Phase 1 (see below), therefore a second strategy was applied. This was to contact local groups and associations via social media in order to access a parent sample- these included local Parent Carer Forums, local SENDIAS (Special Educational Needs and Disability, Information, Advice, Support) services, and other local parent support groups. Those participants sampled via social media had to have children attending special schools in the three local authorities

listed (as per the inclusion criteria). The Peninsula Childhood Disability Research Unit (PenCRU) also agreed to disseminate information about the research to local parents.

As of January 2019, (DfE, 2019b), there are approximately 2,500 pupils attending special schools across the three local authorities sampled in the present research. My aim for Phase 1 was to sample as many participants as possible- in practical terms, the questionnaire being in electronic format meant that collecting a larger number of responses would not have the effect of increasing the time taken to input the data subsequently (relative to paper-based questionnaires).

The sampling strategy was informed by a calculation in which I estimated the number of pupils new to a school each year- it was estimated that there would be approximately 100 pupils per special school who had been attending for at least 12 months. I initially contacted 10 schools across the three localities. When this did not generate a sufficient response, headteachers of all listed special schools were contacted. A total of 6 special schools agreed to send the questionnaire to parents (see demographics information from Phase 1 findings for full details of parent responses for each sampling strategy).

A weakness of non-probability, voluntary sampling technique was that it risked generating a sample which would not be representative of special school parents across the three localities (see strengths and limitations).

Data collection (materials and procedures)

Development and construction of the questionnaire

The questionnaire was informed by that Bagley et al (2001). However, this research is different from that of Bagley et al (2001) in that the focus is on special schools only. Due to this, questions were adapted so as to be more suitable for the present sample (for example, for the question- 'when considering special education for your child, which of the following influenced your decision?' which was adapted from the questionnaire of Bagley et al (2001), options such as 'child has special educational needs' was not included as this was implied by the inclusion criteria).

As with Bagley et al (2001), the questionnaire used both fixed and open-ended questions to allow parents to elaborate where appropriate. Additional questions were formulated to reflect the Phase 1 research questions. The questionnaire also included additional information

which would be used to inform later analysis- child's main areas of SEN (including any diagnoses that they have) as indicated on their Education, Health and Care plan, child's age and gender, the name of the child's school and date they started the school (these were used to ensure the participant met the inclusion criteria), type of placement (residential or day) and the type of provision the child attended before their current school. At the end of the questionnaire, as per that of Bagley et al (2001), participants were given the opportunity to indicate whether they would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview (Phase 2). Please see Appendix 4 for a copy of Phase 1 questionnaire.

E-questionnaires which were sent to schools were distributed internally via email (participants were invited to click on a hyperlink embedded within the email which took them to the questionnaire- see Appendix 5 for the letter sent out to parents). This same hyperlink was used so that participants could access the questionnaire via social media (see Appendix 6 for recruitment post used on social media). Phase 1 data was collected between July 2019 and January 2020.

Pilot study feedback. The draft questionnaire was subjected to a pilot study to ensure its clarity and that it was sufficiently sensitive to address to research questions. The questionnaire was sent to out to 3 parents of children with additional needs. These parents gave feedback around the wording of specific questions and the inclusion of additional questions (please see Appendix 7 for a copy of the draft questionnaire, with amendments made as a result of pilot study).

Data analysis

SPSS was used to generate descriptive statistics and frequencies from the forced choice questions. The software was also used to carry out cross-tab analyses (Chi-Square test of independence) and correlational analyses between variables, which were considered pertinent to the research questions.

A content analysis was conducted for the qualitative responses and open-ended questions, using Nvivo. The content analysis fits in with what Hsieh and Shannon (2005) refer to as 'conventional content analysis' whereby the researcher avoids the use of pre-conceived categories but allows 'the categories and names for categories flow from the data' (p.1279). This method of content analysis is therefore described as 'inductive' or 'bottom up'. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) state that researchers can combine subcategories into a smaller set of broader categories; with the present data (and the small amount of qualitative data from

Phase 1), the smaller categories have been preserved. I considered that to group them into larger categories would be to lose some of the nuances and individuality of the participants' responses (the content analysis of the Phase 1 data can be seen in Appendix 8). Participant responses were categorised into multiple categories where appropriate.

Chapter 5: Phase 1 findings

Demographic information

Fifty-seven participants took part in Phase 1. The age of the children ranged from 5 to 20 with a mean of 12.53 years of age (*SD*= 3.36). 77.2 % (n=44) of children were male, 22.8% (n=13) were female.

Participants indicated when their child started at their current special school. Responses were varied for this (for example, parents indicating their child's age when starting school, or the year when they started). With some of the data entries, an approximation was taken of their start date, based on data given (for example, the age of the child when starting compared against their current age). The mean duration children had been attending their current school was 4.9 years (SD= 3.33). Overall, 47.4% (n=27) of children had started their school within the last 3 years.

All respondents indicated that their child attended a day placement, with the exception of one response indicating a residential placement and one indicating a part-time placement. 50.9% of participants(n=29) indicated that their child previously attended a mainstream school. Of the 43.9% (n=25) of participants who indicated an 'other response', the majority indicated attendance to a mainstream setting.

Thirty participants (52.6%) indicated that they heard about the study through their school and 26.3% (n=15) using social media. The remaining participants (n=12) referred to 'other'- the qualitative data mostly referred to the above sampling methods- 5 participants heard about the study through Peninsula Childhood Disability Research Unit (PenCRU).

Statistical analyses

Chi-square analyses

The following chi-square analyses were carried out to establish relationships between variables within the data. These were considered to be appropriate based on previous research and the research questions, with a specific focus on:

1. The relationships between perception of 'real' or 'hard' choice in decision-making, and appropriateness of mainstream school (see Reindal, 2010; Runswick-Cole, 2008; Lauchlan & Greig, 2015)

2. The relationships between perception of 'real' or 'hard' choice in decision-making, and the number of schools to choose from (see Tobin et al 2012).
3. The relationship between 'real choice' and 'hard choice'.

See Appendix 9 for summary tables of all chi-square analyses.

Correlational analyses

Correlational analyses were alternatively carried out to establish the relationships between specific questionnaire items which had two 6-point scales:

1. The relationship between how well-informed participants felt and the extent to which they felt supported by professionals (see Mann et al, 2015).
2. The relationship between participant's expression of views being well-supported and their views and preferences considered.

Given the ordinal nature of the variables, a Spearman's correlation was used. See Appendix 10 for summary tables of all correlational analyses.

Research question 1) What do parents consider high-quality inclusive education to be for their child?

Figure 1

Concepts of inclusive education
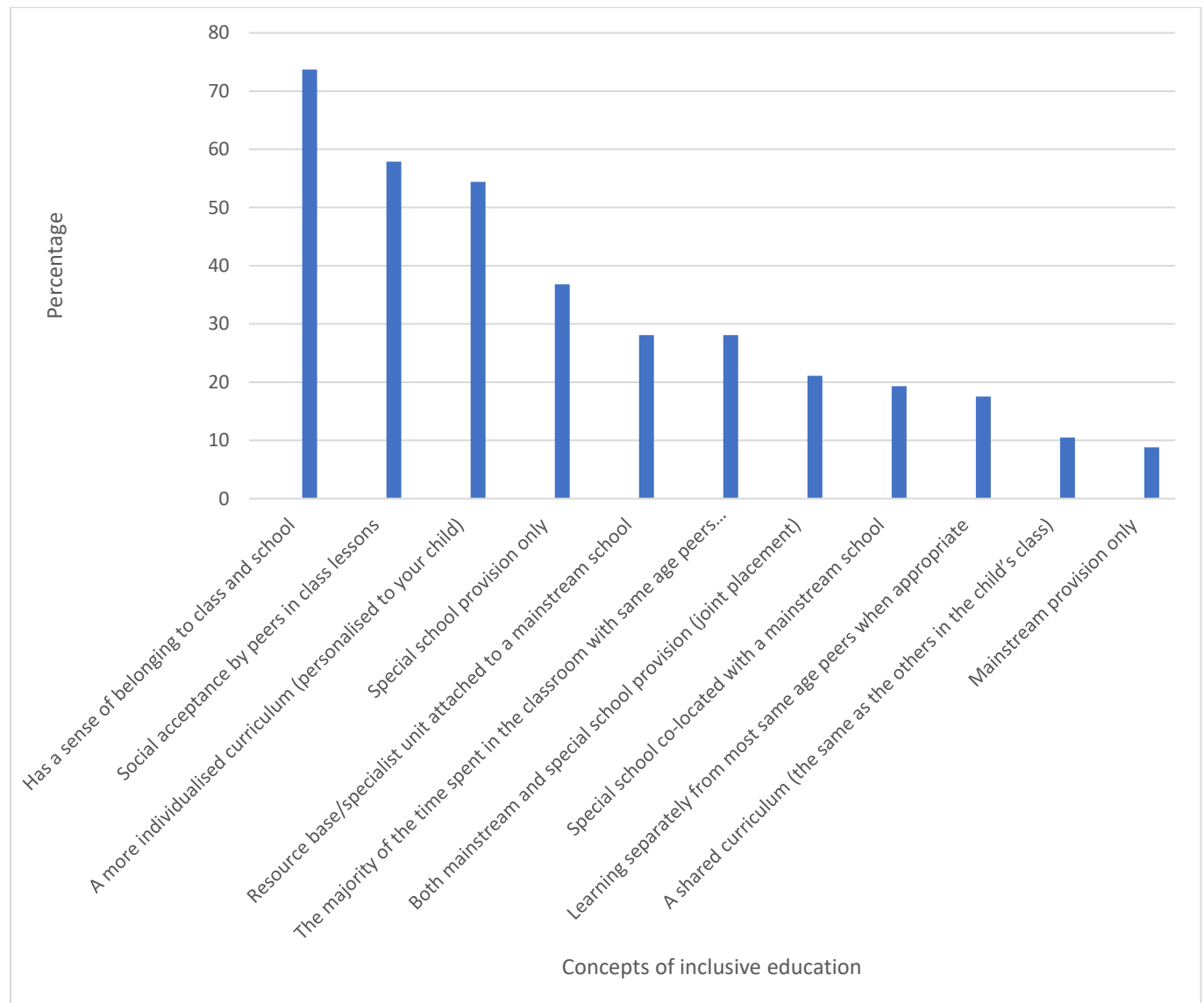
Figure 1 shows participant responses to the question: 'What does high quality inclusive education provision mean to you as regards your child?' Participants were able to tick all options which they felt applied to them. Fifty-seven participants answered this question. Overall, 73.7% of participants (*n*=42) indicated that a sense of belonging to class and school was most important as part of high-quality inclusive education for their child. In addition to this, 57.9% (*n*=33) stated that 'social acceptance by peers in class lessons' and 54.4% (*n*=31) felt that a more individualised curriculum was important.

The categories relating to placements were all rated as lower than 40%. In terms of provision, 'special school provision only' (36.8%, *n*=21) was rated higher than resource base/specialist unit attached to mainstream school (28.1%, *n*=16), joint placement (21.1%, *n*=12), co-located schools (19.3%, *n*=11) or mainstream provision only (8.8%, *n*=5). This difference between participants' selecting special school only and mainstream only suggests a particular interpretation of inclusive education, which may be seen as contrary to its traditional interpretation (see Phase 1 summary and discussion)

The cross-tab analysis showed that there was a high degree of crossover between responses to the three top-rated categories, for example, of the 42 participants that selected 'has a sense of belonging in class and school', 32 participants (76.2%) also selected 'social acceptance by peers' and 30 participants (71.4%) also selected 'individualised curriculum'.

The cross-tabulation data also shows that participants that selected 'sense of belonging' most-commonly selected 'special school only' as the provision type (the same was true for 'social acceptance'). Participants that selected 'individualised curriculum' also most-commonly selected 'special school only' as well as 'co-located special school' as the most appropriate provision types. There is a clear link here between these variables (particularly sense of belonging) and special school as the most appropriate provision to meet these requirements.

Participants were given opportunities throughout the questionnaire to give qualitative responses to explain their answers. In some cases, only a small number of participants gave qualitative responses. It should be noted that this secondary data is intended to be illuminating rather than providing a detailed explanation for the patten of response.

Eleven participants gave qualitative responses in the 'other' category. A content analysis was carried out of these responses (see Appendix 8 for all content analysis tables). Five participants' responses referred to 'inclusion as meeting social needs', for example, 'being accepted for who he is' (participant 42) and 'finding special needs peers to befriend' (participant 44). Within this category, 1 participant made specific reference to the role of co-located schools to meet social needs, 'teaching acceptance of differences to the next generation' (participant 15).

Four participants referred to 'inclusion as meeting academic needs'. For example, education that is 'needs-led, not curriculum led' (participant 19) and 'relevant to the child in terms of needs, and useful skills and knowledge base for them' (participant 54). Two participants

similarly referred to the importance of having high aspirations and expectations for children with SEN.

Research question 2) Why did parents choose special school?

Figure 2

Reasons for choosing special school

Reasons for choosing special school
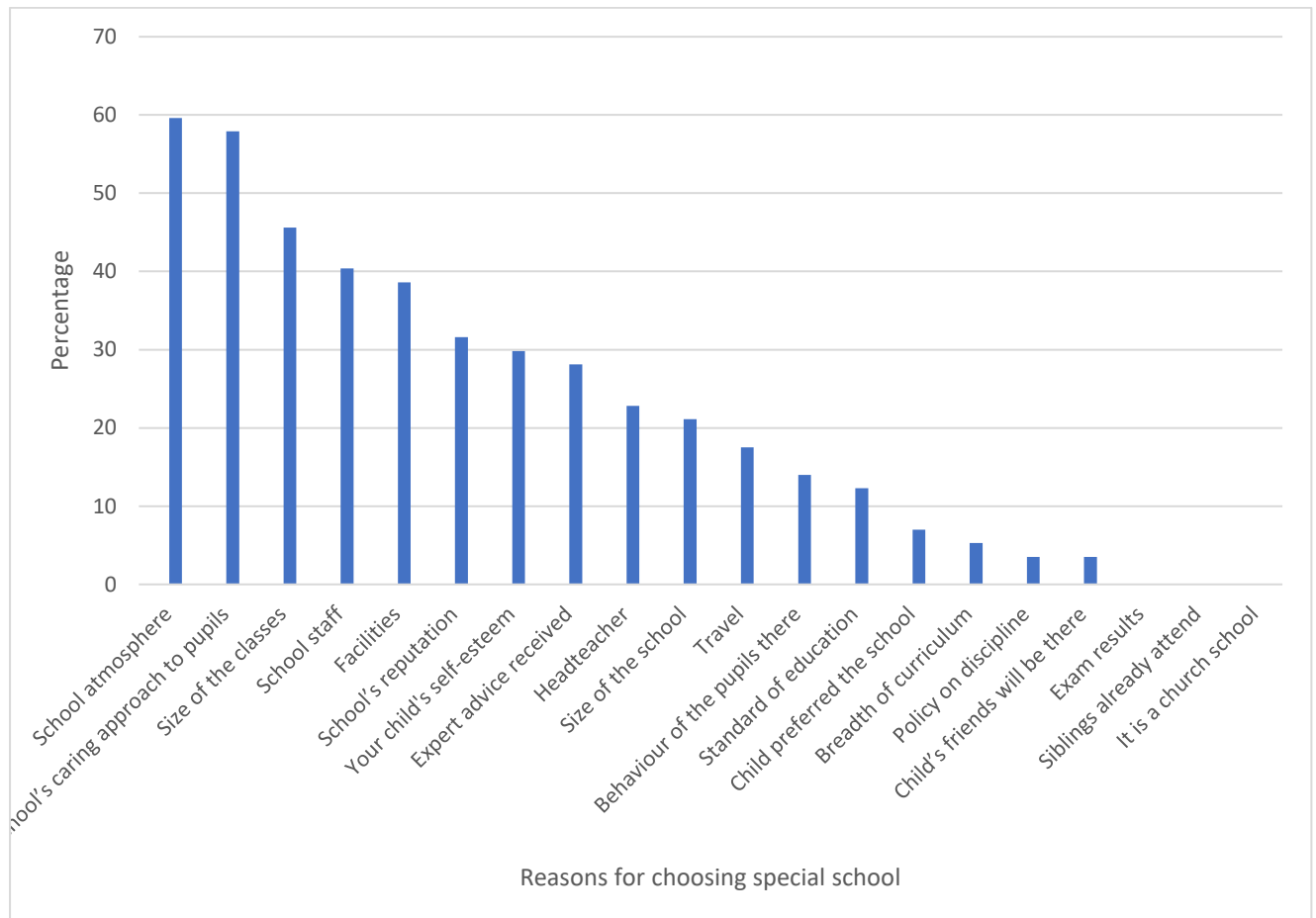
Figure 2 shows the answers participants gave in response to the question 'When considering special education for your child, which of the following influenced your decision?' They were asked to select the four most important reasons.

Fifty-seven participants answered this question. Overall, 59.6% of participants (*n*=34) indicated that school atmosphere influenced their decision, 57.9% (*n*=33) selected 'school's caring approach to pupils', and 45.6% (*n*=26) selected 'size of the classes'. The responses broadly suggest parents see the school itself and its staff as important factors in their decision-making. Factors pertaining to the standard of education and curriculum were not rated as highly by parents. No participants indicated that exam results or siblings currently

attending the school influenced their decision. This can be seen as reflective of parents' concept of inclusion- a sense of belongingness as the most important aspect of inclusive education (research question 1).

Eleven participants gave qualitative responses to 'other'- a range of responses were given. 32 respondents referred to the importance of the school having an 'understanding of the child's needs and/or conditions', for example 'other children attending with the same condition as my son and the school understanding the condition' (participant 40). Other categories included 'failure of mainstream school', 'lack of choice' (for example 'I was given no other option'- participant 44), 'facilities' and 'recommended by others' (all 2 respondents).

Research question 3) Do parents feel that mainstream school could have been appropriate for their child?

Figure 3

Appropriateness of mainstream school
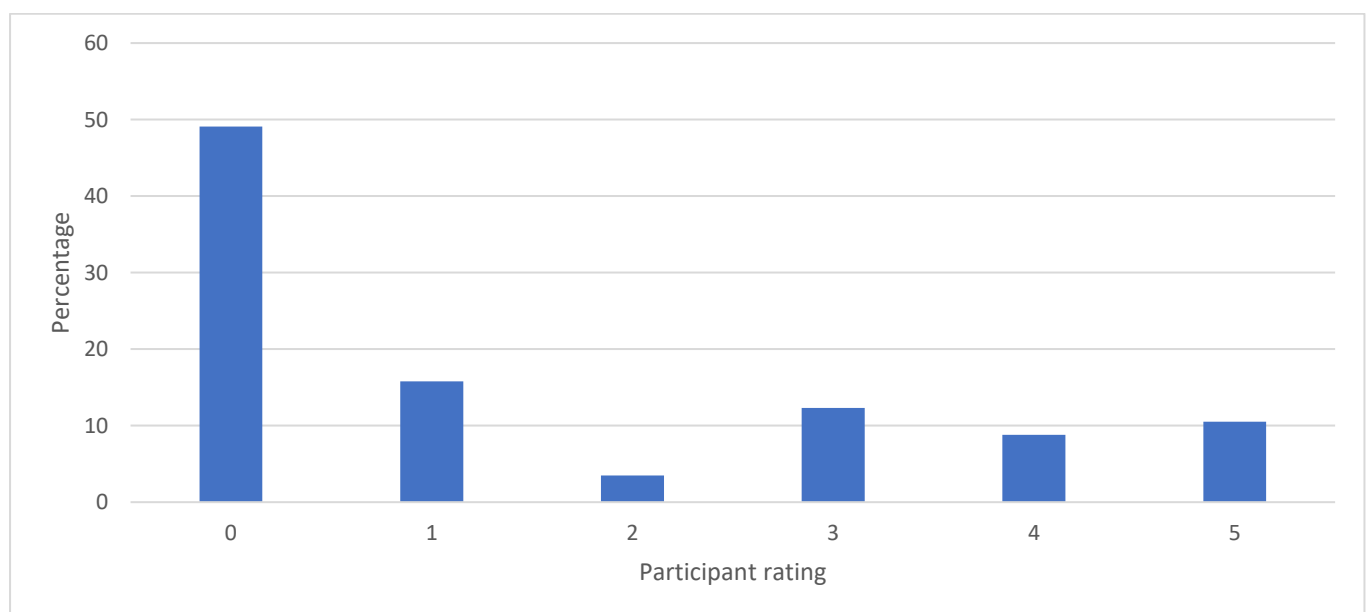
Figure 3 shows the percentages of responses to the question 'To what extent do you feel that, with the right level of support, a mainstream setting could have been appropriate for your child?' with participants giving their ratings on a Likert scale of 0-5 (Likert scales were not labelled and as such, were open to individual interpretation). Fifty-seven participants answered this question. The modal response was '0' (*n*=28) and the mean response was 1.47 (*SD*=1.82). However, there was a spread across the data: for example, 29 participants indicated that mainstream education could have been appropriate for their child to some

degree (giving ratings from 1-5), however 28 participants suggests that it was not at all appropriate (giving a rating of 0).

Participants were asked to indicate why they gave their rating- 49 participants gave qualitative responses. The content analysis showed that only four participants gave responses explaining why mainstream school could have been appropriate (categories included positive previous experience- two respondents, and high-quality mainstream provision available- one respondent). Of the responses which explained why mainstream school was not appropriate, two key categories emerged. Firstly, the 'level of need/level of support required'- within this category, there were 17 participants referring to 'level of need' and 9 referring to 'level of support required'. It is important to recognise that these represent similar yet distinctly different constructs for parents (for example, the needs as too great for mainstream or the support as too limited in mainstream) but these constructs could be overlapping, for example: 'My child's needs have become more complex as time has gone on, both physically and mentally. Mainstream would never have worked out for her' (participant 41) and 'He has high care needs, is doubly incontinent and requires constant supervision when eating. He has no concept of danger. He is not able to communicate with other children and requires highly trained teaching staff to be able to get through to him' (participant 40).

Secondly, 'previous experience of mainstream school' (17 participants), for example 'We tried and failed to have our daughter treated decently at a mainstream school' (participant 43). Other themes to emerge included 'class size/environment' (8 participants), 'lack of training/information' (4 participants), 'funding' (4 participants) and 'curriculum/learning' (3 participants). See Appendix 8 for full content analysis.

Research question 4) Were alternative forms of education considered during the selection process?

Figure 4.

Alternatives to special school considered
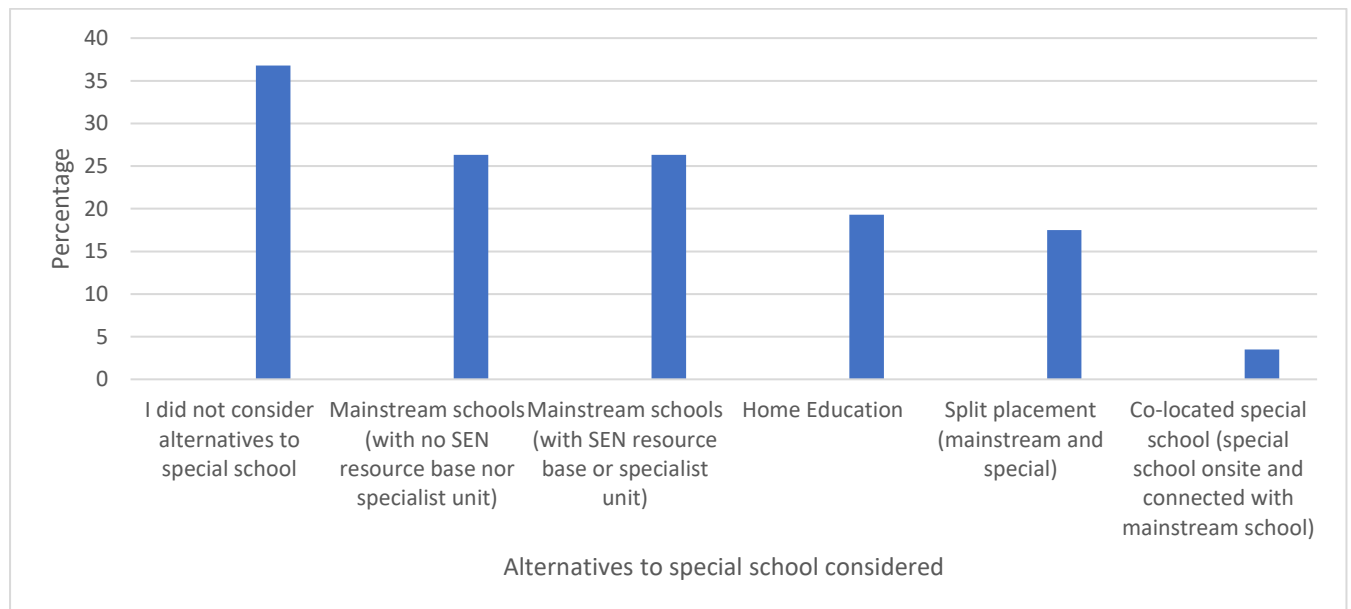
Figure 4 shows the responses to the question 'Did you consider alternative forms of education instead of a special school?' Participants were asked to select all options which applied to them. Fifty-seven participants answered this question. The modal response was that participants did not consider alternatives to special school (21 participants, 36.8%). However, the key finding here is that 63.2% (36 participants) indicated that they had considered an alternative to special school.

A cross-tabs analysis showed that of the 15 participants that considered mainstream school with a resource base, only 6 of these (40%) also selected mainstream school with no resource base. This implies that parents were aware of the role of a resource base with mainstream schools. There was a strong cross-over of responses between mainstream school being considered and home education (for example, of the 11 participants who considered home education, 9 of these- 81.8%- also considered mainstream school with a resource base).

Thirteen participants gave qualitative responses in 'other'. The key category which emerged from the content analysis was the 'failure of mainstream school', informing participants' considerations during the selection process (3 respondents), for example 'Mainstream had

already failed and a year of no education due to severe mental health caused by mainstream' (participant 47).

Research question 5) To what extent do parents feel that they had a 'real choice' of schools (more than one option that was good enough)

Figure 5.

Real choice
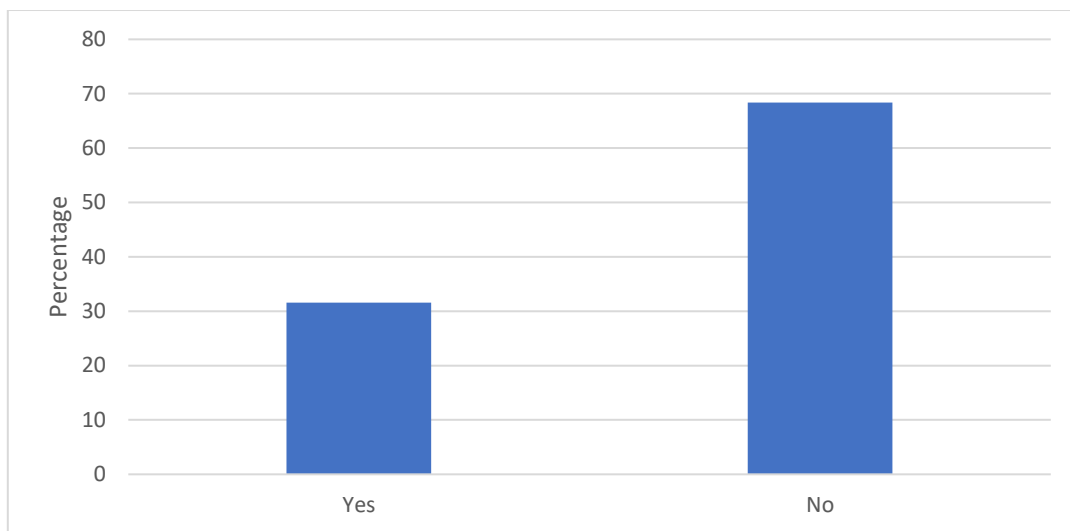
Figure 5 shows the percentages of responses to the question 'Do you feel you had a real choice between special school provision and other types of provision (e.g. more than one option that was good enough)?' Fifty- seven participants answered this question. Overall, 68.4% (*n*=39) stated 'No' and 31.6% (*n*=18) stated 'Yes'.

A Chi-Square analysis was conducted of responses to question 9 (whether participants felt that they had a real choice) and question 11 (the extent to which parents felt mainstream school could have been appropriate)- see chi-square analysis question 1, page 38. The initial analysis showed that some expected cell counts of less than 5. To correct for this, the variable for question 11 (mainstream appropriate) was recoded in the following way: 0-2 as 'broadly inappropriate' and 3-5 and 'broadly appropriate'. The relationship between these variables was not significant: $(x^2(1, N = 57) = 2.708$ (p= .100). See Appendix 9 for summary tables of all chi-square analyses.

Table 2 demonstrates that of the 18 participants indicating that they had a real choice, 15 of these (83.3%) indicated that mainstream schools were 'broadly inappropriate'. Only 3 of 57 participants (5.3%) indicated that they had a real choice and that mainstream school was

broadly appropriate. This suggests that participants' constructs of real choice were not related to the appropriateness of mainstream school.

Table 2

Cross-tabulation between 'real choice' and 'mainstream appropriate' variables.

| | | | MAINSAPPROP | | |
			Broadly not appropriate (0-2)	Broadly appropriate (3-5)	Total
REALCHO	no	Count	24	15	39
		% within REALCHO	61.5%	38.5%	100.0%
	yes	Count	15	3	18
		% within REALCHO	83.3%	16.7%	100.0%
	Total	Count	39	18	57
		% within REALCHO	68.4%	31.6%	100.0%

If indicating 'No', participants were asked to specify why they felt they did not have a real choice. 34 participants gave qualitative responses to this. A key category which emerged from the content analysis of these responses (suggestive of a lack of real choice), was that 'mainstream/other provision was inappropriate' (16 respondents): for example, one participant responded 'Due to his very complex needs I do not believe mainstream provision was an option to us' (participant 28).

A further key category was a lack of 'choice of schools' (12 respondents) – one participant responded 'I felt there was reluctance in giving me choices' (participant 37). Other responses implied that the choice was taken out of their hands (see 'decision was not theirs' category - 5 respondents)- for example 'we were 'pushed' towards a special school placement by being told that there was no other option for our child' (participant 17). Five respondents also referred travel/location as impediments to 'real choice'.

Participants indicated the number of schools they had to choose from (question 15). Fifty-six participants answered this question. Where participants' responses were unclear- for example '3 but they only really offered 1 as the closest/cheapest option', the highest number referred to (in this case, 3) was chosen as their response. 22 participants (40%) indicated that they had 1 school to choose from, which was the modal response. Sixteen participants (29.1%) indicated that they had 2 schools to choose from, which was the mean response (*SD*=1.44).

Participants were asked to briefly comment on what their school options were. Forty-eight participants gave responses. The content analysis showed that of these, 29 respondents referred to special schools only, whereas 9 respondents referred to both special school and mainstream school (the remaining responses did not clearly state the type of provision).

A Chi-square analysis was conducted between responses to question 9 (whether participants felt that they had a real choice) and question 15 (how many schools participants had to choose from)- see chi-square analysis question 2, page 38. The initial analysis showed that some expected cell counts of less than 5. To correct for this, the variable for question 15 (how many schools) was recoded in the following way: 0-1 (zero or one option) and 2 or more (multiple options). The relationship between these variables was significant (x^2(1, $N = 55$) = 6.757, (p= .009). Table 3 shows that of the 17 participants indicating that they had a real choice, 14 of these (82.4%) indicated that they had 'multiple options' to choose from. See Appendix 9 for summary tables of all chi-square analyses.

Table 3

Cross-tabulation between 'real choice' and 'how many schools to choose from' variables

| | | | HOWMANYSCHOOLS | | |
			0-1	2+ (multiple)	Total
REALCHO	no	Count	21	17	38
		% within REALCHO	55.3%	44.7%	100.0%
	yes	Count	3	14	17
		% within REALCHO	17.6%	82.4%	100.0%
Total		Count	24	31	55
		% within REALCHO	43.6%	56.4%	100.0%

Research question 6) Did parents experience a dilemma concerning school choice?

Figure 6

Hard choice
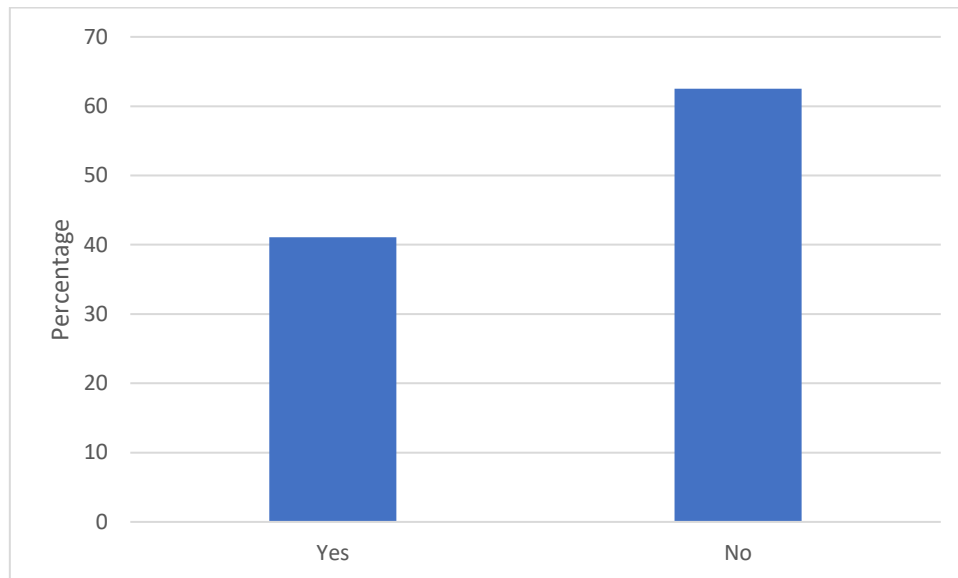
Figure 6 shows the percentages of participant responses to the question 'Did you experience a hard choice when choosing appropriate provision for your child?' Fifty-six participants answered this question. Overall, 62.5% (*n*=35) of participants indicated 'No' and 41.1% (*n*=23) indicated 'Yes'.

Participants were asked to explain their answer if they selected 'Yes'. Twenty-eight participants gave qualitative responses. The key category to emerge from the content analysis of these responses was that participants felt they had 'no choice or limited choice' (14 respondents)- one participant responded 'I didn't believe there was a good enough school in our area and still don't but had to go for the best of what there was to offer' (participant 53). Another participant responded: 'Our child has MSI and there were and still aren't any MSI schools in the local area' (participant 17). Other categories made reference to having to fight to get the provision they wanted for their child (see 'fight to get provision' category, 4 respondents) and feeling and sense of urgency to find a school place (see 'urgency' category, 3 respondents). Two participants also conceptualised hard choice as 'accepting difference' within their child, for example: 'It was a very emotive process. There is a huge lack of understanding how hard this is for parents. More stress upon the existing stress, plus an element of grief that the school life you always imagined (and possible see happening with siblings) does not and will never exist' (Participant 25).

