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Exploring Transitions and Resourced Provision for Children with Autism in a Mainstream School: Pupil and Teacher Perspectives.

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree of

BSc (Hons) Education and Psychology.

Declaration of Authorship

I confirm that the material contained in this dissertation is all my own work and where the work of others has been drawn upon, it has been properly acknowledged according to appropriate academic conventions. No portion of this work has been submitted or is currently being submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or institute of learning.

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Contents

Abstract

Combined settings incorporating specialist and mainstream educational provision through the use of additional resourced bases/units can be the ideal scenario for young people with autism; however there is a lack of research surrounding this type of provision, especially from the perspectives of the young people themselves. This case study of a specialist base within a mainstream primary school in Southampton, focuses on the views and experiences of pupils who attend a combined setting and the staff who support them here. A classroom project was completed by the pupils with autism to express their feelings through drawn posters of their school day. This was followed by semi-structured interviews with pupils (N=5) and staff members (N=6), aiming to find out more about how daily transitions are supported and managed. Four key themes were found within the data; Structured and Unstructured Periods, Friendship and Peers, Support, and Identity. Pupils and staff discussed both benefits and drawbacks of the use of a base but generally reported on more positive experiences. It is concluded that use of the additional resource base for these pupils and staff was an effective method of practice, however research should be conducted further to discover more on the views and experiences of those with autism and who make use of this type of setting, to see if similar themes occur.

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Introduction

The current prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorder (autism) diagnoses is growing, with around 1 in 59 children receiving a diagnosis in the U.S.A (Baio *et al.*, 2018). Autism is defined as 'a complex developmental condition that involves persistent challenges in social interaction, speech and nonverbal communication, and restricted/repetitive behaviour' (American Psychiatric Association, 2019). The special educational needs and disability code of practice (SEND CoP) in England provides a statutory basis for all children to be educated in mainstream schools, unless their needs cannot be adequately met (Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care, 2015). Therefore, currently 70% of young people with autism are educated in mainstream schools (Department for Education, 2017), resulting in a number of challenges for schools to educate and provide support for these pupils (Ravet, 2011).

Mainstream settings can create difficulties for autistic pupils (Humphrey and Lewis, 2008; Roberts and Simpson, 2016) and a number of concerns for their parents (Flewitt and Nind, 2007). The school environment results in pupils engaging in a number of transitions, for example moving from task to task or between classrooms and teachers. These can be defined as horizontal transitions, as opposed to vertical transitions which are associated with upward shifts such as moving from primary to secondary school (Kagan and Neuman, 1998). It is suggested that 25% of primary school pupils' time is spent in transition activities (Sterling-Turner and Jordan, 2007) as these horizontal transitions occur daily and structure pupils' 'movement across space and time' (Vogler, Crivello and Woodhead, 2008, p.2). Many pupils can experience difficulty with their educational transitions, but children with autism particularly require additional support to enable these transitions to occur smoothly. Difficulties associated with routine change and a need for predictability can lead to behaviours including verbal and physical aggression, noncompliance and self-injury (Mesibov and Shea, 2011). Therefore it is necessary that schools have the appropriate knowledge and strategies in place to ensure these transitions are supported in ways that facilitate engagement and positive experiences for the pupils, their class peers and teachers; particularly as those with autism are at a greater risk of exclusion from school (Brede *et al.*, 2017).

Indeed, when such strategies are in place, mainstream settings can also bring a number of benefits for pupils, including the opportunity to engage in the national curriculum, socialise

with classmates and receive the knowledge, skills and values needed to engage in society (Mesibov and Shea, 2011). More recently schools have begun to introduce specialist bases or units within mainstream schools as combined settings (National Autistic Society, 2018). These provisions aim to offer autistic pupils inclusive access to education by providing expert knowledge, teaching and support within a mainstream environment. Structured environments are created and pupils' engagement in mainstream activities and lessons are flexible and appropriately supported. This allows pupils to receive both the benefits of specialist and mainstream provision and enforces inclusive practices (Hoy, Parsons and Kovshoff, 2018).

My research aimed to discover the views and experiences of pupils with autism and their support staff who attend a specialist resourced base in a mainstream school. These pupils will encounter a number of unique horizontal transitions as they move from specialist to mainstream environments throughout the day. Transitions are known to be fundamental to children's experiences and well-being, with changing environments requiring them to adapt and overcome a number of obstacles (Vogler, Crivello and Woodhead, 2008). For a pupil with autism who transitions between multiple environments, these obstacles can appear more challenging and more frequent. My research is part of the Autism Community Research Network @ Southampton (ACoRNS) which focuses on the transitions of young people with autism to develop an understanding of the effective support and practice that can be used to encourage more positive experiences (ACoRNS, 2018).

Literature Review

There are concerns about the appropriate educational provision for pupils with autism due to a number of negative experiences reported, including bullying and loneliness (Glashan, Mackay and Grieve, 2004; Humphrey and Lewis, 2008; Humphrey and Symes, 2010). A recent survey conducted by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Autism (APPGA) (2017) discovered the views and experiences from a number of stakeholders, which suggested mainstream schools are not equipped to provide autistic children and their families with the necessary teaching and support. Results revealed generally negative responses from a large sample of 2,573 parents and carers, 176 young autistic people and 308 teachers; with over half of the young people reporting unhappiness at school. The survey also revealed that anxiety is often misunderstood as pupils misbehaving, which is concerning considering the high number of autistic children attending a mainstream setting (Department for Education, 2017). Parents also agreed that the schools were not providing enough specialist input to meet their child's particular needs, although they felt their child was academically able to attend mainstream schools. Further issues also raised included a lack of knowledge on autism, sensory triggers, large class sizes and unstructured periods such as break and lunch. This continues a difficult debate for parents as they have to make decisions regarding the placement of their child (Jindal-Snape *et al.*, 2005)

The opportunity for their child to learn alongside other classmates is a prominent reason for parents' preference for mainstream over specialist schooling (Flewitt and Nind, 2007). However, research has suggested that children with autism experience high levels of bullying and engage in fewer social interactions than their non-autistic classmates (Wainscot *et al*., 2008). Wainscot *et al.,* (2008) used a control sample to make comparisons between those with or without autism in a mainstream school and found that 0% of the control pupils and 33% of autistic pupils spent their time alone during break time.

Humphrey and Symes (2010) confirmed issues surrounding autistic pupils' social conduct experiences at school through questionnaires. Their sample consisted of 120 pupils with autism, dyslexia or a group of controls from 12 mainstream secondary schools. Pupils indicated the frequency of bullying and their perceived level of social support. Autistic pupils reported the lowest level of support from their classmates, however no difference was found in perceived level of support from teachers. This study also found that autistic pupils were three times more likely to be bullied compared to their classmates, which is concerning as not

only is the act of bullying distressing but it can lead to a number of negative consequences including in self-esteem, mental health and relationships (Rigby, 2003). However, it is important to note that the pupils may have not reported their experiences of bullying as accurate, particularly as people with autism can interpret behaviour differently due to impairments in social cognition (Turi *et al.*, 2017). Even so, Humphrey and Symes (2010) suggest that lack of bullying and social support are strong indicators of inclusion, therefore it can be suggested that for mainstream schools to practice inclusively, measures are required to prevent bullying and increase social support.

O'Hagan and Hebron (2016) demonstrate how specialist resource bases within mainstream schools can be of benefit, particularly when addressing these concerns surrounding friendship. Although the opportunity is there to interact with mainstream peers, the three pupils interviewed had formed their main friendships with other children who also attended the specialist base. The base served as a safe place in supporting the formation of friendships as well as somewhere the pupils could return to during difficult, more unstructured periods of the day such as break time.

Combined educational settings offer a potentially inclusive type of provision through creating an environment which is flexible in its ability to provide the support pupils with autism require, whilst also allowing access to the mainstream resources and experiences (Jordan, 2005). Flewitt and Nind (2007) found how a combined setting can therefore answer some concerns surrounding autistic pupils at school. Interviews with parents revealed concerns about levels of inclusivity when deciding on the appropriate setting for their child, as they remained unconvinced that one school could provide the ideal situation. Parents preferred combined settings as they provided benefits such as socialising with mainstream pupils but also additional specialist support. This could suggest that the use of specialist resource bases within mainstream schools provide 'the best of both worlds' which many parents desired for their child. However it is necessary to note that this study was on parents' decisions regarding early year's placements and their thoughts may differ in terms of primary or secondary schooling. Parents also stated fears of their child becoming confused with the multiple settings, however this was outweighed by the positives a combined setting brought, including parents feeling as if their family was part of the community. This is supported by Hebron and Bond (2017) who found that specialist resource bases within a mainstream school allowed both parents and pupils to feel part of the wider community, particularly in the engagement in after-school clubs and trips.

