An exploratory study of the positive perceptions and experiences of inclusion in mainstream secondary schools for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) from the perspectives of pupils with SEND, parents and carers of pupils with SEND and special educational needs coordinators.

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List of Abbreviations

AEP: Association of Educational Psychologists

ASD: Autism Spectrum Disorder

BPS: British Psychological Society

CASP: Critical Appraisal Skills Programme

DES: Department for Education and Science

DfE: Department for Education

EHCP: Education and Health Care Plan

EP: Educational Psychologist

EPS: Educational psychology service

LA: Local authority

NC: National Curriculum

OCC: Office of the Children's Commissioner

OFSTED: Office for Standards in Education

PEP: Principal Educational Psychologist

SEN: Special educational needs

SEND: Special educational needs and disabilities

SENDA: Special Educational Needs and Disability Act

SENDCo: Special Educational Needs Coordinator

SENDCoP: Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Code of

                        Practice

SLR: Systematic Literature Review

SLT: Senior Leadership Team

TA: Teaching Assistant

TEP: Trainee Educational Psychologist

ThA   Thematic Analysis

UK: United Kingdom

UN: United Nations

UNESCO: The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural

                Organisation

<u>Abstract</u>

There is a growing trend in the number of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) (National Statistics, 2023), the number of pupils with education and health care plans (EHCPs) in specialist provision (Gov.UK, 2023), and the number of pupils of secondary age in specialist settings (Day & Prunty, 2010; Pirrie et al., 2006). It is also noted that despite continued investment and drive for inclusive schools there is low parental confidence in mainstream schools meeting the needs of children with SEND (DfE, 2023). This research explores the perceptions of "what works" to facilitate the inclusion of pupils with SEND in mainstream secondary schools from the perspectives of pupils with SEND, parents/carers of pupils with SEND and special educational needs coordinators (SENDCos).

The existing evidence base of positive first-hand experiences of inclusion in mainstream secondary schools for pupils with SEND appears to be limited with minimal research identified with this focus in the systematic literature review. This research provides an opportunity for the voices from potentially marginalised groups such as pupils with SEND to share their expertise on the topic of inclusion and inclusive strategies. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather the voices of fourteen participants (six SENDCos, five pupils with SEND and three parent/carers of pupils with SEND). Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2020) was used to generate themes from the data. Six themes were identified and labelled as "relationships, responsiveness, provision, sharing information, belonging and culture/ethos". Potential implications of the research are offered with a particular focus on school systems and Educational Psychologists. Finally future avenues of research are suggested which include the position of SENDCos in senior leadership, and "normalising differences" within schools to promote inclusion.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 The aims, focus and rationale for the research.

The overall aim of this research is to explore what works well in supporting inclusive practices for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in mainstream secondary schools. A substantial amount of research has already been undertaken in relation to the perceived barriers to inclusion and so this research aims to gather positive examples which facilitate the inclusion of pupils with SEND. The debate about where children with SEND "should" be educated or the role of special schools is not part of the focus of this research. Instead, this thesis aims to listen to the voices of those with SEND experiencing education within a mainstream secondary school setting, the voices of parents/carers of pupils with SEND and the voices of special educational needs coordinators (SENDCos) to explore the positive features which can facilitate and support an inclusive setting to take these experiences and views forward to enhance provision further.

The aim of gathering these multiple perspectives is to support mainstream secondary schools to recognise and celebrate the positive approaches already implemented to promote inclusion for pupils with SEND. It is hoped that from participant reflections and insights settings can learn "what works" and make further enhancements to what is already in place. It is also hoped that this will inform/facilitate future adjustments made for children with SEND and help to promote their positive experiences and enable them to have their needs met and reach their full potential. Furthermore, it is hoped that educational psychologists (EPs) might use this research to reflect on the inclusive practices within the secondary schools they work and to support them to enhance their practices through positively framed lines of enquiry.

1.2 Personal and professional interest and motivation for this research

The author's motivation for this research arose from both personal and professional experiences. In my role as a parent of a child who has developmental delays, we have personally faced marginalisation, exclusion

and inequality. I wanted to gather the voices of pupils with SEND as their voices can be less prominent in research. I believe that the voices of those who are marginalised can be important for informing ways forward. In addition to this, my previous experience as a teacher working in both mainstream and special schools and in my current role as a trainee educational psychologist (TEP) I am aware of how the UK education system can be both inclusive and exclusionary for pupils with SEND. Furthermore, these experiences have driven my recognition of the importance for a collaborative approach with the engagement of pupils, parents/carers and school staff in the process of striving for change in the form of equality and equitable opportunities and experiences for all.

The local and national trends linked with increasing numbers of pupils with SEND in combination with a lack of specialist school places, a right to a mainstream education and the moral agenda of inclusion is prominent in my work as a TEP. Furthermore, in my local authority (LA) there was a drive to enhance inclusion within secondary schools as there was a trend observed which matched the national trend of over-representation of pupils with SEND of secondary school age in specialist provision. The LA wanted more children with SEND to transition from a mainstream primary into a mainstream secondary, but there were increasing requests for specialist provision at this point of transition. Each day I am aware of these challenges for pupils with SEND and listening to the difficulties they face alongside their families drives me to be invested both on a personal and professional level to try to make a positive difference for the future.

1.3 Terminology defined.

To assist with clarity and understanding of this research a description of key terms used within this thesis is provided below.

1.3.1 SEN or SEND

In the UK, the acronyms SEN (special educational needs) and SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) are currently used

interchangeably (Hodkinson, 2019). However, to avoid possible confusion for the reader, the most recent acronym "SEND" is used most frequently.

I consider children and young people with SEND to be marginalised within our society. Although using terms such as SEND could be viewed as further marginalisation, I use this term to identify the group of participants for my research. I use this term with high regard and respect to aid the purpose of this study to enhance the inclusivity of our educational settings and systems.

1.3.2 Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

As outlined in the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice (SENDCoP) (DfE, 2015), a child or young person is considered to have SEN if "they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision" (p15) "which is additional to or different from that made generally for other children or young people of the same age by mainstream schools' (p16).

This definition will be adopted for this thesis to encompass and acknowledge the range of needs that children and young people may have and the needs which educational settings are trying to meet.

The SENDCoP (DfE, 2015) also outlines four broad areas of SEND:
- Communication and interaction - which may encompass difficulties with speaking, understanding or communication as well as autism spectrum conditions.
- Cognition and learning – which may include mild, sever or profound learning difficulties where children can require additional support to access their learning as well as specific learning difficulties for example dyspraxia.
- Social, emotional and mental health – may include difficulties such as anxiety, depression, eating disorders or physical symptoms which are medically unexplained including conditions such as attention deficit disorder attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or attachment disorder.

- Physical and sensory - which may include a physical disability including visual impairment, hearing impairment, or multisensory impairment.

1.3.3 Levels of support

Since the introduction of the term "special educational needs" there have been classifications of varying degrees in relation to the levels of support offered within school settings. Three levels of SEN and associated support were implemented from 2001 to 2014 which were School Action, School Action Plus and a Statement of SEN. The terms School Action and School Action plus were allocated to pupils who were assessed as requiring support from school staff (DfE 2001). As outlined by Long and Roberts (2024), in 2014 the terminology was changed, and two levels of support were identified as SEN support and Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs):

Level one: "SEN Support, provided to a child or young person in their pre-school, school, or college" (Long & Roberts, 2024, p5). This is support which is additional to, or different from, the support generally made for other children of the same age in a school. Children with SEND can receive support from their educational setting from the resources already available within the school. Additionally, they may be placed on the school SEN register to help to track the type and level of support they receive.

Level two: "Education, Health, and Care Plans provide a formal basis of support for children and young people who need more support than is available through SEN Support" (Long & Roberts, 2024, p5). For children or young people who require extra help and have more complex needs they may remain at level one whilst an EHC needs assessment request is made.