A Chi-Square analysis was conducted of responses to question 10 (whether participants felt like they experienced a hard choice) and question 11 (the extent to which parents felt mainstream school could have been appropriate)- see chi-square analysis question 1, page 38. Again, this was conducted with the recoded variable for question 11: 0-2 as 'broadly inappropriate' and 3-5 and 'broadly appropriate'. See Appendix 9 for summary tables of all chi-square analyses.

The relationship between these variables was significant (x^2(1, N = 57) = 4.711 (p=0.03). Table 4 shows that of the 34 participants indicating that they did not experience a 'hard choice', 27 of these (79.4%) indicated that mainstream school was 'broadly inappropriate'. This implies that parents' choices may been considered as 'easier' when mainstream school was not considered to be an option for them.

Table 4

Cross-tabulation between 'hard choice and 'mainstream appropriate' variables

			MAINSAPPROP		
			Broadly not appropriate (0-2)	Broadly appropriate (3-5)	Total
HARDCHO	no	Count	27	7	34
		% within HARDCHO	79.4%	20.6%	100.0%
	yes	Count	12	11	23
		% within HARDCHO	52.2%	47.8%	100.0%
Total		Count	39	18	57
		% within HARDCHO	68.4%	31.6%	100.0%

A Chi-Square analysis was also conducted of responses to question 10 (whether participants felt like they experienced a hard choice) and question 15 (how many schools participants had to choose from)- see chi-square analysis question 2, page 38. Again, this was conducted with the recoded variable for question 15 (how many schools): 0-1 as 'zero or one option' and 2 or more (multiple options). Although the cross-tabulation data (see Table 5), indicates some relationship between participants having a hard choice and having a greater number of schools to choose from (of the 23 participants indicating they had a hard choice, 15 of these- 65.2%- indicated they had multiple school to choose from)- the relationship between these variables was not significant x^2(1, N = 55) = 1.260 (p=.262). See Appendix 9 for summary tables of all chi-square analyses.

Table 5

Cross-tabulation between 'hard choice and 'how many schools' variables

| | | | HOWMANYSCHOOLS | | |
			0-1	2+ (multiple)	Total
HARDCHO	no	Count	16	16	32
		% within HARDCHO	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
	yes	Count	8	15	23
		% within HARDCHO	34.8%	65.2%	100.0%
Total		Count	24	31	55
		% within HARDCHO	43.6%	56.4%	100.0%

A Chi-Square analysis was conducted of responses to question 9 (whether participants felt that they had a real choice) and question 10 (whether participants felt like they experienced a hard choice)- see chi-square analysis question 3, page 38. The relationship between these variables was significant (x^2 (1, N = 57) = 6.131 (p=.013). Table 6 shows that, of the 18 participants that indicated that they had a 'real choice', 15 of these (83.3%) indicated that they did not have a hard choice. See Appendix 9 for summary tables of all chi-square analyses.

Table 6

Cross-tabulation between 'real choice' and 'hard choice' variables.

| | | | HARD CHOICE | | |
			no	yes	Total
REALCHO	no	Count	19	20	39
		% within REALCHO	48.7%	51.3%	100.0%
	yes	Count	15	3	18
		% within REALCHO	83.3%	16.7%	100.0%
Total		Count	34	23	57
		% within REALCHO	59.6%	40.4%	100.0%

In summary, there is a significant relationship between parents considering themselves to have had a 'real choice' of schools and having more schools to choose from (2 or more). There was also a significant relationship between parents considering themselves to have had a 'hard choice' and the appropriateness of mainstream school (choices made easier by mainstream school being considered inappropriate). Participant having a real choice also significantly impacted on whether they had a hard choice- the data suggesting a real choice meaning an easier choice.

Research Question 7) Did parents feel well-informed in their decision and supported by professionals?

Figure 7

How well-informed participants felt
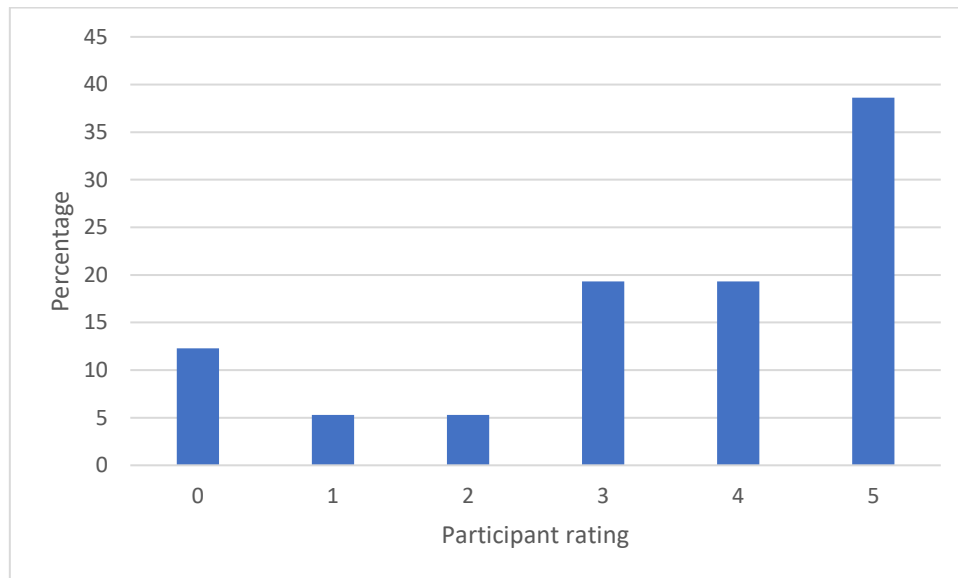
Figure 7 shows the percentages of responses to the question 'How well-informed did you feel when deciding on a school for your child (i.e. whether to choose specialist or mainstream school)?' Fifty-seven participants answered this question. On a Likert scale of 0-5, the modal response was 5 (38.2%, n=22), with a mean response of 3.25 (*SD*= 1.89). 44 participants (77.19%) indicating between 3 and 5. Seven participants (12.3%) gave the response of 0.

Participants were asked to explain why they had given their rating- 51 participants gave qualitative responses. These responses reflect the range observed in the quantitative ratings. Seventeen participants referred to being 'well-advised' during the process (the most common categories within this were that participants were helped by external professionals- 9 participants- and helped by school staff- 5 participants). Eleven participants were categorised within 'participants carried out their own research/ made their own decision' - one participant responded 'I ensured I had as much information as I could and I visited schools a number of times' (participant 27). Nine respondents also referred to 'mainstream/other provision being inappropriate' as informing their decision (and the degree to which they felt well-informed).

However, 7 respondents implied that they had not been well-informed (see 'Not well-informed category), for example: 'I trusted the people that gave me advice. Years later I

52

realised the information I had been given was completely wrong' (participant 32). Four respondents also implied that they did not have support (see 'Nobody helped' category).

Figure 8

Professional support
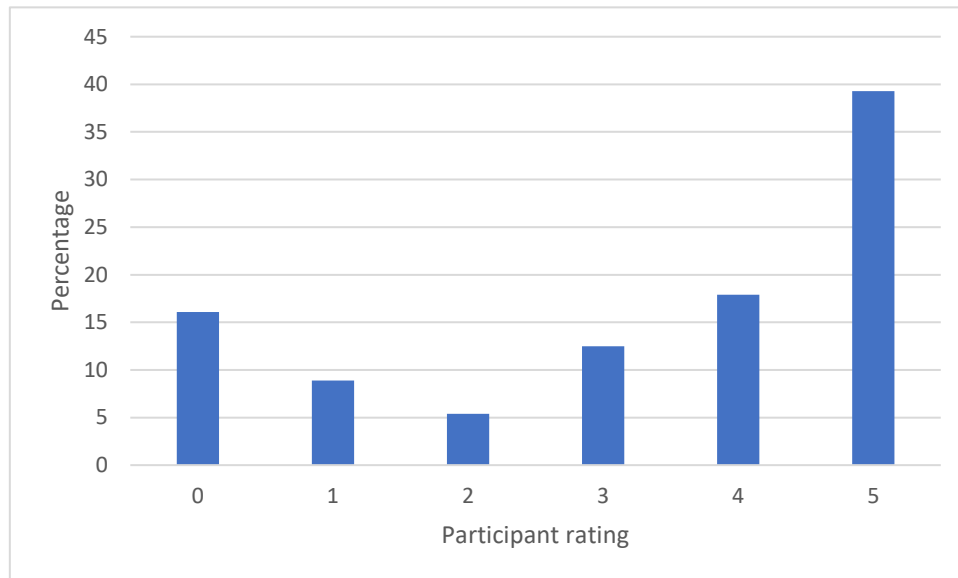
Figure 8 shows the percentages of responses to the question 'To what extent did you feel supported by professionals during the decision-making process?' Fifty-six participants answered this question. On a Likert scale of 0-5, the modal response was '5' (39.3%,n= 22), and a mean response of 3.25 (*SD*= 1.89). Overall, 39 respondents (69.64%) gave responses between 3 and 5, and 9 participants (16.1%) gave the response of 0.

Participants were asked to explain why they had given their rating. Forty-seven participants gave qualitative responses. Again, these responses reflect the range observed in the quantitative ratings. Twenty-one participants referred to not being supported. Responses included those who lacked any professional help, for example 'We didn't have any professionals involved to help us' (participant 19) as well as those that had professional help but did not consider it to be useful or high-quality, for example 'professional input has been very poor and the only input that has been worthwhile and actually reflects my child has been from private services' (participant 47) and 'very few other professionals had any interest. The ones that did expected us to be 'told' rather than advised where was best for our child' (participant 25).

Fifteen participants referred to school staff supporting them (the most common category within this was support from mainstream school staff- 10 participants). Sixteen participants

also referred to being supported by external professionals (the most common of which was a psychologist- 4 participants). The local authority and SENDIAS/support groups were also cited (2 participants each).

A Spearman's correlation was conducted of responses to question 7 (whether participants felt that they were well-informed when making a decision) and question 8 (the extent to which they felt supported by professionals)- see correlational analysis question 1, page 39. This relationship was significant: r_s= .677, p= .000 (two-tailed)- see Appendix 10 for summary tables of all correlational analyses. A cross-tabulation of these two variables showed that, of the 7 participants that indicated they had not at felt well-informed (rating 0/5 on the 0-5 Likert scale), 5 of these (71.4%) also indicated that they had not felt well-supported by professionals (indicating 0/5). Of the 22 participants indicating that they felt very well-informed (indicating 5/5), 17 of these (77.3%) indicated that they had also felt very well-supported by professionals (indicating 5/5). This suggests that those who were well-supported also felt well-informed in the decision-making process.

Research Question 8) How were parents' views facilitated and taken into consideration?

Figure 9

Expression of views supported
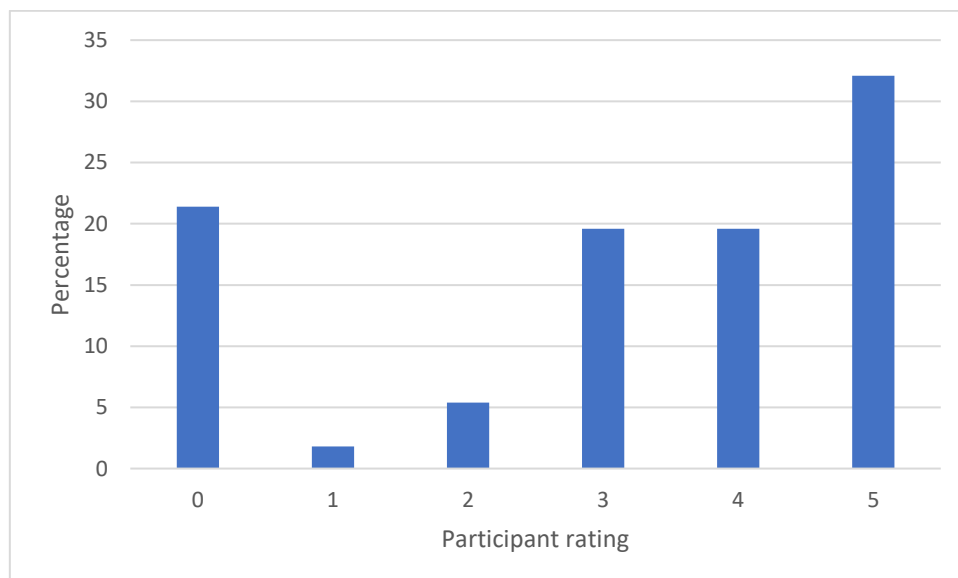
Figure 9 shows the percentages of responses to the question 'To what extent was the expression of your views about your child's needs and your preferred provision supported during the decision process?' Fifty-six participants answered this question. On a Likert scale

of 0-5, the modal response was '5' (32.1%, n= 18) with a mean response of 3.11 (*SD*= 1.89). 71.43% (n=40) gave responses between 3 and 5. 21.4% (n=12) gave the response of '0'.

Participants were asked to explain why they had given their rating. Forty-seven participants gave qualitative responses (some of these comments referred generically to being well-supported or not well-supported without further detail). Those that felt well-supported most-commonly referred support from mainstream school (4 respondents), professional support (3 respondents) and support from special school (2 respondents).

Those that did not feel the expression of their views had been well-supported most-commonly referred to the 'lack of availability of placements/choice of schools' (5 respondents impacting on participants' expression of views, for example 'I was able to convey that I wanted him to attend a SEN school but as I say I felt concerned that he wouldn't have a place etc. As I was told by several places are limited' (participant 21). Further categories also included references to 'fight/tribunal' (4 respondents) and encountering difficulties with the local authority (see 'local authority not helpful'- 4 respondents).

In addition to this, 7 respondents referred to 'consensus' (between staff/professionals) as a factor which supported the decision-making process- one participant stated: 'It was also clear that my son would need specialist provision due to his complex needs and this was recognised by all who were involved' (participant 28).

Research Question 9) Do parents feel that their preferences were listened to and taken into consideration?

Figure 10

Views and preferences considered
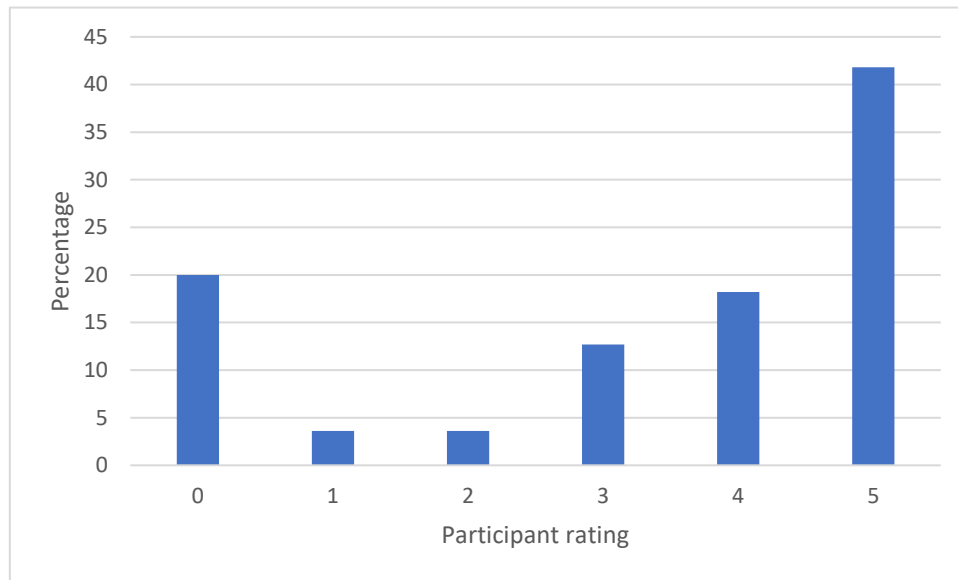
Figure 10 shows the percentages of responses to the question 'To what extent did you feel that your views/preferences were adequately considered during the selection process?' Fifty-five participants answered this question. On a Likert scale of 0-5, the modal response was '5' (41.8%, n=23) and a mean response of 3.31 (*SD*= 1.95). 72.73 (n=40) gave responses between 3 and 5. 20% (n=11) of respondents gave the responses of '0.

Participants were asked to explain why they had given their rating. Forty participants gave qualitative responses (some of these comments referred generically to their views preferences being considered or not considered, without further detail). Two participants referred specifically to their choice being agreed (see 'choice was agreed' category). Also cited was support from special schools, professionals, the local authority and external agencies (1 respondent each).

Seven participants also referred there being to a 'lack of choice', impacting on whether parents felt there had been a selection process. Again, participants referred to having to fight or challenge' the local authority (3 respondents) and having a 'lack of information or misinformation' (1 respondent).

A Spearman's correlation was conducted of responses to question 12 (the extent to which expression of views was supported) and question 13 (the extent to which views and

preferences were adequately considered)- see correlational analysis question 2, page 39. This relationship was significant r_s= .922, p= .000 (two tailed)- see Appendix 10 for summary tables of all correlational analyses. A cross-tabulation showed that, of the 11 participants who indicated that the expression of their views was not at all well-supported (rating 0/5), 10 of these (90.9%) also indicated that their views and preferences had not been at all well-considered. Similarly, of the 18 participants that indicated that the expression of their views had been very-well supported (5/5), 18 of these (100%) indicated that their views and preferences had been very-well considered. This may suggest that systems which were effective in facilitating parent views were also effective in enacting them. Alternatively, it may suggest that when parents felt their views had been well-enabled, they were more likely to feel like their preferences had been considered.

Figure 11

Securing the preferred choice of school
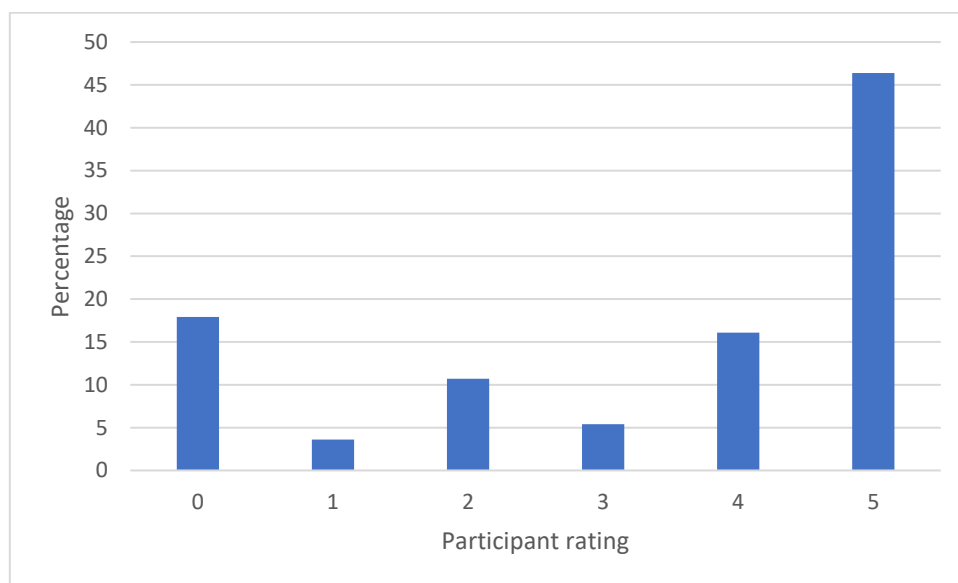
Figure 11 shows the percentages of responses to the question 'Once your decision was made, how easy was it to get your preferred choice of school?' Fifty-six participants answered this question. On a Likert scale of 0-5, the modal response was '5' (46.4%, n=26) with a mean response of 3.38 (*SD*= 1.95). 67.86% (n=38) gave responses between 3 and 5. 17.9% (n=10) gave a response of '0'.

Participants were asked to explain why they had given their rating. Forty-five participants gave qualitative responses. Several responses suggested that getting their preferred choice of school was easy, the most common factors supporting this being that parents were given

their preferred choice, or one that they were happy with (see 'first choice/choice agreed' category- 5 respondents) and professionals supported parents to get their choice ('professional support', 3 respondents). Several responses also referred to difficulties in getting their preferred choice of school, the most common factors being a 'lack of choice and/or lack of spaces' (7 respondents) and a long wait to hear the outcome of their application (6 respondents). See full categorisation of responses in Appendix 8.

Participants were asked an open question: 'Was there anything additional you had to do to get your preferred school placement?' Of the 48 participants that responded to this question, 26 of these gave responses indicating that they did not have to do anything additional. 22 participants indicated that they did have to do something additional. Of these, 10 respondents referred to having to challenge the system (for example, considering legal action or going to tribunal). For example, 'I had to threaten legal action. I had to point out that keeping my son is isolation for 80 per cent of his day was not a full-time education and his mental health was being so massively damaged by this treatment that he was unable to engage in any learning' (participant 22). Other prominent categories included the need for 'additional multi-agency or professional involvement' (4 responses), 'making additional enquiries' (2 responses) and having a 'long wait' (2 responses).

Figure 12

Improving the system
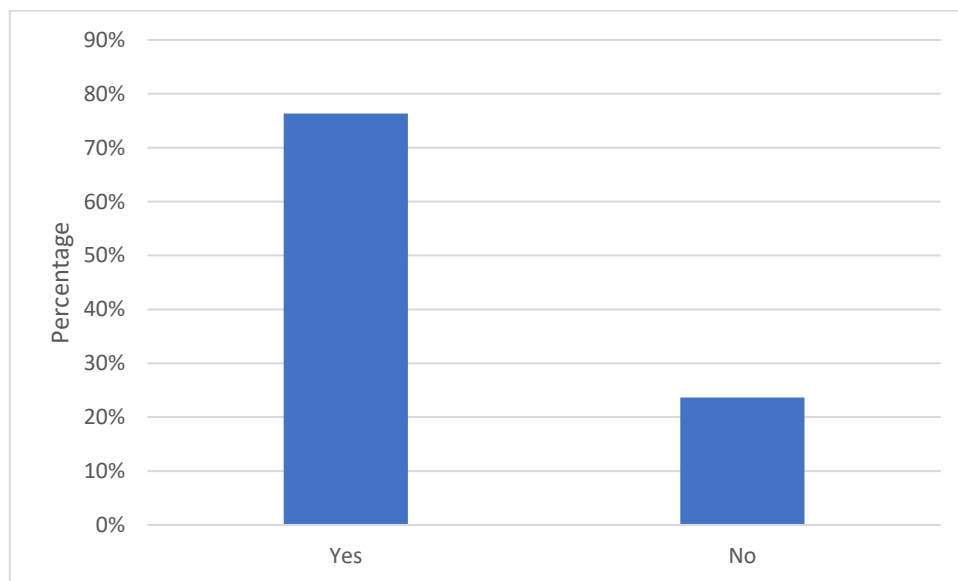
Figure 12 shows the percentages of responses to the question 'Are there any ways in which you think the system of parental choice of schools should be improved?' Fifty-five

participants answered this question. Overall, 76.4% (n= 42) of participants indicated 'Yes' and 23.6% (n=13) indicating 'No'. Participants were asked to explain how they feel the system could be improved (if responding 'Yes'). Forty-three participants gave qualitative responses. A content analysis of the responses indicated a range of responses, the most common of which was having more options (schools and school places) available (see 'More places/schools/options' category-15 respondents), greater availability of information/awareness of options (7 respondents) and greater professional support, advice and/or expertise (6 respondents).

Chapter 6: Phase 1 summary and discussion

In the following chapter I will summarise and discuss the key findings from Phase 1 research by research question, with reference to previous literature.

Research Question 1) What do parents consider high-quality inclusive education to be for their child?

Participants' responses suggested that 'a child having a sense of belongingness' was the most important aspect of high-quality inclusive education provision. The next highest-rated aspect was 'social acceptance by peers in class lessons'. There are several references within the qualitative data which refer to inclusion as meeting social needs, reflective of references to 'social inclusion' in previous literature such as that of Gibb et al (2007). Several parents referred to the importance of the child's social group at special school, for example relating to peers, being accepted for who they are and being respected. One participant referred specifically to the role that co-located schools could have in promoting social inclusion (although only 11 of 57 participants- 19%- of the sample indicated that they considered co-located schools to be high-quality inclusive provision, with only 2 participants- 3.5% -of the sample indicating that they considered co-located schools as an alternative to special school).

The third most prevalent response was 'a more individualised curriculum'. Within the qualitative data, participants referred to inclusion as meeting academic needs, reflective of the references to 'academic inclusion' in previous literature (Gibb et al, 2007; Fisher & Frey, 2001), such as appropriate curricula, specialised teaching and outdoor learning, with particular references to the importance of having high expectations and aspirations for the children. Within one of these responses regarding aspirations, one participant referred to inappropriate curricula in special schools, referring to 'wasting children's days on messy play' and 'rubbish sensory activities which teach them nothing' (participant 55). Although the majority of participants were supportive of the social and academic support which their child receives in a specialist setting, this is a clear example within the data of a parent feeling that adaptations to their child's curriculum has resulted in what they consider to be a poor standard of education.

Gibb et al (2007) proposed that 'to be considered successful, a programme to place a child with SEN in a mainstream school would need to enable both academic and social inclusion' (p. 110). These results suggest that this is true when considering the concept of high-quality, inclusive education more widely, not just within mainstream settings.

It is also of interest that the type of provision was not generally considered to be an important factor in defining 'inclusion'. Participants' responses suggested that special school provision (only) is best equipped to provide an inclusive education (21 of 57 participants - 37%- indicated that high-quality, inclusive education meant special school only), with only 5 of 57 (9%) indicating that mainstream school only. This view is contrary to the dominant concept of inclusive education as informed by Warnock (1978)- that special schools should be for the only the most complex, long-term needs, with mainstream school able to meet the needs of the majority. The present research suggests that parents of special school children do not generally subscribe to this 'inclusion as all children under one roof' philosophy.

There has been a commitment in recent years to improve the 'range and diversity of schools from which parents can choose" (DfE, 2011, p. 5) with pledges to continue this trend more recently (DfE, 2019a). Although the modal response in this study was that special school (relative to mainstream school, resources bases or co-located schools) represented high-quality inclusive education for their child, there were a number of responses suggesting that these other types of provision would also be considered as such (for example, 28% indicated a resource base as such). This suggests that some parents do not see separate, specialist provision as the only opportunity to provide their child with an inclusive education, and the diversity of school options is therefore important.

One definition of belongingness is 'the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment' (Hagerty et al, 1992, p.173). Another definition is feeling 'personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment' (Goodenow, 1993, p. 80). Although not a recent definition, this latter interpretation of belongingness particularly reflects the qualitative responses of participants (particularly those referring to 'inclusion as meeting social needs'- see Appendix 8 for content analysis).This, in combination with the quantitative findings, suggest that a child having a sense of belongingness is of high-importance to parents of children in special schools.

Research Question 2) Why did parents choose special school?

Participants' responses suggested that the school staff (school atmosphere and caring approach), and the facilities (including sizes of class) are most important to parents. These former aspects are reflective of how parents constructed high-quality, inclusive education (based on a sense of belonginess and social acceptance- see research question 1, above). Aspects of school relating to academic provision and performance of the school did not appear to be as important for parents (for example, no participants indicated that 'exam

results' had informed their decision). The qualitative responses indicated that the school having an understanding of the child's need and/or conditions was important to parents. From these responses, I would argue that familiarity with a school prior to the selection process would be important for parents; 'school atmosphere' and a 'school's caring approach to pupils' were the reasons most frequently chosen- these are not aspects which can be easily understood without visiting the setting. Although reputation was still rated by many parents (32%), parents appear to value the more relational skills that the schools could offer.

These findings converge with previous research which suggests teacher's attitudes are an important factor underlying school choice for children with SEN/disabilities (Mawene & Bal 2018), as well as teachers' expertise (Jenkinson, 1998) and class-size (Jenkinson, 1998; Mawene & Bal 2018). One area of divergence was that travel/distance was not rated highly as a reason behind school choice for pupils with SEN as it has been in previous research (Bagley et al, 2001; Mawene & Bal 2018). This discrepancy may be reflective of the localities in which the present research took place- given the low numbers of special schools relative to other localities in the UK, parents in this research are more likely to have had travel implications for several of their school choices, meaning that it was less important to their final choice.

Mawene and Bal (2018) found that the availability of a special education programme that best meets child's need was the most cited factor behind special school choice. This is a key discrepancy with the present research, given the most common responses suggest that learning content was not the highest priority for parents. Within the qualitative responses, only one parent referred to the quality of education, referring to 'taking learning and high standards seriously at all times' (participant 9). Bagley et al (2001) and Jenkinson (1998) found that academic skills and standards were more commonly cited as reasons behind choice by parents whose children attend mainstream school; the present research supports the argument that parents of special school children do not prioritise these aspects as highly.

Twenty-eight percent of participants indicated that expert advice was a reason behind school choice. This is reflective of Mann et al (2015); this research found that parents wanted information from educators/professionals, however many participants valued input from other sources (such as other parents) also. Again, given the key reasons given seem to prioritise approach towards pupils and facilities, it may be that parents valued the advice of experts less as they are arguably not in a position to best advise on the aspects of the schools which parents most care about.

Research Question 3) Do parents feel that mainstream school could have been appropriate for their child?

The modal response was that mainstream school was not at all appropriate for their child (28 of 57 participants- 49%- indicated '0'). The qualitative data indicated that the level of need (and related to this, the level of support required) and previous experience of mainstream were most-commonly cited as reasons for mainstream school being considered inappropriate. The qualitative data is reflective of the findings of Mann et al (2018) who found that missing out on specialist teaching and resources, inappropriate work and lack of support were key reasons behind transitions from mainstream to special school. However, mainstream school experiences whereby a high level of support has been put in place could also have adverse effects: Bailey and Baines (2012) argue that SEN pupils may develop greater levels of dependency on staff members in mainstream primary schools (having received higher levels of support with familiar adults). This may underlie some parents' beliefs that their child is therefore reliant on this additional support- a level of support they may see as more befitting a special school.

In contrast to this, it is important to note that a similar number of participants (29 participants- 51%) in the present study also indicated that mainstream education could be appropriate to some degree (giving response between 1-5) with 6 participants (11%) indicating that it would be highly appropriate (giving a response of '5'). Positive previous experiences of mainstream school and having positive expectations of the local mainstream were cited as reasons for mainstream school being appropriate, however these responses were not common (see full content analysis, Appendix 8).

To an extent, the research is in line with previous literature which suggests that special school is a choice for parents because of the shortcomings of mainstream education to accommodate need (Reindal, 2010; Runswick-Cole, 2008) resulting in a form of forced choice. However, the present research also suggests that many parents do not completely abandon the idea of mainstream school as appropriate once their child has left (the majority of participants' children originally attended mainstream setting). The responses of the 51% who felt mainstream school was appropriate to a degree perhaps suggests that parents have changed their views to a preference for special school over time. Given the limitations of Phase 1 to explore this, the process of parents' preferences changing over time were explored in more detail in Phase 2.

When considering this research question, it is interesting to consider the assertion of Runswick-Cole (2008) that choosing a special school is more likely for parents with more

individualised models of disability. There were several responses in the qualitative data which referred to the *needs* of the child being too great for mainstream school, for example:

> 'Would no way have been an option. Autism was far too severe for mainstream' (participant 13)

> 'My son's level of need not suitable' (participant 39)

However, several responses also suggest that it is the *support* itself which is not appropriate to meet the need, for example:

> 'Would need constant kind to (*of*) one provision which would not be cost effective and the curriculum would need to be adapted too much to accommodate' (participant 6)

> 'I think if he had 1-2-1 support he would have coped. Sadly this level of support doesn't seem available in mainstream' (participant 7)

I would argue that the latter is more representative of a social model view (focusing more on the barriers a child faces) and the former a more individualised (medical model) view; there were several other categories of qualitative responses that were based around the appropriateness of the environment (for example, 'class sizes/environment', 'lack of training/information about child's needs' and 'curriculum'). In reference to the above typology, parents consider a number of factors beyond the child's individual needs and disabilities. However, it is at times unclear as to whether parents consider the environment as unsuitable for the child's needs, or that the needs were too great for the environment.

Previous research suggests that pupils with SEN (and lower ability pupils) encounter more difficulties in mainstream school transition than non-SEN pupils (Galton, Gray & Ruddock, 1999; Anderson, 2000; Hodson, Baddeley, Laycock & Williams, 2005; West, Sweeting & Young, 2010). It is interesting that, whereas many of the qualitative responses were based around direct experiences of mainstream school, some were more hypothetical, for example:

> 'There is absolutely no way a mainstream school would have been able to cope with my son's violent outbursts' (participant 37)

> 'The campus are not secure, the class sizes too big, the ratio teacher/assistant too low and emotionally he would have been unable to cope with the mindset of many

mainstream children and becomes vulnerable to bullying. I have seen and heard evidence of this from parents with. Borderline special needs kids struggling with the mainstream set up.' (participant 8)

It is interesting that parents' views about mainstream school may not always be informed by direct experience, but could be informed by the views of other parents or by research such as that cited above, which suggests to parents that a transition to another mainstream setting is likely to be unsuccessful.

Research Question 4) Were alternative forms of education considered during the selection process?

Although the most common response was that participants had not considered alternatives to special school (21 of 57 participants- 37%), the key finding was that the majority of participants therefore did consider a range of options when choosing, most commonly mainstream schools. Within the qualitative data, 3 participants (of 13 that gave qualitative responses) referred to mainstream education failing to meet their child's needs. There were also references to school options which parents would have liked (such as split placements- mainstream and special school- and resource bases) which were not available.

A very small number of participants considered 'co-located schools' (2 participants- 4%). Of the 22 listed special schools across the localities in the present research, only one of these is co-located with a mainstream school (this lack of availability locally may be the reason why it was considered by so few). One of the participants whose child attended this school referred to the benefits of co-located schools for social inclusion:

'I think it could work on a social level, teaching acceptance of differences to the next generation… Exposure to disabilities makes people realise that kids are just kids.' (participant 15)

I would argue this degree of social integration between SEN and non-SEN pupil is something which is not so easily achieved in separate specialist provision, yet the data suggests that a sense of belonging and social acceptance is something parents consider to be important (see findings relating to research question 1).

Fifteen participants (26%) considered a mainstream school with a resource base (which is same number of participants that considered a mainstream school without a resource base). Previous research has found that parents of children with ASC have shown a preference

towards resource bases within mainstream provision (Tobin et al, 2012). Maras and Aveling (2006) similarly reported that parents and young people (with SEN) found the presence of specialist units to be reassuring (when transitioning to a mainstream school). In the qualitative data, one participant referred to a preference for a resource base but one was not available in the area they lived in (this parent also had a child with autism, along with other additional needs). Similarly, one parent referred to a similar situation with a split placement, in which 'neither school was able to provide this as an option' (participant 31). Although the reasons behind alternatives being considered are not clear for all parents from the data, these responses are demonstrative of cases in which options were desired and explored (resource bases and split placements), but not available.

Research Question 5) To what extent do parents feel that they had a 'real choice' of schools (more than one option that was good enough)

The majority of participants (39 participants- 68%) felt that they did not have a real choice between special school provision and other types of provision. The concept of what a 'real choice' was left largely to parent interpretation (with the example provided in the questionnaire of 'more than one option that was good enough').