Bond and Hebron (2016) and Hebron and Bond (2017) longitudinal studies strengths lie through finding the perspectives from three different groups of stakeholders, as well as collecting their data across both primary and secondary schools. Their research was part of a large evaluation of resource provision, but they specifically focused on the experiences of the autistic pupils, parents and teachers across both papers. Almost all participants reported generally positive perceptions of their school experiences with use of additional specialist provision. This is in support of previous literature which found that parents of children in resourced provisions have positive attitudes about the school (Starr and Foy, 2012; Lindsay *et al.*, 2016). Hebron and Bond (2017) also found that having specialist resource bases generated positive experiences through providing 'flexible, individualised support and quiet spaces' (p.569), alongside pupils focusing on the positive relationships with staff in their interviews.

This is in agreement with the findings of Frederickson, Jones and Lang (2010) who compared the differing strategies between mainstream schools with or without additional provision and found that the additional bases provided teachers with more time and flexibility which they described as 'the beauty of the whole system' (p.68). An increase in time and flexibility can result in teachers' attention focusing towards offering interpersonal relationships, which pupils claim are a significant factor in determining enjoyment of lessons (Hopkins, 2010). This is supported by a 2006 Ofsted report which stated that the best provisions were those where 'relationships between staff and pupils were of highest order' (Ofsted, 2006, p.9). The report presents that mainstream schools with additional resourced provision were most successful for providing good academic, social and personal outcomes for pupils. Tobin *et al.*, (2012) also demonstrated the value parents put on additional provision within mainstream schools, with it particularly influencing school selection over other factors.

Stoner *et al.*, (2007) interviewed parents to see how they felt about their child's experiences at school including both the vertical and horizontal transitions experienced daily. These included moving between tasks and environments, as well as changes such as having a new teacher. Parents gave a number of barriers which they felt prevented smooth transitions for their child. One was a lack of acknowledgement from teachers of their child's requirements, such as providing more time for transitions to be made so they could come to terms with changing surroundings. The parents desired flexibility from the school and staff so that time, sensitivity, expertise and strategies can be put in place to improve support. Therefore alongside the recently discussed findings (Ofsted, 2006; Frederickson, Jones and Lang,

2010), this concern surrounding transitions could be addressed through use of a specialist resource base.

However, pupils' attendance at a combined setting results in an increased number of horizontal transitions as they move between classrooms, pupils and teachers. All school pupils experience a number of transitions including transitioning from home to school and between activities but Hume *et al.*, (2014) emphasises that the expectations placed upon autistic pupils can prove particularly difficult. Difficulties associated with routine change and a need for predictability can lead to a number of negative behaviours, experiences and feelings from these pupils (Mesibov and Shea, 2011). Transitions have often been considered periods 'without any additional educational purpose' (Banerjee and Horn, 2013, p.4), however facilitating transitions can encourage independence, minimise challenging behaviour and promote more productive time in the classroom (Ostrosky *et al.*, 2008). Therefore it is essential that transitions are supported appropriately in ways that facilitate engagement and positive experiences for pupils, their classmates and teachers.

Rosenkoetter and Fowler (1986) found that teachers from special education classes approached transitions differently and more successfully than those in mainstream classes. Possible reasons provided were small class sizes and stronger teacher-pupil ratios where teachers are able to provide more individual approaches. Although this research is over thirty years old, it is still relevant in forming an understanding as to why specialist classrooms may be more effective in supporting autistic pupils during transitions. Additional specialist provision may also have the flexibility to implement support mechanisms which have been proven to help support transitions for pupils with autism, for example through using visual/photographic cueing and modelling (West, 2008), which the parents from Stoner *et al.*, (2007) desired.

It is important to consider pupils' own views about how they feel during their school day and the support they receive. The SEND code of practice states that children must be given the right to express their opinions and for these to be involved in discussion and any decisions made for their education (Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care, 2015, p.20). However, more research needs to be done to better understand the needs of children (Calder, Hill and Pellicano, 2013), not least because it has been suggested that what pupils say about their own learning experiences is the most important way of improving schools (Rudduck, Demetriou and Pedder, 2003). Research focusing only on parents' views

is problematic in this context because the SEND code of practice is clear that the views of parents should not be used as a proxy for young people's views.

The purpose of my project is to therefore access and understand the experiences and views of pupils who attend an additional specialist resource base in their mainstream school. As a supportive environment is of importance in successful provision, I also aim to hear from the members of staff who work within the resource base. Not only will they be able to provide an insight into their methods, views and experiences, but they can facilitate an understanding of the pupils' experiences also.

To do so, I will explore the following research questions:

1. What are the views and experiences of young pupils with autism about their daily transitions between a specialist resource base and the further mainstream areas of their school?

2. What are the views and experiences of teachers about the transitions of young pupils with autism between a specialist resource base and the further mainstream areas of their school?

3. What do these views and experiences identify as the effective practices that support transitions and the practices that could be developed or improved further?

Methodology

<u>Research Design</u>

O'Connor *et al.*, (2011) addresses the issues which can arise when conducting research which aims to offer pupils with SEND, including autism, a voice in their experiences. They reinforce the importance of not simply gathering data from pupils passively, but for the pupils to feel as if they are making a contribution to their own experiences too. This largely influenced my research design and the choice to use a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis. Qualitative methods allows participants to be involved in the discovery of their own experiences, meanings and interpretations through complete, detailed description (Pamela Atieno, 2009). A quantitative approach could limit participants' own contribution as well as the possible outcomes from the project (Davies and Hughes, 2014).

Due to its in-depth nature, a case study of members of staff and pupils from a within a single school was chosen. Specifically I wished to investigate a particular group of pupils: those with autism who attended a specialist resource base within a mainstream school. Case studies can be criticised for their lack of generalisability and use of small samples (Tsang, 2013), however, Travers (2001) points out how a lot can be learnt from a small amount of data. A case study also draws upon a range of evidence and can provide rich, detailed data. This is something I aim to achieve by the in-depth approach of my research.

<u>Participants</u>

A purposive sample was used as I aimed to explore the views of pupils with a diagnosis of autism who attended a specialist resource base within mainstream primary school. The school site was elected in partnership with ACoRNS. The pupils' parents/carers were provided with information and consent forms. Six consented for their child to participate, two parents returned forms stating they did not consent for participation. One child did not provide their assent to take part. The final participants therefore consisted of three nine year old and two eleven year old boys and six staff members (one male class teacher and five female teaching assistants).

<u>Methods</u>

Posters:

Visual supports are commonly used for those with autism to support communication in a range of ways, including 'expressing needs and wants, sensory preferences and emotions, and seeking and offering information' (Arthur-Kelly *et al.*, 2009, p.1476). The posters made by the pupils were a representation of their average day at school and were used as a visual aid to facilitate the interviews conducted, by providing an additional resource for both myself as the researcher and the participants to elaborate on. Asking the pupils to create a poster coincides with O'Connor *et al.*, (2011) recommendation of pupils actively making their own contribution to the research conducted.

O'Connell, (2013) also emphasised how using visual approaches can enable more active participation in research, as it does not rely on verbal skills. By not only relying on verbal responses, the posters provide a source of data which can be analysed and used to make conclusions. Interviews also rely on participants thinking back to previous experiences and emotions and this use of autobiographical memory is something children with autism can find difficult (Crane, Goddard and Pring, 2013). However the use of visual supports addresses this somewhat as it can act as a method to help the pupils remember and recall their events and emotions.

Semi-structured interviews:

Cridland *et al.*, (2015) suggest that qualitative methods are the most appropriate way of carrying out research particularly when involving children with SEND as they can be used to investigate 'complex issues and emphasis on presenting rich descriptions rather than on testing priori hypotheses' (p.3). Semi-structured interviews are therefore my chosen method as they enable questions to be structured and rephrased where necessary, allowing for flexibility if answers require elaboration or rewording for easier understanding. Through the use of open-ended questions the opportunity is also given for participants to provide responses that are meaningful to them and for these to be questioned in more detail (Alsaawi, 2014).

Semi-structured interviews are a simple and efficient way to collect data, but the process can be time consuming. A large amount of qualitative data can lead to lengthy and difficult analysis and this was kept in mind when planning and carrying out the research. To ensure ease, as well as ensuring that the interviews sought what they aimed to find, the questions were planned in advance (appendix A-B). These questions aimed to direct discussion about

the pupils' experiences of their school day, and how staff support the pupils, respectively. Both sets of questions were based upon main themes drawn from the literature:

Transitions: Focusing on the horizontal transitions that pupils engage in throughout the day. Hume *et al.*, (2014) suggests that pupils with autism find difficulty with their daily school transitions, including recognising the cues which indicate the start and end of activities or lessons. Difficulties can also arise in transitioning between locations within the school and between teachers, subjects and pupils.