1.3.4 Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP)

In England until 2014 a document called a "statement of special educational needs" was used for pupils who required a higher level of support. The statement outlined the special educational needs and associated provision

for children and young people until the age of 25 years old (Long & Roberts, 2024). The Children and Families Act 2014 and the revised SENDCoP (DfE, 2015) instigated the change from statements to EHCPs.

An EHCP may be issued following a statutory assessment process by the LA. An EHCP is a legal document which outlines the educational, health and social needs of a child or young person aged up to 25 years old who requires additional support which is more than what is readily available to other children or through SEN support (Gov.UK, 2023). An EHCP outlines long term outcomes, short term targets and the specific provision required to be implemented to provide support to meet the needs (Gov.UK, 2023).

1.3.5 Local Authority (LA)

LAs have the majority of the strategic responsibility for education. They have a legal duty of ensuring that the educational potential of every child is reached (Gov.UK, 2024).

1.3.6 Academy Trusts

Academies are not-for-profit companies. Trustees are responsible for the performance and outcomes within the setting.

1.3.7 Types of school

Mainstream school

In England a mainstream school is a school which is not a special school **and** is either a maintained school or an Academy (section 83 Children and Families Act, 2014).

Special school

In England a special school is a school which is "*specially organised to make special educational provision for pupils with SEN*" (section 337 of the Education Act, 1996).

Secondary schools

This research will focus on pupils in mainstream secondary school settings. In England secondary schools support young people aged 11 to 16 years old. This is broken down to Key Stage Three Year 7, 8 and 9 from 11 to 14 years old and Key Stage Four Year 10 and 11 from 13 to 16 years old (Gov.UK, 2023).

Academies

Academies receive direct funding from the government and are run by academy trusts. They have more control over their curriculum, and they do not have to follow the national curriculum. They do have to follow the same rules on SEND in line with the other types of school (Gov.UK, 2023).

1.3.8 Integration

Cairns and McClatchey (2013) describe integration as providing a segregated provision for pupils with SEND within a mainstream setting. This can lead to limited interactions between pupils with SEND and pupils without SEND, perhaps just at break and lunch time which may position integration as a lesser form of inclusion (Cairns & McClatchey, 2013).

1.3.9 Inclusion

The Oxford Language Dictionary (2023) outlines inclusion as:

1. "The action or state of including or being included within a group or structure".
2. "The practice or policy of providing equal opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalised, such as those who have physical or intellectual disabilities".

An inclusive setting supports all pupils to learn within the same classes (Cairns & McClatchey, 2013). UNICEF (2017) outlines an inclusive education system as including all pupils (non-disabled, Disabled and pupils with special educational needs) and supporting them to learn regardless of their abilities

or needs. Booth et al., (2011) highlights that inclusion is when all pupils are valued and included within the curriculum and when school culture makes adjustments to support individual needs as required.

1.4 Research approach

This thesis focuses upon the principle of inclusion and aims to explore what facilitating factors are perceived to support the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) within mainstream secondary schools. The methodological approach adopted for this research is qualitative to facilitate an exploratory focus. Semi-structured interviews are utilised to gather positive first-hand experiences and perspectives of inclusion and inclusive practices. Thematic analysis is used to understand the information to generate themes across the data set. Findings are presented in thematic maps which indicate the responses across participant groups. Each participant group is also identifiable within each theme. Quotes from individual participants are used to share their voices and to enrich the data.

1.5 Overview of thesis

Chapter 2 is a literature review which presents the background information and research in relation to inclusion with an overview of the challenges and existing practices. Chapter 3 is a systematic literature review which offers a presentation of the existing research base for inclusive practices for pupils with SEND in mainstream secondary schools. The rationale for the current research is also identified. Chapter 4 outlines the methodology applied to the research with the underlying philosophical position of the researcher and the stance adopted for this research shared. The methodological approach used to collect and analyse the data is also stated. The decisions made and the ethical considerations applied to the research approach are also highlighted. Chapter 5 depicts the findings from the Reflexive Thematic Analysis which are presented in the form of thematic maps. Illustrative quotes from participants are used to enrich the data. Chapter 6 conveys a discussion of the findings from this study in relation to the existing evidence base.

Limitations of this study, implications for the professional practice of educational psychologists and possible areas of future research are suggested.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Chapter overview

This literature review aims to consider why research into inclusive practice for pupils with SEND is important, what is already known about inclusive practice in mainstream settings for pupils with SEND and why it is a valid area of research to enhance the practice of EPs. Firstly, the topic of inclusion for children and young people with SEND will be introduced. The concept of inclusive practice within mainstream provision for children and young people with SEND will then be explored. The issues surrounding inclusion and inclusive practices within educational settings will be offered. Systemic responses to facilitating inclusion will be discussed, with a particular focus on the EP role in supporting organisational change. The importance of stakeholder views and a collaborative approach to inclusion will also be outlined.

2.2 Prevalence and implications of SEND

2.2.1 Prevalence

Across England, since 2016 there has been an increasing trend in the number of children and young people who are identified as having SEND (DfE, 2019; National Statistics, 2022). In 2023, just under 1.6 million pupils (17% of all pupils) were identified as having SEND with 12.6% or 1.2 million pupils receiving SEN support and 4.3% or 0.4 million pupils with an EHCP (National Statistics, 2023). National Statistics (2023) indicate that 32% of pupils with an EHCP had Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) as their primary area of need. The second most common area of need was speech, language and communication needs with 18% of pupils with an EHCP. At an SEN support level, the most common area of need was speech, language and communication needs (25% of all pupils at this level) and the second most common area of need was social, emotional and mental health needs (21%) of pupils at SEN support level.

There has been a general increasing trend in the number of pupils attending a specialist provision, rather than a mainstream setting (Norwich, 2019). It is highlighted that there is a national and international trend for an increasing number of admissions for pupils with SEND transferring to specialist secondary schools at the end of primary education (Day & Prunty, 2010; Pirrie et al., 2006). Data also suggests that the proportion of the population of special schools consists of two thirds secondary age pupils, a disproportionate and over-represented age group in this type of setting (DfES,2004). Education statistic data (Gov. UK, 2023) shows that from 2022-2023 there were 87, 219 pupils with an EHCP in mainstream secondary schools. This is in comparison to 147,330 pupils of secondary age with an EHCP in special schools. This is a difference of 60,111 more pupils with an EHCP attending a specialist setting than a mainstream setting. This disproportionality could be viewed as an indication that the inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream secondary schools is not being achieved (Dyson & Gal lannaugh,2008) and the agenda for inclusion is a continual area of development. Conversely it could indicate that more pupils are identified as having SEND and needing specialist provision when they reach secondary school age.

2.2.2 Implications of SEND

Enhancing the provision for pupils with SEND is paramount as the educational outlook for this group can be troubling. The Department for Education (2019a) identifies that pupils with SEND are significantly more likely to receive fixed and permanent exclusions. More pupils with SEND are also placed on a part-time timetable (OCC, 2017) and are more likely to be off rolled by their school (Ofsted, 2019). Research also indicates wider life outcomes are impacted and people with SEND are up to seven times less likely to find paid employment, twice as likely to be living in poverty and up to four times more likely to develop mental health difficulties (O'Brien, 2016). These factors may be reduced through positive educational experiences and support to reach their full potential, further highlighting the importance of

exploring inclusive practices and inclusive education for children and young people with SEND.

2.3 History, legislation and policy

It is important to consider the background to inclusion for the English education system as it contextualises present day SEND provision and practice. Agendas of inclusion have been guided and governed by international human rights agreements, governmental legislation, policies and research which endorse the ideology of a better future for children and young people with SEND (Norwich, 2012).