The quantitative data suggests that a lack of choice of schools in the local area affects parents feeling they had a 'real choice' (there was a significant relationship between parents feeling they had a 'real choice', and the number of schools they had to choose from). Of the 17 participants indicating that they had a real choice, 14 of these (82%) indicated that they had at least 2 schools to choose from. The qualitative data also suggests that the appropriateness of mainstream education affects parents having a 'real choice', although the relationship in the quantitative data was not significant.

The majority of participants stated that there was only 1 school available to them (suggesting a lack of choice between schools), with approximately half of participants (51%) listing only special schools as available options (suggesting there were not appropriate mainstream options for many of parents).

Parents experiencing limited choice is reflective of previous literature (for example, Tobin et al 2012). Although a low proportion of the sample cited 'travel' as a reason behind school choice (18%), five participants referred to travel and/or location within the qualitative data as affecting a 'real choice'. For these parents, the limited choice within their area had an impact on feeling as if they had a real choice.

Research Question 6) Did parents experience a dilemma concerning school choice?

The majority of participants (35 of the 56 participants- 63%) indicated that they did not have a hard choice when choosing appropriate provision for their child. Whereas having a real choice was not significantly impacted by feeling that mainstream school was appropriate, having a 'hard choice' was, with the majority of participants indicating that they did *not* have a 'hard choice' also indicating that mainstream school was inappropriate (79%).This suggests that parents may feel the dilemma they face is eased by feeling that mainstream is not an option. A key theme within the qualitative data was that parents felt they had no choice or limited choice (with parents commonly commenting on a lack of choices available to them). Despite this prevalence in the qualitative data, the relationship between parents having a 'hard choice' and the number of schools they had to choose from was not significant.

As stated, 51% of participants indicated that mainstream school could have been appropriate for their child to some degree (from a sample of parents who had all chosen special school). There were references in the qualitative data to the choice being an emotive process and the difficulty of accepting that their child is 'different' by choosing special school. Although these references were not commonplace, they suggest that some parents are 'giving up' on an initial preference for mainstream education and this process as a difficult one.

Real choice and hard choice

In summary, the data around real choice and hard choice represents a complex picture: 'real choice' as impacted by the number of schools to choose from (with qualitative data suggesting that appropriateness of mainstream school is also a factor) and 'hard choice' impacted by the deemed appropriateness of mainstream school (with qualitative data suggesting that number of schools to choose from is also a factor).

There was also a relationship between 'real choice' and 'hard choice' in the data (for example, of those saying they had real choice, 83% indicated they did *not* have a hard choice. This may suggest that when parents feel like they have a real choice, they also have an easier choice.

Research Question 7) Did parents feel well-informed in their decision and supported by professionals?

The majority of participants indicated that they felt well-informed when deciding on a school, however there was a range of responses within the data (7 of the 57 respondents -12%- indicating they did not feel at all well-informed, indicating 0/5). The qualitative data suggests that parents rely on a mixture of their own research and support from external professionals and schools. Similarly, the majority of participants felt that they were supported by professionals, again with a range of responses within the data (9 out of the 56 respondents- 16%- indicating that they did not feel at all well-supported). Mainstream school staff were the most cited within the qualitative data as professionals who supported parents (however many respondents indicated that they were not supported). This suggests that having good support from the child's mainstream school (such as from SENCos, headteachers and teachers) is very important for parents. These are likely to be the first 'points of contact' for parents, with a key role in guiding parents towards appropriate school choice and the process involved.

A key finding from the research was a strong (significant) positive correlation between parents feeling well-informed and having good professional support. Parents having a lack of help and insufficient information during school selection is a common finding in previous research (Tobin et al, 2012, Parsons et al, 2009; Mann et al, 2015). Mann et al (2015) argued that the accurate representation of parent preference is affected by difficulties in accessing reliable information and pressure from professionals. This research suggests that these aspects are not mutually exclusive.

Research Question 8) How were parents' views facilitated and taken into consideration?

The majority of parents indicated that their expression of views was well-supported, with a range of response in the data (12 of the 56 respondents- 21%- indicating that the expression of their views was not at all well-supported, indicating 0/5). The qualitative data suggested a number of reasons for this range, however consensus (between parents and professionals, agreeing that special school is most appropriate) emerged as a factor which appeared to be important to parents feeling their views has been well-facilitated. This suggests that it is important to parents that professionals see their child as they do.

Where there were qualitative references to school staff (mainstream and special) and professionals supporting parents, the exact nature of this support was rarely identified.

Taylor-Brown (2012) suggests that levelling out power imbalances during meetings is key to an effective person-centered approach. One participant referred to the 'fantastic' support they had had in multi-agency meetings. Many participant responses were around *who* supported them, rather than *how*. I would argue that this could be reflective of parents feeling that personal traits within staff members were of high importance to them. As suggested by previous research, the decision to choose special school can be both a rational and an emotional process for parents (Mann et al, 2015)- it is understandable that parents focused on the people around them that were perhaps able to provide rational and emotional support:

> 'My Senco at primary school was amazing and we visited schools and came to the decision on two and we were given a place at one of them.' (Participant 4)

> 'I don't think my views or his needs were given any consideration whatsoever, with the exception of his first special school head teacher. This not only relates to the decision process but every single day and incident that occurred during his entire school experience up until when he started at a specialist college placement in September 2018'. (Participant 42)

> 'It was due to my daughter's OT that I found her current school'. (Participant 35)

Parents also referred to the lack of choice/availability of placements as affecting the facilitation of views, as well as criticism of the local authority and having to 'fight' the system:

> 'Once I decided my son needed a specialist setting, I had to fight tooth and nail for a place for him - threatening legal action, contacting the head of children's services direct to point out the LA's legal obligations and duty of care failure of my son in mainstream. My fight was so stressful, I decided to quit my job as a (professional) … and re-train as a SEND law advice caseworker… to help others going through the process'. (Participant 22)

The recent report from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (2019) states that 45% more complaints were received in 2018-19 compared to 2016-17, with 87% of the complaints upheld which was considered to be 'exceptional and unprecedented' (p.1). This suggests an increasing trend of complaints to the local authority since the introduction of the Children and Families Act (2014) and something which, as exemplified by the above quote, can have a major impact on the lives of parents.

Research Question 9) Do parents feel that their preferences were listened to and taken into consideration?

The majority of parents indicated that their views and preferences were well-considered, with a range of responses in the data (11 of the 55 respondents- 20%- indicated that their preference were not at all well-considered, indicating 0/5). The range of positive and negative qualitative responses were reflective of this range; having a lack of choice emerged as a recurrent theme for parents once again, with many parents also commenting on finding the process difficult:

> 'It went right to the wire and our views were completely dismissed. We were then told (by letter) we got the school we didn't want. We did eventually get the school we wanted but how many parents just don't have the fight left?' (participant 25)

There was a strong (significant) positive correlation between participants' expression of views being well-supported and feeling that their views and preferences has been considered. This suggests that the systems in which parents felt able to express their preferences were also those in which those preferences were well-considered.

When asked how easy it was to get their preferred choice of school (once their decision was made), the majority indicated that it was easy, with a range of responses in the data (18% indicated it was not at all easy). Reasons which parents cited as making the process easier was having their first choice agreed and professional support, whereas having a lack of choices of school (lack of space) and a long wait were cited as making the process more difficult.

A number of parents (10 participants, 18%) responded to the open question ('was there anything additional you had to do to get your preferred school placement?) by suggesting that they had to challenge the system (some of these referring to tribunals or taking legal action).

Summary (research questions 7-9)

Parent partnership is something which is central to the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015). Overall, parents' responses around their experience of choosing (research questions 7,8 and 9) broadly suggest that the majority have positive experiences, however there is a minority for whom the experience is strongly negative (for example, due to a lack of choice, a lack of

support from professionals and having to challenge the system). Parents report having a long wait and having to 'fight' the local authority- this is consistent with previous research (for example, Jindal-Snape et al, 2006).

The data suggests the members of staff and professionals who can commonly support parents in their decision-making (such as psychologists, portage workers, social workers and speech and language therapists). In addition to this, when parents felt able to express their view, they generally would also feel that their views and preferences had been taken into consideration. Although this relationship may be expected, it is important to consider parents' feelings of empowerment through their voices being heard, and the subsequent feeling that the system of choice had been responsive.

Mann et al (2018) stated that 'the argument that special schools exist to accommodate parental choice (Jenkinson, 1998) becomes less persuasive when parental authority is not authentic' (p. 191). Despite examples to the contrary, this research largely suggests that parental authority is authentic (if the measure of this is that parents feel well-informed, supported by professionals, their views facilitated and taken in account in the decision-making process).

The majority of participants (42 of 55 respondents- 76%) felt that there were ways in which to improve the system of parental choice. The most common response for how this could be done was to provide more school places/options to parents (which is in keeping with the finding that limited choice impacted on parents feeling that they had a real choice), as well as having greater professional support/advice and greater availability of information. There were two responses which also suggested that improving mainstream provision is part of improving the system overall:

> 'Either all mainstream school staff are properly trained in SEN and the schools become truly inclusive - or we have to build more specialist schools to meet the ever-growing demand for SEN pupils'. (Participant 22)

> 'More special school provision and/or better specialist provision in mainstream schools'. (Participant 28)

Although the sample in the present research generally referred to their child's current school in positive terms, I would argue that it is important to recognise that some parents had (and may still have) a preference against full-time specialist provision.

'Special schools are awful places that waste children's lives on sensory activities rather than education. They confuse communication difficulties with cognitive impairment, they have extremely low aspirations for children and just don't have up to date training on teaching methods. The focus is mainly on autistic children. All children in special schools are treated as if they are autistic even if they are not. The schools appear to have no motivation to teach disabled children. They are running ('ruining') children's life chances rather than helping them'. (Participant 55).

Although this parent may have based their views on negative experiences, it is perhaps representative of views against the recent drive to increase the number of UK special schools due to the belief that they provide a lower standard of education than mainstream schools.

Chapter 7: Phase 2 Method

The following chapter will outline the method used for Phase 2 of the research. As per the explanatory sequential design, the Phase 2 research questions were informed by an interim analysis of the Phase 1 findings (using the Phase 1 data collected by October 2019- responses from 45 participants were analysed).

Findings from interim analysis of Phase 1 data

Five key areas which emerged from interim analysis (see Appendix 11 for interim analysis notes):

Key finding 1: inclusive, high-quality education

It was found that 'belongingness', 'social acceptance' and 'individualised curriculum' were the key aspects of high-quality, inclusive education for parents. A cross-tabs analysis found that these three aspects were most commonly chosen by parents who considered 'special school only' as high-quality, inclusive education.

Key finding 2: real choice

 The majority of participants indicated that they did not feel they had a 'real choice' of schools.

Key finding 3: appropriateness of mainstream school

Half of the participants indicated that mainstream school was not at all appropriate for their child, which was the modal response. A cross-tab analysis suggested a possible relationship between the appropriateness of mainstream school and parents feeling that they had a real choice.

Key finding 4: process of choice

Participants most commonly reported that the expression of their views had been very well supported during the decision-making process (modal response). However, the second most common response was that expression of views had not been at all well-supported. The same pattern emerged for participants' responses to whether they felt their views had been

adequately considered. This suggests that parents have a wide variety of experiences, in terms of how they feel their views have been considered. The qualitative data also suggested that the process of choice may be easier for parents who have more complex needs (in terms of the expression of their views being supported and preferences considered (see Appendix 11, response to question 12). The majority of participants also indicated that the system of parental choice of schools should be improved.

Key finding 5: professional/school support.

Participants most commonly reported that they had felt very well supported by professionals during the decision-making process (modal response), however there was a range of responses across the scale. This again suggests that parents have a wide variety of experiences, in terms of the extent to which they feel supported by professionals.

Generating research questions from the interim findings

Table 7 shows how these findings formulated the basis of the research questions for Phase 2.

Table 7

Generating research questions from the interim findings

Finding from interim analysis	Research Questions (Phase 2)	Rationale
Parents' concept of high-quality inclusive education was special school only (contrary to the dominant concept of inclusion).	1) What are parents' constructs of inclusive education (do they prioritise academic or social inclusion)?	To examine parents constructs of inclusion in greater detail, and why these are more appropriately met in special school.
Mainstream school was considered completely inappropriate for half of the participants.	2) Why do parents feel that mainstream school could (or could not) have accommodated their child's needs?	To examine why this was in greater detail, as well as how mainstream would have had to adapt to accommodate their child

A wide variety of experiences of choosing (in terms of facilitation of views and preferences considered).	3) What were the factors supporting parents to make their decision (what did good professional support look like)?	To examine why these experiences can vary so greatly, with a detailed exploration of factors which facilitated and impeded the process)
	4) What were the factors which impeded parents in making their decision?	
Choice may be easier for parents who have more complex needs- there being greater consensus among professionals/school staff (qualitative data).	5) Did the child's level of need have an impact on the experience of choosing?	To compare the experiences of parents of children with higher level and more moderate levels of need)
The majority of parents felt that the process of choice could be improved.	6) How could the process have been improved for parents? (for example, what support would parents have liked that was not available and are there any options parents would have liked?)	To examine how parents would like the system to be improved in greater detail than Phase 1 (through participants that had both had positive and negative experiences), for example other school options and additional support they would have liked which was not available)
The majority of parents felt they did not have real choice.	7) Where parents do not feel they have a real choice, what could have made it a real choice for them?	To understand in greater detail why some parents felt they did not have a real choice and how they felt this could be facilitated.
	8) Did the interview process lead parents to consider new options not previously considered?	To understand the robustness of parent's views, and whether their involvement in both phases of this research has led to consider options they previously had not

Participants and Sampling

The questionnaire for Phase 1 invited participants to indicate whether they would be willing to participate in an interview in order to speak in greater depth around special school choice. If participants indicated that they would be willing to participate, they were forwarded to a separate page on the questionnaire where they could give their name and their email address.

My aim was for 10% of the Phase 1 sample to participate in follow-up interviews, with a minimum of 5%. This percentage of participants was considered by the researcher as sufficient to provide rich data for analysis and a perspective from a good proportion of the wider sample, but to be achievable within the time constraints of the project.

Given the findings from the interim analysis of Phase 1 data, a purposive sampling method was used to ensure diversity of participants (see Demographic section in Phase 2 findings, Chapter 8), particularly across the following areas:

1) Whether the experience of school choice had generally been a positive or negative experience for the participant (based on responses to questions 12, 13 and 14- see Appendix 4 for the questionnaire used in Phase 1)
2) A range of child needs
3) Whether the participant had indicated that they felt that they had a 'real choice' or not
4) Whether the participant had indicated that mainstream school was appropriate for their child
5) A range of locations

Table 8 shows the participants (each has been assigned a pseudonym) against the five factors listed above:

Table 8.

Phase 2 sample information

Participant (anonymised)	Experience	Child needs	Real choice (yes/no)	Mainstream appropriate rating (0-5)
Grace	Mixed	Cerebral Palsy, profound and multiple learning difficulties, complex medical needs	No	0
Izzy	Very good	Autism Spectrum Condition (high functioning), Obsessive Compulsive Disorder	No	0
Fiona	Good	Cerebral Palsy, Global Delay, Cortical Visual Impairment	Yes	0
Martha	Very Poor	Autism Spectrum Condition	No	0
Haley and Andrew	Good	Global Developmental Delay	Yes	1
Verity	Very Good	Global Learning Delay	Yes	3

Data Collection (materials and procedures)

Development and construction of the interview schedule

A semi-structured interview schedule was developed for the purposes of this research (the full interview schedule can be found in Appendix 12). This was informed by the process outlined by Smith (1995). The interim analysis of Phase 1 was used to inform Phase 2 research questions, (see Table 7). For the purposes of developing the interview schedule, these research questions were grouped into 6 broad themes (see Table 9).

Table 9

Themes informing the interview schedule

Theme	Research question(s)
1) Choice of school (*real choice*)	7
2) Perception of mainstream school	2
3) Making the choice (*how views were considered*)	3,4,5,6
4) Professional and school support	
5) Inclusive, high-quality education	1
6) Reflection on research process	8

These six themes were ordered (as presented in Table 9). The themes (and the subsequent interview schedule) were ordered in such a way so as to enable participants to feel comfortable in an interview context, and able to discuss their views fully. As such, more 'surface level' areas were positioned at the beginning of the interview (such as questions around their choice of school, perceptions of mainstream schools, how their views were considered and professional support) before moving onto deeper level questions regarding parents' theoretical consideration of the concept of inclusion, and reflections on options they may not have previously considered.

The main questions were broad and designed to give the participant space to explore an area, before prompting questions narrowed the focus on inquiry. Questions were also adapted on this basis of responses participants had given in Phase 1 (for example, 'Why do you/do you not feel that mainstream school would have been appropriate for your child?')**.** The prompts and probes were written to be adaptable based on the participants' responses to the initial question. One of the key aspects of the Phase 2 research questions and interview was to consider how the process worked well and/or could be improved for parents. The prompts and probes allowed for this to be explored in greater detail.

The interview schedule was drafted, piloted with an acquaintance of mine from a teaching background (to check for appropriateness and clarity of questions), and shared with my supervisors with amendments made to wording of the questions and the follow-up prompts (see Appendix 12 for the Phase 2 interview schedule with amendments made).

Administration of interviews

Parents who were selected through purposive sampling were contacted via email to arrange a suitable date and time for an interview. All interviews were conducted via telephone and recorded using a Dictaphone. The recordings were anonymised by way of a pseudonym, and manually transcribed. Phase 2 data was collected between November and December 2019.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis

The data for Phase 2 was analysed thematically, utilising Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage framework. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that there are two broad approaches to thematic analysis 1) A 'bottom up' or inductive analysis whereby coding is data-driven (based on the responses of participants), 'without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher's analytic preconceptions' (p. 83) and 2) 'top down' or theoretical analysis which is more analyst-driven, with coding driven by pre-existing frameworks and/or research questions. The authors state that the analyst may be interested in seeing how particular features play out across the data and focus on that feature when coding the data.

Given the explanatory sequential design employed, specific research questions were generated for Phase 2, based on the Phase 1 findings. Due to this, items were coded focusing on particular features in the data, and as such the analysis was subject to 'top down' influences. I was interested to see participants' responses across these specific areas- although participants typically spoke more broadly around wider issues pertinent to them, this approach allowed for a greater level of focus on specific questions emerging from the Phase 1 data.

Interviews were initially coded using the research questions as a coding framework (see Appendix 13 for initial nodal structure). However, coding in this way was limited in that it only informed me of the frequencies of responses relating to each research question and did not offer sufficient detail. For example, there were 59 references within the initial code 'Factors supporting parents' decision/ supporting process' but no detail as to the nature of these factors. Therefore, a further analysis was conducted, seeking more specific emergent codes within these initial broader codes. For example, the aforementioned code 'Factors supporting parents' decision/ supporting process' was re-analysed with specific codes identified such as

'parents supported by special school staff', 'the process was quick' and 'parents knew what their options were'.

These codes were then sorted into appropriate subthemes and broader main themes (See Appendix 14 for final node structure). The process of thematic analysis was a recursive one - something which Braun and Clarke (2006) state is typical within reflexive thematic analysis - such that codes and themes were re-assessed and re-defined as necessary throughout the process.

Given the critical realist framework which was applied to the research, I coded according to the explicit meaning of words and phrases, with themes therefore identified at a semantic/explicit level, as opposed to a 'latent' level whereby the thematic analysis considers underlying ideas and assumptions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The analytic process can be described as descriptive, with interpretation (broader meanings and implication) occurring at a later stage.

Generation of themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that 'the "keyness" of a theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures – but in terms of whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question' (p. 82). The sub-themes listed are generally made up of responses from at least 2 participants (themes were generated on the basis of the number of participants referring to it, rather than the number of references coded). This was because participants would re-visit similar topics a number of times during their interviews; defining frequency of response by way of references would not have been reflective of the significance of each theme. However, there were codes within the data which captured a key aspect of a research question, but were only referenced by one participant. To dismiss these codes would be to lose an important part of the individual contributions of the interviewees. Therefore, themes that have been generated as a result of single code/interviewee but still considered key to a research question have been labelled as 'minor themes'.

Cross-participant analyses. To answer some of the research questions, it was necessary to conduct cross-participant analyses. For example, to answer research question 4- Do parents see it as feasible that mainstream could have accommodated their child's needs and if so, how would they have to change? Responses of participants considering mainstream as feasible were compared with those who did not consider it to be feasible, in order to see areas of convergence and divergence.

Sample interview transcripts with examples of coding can be seen in Appendix 15.

Chapter 8: Phase 2 findings

In this chapter I will address each of the Phase 2 research questions, with reference to the relevant themes from the thematic analysis. The full table of main themes and subthemes (with participant responses to each code) can be seen in Appendix 16. Where appropriate, cross-participant analyses were carried out between participants with specific differences in their Phase 1 responses (for example, between participants indicating that mainstream was appropriate and those that did not), in order to address any areas of convergence and divergence. This section will be followed by a discussion of the results, with reference to existing literature.

Demographic information

Seven participants took part in Phase 2 (given two of these participants were parents of the same child, their data has been reported as a single respondent- 6 respondents equates to 10.5% of the phase 1 sample). See Table 8 for details of each participant.

Research Question 1: What are parents' constructs of inclusive education (do they prioritise academic or social inclusion)?

Table 10

Main themes and subthemes relating to research question 1

Main theme	Subthemes
Inclusion as meeting academic needs	Appropriate curriculum
	Participation in learning
	Wellbeing (learning)
	Facilities
	Mainstream and special school have different definitions of inclusion
Inclusion as meeting social needs	Social and community involvement
	Safe/protective environment
	Wellbeing (social and emotional)
	Acceptance
	Participation in wider activities

('minor themes'- those generated from a single code/interviewee are recorded it italics)

Table 10 shows the themes and subthemes relating to research question 1. The subthemes above and how they have been categorised is informed by but not restricted to previous definitions of academic and social inclusion (for example, Gibb et al, 2007). It is reflective of how the six participants conceptualised inclusion when asked about this topic during their interviews.

Main theme: Inclusion as meeting academic needs

Subtheme: Appropriate curriculum. A key aspect of academic inclusion was that parents felt that their child was accessing an appropriate curriculum, learning activities and/or exams. All interviewees referred to this aspect.

'Listening to the Teacher and being asked to draw a picture. He wouldn't be able to participate in that but a sensory curriculum where you use a lot of special equipment, you have a light room, you have a hydrotherapy pool, you have physiotherapy in school, is, there wasn't even, it wasn't even a consideration for me. It was just like he's got to go to this school because it is going to meet his needs so much better than anywhere else' (Grace)

'They're not there to follow a strict curriculum along the lines of what you get in mainstream school. At Year 2 we want to do SATs, at Year 3 we'll start developing foreign language. At Year 4 we'll do whatever. The school develops it's education plan for the children individually and around the children and their abilities, and their needs. So they're getting educated at the right level because the individual child is the SENCO of their plan'. (Haley and Andrew)

Subtheme: Participation in learning. Two participants referred specifically to their child being able to participate in learning:

'She always had that one to one next to her she probably felt a little bit left out but when she's gone to this school there's children that have her same needs and she doesn't feel so left out I would say. So I think that's probably how her confidence has boosted up even more because there's children at her level as well, not just her the only one in the class with a one to one'. (Verity)

Subtheme: Wellbeing (learning). Three participants also referred to the positive impact on child wellbeing which was engendered by having appropriate academic provision:

'She learns to a level that she can understand, she's not made to feel that she's different, you know, all of those things'. (Martha)

'He will be the first pupil at the school to ever take a music exam… Those sort of opportunities that help his confidence'. (Izzy).

Subtheme: Facilities. Two participants referred to the appropriateness of the facilities at special school (particularly to provide therapeutic support):

'So for him to go to a special school where they're completely geared up for special needs. They have everything that he needs to keep him safe, he has hoisting equipment and changing facilities and all of that practical stuff'. (Grace)

'His curriculum is very very different and I mean he does therapeutic work most of the time and he would miss out on that basically if he was in a mainstream'. (Fiona)

Subtheme: Mainstream and special school have different definitions of inclusion. It is noteworthy that one participant suggested that a mainstream school's definition is different to that of a special school:

Well, okay so you can look at that in both areas. Inclusion, that mainstream school their definition of the word inclusion is that he's in a class, he's with children, however when it comes to lessons and stuff they then take him out of class, include him in the event but teach it differently.

They would do the, like if they were telling a story he would be in the story and then they'd take him out to do the work. So he's in for a little bit at the beginning even if he didn't understand it. So he was sitting down as part of the class.
So I would say that was mainstream's definition of the word inclusion whereas inclusion at (current school) is exactly what it says on the tin. They're all in it together. They all do everything as a class, as a group and it's much more hands on.' (Haley and Andrew)

Main theme: Inclusion as meeting social needs

Subtheme: Social and community involvement. The majority of parents (5 out of 6) felt that social and community involvement was a key aspect of inclusion. This included for example, having a social group at school, mixing with non-SEN pupils, involvement in the community and avoiding bullying at special school (see Appendix 16 for full categorisation of codes). Four participants made specific reference to the importance of their child mixing with non-SEN children:

'I think it's so important that as a society that children who are disabled do everything together as a community and that they do go to places where they are going to see non-disabled children so that we all become a society where we we're happy to integrate and it becomes less of a stigma in a way doesn't it if children grow up seeing disabled children.' (Grace)

'I think one of the things that I did think about for him was whether or not he could go, attend my other son's school for social things but again that's, it just wouldn't be appropriate for him but the one thing that I do think would be for inclusion and actually going the other way, not him going into a mainstream but mainstream students coming into his setting'. (Fiona)

Four participants referred to the importance of their children being involved in the community. It appears that these parents valued the involvement of their children beyond the community of their school:

'So I think it's about mixing with the public and I think that's more important as inclusion, whatever that means really, is to be included in being given the opportunity to be out and mixing with people'. (Izzy)

'I mean in theory that's how I see her inclusion as being with a carer who takes her out into the community but that she's in a way protected and cloistered at school'. (Martha).

Three participants referred to their child avoiding bullying at special school, which they may have experienced in a mainstream setting:

'I guess worries for me were always about if (child) went somewhere where there was predominantly non disabled children would he be included, would it be more difficult for him to be included. Would he bullied. And I know there's a huge issue about bullying and in all schools they now have an anti bullying policy and it's all managed very well but children can be cruel without even knowing they're being cruel. And single people out and a child with a disability is so much easier to single out than anybody else'. (Grace).

One participant expressed the view that mainstream schools (with resource bases) represent segregation:

85

'I feel that very much it makes them feel even worse, you know, how would one feel if one went to school and you were sort of, there was a sort of apartheid, the children with Autism and then the normal ones… I think what makes *(the special school)* so happy is the fact that they're all in the same boat and they're all appreciated enough for being in that boat rather than children who are sort of segregated and made to feel like they don't conform or fit in compared to the normal'. (Martha)

Subtheme: Safe, protective environment. Related to the subject of the child experiencing social difficulties, two participants referred to the importance of a safe, protective environment for their child:

'So being in a more protective environment where he's got small classes and everybody is a little sphere around him, that was most important'. (Fiona)

'As a parent you want to protect, you want to make sure your child is in a safe environment, are they going to be happy, nothing horrible is going to happen to them and I think it's a big concern no matter how schools do about bullying there's always things that can go unseen'. (Grace*)*

Subtheme: Wellbeing (social and emotional). Three participants referred to special school as having a positive effect on their child's wellbeing:

'She's in a class of just 10 children with the same needs as her and like I said her confidence has hit the roof since going to that school. She's 100% happy there. I mean even in the summer holidays she's always asking when is she going back to school because she loves it so much. That's what we get from her.' (Verity)

'I think it's feeling safe, feeling happy and feeling confident in your environment will produce an environment where you can learn academically and that's exactly what has happened'. (Izzy)

Subthemes: Acceptance and Participation in wider activities. Similarly, one participant referred to the importance of acceptance and participation for their child in special school:

'They're all in it together. They all do everything as a class, as a group and it's much more hands on… And that's them being them which means everybody accepts them for who they are. That's what I find that special school is all about. Each pupil and

child they are being the best that they can be, that's what the staff are trying to do'. (Haley and Andrew)

Research Question 2: Why do parents feel that mainstream school could (or could not) have accommodated their child's needs?

Table 11

Main themes and subthemes for research question 2

Main theme	Subtheme
Mainstream school as appropriate	*Mainstream adaptations*
Mainstream school as inappropriate	Resourcing and environment
	Skills of the staff
	Needs of the child
	Engagement with curriculum
	Socialising

('minor themes' are recorded it italics)

Main theme: Mainstream school as appropriate

Subtheme: Mainstream adaptations. Table 11 shows the main themes and subthemes relating to research question 2. Only one of the participants indicated that mainstream provision could have been appropriate for their child. This participant made references to there being consistency of approach between mainstream and special school, the mainstream environment/resources being appropriate for their child's needs and the mainstream staff indicating that they could meet the child's needs:

> 'Obviously I spoke to the Teachers within the two mainstream schools … and their responses were, you know, quite impressive I would say and I felt that they would have met her needs if she did have to go to their school… But they said they would obviously work alongside of her primary school that she was in at the time to see exactly what they did with her and make sure that they would do the same. So I definitely felt like I had choices'. (Verity)

This responses of this participant (Verity) were used in the cross-participant analysis to ascertain possible reasons why, given their positive view of mainstream school, they chose special school for their child.

Main theme: Mainstream school as inappropriate

Subtheme: Resourcing and environment. Four of the six participants interviewed also referred to the resources/environment at mainstream being inappropriate for their child.

'So they, you know, yes other children got help but I think the building and the staff couldn't physically do anymore. There wasn't any more room or anywhere to build to do nice sensory rooms or things like that and the money wasn't there, I know that from being a member of staff but I don't think that some of the staff had the training and experience to give anymore'. (Haley and Andrew)

Two participants within this subtheme also made specific reference to the lack of funding in mainstream school to support their child.

Subtheme: Skills of the staff. Three participants suggested that the skills, staff expertise and/or training would be insufficient to meet their child's needs in mainstream school. For example:

'The level of skills and expertise just isn't in a mainstream and that would only be applied, even with all the funding in the world and the best will in the world that would only be a TA and they don't have that level of direction. And understanding of Tristan's significant needs so, yeah, for his level of needs I don't think it every would be feasible'. (Fiona)

Subtheme: Needs of the child. Three of the six participants indicated that mainstream provision would have been inappropriate for the child due to the needs of the child:

'I mean I guess if we'd really wanted to we could have said we wanted Sam to go to a mainstream school but I don't feel, because his needs are very profound I don't feel that a mainstream school would have been able to meet his needs. Obviously I know there's a legal requirement to make adaptations and bring in hoists and all of that sort of thing to make that access possible but I don't think it would have actually been the right option for him'. (Grace).

Two of the participants specifically indicated that mainstream school would be inappropriate for their child as they would be disruptive to other children.

'If I was a parent and I didn't have special needs children and say my daughter's hair was pulled by an Autistic child I would be upset and that's what Mia was doing, she was going round pulling people's hair and being sort of wild and disrupting the class and I can see that from their point of view it must have been incredibly difficult for the staff and for the other parents'. (Martha)

'And to some degree I didn't want him to impede their learning because he wouldn't have been part of their class and when he was he probably would have been quite disruptive'. (Fiona)

Subtheme: Engagement with curriculum. Three participants referred to engagement with the curriculum as a reason that mainstream school was inappropriate (for example, due to an inappropriate curriculum or lack of engagement and participation with the learning):

'I think a mainstream school, they're obliged to concentrate on academics and for my son that's not the main objective.' (Izzy)

Subtheme: Socialising. Two participants also referred to aspects of the socialisation which they felt made mainstream school inappropriate (such as the lack of social interaction and the possibility their child would have experienced bullying):

I mean he's profoundly disabled so it's a physical and a cognitive disability that he's got so he is in a wheelchair and he cannot support himself at all. He literally has no verbal skills, he has no language. So for him to sort of interact with able children in a mainstream school just wouldn't have been possible and I'm sure that children would have tried to interact with him but I just don't think he would have got anything out of that'. (Grace)

I think the lack of training generally with Teachers with special needs, I've heard so many stories of other people's children who are not quite severe enough, you know, on the spectrum to be in a special needs school and they end up in mainstream and they get bullied by the Teachers and the pupils because they're different and they can't really handle being there'. (Izzy)

Cross-participant analysis

Responses were compared between Verity (the participant who indicated that mainstream school could have been appropriate) and the other participants. It is noteworthy that Verity was the only participant who did not refer to aspects of the process of choice that were difficult for them. Factors which appeared to facilitate this positive experience were support from professionals, consensus around the child's needs/setting, a quick process and her child having an early assessment of needs. With this participant's responses, there was no suggestion that special school had been chosen because mainstream provision had failed. In fact, this participant implied that they were confident that the local mainstream settings could meet the child's need and were impressed by them. Verity also indicated that aspects of academic inclusion (wellbeing [learning], accessing appropriate curricula and participation in learning) and social inclusion (wellbeing- [social and emotional]) were important to her.

It is noteworthy that this parent's experience of choosing was highly positive, more so than the other participants- this (particularly the support from school staff) is likely to have given the parent confidence that a mainstream school could make the necessary adaptations for their child. In this sense, this parent's decision to choose special school appears to have been driven by their preferences and goals for their child (such as the child accessing the appropriate curriculum, not feeling different and their wellbeing) rather than negative previous experiences.

Although Haley and Andrew indicated that they felt that mainstream school was inappropriate for their child (due to the skills of the staff, resourcing/environment and funding), they also indicated that it was important to them to feel the child's previous mainstream school had put everything they could in place:

> 'I always wanted what was the best for (child) but I wanted the school to … I wanted them to earn their pay. I wanted them to go, to reach that point where they'd done everything they could do, where everything was in place and there was still not the required progress before I'd made the decision'. (Haley and Andrew)

This response from Haley and Andrew suggests that mainstream school could have been considered appropriate had the measures the school put in place been successful- these parents appears to have wanted to test the limits of what a mainstream school could offer, before deciding in favour of special school. This contrasts with the responses from Verity, who implied that the mainstream school placement has not been unsuccessful, but that special school was chosen due to the parent's preferences and goals.

Haley and Andrew also suggested that mainstream and special schools have different definitions of what they consider inclusion to be (all pupils included in activities within the classroom as opposed to being taken out for additional support). These parents experiences had led them to suggest that mainstream school has not necessarily 'failed' their child in its provision, but that it was unable to meet the child's need, which I would argue is an important difference (a blameless acceptance that mainstream school had supported their child as best it could, given the limitations of what it could offer). These experiences appear to have informed the parent ideology around inclusion- an implication that mainstream inclusion is perhaps a lesser, 'watered down' version of special school inclusion.