Likes and Dislikes: Research has revealed different findings about autistic pupils' experiences of school (Wainscot, *et al.,* 2008; Calder, Hill and Pellicano, 2013). Seeking knowledge of what parts of the day the pupils like or dislike can provide an insight to their emotions and reveal what factors may contribute to enjoyment and/or unhappiness at school.

Friendship: Children with autism can experience difficulties in social communication with peers and may also interpret friendship different than non-autistic peers (Humphrey and Lewis, 2008; Calder, Hill and Pellicano, 2013). The interview questions therefore seek to find out the existence of friendship, when and where the pupils see their friends, and the nature of these friendships.

Identity: Having a specialist resourced base within a mainstream school provides a unique experience for both pupils and staff where two school identities can be established. The questions aim to discover how the participants conduct their day with use of the base, their feelings about it, and their opinions on its effectiveness.

<u>Ethical Considerations</u>

The Ethics and Research Governance Committee at the University of Southampton gave ethical approval (see appendix C) and appropriate methods were taken to ensure any ethical issues were addressed. The pupils (see appendix D) and members of staff (see appendix G) were given information sheets, of which the pupils' was adapted to be appropriate for their age and development. Staff members signed a consent form (see appendix H) to indicate their agreement to participate, and children received an assent form. Parents were provided with an information sheet (see appendix E) to explain the research aims and procedure and a consent form to sign (see appendix F) if they were happy to support their child's participation. However, parent/carer consent cannot act alone as a replacement for assent of pupils themselves (Cridland *et al.*, 2015) and consent also needs to be applied throughout data

collection (Loyd, 2013). To ensure this, the pupils were asked again prior to the recording of the interviews if they were happy with the process, as well as being reminded that they could stop the interview at any time. A member of staff was also present who they could turn to if they felt any discomfort.

There was a very low risk to participants beyond the everyday risks of attending school. There was the possibility that some participants may have found the interview scenario and questions distressing to discuss, however they were again reminded that they did not have to answer all of the questions and could take a break or stop at any time.

Confidentiality was assured by no personal details including names of participants being used in the collection, analysis or write up. Data was also kept in compliance with the University of Southampton's Data Protection policy.

<u>Procedure</u>

Through collaborating with teachers to design a classroom activity, pupils were initially asked by their teacher to create a poster of their typical day at school. They were asked to reflect on their own experiences and emotions of the different transitions which occur daily; this included their likes/dislikes and who they generally spent their day with. The pupils had a choice on how to display their poster but were advised to present it in chronological order in the form of a timeline.

On a following day, I met with the pupils and members of staff to conduct face-to-face interviews. The previously made posters remained on the table in front of both myself and the participants so that they could be used for reflection and to help direct discussion. The interviews with pupils lasted between 6 and 20 minutes, whilst interviews with staff lasted between 3 and 35 minutes; both were voice recorded using a Dictaphone. It was important to record the interviews as note-taking alone would not have been enough to collect data detailed and accurately.

On a later date, the staff and I put together a book presenting the posters the pupils had made along with quotations from the interviews. This was so the class could share their experiences with others and have a physical evidence of their experience contributing to this research.

<u>Data Analysis</u>

Transcriptions of each interview were made and analysed through a method of categorisation, provided by Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003). Firstly 'preset-categories' were established from the literature and interview questions, which were sought through initial readings of the transcripts with codes noted on the side (step 1). Emergent categories were then identified through further reading and coding of the transcripts, as categories which may have not initially been established by the literature or interview questions (step 2) (see appendix I). Analysis was then focused by question, to identify any differences or similarities across participants, as can be seen in appendix J (step 3). Through identifying patterns and connections within the transcripts and categories, main themes were established and transcripts were colour coded according to these themes (step 4) (see appendix K).

Findings and Discussion

The posters created by the pupils can be seen in figures 1-5 below. Through these and transcription and coding of interview data, four key themes were identified. These themes provide the main findings of the views and experiences of pupils and staff and direct discussion into suggested practice which could be developed to support them further.
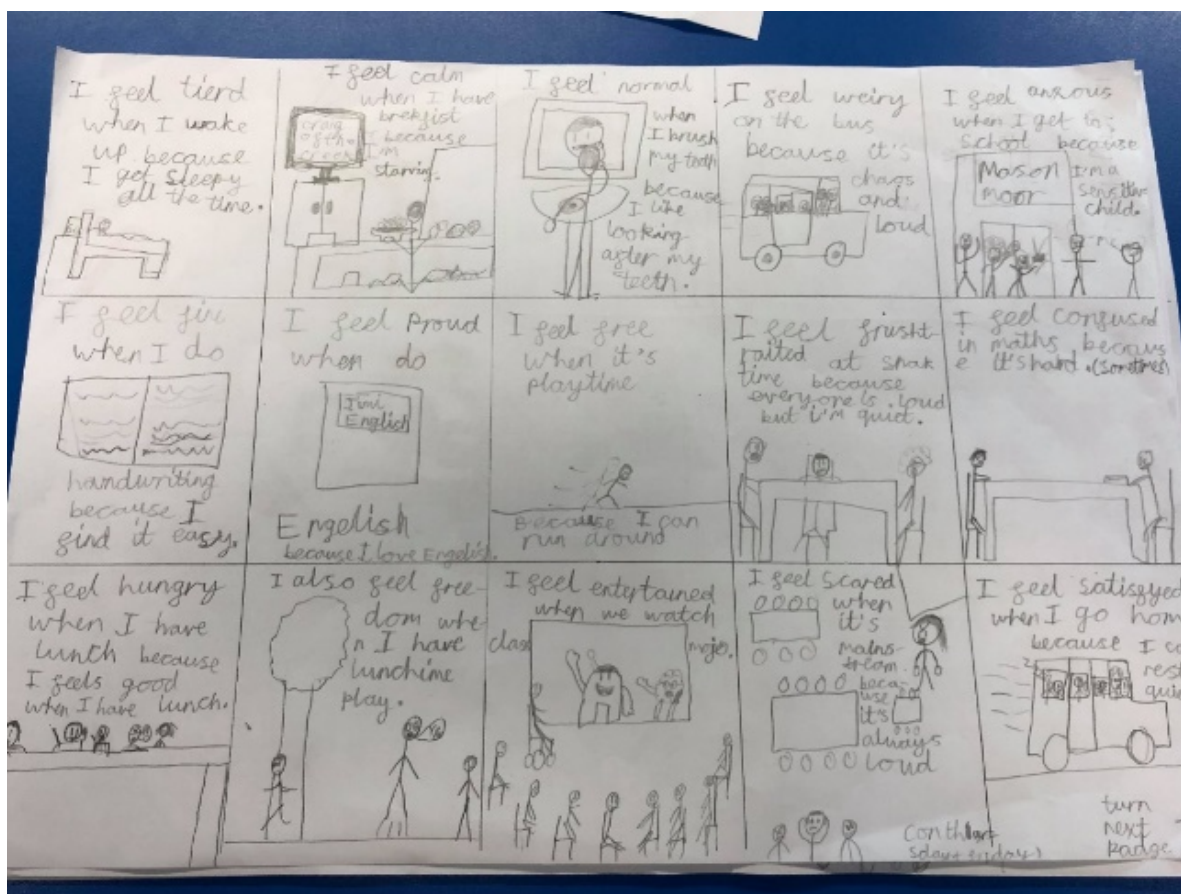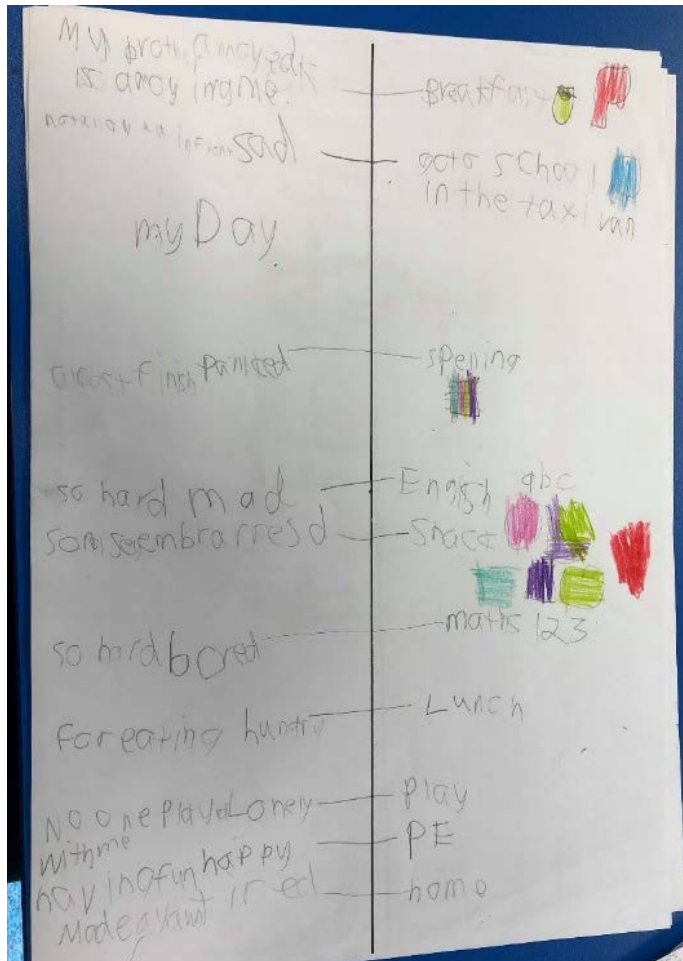

Figure 1.