2.3.1 History

The rights of individuals gained recognition shortly after World War II in 1948 through the newly created United Nations. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulated that "everyone has the right to education". However, historically in England, children with SEND were categorised by society based upon physical and social norms (Billington, 2000). Those who did not conform were deemed "ineducable" and were often sent to homes or asylums to be cared for (Thomas & Vaughan, 2004). This care model was operational until 1972, after which, education was provided for *all* children and young people, although segregation remained. Specifically in 1978, a review of SEND was undertaken by the Warnock Committee (DES, 1978). The Warnock Report advocated that the previously assigned categorisations of disability be removed to be replaced with a continuum of need (DES, 1978). In 1978, the Warnock Report (DES, 1978), made proposals for inclusive schooling which was operationalised via the 1981 Education Act. This was the first documentation stating that where possible *all* children and young people should be educated together in mainstream provision; a model towards inclusive education (Leyden & Miller, 1998).

2.3.2 Legislation

Internationally, within educational settings, this vision of inclusive provision gained momentum via the Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994). After which, inclusion became part of educational policies across many countries with the aim of enhancing provision and outcomes for children with SEND (Farrell & Ainscow, 2002). The overarching ethos was that the needs of all children and young people should have their needs met within "ordinary" schools regardless of physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. Following this the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006) advocated that the education for children and young people with SEND should be delivered without discrimination (Article 24), they should have a right to express their views (Article 12), and a right to participate regardless of their difficulties (Article, 23).

2.3.3 Policy into practice

The national curriculum (NC) was first introduced in 1989, with an inclusive ethos that all pupils, including those with SEND, would receive a broad and balanced curriculum (DES, 1989). The expectation of reasonable adjustments within lessons was enshrined in law through the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) 2001. This document stated that schools have an obligation to educate children with SEND in mainstream provision unless it is against parental wishes or is not conducive to the education of others. This notion can be seen in the 2001 SEND Code of Practice (DfES, 2001), which advocated for individual learning characteristics, the school learning environment and teaching styles to be included as part of the statutory assessment of SEND. In 2004, The Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED), advised mainstream schools to ensure that pupils with SEND receive a curriculum which is pertinent to their needs. This is echoed in the most recent Code of Practice (DfE, 2015), which advocates for individualisation of the curriculum with differentiation of teaching and provision.

2.3.4 Political perspectives

The agenda for supporting children and young people with SEND and developing inclusive education settings appears to be a high priority on the UK Government's agenda. In the 2023 Green Paper "Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AF) Improvement Plan: Right support, Right Place, Right Time (DfE, 2023) it is highlighted "the important role mainstream settings play in providing quality first teaching and evidence-based SEN support to meet the needs of the majority of pupils with SEND" (p.8).

The Schools White Paper (DfE, 2022) outlined proposals and expectations about what high quality, inclusive and effective mainstream provision needs to look like to remove barriers to engagement and learning to support all pupils to reach their full potential. It states that "we must do more to ensure that children with SEND have the same opportunities to thrive as their peers" (p4). Enhancing teaching by "providing training on areas that are fundamental to high quality teaching like behaviour management, adaptive teaching and curriculum design, these reforms will help teachers and leaders to support all pupils to succeed, including those identified with SEND" (p17).

2.4 Inclusion and education

2.4.1 Construct of inclusion

Despite the popularity and increasing momentum towards inclusion, it remains a contested construct with varying definitions (Dimitrellou et al., 2020; Hornby, 2015; Norwich, 2013). Inclusion can be construed as a social construct which is multifaceted and changeable depending upon the current legislation and governmental drive (Dimitrellou et al., 2020; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008). A lack of consensus on the definition of inclusion may be perceived as a barrier to successful implementation (Avramidis et al., 2002).

Until the mid-1990's when international reforms such as the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) and national educational governance such as

Excellence for All Children (DfEE, 1997) were actioned the concept of "integration" was perhaps more prominent than "inclusion" (Cairns & McClatchey, 2013; Farrell, 2001). More recent reforms such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004) and UNESCO (2005) broadens the term to encompass SEND in relation to participation in education, presence in the classroom, acceptance from others and greater achievement across areas including social, emotional, cognition and academic outcomes (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). The wider remit and holistic perspective positions inclusion as a continual process, opposed to the previous rudimentary perspective.

Furthermore, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, 2005, Human Rights Act 1998, and the subsequent Equality Act 2010, have played a significant role in shaping the current inclusion discourse by giving it legal weighting and raising the profile of SEND within our society. The acts have human dignity and equality of opportunity firmly at their roots. The shift towards inclusive practice is in opposition to the traditional medical model perspective where difficulties are regarded as originating from within the individual (Frederickson & Cline, 2015).

2.4.2 Inclusive education

Inclusive education can be understood as a multi-faceted notion which incorporates the celebration of difference, diversity, equity, equality of opportunity and the promotion of human rights (Slee, 2011; Smith, 2010; Topping, 2012). At a systemic level within schools there can be a focus upon creating an environment and ethos which supports pupils to thrive and progress through feelings of being included both socially and educationally (Lauchlan & Greig, 2015; Loreman et al., 2011; Mitchell, 2005). Inclusive education can be positioned as being underpinned by social justice and human rights (Tomlinson, 2015; Qu, 2022). At a moral level the right to education is conveyed within frameworks such as the human rights agenda, which aims for all children to reach their full educational potential. Social models of disability view disability as a socially constructed concept which

shifts the "problem" of disability away from the individual towards society (Tregaskis, 2002). A social model of disability views society as problematic and disabling and strives to remove barriers which are generated by organisations and systems (Qu, 2022).

A review of inclusive education by Salend (2011) proposes four idealistic principles which support inclusion; firstly, a challenging curriculum is provided to all pupils, secondly, the recognition of each pupil's individual strengths and difficulties, thirdly, effective differentiation and continual reflective practice and finally, co-production and collaborative practice between all stakeholders. The quality of provision is paramount to meeting the needs and achieving outcomes for children with SEND (Ofsted, 2006; 2010). An inclusive school can be viewed as a setting which aims to enhance and raise the learning outcomes and participation levels for all pupils (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). Schools may be perceived as successfully achieving inclusion when *all* children are included (Leyden & Miller, 1998), all children feel they belong through positive relationships with peers and adults (Rallis & Anderson, 1994), and all children are active participants within their school community (Farrell, 2011). It is also acknowledged that the culture and ethos of a setting are paramount towards the agenda of inclusion (Warnes et al., 2022).

The benefits of inclusive education have been suggested to enhance aspects of both social and academic outcomes (Loreman et al., 2011). Students and staff can develop greater tolerance for difference (Boyle et al., 2011) with teachers positively challenged to adapt their pedagogy to meet the wide variety of learning needs (Boyle et al., 2012). At a societal level inclusive education can reduce disadvantage (Snow & Powell, 2012) and contribute to enhanced economic viability (OECD, 2012).

2.5 Influential factors and contributing challenges

There is a vast array of research studies which explore the perceived barriers to inclusion. Barriers to inclusion and a deficit view are not the focus

of this research. However, outlined below are some factors which may influence the inclusivity of practices, procedures and outcomes for practices within schools.

2.5.1 Parental choice and confidence in mainstream schools

Parents have increasingly greater levels of choice and are positioned as key stakeholders in the decision-making process over where their child is educated (DfE, 1994; DFES, 2001). Current legislation within England such as the Equality Act (2010) and SENDCoP (DfE. 2015) acknowledge that children and young people with a range of SEND can have their needs met within mainstream education settings (if that is the preference of the parent). However, research indicates that parents/cares have "low confidence in the ability of mainstream settings to effectively meet the needs of children and young people with SEND" (DfE, 2023, p.15). Studies by Jenkinson (1998) and Palmer et al., (2001) showed that parents chose specialist provision over mainstream for their child due to perceived specialist skills of staff within specialist settings, smaller class sizes and more one to one support. Additionally, Whitaker (2007) found that if there has been a negatively perceived experience of inclusion in primary stage education, there may be an increased request for special school provision at secondary age level. The limitations for these studies may include representational bias, as the participants who volunteered to complete the research may have been more likely to indicate their dissatisfaction and negative experiences given the opportunity to do so.