Research Questions 3 and 4

- **What were the factors supporting parents to make their decision (what did good professional support look like)?**
- **What were the factors which impeded parents in making their decision?**

Table 12

Main themes and subthemes relating to research questions 3 and 4

Main Theme	Subtheme
How the process supported parents (and /or was positive for them)	Parents being pro-active
	Options given to parents
	Support from school staff
	Support from professionals
	Level of agreement around child's needs
	Speed of process
	Early Assessment
	Knowing mainstream school had put in place all they could
How the process was difficult for parents	Lack of support/guidance
	Options not clear
	Disagreement around child's needs
	Challenging the system

('minor themes' are recorded it italics)

Main theme: How the process supported parents (and /or was positive for them)

Subtheme: Parents being pro-active. Table 12 shows the main themes and subthemes relating to research questions 3 and 4. Three participants referred to being pro-active or doing their own research when choosing schools.

91

'But I also think that through the whole process you have to keep picking up the phone and ringing people to catch on things or give extra information, or check that something has been done because if you don't sometimes it gets missed'. (Haley and Andrew)

'But equally then you could go on to the internet and websites are better now than they were then but you could then go online and find out a bit of information about the school'. (Grace)

Subtheme: Options given to parents. Two participants referred to the availability and/or awareness of school options as supportive for them in the decision-making process:

'But I suppose choice in terms of people supporting us to go round and look at them so that I knew what my choices were. It wasn't, I think that's probably where I felt I had a choice, it was clear what the schools were. I didn't have to go out and find them so much'. (Fiona).

When considering these options, it is noteworthy that only one parent referred to their child choosing the school themselves. Although consulting their children may have implicitly been part of some parent's decisions, only one parent clearly stated this (it should also be noted that some of the pupils may not have been able to communicate preferences of schools due to their needs).

Subtheme: Support from school staff. All participants indicated that they were supported by school staff during the decision-making process (five participants indicating they were supported by special school staff, and three referring to mainstream staff):

'I think we met with a couple of different staff at the school, so we met with the Deputy Head. I think she did the tour for us at the school and then we met with one of the Senior Administrators who dealt with all the admissions and they were both really really helpful in answering questions and took plenty of time to, you know, answer any queries that we had and spent time with her. Showing us around the building and talking about how the pupils would be looked after and how their educational needs would be met. I feel people spent a lot of time with us to make sure that we were comfortable and had all the information we needed'. (Grace, referring to special school)

'He basically gave any advice, if you had any concerns you could go to him and he would answer it. He obviously helped out with any paperwork and so on. He was just always there supporting us step by step including the home school transport that we asked for when we were doing her secondary, he got the applications and stuff for me. Things like that. So, yeah, I would say he was definitely the main one that was absolutely brilliant for Courtney's education'. (Verity, referring to mainstream school)

Subthemes: Support from professionals, Level of agreement around child's needs. Participants also referred to receiving support from a number of professionals, such as advisory teachers, care managers, EPs, Key workers and Portage. Five participants referred to their being consensus among professionals (around child's needs and/or appropriate setting), with two participants specifically referring to their child's needs being clear (and how this supported the process):

'No, I think there was a good level of agreement. I think everybody who was involved with Sam's sort of package, all the different professionals agreed that- (*school*)- the school that he went to, was going to be the best option for him so there was never anybody trying to suggest something different. There was a good consensus really'. (Grace)

Subthemes: Speed of process, Early assessment. Four participants indicated that the process of finding out whether their child had a place at their chosen school was quick. Similarly, one participant referred to their child having an early assessment of need, which supported them.

Subtheme: Knowing mainstream school had put in place all they could. As previously referred to, one participant referred to the importance feeling the child's previous mainstream school had put everything they could in place. This appeared to support the participant in feeling that special school was the more appropriate option.

Main theme: How the process was difficult for parents

Subtheme: Lack of support/guidance. Four participants referred a lack of support (referring to, for example, a lack of guidance, a lack of suggestions and in the case on one participant, poor communication from the council):

'Just to have been told that you've got a choice and to have people telling you, guiding you because as I say when you have a special needs child you don't know where you're going. You're feeling around in the dark, you don't know how things work and who you are supposed to be talking to, and what you're supposed to be talking to them about or anything. It's something you've got to work out for yourself'. (Martha)

Subtheme: Options not clear. Three participants also referred to their options not being clear. It was noted that one of the participants responding to this (Fiona) had also stated that the options were clear. Although this participant stated that she 'knew what my choices were' (see quote above), they also implied that prospectuses could be misleading as to whether they would be able to accommodate a child:

'Yeah, just saying "no, sorry we don't have ..." but if you look on their prospectus or whatever online it says that they accept children from four years old. So I said to them, I said "well why …" because this is unfair on parents because you just think alright our decision is, we're securing that we've got a place for our child at a visually impaired school, we've got a visually impaired child and then you turn up and they're like "oh no, you can't come here". (Fiona)

In this case, the school would not enrol their child as he was considered too young and the school were concerned that there would be no peer group for him (which appears to contradict the information on the prospectus). This example demonstrates the complexity of parent choice and that several factors inform whether parents feel they have a clear understanding of their options (in the case of Fiona, professional support and clarity of information from schools). Greater awareness of their options is something participants also identified as a suggested area for improvement (see below).

Subthemes: Disagreement about child's needs, Challenging the system. Three participants made references to there being disagreement around a child's needs (between parent, staff and/or external professionals):

> 'I disagreed with one of the last things that was said to me at his school, it was between the professional but they'd re-assessed him. This was when he was seven or eight year old, I can't remember now, they'd re-assessed him and they said "we've re-assessed him and they've changed the way that it's done and we now think that he is still P1" which is, if you understand the terminology, P1 means like one year old in terms of ability and everything and I completely didn't agree with that at all. It was just nonsense and how well he's done at school now has just proved it was nonsense'. (Izzy)

One participant making specific reference to the local authority disagreeing with her choice of school:

> 'They were trying to save money basically- they didn't want us [unintelligible 00:20:41] to (school) because it's like a 40-minute drive and I felt it was just about money'. (Martha)

This participant also made several references to having to challenge the system (see cross-participant analysis).

Cross-participant analysis

Martha was highlighted as she indicated on her questionnaire responses that her experience had been generally poor, based on how well her expression of views has been supported, her preferences considered and how easy it was to get her preferred school (although Martha had originally indicated she felt well-informed and had reasonable professional support).

Martha indicated that indicated that she felt she had a lack of support/guidance (with the exception of guidance from special school staff)- there was disagreement from the council regarding the parent's choice of school, options were not clear and the parent felt they had to challenge the system:

> 'I had to fight for the one I wanted. I felt like it was just a fight, the whole thing, to get her into a school that I liked myself and fit her, the fight. All the way along, I was told by the council it's not your choice and then I was being by other people that it is your

choice actually and that kind of thing. So, yeah, it did feel like a massive fight'. (Martha).

In contrast to this, Verity and Izzy both reported generally positive experiences (based on how well their expression of views has been supported, their preferences considered, how easy it was to get preferred schools, how well-informed they felt and the level of professional support). The areas of convergence amongst these two participants were that they felt supported by both school staff and professionals, the process was quick, and there was consensus among staff around the child's needs. Martha's responses suggest that there was a lack of support and that she had encountered significant barriers at county level. The comparison between these responses suggests that it is important that parents feel supported by school professionals, external professionals and at a county level. Martha indicated that to improve the system was for her to be made explicitly aware of what here options were, as well as more support from professionals and making the choice earlier (see Phase 2, research question 6).

Research Question 5) Did the child's level of need have an impact on the experience of choosing?

Cross-participant analysis

Fiona and Grace both indicated that their child's needs were clear and that the level of their child's need was too great for mainstream school. The two participants have children that both have significant needs (physical and learning difficulties). There were points of convergence of how these parents found the process to be positive: both had support from professionals and special school staff and there was agreement among professionals around their child's needs. Both participants also indicated that they were pro-active when choosing. However, both participants referred to their options not being clear:

> 'Maybe reflecting on it I don't feel that we really fully discussed all the different options'. (Grace)

> 'But if you look on their prospectus or whatever online it says that they accept children from four years old … we've got a visually impaired child and then you turn up and they're like "oh no, you can't come here". (Fiona)

Both participants also referred to wanting more options:

'I mean the whole issue about the visually impaired school not being available, yeah, I think basically if they had accepted us we would have, because his vision is the most important, we would have gone there. I was really willing, I had some people saying we should fight for it and then I thought, I didn't want him to be anywhere where he didn't have a peer group unless I had other parents who were willing to do the same, I just thought I can't, I'm just not willing'. (Fiona)

One of the participants also referred to the child's needs changing over time which affected the decision-making process:

'We did look at (school) because at one point we did definitely think that was going to be right but then (child) basically made that decision by starting to crawl and we realised that he was going to be a bit of a pain in the bottom for it. We were very much going down that view. So things changed quite abruptly actually so we they were really like "no we're going to go to (school)" and then, because it just seemed absolutely perfect, but then we changed our minds really quite quickly and I don't know if we even looked at (school) at that point' (Fiona)

These findings suggest that even for parents of children with significant needs, where there is support from professionals and staff and consensus of agreement around the child's needs, parents have still experienced difficulties in knowing what the different options were and whether they were feasible. Furthermore, these needs may not be consistent over time which can have an impact on school choice. Five of the six interviewees referred to there being consensus between professionals regarding the child's needs and/or appropriate setting and yet a range of experiences was reported. In this sense, the level of need did not appear to impact on the parent's having a positive/negative experience of choosing.

Research Question 6) How could the process have been improved for parents? (for example, what support would parents have liked that was not available and are there any options parents would have liked?)

Table 13

Main themes and subthemes relating to research question 6

Main theme	Subtheme
Improving the system of choice	Awareness of options
	Additional support
	More options

('minor themes' are recorded it italics)

Main theme: Improving the system of choice

Subtheme: Awareness of options. Table 13 shows the main theme and subthemes relating to research question 6. Three participants referred to wanting to have a greater awareness of the options- a recurrent finding was that parents would like to have a clear 'list' of school options:

'The council again they should have said "right, these are the schools in the county, these are the ones you can go for, go and have a look" but they didn't'. (Martha)

'I guess probably again it's a bit like there wasn't that much choice or if there was maybe we weren't aware of it so again it's maybe sitting down with a family at the very beginning and saying this is where we're at, this is what options you have, let's look at them all and have a chat about it'. (Grace)

'Whereas beforehand if someone would have sat down and said "right so (school) is a school that provides services for blah blah, (school) does X, Y and Z and (school) does blah blah" so we wouldn't have bothered going for a visit to (school) at all'. (Haley and Andrew)

The above responses appear to suggest that parents would like greater transparency from the local authority regarding the options that are available to them. Within this subtheme, two participants also indicated that they were not aware of co-located special schools.

Subtheme: More options. Two participants referred to wanting more options available to them, these being a school for the visually impaired (Fiona), and a split placement (Grace). The reasons they gave for *not* pursuing certain options is of interest. As previously stated, one participant (Fiona) referred to a school which stated that there would be no (similar age) peer group for their child at the school, and as a result, did not offer them a place. Another participant (Grace) stated that they had heard of split placements from other families but considered this to be a more 'difficult package to get approved'. In both cases, there is a sense that different options may have been taken had they seemed like a realistic option at the time.

Subtheme: Making the choice earlier. Similarly, one participant suggested that the parent should be made aware that choices are available at an earlier stage:

'Well I think, as soon as your child is diagnosed… they should then say to you "right, you have a choice" but they don't. There's nobody comes to you and says you have a choice and in fact I have an Educational Psychologist who works with Mia and she never said "you have a choice" either'. (Martha)

Subtheme: Communication. One parent also suggested that communication should be improved:

'You need a key person to help you through that time, that knows what was going on, you know, to give us that information and knew the schools to give us that information to help guide us rather than little snippets from a couple of people… Some sort of, an overseer who would just keep track of things and an email every couple of weeks, we've not heard back yet but we are chasing it up. That's all it needs, a one liner because we get the feeling that it's still being dealt with, not the 'well it's all gone quiet what does that mean'. (Haley and Andrew)

Subtheme: Additional Support. One participant stated that they would have liked more support from an EP:

'I think, I mean every Educational Psychologist is obviously a different person, very different, but mine was just fairly ineffectual. So it would have been great if she'd been really sort of saying "right, come on, we can do this … and maybe just come with me to go and see a school even and say "this would be good because" or "this wouldn't be good because…". (Martha).

One participant also suggested that additional peer support would be valuable:

'So I really, it's something that I would love to do if I had a bit more time on my hands is to maybe set up some sort of peer support group where people can hear from other parents because actually sometimes that's the best information and advice you get is from another parent who's been through what you're going through now'. (Grace)

Research Question 7) Where parents do not feel they have a real choice, what could have made it a real choice for them?

Cross-participant analysis.

Three of the six (Phase 2) participants had indicated in the Phase 1 questionnaire that they considered themselves to have had a real choice between special school provision and other types of provision, and three indicated that they did not. Of the three participants that did not have a real choice (participants Martha, Grace and Izzy), one point of convergence for all three was that they felt that mainstream school was inappropriate for their child.

When considering the main theme of 'how the process was difficult for parents', there were some areas of convergence among these participants, namely a lack of support/guidance (Martha and Izzy), disagreement around the child's needs (Martha and Izzy) and options not being clear to parents (Martha and Grace). When considering the main theme of 'improving the system of choice', areas of convergence included having a greater awareness of options and additional support (both Martha and Grace).

Research Question 8) Did the interview process lead parents to consider new options not previously considered?

Five of the six interviewees indicated that the interview process did not cause them to re-consider their choice. However, one participant stated that the research had caused them to reflect on alternatives such as resource bases and split placements and thought about other families:

> 'It does sort of encourage you to reflect on a process and equally think well could we have thought of something else and we've talked today about this sort of, the schools where you might have a special needs unit within a mainstream school. Or the dual placement, they're options that maybe at the time I didn't think about those but now reflecting back I have thought about them… I think it's more of an opening your eyes and again thinking about other families more than thinking about myself. I think other options were out there that we never really pursued but I think subliminally we've made that choice in a way if you know what I mean'. (Grace)

Another participant indicated that the research caused them to consider how the system could be improved. However, it was expressed by the majority that the research did not cause them to feel that they would change their choice or that they made an 'incorrect' choice. This suggests that although the majority of parents in Phase 2 named aspects of the

decision-making process that was difficult or negative for them (five of the six participants), participants generally seemed to be happy with their decision and with the outcomes of the process.

Chapter 9: Phase 2 summary and discussion

Research question 1: What are parents' constructs of inclusive education (do they prioritise academic or social inclusion)?

Academic inclusion

In terms of meeting academic needs, parents of special school children seem to value the individuality and flexibility of the curriculum offered (see 'Appropriate curriculum' subtheme). However, in reference to accessing the curriculum, one parent suggested that mainstream and special school have different definitions of inclusion. Laughlan & Greig (2015) refer to one argument that withdrawing pupils to a separate space within the same school could be considered as inclusive as it may allow equitable access to the shared curriculum- this is of interest in light of this parent's view. This parent is suggesting that academic inclusion in mainstream school may include withdrawal to a separate space (even a resource base), whereas in special school this involves all pupil remaining in the classroom together. Indeed, the idea that resource bases represent 'partial segregation' (Lauchlan & Greig, 2015, p. 80) was also reflected in the present research.

Social inclusion

One of the key findings was that participants wanted their children to have opportunities to mix with non-SEN (or typically developing) pupils. In light of this, it is interesting to consider the distinction of Jenkinson (1998)- that parents of children with disabilities in mainstream schools favour an inclusionary stance- giving their child opportunities to mix with non-disabled children- and those with children in special schools put greater emphasis on quality of learning provision. The present findings suggest that this distinction is an oversimplification. One participant (Fiona) proposed that social inclusion could be realised by mainstream pupils visiting the special school classroom- this is comparable to the concept of 'reverse inclusion'. The research of Schoger (2006) involved a 'Reverse Inclusion Programme' which involved bringing children from a mainstream class to a special school class for regular interactions with them. This had a marked impact on the special school children (in terms of developing their social interaction skills and ability to initiate these) and the mainstream school children (in terms of how they perceived those with disabilities). It is interesting that so many parents referred to the importance of their children mixing with

typically developing peers, when again there were parents in this phase that had not heard of co-located special schools.

Involvement in the wider community was also valued among participants. In light of this, it is of interest to consider social role valorization theory (Wolfensberger, 2013). Mann et al (2016) refers to the process of social devaluation (Wolfensberger, 2013) which occurred as a child attending special school 'moved away from the typical places and experiences of his former schooling life and further into the atypical places and experiences of a 'special school student'.' (p. 916). The participants of the present study appeared to value their child maintaining typical experiences in the community either as part of or additional to their education.

Three participants made reference to their child avoiding bullying at special school, which they felt they may have experienced in a mainstream setting: this is supported by previous research, for example Evangelou et al (2008), who found that children with SEN are more likely to be bullied when transitioning to mainstream secondary school (from mainstream primary). Research has demonstrated that interventions can be successful in supporting those considered vulnerable at transfer (including those with SEN) to make a positive social transition to mainstream secondary school (Bloyce and Frederickson, 2012). Some parents within the present study clearly felt that their children were vulnerable to social exclusion and negative experiences; this may have been a deterrent for some parents considering mainstream, and would likely have had a significant impact on their decision between mainstream and specialist provision.

The references within the Phase 2 data around acceptance, participation and wellbeing as part of socially including a child in school is reflective of the definitions of 'belongingness' (Hagerty et al, 1992; Goodenow, 1993) previously discussed in Phase 1.

Summary of key themes around inclusion

The key themes from this phase suggest that parents particularly value social and community involvement (building social groups, maintaining contact with children outside of their schools, and having community involvement) and access to appropriate curricula, learning activities and exams. Therefore, inclusion in this phase is interpreted by parents as engaging in learning at an appropriate level, and that this is most appropriately achieved separately from a mainstream environment (meaning that mixing with non-SEN children- which parents considered to be important- has to be enabled outside of the school environment).

Lightfoot & Bond (2013) give the example of how different parents goals for their child can mean different choices of provision, even if the parents share the same broad view of inclusion. In the case of their research, the pursuit of life skills and social opportunities for her child resulted in a parent choosing specialist provision, despite having a commitment to inclusion. The 'commitment to inclusion' in Lightfoot & Bond (2013) refers to a preference for mainstream provision. Parents in the present research did not conceptualise inclusion in this way, but rather that special school was better placed to provide an inclusive environment for their child. This is reflective of the more recent views of Warnock (2010) that there should be an emphasis on meeting children's need in the educational setting which suits them best, as opposed to the 'all children under one roof' model of integration. Indeed, one participant expressed the view that resource bases in school represented a greater level of segregation than special schools, which I would argue is contrary to their intended purpose.

The 'dilemma of difference' around inclusive education is highly relevant here. Minow (1990) outlined the risks of two approaches to inclusion: 1) treating people differently, emphasising that difference and risk stigmatisation and 2) treating people the same, being insensitive to their differences and risk stigmatisation in this way. The former is referred to as the 'differentiation stance', the latter the 'commonality stance'. Whereas both of these approaches can appear potentially problematic, Norwich (2013) argues that the concept of 'difference' can be re-framed as either stigmatising or enabling. Participants in Phase 2 of this research appeared to subscribe to the idea that the recognition of different learning needs within their children (and subsequent change of setting) has been enabling for their child.

Research Question 2: Why do parents feel that mainstream school could (or could not) have accommodated their child's needs?

Four of the six participants indicated that mainstream provision would have been inappropriate for the child due to the resources and environment, with three referring to the skills and expertise of the staff and three to the needs of the child. This is reflective of the mix of responses in Phase 1; participants that cited 'level of need' as a reason, but also those that cited the 'level of support required' (as well as reasons such as class sizes and lack of training). Two further subthemes- 'engagement with curriculum' (three participants) and 'socialising' (two participants) are consistent with ideas parents held around inclusion (prioritising both social and academic inclusion), as discussed in the previous section.

Previous literature has suggested that parents of children with SEN are more concerned with ensuring continuity to the next setting and the need for schools to discuss the kind of support which would be beneficial with children and families, rather than offering a similar package of support to all pupils with similar needs (Maras & Aveling, 2006). This appeared to be the case for the participant (Verity) that indicated that mainstream school could have been appropriate. Although Maras and Aveling (2006) suggest that the above support can ensure a positive transition to a mainstream school, case studies in their research also suggested that 'some will struggle despite support being in place' (p. 201). For some parents, the needs of the child clearly outweigh the support they feel can be put in place.

Again, it is important to consider the argument of Runswick-Cole (2008) that special school choice is more likely for parents with more individualised models of disability. Although a child's level of need was cited as a reason for mainstream school being inappropriate (which would be reflective of a within-child, deficit-based stance), this was often within the context of insufficient resources and environment the schools could offer and the skills and expertise of the staff (reflective of more social model thinking). Therefore, I would argue that parents are considering their child's needs, but within the context of what they feel mainstream school are able to offer. This is reflective of the argument of Landsman (2005) that parents can consider multiple models of disability.

Two participants appeared to consider it feasible that mainstream school could have met need. One participant (Verity) expressed greater levels of confidence in this but appeared to choose special school instead as it more closely matched their goals for their child. The other participant(s) (Haley and Andrew) appeared to be initially invested in mainstream education for their child, but eventually opted for special school as the measures put in place by mainstream school had not been successful. This change in parent views and preference of provision type over time is consistent with previous research (for example, Mann, 2016).

Research questions 3 and 4

3) What were the factors supporting parents to make their decision (what did good professional support look like)?

4) What were the factors which impeded parents in making their decision?

Participants in Phase 2 gave a number of reasons as to why they had a positive and/or negative experience around choosing (with clear differences across the subthemes between the level of support and guidance, clarity of options and level of professional agreement

around the child's needs). The cross-participant analysis suggests that positive experiences of school choice was informed by support by school professionals, external professionals and at county level. The findings are reflective of previous research which refers to the key role of professionals in supporting parents (for example, Mann et al, 2015). It is of interest that both mainstream and special school staff support was cited by participants- it appears that it is important that parents are supported by child's current school (informing the steps of the process) and the chosen school (supporting the transition).

Four participants indicated that the process of finding out whether their child had a place at their chosen school was quick, with one participant also referring to their child having an early assessment of need. These findings are interesting in light of the recent report from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (2019), which reports that delay is a factor in the majority of SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) complaints that are investigated, with councils attributing this to 'staff shortages or absence, decisions needing to be signed off by managers or panels, or delays by other bodies in providing evidence and advice.' (p. 5). It is interesting in the present research that participants across Phases 1 and 2 did not commonly refer to a delay when making a choice of school- this suggests that delays may occur at the time of statutory assessment rather than during special school choice (it is recognised however that the report is reflective of the statutory delays at the time of publishing and may not be generalisable beyond this).

An interesting finding was that, of the six participants, only one parent referred to their child choosing the school themselves. According to the Children and Families Act (2014), local authorities have a duty to regard the wishes of children and young people and enable them to participate fully in decisions relating to them. The research report into parent's and young people's experiences of EHCPs (DfE, 2017) suggests that many children and young people are not being given the support they need to express their views, either through being offered an advocate (41%), visual aids (21%) and communication aids (18%). Approximately 1 in 10 parents and young people needed these forms of support but had not been offered them. I would argue that these are particularly important adaptations when considering how to enable many of the children in the present study to express their views. It may be that parents feel that, whilst the child's views are taken into consideration, it is ultimately their decision to make. This is unclear from the present data; the present data does suggest however is the voices/choices of children and young people are not central to the process.

Research question 5: Did the child's level of need have an impact on the experience of choosing?

The cross-participant analysis suggested that those parents with higher needs children, although experiencing many positive aspects (for example, support from professionals and special school staff and agreement among professionals around their child's needs), these parents still found there to be a lack of clarity regarding their options. It is interesting that the options these participants wanted available to them (a school for the visually impaired-Fiona- and a split placement- Grace) was more around getting these options approved or accepted rather than the appropriate placements not existing. The systematic review of research regarding special school (or programme) choice by Mawene and Bal (2018) found that research has overgeneralised around parent experiences, focusing on a range of needs rather than single categories. The present research suggests that this would be valuable, to understand the experiences of those with higher levels of needs for whom the optimal school placement may be less clear, and where acceptance to schools or approval or certain packages may be more difficult to secure.

Research question 6: How could the process have been improved for parents? (for example, what support would parents have liked that was not available and are there any options parents would have liked?)

The key areas in which parents indicated that the system of choice could be improved was by having a greater awareness of options, more options available and additional support to make their choice. It is important to consider the range and diversity of options parents considered themselves to have. Two participants suggested during the interview that they had not heard of co-located schools (reflective of the finding in Phase 1, whereby only 3.5% of the sample indicated that they considered co-located special schools). Two participants also referred to wanting more options. The green paper- 'Support and Aspiration: 'A New Approach to Special Educational Needs and Disability' (2011) indicated an intention to increase the range and diversity of schools, as stated that parents should have access to good quality information. Although there has been significant political shift since 2011, the government's pledge in March 2019 to build 37 new free special schools across the UK (6 in the South-West) suggests that this imperative is still present within the present administration. Building new schools will increase the *number* of choices for parents however it is unclear as to whether there will be a *diverse* range of provision available (the press release did not refer to co-located schools).

Of those participants that suggested that they would have liked 'more options', there is a sense that different options may have been taken had they seemed like a realistic option at the time. I would argue that the criteria by which local authorities can refuse a request for a school according to the Children and Families Act (2014) Section 39, subsection 4 is stringent, however it could be open to interpretation. For example, a split placement may be the preference of the parent and child but may be considered 'incompatible with the efficient use of resources' or unsuitable for the special educational needs of the child or young person'.

Having an increased awareness of their options was also an area which parents felt could be improved. In terms of providing parents with 'good quality information', the data suggests that parents would like this in the form of clarity of choices- having clear potential options outlined for them which would be appropriate to their child's needs, communicated clearly. The local offer- a series of online documents which outline the services available to children and young people (and parents) within a local authority (introduced in 2014 as stipulated by the Children and Families Act)- was not mentioned by Phase 2 participants. It should be noted that some of these participants made their choice of school prior to this legislation. Participants' responses suggested that they would like their options to be outlined for them in person (see 'Awareness of options' subtheme). I would argue that this requires a) a role which offers this to exist within the service and b) the expertise and knowledge of staff within that role. There is the role of caseworkers (referred to in some local authorities as the 0-25 team), but their role is to implement statutory processes rather than offering advice.

In terms of having additional support around school choice available in the future, one participant suggested that they would have liked this specifically from an EP. Fallon et al (2010) conceptualise EPs as:

> scientist-practitioners who utilise, for the benefit of CYP, psychological skills,
> knowledge and understanding through the functions of consultation, assessment,
> intervention, research and training, at organisational, group or individual level across
> educational, community and care settings, with a variety of role partners. (p.14)

I would argue that EPs have a role in an advisory capacity at an individual level, but this is not generally regarding specific school placement. Similarly, the role of the SENCo is generally not considered to encompass informing parental decisions around school placement (see Rosen-Webb, 2011). I would argue that local Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information Advice and Support Services (SENDIASS) may be best placed

to offer this impartial advice (participants from the Phase 1 data referred to these services as supportive), but they would be unable to inform the final decision.

Clear opinions around school choice that some parents will seek from professionals, could instead come from other parents; previous research has suggested parents highly value the perspective of other parents (Mann et al, 2015)- indeed, one participant (Grace) referred to a desire to set up a peer support group, where parents can offer information and advice to one another. It should be noted that this participant made their school selection prior to the widespread use of social media for parent groups. Social media groups (including parent carer forums, local SENDIAS services and independently formed parent groups) were contacted as part of the recruitment process for Phase 1. These groups are now ubiquitous, and I would argue are a key way in which parents can seek out more formal and informal information around schools (however they were not commonly referred to in the present research). Given that a school's atmosphere and a caring approach towards pupils were the most commonly-cited reasons for choosing special school in the Phase 1 data, perhaps parent support groups (through social media or otherwise) are an important, yet underutilised source of information and advice.

Research question 7: Where parents do not feel they have a real choice, what could have made it a real choice for them?

In terms of this research question, the responses highlight the complexity behind what a 'real choice' might be constructed as. The Phase 2 data implies that real choice (or perhaps rather a *realistic* choice) may be informed by the appropriateness of mainstream school, but also may be informed by how well the decision was facilitated and supported by professionals. During the interviews, participants made specific suggestions as to what could have made it a real choice for them, such as being having a choice as soon as their child is diagnosed, rather than waiting for mainstream provision to fail (Martha) or having the option of a split placement (Grace).

However, these responses did not address the underlying issue of how parents can have a real choice (between mainstream and special school), when they have identified the needs of their child as too great for mainstream schools. Perhaps this is again reflective of the more recent views of Warnock (2010)- an emphasis on prioritising appropriate settings to meet need of children and young people rather than inclusion under 'one roof'; that parents are more concerned with having the choice of suitable provision, rather than seeking adaptations

to a mainstream environment which they may consider beyond the remit of these schools to provide.

Research question 8: Did the interview process lead parents to consider new options not previously considered?

In summary, parents appeared to feel confident in the decisions that they had made and felt that their choices had been the correct ones. The research process appeared to have value for some parents in terms of initiating reflection on alternative provision, consideration of other families as well as how the system could be improved in the future. I would argue that there is an important role for research such as this to, not only provide insights into parent experiences, but also to act as a space for parents to reflect on their decision and perhaps gain insights into their own underlying viewpoints. Research such as that of Mann (2016) (which gives a rich narrative account of parent whose child was initially in mainstream school, then transferred to special school, before being transferred back to mainstream) is an example of research which provides parents with this space for reflection whilst being a valuable narrative for parents in similar situations to consider.

Chapter 10: Overall discussion

Integrating Phases 1 and 2

Following an interim analysis of Phase 1 data, Phase 2 was designed to illuminate significant aspects of the Phase 1 data which required further exploration. Below is a summary of findings from the research, bridging together findings from both phases, with four key areas identified:

1) Making the decision

Phase 1 data suggested that when choosing a school, the atmosphere of the school and the approach of the staff was prioritised. The data suggested that the majority of participants considered alternatives to special school, in particular mainstream schools (with and without resource bases). Phase 2 data suggests that having a lack of awareness and understanding of what their options were, and a lack of support and guidance were key barriers to choice. When reflecting on the research process, participants in Phase 2 appeared to be secure in the choices they had made (it should be noted that given the sample in the present research, there may be a cognitive dissonance effect, such that those having selected special school are more likely to be pro-special school over time).

When considering whether participants considered themselves to have a 'real choice', the data from both phases suggests that this is a multi-faceted concept. There was a significant relationship in the Phase 1 data between parents considering themselves to have had a 'real choice' and having a greater number of schools (more than 1) to choose from (with qualitative data suggesting that considering mainstream school as inappropriate impacted on parents feeling they did not have a real choice). Participants in Phase 2 who did not consider themselves to have had a real choice also considered mainstream school to be inappropriate and identified several barriers during the process (such as a lack of support and guidance and options not being clear). Across both phases, having a 'real choice' appears to be related to the number of school choices, with appropriateness of mainstream school, and quality of facilitation and professional support (supporting parents to be aware of options) also being influential factors.

Interestingly, there was a significant relationship (Phase 1) between parents experiencing a 'hard choice' and the appropriateness of mainstream school. The quantitative data suggests participants experienced an easier choice when mainstream school was considered not (or

111

less) appropriate. The qualitative data also suggests that having fewer schools to choose may also result in a harder choice.

The significant relationship between real choice and the number of schools to choose from is of particular interest in the present research. The local authorities in which this research took place had a small number of special schools, relative to other areas of the UK. Cities such as London have a much higher density of schools- for example, the borough of Islington alone has 6 special schools (DfE, 2019b). This may lead to increased choice for parents but increased competition for places due to population density. Mawene and Bal (2018) call upon future research with 'a sharper focus on geography, such as differences between parents in rural and urban areas' (p. 327). This was beyond the remit of the current study (see strengths and limitations), although I would similarly argue for the need for such research.

Overall, although increased choice of schools may create what parents would consider a 'real choice', it may also lead to increased difficulties in making that choice (a harder choice). Having mainstream schools as a realistic option appeared to have impacted on parents having a harder choice, which may be considered contrary to expectations. However, it could also be argued that when parents have fewer options (the modal response in Phase 1 being that one school was available to them), they will inevitably experience a 'hard choice' of sorts, given the compromise on the parents' autonomy to choose. This relationship was not observed in the cross-tabular data (only half of the parents indicating that they did not have real choice, indicated having a hard choice). It may be that this 'Hobson's choice' of one school was not considered to be a hard choice when this was a preferred school which the child then secured a place at.

2) The process of choosing

Phase 1 data indicated that parent mostly felt well-informed and supported by professionals and there was a significant correlation between these two factors. Parents also mostly indicated that the expression of their views was well supported and that their views and preferences had been considered (with a significant correlation between these two factors also). Across both phases, the role of professionals was consistently raised- external professionals (such as a psychologist, portage worker, social worker, advisory teachers), as well as the staff from both mainstream school and special school. The importance of there being consensus between parents and professionals (around a child's needs and appropriate setting) was an area of convergence between Phases 1 and 2. Despite this, a lack of support and guidance was commonly cited in Phase 1 and Phase 2 as a factor which was challenging during the selection process.

In Phase 1, when answering whether they felt well-informed in their decision, several respondents referred to carrying out their own research (in the qualitative data). Rowe and Windle (2012) suggest that middle-class families have developed 'highly advanced strategies or awareness of strategies for achievement of enrolment into school-of-choice.' (p.149). This is somewhat contradicted by studies such as Mann et al (2015) stating that the 'largely privileged' parents in their study were still affected by poor sharing of information from educators and professionals, which affected the decision-making process. As suggested in Phase 1, participants in Phase 2 were reliant on information provided by external professionals and school staff. I would argue that the findings suggest that being proactive and researching schools is effective to a point, but parents also require schools and professional support for advice and facilitation of views (although it is acknowledged that the backgrounds and socio-economic status of the participants is not known).

Overall, the research suggests that it is important for parents to feel supported from both schools (the present mainstream school and prospective special special), supported by external professionals, with a clear understanding of the available options, and for there to be consensus of opinion/agreement around the child's needs and appropriate setting among those around the child.

3) *Improving the system*

The Phase 1 findings indicated that the majority of parents feel that the system of parental choice of schools should be improved. Phase 1 suggested that parents would like more options/school places, greater availability of information, and greater professional support, advice and expertise (however, participants varied in what they wanted this support to look like- for example, ranging from assisting with school visits, making suggestions of possible schools, giving opinions, impartial advice and guidance, and offering counselling). Similarly, Phase 2 findings suggested that parents would like to have increased awareness of what their options are (for example, a list of schools), a greater number of options and additional support. Although both phases of the data imply that many parents would like a professional to support their decision-making (through information-sharing and support to choose), the data also suggests that parents can be unsure of who this professional should be. A significant correlation was found during Phase 1, between parents feeling that they well-informed and the level of professional support they had. It is important that this professional support is appropriate for parents and they are aware of who they can seek support from (see implications- Chapter 10). An interesting finding was that the local offer was not cited by parents throughout Phases 1 and 2 as a source of information (however some of these parents made their decision prior to the introduction of the local offer in 2014).