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

Figure 5

<u>Structured and Unstructured Periods</u>

The staff stressed that the use of their specialist resourced base offered the opportunity for more structure, allowing the class to stick to a routine which the pupils appreciated. One pupil wrote on their poster that they feel anxious as they first arrive at school, when asked why he said:

> *'I don't know what's in store, cause it can be like children flying across screaming or maybe it could be a calm day where everybody is normal.'*

But the same pupil then expressed:

> *'I feel fine when I do handwriting in the morning cause I find it quite easy and it settles me in everyday and it kind of makes me feel welcome.'*

Handwriting is part of their initial lessons in the base and an example of a period providing routine and structure. Discussion revealed that the time spent in the base was enjoyable and successful for both pupils and staff. Although a few pupils described the content of the lessons within the base as sometimes challenging, they all enjoyed and preferred the morning lessons in comparison to their time spent in the mainstream classrooms in the afternoon. For example in figure 2 the pupil's emotions were happy during spelling in the base, but angry during mainstream.

The familiarity of routine was suggested by staff as a possible reason for the pupils' preferences for their time spent in the base. It is common for those with autism to find difficulty with changes in routine (Seltzer *et al.*, 2003), therefore the ability to have a structured area and time was reported as a large benefit of having the resourced provision base. However, none of the pupils spoke directly about routine when discussing their differing feelings between their lessons. The majority of reasons given for disliking mainstream lessons was because of the volume of noise, which staff also agreed was a large contribution, however ensuring structure into the specialist lessons can result in a quieter and calmer environment.

The staff also suggested that the more unstructured transition periods can lead to the most problematic behaviours from the pupils. Physical Education (PE) lessons were a common topic of discussion in relation to its increased number of transitions. Within this lesson the

pupils are separated into three different groups where they engage in one activity and then move onto the next. These transitions were reported as either a positive or negative experience for the pupils. As one member of staff explained:

> *'if they like the activity, they have to end something they really enjoy to move onto something they may not, and if they don't like PE at all then they're having to go on from one thing they don't like to another'.*

However the staff acknowledged that making these transitions more structured may not necessarily be beneficial to the pupil's personal growth. Again relating to real life experience, one staff member stated:

> *'They need to experience transitions, because it's real life situations…a safe environment can change, they need to learn how to cope with that'.*

This emphasises the benefit of a combined setting, as it exposes pupils to experiences which they will encounter daily, as well as providing them with continued support, knowledge and strategies needed in coping with these.

One daily transition which raised concerns for both pupils and staff was the journey to school. Three of the pupils described this negatively, with feelings such as *'worried'* and *'sad'* and referring to their journeys as *'chaos' 'loud'* and *'difficult'*. One boy wrote *'I feel weary'* next to his picture of the bus (fig.3); when asked why, he highlighted that it was often noisy and that he would feel anxious about what was in store for the day. However, the same pupil described his feelings as *'satisfied'* on the journey home as he used this journey to sleep and wind down after a busy day. A staff member reported how a different pupil dislikes the journey home, stating *'I think he likes the security of school so he becomes unsettled at the end of the afternoon'.*

Therefore, it may not necessarily be the environment of the bus which is problematic for every pupil, but that this journey is the period where possible anxieties surrounding school can arise. It is important to recognise that these transitions between home and school can be challenging and so more support may be needed. For example as a member of staff said:

> *'they come in and straight away we expect them to sit quiet and do their handwriting, perhaps some of them really need to let off a bit of steam first'.*

<u>Friendship and Peers</u>

All of the pupils interviewed spoke of having a number of friends. When asked about their favourite part of their day the majority of responses were break time where they played with their peers, and one pupil consistently reported that his favourite time of the day was when he could spend time with a particular friend. A number of pupils also reported playing with children from the mainstream class, although the staff agreed their friendships were mainly formed with the other pupils in the base. This supports the research findings of O'Hagan and Hebron (2016), who found that autistic pupils in specialist bases mostly formed their friendships there. Therefore my findings reinforce that use of specialist bases or units provide an apparently comfortable environment for strong friendships to be formed for autistic pupils which may not be achieved in typical mainstream settings.

It could be suggested that these findings are due to the number of interaction opportunities the autistic pupils have or do not have with other pupils. This can be understood through the 'proximity principle', the tendency for relationships to be formed with those physically close to you (Chadsey and Gun Han, 2005). The pupils spend the majority of their day with the other children from the base, including when they are in the mainstream classroom. One staff member explained how their physical placement within the class will be sat away from their mainstream peers and suggested that an improvement would be for them to sit together: *'they do feel part of the class, but sometimes it feels a little bit still that we aren't.'*

However another member of staff stated that the autistic pupils often interact with their mainstream peers and that *'there are a lot of lovely children who will automatically grab out children to partner up with'*. Possible advisory practice would therefore be for members of staff to make consistent arrangements which enable more interactions within the classroom and lead to further chances of friendship bonding.

One pupil discussed his difficulties with communicating with peers, emphasising feelings of embarrassment and loneliness:

> *(I) What have you written next to playtime?*
> *(P) Lonely.*
> *(I) Why do you feel lonely?*
> *(P) Because some people won't allow, because some people don't want to play with me. Sometimes I get too annoying.*

(I) You think you're being annoying? How does that make you feel?

(P) Sad. It's because I like to play doctor who.

One member of staff also spoke of this particular pupil, highlighting how he frequently spends his time alone during break and play:

'*He tends to sort of be in their [the other pupils] faces all the time and no one tends to want to play with him'*.

Many people with autism display particular interests and/or obsessions and preoccupations, which can create difficulties with forming friendships (Howard, 2006). Although the staff spoke of strategies they put in place to support this particular pupil such as encouragement and monitoring on the playground, one also suggested: '*maybe it would be quite good to have like a buddy, so they have a link with the mainstream'*. Buddy systems have shown to be very effective in encouraging friendships and reducing loneliness for school aged children (Walsh and Gamage, 2003). Thus, methods such as this can be recommended as possible practice. The same member of staff suggested that mainstream pupils should be further educated about autism, believing this was an obstacle in experiences. This aligns with the APPGA (2017) survey which found that 7 in 10 autistic young people felt as if their peers did not understand them.

Support

Good communication between staff and pupils was expressed as vital technique for supporting smooth transitions and the overall content of the day. However, four members of staff expressed a desire for further communication with the mainstream staff members, stating that a lack of communication with the department was a drawback in their experiences. They emphasised that active communication ensures they can provide the additional support for pupils through preparing and differentiating work to their individual abilities. The staff spoke of how occasionally the content within the mainstream lessons are not at an appropriate level, which one described as sometimes '*not pitched right'* and '*way over the children's heads'*. Being informed of the particular lesson content or of any changes prior to moving to the mainstream classrooms would mean that staff could sufficiently prepare the work for the pupils' transition. This could result in more positive experiences, particularly in reference to their previously discussed difficulties with change.

Staff confirmed that their pupil to staff ratio of 2:1 allowed them to provide enhanced, focused support in the mainstream periods. Methods used to facilitate learning included use of visual schedules and 'foundation boxes' which consist of work activities catered for each pupil. If any difficulties arise such as unsuitable content then members of staff can apply use of these boxes as needed; including leaving the room and continuing work elsewhere if necessary. This way anxieties are reduced but productivity is still high. However, a member of staff stated that they avoid leaving the mainstream classrooms as much as possible as the swift changes in the afternoon represent a more realistic experience for the pupils, stating: '*that's life, they've got to learn how to adapt*'.

This focus upon support relates to the concept of 'guided participation' which emphasises children's engagement in their own world alongside the role of adults and peers (Vogler, Crivello and Woodhead, 2008). Vogler, Crivello and Woodhead (2008) argue that the guidance provided by adults shapes children's confidence in performing culturally valued behaviour, routines and skills. When asked about the strategies they use to support the pupils, one staff member highlighted their use of modelling;

> '*We use loads of modelling, we model, and we've got high expectations here so we model a lot of behaviour of how we expect them to behave. I like to think this teaches them valuable life skills too*'.