2.5.2 School structure and organisation

Striving for the inclusion of pupils with SEND in mainstream education appears to be a common challenge around the world (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). The evolution of meeting the needs of pupils with SEND from a model of integration to inclusion has impacted the roles and responsibilities of schools (Landor & Perepa, 2017; Rix et al., 2009). Schools are now required to actively meet the needs of their whole population including pupils with SEND through recognising and adopting a holistic approach, rather than just

focusing on the physicality of having pupils with SEND on roll (Garrote et al., 2017; Humphrey, 2008). The heterogenous and comorbidity of needs of the SEND population may challenge school systems, particularly secondary schools (Runswick-Cole, 2011). Secondary schools have a larger number of pupils and a greater diversity of needs which will increase the requirement for accommodation and adaptability (Wedell, 2005; Rix et al., 2009). A range of alternative interventions and provision will be called for as there is no single intervention that covers all requirements (Landor & Perepa, 2017). Black (2019) employed a mixed-method research design utilising both surveys and interviews with parents, school staff and children to explore why there are a significant number of secondary aged pupils in specialist provision. Parents described mainstream secondary schools as "impersonal, difficult to access and children can easily become lost" (Black, 2019, p 57). The participants also indicated that it may be easier for primary schools to meet needs due to their "size and structure, relationships between staff/parents/children and the flexibility of the day or timetable" (Black, 2019, p57).

2.5.3 Transition from primary to secondary

The transition from primary to secondary school can be difficult for all pupils and particularly pupils with SEND, it is suggested that it can contribute to heightened levels of stress and anxiety (Zeedyk et al., 2003). A supportive and positive transition can facilitate feelings of inclusion for pupils and ease parental concerns (Hoy et al., 2018). A study conducted by Hoy et al., (2018) explored the process of transition for pupils with ASD from primary to secondary school highlights important strategies such as flexibility in approaches, knowledge of the child and their needs, and communication between school and home. This study is however, limited to gathering the views of transition in relation to pupils with ASD from a case study of one secondary school. This study utilised photovoice methodology to support pupils' engagement in interviews. The views of pupils, parents and staff were also gathered, although the sample sizes were small with five, six and four participants for each group respectively. This study also took place in a

secondary school with an enhanced resource provision, this may influence the practices implemented in this setting which may not occur in other mainstream secondary schools where this provision is not available. This may limit the generalisability of these findings.

2.5.4 School performance

Within England schools are judged by regulatory bodies such as the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) on several factors including complying with governmental demands of high academic standards and the inclusion of pupils with SEND (Florian & Rouse, 2001). It could be argued that a neo-liberalist stance within educational agendas creates a dichotomy between schools being inclusive of pupils with SEND and a drive for high academic outcomes on league tables (Runswick-Cole, 2011). Farrell et al., (2007) suggest that the pressure placed upon schools for high academic performance facilitates a culture of concentrating staff investment in this area, which may draw attention and support away from other areas such as SEND.

2.6 Contributing factors for inclusive schools

Strategies, features and factors which may contribute towards generating inclusive mainstream secondary schools are now discussed below.

2.6.1 Attitudes towards inclusion

The UK government report entitled Removing Barriers to Achievement (Department for Education and Skills [DfES], 2004) stated that "all teachers should expect to teach children with special educational needs and all schools should play their part in educating children from their local community whatever their background or ability". (p. 7). It is clear that the attitudes of teachers and school staff towards the inclusion of pupils with SEND in mainstream schools can influence and determine the outcomes of inclusion (Tait & Purdie, 2000). How teachers perceive themselves and their role can influence the level of inclusiveness and whether adaptive approaches are implemented (Ellins & Porter, 2005). Successful inclusive

education has been found to have a strong link with positive teacher attitudes (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). It is therefore important to foster positive perceptions of inclusion and to support teacher confidence and skills. Research conducted by Boyle et al., (2013) found that there were gender differences with female staff being more positive in attitudes towards inclusion in comparison with their male colleagues. However, this trend in data was inconclusive in other studies (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Boyle et al (2013) also found that the level of positivity towards inclusion was different for those in their initial year of teaching with higher levels than colleagues who had been teaching for longer. These findings were also echoed by Costello and Boyle (2013) and Hoskin et al., (2015) who found that teachers who were training or early career teachers had a more positive attitude to the inclusion of pupils with SEND in mainstream classes and a positive perception in their ability to execute inclusive practices. However, research conducted by Kraska and Boyle (2014) did not report the same trend, instead they found that teachers were positive about inclusion regardless of how long they had been teaching. Saloviita (2015) suggests that the method used to collect data can produce different results which may account for variations in the data. The study conducted by Kraska and Boyle (2014) also examined attitudes of preschool and primary preservice teachers, whereas the other studies examined secondary school teachers. Additionally, the construct of attitudes can vary and can include attitudes towards pupils with SEND being included in mainstream provision or attitudes towards perceived capabilities of being able to meet their needs.

2.6.2 Inclusive pedagogies

Farrell (2007) emphasises the importance of using a range of strategies to raise achievement, including a focus on high quality teaching. With additional support such as targets from EHCPs, it is hoped that individuals can reach their outcomes (DfE, 2015). The adaptation of educational provision must occur according to the child's needs (Batten 2005). Differentiation by teachers to adapt teaching and learning can facilitate engagement in lessons (Florian, 2008). Research indicates that a lack of differentiation from

teachers can be a barrier to inclusion (Paliokosta & Blanchford, 2010). It is also proposed that parents value a more individualised curriculum (Satherley & Norwich, 2021).

Flexible, individualised and accommodating approaches to teaching and learning have been highlighted as important factors of inclusive pedagogies (Woodfield & Ashby, 2016). Classroom based strategies such as check-ins during lessons, clear explanations and using multi-modalities for activities were recognised as supporting pupil engagement (Whitburn, 2014). Additionally, access to a calm space, additional time for completing tasks and creative timetabling were also outlined as supporting a range of needs (Woodfield & Ashby, 2016). The limitations of these studies include the participant groups and generalisability of findings. The findings may be specific to a particular type of disability or area of need and the findings may not support a wide range of pupils. For example, the participants in the study by Woodfield and Ashby (2016) were autistic, whilst Whitburn (2014) focused upon students with visual impairments. Conversely, Lewis and Norwich (2004), propose that special needs pedagogy does not exist, instead broad quality first teaching with principles of an inclusive pedagogy can support the needs of all pupils.

The role of teaching assistants (TAs) in supporting pupils with learning is also a prominent area of research. The Making a Statement (MaSt) study (Webster and Blatchford 2013, 2015) tracked the educational experiences of 48 9–10-year-olds who had an EHCP. The study indicated that the participants had a less effective teaching experience than their peers without SEND. TAs were positioned as making decisions and differentiating tasks to make them accessible for these students. This research was undertaken in primary schools with Year 5 pupils who were shadowed by the researchers for one week each. This research is limited to one stage of education and only a snapshot is captured in the timeframe of observations. The results may not therefore represent the positive influences TAs can have for pupils with SEND. Delegation by teachers for TAs to differentiate activities may also lead to children with SEND having less access to the class or subject teacher

(Lehane, 2016; Blatchford et al., 2013). This may fuel the feeling of disconnect of responsibility from teachers being teachers of all pupils, and furthermore, the effectiveness of instruction may be reduced (Lehane, 2016). Ellins and Porter (2005) suggest that TAs with specialist subject knowledge and training may be required to improve the quality of support provided for pupils with SEND. Conversely, research also suggests that overall, the impact of high levels of TA support was described positively and was viewed in almost all cases as essential for successful inclusion (Webster & Blatchford, 2019). moreover, Webster and Blatchford (2018) found that mainstream secondary schools view TAs as a key strategic approach for meeting the needs of pupils with SEND. However, a range of research (Blatchford et al., 2011; Webster & Blatchford, 2013; 2015), suggests that within educational policy there is a dependency upon TAs to meet the needs of pupils with SEND.