Across phases, of those parents who felt that the system of choice should be improved, there appears to be a drive for parents wanting there to be a) more school options b) clarity of information around choice, and c) increased support. This point around availability of information relates to parents' constructs of real choice (which had a significant relationship to the number of school parents had to choose from). I would argue that the large numbers in the present study indicating they had 0 or 1 schools as choices suggests that they were not sufficiently informed about the breadth of options when making the decision (given the number of schools across the local authorities). It may be that parents considered this number of schools as what was possible or realistic, rather than what was available.

4) Inclusion

A key finding regarding parents' interpretations of 'inclusive education' across both phases was that inclusion is not seen as synonymous with mainstream school. Participants in Phase 1 indicated that having a sense of belonging in class and school was the most important aspect of high-quality inclusive education provision (this was the most important factor in the research by a considerable margin, with nearly ¾ of participants indicating that this was important to them). The other factors considered most important were social acceptance by peers in class lessons and a more individualised curriculum (personalised to their child). These findings were similar in Phase 2, as the majority of participants indicated that social and community involvement was important for their child, and all participants indicated that an appropriate curriculum was important. Inclusion in this phase was interpreted by parents as engaging in learning at an appropriate level, separately from a mainstream environment (meaning that mixing with non-SEN children- which parents considered to be important- has to be enabled outside of the school environment). Despite this, participants across both Phase 1 and Phase 2 had not considered (and/or were not aware of) co-located special school which allow for social experiences with non-SEN pupils without having to put additional measures in place. It may be that the lack of awareness of such provision is due to its scarcity across the localities in the present research.

Both academic and social aspects of inclusion were considered important by parents across both phases. As previously stated, participants' references to social aspects of inclusion is reflective of definitions of belongingness within previous literature (for example, Goodenow, 1993). A key finding was that special school is considered the type of provision which can best provide what parents consider inclusive education- particularly the sense of belonging which so parents considered a key part of high-quality, inclusive education. A shared academic curriculum in a mainstream school was not considered to be inclusive education.

This appears to be reflective of a definition of inclusion which is quite distinct from the 'under one roof' interpretation of Warnock (1978), and closer to the more recent views of Warnock (2010) of seeking out the educational setting which suits a child's needs best. As one participant suggested in Phase 2, mainstream and special schools appears to have different interpretations and implementations of inclusive practice.

In addition to this, some parents indicated that factors such as the behaviour of their child, as well as the resources and environment rendered mainstream school inappropriate, leading to special school being favoured. Some parents appeared to have decided on the incompatibility of their child for a school, rather than requiring the mainstream school to adapt to meet need (this is explored in greater detail in the 'Consideration of frameworks' section, below).

Summary of key findings

- The distinction here between parents having a real choice (conceptualised by the number of choices available) and a hard choice (conceptualised as a dilemma- in the present study the choices were made more difficult by mainstream school being *more* appropriate, not less). This research suggests that importance of parents feeling that they have options to choose from but also that they are clear in their mind over the appropriateness of special school when making the choice.

- In terms of improving the system, parents indicated that they wanted a greater number of school options, greater clarity of information around choice and increased support. On this latter point, parents wanted professional support to ensure their options were clear but were unclear as to who this professional would be.

- Finally, the parents in this research presented a clear view of inclusion which is contrary to the dominant 'inclusion as all children under one roof' philosophy (Warnock, 1978). Accessing a shared academic curriculum was not considered to be effective inclusion for these parents. Instead, this was for their child to feel a sense of belongingness and acceptance in their setting, and to be accessing an appropriate curriculum for their needs. Parents felt that this was best achieve in separate, specialist provision. Parents also prioritise their children socially mixing with non-SEN children, and sought opportunities to do this outside of the child's school setting.

Consideration of frameworks

Models of disability and approaches to inclusive practice.

      Expectations of mainstream school. The distinction of Runswick-Cole (2008) around how medical and social model thinking may inform parents' decision-making was referred to previously during the discussion sections for both Phase 1 and 2. One of the difficulties within the present research is to separate within-child thinking from assumptions around mainstream school; whether participants feel that the child's needs are too great for mainstream school, or that mainstream school cannot offer the level of support (including an appropriate environment and staff expertise). Across both phases, there were indeed examples of parents considering their child's needs as significant, but within the context of what they feel mainstream school can offer (reflective of both social and medical model thinking). It is noteworthy that participants Fiona and Grace (the participants whose children had physical disabilities and learning difficulties and may be considered to have the highest needs of those in Phase 2, indicated that both level of their children's needs were too great for mainstream, and that the environment/resources were not appropriate:

> 'I think because his needs are so profound I just think going to a school where all the other children are running around and they're all talking to each other and their needs are so much different to my son's I think it could have been quite an isolating environment for him, no matter how many staff you have in place to help him integrate and all of that. He's always going to be so much different to everybody else and I think a special school is much more inclusive for the level of need that he has'. (Grace)

I would argue that parents' views are shaped by their previous experiences. The sample for this research were parents who have chosen special school for their child (some of them several years previously)- for some of these parents, this may have come from a shift in their thinking which they feel requires justification. The commonly-held belief in this research, that a child's needs are too great for mainstream school can be interpreted in two ways:

1) that mainstream schools are insufficient to meet need or;

2) that school with specialist resources and expertise are more appropriate to meet need

What is clear from the research is that parents in Phase 2 of the study indicated that special school was enabling for their child, both in the sense of inclusion academically (through for example, individualised, appropriate curricula) and socially (through for example social and

community involvement). These aspects are important to parents and it is generally special school for them which provides these where mainstream school cannot. As stated, when considering 'dilemmas of difference' (Minow, 1990; Norwich, 2013), these parents appeared to consider the recognition of difference in their child as enabling, as it resulted in access to more appropriate provision. The research also suggests that these views are robust (given parents in Phase 2 were generally confident that they had chosen an appropriate setting for their child).

Although the decision-making process can be seen as occurring over a relatively short time period, the underlying views of parents will develop over a longer time period. Participants Haley and Andrew (who wanted to feel that the child's previous mainstream school had put everything they could in place, before deciding whether special school should be considered) are an example of how views can change based on experience, and be shaped by the process and professionals around parents. Runswick-Cole (2008) refers to a change of parents' preferences when mainstream schools was considered to have been unsuccessful. Reindal (2010) refers to the 'necessarily evil' of special schools, given mainstream schools are unable to meet the needs of all children. The present research raises questions over what should be expected of mainstream schools, so as to determine whether they have 'failed' in their provision, or whether it is beyond the scope of what should be expected from a mainstream school. Local authorities produce guidance to school around expectations for inclusive provision (sometimes referred to as 'universal provision') which they are expected to provide for every child. However, I would argue that it can still be unclear for schools the level of need they are expected to support (even with funding provided through an EHCP).

The majority of pupils with an EHCP do not attend a special school- as of January 2019 in the UK, 43.8% of children with EHCPs attend state-funded special schools, and 1.3% attend non-maintained special schools (DfE, 2019b). Since 2010, those attending state-funded secondary schools has decreased considerably, whereas those in state-funded primary and special schools has risen (the former only marginally). This could be reflective of the trend that children attend primary mainstream schools with support that is either not sufficient to meet need or cannot be replicated in secondary school, resulting in a move to special school for the secondary years.

It is also of interest to consider the parents who specifically cited the needs of their child as reasons for mainstream school being inappropriate (particularly those in Phase 2 that felt their child would have been disruptive to others in mainstream) in light of the Children and

Families Act (2014): In Section 39 (subsection 4), it is outlined that the local authority must ensure an EHCP names a requested school unless:

(a)the school or other institution requested is unsuitable for the age, ability, aptitude or special educational needs of the child or young person concerned, or

(b)the attendance of the child or young person at the requested school or other institution would be incompatible with—

(i)the provision of efficient education for others, or

(ii)the efficient use of resources.

These latter two exceptions (section 4b) are applicable here; I would argue that some of the parents consider the behaviour of their child to be incompatible with a mainstream environment and they are concerned around the wider impact this could have on the education of others. Similarly, multiple participants did not feel that resources and/or environment were adequate to meet their child's level of need. In this sense, parents appear to have made the decision around incompatibility (due to their child's needs and/or behaviour and the mainstream resources and environment) without requiring mainstream schools to consider how they may accommodate such needs.

The importance of professional advice*. Denison et al (2006) argues that the discourse of medical model language implies the need for outside, multi-agency teams. This research suggests that a significant relationship between professional support and feeling well-informed for all parents. However, less than a third of participants indicated that expert advice influenced their final decision (Phase 1). This may imply that professional support is an important part of the process but does have a bearing on parent's final choice of school.

As previously stated, the participants in the present study gave a range of responses implying both medical and social model thinking. Phase 2 particularly demonstrated that for participants with children with physical needs (participants Fiona and Grace), they still felt that their options were not clear (but spoke positively about support from school staff and external professionals). Hence, professional advice would still seem to be important in these cases. Given only one participant (Verity) in Phase 2 implied that mainstream school could have been appropriate for her child, the research was not able to indicate the importance of professionals particularly for these 'borderline' parents- support from professionals and school staff was referred to positively, but it was not clear whether this was integral to their decision to ultimately choose specialist provision.

Ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006)

The majority of parents (Phase 1) felt that they did not consider themselves to have had a 'real choice'. The significant relationship between parents considering themselves to have had a 'real choice' and having a greater number of schools (more than 1) to choose from, suggests that constraints within the macrosystem of a child are an important of the decision-making process.

Parents' constructions of inclusive education (particularly in the Phase 2 data), imply that a range of factors within the child's microsystem (for example, a social group at special school and appropriate curriculum) and mesosystem (for example, socialising with non-SEN pupils and integrating into the community) are important to them. Similarly, parents' overall reasons for choosing school reflected systems closer to the child (for example, school atmosphere and a caring approach to pupils). Prior to this research, I considered that the choices of parents would be less concerned with the microsystem and more concerned with the interaction of systems more remote to them. Parents in this research seemed to strongly consider the lived experience of their child and what this might look like in the classroom, which informed their decisions at a macrosystemic level.

There appears to be a tension here around choice, stemming from the number of schools available. However, it is unclear the degree to which parents' views around high-quality inclusive education inform the number of options they consider to be feasible, or conversely whether availability of schools (and the final choice of school) informs views around inclusive education (I.e. parents with a narrower view of what high-quality inclusive education could be- such as special school only- are more likely to consider themselves to have fewer options. However, some of these options, such as a co-located special school, could inform subsequent views around inclusive education, as was the case for one participant in Phase 2.)

   Time. The research findings suggest that there can be several changes occurring in parents' thinking over time- conceptualised by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) as the 'chronosystem':

   Accepting difference. Firstly, some parents in the research indicated that choosing special school involves a process of accepting difference, for example:

'It was a very emotive process. There is a huge lack of understanding how hard this is for parents. More stress upon the existing stress, plus an element of grief that the school life you always imagined (and possible see happening with siblings) does not and will never exist' (Participant 25, Phase 1)

This quote particularly emphasises the change in thinking which this parent conceptualised as 'grief'; I would argue that this change of expectations is likely to have taken place over a considerable amount of time.

Changes to need. Secondly, there was reference to changes in a child's need over time:

'We did look at (school) because at one point we did definitely think that was going to be right but then (child) basically made that decision by starting to crawl …So things changed quite abruptly actually so we they were really like "no we're going to go to (school)" and then, because it just seemed absolutely perfect, but then we changed our minds really quite quickly' (Fiona, Phase 2)

This is reflective of the findings of Tobin et al (2012), that parents could be in denial about their child's needs, learn that their child's needs were different to what they had first assumed (as in the case above), or changed their mind toward their child requiring a specialist setting. The needs and progression of children with SEN is changeable over time (hence the need for an annual review process)-, particularly children with life-limiting or degenerative conditions. Therefore, it can be expected that the views of parents will change also (Tobin et al, 2012; Runswick-Cole, 2008; Mann et al, 2018), and that acceptance of these changes can be a difficult process.

Availability of schools. The Phase 1 qualitative data indicated a relationship between parents feeling that they had a real choice and the number of schools available to them. Parents most-commonly reported that they had one school to choose from. Some of the parents in the research were successful in their decision and were able to get their first choice. It is important to recognise that if the school they had chosen had not been available, the process could have been very different for these parents, especially if they only had one school which was available and/or preferred. Schools, their availability and the needs they cater for will change over time. Given the recent pledge to increase the numbers of specialist provision nationwide, it would be of interest to see whether the proposed increase in schools (if it occurs) leads to changes in parents feeling that they had a 'real choice' of schools.

Strengths and limitations of the research

Strengths

One of the key strengths of the present research was the use of a two-phase, mixed methods design. This allowed for a broader investigation of parent views throughout the local authorities, with a more focused investigation of a small number of parents, focusing on specific features within their Phase 1 responses. Creswell and Clarke (2011) refer to several advantages of using mixed methods, such as being able 'to use all of the tools of data collection available' (p12) and answer questions that cannot be answered using singular (quantitative or qualitative) approaches alone. In the case of the present research, mixed methods (and the explanatory sequential design employed) enabled a shift of focus for the Phase 2 enquiry, which looked in detail at successful aspects of parent choice and what facilitated these, as well as how parents would like to improve the system of choice.

Related to this, I would argue that a further strength of the research was the detailed analysis of interview responses in Phase 2. I felt that it was important not only to analyse the responses of the whole Phase 2 sample for common themes (with a focus on specific research questions), but also to cross-analyse specific participants, on the basis of their responses (to the questionnaire and interview). Areas of convergence and divergence were identified within Phase 2 (between participants who had different experiences of special school choice) as well as across Phases 1 and 2.

Overall, the parents engaged with both phases of the research to provide rich, authentic data regarding their experiences of special school choice, views around inclusive practices and suggestion to improve the system of choice for prospective parents.

Limitations

In terms of limitations, the research did not generate a large sample size (Phase 1). I consider this largely due to the small number of schools which engaged with the research (only 6 schools out of 18 special schools contacted). Given over half of the participants heard about the research through their child's school, greater engagement from school headteachers would likely have increased the sample size significantly. Whereas participants from all three localities participated, this was unevenly distributed, with one of the local authorities only making up 8% of the sample (4 participants). This meant that meaningful comparisons between location were not possible.

121

I had also hoped that a comparison between different types of child need (and possible relationships between these and experiences of school choice) would be possible ,based around the four areas of need listed in the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015)- Communication and Interaction, Cognition and learning, Social, emotional and mental health, and Sensory and physical needs. However, the data parents provided was often complex, with conditions reported which could not be clearly categorised (for example, sensory/physical conditions that are likely to impact on other areas of SEN, but the degree to which is not clear). In order to investigate type of need accurately, the data collection tools may have to be adapted (for example, to a forced choice question with limited options). Alternatively, a separate research project could be carried out focusing on one type of need only (replicated for comparison with other types of needs- see 'Future directions for research')

Within the sample for Phase 2, only one participant clearly suggested that mainstream would have been appropriate for her child. 11% of Phase 1 participants indicated that mainstream school could have been wholly appropriate for their child (with the right level of support). Sampling a greater number of participants with this view for Phase 2 would have allowed for a more detailed investigation of the factors underlying this viewpoint, but more importantly, the reasoning behind special school choice despite this view.

The difficulty of ascertaining the causal relationship between school choice and ideology (whether availability of schools- and school chosen- informs views around inclusive education or vice-versa) was raised in the discussion. The inclusion criteria- that the children of the parents sampled had to have been attending a special school for at least 12 months- was given so that parents were in a position to be able to reflect on their experiences, increasing the likelihood that ongoing issues around choice would have been resolved. However, this also meant that parent's ideology could have been shaped by the decisions they had previously made. As Runswick-Cole (2008) states: ' It may also be that parents' choice of school is not only influenced by models of disability, but that parents' choice of school, in turn, constructs the model of disability with which they identify' (p.179). The way in which to explore this in future research is suggested (see 'Future directions for research').

Implications

National policy and practice

The present research has several implications for changes to national and local policies and practices. Concerning the findings around 'real choice' (relating to the number of schools to choose from)- many parents in the present study reported having 0 or 1 schools as choices, implying a possible lack of awareness of schools and/or the feeling that many available options were inappropriate. The absence of the local offer from the responses was stark- it is important that the local offer is utilised as intended by the Children and Families Act (2014) and a useful tool for parents to understand their services and school options fully. Promoting this may be key to supporting parents and reducing reliance on professional support.

However, the research also suggests that some parents experience a difficult choice around special school, which can be compounded when mainstream school is considered feasible for their child. In this sense, I would argue that the local offer may be insufficient to give parents a clear understanding of their child's needs and which setting may be most appropriate. The role of professionals is discussed further in the following section.

Related to this, the research suggests that parents should be supported in their understanding of the expectations of a mainstream school. Some parents appeared to decide that mainstream school was inappropriate for their child without challenging the mainstream school to consider how they could meet their needs. I would argue that it is important that parents are aware of the legislation around choice, and that schools are able to clearly justify if a school choice is inappropriate and/or they are unable to meet need (as stipulated in the Children and Families Act, 2014). It is the duty of local authorities to ensure that expectations of universal provision are clearly communicated to all parents.

EP practice

The findings have a number of implications for the practice of EPs (as well as raising a number of questions), particularly around the role of the EP for a) supporting parents and b) supporting children and young people with SEN.

Supporting parents. Parents reported wanting greater clarity around the options which were available to them- one parent suggested that she would have liked the support of an EP with this (see Phase 2 findings and discussion). As discussed, this is not something

which is regarded as part of EP role (Cameron, 2006; Fallon et al, 2010). I would argue that EPs have a responsibility to remain needs-focused, and to become involved in decision-making around school placement may be considered at odds with the impartiality expected within the profession. However, given the level of 1:1 work carried out by EPs with parents through consultation, it is important that EPs act in an advisory capacity, signposting parents towards appropriate sources of information and supporting parents to be aware of how different types of provision are equipped to meet different needs. As previously stated, local SENDIASS may be best placed to offer advice around the specific schools which may be available locally to parents (and feasible), and guidance around the stages of the decision-making process.

In addition to supporting parents directly, EPs may have a role in research, assessing how they consider their roles within this process. It would be of interest to collect this information on a national level, to establish a) whether EPs feel they can and/or do support parents considering special school for their child and b) whether this support should be a focus for local authorities and EP services going forward.

Supporting children and young people with SEN. The most effective way for EPs to support parents during the decision-making process may be through their work with children and young people and schools, in promoting inclusive practices. Hardman and Worthington (2000) examined the views of EPs towards inclusion, and the hypothetical and ideal placement of children with SEN (based on a number of vignettes). The majority of preferred placements were 'mainstream with support', with only 10% in special school. The exception to this was for children with profound and multiple learning needs, for whom special school was the preferred choice. The authors suggest that this is indicative of EPs having a 'pro-inclusion philosophy'. More recently however, Gibbs (2018) has argued that 'educational psychologists have not always done enough to oppose segregation or argue for inclusion' (p.93).

These considerations are important in light of the present findings. Firstly, the high number of parents indicating that mainstream school was wholly inappropriate for their child, may be considered at odds with the 'pro-inclusion philosophy' of EPs (Hardman and Worthington, 2000). Secondly, parents indicated that a sense of belongingness, social acceptance and an individualised curriculum were the most important aspects of 'high-quality, inclusive education', with references made (across both phases) to inclusion as supporting both social and academic needs. These factors should be given clear consideration when planning the provision for children with SEN in mainstream school, particularly those who are finding the

academic and/or social environments in mainstream school to be difficult to manage, and/or whose parents are considering special school due to a perception that mainstream school is not meeting need. It is noteworthy after all, that the majority of parents in the present research had children that were in mainstream placements, prior to moving to specialist provision.

To fulfil the role of arguing for inclusion (Gibbs, 2018), it is important that EPs support children and young people in promoting a sense of belongingness in mainstream schools (through an awareness of the child's academic *and* social needs, even if one of these is not considered their primary need), and use their unique position to be an advocate for the child in promoting inclusive practice and best possible outcomes for the child.

I would also argue that it is important for EPs to facilitate training and discussion with school staff around definitions of inclusive practice. In light of the present findings (particularly around parents' conceptualisation of inclusion), this training should support mainstream schools' understanding of circumstances where it may be considered 'more inclusive' for a child to be accessing separate, specialist provision and to facilitate parents to express their views around this.

Future directions for research

The future directions for research are largely based on the strengths and limitations, as well as prominent findings which bear further investigation.

Firstly, it would be interesting to replicate the study in a location with a higher population density and number of special schools, such as London. Parents considering themselves to have had a 'real choice' was related to the number of schools they had to choose from. It would be interesting to see whether there would be a similar relationship for parents with a greater number of options. Similarly, focusing the study on one type of need only (and then replicating the study for other types of need) would provide a useful comparison as to how a child's type and level of need interacts with school choice. Mawene and Bal (2018) argue that these two factors- geography and type of disability- are important factors to consider in future research around decision making; 'geography' in the broader sense of comparisons between local communities (race, class and history), not just in the context of proximity to schools.

Secondly, further research could involve parents at the time of (or just before) making the decision around school placement. As stated, it was difficult to ascertain whether availability of schools (and type of school finally chosen) informs views around inclusive education or vice-versa. Sampling at this time would allow for the views which informed the decision to be investigated accurately, as opposed to views which have been possibly later shaped by parents' experiences of special school. This would also allow for an understanding of the emotional toll which decision-making can take on parents (suggested within the present research), as well as perhaps a greater understanding of the changes in perspectives which occur for parents who initially consider mainstream school to be appropriate for their child (and why some ultimately chose special school).

Finally, it would be a valuable insight to research the child's perspectives on school choice. Although child voice may have been central to many of the decisions made in the present research, only one parent (Phase 2) indicated that their child had chosen their school. As stated, the changes to children's academic and social experiences were met positively by participants (Phase 2). It would be of interest to see whether this interpretation is similar for the child. I would argue that academic inclusion (an appropriate curriculum and differentiation) is something which can be best informed by educational professionals, however the success of social inclusion is perhaps best judged by the child themselves and their sense of belongingness. This research could be important in informing both how the voice of the child can inform school choice (particularly for those with profound and multiple needs), as well as understanding the nature of the transition from mainstream to special school.

Concluding comments

Mann et al (2018) proposed the following dilemma which arose from their research: 'Do families remain in regular schools thereby accepting the potential stress associated with this choice but embedding an expectation for inclusion? Or do they move to special school, hoping to avoid strain but releasing regular schools from their obligations?' (p. 190). The assumption here is that inclusion is equatable to attendance in a mainstream school. Parents in the present research suggested that special school provides their child with a type of inclusion which they did not have in mainstream school. It may not be the case that parents are choosing special school to avoid the 'strain' of pushing for inclusive practices within mainstream school, but that they are seeking a more appropriate, inclusive education for their child in special school. Indeed, more than a third of participants indicated that they considered 'high-quality inclusive education provision' to mean 'special school only'.

126

Related to this is the 'capability approach' to inclusive education. Terzi (2014) argues for an 'equality of capabilities' approach, rather than equality based on distribution of resources. 'Capabilities' are described by Terzi (2014) as opportunities to achieve 'valued functionings', these being 'modes of doing and being, or actions and states that people want to achieve and engage in' (p.485). The key implication of a capability approach is that quality of education and child wellbeing is prioritised over the location (and type of placement). One participant's response from Phase 1 is particularly relevant here:

> 'For whose benefit would the 'inclusive education' be? In what way would it be 'high quality' compared to specialist education with suitably experienced and specialised teachers and TAs? What would be the point of trying to teach my son about the Romans for example when he cannot write his own name or understand the difference between today and tomorrow?'. (Participant 40, Phase 1)

This parent's concept of inclusive education is one of a mainstream approach which they feel would not provide their child with opportunities to achieve valued functionings. Rather than questions around the appropriateness of mainstream or specialist provision, the capability approach may provide an alternative framework for understanding the importance of special schools to parents, for enabling equality of capabilities and allowing children and young people to maximally achieve.

Finally, Runswick-Cole (2008) found that parents' (of children with SEN in mainstream and special school) stories around inclusion fell into three categories: parents wanting nothing but mainstream school, parents initially wanting mainstream school but changing their preference later, and parents that have always wanted their child to go to special school.

However, the quote below represents a further category:

> 'Just to have been told that you've got a choice and to have people telling you, guiding you because as I say when you have a special needs child you don't know where you're going. You're feeling around in the dark, you don't know how things work and who you are supposed to be talking to, and what you're supposed to be talking to them about or anything. It's something you've got to work out for yourself. And there was no guidance really except, as I say, when I went to the school… and they then became very helpful. It was by chance in a way that one went'. (Martha, Phase 2)

This quote illustrates the point that some parents of children with SEN are unsure of the best provision for their child and may not have a firm position regarding inclusion. The research suggests that previous experience of mainstream school can shape these views, and that professional support is key to parents feeling well-informed. Whilst I would argue parent should always be considered the experts of their children, it is important to remember that parents should not automatically be considered experts of the systems of school choice.

It is important that school choice is not considered to be an isolated event, but instead a complex process which over time, informs and is informed by underlying views around inclusion and high-quality education.

References

Alexiadou, N., Dovemark, M., Erixon-Arreman, I., Holm, A. S., Lundahl, L., & Lundström, U.
(2016). Managing inclusion in competitive school systems: The cases of Sweden and
England. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, *11*(1), 13-33.
https://doi.org/10.1177/1745499916631065

Anderson, L. W., Jacobs, J., Schramm, S., & Splittgerber, F. (2000). School transitions:
beginning of the end or a new beginning?. *International journal of educational
research*, *33*(4), 325-339. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0883-0355(00)00020-3

Angus, L. (2015). School choice: Neoliberal education policy and imagined futures. *British
Journal of Sociology of Education*, *36*(3), 395-413. https://doi.org/
10.1080/01425692.2013.823835

Bagley, C., Woods, P. A., & Woods, G. (2001). Implementation of school choice policy:
interpretation and response by parents of students with special educational
needs. *British Educational Research Journal*, *27*(3), 287-311.
https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920120048313

Bailey, S., & Baines, E. (2012). The impact of risk and resiliency factors on the adjustment of
children after the transition from primary to secondary school. *Educational and Child
Psychology*, *29*(1), 47.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research
in Psychology, 3 (2). pp. 77-101. http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

British Psychological Society. (2014). *Code of human research ethics*.
https://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/bps-code-human-research-ethics-
2nd-edition-2014

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development*. Harvard University Press.

Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. A. (2006). The Bioecological Model of Human
Development. In R. M. Lerner & W. Damon (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology:
Theoretical models of human development* (pp. 793-828). John Wiley & Sons Inc.

Bloyce, J., & Frederickson, N. (2012). Intervening to improve the transfer to secondary school. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, *28*(1), 1-18. https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2011.639345

Cameron, R. J. (2006). Educational psychology: The distinctive contribution. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, *22*(4), 289-304. https://doi.org/10.1080/02667360600999393

Country Digest. (2020). *English counties by population and area.* https://countrydigest.org/ english-counties-by-population-and-area/

Creswell, J. W., & Clark, V. L. P. (2008). *The mixed methods reader.* Sage Publications.

Creswell, J. W., & Clark, V. L. P. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research.* Sage publications.

Dann, R. (2011). Secondary transition experiences for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Conditions (ASCs). *Educational Psychology in Practice*, *27*(3), 293-312. https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2011.603534

Dennison, A., McBay, C., & Shaldon, C. (2006). Every team matters: The contribution educational psychology can make to effective teamwork. *Educational and Child Psychology*, *23*(4), 80.

Department for Education. (2011) *Support and Aspiration: A New Approach to Special Educational Needs and Disability.* https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ support-and-aspiration-a-new-approach-to-special-educational-needs-and-disability-consultation

Department for Education (2014, September 4). *New curriculum will make education system 'envy of the world.* https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-curriculum-will-make-education-system-envy-of-the-world

Department for Education. (2015). *Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0to 25 years.* https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/ uploads/ attachment_data/file/398815/SEND_Code_of_Practice_January_2015.pdf

Department for Education. (2017). *Experiences of Education, Health and Care plans.* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachm

ent_data/file/709743/Experiences_of_EHC_plans__A_survey_of_parents_and_youn
g_people.pdf

Department for Education. (2019a, March 11). *Press release: Thousands of places created in new special free schools*. https://www.gov.uk/government/news/thousands-of-places-created-in-new-special-free-schools

Department for Education. (2019b). Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2019. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2019

Evangelou, M., Taggart, B., Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., & Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2008). *What makes a successful transition from primary to secondary school?* Department for Children, Schools & Families Research Report No. DCSF-RR019. DCSF.

Fallon, K., Woods, K., & Rooney, S. (2010). A discussion of the developing role of educational psychologists within Children's Services. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, *26*(1), 1-23. https://doi.org/10.1080/02667360903522744

Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2001). Access to the core curriculum: Critical ingredients for student success. *Remedial and Special education*, *22*(3), 148-157. https://doi.org/10.1177/074193250102200303

Galton, M. J., Gray, J., & Rudduck, J. (1999). *The impact of school transitions and transfers on pupil progress and attainment*. DfEE.

Gibb, K., Tunbridge, D., Chua, A., & Frederickson, N. (2007). Pathways to inclusion: Moving from special school to mainstream. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, *23*(2), 109-127. https://doi.org/10.1080/02667360701320770

Gibbs, S. (2018). The immorality of education: A position paper for educational psychologists. *Educational and Child Psychology*, *35*(3), 86-96.

Goodenow, C. (1993). The psychological sense of school membership among adolescents: Scale development and educational correlates. *Psychology in the Schools, 30*(1), 79-

90. https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6807(199301)30:1<79::AID-PITS2310300113>3.0.CO;2-X

Gorard, S. (2014). The link between Academies in England, pupil outcomes and local patterns of socio-economic segregation between schools. *Research Papers in Education*, *29*(3), 268-284. https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2014.885726

Haegele, J. A., & Hodge, S. (2016). Disability discourse: Overview and critiques of the medical and social models. *Quest*, 68(2), 193-206. https://doi.org/10.1080/00336297.2016.1143849

Hagerty, B. M., Lynch-Sauer, J., Patusky, K. L., Bouwsema, M., & Collier, P. (1992). Sense of belonging: A vital mental health concept. *Archives of psychiatric nursing*, *6*(3), 172-177. https://doi.org/10.1016/0883-9417(92)90028-h

Hardman, M., & Worthington, J. (2000). Educational Psychologists' orientation to inclusion and assumptions about children's learning. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, *16*(3), 349-360. https://doi.org/10.1080/713666082

HM Government (2010). *Equality Act 2010*. http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents

HM Government. (2014). *Children and Families Act 2014*. The Stationery Office.

Hodson, P., Baddeley, A., Laycock, S., & Williams, S. (2005). Helping secondary schools to be more inclusive of year 7 pupils with SEN. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, *21*(1), 53-67. https://doi.org/10.1080/02667360500035207

House of Commons Education and Skills Committee (2006). *Special Educational Needs Third Report of Session 2005–06 (vol.2)*. https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm 200506/cmselect/cmeduski/478/478ii.pdf

House of Commons Education Committee (2019). Special educational needs and disabilities first report of session 2019-20. https://publications.parliament.uk /pa/cm201919/cmselect/cmeduc/20/20.pdf

Howe, K. R. (1988). Against the quantitative-qualitative incompatibility thesis or dogmas die hard. *Educational researcher*, *17*(8), 10-16. https://doi.org/10.3102/ 0013189X017008010

Hsieh, H. F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative health research*, *15*(9), 1277-1288. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687

Hughes, G. (2011). Towards a personal best: A case for introducing ipsative assessment in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, *36*(3), 353-367. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2010.486859

Jenkinson, J. C. (1998). Parent choice in the education of students with disabilities. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, *45*(2), 189-202. https://doi.org/10.1080/1034912980450205

Jindal-Snape, D., Douglas, W., Topping, K. J., Kerr, C., & Smith, E. F. (2006). Autistic Spectrum Disorders and Primary-Secondary Transition. *International Journal of Special Education*, *21*(2), 18-31.

Johnson, R. B. (2017). Dialectical pluralism: A metaparadigm whose time has come. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, *11*(2), 156-173. https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689815607692

Johnson, R. B., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2004). Mixed methods research: A research paradigm whose time has come. *Educational researcher*, *33*(7), 14-26. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X033007014

Kendall, L., & Taylor, E. (2016). 'We can't make him fit into the system': parental reflections on the reasons why home education is the only option for their child who has special educational needs. *Education 3-13*, *44*(3), 297-310. https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2014.974647

Landsman, G. (2005). Mothers and models of disability. *Journal of Medical Humanities*, *26*(2), 121-139.

Lauchlan, F., & Greig, S. (2015). Educational inclusion in England: origins, perspectives and current directions. *Support for learning*, *30*(1), 69-82. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9604.12075

Lightfoot, L., & Bond, C. (2013). An exploration of primary to secondary school transition planning for children with Down's syndrome. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, *29*(2), 163-179. https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2013.800024

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (2019). *Not going to plan? Education, Health and Care plans two years on. https://www.lgo.org.uk/assets /attach/5693/EHCP-2019-vfC.pdf*

Mack, L. (2010). *The Philosophical Underpinnings of Educational Research*. https://secure.apu.ac.jp/rcaps/uploads/fckeditor/publications/polyglossia/ Polyglossia_V19_Lindsay.pdf

Mann, G. (2016). From here to there and back again: the story of a mother, her son, disability, and school choice. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *20*(9), 909-920. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2015.1122842

Mann, G., Cuskelly, M., & Moni, K. (2015). Choosing a school: parental decision-making when   special schools are an option. *Disability & Society*, *30*(9), 1413-1427. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2015.1108182

Mann, G., Cuskelly, M., & Moni, K. (2018). An Investigation of Parents' Decisions to Transfer Children From Regular to Special Schools. *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities*. https://doi.org/10.1111/jppi.12238

Maras, P., & Aveling, E. L. (2006). Students with special educational needs: transitions from primary to secondary school. *British Journal of Special Education*, *33*(4), 196-203. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8578.2006.00439.x

Mawene, D., & Bal, A. (2018). Factors Influencing Parents' Selection of Schools for Children with Disabilities: A Systematic Review of the Literature. *International Journal of Special Education*, *33*(2), 313-329.

Maxwell, J. A. (2011). *A realist approach for qualitative research*. Sage.

Maxwell, J. A., & Mittapalli, K. (2010). Realism as a stance for mixed methods research. *Handbook of mixed methods in social & behavioral research*, 145-168. https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781506335193.n6

Minnis, M., Seymour, K. and Schagen, I. (1998) *National Results of Years 3, 4 and 5 Optional Tests*. NFER.

Minow, M. (1990) *Making all the Difference: Inclusion, Exclusion and American Law*. Cornell University Press.

Mustafa, R. F. (2011). The POE Ms of Educational Research: A Beginners' Concise Guide. *International Education Studies*, *4*(3), 23-30.

Norwich, B. (2013). *Addressing tensions and dilemmas in inclusive education: Living with uncertainty*. Routledge.