However members of staff also spoke about how the school was currently struggling with behaviour from a number of mainstream pupils. One pupil discussed their behaviour:

> *(I) Are there any parts of the day which you do not like?*
> *(P) Mainstream.*
> *(I) Why do you not like mainstream?*
> *(P) Because it's the people.*
> *(I) What do you not like about the people?*
> *(P) Cause they keep shouting and being naughty.*

As well as being overwhelming for the autistic pupils because of a high level of disruption and noise, the staff were also concerned that the misbehaving children were modelling behaviour which was not appropriate. This is of particular interest as it is direct contrast with one of the main reasons parents give for the preference of mainstream schooling for their children; to increase social opportunities. For example, Waddington and Reed (2006) found

that socialisation was an important factor for parents' decisions regarding their child's placement in schools, as they believed it would be good for their child to model off other children. However the findings from the current interviews suggest that this may not always be a positive influence.

<u>Identity</u>

The pupils and staff hold a sense of multiple identities within the school; between the specialist resource base and the mainstream classrooms and between their mainstream school and the specialist school of which the resource base is collaborated with.

Specialist vs Mainstream Classroom:
In terms of within the mainstream school, the views and feelings from staff were mixed. As one staff member quoted:

> '*the benefits are that you get the best of both worlds but in some senses you also end up with the worst of both worlds as well.'*

This follows the findings of Flewitt and Nind (2007), where parents also described the combined setting as 'the best of both worlds' (p.436). In the current interviews it was emphasised that the specialist base provides the pupils and staff with a '*supportive'* and '*safe'* environment to teach sufficiently as well as develop skills outside of academia. Positives of accessing mainstream provision included allowing the pupils to develop social skills and have access to the same taught content as other pupils their age; however the interviews also revealed drawbacks of combining the two. One member of staff spoke of feeling '*like a spare part in somebody else's school'* and '*you can feel like you're out here by yourself"*. Relating back to the issues which were discussed earlier surrounding communication with mainstream staff, this could suggest that being part of a specialist resourced base produces a struggle with identity. However the same staff member did emphasise that there is also a '*sense of your own community'* and '*a strong team'*. They furthermore spoke of the provision providing the freedom to make choices and engage in activities which they would not be able to do if it was strictly mainstream based.

For the pupils, there was also evidence of split identity between the base and the mainstream classrooms. One member of staff spoke of a pupil who felt like '*a big fish in the base but a very small fish in mainstream'* and can therefore offer further explanation for the pupils

dislike for mainstream lessons. Though the staff member emphasised that although the pupil felt this way, he still successfully transitions to the mainstream classroom every day.

Mainstream vs Specialist School:

The pupils were either unfazed or excited with the fact they were part of two schools, but none suggested any difficulties or dislike towards the matter. One boy spoke about how he feels '*different*' because of it, but in a positive way such as it was '*cool*' to have his photo as a pupil on the websites of both schools. Other pupils too used the words '*cool*' and '*exciting*' to describe their feelings. One thing they particularly enjoyed was the opportunity to visit the specialist school every week to go swimming, in which both staff and pupils described as the '*highlight of the week*'. When talking about the specialist school, one member of staff said '*they see it as a place that is very free, relaxed and chilled*'. Further positives spoken of were the opportunity to go on both the specialist and mainstream school's trips and the specialised input from staff.

However, one member of staff highlighted that in some cases they '*lose out*' on what the specialist school could offer to their pupils. These included resources such as the ICT suite and kitchen which are not available in the mainstream setting. The staff member believed that by not having access to these resources it meant that pupils missed out on '*fundamental life learning*' which the specialist school placed more focus on compared to mainstream's focus on academic targets. This coincides with Shah (2007) who found that young people with special educational needs and disabilities took up opportunities to visit specialist schools to use their facilities, reporting the lack of access to these in their own schools as a significant problem.

Conclusions

This dissertation sought to explore the views and experiences of primary aged pupils with autism and their support staff on their day to day transitions within a specialist resourced provision base in a mainstream school. Overall these views and experiences were generally positive, with the specialist base bringing a number of benefits, and all pupils enjoying their time spent within it. For the pupils, the base provides a quieter, safe and fun environment where they receive close support and the opportunity to form a number of friendships. Most of the anxieties which were apparent were centred either on noise level or those particular to each individual child and therefore can be difficult to avoid in terms of general change of practice. However it is important to bear these in mind in gaining an understanding of these individual needs and meet them where possible.

Overall, as one member of staff explained, the combined setting provides '*the best and worst of both worlds*'. For the staff, the base allows for flexibility and access to some resources and expertise from the specialist school. However they also encounter some lack of communication within the mainstream school, and feel as if the behaviour of some of the mainstream pupils has made a negative impact. This continues the debate surrounding what constitutes the most appropriate provision for pupils with autism (Parsons *et al.*, 2011) and emphasises the difficulty in finding the ideal place which can address everything. Nevertheless, this research supports the use of additional specialist bases/units in mainstream schools as appropriate practice for young people with autism.

However this research is not without limitations. Firstly, there was a chance of inaccuracy of answers provided from both pupils and staff. The data collection methods of posters and interviews required the pupils to use their memory in thinking back to different experiences. As mentioned in the previous chapter, those with autism can find difficulty in with this (Crane, Goddard and Pring, 2013) and therefore inaccuracies may have appeared in their accounts.

Furthermore, only one person analysed the transcripts which could have involved an interpretive bias. For example it is possible as a researcher to look to validate expected themes whilst ignoring others (Taylor-powell and Renner, 2003), this could therefore be avoided in the future by carrying out inter-rater coding (Armstrong *et al.*, 1997). Best practice includes inter-rating coding in mitigating interpretive bias to improve trustworthiness and quality of research (McAlister *et al.*, 2018).

The findings and conclusions from this study cannot be generalised as a small sample within only one school was used and what works well for one school may not for another. Another possible improvement would be to include a wider range of participants such as the mainstream staff and mainstream pupils in order to understand the context from their perspectives as well. I would also carry out the interviews with staff prior to the interviews with pupils. This is because I believe the staff provided information which would have been beneficial to use to shape the questions for the pupils.

However overall this study has given young people with autism and staff an active opportunity to engage in research as well as provide them with a platform to have their voice heard. All participants enjoyed the experience and many spoke of its benefits to them and their school. This also reinforces that it is possible for young autistic pupils to successfully take part in research and that they should continue to be offered such opportunities to make positive differences to their experiences.

Word count: 7997.

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Appendices

<u>Appendix A - Pupil interview schedule</u>

I have your project you made recently in class. I am going to ask you a few questions about these projects and your school day. You can use the project to help you answer these questions. Our chat today is voice recorded to help me remember what you have said. You can stop or take a break at any time and you do not have to answer the questions if you do not want to.

1) Firstly can you tell me about what you have made here for your project?

2) What is your favourite part of the day you have drawn/written?

Prompts: Why? Is it the people/the place/the subject? How does it make you feel?

3) Is there a part of the day that you like less?

Prompts: Why? Is it the people/the place/the subjects/too difficult? How does it make you feel?

4) For the next question, I would like you to think about different parts of the day and what you like or dislike about them (these can be from the next list or the parts of the day they've drawn) What do you like or dislike about:

-Getting to school.

Prompts: How do you get to school? Bus? Taxi? Are you excited for school?

-Morning lessons in resource base.

-Break/Lunch times.

-Afternoon in mainstream classroom (this could include swimming/PE).

Prompts: This could include swimming and PE. Having different teachers.

-Leaving school.

Prompts: How do you get home? Do you like when home time comes along?

-Any other part of the day the pupil may have on their project or wish to speak about.

5) Who are your friends? When do you see them during the school day?

Prompts: Are they the children in the resource base? In the mainstream classroom? Outside of school?

6) What would make your day at school better? What would you like to change?

7) Do you have any feelings about being part of two schools, [School 1] and [School 2]?

<u>Appendix B - Staff interview schedule</u>

I have the projects the pupils made recently in class about their school day. I am going to ask you a few questions about these projects and your role, as well as your own views and experiences. This will be voice recorded and you can stop the interview at any time.
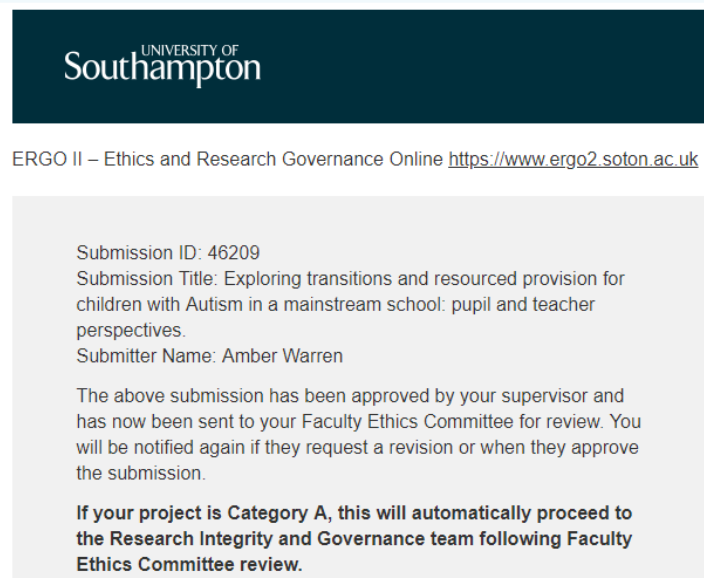
Their role and the base:

1) Can you explain to me your role in supporting the pupils day to day at school?