2.6.3 Teacher training

The confidence levels of teachers in supporting pupils with SEND has been found to be an important factor in the effective implementation of individualised and inclusive practices (Sinz, 2004). Research outlines that teachers perceive that they are inadequately trained to achieve inclusive practices (Allan 2015; Robinson & Goodey, 2018; Avramidis et al., 2002). It is proposed that training can enhance teacher attitudes towards inclusion through increased confidence levels (Avramidis et al., 2000). Teachers may identify as not being trained or supported to adequately meet the needs of pupils with SEND (Robertson et al., 2003). This may be due to their perception of their initial teacher training as being inadequate (Avramidis et al., 2002). Additional training for teachers on how to support pupils with SEND to integrate into all aspects of mainstream school may be required (Stakes & Hornby, 2012). Teachers receiving adequate training has been identified by parents of pupils with ASD as a paramount factor to enable the needs of these pupils to be met in mainstream schools (Jindal-Snape et al., 2005). This research utilised a small sample size of five parents and results may therefore need to be interpreted and applied with some caution.

2.6.4 Belonging and relationships.

Maslow (1943) ranks belonginess as the third most fundamental need of the self, which emphasises its importance. It is proposed that wellbeing and healthy development can be linked to a sense of belonging (Dimitrellou & Hurry, 2019). Research has found that feeling connected with your school can have a range of positive influences including enhancing academic outcomes (Niehaus et al., 2012) and mental wellbeing (Millings et al. 2012). Inclusion encompasses the whole school community (Babbage, 2013). Successful schools are proposed as creating a community where pupils are supported and feel safe which is part of the culture (Lopez et al., 2016). A range of studies (e.g. Dimitrellou et al., 2020; Grima-Farrell et al., 2011; Webster & Blatchford, 2019) present supportive relationships as a prominent aspect of creating a connection and a sense of belonging. It is proposed that friendships with peers may increase a sense of belonging (Aubineau & Blicharska, 2020) and inclusion within the school community (Carter et al., 2016). The potential impact that student-teacher relationships can have has been outlined by Hattie (2008) who found that the relationship can have a greater impact than the perceived level of professional competence, which was shown by a greater statistical effect size in the results. A large cross-country study conducted by Chiu (2016) explored school belonging for 193, 073 15-year-olds. This study found that positive teacher-pupil relationships were found to be associated with a sense of belonging. School belonging (or connectedness) has been widely associated with positive outcomes although the research conducted with pupils with SEND is relatively sparse (Porter & Ingram 2021). It can also be difficult to compare studies due to the construct being explored and the measurement adopted by each researcher.

2.6.5 Whole school approach to inclusion

In recent years there has been a focus on the wider school context and a move away from a medical model of individual deficits (Rose, 2001). If inclusive education is positioned as a social construct the relationships and interactions between people and systems are considered. An ecological

systems model (Bronfenbrenner, 1976) positions learners at the centre. Research conducted by Rouse and Florian (1996) identify that the attributes of an effective inclusive setting include a common mission to achieve inclusivity and a problem-solving ethos to generate an inclusive learning environment for all pupils. Furthermore, they found that inclusive settings had teachers who took responsibility for all children in their classes, rather than relying on the SENDCo or learning support department for pupils with SEND. Research conducted by Booth and Ainscow (2002) also highlighted the importance of a whole school approach to inclusive practice. However, achieving inclusivity can be difficult as it requires all members of the organisation to share an inclusive view and for an organisational paradigm to support individual efforts to promote these values and support social justice (BPS, 2022; Farrell, 2001).

There is also a call for the support of senior management (Horrocks et al., 2008). This could include the position of the SENDCo in the senior leadership team (SLT). The SENDCoP (DfE, 2015) positions SENDCos in the role of providing strategic leadership in the area of SEND which includes promoting inclusivity. Ainscow and Sandill (2010) research indicates that effective leadership which encourages all staff to promote the values of inclusion including quality teaching, equality and equity of opportunities and social justice is a crucial element of enabling an inclusive learning community. Coleman (2020) suggests that a school's commitment level for inclusivity is indicated through the SENDCo's position. It is proposed that being part of the SLT could enhance SENDCo's involvement in strategic decision-making (Lin et al., 2022). This could be supported through a voice in the leadership of SEND in the school and formally promoting the importance of SEND (Oldham & Radford, 2011). However, in contrast, the Bera-funded study (Done & Knowler, 2021) did not find the same outcomes and instead the position of the SENDCo on SLT was not found to influence the promotion or hinderance of inclusivity.

2.7 The role of Educational Psychologists in promoting inclusion.

EPs can support educational settings to be more inclusive (BPS, 2022). Within the profession, there are a number of factors which indicate that EPs are striving to promote inclusion within their own practice and within the systems in which they work (Farrell, 2006). For example, professional bodies such as the Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP) and the British Psychological Society (BPS) actively promote inclusive working via position papers (AEP, 1999; BPS, 2022), national interest groups and research (Farrell, 2006). However, this drive for inclusive practice within a profession can be challenging which may be partially due to the perceptions of what the role of the EP entails (Atfield et al., 2023). Research indicates that there is an inconsistent understanding and even a misconception about the role of the EP, particularly in relation to early intervention and systemic level work (Atfield et al., 2023). Stakeholders such as schools, teachers and even parents may view the role of the EP as a vehicle for gaining access to support from other services (Atfield et al., 2023), as primarily administering assessments (Atkinson et al., 2022) and recommending placements within specialist provisions for pupils with additional needs (Farrell et al., 2006; Gilman & Gabriel, 2004).

The BPS position statement on inclusion (BPS, 2022), position EPs as being frequently involved in assisting educational settings to become more inclusive. The BPS (2022) advocate for EPs to highlight the impact of environmental and systemic factors as contributing factors for inclusion rather than individual deficit model perspectives. Furthermore, to facilitate inclusive pedagogies EPs should enlist the collaboration of pupils, parents/carers and staff (BPS, 2022).

2.8 Gathering voices.

2.8.1 Pupil voice

2.8.1.1 Policy and gathering pupil voices.
There has been a drive towards pupil participation within legislation and government recommendations. The importance of seeking and actively

listening to children's voices is enshrined in international legislation (UNICEF, 1989). Governmental guidance also acknowledges the unique perspective and contribution of children with SEND in relation to their own experiences and knowledge about what type of help would facilitate educational outcomes (DfES, 2001; DfE, 2015). Schools are also held accountable for gathering pupil voice as part of Ofsted inspections in which schools are asked about the extent that pupil views are sought and acted upon (Ofsted, 2006).

2.8.1.2 The importance of pupil voice

The concept of pupil voice can be attributed to providing opportunities to children and young people to express their views and to have people actively listen to them and respond accordingly (Riley & Docking, 2010). An important facet when considering inclusion is the direct experiences and perspectives of the children and young people in relation to their own educational provision (Norwich & Kelly, 2004). Including pupil voice can empower children and young people to be "experts" in the research topic (Warren, 2000). The importance of having a voice in a democratic society is highlighted by Doddington et al., (2000) and Davie et al. (1996) who suggest that it is a fundamental human right. The justification of seeking pupil voice may be partly in relation to positioning pupils as agents of change (Cook-Sather, 2007) and pupil voice may contribute to the construction of new realities, understanding and a transformative vision of education (Lewis and Porter, 2007; Peters, 2010). Fox (2015) proposes that gathering pupil views should be at the core of EP practice which aligns with an ecological systems stance (Bronfenbrenner, 1976) and the SEND Code of Practice (DfE 2015).