Ofsted. (2015). *Key Stage 3: the wasted years?* https://www.gov.uk/govern ment/publications/key-stage-3-the-wasted-years

Ofsted. (2006). *Inclusion: does it matter where pupils are taught?* https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/6001/1/Inclusion%20does%20it%20matter%20where%20pupils %20are%20taught%20%28pdf%20format%29%20.pdf

Ofsted. (2017). *Annual Report 2016/17: education, children's services and skills*. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-annual-report-201617-education- childrens-services-and-skills

Osburn, J. (2006). An overview of social role valorization theory. *The SRV Journal, 1*(1), 4- 13.

Parsons, S., Lewis, A., & Ellins, J. (2009). The views and experiences of parents of children with autistic spectrum disorder about educational provision: comparisons with parents of children with other disabilities from an online survey. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, *24*(1), 37-58. https://doi.org/ 10.1080/08856250802596790

Reindal, S. (2010). What is the purpose? Reflections on inclusion and special education from a capability perspective. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 25, 1, 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1080/08856250903450806

Rosen-Webb, S. M. (2011). Nobody tells you how to be a SENCo. *British Journal of Special Education*, *38*(4), 159-168. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8578.2011.00524.x

Rowe, E. E., & Windle, J. (2012). The Australian middle class and education: A small-scale study of the school choice experience as framed by 'My School' within inner city families. *Critical Studies in Education*, *53*(2), 137-151. https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2012.672327

Runswick-Cole, K. (2008). Research section: Between a rock and a hard place: Parents' attitudes to the inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream and special schools. *British Journal of Special Education*, *35*(3), 173-180. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8578.2008.00390.x

Schoger, K. D. (2006). Reverse Inclusion: Providing Peer Social Interaction Opportunities to Students Placed in Self-Contained Special Education Classrooms. *Teaching exceptional children plus*, *2*(6), n6.

Shakespeare, T. (2006). The social model of disability. *The disability studies reader*, *2*, 197-204.

Shannon-Baker, P. (2016). Making paradigms meaningful in mixed methods research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, *10*(4), 319-334. https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689815575861

Smith, Jonathan A. (1995) Semi structured interviewing and qualitative analysis. In: Smith, Jonathan A. and Harre, R. and Van Langenhove, L. (eds.) *Rethinking Methods in Psychology (pp. 9-26).* Sage Publications

Staufenberg, J. (2017, March 4). Private special school places cost £480 million per year. *Schools week*. https://schoolsweek.co.uk/private-special-school-places-cost-480-million-per-year/

Tashakkori, A. & Teddlie, C. (2003) *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioural research*. Sage.

Taylor-Brown, M. (2012). How did young people identified as presenting with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties experience a person-centred transition review meeting? *Educational and Child Psychology*, *29*(3), 54.

Terzi, L. (2014) Reframing inclusive education: educational equality as capability equality. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 44, 4, 479-493. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2014.960911

Tobin, H., Staunton, S., Mandy, W., Skuse, D., Helligreil, J., Baykaner, O., Anderson, S., & Murin, M. (2012). A qualitative examination of parental experiences of the transition to mainstream secondary school for children with an autism spectrum disorder. *Educational and Child Psychology*, *29*(1), 75.

UPIAS. (1974). *Union of the Physically Impaired against Segregation: Policy Statement*. http://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/files/library/UPIAS-UPIAS.pdf

Vaz, S., Falkmer, M., Ciccarelli, M., Passmore, A., Parsons, R., Black, M., Cuomo, B., Tan, T., & Falkmer, T. (2015). Belongingness in early secondary school: Key factors that primary and secondary schools need to consider. *PloS one*, *10*(9), 1-27. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0136053

Warnock, M. (1978). *Report of the committee of enquiry into the education of handicapped children and young people*. http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/warnock/warnock1978.pdf

Warnock, M. (2010). Special educational needs: A new look in L. Terzi (ed) *Special Educational Needs: A New Look (11-45)*. Continuum.

West, P., Sweeting, H., & Young, R. (2010). Transition matters: pupils' experiences of the primary–secondary school transition in the West of Scotland and consequences for well-being and attainment. *Research papers in education*, *25*(1), 21-50. https://doi.org/10.1080/02671520802308677

Wolfensberger, W. 2013. *A Brief Introduction to Social Role Valorization: A high Order Concept for Addressing the Plight of Societally Devalued People, and for Structuring Human Services.* (4th ed). Valor Press.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Certificate of ethical approval

UNIVERSITY OF **EXETER**

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

St Luke's Campus
Heavitree Road
Exeter UK EX1 2LU

http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/education/

CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

<u>Title of Project:</u>   **An exploration of experiences of parents when choosing special school placements**

<u>Researcher(s) name:</u> David Satherley

<u>Supervisor(s):</u>   Professor Brahm Norwich
Lata Ramoutar
Margie Tunbridge

<u>This project has been approved for the period</u>

From: 13/03/2019
To: 30/08/2020

<u>Ethics Committee approval reference:</u>   D1819-035

Signature: Date: 13/02/2019
(Professor Dongbo Zhang, Graduate School of Education Ethics Officer)

Appendix 2. Ethics application form

COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

All staff and students within SSIS should use this form; those in Egenis, the Institute for Arab and Islamic Studies, Law, Politics, the Strategy & Security Institute, and Sociology, Philosophy, Anthropology should return it to ssis-ethics@exeter.ac.uk. Staff and students in the **Graduate School of Education** should use ssis-gseethics@exeter.ac.uk.

Before completing this form please read the Guidance document

which can be found at http://intranet.exeter.ac.uk/socialsciences/ethics/

Applicant details	
Name	**David Satherley**
Department	**Educational Psychology**
UoE email address	**ds536@exeter.ac.uk**
Duration for which permission is required	

Please check the meeting dates and decision information online before completing this form; your start date should be at least one month after the Committee meeting date at which your application will be considered. You should request approval for the entire period of your research activity. Students should use the anticipated date of completion of their course as the end date of their work. Please note that retrospective ethical approval will never be given.

Start date:13/03/2019	End date:30/08/2020	Date submitted:13/02/2019
Students only		

All students must discuss (face to face or via email) their research intentions with their supervisor/tutor prior to submitting an application for ethical approval. **Your application must be approved by your first or second supervisor (or dissertation supervisor/tutor) prior to submission and you MUST submit evidence of their approval with your application, e.g. a copy of an email stating their approval.**

Student number	580016869
Programme of study	**Doctor of Educational Psychology (DEdPsych)**
	If you selected 'other' from the list above please name your programme here

Name of Supervisor(s) or Dissertation Tutor	**Professor Brahm Norwich** **Lata Ramoutar** **Margie Tunbridge**
Have you attended any ethics training that is available to students?	Yes, I have taken part in ethics training at the University of Exeter **Ethics training received on the doctoral programme** 01/04/2018

Certification for all submissions
I hereby certify that I will abide by the details given in this application and that I undertake in my research to respect the dignity and privacy of those participating in this research. I confirm that if my research should change significantly I will seek advice, request approval of an amendment or complete a new ethics proposal. Any document translations used have been provided by a competent person with no significant changes to the original meaning.   **David Satherley** Double click this box to confirm certification ⊠   *Submission of this ethics proposal form confirms your acceptance of the above.*

TITLE OF YOUR PROJECT

An exploration of experiences of parents when choosing special school placements

ETHICAL REVIEW BY AN EXTERNAL COMMITTEE

No, my research is not funded by, or doesn't use data from, either the NHS or Ministry of Defence.   If you selected yes from the list above you should apply for ethics approval from the appropriate organisation (the NHS Health Research Authority or the Ministry of Defence Research Ethics Committee). You do not need to complete this form, but you must inform the Ethics Secretary of your project and your submission to an external committee.

MENTAL CAPACITY ACT 2005

No, my project does not involve participants aged 16 or over who are unable to give informed consent (e.g. people with learning disabilities

If you selected yes from the list above you should apply for ethics approval from the NHS Health Research Authority. You do not need to complete this form, but you must inform the [Ethics Secretary](#) of your project and your submission to an external committee.

SYNOPSIS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Maximum of 750 words.

The proposed study aims to to examine the views of parents of pupils in UK special schools and the extent to which they feel they had an independent, informed choice of school as well as looking in depth at how these choices are facilitated in schools (according to parental experience). The research project will form the basis for my doctoral thesis. Data collection will begin from March 2019 with the data analysis and write-up concluding in August 2020.

Previous research has indicated that the parents of those with SEND have different priorities for their children than parents of non-SEN children, more focused on the individual needs of their child and the specialist teaching and programmes offered (Bagley, Woods & Woods, 2001; Jenkinson, 1998; Mann, Cuskelly & Moni, 2018). There is also research which suggests that many parents do not feel supported or well-informed by professionals throughout this process (Mann, Cuskelly & Moni, 2015), and that the presence of special school education remains a 'necessary evil' (Reindal, 2010, p.2), due to the failures of mainstream education to accommodate a large diversity of needs. There is little direct research in the UK into process of special school selection for parents since the Children and Families Act (2014) and SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) and the introduction of the revised National Curriculum (2013). There has been little direct research in this specific area in the UK since the study of Bagley et al (2001), when curriculum design, school autonomy and the degree to which parent choice is prioritised has changed a great deal.

The overall aims of the project are as follows:

1. To examine the views of parents of pupils in special schools in the South West of England: their reasons behind choosing special school, the extent to which they feel they had an independent choice and their views on alternative provision (e.g. specialist provision within mainstream settings)
2. To examine whether parent ideology informs special school selection and to examine in depth how choices are facilitated in schools, according to parental experience.

Phase 1 will involve a survey of parents with children that have been attending a special school for at least 12 months (this timeframe is to increase the likelihood that any ongoing major issues around school placement have been resolved). Phase 1 will aim to address the following research questions:

142

- What were the overall reasons behind parents choosing special school?
- To what extent do parents feel they settled for separate provision rather than actively choosing special school education for their child? Did they experience a dilemma concerning school choice?
- Were alternative forms of education considered during the selection process? (for example, mainstream education, mainstream schools with attached resource bases or home education)
- How are parent views facilitated? Did they feel that it was person-centered with even power distribution?
- Do parents feel that their own philosophies and ideologies were listened to and taken into consideration? (this will be worded so as to be accessible to parents, asking around their underlying views, particularly based around what high-quality education and inclusion means for the child).
- Does the severity of the child's need (moderate and complex needs) impact on the experience which parents have when making a choice of schools?

Phase 2 will involve semi-structured interviews with a selection of parents from the Phase 1 sample. Participants completing the surveys will have the option to consent to be contacted for a follow-up interview to further explore their questionnaire responses. Due to the explanatory research design employed, the specific interview schedules and the prioritisation of questions will be based upon the analysis of the data in Phase 1. The semi-structured interviews will be based upon the above research questions, going into greater depth than the surveys.

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH

The research will take place in the UK.

The following sections require an assessment of possible ethical consideration in your research project. If particular sections do not seem relevant to your project please indicate this and clarify why.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research will consist of:

1. Electronic questionnaires and paper questionnaires administered to a voluntary sample of parents of special school children, across the South West (Phase 1)
2. 1:1 semi-structured interviews (a mixture of face-to-face, telephone and video calls) with a voluntary sample drawn from respondents to Phase 1 (Phase 2).

Characteristics of sample

For Phase 1, my aim is to survey as many parents as possible, however I will be seeking a sample of at least 100 parents. Although it would generate a larger sample than specified, I plan to contact 10 schools across 3 local authorities (███████████████) initially, owing to the high possibility that some of the headteachers will be unwilling to contact parents or there being a low

response from some of the schools. The sample of parents will need to have the following characteristics:

- To have a child with an Education, Health and Care plan who is attending a special school in ███████████████
- For their child to have been attending the special school for at least 12 months

I would like to survey parents from a range of areas (rural, semi-rural and urban), a range of special schools (such as day provision and residential), including parents of children and young people with different categories and different levels of need (moderate to more complex, across the four areas need in the SEND Code of Practice, [DfE, 2015]).

For Phase 2, I would like 10 participants to partake in the semi-structured interviews, to provide rich data for analysis, with 5 participants as a minimum. If there is a higher number than this volunteering, the interviewees will be purposively sampled to ensure a wide range of SEN throughout the sample (moderate to severe). For further information about recruitment, please see the section on the voluntary nature of participation below.

Expected outputs

At this stage, I would hope for the outputs of this project to include the following:

- Conference presentations
- Journal articles (both academic and practitioner)
- Presentations to professionals

Discussion of sensitive topics

For parents, the process of placing their child in special school can be a difficult experience for parents, and a sensitive topic. Please see the section on possible harm below for discussion of how I intend to minimise harm to participants.

PARTICIPANTS

I aim to survey at least 100 parents during Phase 1 of the research and conduct semi-structures interview with 10 of these participants. The information which is sent to schools (to send to parents) will be carefully worded so as to maximise the possibility of generating a sample which represents a wide range of parental viewpoints, as opposed to solely attracting those who have had negative experiences.

THE VOLUNTARY NATURE OF PARTICIPATION

Phase 1

The sample will be drawn from special schools within the ██████████████ local authorities. As parent/carer names are kept in confidence by schools, I will contact head teachers of all special schools throughout these local authorities by email, inviting them to discuss the project by phone/skype. Headteachers will be invited to distribute consent forms and information sheets to all parents; their active consent will be required to partake in the research. E-questionnaires will be sent to the schools and distributed internally via email. Printed versions of the questionnaire will also be delivered to the schools so that parents unable to access the online version will be able to partake. Should this preferred sampling method not produce sufficient participants, voluntary organisations and parent forums will also be contacted (such as the Advisory Centre for Education, 'SEN Jungle', Driver's Youth Trust, Parent Carers forums, and SENDIAS services) to generate a sample. If it is necessary *to* generate interest in the project I would also contact groups such as The South and West *Association* of Leaders in *Special Schools (SWALSS) which may be able to provide opportunities to liaise with headteachers. The information sheets will* emphasise that all participation is voluntary and consent can be withdrawn at any time. *All information from the surveys will be kept confidential and anonymised for the research purposes.*

Phase 2

Participants completing the surveys will have the option to consent to a follow-up interview to further explore their questionnaire responses. *During* Phase 2, I will ask participants whether they agree to me recording the session at the start of interviews and explain to them that they can stop the recording at any point during the session. The interviews will be anonymised and confidential. Participants will be able to withdraw from the interviews at any time.

If emailing, I will use my university email address, to preserve confidentiality and to distinguish

my professional and academic roles.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS

All participants will be able to complete the surveys in their own time. Large print questionnaires can be requested if required. There is no strict time limit for the semi-structured interviews; questions can be re-phrased by the interviewer to aid understanding and participants can be given additional time if needed.

THE INFORMED NATURE OF PARTICIPATION

There will be two separate information sheets (one for part 1 of the study, and one for part 2), and two separate consent forms (for parts 1 and 2). The information forms include the aims and purposes of the research that I will give to participants; the information sheet (for part 1) includes my contact details as well as those of my research supervisors. Only participants that indicate that they would be willing to partake in a follow-up interview will be given the information sheet and

consent form for part 2. The consent form for part 2 includes an additional section for participants' contact information so that participants can be contacted to arrange a suitable time for interview. During the interviews, if participants raise any questions (whether at that stage or before or after the interview) then I will answer them.

ASSESSMENT OF POSSIBLE HARM

The research will abide by the principles of the Code of Human Research Ethics (British Psychological Society, 2014), the HCPC Standards of Proficiency (Health and Care Professions Council, 2015) and the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2018). For the current research, particular attention is drawn to the elements of risk involved with this study (as outlined in the BPS Code), namely the with the discussion of sensitive topics being a potential source of psychological stress.

Surveys with parents (Phase 1)

Within **Phase** 1, participants will be required to reflect on their experiences of choosing their child's special school placement, which requires them to consider whether they *settled* for the current provision rather than actively it and the potential dilemmas they encountered. It is recognised that this experience may have been an upsetting one and completion of the survey may serve as a reminder of this time. Should additional support be required, participants will be given details of support services on their information sheet. All survey data will remain confidential and be anonymised. The information sheet will inform participants that they are under no obligation to submit the survey and can withdraw their information at any time.

Semi-structured interviews (Phase 2)

Within **Phase** 2, I will be asking parents to speak in detail about their experiences relating my research questions. I will ensure that all questions asked will pertain directly to my research questions; this is to preserve the integrity and rigour of the research, but also to protect myself and participants from inappropriate discussion of personal issues not relevant to the research. Participants will be made aware that they are under no obligation to answer any questions and they can withdraw from the interview at any time without explanation. Audio recordings and transcriptions from interviews will be stored securely and remain confidential. Participants identities will remain anonymous and pseudonyms will be assigned to each prior to transcription. Any identities or distinguishing characteristics revealed during the interviews will be omitted from the transcript.

As a Trainee Educational Psychologist, I regularly hold consultations with parents who can become emotional. I have experience in dealing with these situations and using appropriate strategies to support the parent. I will utilise these skills when interviewing parents in this research.

The risk of being a lone researcher

Given that the research will be conducted across four localities and parent availability for interviews may be restricted, I will need to be flexible as to where the interviews take place. This may be in the participant's home. I will ensure that I am following lone working guidance within BPS 'Practice Guidelines' (BPS, 2017). Specific protocols will be put in place to ensure my safety for home visits:

- Ensuring my supervisor knows the name and exact location of the interview.
- I will also inform a family member of the approximate location of the interview (so as to preserve confidentiality).
- I will inform my supervisor and the family member when I have entered the property.
- Each interview should take no longer than 60 minutes. I will ensure that my supervisor/family member calls me on my mobile if they have not heard from me after 2 hours from my initial call. If I do not answer that call, they will be required to call me again 30 minutes later. If I do not answer that second call, they will be required to call the police.

DATA PROTECTION AND STORAGE

The data protection and storage will be compliant within principles of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018. The consent forms and participant information sheets will also be compliant to this legislation.

I will only capture confidential information about participants on their consent forms. The data from each completed survey will be assigned a codename. All survey data (including the key to this code system) will be stored as password-protected files on the University of Exeter U-drive which will only be accessible to the researcher and research supervisors. No data will be stored on my home computers or portable devices. All paper questionnaires and consent forms obtained will be scanned and stored on the University of Exeter U-drive and shredded.

Following the interviews, each participant will assigned a pseudonym. Every effort will be made to preserve the anonymity of the parent, and child discussed. Reference to family members within the audio recordings will be replaced in transcription with a label such as 'spouse', 'brother' etc. Any further information which reveals the identity of the parent or child such as school or place names may also be changed. Any information which identifies a CYP, parent/carer or school will not be included in the research.

The information sheets explain how data will be stored and contains a data privacy notice (in accordance with the principles of GDPR and the Data Protection Act, 2018). Digital recordings will be deleted as soon as I have an authoritative transcript of the interview. I will ensure that any analysis of the data which is not stored on U drive only uses the codenames/ pseudonyms. Data that includes confidential details (including contact details) may be kept for up to 5 years so that, if necessary, I can contact participants during my doctorate. It will be destroyed as soon as my

doctorate is awarded. Anonymised data may be stored indefinitely. Data will be kept confidential unless for some reason I am required to produce it by law or something in the interview causes me concern about potential harm to participants. In the case of the latter, I will first discuss with my supervisor what, if any, further action to take. If I am able to secure funding to have interviews transcribed then I will brief the transcriber on the need to remove any identifying details and will explain to the transcriber what I mean by this (for example, names of participants).

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

I have no conflicts of interests in this research

USER ENGAGEMENT AND FEEDBACK

Given the practicalities of the research being carried out across multiple localities and its time-limited nature, this approach is not intended for the current research. However, participants will be able to request a copy of their surveys and interview transcripts. A summary of key findings will be prepared for participants and schools once the research is concluded.

INFORMATION SHEET

Participant Information Sheet- Part 1 (Questionnaires)

Title of Project: An exploration of experiences of parents when choosing special school placements

Researcher name: David Satherley

Date: 6.02.19

Invitation and brief summary:

The project aims to to look at the views of parents of pupils in UK special schools, specifically their experience of choosing a school for their child. This first part of the study is a survey which will ask parents about their reasons for choosing special school, the potential dilemmas experienced, alternative options explored, how their views were facilitated during the process and their underlying views around what a high-quality education looks like for their child. Participants will be given the opportunity to volunteer to partake in the second part of the study, which will involve follow-up interviews.

Purpose of the research:

I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of Exeter and this research forms part of my doctoral thesis.

Why have I been approached?

The research is asking parents of children that have been attending a special school for at least 12 months; it is being conducted across the ████████████████ localities.

What would taking part involve?

Participants will be emailed with a link to an e-questionnaire; they will also be able to request a paper questionnaire if they prefer. At the end of the questionnaire, participants will be given the option to consent to a follow-up interview.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

It is my hope that this research will be representative of the special school selection process across the South West and the individual experiences of parents. As a Trainee Educational Psychologist, it is also my hope that the research would also support the development of a role for Educational Psychologists to support parents and schools in this process.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

It is recognised that the experience of choosing educational provision for their child and the potential dilemmas entailed may have been an upsetting one, and completion of the surveys and interviews may serve as a reminder of this time. Should participants seek additional information and support, they will be referred to their local Special Educational Needs Advice and Support Service (SENDIAS). Contact details for these services are given overleaf.

What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?

Participants can request to withdraw their consent at any point, without reason given. Their data will then be destroyed.

How will my information be kept confidential?

The University of Exeter processes personal data for the purposes of carrying out research in the public interest. The University will endeavour to be transparent about its processing of your personal data and this information sheet should provide a clear explanation of this. If you do have any queries about the University's processing of your personal data that cannot be resolved by the research team, further information may be obtained from the University's Data Protection Officer by emailing dataprotection@exeter.ac.uk or at www.exeter.ac.uk/dataprotection

I will only capture confidential information about participants on the consent forms. The data from each completed survey will be stored as password-protected files on the University of Exeter U-drive which will only be accessible to the researcher and research supervisors. All paper questionnaires and consent forms obtained from schools will be scanned and stored on the University of Exeter U-drive and shredded.

Data that includes confidential details (including contact details) may be kept for up to 5 years so that, if necessary, I can contact participants during my doctorate. It will be destroyed as soon as my doctorate is awarded. Anonymised data may be stored indefinitely. Data will be kept confidential unless for some reason I am required to produce it by law.

What will happen to the results of this study?
A summary of key findings (drawn from both part of the study) will be prepared for all participants and for the schools involved once the research is concluded. It is my hope that the results of this research would be of interest to the parents and schools participating, and will be used in conference presentations, presentations to professional colleagues as well as in journal articles.

Who is organising and funding this study?

My research supervisors at the University of Exeter are Professor Brahm Norwich, Margie Tunbridge and Lata Ramoutar (please see overleaf for contact information). This research is funded by the Graduate School of Education (GSE).

Who has reviewed this study?

This project has been reviewed by the Graduate School of Education Research Ethics Committee at the University of Exeter.

Further information and contact details

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information and Advice Support (SENDIAS) services:

If you would like further information concerning this research, please contact:

Name: David Satherley (Trainee Educational Psychologist)

Postal address: Educational Psychology, North Cloisters, St Luke's campus, The University of

Exeter

Email: ds536@exeter.ac.uk

If you have concerns/questions about the research you would like to discuss with

someone else at the University, please contact my research supervisors:

Professor Brahm Norwich: b.norwich@exeter.ac.uk

Margie Tunbridge: m.a.tunbridge@exeter.ac.uk

Lata Ramoutar: l.ramoutar@exeter.ac.uk

Gail Seymour, Research Ethics and Governance Manager

g.m.seymour@exeter.ac.uk, 01392 726621

Thank you for your interest in this project

_____
_____

The final question on the parent questionnaire will be as follows:

I would like to interview some parents in order to speak in greater depth around special school choice. This is entirely voluntary and those consenting will be contacted in advance to arrange a convenient place and time.

Would you be willing to be interviewed about special school choice? YES/NO

If participants select 'YES' on the e-questionnaire, they will be forwarded to the following information sheet for part 2, as well as the consent form for part 2. Participants completing their questionnaires on paper will be sent this information separately.

_____
_____

Participant Information Sheet- Part 2 (Interviews)

Title of Project: An exploration of experiences of parents when choosing special school placements

Researcher name: David Satherley

Date: 6.02.19

Invitation and brief summary:

This second part of the study will involve interviewing a number of parents who have completed the survey, to speak to them in greater depth around the process of selecting a special school for their child.

What would taking part involve?

I will contact participants who have given consent to arrange a date/time which suits them to be interviewed; this may be conducted within the participant's home, a public space, the child's school or via phone/video call. Each interview should take no longer than 60 minutes.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

It is recognised that this part of the study may involve home visits and/or meeting on a 1:1 basis. Where possible, interviews will either be carried out in a public environment such as a school or a public space local to the parent. In the event that an interview is conducted within the parent's home, appropriate measures will be taken in line with the 'lone working guidance' within BPS 'Practice Guidelines' (BPS, 2017).

What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?

Participants can request to withdraw their consent at any point, without reason given. Their data will then be destroyed.

How will my information be kept confidential?

The University of Exeter processes personal data for the purposes of carrying out research in the public interest. The University will endeavour to be transparent about its processing of your personal data and this information sheet should provide a clear explanation of this. If you do have any queries about the University's processing of your personal data that cannot be resolved by the

research team, further information may be obtained from the University's Data Protection Officer by emailing dataprotection@exeter.ac.uk or at www.exeter.ac.uk/dataprotection

I will only capture confidential information about participants on the consent forms. The data from each interview will be stored in password-protected files on the University of Exeter U-drive which will only be accessible to the researcher and research supervisors. Following the interviews, each participant will assigned a pseudonym. Every effort will be made to preserve the anonymity of the parent and child discussed. Reference to family members within the audio recordings will be replaced in transcription with a label such as 'spouse', 'brother' etc. Any further information which reveals the identity of the parent or child such as school or place names may also be changed. Any information which identifies a CYP, parent/carer or school will not be included in the research.

Digital recordings will be deleted as soon as I have an authoritative transcript of the interview. I will ensure that any analysis of the data which is not stored on the U drive only uses the pseudonyms. Data that includes confidential details (including contact details) may be kept for up to 5 years so that, if necessary, I can contact participants during my doctorate. It will be destroyed as soon as my doctorate is awarded. Anonymised data may be stored indefinitely. Data will be kept confidential unless for some reason I am required to produce it by law or something in the interview causes me concern about potential harm to participants.

Thank you for your continued interest in this project.

CONSENT FORM

Consent form for part 1 (questionnaires):

Title of Project: An exploration of experiences of parents when choosing special school placements.

Part 1: Questionnaires

Name of Researcher: David Satherley

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet dated 6.02.19 for the above project (part 1). I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without my legal rights being affected.

3. I understand that relevant sections of the data collected during the study, may be looked at in anonymised form by members of the research team, where it is relevant to my taking part in this research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my records.

I understand that taking part involves anonymised questionnaire responses to be used for the purposes of:

Inclusion in an archive for a period of up to 5 years

Reports published in journal articles; for conference presentations and presentations to professionals. ☐

I agree to take part in the above project. ☐

Name of Participant	Date	Signature

Name of researcher	Date	Signature
taking consent		

When completed: 1 copy for participant; 1 copy for researcher/project file

Consent form for part 2 (interviews):

Title of Project: An exploration of experiences of parents when choosing special school placements Part 2- Interviews

Name of Researcher: David Satherley

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet dated 6.02.19 for the above project (part 2). I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without my legal rights being affected. ☐

3. I understand that relevant sections of the data collected during the study, may be looked at in anonymised form by members of the research team, where it is relevant to my taking part in this research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my records. ☐

I understand that taking part involves anonymised interview transcripts to be used for the purposes of:

Inclusion in an archive for a period of up to 5 years ☐

Reports published in journal articles; for conference presentations and presentations to professionals.

☐

I agree to take part in the above project. ☐

_____   _____   _____
Name of Participant   Date   Signature

Please provide contact details so that a suitable date, time and place can be arranged for the interview:

Mobile:

Home:

Email:

_____   _____   _____
Name of researcher   Date   Signature

taking consent

When completed: 1 copy for participant; 1 copy for researcher/project file

Appendix 3. Recruitment letter to headteachers

Research about parents' views about special schools

This study is about the views of parents whose children go to special schools, specifically their experience of choosing specialist education for their child. I would be very keen to make contact with the parents of _____ school and this is where your support is crucial to this study.

The research is being conducted across the ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ local authorities with parents of children that have been attending a special school for at least 12 months. This first part of the study is an electronic survey which will ask parents about their experiences of and reasons for choosing specialist education as well as exploring their underlying views around what a high-quality education looks like for their child. Participants will be given the opportunity to volunteer to participate in the second part of the study which will involve follow-up interviews, allowing parents to talk in greater depth around this topic.

What we are asking is whether you could and send parents in your school whose children have been at the school for more than 12 months, an email about taking part in the project which will include a link to the survey questionnaire. We could send you a draft letter for you to send parents, which you can adapt as needs be. There would be no further involvement from yourself. Parents responses will be confidential with their data anonymised. The parent letter would make it very clear that it is for parents to decide to take part or not.

This research will be undertaken by a trainee Educational Psychologist from the University of Exeter, under supervision of Mrs Margie Turnbridge and Professor Brahm Norwich, as part of a doctoral training programme. This project has been approved by the Graduate School of Education (GSE) Research Ethics Committee at the University of Exeter.

A summary of key findings will be prepared for all participants and for the schools involved once the research is concluded. This is significant research that can inform policy making about the future of special schools and special provision.

If you have any questions about the study, this can be discussed by phone, email and/or video call. Please confirm whether you would be able to partake in this research by reply to this email, a phone conversation or video call.

Many thanks,

David Satherley, Brahm Norwich and Margie Tunbridge

Appendix 4. Phase 1 questionnaire

1. Information sheet (1)

1. Title of Project: An exploration of experiences of parents when choosing special school placements Researcher name: David Satherley Invitation and brief summary: The project aims to to look at the views of parents of pupils in UK special schools, specifically their experience of choosing a school for their child. This first part of the study is a survey which will ask parents about their reasons for choosing special school, the potential dilemmas experienced, alternative options explored, how their views were facilitated during the process and their underlying views around what a high-quality education looks like for their child. Participants will be given the opportunity to volunteer to partake in the second part of the study, which will involve follow-up interviews. Purpose of the research: I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of Exeter and this research forms part of my doctoral thesis. Why have I been approached? The research is asking parents of children that have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and have been attending a special school for at least 12 months; it is being conducted across the Devon, Plymouth and Torbay localities. What would taking part involve? Participants will be emailed with a link to an e-questionnaire; they will also be able to request a paper questionnaire if they prefer. At the end of the questionnaire, participants will be given the option to consent to a follow-up interview. What are the possible benefits of taking part? It is my hope that this research will be representative of the special school selection process across the South West and the individual experiences of parents. As a Trainee Educational Psychologist, it is also my hope that the research would also support the development of a role for Educational Psychologists to support parents and schools in this process. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part? It is recognised that the experience of choosing educational provision for their child and the potential dilemmas entailed may have been an upsetting one, and completion of the surveys and interviews may serve as a reminder of this time. Should participants seek additional information and support, they will be referred to their local Special Educational Needs Advice and Support Service (SENDIAS). Contact details for these services are given below. What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study? Participants can request to withdraw their consent at any point, without reason given. Their data will then be destroyed. *

☐ I have read and understood this information

2. Information sheet (2)

2. How will my information be kept confidential? The University of Exeter processes personal data for the purposes of carrying out research in the public interest. The University will endeavour to be transparent about its processing of your personal data and this information sheet should provide a clear explanation of this. If you do have any queries about the University's processing of your personal data that cannot be resolved by the research team, further information may be obtained from the University's Data Protection Officer by emailing dataprotection@exeter.ac.uk or at www.exeter.ac.uk/dataprotection I will only capture confidential information about participants on the consent forms. The data from each completed survey will be stored as password-protected files on the University of Exeter U-drive which will only be accessible to the researcher and research supervisors. All paper questionnaires and consent forms obtained from schools will be scanned and stored on the University of Exeter U-drive and shredded. Data that includes confidential details (including contact details) may be kept for up to 5 years so that, if necessary, I can contact participants during my doctorate. It will be destroyed as soon as my doctorate is awarded. Anonymised data may be stored indefinitely. Data will be kept confidential unless for some reason I am required to produce it by law. What will happen to the results of this study? A summary of key findings (drawn from both part of the study) will be prepared for all participants and for the schools involved once the research is concluded. It is my hope that the results of this research would be of interest to the parents and schools participating, and will be used in conference presentations, presentations to professional colleagues as well as in journal articles. Who is organising and funding this study? My research supervisors at the University of Exeter are Professor Brahm Norwich, Margie Tunbridge and Lata Ramoutar (contact details below). This research is funded by the Graduate School of Education (GSE). Who has reviewed this study? This project has been reviewed by the Graduate School of Education Research Ethics Committee at the University of Exeter. ▮▮▮▮▮ ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ **If you would like further information concerning this research, please contact: Name: David Satherley (Trainee Educational Psychologist) Postal address: Educational Psychology, North Cloisters, St Luke's campus, The University of Exeter Email: ds536@exeter.ac.uk If you have concerns/questions about the research you would like to discuss with someone else at the University, please contact my research supervisors: Professor Brahm Norwich: b.norwich@exeter.ac.uk Margie Tunbridge: m.a.tunbridge@exeter.ac.uk Lata Ramoutar: l.ramoutar@exeter.ac.uk Gail Seymour, Research Ethics and Governance Manager: g.m.seymour@exeter.ac.uk, 01392 726621 ***

☐ I have read and understood this information

3. Consent form

3. I confirm that I have read the information sheet. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without my legal rights being affected. I understand that relevant sections of the data collected during the study, may be looked at in anonymised form by members of the research team, where it is relevant to my taking part in this research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my records. I understand that taking part involves anonymised questionnaire responses to be used for the purposes of a) Inclusion in an archive for a period of up to 5 years and b) reports published in journal articles; for conference presentations and presentations to professionals. *

☐ I have read and understood this information and agree to take part in this project.

4. Unique Identifier

4. Please create a unique identifier for yourself. This should be your favourite animal, followed by 5 random digits. For example, CAT29584. Please make a note of this, as it will be required if you wish to withdraw your data in the future. *

[   ]

5. Questionnaire

5. When considering special education for your child, which of the following influenced your decision? Read the full list before answering and then tick the four most important reasons. You may specify more than 1 'other' reason.

☐ Headteacher

☐ School staff

☐ Behaviour of the pupils there

☐ Expert advice received

☐ School atmosphere

☐ Your child's self-esteem

☐ Facilities

☐ Policy on discipline

- [ ] Size of the classes

- [ ] Size of the school

- [ ] Exam results

- [ ] Standard of education

- [ ] Breadth of curriculum

- [ ] School's reputation

- [ ] School's caring approach to pupils

- [ ] Travel

- [ ] Siblings already attend

- [ ] Child's friends will be there

- [ ] Child preferred the school

- [ ] It is a church school

- [ ] Other (please specify):

```



```

6. Did you consider alternative forms of education instead of a special school? Tick all that apply. You may specify more than 1 'other' reason.