2) What did you do (and may continue to do) to support the pupils when they moved into Maple Class?

3) What do you think are the benefits of having the resource base here for the pupils?

4) What do you think the drawbacks are (if any) of having the resource base here for the pupils?

5) Overall, what difference do you think having the resource base makes for the children?

These next questions are based around the pupil's school day:

6) Which part of the day do you think the pupils enjoy the most?
-Why do you think this?

7) Which part of the day do you think the pupils find most challenging?
-Why do you think this is?

3) Are there any particular examples you can think of where the pupils/a particular pupil shows difficulty and/or enjoyment from a particular transition in their school day?
For example:
-Getting to and from school.
-Moving from the base to main classroom and vice versa.
-Different teacher.
-Different pupils.
-Changes in the school day.

4) What are the specific methods or strategies you then use to support these daily transitions?

5) If you could put something else in place to support the pupils and/or yourself in their school day, what would this be?

6) Is there anything else you would like to add either about your experiences of supporting children in this resourced provision, or supporting children more generally in their transitions?

ERGO II – Ethics and Research Governance Online https://www.ergo2.soton.ac.uk

Submission ID: 46209
Submission Title: Exploring transitions and resourced provision for children with Autism in a mainstream school: pupil and teacher perspectives.
Submitter Name: Amber Warren

The above submission has been approved by your supervisor and has now been sent to your Faculty Ethics Committee for review. You will be notified again if they request a revision or when they approve the submission.

If your project is Category A, this will automatically proceed to the Research Integrity and Governance team following Faculty Ethics Committee review.

Appendix D: Pupil information sheet / consent form

Pupil information sheet: Project about the experiences of children with autism at primary school.

Hi, my name is Amber Warren. I am student at the University of Southampton and I am asking if you would like to help me with my project.

What is the project about?

My project is to learn more about the experiences of children at your school! I want to learn about what you think about your school day and what the school can do to help you.

Why have I been chosen?

You are a member of Maple Class and I am really interested in what you think about being part of [School 1] and also a part of [School 2].

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be asked to take part in a session with me. This will take place during school time, at a time agreed with your teachers, between February-March 2019. We will talk about a class project about your school day that your teachers will support you with.

I'll ask you some questions so we can find out more about what you think about school. I'd like to use a digital recorder to record what we say. This is the best way of helping me to remember what you've said!

What happens if I don't know the answer?

There is no right or wrong answer, we want you to talk about how you feel and what school is like for you.

You do not have to answer all the questions, and we can stop at any time!

What happens with what I have said?

I will use some of what you tell me in the writing I have to do about the project. I will not include your name in my writing so no-one else will know that it is your words I am using.

Unsure?

If you have any questions, you can talk to your teachers at school and I will also be spending some time in your class so you can ask me too.

Thank you for reading this. If you would like to help me with this project, please tick to show you agree with the statements below:

☐ I understand what the project is about

☐ I agree to take part in the chat with Amber about my class project

☐ I agree to the chat being recorded

☐ I understand that some of what I say could be used in Amber's writing

☐I understand that my name will not be used so no-one else will know that the words are mine

☐ I know I can change my mind about the project and I will not get into any trouble for this

Please write your name below if you are happy to take part in the project

Name:………………………………..

Date:

Appendix E - Parent information sheet

Participant Information Sheet – Parents

Study Title: Exploring transitions and resourced provision for children with Autism in a mainstream school: pupil and teacher perspectives.

Researcher: Amber Warren

ERGO number: 46209

Dear Parent / Carer

My name is Amber Warren and I am in my final year at the University of Southampton, studying for a BSc (Hons) degree in Education and Psychology. As part of my degree, I have to complete an original project. For my project I want to be able to understand the experiences and transitions of pupils with autism who attend the resourced provision at [School 1], and who also spend some of their day within the mainstream primary school.

This project is part of the Autism Community Research Network @ Southampton [ACoRNS; http://acornsnetwork.org.uk/] which seeks to understand more about the views and experiences of autistic children and families. ACoRNS wants to find out what works well for children and share this information with other schools. This project has been discussed and agreed with staff at [School 1] and they are happy for the project to go ahead,

You are receiving this information because your child attends the [School 1] resource base and this is to help you decide whether you would like them to take part or not.

Please read the information below carefully and let [name of class teacher] know if anything is not clear or you would like more information before you decide. You may like to discuss it with others but it is up to you to decide whether or not your child can take part. If you are happy for them to participate you will be asked to sign a consent form.

What will happen to my child if I take part?

This project will take place at the resource base between February and March 2019.

It is planned as part of a classroom activity that children will be completing anyway based around what they like and dislike about their school day, this activity includes asking about the time children spend in different parts of the school (Maple Class, and other classes). Children will also be asked to make a short video or poster to let other children know what the resource base is like.

I will visit the school a few times to get to know the children and staff, and to help the children work on these activities. Then, I will ask your child some questions about what they have drawn or written for their project and about their experiences at school. During the discussion a member of staff will be present in the room or nearby, depending on what your child prefers. I would like to audio-record this discussion as it is the best way to remember what has been said.

Are there any benefits in my taking part?

This project will be beneficial in helping us to understand the experiences of pupils with autism who are supported in a resourced provision like [School 1]. This may have positive implications for you, your child and the school. This could include reassurance that your child is happy and enjoying school and/or lead to ideas about where and how things could be better or different.

This project will also improve our current understanding about the experiences and perspectives of pupils with autism at school.

Are there any risks involved?

Although very unlikely, there is the possibility that pupils may find the project and / or the discussion with me uncomfortable or worrying. If this occurs, I will make sure that we stop the discussion. A staff member from [School 1] will always be there to support children and advise me about whether to continue the discussion. Besides this, there are minimal risks involved in taking part. Any other risks are in line with everyday experiences of being at school.

What data will be collected?

The data that will be collected for this project will be:

(1) The work that children complete as part of the classroom activity; this will be either through a poster, writing or a video created by the pupils and
(2) The answers each child provides during discussion with myself as the researcher.

Your child's age and whether they are a boy or a girl will be stated in the report I have to write, but I will not use the real names of any of the children. This means that it will not be possible to identify them, or their answers, in any way.

The staff may wish to use video recording in the creation of the projects, but these will be kept secure by the members of staff and then transferred to me onto a password-protected computer and then deleted from the recording device. The video will then be used for analysis and write up.

The discussion will be audio recorded. These recordings will be transferred onto a password-protected computer and then deleted from the recording device. The recording will then be used for analysis and write up.

Will my child's participation be confidential?

Your child's participation and the information we collect about your child during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential.

Your child's responses during the discussion will remain confidential and anonymous, meaning no one will be able to identify your child or you, or any students/staff discussed, from the report of the research.

Quotes from the discussion may be used in the report, but the names of individuals will not be written.

Only members of the ACoRNS research team may be given access to data about your child.

Individuals from regulatory authorities (people who check that we are carrying out the study correctly) may require access to the data. All of these people have a duty to keep the information, as a research participant, strictly confidential. They will not know the names of the children involved in the project.

Does my child have to take part?

No, it is entirely up to you and your child to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide you want your child to take part, you will need to sign a consent form to show you have agreed for your child to take part.

Your child's participation is entirely voluntary, if you consent for your child to take part; please read and sign the consent form and return it to the class teacher, or to the school reception.

What happens if I change my mind?

You have the right to change your mind and withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without your participant rights being affected. If you or your child change your mind, you can withdraw your child at any time up until the start of the data analysis (31st March 2019) by contacting myself on apw2g16@soton.ac.uk or speaking to your child's class teacher.

What will happen to the results of the research?

Your personal details will remain strictly confidential. Research findings made available in any reports or publications will not include information that can directly identify you without your specific consent. See examples from previous projects on the ACoRNS website: http://acornsnetwork.org.uk/projects/

The findings of this project will be written up as part of my dissertation, which is part of my degree in Education and Psychology at the University of Southampton. A summary of the findings will be shared with the school, and those who participated in the research, and be made available on the ACoRNS website. You will be given the option to whether you wish the outputs of the project (including the possible posters/videos) to be shared via the ACoRNS website as a way of placing your child's views and experiences at the centre of our research aims.

Where can I get more information?

If you would like more information, then please contact myself, the researcher: Amber Warren, apw2g16@soton.ac.uk.