2.8.1.3 Pupil voice and SEND.

Despite the theoretical and ethical grounds for gathering the voices of pupils with SEND, it is suggested that there is a lack of studies which have examined the voices of pupils who are deemed as "vulnerable" (Pazey, 2020; Norwich & Kelly, 2004). Research indicates that some "vulnerable groups" including pupils with SEND can be overlooked within research and

their views on aspects which affect them are less likely to be gathered (Hodkinson, 2010). Power imbalances may also be reduced through seeking to understand perspectives of those who may be marginalised (Cook-Sather, 2006; Kefallinou & Howes, 2022). Research also suggests that when pupil voices are gathered it may be conducted in a tokenistic manner (Mitra, 2018) and can be limited to consultation only (Kefallinou & Howes, 2022).

2.8.1.4 Pupil voice and inclusive education

The importance of gaining pupil voice is highlighted through the recognition that it may be difficult to understand inclusion without obtaining experiences which are representative of this group (Lewis & Porter, 2007). In order to best understand a particular topic, those with direct experience need to be listened to (Prunty et al., 2012). Gathering first hand experiences from pupils enables their unique knowledge and expertise to outline what works to support them (Atkinson et al., 2019; Greig et al., 2012). Students who may be perceived as marginalised can feel a greater sense of belonging and engagement through the process of sharing their experiences (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Shogren et al., 2007). Being involved in the decision-making process in relation to educational experiences and aspects which directly impact them needs to be advocated for within schools (Wright, 2008).

2.8.2 The voices of parents/carers

Working in partnership with parents/carers is identified as a priority across policy and within literature (e.g. Kendall, 2017). Recent policy changes have emphasised the importance of involving parents/carers in their child's education (DfE, 2023). In practice this can include inviting parents/carers to develop relationships with schools (Goodman & Burton, 2010). Parental satisfaction is gathered through avenues such as Ofsted inspections and therefore may encourage schools to build relationships with parents/carers.

It is also indicated that parental involvement with school can contribute towards effective inclusive education (De Boer et al., 2010). This can be through advocating for their child and their individual rights (Carter et al.,

2012), supporting their child to engage with school (Hattie, 2009), and providing constructive feedback to school in relation to their inclusive policies and procedures in relation to meeting their child's needs (Ryndak et al., 1995). However, despite these proposed contributions is it is reported that there are minimal studies which have explored parental attitudes towards inclusion and satisfaction with inclusive education (Duhaney & Salend, 2000). Furthermore, the studies which have explored these topics have found mixed results where the impact has been viewed as significant in some studies and not others, this is perhaps due to inconsistency in measurement across the studies (Sharma et al., 2022).

Chapter 3 Systematic Literature Review (SLR)

3.1 Introduction

To discover what research already exists in relation to the chosen topic area of inclusion in mainstream secondary schools for pupils with SEND, the researcher commenced a systematic search and examination of the literature. The overview of the search and findings are presented below. A definition of a systematic literature review (SLR) is offered first, followed by the outline of the methodology employed, including how the studies were found, and which ones were included or excluded. An overview of the included studies is provided including an appraisal and rating of the level of credibility and trustworthiness. A qualitative research synthesis of existing literature and studies is presented with an analysis and interpretation of the reviewed studies. Finally, a rationale for the current study is described and research questions are offered.

3.2 Definition and aims of a Systematic Literature Review (SLR)

The aim of a SLR is to undertake a systematic, rigorous and transparent approach to examine the current research base on a chosen topic (Gough et al., 2012; Petticrew & Roberts, 2008). A SLR involves three main aspects: the identification and exploration of research evidence across a range of existing studies within a specified field, a critical appraisal of the current evidence base, and an overview of the findings to establish what is already known with a view to propose areas for further research (Andrews, 2005; Gough, Oliver & Thomas, 2012; Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). This process supports the discovery of the existing knowledge base, to ascertain any gaps in the current literature and to inspire ways forward for the researcher. Sebba (1999), identifies that the aggregation of evidence can help to inform policy and practice. Evidence-based approaches are important to challenge unproven and potentially harmful practices, solve problems and create improvement for effective learning (Fitz-Gibbon, 1997). Therefore, systematic reviews may be able to address questions about "what works?" and the

effectiveness of educational interventions and approaches (Gough et al., 2012).

Different types of reviews can be undertaken which include rapid reviews which are bound by constraints such as restricting searches to articles published within a specific timeframe (Smela et al., 2023). Umbrella reviews provide a review of multiple reviews (Becker & Oxman, 2008). Scoping reviews typically address a broader research question (Daudt et al., 2013). Literature reviews compile what is already known about a specific topic (Baumeister & Leary, 1997), and systematic literature reviews/synthesis aim to collate existing research to respond to a focused research question (Gough & Thomas, 2016). A systematic research synthesis was employed for this thesis.

3.3 The inclusion and focus on qualitative research.

Although it is recognised that systematic reviews traditionally synthesise quantitative research (Noyes et al., 2008), interest in qualitative and mixed-method reviews is growing (Tashkkori & Teddlie, 2010). Randomised Control Trial studies (RCTs) may be perceived to be at the top of the hierarchy for evidence (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). However, some studies may not be amenable to RCTs, for example, if the objective is to gather a rich knowledge of a topic through views and experiences, these may need to be captured through a qualitative method, not in a statistical data-based manner. Research which utilised a qualitative methodology or a mixed methodology where there was a focus upon the qualitative results were included in the systematic synthesis for this thesis. The SLR research question aimed to explore the views and experiences of different participant groups, and therefore a qualitative method was perhaps more likely to be found in the research studies.

3.4 Qualitative Research Synthesis

3.4.1 Qualitative methodology

A qualitative research synthesis examines studies which are qualitative in nature by the method or design. Aggregative or interpretive approaches can be used. Aggregative syntheses aim for a comprehensive overview of the research. The findings from the studies are mapped and an aggregation of common themes across the studies are elicited (Drisko, 2020). Interpretative syntheses are commonly interpretivist in epistemology enabling the generation of multiple meanings and the emphasis of culture across the data (Drisko, 2020). The development of new theories or perspective are the concern of interpretive syntheses (Drisko, 2020). An aggregative approach was undertaken for this research.

3.4.2 Advantages of a systematic synthesis

Qualitative research searches can generate vast quantities of information. A rigorous methodology is therefore advantageous as it supports a systematic framework to examine and extrapolate data to inform interpretations and ways forward (Savin-Baden, 2010).

3.4.3 Constraints of a SLR

The researcher acknowledges that there are limitations of a SLR. This includes the position of the researcher, their personal experiences, views and biases and how they have influenced the review process (Gough et al., 2012). The question posed by the researcher may present challenges as it may generate a limited amount of data in the topic of focus (Savin-Baden, 2010). Due to time constraints only one reviewer was involved and therefore member checking was not undertaken. The researcher has included and excluded studies dependent upon a set criterion. This provides a challenge as the researcher is applying their own value judgements as to which studies should be included or discounted (Willig, 2001). Different researchers within different paradigms may have different perceptions as to what constitutes relevant evidence (Gough, et al., 2012). This will therefore influence the

outcomes of the review. The contextual information surrounding qualitative data is also an important part of the aggregation process to prevent undermining the richness of the experiences explored (Savin-Baden & Major, 2007). Moreover, researcher bias can be reduced and counteracted through adoption of reflective practices (Savin-Baden, 2010).

3.4.4 Systematic Review Question

It is proposed that outlining a clear research question or research topic aids the success of a qualitative synthesis (Drisko, 2020).

The qualitative SLR was interested in the following question:

> "What does the existing research base indicate about the factors which facilitate positive experiences of inclusion for pupils with SEND within mainstream secondary schools?

Whilst exploring the research literature some subsidiary questions were also held in mind:
- What was the sample size, age of participants?
- What research methods were utilised?
- What were the main findings?

3.5 Synthesis Design

3.5.1 Search strategy

A systematic search strategy is a key facet of a qualitative research synthesis (Mayor & Savin-Baden, 2010). A broad and scoping yet comprehensive search of the available literature on the chosen topic was employed between 11/11/2022 and 10/12/2022. A further search was undertaken between 1/05/2024 and 30/05/2024 due to the time elapsed from the original search. Any new articles were considered using the same criteria as outlined below.