- [ ] Mainstream schools (with no SEN resource base nor specialist unit)

- [ ] Mainstream schools (with SEN resource base or specialist unit)

- [ ] Split placement (mainstream and special)

- [ ] Co-located special school (special school onsite and connected with mainstream school)

- [ ] Home Education

- [ ] I did not consider alternatives to special school

- [ ] Other (please specify):

7. How well-informed did you feel when deciding on a school for your child (i.e. whether to choose specialist or mainstream school)? Please indicate on the scale below:

	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Very much

Please explain why you gave this rating:

8. To what extent did you feel supported by professionals during the decision-making process?

	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Very much

Please explain why you gave this rating:

9. Do you feel you had a real choice between special school provision and other types of provision (e.g. more than one option that was good enough)?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If No, please specify why you felt you did not have a real choice:

```

```

10. Did you experience a hard choice when choosing appropriate provision for your child?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If Yes, please explain:

```

```

11. To what extent do you feel that, with the right level of support, a mainstream setting could have been appropriate for your child?

	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Very much

Please explain why you gave this rating:

```

```

12. To what extent was the expression of your views about your child's needs and your preferred provision supported during the decision process?

	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Very Much

Please explain why you gave this rating:

13. To what extend did you feel that your views/preferences were adequately considered during the selection process?

	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Very much

Please explain why you gave this rating:

14. Once your decision was made, how easy was it to get your preferred choice of school?

163

	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Very much

Please explain why you gave this rating:

15. How many schools did you have to choose from?

Please briefly comment on what these school options were:

16. Was there anything additional you had to do to get your preferred school placement?

17. Are there any ways in which you think the system of parental choice of schools should be improved?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If yes, please explain how you feel the system could be improved:

[ ]

18. What does high quality inclusive education provision mean to you as regards your child? Read all the options first, then tick all options which apply. You may record more than 1 response for 'other'.

☐ Mainstream provision only

☐ Special school provision only

☐ Both mainstream and special school provision (joint placement)

☐ Resource base/specialist unit attached to a mainstream school

☐ Special school co-located with a mainstream school

☐ A shared curriculum (the same as the others in the child's class)

☐ The majority of the time spent in the classroom with same age peers during lesson-time (with in-class support)

☐ A more individualised curriculum (personalised to your child)

☐ Learning separately from most same age peers when appropriate

☐ Social acceptance by peers in class lessons

☐ Has a sense of belonging to class and school

☐ Other (please specify):

[ ]

6. Additional Information

19. Please indicate your child's main areas of special educational needs (including any diagnoses that they have) as indicated on their Education, Health and Care plan: *

20. Child's age: *

21. Child's gender *

22. Name of child's school *

23. When did they start at this school? *

24. Is the placement a residential or day placement? *

25. What type of provision did they attend before attending this school? *

166

☐ Another special school

☐ A mainstream school

☐ A specialist unit /centre

☐ Other (please specify):

[   ]

26. Please indicate how you heard about this study: *

☐ Through the school

☐ Through social media

☐ Other (please specify):

[   ]

7. Invitation to interview

27. Thank you for completing the survey I would like to interview some parents in order to speak in greater depth around special school choice. This is entirely voluntary and those consenting will be contacted in advance to arrange a convenient place and time. I am contactable by email (ds536@exeter.ac.uk) if you have any questions regarding participation. Please indicate if you would be willing to partake in an interview: *

☐ Yes

☐ No

8. Please provide the following details. You will then be contacted to arrange a suitable date and time for interview.

28. Name:

[   ]

167

29. Email address:

Appendix 5. Letter to parents

Dear Sir/madam,

I am writing to you about a study about the stories of parents whose children go to special schools, specifically your experience of choosing specialist provision for your child.

The research is being conducted across the ███████████████████ local authorities with parents of children that have been attending a special school for at least 12 months.

The study is being conducted through the University of Exeter, Graduate School of Education, by a Trainee Educational Psychologist, as part of a doctoral research study under the supervision of Professor Brahm Norwich and Margaret Tunbridge.

The link below will take you to a short electronic survey about your experience of choosing specialist provision as well as your views around what a high-quality education looks like for your child. I would be really interested to hear your views and stories. You will also be given the opportunity to volunteer for a follow-up interview. All of your information will remain strictly confidential and anonymous. The survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

You will receive a summary of the key findings from this research. This is significant research that can inform policy-making about the future of special schools and special provision.

Please do not hesitate to contact me via the email address below if you have any questions.

Please click the link take the survey:

https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/VQFWV/

Many thanks,

David Satherley

ds536@exeter.ac.uk

UNIVERSITY OF
EXETER

Appendix 6. Recruitment post for social media

David Satherley, a trainee educational psychologist at the University of Exeter, is conducting research as part of his doctoral thesis.

The research is aimed at parents of children (with an Education, Health and Care plan) that have been attending a special school for at least 12 months; it is being conducted across ██████████████████████ localities. David is researching parents' experience of choosing specialist provision.

The link below will take you to David's short electronic survey about your experience of choosing specialist provision as well as your views around what a high-quality education looks like for your child. You will also be given the opportunity to volunteer for a follow-up interview. All of your information will remain strictly confidential and anonymous. The survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

Please click the link take the survey:
https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/VQFWV/

Appendix 7. Draft questionnaire with amendments from pilot study

*Amendments or additions made on the basis of pilot study feedback and/or discussions with supervisors are highlighted in green.

1) **When considering special education for your child, which of the following influenced your decision? Read the full list before answering and then tick the four most important reasons. You may specify more than 1 'other' reason.**

   - Headteacher
   - School staff
   - Behaviour of the pupils there
   - Expert advice received
   - School atmosphere
   - Your child's self-esteem
   - Facilities
   - Policy on discipline
   - Size of the classes
   - Size of the school
   - Exam results
   - Standard of education
   - Breadth of curriculum
   - School's reputation
   - School's caring approach to pupils
   - Travel
   - Siblings already attend
   - Child's friends will be there
   - Child preferred the school
   - It is a church school
   - Other reason(s)- please specify ....

2) **Did you consider alternative forms of education instead of a special school? Tick all that apply. You may specify more than 1 'other' reason.**

   - ❏ Mainstream schools (with no SEN resource base nor specialist unit)
   - ❏ Mainstream schools (with SEN resource base or specialist unit)
   - ❏ Split placement (mainstream and special)
   - ❏ Co-located special school (special school onsite and connected with mainstream school)
   - ❏ Home Education
   - ❏ Other (please specify): ……………………………………………………………
   - ❏ I did not consider alternatives to special school

3) **On a scale of 1-5, how well-informed did you feel when deciding on a school for your child (i.e. whether to choose specialist or mainstream school)?**

Not at all   0----------1------------2------------3------------4-----------5 Very much

171

Please explain why you gave this rating:

………

………

……

4) **To what extent did you feel supported by professionals during the decision-making process? Please indicate on the scale below:**

Not at all 0----------1------------2------------3------------4-----------5 Very much

Please explain why you gave this rating:

………

………

……

5) **Do you feel you had a real choice between special school provision and other types of provision (e.g. more than one option that was good enough)?**
❏ Yes
❏ No

If No, please specify why you felt you did not have a real choice:

………

………

……

6) **Did you experience a hard choice when choosing appropriate provision for your child?**
❏ Yes
❏ No

If Yes, please explain:

………

………

…...

7) **To what extent do you feel that, with the right level of support, a mainstream setting could have been appropriate for your child?**

Not at all 0---------1------------2------------3------------4-----------5 Very much

Please explain why you gave this rating:

………

………

………

…...

8) **To what extent was the expression of your views about your child's needs and your preferred provision supported during the decision process?**

Not at all 0----------1------------2------------3------------4-----------5 Very much

Please explain why you gave this rating:
………
………
………
……...

9) **To what extend did you feel that your views/preferences were adequately considered during the selection process?**

Not at all 0----------1------------2------------3------------4-----------5 Very much

Please explain why you gave this rating:
………
………
………
……...

10) **Once your decision was made, how easy was it to get your preferred choice of school?**

Not at all 0----------1------------2------------3------------4-----------5 Very much

Please explain why you gave this rating:
………
………
………
……

11) **How many schools did you have to choose from?**

Number box

Please briefly comment on what these options were:

………
………
………
……..

12) **Was there anything additional you had to do to get your preferred school placement?**

………
………
………
………………………
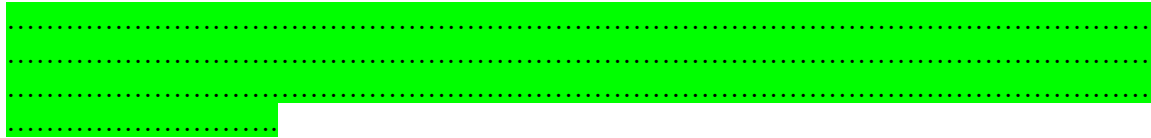
13) Are there any ways in which you think the system of parental choice of schools should be improved?

❏ Yes
❏ No

If yes, please explain how you feel the system could be improved:
……
……
……
……….

14) What does high quality inclusive education provision mean to you as regards your child? Read all the options first, then tick all options which apply. You may record more than 1 response for 'other'.

❏ Mainstream provision only
❏ Special school provision only
❏ Both mainstream and special school provision (joint placement)
❏ Resource base/specialist unit attached to a mainstream school
❏ Special school co-located with a mainstream school
❏ A shared curriculum (the same as the others in the child's class)
❏ The majority of the time spent in the classroom with same age peers during lesson-time (with in-class support)
❏ A more individualised curriculum (personalised to your child)
❏ Learning separately from most same age peers when appropriate
❏ Social acceptance by peers in class lessons
❏ Has a sense of belonging to class and school
❏ Other (please specify):
………………………………………………………………………………..

Additional information

Please indicate your child's main areas of special educational needs (including any diagnoses that they have) as indicated on their Education, Health and Care plan:

Child's age:

Child's gender:

Name of child's school:

When did they start at this school?

Is the placement a residential or day placement?

What type of provision did they attend before attending this school?
❏ Another special school

- ❏ A mainstream school
- ❏ A specialist unit /centre
- ❏ Other (please specify)   ……………………………..

Thank you for completing the survey

I would like to interview some parents in order to speak in greater depth around special school choice. This is entirely voluntary and those consenting will be contacted in advance to arrange a convenient place and time.

Please indicate if you would be willing to partake in an interview:

- ❏ Yes
- ❏ No

Appendix 8. Phase 1 content analyses

Categories are in descending order by response frequency

Q5. 'When considering special education for your child, which of the following influenced your decision?'

Respondents: 11 (other)

Category	Response frequency	Example quotation
Understanding of needs/conditions	3	'Other children attending with the same condition as my son and the school understanding the condition' 'Schools understanding of my child's needs'
Recommended by others	2	'Recommended by another parent' 'Recommend by Portage service and hearing advisory teacher'
Failure of mainstream school	2	'Specialist school was inclusive whereas mainstream had my son in isolation for 80 per cent of the day - he was excluded from break times, lunches, PE, swimming, all sports, all after-school clubs. He was not given sensory breaks and only allowed to sit in the corridor with an inexperienced TA' 'Failure of mainstream education for my child'
Facilities	2	'Outdoor education and play based' 'Access to therapy'
Lack of choice	2	'I was given no other option' 'Limited choice available'
Quality of education	1	'Although special needs the school behaves like a real secondary school taking learning and high standards seriously at all times'
Training	1	Training for staff so they know how to keep my son healthy and safe

Q6. 'Did you consider alternative forms of education instead of a special school?'
Respondents: 13 (other)

Category	Response frequency	Example quotation
Failure of mainstream school	3	'A mainstream primary school failed to meet my son's SEN and he was left, to quote a CAMHS psychiatrist, on the "cusp of a PTSD diagnosis" because of what he went through. instead he was diagnosed with an anxiety disorder post mainstream' 'My child started school in mainstream for a few years until they started to fail in their provision'
Split placement	1	'I would have liked to split time between mainstream and special school but neither school was able to provide this as an option. We attempted one day per week at the mainstream school who was supported by the specialist school but this was erratic as the mainstream teacher was ill for some weeks so he could not attend. I felt it was too little time spent at mainstream for my son to become familiar and confident enough in attending to make it work long term and it didn't feel like the specialist school was keen to support it continuing long term either because of the cost implication to them of having to spare a TA to attend all day with my son as it then deprived them of resources they needed'
Other special school	1	'A different special school'
Mainstream school with resource base	1	'I wanted mainstream with a special unit but none exist in Exeter'
Steiner School	1	'Steiner School'
Independent school	1	Independent

Q7. 'How well-informed did you feel when deciding on a school for your child (i.e. whether to choose specialist or mainstream school)?'

Respondents: 51 (please explain why you gave this rating)

Category	Response frequency	Example quotation
Well-advised	17	'We were supported and advised that the local and brilliant special school would
	• Well-advised (2)	

	• Help from external professionals (9) • Help from school staff (5) • Support from families (1)		suit our son best ,and we agreed' (well-advised) 'I was advised by portage to put my daughter into a mainstream school and that it would be easy to transfer if needed to a special needs school' (help from external professionals) 'The mainstream primary school that my daughter was attending before she got a place at special school, were extremely helpful with all the information I needed to get her into the school shes been at since year 7 and shes now gonna be going into sixth form' (help from school staff) 'It was only because I was friends with people with SEN children that I had an understanding of the process. If I hadn't, special school would not have been offered as a choice' (support from families)
Participants carried out their own research/ made their own decision	11		'I did my own research and asked any questions I felt needed answering and made sure I was involve in safe care plan for my child' 'I ensured I had as much information as I could and I visited schools a number of times'
Mainstream/other provision inappropriate	9		'After being in a mainstream school & trying home education it was clear that a special school would be more suitable or more to the point the latter were totally unsuitable' 'Knowing my son and is anxiety levels (he has autism) I knew he couldn't attend the local mainstream secondary school. I looked at all 3 specialist schools in our area before making my decision'
Not well-informed	7		'I feel I was totally misled about what a special school could

		offer. They were portrayed to be the 'experts' but they were the opposite. They wrote my child off educationally. They didn't understand his needs and wasted the whole of his primary years on messy play and sensory activities that taught him nothing'
		'Very little information available/given on schools'
Nobody helped	4	'You don't receive any advise and you have to learn and fight everything to get the best setting for your child'
		'Nobody was involved to help us'
Limited choice	4	'I was told a special school was the only option'
		'Felt that we had limited choices, due to lack of places available. Felt pressured to accept the first place offered, however on advice refused place offered and ended up with a much better setting'
Needs clear	2	'My sons needs were clear by age 6 and increased as his self esteem decreased in mainstream primary'
		'We didn't feel there were any real choices for our son as his needs are so profound that mainstream provision would not have been appropriate'
Recommended by other families	1	'Referral from 2 other families'

Q8. 'To what extent did you feel supported by professionals during the decision-making process?'

Respondents: 47 (please explain why you gave this rating)

Category	Response frequency	Example quotation
Not supported	21	'Mainstream professionals said it had to be my decision and refused to advise me'
		'Very few other professionals had any interest. The ones that did expected us to be 'told' rather than advised where was best for our child'
External professionals	16	I ensured I had input from all professionals around my child

		• External professionals (4) • Psychologist (4) • Portage (3) • Social worker/children's Services (2) • Speech and Language Therapy (1) • Learning Disability Team (1) • Private services (1)	(External professionals) 'I had full support of the primary school SEN, school psychologist and teachers' (Psychologist) 'We were well supported by our Portage worker but feel that other advice from other sources would have been valuable in addition to this' (Portage)
School support	15	• School support (2) • Support from mainstream school staff (10) • Support from special school staff (3)	'Although it took longer than we had hoped we had terrific support from ▇▇▇ Council and then from the Dep Head of the school as well' (School support) 'My daughter primary school Homelands was brilliant helping us make a decision for her secondary and put me at ease how coombe pafford will be the best choice for her and her education. Which it was' (Support from mainstream school staff) 'The school was very accommodating to a quick last minute decision, and were delighted to have my daughter. When she attended mainstream school,the special needs school attended her annual review and gave alot of help and advice to her mainstream ta. The child was (and is)always their priority' (Support from special school staff)
Local Authority	2		'LA OK' 'Although it took longer than we had hoped we had terrific support from ▇▇▇ Council and then from the Dep Head of the school as well'
SENDIAS/support groups	2		'SENDIAS GOOD' 'We were also supported a local support group'

Q9. 'Do you feel you had a real choice between special school provision and other types of provision (e.g. more than one option that was good enough)?'

Respondents: 34 (If No, please specify why you felt you did not have a real choice)

Category	Response frequency	Example quotation
Mainstream/other provision was inappropriate	16	'I feel special school was the only choice. Mainstream schools don't offer enough support' 'No choice to really stay in mainstream, due to experiences and their effects on our child'
Choice of schools	12	'Then I was 'told' the only option available to me was our closest special school. If I didn't like it I should homeschool her but I'd get no support as that would be my choice as they could offer a place at a special school. I visited the school and I was appalled by it. I actually came out crying. Thinking if I put my daughter in that school I would have failed her as her mother' 'As already said, our choice of school was limited to one'
Travel/location	5	'Other special schools were too far away' 'No really as ▮▮▮▮▮▮ dont have much choice and I didnt want her to travel 2 hours a day to torquay'
Decision was not theirs	5	'We were 'pushed' towards a special school placement by being told that there was no other option for our child' 'I also feel that we were guided towards a specific special school with no other choices being mentioned'
Special school only option	2	'Special needs school was the only realistic option. No need to look at alternative' 'No it was only special school'
Siblings attend	1	'I'm not unhappy about the way things worked out - my child's school is amazing! There was no choice because siblings were already at the mainstream school and with an excellent Special school next door and willing to help how could it not be good?'

| Fight for place | 1 | 'I felt we had to fight for a place at a good special school' |

Q10. 'Did you experience a hard choice when choosing appropriate provision for your child?'
Respondents: 28 (If Yes, please explain)

Category	Response frequency	Example quotation
No choice/limited choice	14	'There really was no choice for him. It was the specialist setting (the only one in ▓▓▓ that would have met SEN) or nothing' 'The actual choices were limited, there were only 2 special schools that would have been appropriate options'
Fight to get provision	4	'We had to fight to get the provision we felt was most appropriate for our child' 'We had to fight for the school we wanted and felt the council was trying to push our child to go to a school we didn't want'
Urgency	3	'There was also a lot of urgency attached to finding him a place. The urgency related firstly to me wanting to save and restore his self esteem and well being, as well as me needing him to be in school so I could keep my job. I'm a single parent with little support and no childcare. I also strongly felt he should be entitled to the same Ed opportunities that all other children have' 'Had to name a school without having an opportunity to visit and discuss placement both due to timescales and specialist placement only allow visit once space allocated'
Accepting difference	2	'Because choosing a special school meant our child really was 'different'. It was a big part of acceptance on our part' 'An element of grief that the school life you always imagined (and possible see happening with siblings) does not and will never exist'
Hard choice (non-specific)	2	'It was a hard choice following our experiences, the stakes were high because I needed

Category	Response frequency	Example quotation
		him to be in a nurturing environment'
		'No mainstream school had ever taught a child with Down's syndrome so had nothing to compare'
Easy choice	2	'I knew with one visi the special school would be able to restore his confidence and self-esteem and get the best from him academically'
		'We felt that one specialist school stood out as being the best option for us and our son'
Emotive process	1	'Extremely. It was a very emotive process. There is a huge lack of understanding how hard this is for parents'
Dilemma	1	'Yes, because I wanted him in a Cairb unit so he could make friends, but in a mainstream school for all the opportunity'
Mainstream inappropriate	1	'We sent my daughter to a local normal primary school which she absolutely hated'

Q11. 'To what extent do you feel that, with the right level of support, a mainstream setting could have been appropriate for your child?'

Respondents: 49 (please explain why you gave this rating)

Category	Response frequency	Example quotation
Level of need/level of support required	26 Level of need (17) Level of support required (9)	'My child has severe learning difficulties (Level of need)' 'I think if he had 1-2-1 support he would of coped. Sadly this level of support doesn't seem available in mainstream (Level of support required)'
Previous experience of mainstream	17	'Pre-school failed with a 1:1 support worker. Couldn't join in with activities etc' 'I've marked in the middle as my child started in mainstream. I moved them to a special setting due to the mainstream provision starting to fail in their needs'
Class size/environment	8	'He is overwhelmed by a mainstream classroom

183

			environment which causes him to shriek and become very unhappy'
			'It was the environment itself that wasn't suitable'
Lack of training/information	4		Teachers in main stream school wasn't trained well enough for delayed learners
			'They don't have any specialist training'
Curriculum	3		'The special school curriculums with an emphasis on sensory input and life skills is so far away from the mainstream as to be apparently impossible for them to get to grips with'
			'The curriculum doesn't work for me'
Funding	4		'They don't receive enough funding'
			'Most mainstreams have had their SEN support cut'
Mainstream appropriate	4	• Mainstream appropriate (1) • Previous experience of mainstream (2) • High-quality mainstream provision available (1)	'I think my daughter could have been supported in a mainstream school. That would have been my preference. However, now she is in her special school she is doing really well' (Mainstream appropriate) 'He was previously successfully in mainstream with a special unit in California' (Previous experience of mainstream) 'As (school) secondary school and (place) academy had SEN needs available and spires had a SEN unit and was good with their special needs children so I knew if she got in those two school then (school) we had other options we could work within those two if needed be' (High-quality mainstream provision available)
Mainstream school not willing to accommodate	3		'I believe him eed could have been met in mainstream I feel he schools was just unwilling to do so'

Category	Response frequency	Example quotation
		'They want the funding not a complex child'
Lack of professional support	2	'It wasn't just the advice that was missing, it was the early years provision that let my child down particularly in the form of Speech and Language therapy. This meant that we had little choice but a special school' 'Yes but my son was massively let down by the speech and language service and so had no language. If that service had been better then a mainstream school with one to one support could have been a much better option'
Mainstream inappropriate (non-specific)	2	'There would have to be a massive shift in attitudes (and funding), particularly around learning difficulties. Society has a long way to go to catch up with the progress we are starting to see around physical disabilities' 'Too regimented'
Bullying	1	'Unable to cope with the mindset of many mainstream children and becomes vulnerable to bullying'

Q12. 'To what extent was the expression of your views about your child's needs and your preferred provision supported during the decision process?'

Respondents: 47 (please explain why you gave this rating)

Category	Response frequency	Example quotation
Well-supported (non-specific)	7	'Was very well supported' 'I was listened to throughout the whole process'
Consensus	7	'Luckily everyone was in agreement about the choice of school' 'All the specialist involved agreed that a specialist setting would be more appropriate for our child'
Not well-supported (non-specific)	6	'I wasn't supported, just criticized & told my child was 'coping'. In the end, I just pulled him out of school & said lock

		me up or whatever but we can't endure this anymore'
		'At first it was totally ignored and only listened to once severe damage had been caused to my son from the wrong placement'
Lack of availability of placements/choice of schools	5	'I was able to convey that I wanted him to attend a SEN school but as I say I felt concerned that he wouldn't have a place etc. As I was told by several places are limited' 'The placement we needed didn't exist'
Fight/tribunal	4	'We had to fight every step of the way' 'Once I decided my son needed a specialist setting, I had to fight tooth and nail for a place for him - threatening legal action, contacting the head of children's services direct to point out the LA's legal obligations and Duty of Care failure of my son in mainstream. My fight was so stressful, I decided to quit my job as a journalist after 34 years and re-train as a SEND law advice caseworker for SENDIASS to help others going through the process'
Local authority not supportive	4	'Council tried to send our daughter to another inappropriate mainstream school' '0-25 team incredibly dismissive and didn't give me any options for alternative provisions'
Support from mainstream	4	'We had a lot of support from (name) primary school from my daughter SENCO within that school. (Name). He was very supportive and helped (name) alot with her needs. So helped us with lots of support move (name) from mainstream primary to (school)'

		'The headmaster and Sinco were absolutely brilliant, the one-to-one staff were very good but did not understand my daughter. They were unable to keep her occupied enough. They tried to carry on as though she was a normal child'
Professional support	3	'From the team around my child fantastic support' 'It was due to my daughters OT that I found her current school'
Support from special school	2	'The alternative education provider we chose who really supported my child' 'I don't think my views or his needs were given any consideration whatsoever, with the exception of his first special school head teacher'
Mainstream not supportive	2	'At first his initial school were unhelpful and we had to fight every step of the way with our doctors help health visitors help and education board help to show his primary school that a special needs school was the right route for' 'From the mainstream education when we decided to move our child, they were awful. Their behaviour was shocking'
Poor information/advice (non-specific)	2	'At the time we did not have the knowledge that we have now about our sons needs and so we relied too much on professionals and the misleading information we were given at the time about what the school was capable of' 'I was listened to but the advice I was given was wrong'
External agencies supportive	1	'Only by (name) and sendiass and ███████'
Local authority supportive	1	'The 0-25 team supported us throughout as so did other professionals as it was obvious my son would not have coped in mainstream'

| Insufficient funding | 1 | 'I felt it was supported on a conceptual level but that on a practical level there was insufficient funding to enable a dual placement to be a reality' |

Q13. 'To what extent did you feel that your views/preferences were adequately considered during the selection process?'

Respondents: 40 (please explain why you gave this rating)

Category	Response frequency	Example quotation
Views/preferences considered (non-specific)	8	'There were ample opportunities for me to do this running up to our application' 'I was able to convey my feelings in meetings attended'
Lack of choice	7	'There really was no selection process. The school was chosen as it really was the only appropriate option' 'We were told there was no other choice'
Preferences not considered (non-specific)	5	'My views and preferences were irrelevant through his entire primary and secondary education' 'I am going back to 2007/8 but I don't recall being asked'
Fight/challenge	3	'I had to repeatedly insist the LA consult with my parental preference for a specialist school for my son. My views and preferences were not considered until I pointed out the LA was breaking the law by repeatedly telling me the specialist school was "full" and my son could not attend ("full" is not a legal reason to refusal admission!)' 'I felt we had to fight for her place at her current school'
Choice was agreed	2	'We got our 1st choice so I was happy' 'They agreed with our choice for special school'
Special school was helpful	1	'When visiting the special setting, 4 times they were incredibly helpful'

Category	Response frequency	Example quotation
Supported by professionals	1	'Our decision was supported by all the professionals concerned'
Local authority was supportive	1	'I kept in constant contact with the SEN team'
External agency support	1	'We were involved via our local parent partnership (SENDIASS)'
Needs clear	1	'We didn't fight to be heard as there was no question that he could have gone to either setting'
Lack of information/misinformation	1	'We were also lied to by the 0-25 team officer who told us they did not provide 1:1 in special schools'
Consensus	1	'Everyone involved in our sons care, were/are all In agreement about his needs, we all have the same views/preferences for him'
Difficult process	1	'It was a difficult process but eventually my son was given a place at our chosen special school'

Q14. 'Once your decision was made, how easy was it to get your preferred choice of school?'

Respondents: 45 (please explain why you gave this rating)

Category	Response frequency	Example quotation
Lack of choice/lack of spaces	7	'There were hardly any suitable schools nearby then they didn't have any spaces. One space became available in the end but if it hadn't I don't know what would have happened' 'We did not choose - the local authority STATED that the mainstream provision local to our child would be suitable - Oh how wrong they were'
Long wait	6	'I didn't hear until just before the school summer holidays which led to stress and fear he wouldn't have a place.. which is not needed when you have a severe SEN child' 'It was only on the last day of term in the July that they confirmed she could start at the special School in the September. It was horrific'
First choice/choice agreed	5	'After the application we were allocated our first choice provision'

		'We got our preferred choice fairly easily'
Fight/challenge	5	'We had to fight and complete tribunal papers before they agreed with our choice of provision' 'My son is in a mainstream school and his headmistress saw my distress and knew of my situation and was so disgusted by the attitude and behaviour of the 0-25 team, that she took it upon herself to fight for my daughter and me to get her into the school I wanted'
Stress/anxiety	5	The process was, quite simply, as stressful as it could possibly be made to be. The process was never explained, I had to research it. The law was never explained, again I had to research it. '…. was an anxious time for all the family'
Easy (non-specific)	4	'Very easy which was a shock as the specialist school was very popular and i did think they took in children with very serious disabilities more than children like my son but it wasn't the case' 'The preferred school were very receptive to providing a space'
Not easy (non-specific)		'My son's initial Primary School had decided to go to an academy which meant that they lost their base unit which then in turn meant that they couldn't cater for my son's needs' 'Need to show evidence as to way mainstream would not work also school was over subscribed so even more difficult to get in'
Professional Support	3	'It was smooth but only because the child's social worker was involved as she is in care with me' 'One of the professionals helped somehow and a space at the new school was created for my son'

Category	Response frequency	Example quotation
Consensus	2	'(Name) school is the only suitable one within daily travelling distance so everyone agreed' 'There was no question about which SEN school my daughter was going to attend'
Did not get first choice	2	'This was the hardest part because I didn't get my first choice and initially was disappointed' 'Lack of available places meant an instant no to our first choice placement'
Short wait	1	'…little waiting for start time'
Local authority support	1	'With support from the LA…'
Support from schools	1	'…meetings and viewings with heads…'
Had to move location	1	'Moved area for the school'
Process not explained	1	'The process was never explained, I had to research it. The law was never explained, again I had to research it'
Local authority not supportive	1	'0-25 team told me it wasn't my daughters designated school even though I preferred it. Her designated school was awful. Then they said they wouldn't provide transport'
Change of decision by school	1	'There was some questioning of the school but by then the authorities had accepted he needed to be moved straight away and so they agreed. The new school had previously said they would welcome him, then when it was all in place they said they were full and denied meeting me'

Q15. 'How many schools did you have to choose from?'

Respondents: 48 (please briefly comment on what these school options were)

Category	Response frequency	Example quotation
Special School only	29	There was only one suitable local special school available to us Special School closest to where we live (several responses named specific schools in the area)

Category	Response frequency	Example quotation
Special and mainstream schools	9	'Small specialist provision (mainly ASD) - 12 miles away and our local mainstream down the road which is massive and hasn't got a great reputation for behaviour' 'Mainstream 2 sen provisions'

Q16. 'Was there anything additional you had to do to get your preferred school placement?'

Respondents:48 (open question)

Category	Response frequency	Example quotation
No	26	'No not at all the mainstream primary school did it all for me' 'No, we were happy with the second placement offered'
Challenging the system	10	'I had to threaten legal action. I had to point out that keeping my son is isolation for 80 per cent of his day was not a full-time education and his mental health was being so massively damaged by this treatment that he was unable to engage in any learning. I also had the local MP lined up to step in if my email to the head of children's services was ignored (thankfully, she replied!)' 'Scream, shout, pester become his legal team, his senco, his councillor. The system is broken'
Additional multi-agency/professional involvement	4	'All the professionals concerned with our son produced letters supporting our application as so did we' 'Meetings with head teacher and senco also all agencies involved including s&l ,respite careers,OTs and ASD team gave a report and reason on why it would be best case that child went to that school'
Making additional enquiries	2	'A lot of chasing up emails and phone calls' 'I kept writing emails to all the people concerned and I never gave up'
Long wait	2	They would not honor my US IEP and made us wait a year

Category	Response frequency	Example quotation
		for the EHCP process to complete 'From starting ehcp process to satisfactory implementation took 16 months'
Meet the criteria for chosen school	1	'Meet the criteria according to the preferred school'
Move location	1	'Moved from ▓▓▓▓▓ to ▓▓▓▓
Hire a professional advocate	1	'Paid for professional advocate to help with process'
Yes (non-specific)	1	'Be desperate'

Q17. Are there any ways in which you think the system of parental choice of schools should be improved?

Respondents: 43 (if yes, please explain how you feel the system could be improved)

Category	Response frequency	Example quotation
More places/schools/options	14	'Build more special needs schools otherwise choice can't be an option' 'More options to design the provision that suits your child - ie split placement/access to therapy if home educating'
Greater availability of information/awareness of options	7	'I think parents or carers of these children should be given the appropriate information on the schools available and given help in viewing them to make an informed choice' 'More information available about the different schools and what they offer to better understand their suitability'
Professional support/advice/expertise	6	We were supported by professionals and I'm not sure those positions are still in existence, and they are vital to help understand what special schools do and to assist with school visits 'More support for parents. Most parents probably have similar concerns when choosing schools. Professionals probably are aware of what those concerns are, yet in our experience they do not offer info but expect you to know which questions to ask to find answers the that you need'
Consider parents' views	6	'The parents to be listened to more and schools to be willing to try and meet need'

			'From other parents, I would say that the parents should have more input, and more of a say'
Improved mainstream provision/training	5		'…better specialist provision in mainstream schools' 'Either all mainstream school staff are properly trained in SEN and the schools become truly inclusive - or we have to build more specialist schools to meet the ever-growing demand for SEN pupils'
Helped to/opportunities to view schools	5		'…given help in viewing them to make an informed choice' Some way to arrange to visit more easily! We had to take alot of initiative (although we were very determined!)
Less waiting (not so 'long-winded')	2		'Not so long winded' 'We shouldn't have to wait so long for the outcome of our application'
Greater choice	1		'Given more choice'
Advice from other parents	1		'Past parents views could be discussed in one-to-one parents meetings to give advice and support on a parents perspective'
1:1 support in mainstream	1		'Offer more 1-2-1 support in mainstream'
Earlier assessment and transition	1		'Assess earlier and make provision to remove children with obvious need before year 6 primary'
Higher expectations of children	1		'In particular though it is the low expectations of educational outcomes by the senior management teams and advisory teachers that are letting children down the most. It seems that they have no idea on the profound negative impact this has on childrens life chances once they leave school'
Schools more willing to accommodate	1		'Schools to be more neutral (no telling parents 'you won't get in,we are full' 'you won't get transport')'
Funding	1		'Yes but only if adequate funding is available to support that choice'

Category	Response frequency	Example quotation
Easier to transition	1	'It should be made much easier for children to switch between schools if they are not happy'
Whole system of choice improved (SEN and non-SEN)	1	'This needs to be improved across the board. For neurotypical and SEN children. It shouldn't be a postcode lottery. I only have one choice of senior school for my daughter and I seriously worry about her welfare as the school has a serious bullying problem'
Local Authority Communication	1	'Communication from the council'
Needs-based decision-making	1	'It should be genuinely based on the needs of the child. No other pressures brought to bear on the parent. I have not yet been thorough the process of full time choice, so cannot comment on that'

Q18. 'What does high quality inclusive education provision mean to you as regards your child?'

Respondents: 11 (other)

Category	Response frequency	Example quotation
Inclusion as meeting social needs	5 • Inclusion as meeting social needs- 4 respondents • Co-located schools (for meeting social needs)- 1 respondent	'He now has a small number of classmates who have similar disabilities, and this is a lovely social group that he can relate to, and he is no longer lonely, unlike when he was in mainstream with SEN support' 'Help with finding special needs peers to befriend'
Inclusion as meeting academic needs	4	'Needs led not curriculum led; specialised teaching and training for pupils and teachers; high tradition of staff to workers' 'For whose benefit would the 'inclusive education' be? In what way would it be 'high quality' compared to specialist education with suitably experienced and specialised teachers and TAs? What would be the point of trying to teach my son about the Romans for example when he cannot write his own name or understand the difference between today and tomorrow?'