What happens if there is a problem?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you should speak to the researchers who will do their best to answer your questions (Amber Warren, ap2g16@soton.ac.uk).

If you remain unhappy or have a complaint about any aspect of this study, please contact the University of Southampton Research Integrity and Governance Manager (023 8059 5058, rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk).

Data Protection Privacy Notice

The University of Southampton is legally obliged to protect and use the data collected in this project in specific ways. This can sound very complicated but the main thing to let you know is that this means that we treat any information provided within research projects with very high levels of care and consideration.

There is detailed information about this that we are required to let you know, and this can be found at the end of this form.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Amber Warren

The University of Southampton conducts research to the highest standards of research integrity. As a publicly-funded organisation, the University has to ensure that it is in the public interest when we use personally-identifiable information about people who have agreed to take part in research. This means that when you agree to take part in a research study, we will use information about you in the ways needed, and for the purposes specified, to conduct and complete the research project. Under data protection law, 'Personal data' means any information that relates to and is capable of identifying a living individual. The University's data protection policy governing the use of personal data by the University can be found on its website (https://www.southampton.ac.uk/legalservices/what-we-do/data-protection-and-foi.page).

This Participant Information Sheet tells you what data will be collected for this project and whether this includes any personal data. Please ask the research team if you have any questions or are unclear what data is being collected about you.

Our privacy notice for research participants provides more information on how the University of Southampton collects and uses your personal data when you take part in one of our research projects and can be found at http://www.southampton.ac.uk/assets/sharepoint/intranet/ls/Public/Research%20and%20Integrity%20Privacy%20Notice/Privacy%20Notice%20for%20Research%20Participants.pdf

Any personal data we collect in this study will be used only for the purposes of carrying out our research and will be handled according to the University's policies in line with data protection law. If any personal data is used from which you can be identified directly, it will not be disclosed to anyone else without your consent unless the University of Southampton is required by law to disclose it.

Data protection law requires us to have a valid legal reason ('lawful basis') to process and use your Personal data. The lawful basis for processing personal information in this research study is for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest. Personal data collected for research will not be used for any other purpose.

For the purposes of data protection law, the University of Southampton is the 'Data Controller' for this study, which means that we are responsible for looking after your information and using it properly. The University of Southampton will keep identifiable information about you for 1 year after the study has finished after which time any link between you and your information will be removed.

To safeguard your rights, we will use the minimum personal data necessary to achieve our research study objectives. Your data protection rights – such as to access, change, or transfer such information - may be limited, however, in order for the research output to be reliable and accurate. The University will not do anything with your personal data that you would not reasonably expect.

If you have any questions about how your personal data is used, or wish to exercise any of your rights, please consult the University's data protection webpage (https://www.southampton.ac.uk/legalservices/what-we-do/data-protection-and-foi.page) where you can make a request using our online form. If you need further assistance, please contact the University's Data Protection Officer (data.protection@soton.ac.uk).

Appendix F - Parent consent form

PARENT/CARER CONSENT FORM

Study title: Exploring transitions and resourced provision for children with Autism in a mainstream school: pupil and teacher perspectives.

Researcher name: Amber Warren
ERGO number: 46209

Please initial the box(es) if you agree with the statement(s):

I have read and understood the information sheet (Date: 10.12.18/ Version 1) and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.	
Your child's participation I agree to my child taking part in this research project and for the data to be used for the purpose of this study.	
I understand that this project may include video recording and I agree for my child to take part in the project through this way.	
I agree for my child to take part in an interview/discussion for the purposes set out in the information sheet.	
I understand that my child taking part in the study involves audio recording which will be transcribed and then destroyed for the purposes set out in the participation information sheet.	
I understand that my child's responses and any quotes used in the reports of the research will be anonymised; their name will not be used.	
I understand my child's participation is voluntary and they may withdraw at any time (up until 31st March 2019) for any reason without their rights being affected.	
I understand that all data collected will be stored securely and will not be passed onto anyone outside of the research project.	
I agree to the findings of the project, including the views and experiences of my child to be shared via the ACoRNs website, but understand that these will be anonymised.	

Name of parent/carer (print name)...

Name of child (print name) ....

Preferred contact method (email address/phone number) ....

Signature of parent/carer ....

Date ....

Name of researcher (print name)..

Signature of researcher ....

Date...

Appendix G - Staff information sheet

Participant Information - Staff

Study Title: Exploring transitions and resourced provision for children with Autism in a mainstream school: pupil and teacher perspectives.

Researcher: Amber Warren

ERGO number: 46209

My name is Amber Warren and I am in my final year at the University of Southampton, studying for a BSc (Hons) degree in Education and Psychology. As part of my degree, I have to complete an original project. For my project I want to be able to understand the experiences and transitions of pupils with autism who attend the resourced provision at [School 1], and who also spend some of their day within the mainstream primary school.

This project is part of the Autism Community Research Network @ Southampton [ACoRNS; http://acornsnetwork.org.uk/] which seeks to understand more about the views and experiences of autistic children and families. ACoRNS wants to find out what works well for

children and share this information with other schools. This project has been discussed and agreed with staff at [School 1] and they are happy for the project to go ahead,

You are receiving this information because you are member off staff at the [School 1] resource base and this is to help you decide whether you would like to take part or not.

Please read the information below carefully and let [name of class teacher] know if anything is not clear or you would like more information before you decide. You may like to discuss it with others but it is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you are happy to participate you will be asked to sign a consent form.

What will happen to me if I take part?

This project will take place at the resource base between February and March 2019.

It is planned as part of a classroom activity that the pupils will be completing anyway based around what they like and dislike about their school day. This activity includes asking about the time pupils spend in different parts of the school (Maple Class, and other classes). Pupils will also be asked to make a short video or poster to let other children know what the resource base is like which you may help create.

I will visit the school a few times to get to know you and other staff, and to help the pupils work on these activities. Then, I will ask you some questions to get your thoughts and perspectives about what the pupils have drawn or written for their project and about their experiences at school. I would like to audio-record this discussion as it is the best way to remember what has been said.

Are there any benefits in my taking part?

This project will be beneficial in helping us to understand the experiences of pupils with autism who are supported in a resourced provision like [School 1]. This may have positive implications for you, the pupils and the school. This could include reassurance that the pupils are happy and/or lead to ideas about where and how things could be better or different for you and/or the pupils.

This project will also improve our current understanding about the experiences and perspectives of pupils with autism at school.

Are there any risks involved?

Although very unlikely, there is the possibility that you may find the discussion with me uncomfortable. If this occurs, I will make sure that we stop the discussion. Besides this, there are minimal risks involved in taking part. Any other risks are in line with everyday experiences of being at school.

What data will be collected?

The data that will be collected for this project will be:

(1) The work that children complete as part of the classroom activity; and
(2) The answers you provide during discussion with myself as the researcher.

Your names will not be stated in the report I write. This means that it will not be possible to identify you, or your answers, in any way.

The discussion will be audio recorded. These recordings will be transferred onto a password-protected computer and then deleted from the recording device. The recording will then be used for analysis and write up.

Will my participation be confidential?

Your participation and the information we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential.

Your responses during the discussion will remain confidential and anonymous, meaning no one will be able to identify you, or any students/staff discussed, from the report of the research.

Quotes from the discussion may be used in the report, but the names of individuals will not be written.

Only members of the ACoRNS research team may be given access to data about your child.

Individuals from regulatory authorities (people who check that we are carrying out the study correctly) may require access to the data. All of these people have a duty to keep the information, as a research participant, strictly confidential. They will not know the names of the children involved in the project.

Do I have to take part?

No, it is entirely up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide you want to take part, you will need to sign a consent form to show you have agreed to take part.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. If you consent to take part, please read and sign the consent form and return it to the school reception.

What happens if I change my mind?

You have the right to change your mind and withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without your participant rights being affected. If your mind, you can withdraw your child at any time up until the start of the data analysis (31st March 2019) by contacting myself on apw2g16@soton.ac.uk.

What will happen to the results of the research?

Your personal details will remain strictly confidential. Research findings made available in any reports or publications will not include information that can directly identify you without your specific consent. See examples from previous projects on the ACoRNS website: http://acornsnetwork.org.uk/projects/

The findings of this project will be written up as part of my dissertation, which is part of my degree in Education and Psychology at the University of Southampton. A summary of the findings will be shared with the school, and those who participated in the research, and be made available on the ACoRNS website. You will be given the option to whether you wish the outputs of the project (including the possible videos) to be shared via the ACoRNS website as a way of placing your views and experiences at the centre of our research aims.

Where can I get more information?

If you would like more information, then please contact myself, the researcher: Amber Warren, apw2g16@soton.ac.uk.

What happens if there is a problem?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you should speak to the researchers who will do their best to answer your questions.