A search strategy was devised to support a systematic approach to try to reduce bias, to make decision making explicit and to aid replication (Gough

et al., 2012). Multiple search terms and phrases were used across a range of databases to try to achieve an exhaustive search (see Appendix A). The aim of this search strategy was to try to identify as many studies as possible which met the inclusion criteria (Gough et al., 2012). The inclusion criteria can be found in Table 1.

3.5.2 Database search

Three databases were utilised for the systematic search: Web of Science; PsychInfo and ERIC (EBSCO). Additionally, the British library resource for electronic doctoral theses (EThOS) was also explored. These databases were searched using a range of search terms and phrases. A range of strategies were implemented to try to exhaust the topic of focus and try to uncover the relevant articles. The search term "inclusion" was focused on as an umbrella term rather than using connected terms such as "belonging". This was a conscious decision by the researcher as the researcher held the view that facets such as "belonging" were separate constructs and could be searched for as a separate theme and was therefore not at the centre of the researcher's focus when searching for relevant studies. The researcher further acknowledges that this decision to use the umbrella term "inclusion" at the centre of the search strategy will impact the search results and therefore the studies which are generated. This means that some relevant research not specifically conceptualised as being about inclusion due to other terms being used may not be included in the search results and within this thesis. Within the search strings synonyms were applied for some of the search terms including "improve" e.g., enhance, raise, and "pupils" e.g., students. Boolean operator "AND" was used to combine concepts to reduce the number of records e.g., special AND mainstream. To broaden search terms to encompass as many relevant studies as possible the wildcard function was used (Inclu*). This helped to include a range of search terms in one operation e.g., included/inclusive/include/inclusion. All of the search terms utilised, and the results generated are outlined in Appendix A.

3.5.3 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to the studies generated from the searches. The criteria for inclusion and exclusion of studies are explicit to support the interpretation of the findings. The criteria can be found below:

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria applied to the articles generated from the literature search.

Feature	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Country	Studies based in the UK	Studies which are not based within the UK. Different countries have different education systems and terminology of SEN and associated support.
Participant sample	School staff in mainstream secondary schools, parent/carer of pupils with SEND and pupils with SEND. Articles which include mixed views but where the views can be attributed to each type of participant. Data in relation to secondary aged pupils (Key Stage 3-4, 11-16 years old) where pupils are identified as having special educational needs in the form of formal diagnoses or as recognised as requiring additional support by their school.	Articles which focus upon the views of other groups of people which are not pupils, school staff or parents/carers. Sources which focus on pupils with an age of 0-11 years (early years or primary aged pupils)
Setting	Mainstream secondary school settings	Primary schools Specialist settings or special schools /

		alternative provisions / enhanced resource bases Non-educational settings
Study focus	Positive focus on enabling factors of inclusive provision	Focus on deficits or barriers to inclusion. Primary focus on predictions or hypothesising about enhancing inclusive practices. Focus on policies or wider systemic influences such as the local authority. Reflections after leaving school.
Research design	Qualitative	Quantitative design
Data presentation	Descriptions of experiences	Surface level responses, single word answers
Publication	Peer reviewed journals Grey literature including theses and dissertations	Books, magazine articles, chapters, reviews and all other types of publications

3.5.4 Rationale for inclusion / exclusion criteria

3.5.4.1 Country

The topic of inclusion has gained momentum around the world and is an international problem. However, the school structures and systems differ significantly between country to country. The researcher therefore decided to limit this review to the context of the UK. This approach would hopefully support the direct comparison of studies and aid with informing evidence-based practice.

3.5.4.2 Participant sample

The views of school staff who work directly with pupils with SEND who attend mainstream secondary school settings, secondary aged pupils with SEND and parents/carers of secondary aged pupils with SEND were sought as they are positioned as the best source of information to explore the research question.

3.5.4.3 Setting

Mainstream secondary schools were focused upon. Pupil referral units, additional resource provisions or SEN units, "free" schools or primary schools were not included. The ecological systems and strategies implemented will vary across the different types of setting. Furthermore, settings such as free schools and enhanced provision units may set their own curriculum, and the approaches used may differ from mainstream secondary schools. It was therefore concluded that the strategies may not be transferrable and comparable across the different types of educational settings. The aspects of inclusion which work well at primary school may be different from aspects at secondary school. This could include the difference in the physical environments, the multiple lessons and multiple teachers at secondary school, the curriculum expectations, and social interactions. The systemic and organisational features of secondary schools are different from primary schools. This notion is supported by research conducted by Black (2019) which indicated that it may be easier for primary schools to accommodate and meet needs due to the "size, structure, relationships between staff/parents/children and the flexibility of the day/timetable" (Black, 2019, p57).

Furthermore, as my SLR question focused upon the existing evidence base for inclusive practices within mainstream secondary schools including other settings would not enable a representation of this data for direct comparison.

3.5.4.4 Study focus

Direct experiences of inclusive practices were sought in relation to the research question. Studies which hypothesised or imagined potential ways to enhance inclusion or indirect perspectives of inclusion were discounted.

3.5.4.5 Research design

Studies which employed qualitative methods of gathering pupil views were sought as the review question focused on the experiences of pupils with SEND, the views and experiences of parents/carers of pupils with SEND and the views of school staff.

3.5.4.6 Data presentation

Rich data was sought in the form of first-hand experiences of pupils with SEND, parents/carers and school staff as their voices are key to the research question. Qualitative data was prioritised to support exploration of the views and experiences of participants.

3.5.4.7 Publication

Peer reviewed journal articles were prioritised as sources of information. This is due to the rigour and robustness of the publication process. However, as the specificity of the topic area did not generate a large number of relevant peer reviewed literature, grey literature in the form of doctoral theses were also included.

3.6 Study selection

The database searches generated a list of research studies by title. The titles were screened for relevance according to the inclusion/exclusion criteria. The articles were then inspected by looking at the abstract and either saved for further scrutiny or discarded due to irrelevance. The final stage of inspection was at the full article level. Studies which were excluded using the exclusion criteria from above are outlined in Appendix B. The studies which met the inclusion criteria and are included as part of this systematic review

are outlined in Table 2. This systematic process generated a small set of peer reviewed articles for the basis of the literature review and to show what research already exists.

Figure 1. Visual representation of the systematic search process for the SLR

The results displayed (n=) are for the number of results generated across the databases explored (PsychInfo, EBSCO, Web of Science, and EThoS). The search terms used are outlined in Appendix A.

Identification	Records identified as relevant from titles through database searching (initial search n=98, grey search n =2) (additional search n=3, grey search n=2) Total n= 105	
Screening	Records removed after initial screening of abstracts (n=63)	Reasons for removal: duplicates, schools being resource provisions or non-UK based, barriers focus
	Records remaining (initial search n=39) Additional search (n=3)	
Eligibility	Full-text articles assessed for eligibility (n = 42)	Full-text articles excluded, with reasons (see Appendix B) (n =35)
Included	Studies included in qualitative synthesis (see Table 2.2) (n =7)	

3.7 Situating the studies.

A total of seven studies forms the systematic review. Five studies are peer reviewed articles and two are theses. Table 2 provides an outline of each study which is included in the systematic review.

Table 2. Overview of the studies included in the SLR.

Author / Year/ Country / Type of publication	Participant sample / setting	Topic of focus in relation to the review question	Methodology	Main themes / outcomes outlined by the authors of the article	Appraisal, critique and CASP score
Webster & Blatchford (2019)	Year 9, 13–14-year-olds with a statement /EHCP. 34 secondary schools across England 219 interviews were conducted across pupils, teachers, and SENDCos. 49 interviews with pupils.	To explore teaching support, differentiation and how pupils experience these. A voice for children with SEND and school staff	Case study reports Semi-structured interviews, 20-60 minutes long Thematic analysis Qualitative observations	Teaching and support: strategies including questioning, encouragement, repetition Differentiation Smaller sized classes, quieter and calmer learning environments for core subjects – maths and English.	Findings from this study are illustrated with participant data, the data is attributable to each participant group. The themes generated from the research are clearly presented. The recruitment of the participants and the positioning of the researcher were not outlined. It was unclear whether ethical approval had been sought and what ethical consideration had been taken.