High expectations and aspirations	2	'The senior management team, teachers and therapists MUST have high expectations for children with disabilities and above all assumed competence. Too often children are educationally written off and in particular communication impairment confused with cognitive impairment.' 'Special schools need to have higher aspirations for children. They need to understand the negative impact on a child's life chances if they don't. They need to stop wasting children's days on messy play. There needs to be much more a focus on communication and literacy. This recent move to using Evidence for Learning as a progress measure is a massively negative step because it takes the little pressure that there was on special schools before. Children in special schools need an education involving geography, science etc. not just rubbish sensory activities which teach them nothing. Disabled children are warehoused in special schools with minimal education and it is appalling'
Resource base	1	'Mainstream class sizes prohibit any chance of an inclusive education for my son. A resource base attached to a mainstream could work is adequately staffed and SEN pupils not forced into mainstream part'
Equality of opportunity	1	'Being allowed the same opportunities as others, at least others in the same circumstances as him'

Appendix 9. Chi-square analysis tables

REALCHO * MAINSAPPROP Crosstabulation

| | | | MAINSAPPROP | | |
			Broadly not appropriate (0-2)	Broadly appropriate (3-5)	Total
REALCHO	no	Count	24	15	39
		% within REALCHO	61.5%	38.5%	100.0%
	yes	Count	15	3	18
		% within REALCHO	83.3%	16.7%	100.0%
Total		Count	39	18	57
		% within REALCHO	68.4%	31.6%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.708[a]	1	.100		
Continuity Correction[b]	1.793	1	.181		
Likelihood Ratio	2.907	1	.088		
Fisher's Exact Test				.132	.088
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.660	1	.103		
N of Valid Cases	57				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.68.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

REALCHO * HOWMANYSCHOOLS Crosstabulation

| | | | HOWMANYSCHOOLS | | |
			0-1	2+ (multiple)	Total
REALCHO	no	Count	21	17	38
		% within REALCHO	55.3%	44.7%	100.0%
	yes	Count	3	14	17
		% within REALCHO	17.6%	82.4%	100.0%
Total		Count	24	31	55
		% within REALCHO	43.6%	56.4%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.757[a]	1	.009		
Continuity Correction[b]	5.314	1	.021		
Likelihood Ratio	7.252	1	.007		
Fisher's Exact Test				.017	.009
Linear-by-Linear Association	6.634	1	.010		
N of Valid Cases	55				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 7.42.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

HARDCHO * MAINSAPPROP Crosstabulation

| | | | MAINSAPPROP | | |
			Broadly not appropriate	Broadly appropriate	Total
HARDCHO	no	Count	27	7	34
		% within HARDCHO	79.4%	20.6%	100.0%
	yes	Count	12	11	23
		% within HARDCHO	52.2%	47.8%	100.0%
Total		Count	39	18	57
		% within HARDCHO	68.4%	31.6%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.711[a]	1	.030		
Continuity Correction[b]	3.534	1	.060		
Likelihood Ratio	4.681	1	.031		
Fisher's Exact Test				.043	.030
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.628	1	.031		
N of Valid Cases	57				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 7.26.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

HARDCHO * HOWMANYSCHOOLS Crosstabulation

			HOWMANYSCHOOLS		Total
			0-1	2+ (multiple)	Total
HARDCHO	no	Count	16	16	32
		% within HARDCHO	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
	yes	Count	8	15	23
		% within HARDCHO	34.8%	65.2%	100.0%
Total		Count	24	31	55
		% within HARDCHO	43.6%	56.4%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.260[a]	1	.262		
Continuity Correction[b]	.717	1	.397		
Likelihood Ratio	1.271	1	.260		
Fisher's Exact Test				.286	.199
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.237	1	.266		
N of Valid Cases	55				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 10.04.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

REALCHO * HARDCHO Crosstabulation

			HARDCHO		Total
			no	yes	Total
REALCHO	no	Count	19	20	39
		% within REALCHO	48.7%	51.3%	100.0%
	yes	Count	15	3	18
		% within REALCHO	83.3%	16.7%	100.0%
Total		Count	34	23	57
		% within REALCHO	59.6%	40.4%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.131[a]	1	.013		
Continuity Correction[b]	4.777	1	.029		
Likelihood Ratio	6.623	1	.010		
Fisher's Exact Test				.020	.013
Linear-by-Linear Association	6.024	1	.014		
N of Valid Cases	57				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 7.26.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Appendix 10. Correlational analysis tables

Correlations

			HOWWELLINF	SUPPORTEDBYPROFS
Spearman's rho	HOWWELLINF	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.677**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	57	56
	SUPPORTEDBYPROFS	Correlation Coefficient	.677**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	56	56

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Correlations

			EXPRESSIONVIEWSSUPPORTED	VIEWSPREFSCONSIDERED
Spearman's rho	EXPRESSIONVIEWSSUPPORTED	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.922**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	56	55
	VIEWSPREFSCONSIDERED	Correlation Coefficient	.922**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	55	55

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Appendix 11. Interim analysis notes

(This is written in note-format, and was used as a reflective tool during the research processs)

Question-by-question analysis

Question	Topic	Notes (Quant data)	Notes (Qual data)
5	**When considering special education for your child, which of the following influenced your decision?**	Top 5 responses: • School atmosphere • School's caring approach • School staff • Size of classes • Facilities (Nobody responded- exam results, siblings attend, it is a church school) 13%- standard of education 6.7%- breadth of curriculum.	**Range of responses**- Standard of education, professional recommendation, inclusivity (in isolation in mainstream), outdoor/play-based ed, failure of mainstream, understanding of child's condition, learning tailored to need, staff trained. **(Failure/inappropriateness of mainstream came up in 2 responses).**
6	**Did you consider alternative forms of education instead of a special school?**	42%- did not consider alternatives. Co-located schools (lowest response) Approx. 50% overall considered mainstream (with or without SEN resource base)	Several responses- previously child in mainstream. 2 responses refer to mainstream 'failing' 1 response: attempted split placement but this didn't work out
7	**How well-informed did you feel when deciding on a school for your child (i.e. whether to choose specialist or mainstream school)?**	42%- very well informed Most responses 3-5 (79%)	**Several emergent themes:** • Had support from professionals (Portage mentioned twice) • Failure of mainstream informed choice • Parents did own research • Schools were supportive • A lack of support or 'wrong' advice given.

8	**To what extent did you feel supported by professionals during the decision-making process?**	44% felt supported by professionals. Most responses 3-5, but 14% said 0.	**Real mix of responses:** • Helped by school staff • Professionals cited- social worker, educational psychologist, council, SALT • Criticisms of professional involvement ('social worker useless', wrong advice, no professionals involved) • Criticism of schools- SENCo not much knowledge, school didn't help at all. One parent- 'huge fight' ***Interviews- is professional support looked upon more favourably for high needs children where the decision is clearer?***
9	**Do you feel you had a real choice between special school provision and other types of provision (e.g. more than one option that was good enough)?**	64.4%- No.	**Emergent themes:** • Not given a choice of schools, not many in the area, not other choices mentioned, not enough choice • Special school was only choice • Mainstream could not support need/ told could not attend mainstream/ pushed towards special school placement (told no other options) • Mainstream not working- damaging, harmed.
10	**Did you experience a hard choice when choosing appropriate provision for your child?**	72.7%- No.	**Emergent themes:** • No choice/little choice (rural area)/ nothing suitable/ no choice given by 0-25. • 'Fight' (mentioned several times)/ having mental strength to fight/ stakes high, urgency • Acceptance that child is different/ emotive process

			• Responses suggesting 1 school stood out as clear choice (2 responses) • Hated local primary (1 response)
11	**To what extent do you feel that, with the right level of support, a mainstream setting could have been appropriate for your child?**	50%- no (even spread of data with other options) Spread of opinions here.	• **Yes**- mainstream schools with good SEN unit/ good with SEN/ needs could have been met- school unwilling/ needs a massive shift in attitudes and funding (toward LD)/ could have achieved in mainstream if support there. • **No**- range of responses- Unsuitable for child's needs/ violent outburst/ not equipped/ too higher level of support/ site/ class sizes/ curriculum adaptation • **Mainstream failures**- failed to have child treated decently/ pre-school failed/ not good for child's mental health/ early years provision (SALT)
12	**To what extent was the expression of your views about your child's needs and your preferred provision supported during the decision process?**	35%- very much 22%- Not at all	• **Yes**- SENCo support/ concerns addressed/ full support (needs obvious)/ Luckily everyone in agreement/ All agreed/ Supported by professionals (provision geared towards medical needs)/ Clear- child has complex needs/ TAC- fantastic • **No**- 'fight' mentioned several times- fight tooth and nail- quit job, re-trained as SEND law advice caseworker/ was criticised- pulled child out of school/ relied too much on professionals advice, misleading info abut schools/ mainstream awful support/ 0-25 team dismissive/ no

			consideration whatsoever.

*When needs are clear or higher- decision process is easier for parents/ better supported. |
| 13 | **To what extend did you feel that your views/preferences were adequately considered during the selection process?** | 46.5% (5)

25% (0) | • **Yes**- a number of responses indicated they were listened to.
• **No**- Not considered until pointed out LA breaking law/ only listened to when child pulled out of school/ no other choice/ don't recall being asked/ ▮▮▮ only provide transport to nearest school/ completely dismissed- 'fight'/ difficult process/ my views irrelevant throughout entire primary and secondary education.

Again, parents spoke about all being in agreement over needs/ 'no question'/ 'no selection process as only one appropriate option'. Suggestive that the process is easier when needs of the child are greater/clearer. |
| 14 | **Once your decision was made, how easy was it to get your preferred choice of school?** | 54.5% (5)

20.5% (0) | • **Yes**- Got first choice/ got 2nd choice- happy/ easy/ straightforward (as recently had specialist support)/ very easy
• **No**- Long wait/ had to complete tribunal papers/ fight/ didn't have choice/no other option/ no question/ moved area/ one space became available/ didn't hear for a while- stressful/ stressful- process and law not explain- had to research myself/ after all options 'exhausted'/ didn't chose- LA stated which school/ Battle to get her transferred- decision made last day |

205

			in July (horrific)/ headteacher helped me fight/ extremely stressful wondering if get place/ school agreed then said they were full/ fight.
			Theme- waiting- parents often unsure until last minute/having to wait a long time.
15	**How many schools did you have to choose from?**	Mostly 1-3 Some said 0.	**No clear themes:** Participants mention other special schools which are inappropriate for child's needs/ inappropriate mainstream schools/ travel as a factor in decision.
16	**Open-ended q: Was there anything additional you had to do to get your preferred school placement?**	/	• **Yes**- Moving/ meet preferred school criteria/ writing tribunal papers/ threaten legal action (2 respondents)- local MP involvement/ fight/ 3 month battle/ work with various professionals/ chasing emails/phonecalls etc. • **No**- Lots of 'no responses' or similar.
17	**Are there any ways in which you think the system of parental choice of schools should be improved?**	72%- YES	Emergent themes: • **More choice**: building more special schools/ more special schools or better mainstream provision/ more specialist units in mainstream/ mainstream staff training/ not enough places- lottery/ earlier assessment- provision to move children out of mainstream by Year 6/ easier to switch between schools • **Information**: advice from previous parents/ easier to arrange visits/ 0-25 team informing parents which schools have spaces/ outline strengths of schools/ clear list of options (and

			travel arrangements) prior to application/
			Professionals/process: be listened to more/ schools willing to try/ wanting opinions from professionals/ Professionals not gagged by council/ schools more neutral/ professionals less biased/ Helped by those with expertise in the child's condition/ not being pushed towards cheapest option/ counselling- helping coming to terms with child's disability.
18	**What does high quality inclusive education provision mean to you as regards your child? Read**	Top 5 responses: - Belongingness - Social acceptance - Individualised curriculum - Special School only - Majority of time spent in class	**Range of different responses:** - Acceptance (2 responses) - High expectations- not written off - Needs-led, not curriculum led. - Outdoors/play-based - Like idea of co-located (teaching acceptance/exposure) but not suitable for my child. - Resource-based (IF well-staffed, children not made to go into main school). Some parents see these options as inclusive but changes need to be made. *'For whose benefit would the 'inclusive education' be? In what way would it be 'high quality' compared to specialist education with suitably experienced and specialised teachers and TAs? What would be the point of trying to teach my son about the Romans for example when he cannot write his own name or understand the difference*

Cross-tabs

- **Q9 and Q11- Real choice* mainstream appropriate**

RealChoice * Mainstreamapprop Crosstabulation

Count

		Mainstreamapprop						Total
		.00	1.00	2.00	3.00	4.00	5.00	
RealChoice	No	14	3	1	2	2	6	28
	Yes	8	4	1	2	1	0	16
Total		22	7	2	4	3	6	44

- **14/44 respondents- No real choice and mainstream completely inappropriate.**
- 8/44 respondents- Yes real choice and mainstream completely inappropriate.
- 6/44- No real choice, mainstream appropriate
- 0/44- Yes real choice, mainstream appropriate

Q18- What does high-quality inclusive education look like? When parents ticked special school only, what else did they tick?

Mainstream only	0
Joint placement	1
Resource base	2
Co-located school	1
Shared curric	2
Time spent in classroom	3
Individualised curric	**6**
Learning separately from peers	2
Social acceptance	**9**
Belonging	**11**

Initial themes/observations from data:

- **Choice**– parents spoke about having a lack of choice (few options in area, not given choice by 0-25 team, not enough places available)

- **Mainstream schools**- negative experiences in mainstream schools informed choice/ 50% parents felt mainstream inappropriate but views were varied. Data suggests a relationship between parent having a 'real choice' and feeling mainstream is an option (see cross-tabs).

- **Information from professionals**- experiences of professional and school support varied widely between responses.

- **Process-** expression of views and consideration of preferences- wide variety of responses. Many responses mentioned fighting to get the school/provision they wanted and the stressful experience of waiting for confirmation. Process may be easier if child has more severe needs? (greater consensus among professionals/school staff).

- **Overall changes to process that parents want**- more choice, better-quality information and support from professionals/school.

- Parents who consider high-quality, inclusive education to be special school only for their child- individualised curriculum, social acceptance and belongingness are most important to them (see cross-tabs).

Appendix 12. Phase 2 Interview schedule

*Additions made on the basis of pilot study feedback and/or discussions with supervisors are highlighted in green.

1) **Do you feel like you had a real choice between mainstream and special school? (adapt based on questionnaire response)** Specify for parents to speak about **type of provision**- special or mainstream- ***not*** number of schools

Possible prompts/additional questions:

- What was your choice based on?
  Prompts -your own views/research, professional/school support or pressure, negative views/experiences of mainstream education
- (If negative)- What could have made this a real choice for you (e.g. more than one option that was good enough)?
- Are there options you would have liked (even if they do not exist?)

2) **Why do you/do you not feel that mainstream school would have been appropriate for your child? (adapt based on questionnaire response)**

Possible prompts/additional questions:

- Do you feel that mainstream school could have accommodated your child's needs?
- If not, why not? (willingness of school, resources, facilities?)
- If not, how would mainstream have had to change- do you see this as feasible? (prompt parents to consider SEN units, co-located special schools). Did you consider these options in any detail?
- What do you feel a special school provides for your child that a mainstream cannot/couldn't?

3) **How were your views taken into account during the decision-making process?**

Possible prompts/additional questions:

- What level of agreement/disagreement was there regarding your child's needs? What did you agree/ disagree on? (*considering whether the process is more challenging for parents of children with moderate needs; is the process easier when school and professionals are in unanimous agreement?)*
- What level of agreement/disagreement was there regarding an appropriate **setting** for your child? Did you get your first choice of school? If not, why not?
- Did you have to wait long to find out about school placement?

4) **Who (if anyone) did you feel supported by during this process? (adapt based on questionnaire response)**

Possible prompts/additional questions:

- To what extent do you feel that you were reliant on information from schools or professionals?
- Explain how the school supported you.
- Explain how professionals supported you.
- Explain what support you would have liked from schools/professionals during this process.

5) What does inclusive education mean for your child?

Ask parents to consider these two definitions:

- Inclusion as:
  a) Sense of belonging, engaged in learning/not under the same roof as non-disabled children? Can have Inclusive education in special school. Child has social interaction with non-disabled children in some setting…

  b) Inclusion as participation academically/ socially in **mainstream schools** and/or classes. Includes part-time in a unit/part-time in mainstream class.

Possible prompts/additional questions:

- (see questionnaire responses and ask parents to elaborate: Why is this important to them/for them?)
- Does inclusive education mean meeting their academic needs or social/emotional needs? Does their current school meet both of these needs?

6) Did answering these questions make you think in new ways/ examine options not considered?

Appendix 13. Initial node structure

Name	Files	References	Created On	Created By
Social inclusion (wellbeing)	6	35	20/02/2020 17:25	D.S
Academic, Curriculum inclusion	6	26	20/02/2020 17:25	D.S
What could have made real choice	2	9	20/02/2020 17:26	D.S
Options parent would've liked	2	3	20/02/2020 17:27	D.S
Mainstream could have accommodated, how changed	0	0	20/02/2020 17:27	D.S
No	5	25	20/02/2020 20:28	D.S
Yes	1	4	20/02/2020 20:28	D.S
Interview made consider new options	0	0	21/02/2020 11:54	DS
No	5	6	21/02/2020 11:55	DS
Yes	2	3	21/02/2020 11:55	DS
Factors supporting parents decision, supporting process	6	59	20/02/2020 17:28	D.S
Factors impeding parents decision, impeding process	5	24	20/02/2020 17:29	D.S
How could be process improved, support would've liked	4	24	20/02/2020 17:29	D.S
Consensus, level of agreement around needs & setting	0	0	20/02/2020 17:30	D.S
Consensus	5	10	20/02/2020 20:37	D.S
Lack of consensus	3	6	20/02/2020 20:37	D.S

Appendix 14. Final node structure

Name	Files	References	Created On	Created By
Mainstream could have accommodated	0	0	06/03/2020 10:46	D.S
Mainstream adaptations	0	0	06/03/2020 10:46	D.S
Mainstream environment, resources appropriate	1	3	28/02/2020 10:52	DS
Consistency of approach between mainstream and special	1	1	28/02/2020 10:53	DS
Mainstream staff felt they could meet need	1	1	28/02/2020 10:52	DS
Mainstream school as inappropriate	0	0	06/03/2020 10:47	D.S
Skills, staff expertise, training insufficient at mainstream	3	6	28/02/2020 10:34	DS
Resourcing and Environment	0	0	06/03/2020 10:47	D.S
Environment, Resources not appropriate at mainstream	4	8	28/02/2020 10:33	DS
Funding insufficient at mainstream	2	4	28/02/2020 10:44	DS
Needs of the child	0	0	06/03/2020 10:49	D.S
Level of Need too great for mainstream	2	4	28/02/2020 10:35	DS
Child would be disruptive to mainstream pupils	2	2	28/02/2020 10:32	DS
Engagement with curriculum	0	0	06/03/2020 10:50	D.S
Curriculum not appropriate at mainstream	3	4	28/02/2020 10:36	DS
Would not have engaged,participated in mainstream	1	2	28/02/2020 10:38	DS
Socialising	0	0	06/03/2020 10:50	D.S
Would not have had social	1	2	28/02/2020 10:39	DS

interactions in mainstream				
Would have experienced bullying at mainstream	1	1	28/02/2020 10:43	DS
How the process supported parents (and or was positive for them)	0	0	06/03/2020 10:53	D.S
Parents being pro-active	0	0	06/03/2020 10:53	D.S
Parents proactive when choosing	2	3	28/02/2020 12:40	DS
Parents did own research	1	2	28/02/2020 12:50	DS
Options given to parents	0	0	06/03/2020 10:54	D.S
Parents had several schools to choose from	1	2	28/02/2020 12:36	DS
Parents knew what their options were	1	1	28/02/2020 12:38	DS
Parents had recommendations from other people	1	1	28/02/2020 12:59	DS
Support from professionals	0	0	06/03/2020 10:55	D.S
Supported by portage	1	4	28/02/2020 12:44	DS
Parents were supported by professionals	1	3	28/02/2020 12:38	DS
Supported by Advisory Teachers	1	3	28/02/2020 12:38	DS
Supported by key worker	1	1	28/02/2020 12:48	DS
Supported by EP	1	1	28/02/2020 12:53	DS
Supported by Care Manager	1	1	28/02/2020 13:00	DS
Support from school staff	0	0	06/03/2020 10:55	D.S
Parents supported by mainstream staff	3	12	28/02/2020 12:53	DS
Parents supported by special school staff	5	9	28/02/2020 12:13	DS
Communication between schools was good	1	2	28/02/2020 12:43	DS
Parent were given	1	2	28/02/2020	DS

information from the school (documents)			12:51	
Level of agreement around child's needs	0	0	06/03/2020 10:57	D.S
There was consensus among staff, professionals	5	10	20/02/2020 20:37	D.S
The child's needs were clear	2	6	28/02/2020 12:36	DS
Speed of process	0	0	06/03/2020 10:58	D.S
The process was quick	4	5	28/02/2020 12:46	DS
Early assessment	0	0	06/03/2020 10:58	D.S
The child's needs were assessed when they were young	1	1	28/02/2020 12:54	DS
Knowing mainstream school had put in place all they could	0	0	06/03/2020 10:59	D.S
Mainstream school had done all they could	1	1	06/03/2020 10:10	D.S
How the process was difficult for parents	0	0	06/03/2020 11:01	D.S
Lack of support, guidance	0	0	06/03/2020 11:01	D.S
There was a lack of support, guidance	4	9	28/02/2020 11:53	DS
Poor communication from county	1	5	28/02/2020 11:58	DS
Disagreement around child's needs	0	0	06/03/2020 11:02	D.S
There was a lack of consensus among staff, professionals	2	5	20/02/2020 20:37	D.S
County disagreed with choice	1	1	28/02/2020 11:45	DS
Options not clear	0	0	06/03/2020 11:03	D.S
Parents were not given choice, options	2	5	28/02/2020 11:44	DS
Options were not clear to parents	1	1	28/02/2020 11:54	DS
Challenging the system	0	0	06/03/2020 11:04	D.S

215

Parents had to fight for child's place	1	5	28/02/2020 11:44	DS
Improving the system of choice	0	0	06/03/2020 11:04	D.S
Awareness of options	0	0	06/03/2020 11:06	D.S
Parents would have liked a list of options, schools	3	10	28/02/2020 15:04	DS
Parents would have liked choices, options outlined	1	5	28/02/2020 11:03	DS
There were options parents had not heard of	2	2	01/03/2020 10:55	D.S
Making the choice earlier	0	0	06/03/2020 11:06	D.S
Parents would like to make choice earlier	1	2	28/02/2020 11:02	DS
Additional Support	0	0	06/03/2020 11:07	D.S
Parents would like peer support group	1	3	28/02/2020 15:04	DS
Parents would like more professional support	0	0	28/02/2020 15:03	DS
Educational Psychologist	1	2	28/02/2020 15:03	DS
Communication	0	0	06/03/2020 11:08	D.S
Parents would like key worker to keep them informed	1	3	28/02/2020 15:09	DS
Parents would like improved communication	1	1	28/02/2020 15:08	DS
More options	0	0	06/03/2020 11:08	D.S
Parent would have liked school for visually impaired as option	1	2	28/02/2020 10:57	DS
Parent would have liked split placement as an option	1	1	28/02/2020 11:04	DS
Inclusion as meeting academic needs	0	0	06/03/2020 11:10	D.S
Wellbeing (learning)	0	0	06/03/2020 11:10	D.S
Curriculum,	2	2	28/02/2020	DS

learning has a positive effect on wellbeing in special school			15:24	
Child does not feel different, behind	2	2	28/02/2020 15:25	DS
Appropriate curriculum	0	0	06/03/2020 11:11	D.S
The child is accessing appropriate curriculum, learning activities, exams	6	15	28/02/2020 15:24	DS
The child is 'pushed' academically in special school	2	3	28/02/2020 15:27	DS
Child can be academically 'written off' in special school due to other needs	1	1	06/03/2020 09:48	D.S
Facilities	0	0	06/03/2020 11:11	D.S
The child has access to therapeutic support in special school	2	2	28/02/2020 15:25	DS
Resources, facilities are appropriate in special school	1	2	28/02/2020 15:27	DS
Participation in learning	0	0	06/03/2020 11:11	D.S
The child is able to participate in special school, be in the classroom	2	7	28/02/2020 15:34	DS
Mainstream and special schools have different definitions of inclusion	0	0	06/03/2020 11:13	D.S
Mainstream and special school have different definitions of inclusion	1	1	06/03/2020 10:15	D.S
Inclusion as meeting social needs	0	0	06/03/2020 11:14	D.S
Social and community involvement	0	0	06/03/2020 11:14	D.S

The child is involved in the community	4	10	28/02/2020 15:58	DS
Child has social group in special school	5	7	28/02/2020 15:58	DS
Child socialises with non-SEN children	4	8	28/02/2020 15:58	DS
The child avoids bullying at special school	3	7	28/02/2020 16:00	DS
The child is segregated in mainstream	1	1	06/03/2020 09:53	D.S
Acceptance	0	0	06/03/2020 11:15	D.S
The child is accepted for who they are	1	1	28/02/2020 16:20	DS
Participation in wider activities	0	0	06/03/2020 11:15	D.S
Children do all activities together in special school	1	2	28/02/2020 16:19	DS
Wellbeing (social and emotional)	0	0	06/03/2020 11:15	D.S
Special school has a positive effect on emotional wellbeing	3	3	28/02/2020 15:58	DS
Safe, protective environment	0	0	06/03/2020 11:16	D.S
Special school provides a safe, protective environment	2	2	28/02/2020 16:03	DS
Parent reflections from the interview process	0	0	06/03/2020 11:19	D.S
Interview did not make parent consider new options	5	6	21/02/2020 11:55	DS
Interview made parent think about other families	1	1	28/02/2020 10:17	DS
Interview made parent think about how system can be improved	1	1	28/02/2020 10:17	DS
Interview made parent consider split placement	1	1	28/02/2020 10:17	DS
Interview made	1	1	28/02/2020	DS

parent consider resource base	10:16

Appendix 15. Sample interview transcripts and coding

> Click to edit
>
> So as much as they are independent educational units and they do all their education separately they might have events together or they might have some children come in and do a reading club with some of the children, some of the children from mainstream come into the special and do like a reading club with the children with disabilities.
>
> So for me that's sort of the best of both worlds is that my child is getting all his needs met in a purpose made environment for his needs, but equally he is getting some interaction from children who don't have disabilities. He's going to get some benefit from that because he's quite sociable but I think they're going to get benefit from actually learning about disabilities and accept that as part of normal life.

Interview transcript- 'Grace'. Coded at 'Child socialises with non-SEN children.

> Click to edit
>
> just to see how she got on and they felt like she wasn't ready so then they tried the following year and so on.
>
> **Interviewer:** Okay. I'm jut wondering whether there was a level of disagreement around an appropriate setting. So in Year 4 do you feel like the school and yourself disagreed on whether Courtney should go to Combe Pafford in Year 4 or was that …
>
> **Respondent:** No, no, I think it's just the suggestion that they decided to offer and it was completely up to me if I wanted to apply for it at that point or to keep her there and I said "well you're doing everything you can here" she was settled, you know, so we kept her there until Year 6.
>
> **Interviewer:** So it was your choice, okay. And it sounds like Combe Pafford was your

Interview transcript- 'Verity'. Coded at 'Parents supported by mainstream staff' and 'there was consenses among staff, professionals'.

but not necessarily under the same roof as non disabled children and the other one is really inclusion as participation academically and social in mainstream schools or classes. What do you feel inclusion is for Tristan?

Well, okay so you can look at that in both areas. Inclusion, that mainstream school their definition of the word inclusion is that he's in a class, he's with children, however when it comes to lessons and stuff they then take him out of class, include him in the event but teach it differently.

They would do the, like if they were telling a story he would be in the story and then they'd take him out to do the work. So he's in for a little bit at the beginning even if he didn't understand it. So he was sitting down as part of the class.

So I would say that was mainstream's definition of the word inclusion whereas inclusion at Cambridge is exactly what it says on the tin. They're all in it together. They all do everything as a class, as a group and it's much more hands on.

An example of that was when I was at mainstream the children that had extra needs had to try and keep quiet, you had to try and keep them from marching across the stage or whatever. In special school if they get up and walk across the stage that's fine because that's what they need to do and everybody knows that's what they need to do. They just need to move

Coding Density

There was a lack of consensus among staff, professionals

The child is able to participate in special school, be in the classroom

Poor communication from county

There was a lack of support, guidance

Parents proactive when choosing

Parents would like key worker to keep them informed

Mainstream and special school have different definitions of inclusion

Interview transcript- 'Haley and Andrew'. Coded at 'The child is able to participate in special school, be in the classroom' and 'Mainstream and special school have different definitions of inclusion'.

Appendix 16. Main themes and subthemes (with participant responses to each code)

Main theme	Subtheme	Codes	Participant responding
Mainstream school as appropriate	**Mainstream adaptations**	Consistency of approach between mainstream and special (1)	VERITY
		Mainstream environment/ resources appropriate (1)	VERITY
		Mainstream staff felt they could meet need (1)	VERITY
Mainstream school as inappropriate	**Resourcing and Environment**	Environment/Resources not appropriate at mainstream (4)	FIONA GRACE IZZY HALEY AND ANDREW
		Funding insufficient at mainstream (2)	IZZY HALEY AND ANDREW
	Skills of the staff	Skills, staff expertise, training insufficient at mainstream (3)	FIONA IZZY HALEY AND ANDREW
	Needs of the child	Level of need too great for mainstream (2)	FIONA GRACE
		Child would be disruptive to mainstream pupils (2)	MARTHA FIONA
	Engagement with curriculum	Curriculum not appropriate at mainstream (3)	FIONA GRACE IZZY
		Would not have engaged/ participated in mainstream (1)	GRACE
	Socialising	Would have experienced bullying at mainstream (1)	IZZY

		Would not have had social interactions in mainstream (1)	GRACE
How the process supported parents (was positive for them)	**Parents being pro-active**	Parents pro-active when choosing (2)	FIONA HALEY AND ANDREW
		Parents did own research (1)	GRACE
	Options given to parents	Parents knew what their options were (1)	FIONA
		Parents had several schools to choose from (1)	FIONA
		Parents had recommendations from other people (1)	IZZY
	Support from professionals	Parents were supported by professionals (advisory teachers, care manager, EP, Key worker, Portage) (4)	GRACE VERITY IZZY FIONA
	Support from school staff	Parents supported by special school staff (5)	MARTHA FIONA GRACE IZZY HALEY AND ANDREW
		Parents supported by mainstream school staff (3)	VERITY IZZY HALEY AND ANDREW
		Communication between schools was good (1)	FIONA
		Parents were given information from schools (documents) (1)	GRACE
	Level of agreement around child's needs	The child's needs were clear (2)	FIONA GRACE

		There was consensus among staff, professionals (5)	MARTHA FIONA GRACE VERITY IZZY
	Speed of process	The process was quick (4)	GRACE VERITY IZZY HALEY AND ANDREW
	Early Assessment	The child's needs were assessed when they were young (1)	VERITY
	Knowing mainstream school had put in place all they could	Mainstream school had done all they could (1)	HALEY AND ANDREW
How the process was difficult for parents	**Lack of support/guidance**	There was a lack of support/guidance (4)	MARTHA FIONA IZZY HALEY AND ANDREW
		Poor communication from county (1)	HALEY AND ANDREW
	Disagreement around child's needs	County disagreed with choice (1)	MARTHA
		There was a lack of consensus among staff/professionals (2)	IZZY HALEY AND ANDREW
	Options not clear	Parents were not given choice/options (2)	MARTHA GRACE
		Options were not clear to parents (1)	FIONA
	Challenging the system	Parents had to fight for child's place (1)	MARTHA
Improving the system of choice	**Awareness of options**	Parents would have liked a list of options, schools (3)	MARTHA GRACE HALEY AND ANDREW

		Parents would have liked their choices/options outlined (1)	GRACE
		There were options parents had not heard of (2)	MARTHA GRACE
	Making choice earlier	Parents would like to make choice earlier (1)	MARTHA
	Additional support	Parents would like peer support group (1)	GRACE
		Parents would like more professional support (EP) (1)	MARTHA
	Communication	Parents would like key worker to keep them informed (1)	HALEY AND ANDREW
		Parents would like improved communication (1)	HALEY AND ANDREW
	More options	Parent would have liked school for visually impaired as option (1)	FIONA
		Parent would have liked split placement as an option (1)	GRACE
Inclusion as meeting academic needs	**Wellbeing (learning)**	Curriculum, learning has a positive effect on wellbeing in special school (2)	MARTHA IZZY
		Child does not feel different, behind (2)*	MARTHA VERITY
	Appropriate curriculum	The child is 'pushed' academically in special school (2)	FIONA GRACE
		The child is accessing appropriate curriculum/ learning activities/ exams (6)	MARTHA FIONA GRACE VERITY

225

			IZZY HALEY AND ANDREW
		Child can be academically 'written off' in special school due to other needs (1)	GRACE
	Facilities	Resources, facilities are appropriate in special school (1)	GRACE
		The child has access to therapeutic support in special school (2)	FIONA GRACE
	Participation in learning	The child is able to participate in special school/ be in the classroom (2)	VERITY HALEY AND ANDREW
	Mainstream and special school have different definitions of inclusion	Mainstream and special school have different definitions of inclusion (1)	HALEY AND ANDREW
Inclusion as meeting social needs	**Social and community involvement**	Child has social group in special school (5)	MARTHA FIONA GRACE IZZY HALEY AND ANDREW
		Child socialises with non-SEN children (4)	MARTHA FIONA GRACE IZZY
		The child is involved in the community (4)*	MARTHA FIONA GRACE IZZY
		The child avoids bullying at special school (3)	MARTHA GRACE IZZY
		The child is segregated in mainstream (1)	MARTHA

	Acceptance	The child is accepted for who they are (1)	HALEY AND ANDREW
	Participation in wider activities	Children do all activities together in special school (1)	HALEY AND ANDREW
	Wellbeing (social and emotional)	Special school has a positive effect on emotional wellbeing (3)	MARTHA VERITY IZZY
	Safe/protective environment	Special school provides a safe, protective environment (2)	FIONA GRACE
Parent reflections from the interview process		Interview made parent think about how system can be improved (1)	IZZY
		Interview made parent think about other families (1)	GRACE
		Interview made parent consider split placement (1)	GRACE
		Interview made parent consider resource base (1)	GRACE
		Interview did not make parent consider new options (5)	MARTHA FIONA GRACE VERITY HALEY AND ANDREW

(*not referring to special school only)