If you remain unhappy or have a complaint about any aspect of this study, please contact the University of Southampton Research Integrity and Governance Manager (023 8059 5058, rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk).
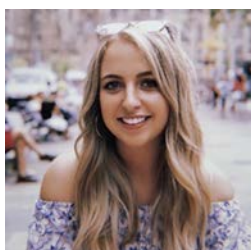
Data Protection Privacy Notice

The University of Southampton is legally obliged to protect and use the data collected in this project in specific ways. This can sound very complicated but the main thing to let you know is that this means that we treat any information provided within research projects with very high levels of care and consideration.

There is detailed information about this that we are required to let you know, and this can be found at the end of this form.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Amber Warren

More details about Data Protection and Privacy

The University of Southampton conducts research to the highest standards of research integrity. As a publicly-funded organisation, the University has to ensure that it is in the public interest when we use personally-identifiable information about people who have agreed to take part in research. This means that when you agree to take part in a research study, we will use information about you in the ways needed, and for the purposes specified, to conduct and complete the research project. Under data protection law, 'Personal data' means any information that relates to and is capable of identifying a living individual. The University's data protection policy governing the use of personal data by the University can be found on its website (https://www.southampton.ac.uk/legalservices/what-we-do/data-protection-and-foi.page).

This Participant Information Sheet tells you what data will be collected for this project and whether this includes any personal data. Please ask the research team if you have any questions or are unclear what data is being collected about you.

Our privacy notice for research participants provides more information on how the University of Southampton collects and uses your personal data when you take part in one of our research projects and can be found at http://www.southampton.ac.uk/assets/sharepoint/intranet/ls/Public/Research%20and%20Integrity%20Privacy%20Notice/Privacy%20Notice%20for%20Research%20Participants.pdf

Any personal data we collect in this study will be used only for the purposes of carrying out our research and will be handled according to the University's policies in line with data protection law. If any personal data is used from which you can be identified directly, it will not be disclosed to anyone else without your consent unless the University of Southampton is required by law to disclose it.

Data protection law requires us to have a valid legal reason ('lawful basis') to process and use your Personal data. The lawful basis for processing personal information in this research study is for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest. Personal data collected for research will not be used for any other purpose.

For the purposes of data protection law, the University of Southampton is the 'Data Controller' for this study, which means that we are responsible for looking after your information and using it properly. The University of Southampton will keep identifiable information about you for 1 year after the study has finished after which time any link between you and your information will be removed.

To safeguard your rights, we will use the minimum personal data necessary to achieve our research study objectives. Your data protection rights – such as to access, change, or transfer such information - may be limited, however, in order for the research output to be reliable and accurate. The University will not do anything with your personal data that you would not reasonably expect.

If you have any questions about how your personal data is used, or wish to exercise any of your rights, please consult the University's data protection webpage (https://www.southampton.ac.uk/legalservices/what-we-do/data-protection-and-foi.page) where you can make a request using our online form. If you need further assistance, please contact the University's Data Protection Officer (data.protection@soton.ac.uk).

Appendix H - Staff consent form

STAFF CONSENT FORM

Study title: Exploring transitions and resourced provision for children with Autism in a mainstream school: pupil and teacher perspectives.

Researcher name: Amber Warren
ERGO number: 46209

Please initial the box(es) if you agree with the statement(s):

I have read and understood the information sheet (Date: 10.12.18/ Version 1) and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.	
I agree to take part in this research project and agree for the data to be used for the purpose of this study.	
I understand that this project may include video recording and I agree to take part in the project through this way.	
I agree to being interviewed for the purposes set out in the information sheet.	
I understand that taking part in the study involves audio recording which will be transcribed and then destroyed for the purposes set out in the participation information sheet.	
I understand that my responses and any quotes used in the reports of the research will be anonymised; my name will not be used.	
I understand my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time (up until 31st March 2019) for any reason without my rights being affected.	
I understand that all data collected, including that of the interview recordings will be stored securely and will not be passed onto anyone outside of the research project.	
I agree to the findings of the project, including the views and experiences I share to be shared via the ACoRNs website, but understand that these will be anonymise.	

Name of participant (print name)..

Signature of participant ....

Date ....

Name of researcher (print name)..

Signature of researcher ....

Date..

Appendix I - Coding of transcript, demonstrating step 1 and 2:

(I) Can you explain to me your role in supporting the pupils day to day at school?

Su   (P) My role is I'm a ssa, so I **support** the children throughout the day, in our classroom

Su   in the morning and we go into mainstream in the afternoon. So it's **supporting them**

with their work, their wellbeing, generally all round really.

(I) What did you do (and may continue to do) to support the pupils when they

moved into Maple Class?

Su   (P) **Help** them, **settle** them, **encourage** them, loads of encouragement, loads of

Mod   modelling, we model, we've got **high expectations** here so we a model a lot of

behaviour of how we expect them to behave, we expect manners and general. I like to

Prep   think we **teach them life skills** as well as lessons.

What do you think are the benefits of having the resource base here for the pupils?

(P) I think it really benefits the in-between children, the ones who don't need the full

support but won't fully cope mainstream. So I think it really benefits them because it

Su   gives the **taste of both.** They've got the **support** but they're a little bit more

BOB

Ind   encouraged to be **independent**, make their **own choices** and I think we bring them on

Prep   really well, **ready for secondary school.**

Appendix J - Organising categories from answers by question, demonstrating step 3:

Question	Categories
	Responses to the question were sorted into:
Can you explain to me your role?	Support (Su). Planning (Plan).
What did you do and may continue to do to support the pupils when they first attended this class?	Model (Mod). Befriend (F). Communicate (Com). Routine (Rou). Give time (T). Preparation for real world (Prep).
What are the benefits of having the resourced base / combined setting??	Best of Both Worlds (BOB). Independence (Ind). Friendships (F). Support (Su). More time (T). Safe space (Sa). Preparation for real world (Prep). Included (Inc). Identity (I)
What are the drawbacks of having the resourced base / combined setting?	Lack of communication (Com). Missing out (Miss). Behaviour problems (BP). Noise (Noi).

Appendix H - Main themes

Structure / Unstructured Periods:
-Routine.
-Benefit of resource base.
-Less structured nature of mainstream.
-Transitions.
-Life experience.
-Noise.

Support:
-Throughout transitions.
-Within mainstream lessons.
-If something goes wrong.
-With making friendships.
-Safe space.
-Support from mainstream teachers.

Friendship:
-Feeling lonely.
-Playing with friends.
-Having a best friend.
-Friends with mainstream pupils.
-Positioning in classroom.

Identity:
-Between classrooms.
-Between schools.
-Facilities.
-Community.
-Best of both worlds.
-Worst of both worlds.

Example extract 1 - Staff transcript colour coded, demonstrating step 4.

(I) Yeah my next question is what are the drawbacks?

(P) Um so yeah like I said it's a double edge sword. I just spoke about the expertise at *the specialist school* but then on the flip side we're not at *the specialist school* so in some cases we lose out on that, we aren't always in the loop. You don't have as easy access to some of the equipment and resources they provide, the children don't have necessarily peers who are as similar as them. Um likewise um being a spare part in somebody else's school, um um most of this, for the learning it is very easy that maple children get lost in the mainstream class, the provision isn't there, it is not as tight as in *name of class*. Some of that is down to the logistics of mainstream school life, things change, topics change, schedules change, mainstream teachers have an agenda and a target to hit where they do things to reach them and sometimes *name of class* pupils get left behind, they get left out. We're not doing that, we're not part of that. Also mainstream classrooms are busy, you know it can get noisy, it can be very sensory overwhelming for *name of class* children. Um we have encountered some challenging behaviour from *name of school* children which has a knock on effect on ours. They end up watching this model of behaviour and we have to try and help them with that.

Example extract 2 - Pupil transcript colour coded, demonstrating step 4.
(I) You've wrote here 'I feel anxious when I get to school because I'm a sensitive child'.

(P) Yeah cause I don't know what's in store. Cause it can be like children flying across screaming or maybe it could be a calm day where everybody is normal.

(I) Is it normally a calm day?

(P) Um its random. Yeah sometimes not in mainstream, and one some naughty children, well sometimes they're not, but sometimes when they are a bit angry they usually get stressed cause anger problems. It's not calm then.

(I) So what does it say here *points to poster*?

(P) I feel fine when I do handwriting cause I find it quite easy and it settles me in because we do it every day and it kind of makes me feel welcome. I sit on my own in the base. It's quite rare me sitting next to some people cause nowadays since four years ago I used to be with my old friends that I knew for long. But since they've gone to secondary school, um and um ive started making new friends like George and Daniel.

(I) So you've made new friends here?

(P) Yep.

(I) What does it say here?

(P) Frustrated at snack time, cause it can be chaos and some people can scream and argue.

Teacher: is it better now we've changed it to all sit around the table?

(P) Yeah I find it quite calming since yeah.

(I) So having the adults there helps?

(P) Yeah makes it calming.