					CASP score 8/10*
Humphrey and Lewis (2008)	4 mainstream secondary schools, northwest England. 19 students with ASD, aged 11-17 years Interviews also took place with school staff including teaching assistants, teachers, SENDCos, and management. The number of participants in this group were not specified	Exploring inclusion for pupils with ASD What are the views of key stakeholders in what supports pupils with ASD What do pupils with ASD perceive to be supportive	Multiple case study design – 4 case studies Interviews with and Observations Content analysis driven approach	Communication Teaching assistants and support Adaptations, quiet room, quiet classrooms Ethos – acceptance of pupils with ASD / SEND in school.	A clear outline of the case study design was presented. Data analysis was also clearly outlined. Participant responses were provided to enrich the themes that are presented. It was unclear if the researcher acknowledges their relationship with the participants and the potential bias. It is also unclear what ethical considerations were applied and taken. CASP score = 8/10*
Dimitrellou & Male (2020)	Three mainstream secondary schools	Focusing on the research question: what do children and young people with SEND report	56-item questionnaire, then 34 face to face interviews using a 36 open-ended	Support from TA's Relationships with TA's	Ethical considerations were clearly outlined. The process of data collection including the recruitment of participants was clearly

	34 pupils with SEND Year 7-10	about their school experiences?	question framework Thematic analysis	Approachable teachers, respectful, fun lessons Taught in a way that facilitated their learning and skills to manage their behaviour Interesting lessons group work, to work with peers and to socialise	outlined. The data analysis and findings were clearly presented with quotes from participants to enrich the proposals. CASP score = 10/10*
Kefallinou & Howes (2022)	Secondary aged pupils aged 12-16 with SEND attending mainstream secondary school. 6 students from England, 6 students from Greece. 2 schools from England and 2 from Greece. 4 SENDCos, 4 teachers and 3 TAs	Exploring pupil voices of experiences of inclusion within mainstream schools	Multiple case study design Learning walks for 30 minutes around the school, given by the participants. Interviews with 4 SENDCos, 4 teachers, 3 TAs Digital cameras provided to capture places they liked/disliked and Individual interviews Thematic analysis	Relationships with key people Interactions with peers or teachers Support strategies from teachers and TAs	Clear description of participant sampling, however the position and potential bias was not discussed Data collection and data analysis were clear and detailed. The results were supported with quotes from the participants. CASP score = 9/10*

	*Data separated out into different schools/countries				
Murdoch (2019) Thesis	Seven young people aged 12-16 with additional needs Based in a Scottish secondary school Seven adults – five members of staff and two parents	Exploring the processes of inclusion. Focusing on pupil voice. To gain insight into the lived experiences to understand the realities of inclusive education.	Phenomenological Interviews Phenomenological analysis	Perceptions of pupils by the school Home-school relationships Relationship between teachers and young people Importance of salience and listening Recognition of difficulties including transitions	The researcher clearly presented the process undertaken and the reasons behind each step throughout the research. Consideration was provided about how the researcher considered their role and potential influence in the data collection and data analysis. CASP score = 10/10*
Beaver (2016) England Thesis	13 pupils with SEND from one secondary school in the southeast of England. Pupils aged 11-16 years old.	To explore inclusion for the current cohort of pupils but also for future cohorts. To explore inclusive provision using pupil voice.	Interviews Case study Thematic Analysis	Extra-curricular activities, for example music Support in the classroom by staff Support outside of the classroom	A rigorous presentation of the research proposal including the ethical procedures undertaken, the decisions made in relation to the research design, a clear identification of how participants were recruited and ethical considerations about potential bias, clear

				Being consulted	procedures in data analysis and how themes were generated.
				Positive relationships with staff and peers	CASP score = 10/10*
				Resources	
				Listening to pupil views	
				Feeling included in the school community	
Porter & Ingram (2021)	108 Year 8-9 girls aged 12-14 years with SEND Four mainstream secondary schools in the UK.	To explore feelings of belonging and inclusion	Questionnaire – looked at ratings of how the girls felt across 13 different settings/parts of the school with options ranging from 1 indicating very good, to 6 indicating very bad. Ratings feelings of belonging. Descriptive statistics for quantitative questionnaire data. Open-ended questions – for	Relationships –with peers and teachers. Emotional support from teachers and staff. Facilities and physical environment: places to go to for quiet and calm. Specific places such as having somewhere to go to at break and lunch Teaching and learning: teacher enthusiasm, fun lessons, not too much writing or homework. Working in groups. Adult differentiating to meet the needs of different	It was unclear if the researchers had critically examined their influence in the research process. There was a clear outline of the data collection method and analysis. The themes were mainly generated from the responses in the questionnaires and the number of responses for each question supported the prominence of the themes and therefore perhaps their level of importance. CASP score = 9/10*

			example "what helped with inclusion". Iterative thematic analysis approach for qualitative data analysis	pupils with different abilities. Preferences for working in groups, pairs or with someone. Strategies: clear explanations form teachers, Support in lessons from peers to make you feel comfortable, help you if you get stuck, sitting with people you like	

*Explanations of the CASP score can be found in Appendix C.

3.8 Quality assessment of selected studies

The rigour of the studies included in this SLR (n=7) was explored through the application of the screening tool Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) (2018). Ten appraisal questions were applied to each study to examine the quality and trustworthiness of the results and if the study would be included in the SLR. Factors such as the sample and design were rated using a "yes, no, or can't tell". A total score out of 10 is allocated to each study. A higher score was achieved through more "yes" ratings for the screening questions. A higher score represents the researcher's perception of a higher quality of study. The overview of the CASP for the studies in this SLR can be found in Appendix C. Table 2 also outlines a descriptive outline of considerations given by the researcher for each study with the overall CASP score.

3.9 Overview of studies

3.9.1 Sample and setting

All of the included studies were undertaken within mainstream secondary schools. Five of the studies were conducted with England, one study was undertaken in Scotland and one study was split between England and Greece (Kefallinou & Howes, 2022). The study by Kefallinou and Howes (2022) was included in the final synthesis as the findings from Greece and England were clearly identifiable. A total of 49 schools were included across the studies. Webster and Blatchford (2019) used 34 schools in their study whereas the remaining six studies used between one and four schools. A total of 430 participants were included across the studies. This included a total of 238 pupils. Pupil participants across all of the studies were aged between 11 and 16 years old and have some level of SEND. Humphrey and Lewis (2008) specify that their pupil participants have ASD. Porter and Ingram (2021) used 108 pupil participants who "self-disclosed SEND". Beaver (2016), Dimitrellou & Male (2020) and Porter and Ingram (2021) only used pupil participants in their studies. The other four studies report a combination of pupils, parents, school staff and some other professionals such as EPs. Murdoch (2019) was the only study to identify the inclusion of parents (n=2). Webster and Blatchford (2019) outlined they conducted 219

interviews across their participants, but they do not specify the breakdown for each group. Humprey and Lewis (2008) highlight they conducted interviews with other staff and stakeholders, but they do not specify the number.

3.9.2 Methodology, data collection and analysis

The method of collecting and analysing data utilised mainly qualitative approaches. Interviews were used in all seven studies as the main data collection method. Additionally, two studies used a mixed-methods approach. Dimitrellou and Male (2020) included a questionnaire, however the findings focused upon the qualitative face-to-face interview data. Porter and Ingram (2021) also included a questionnaire with descriptive statistics used as part of the analysis. Kefallinou and Howes (2022), was the only study to include the use of digital cameras for participants to capture images to be used to support their responses in their interviews. Thematic analysis or phenomenological analysis were used to explore the qualitative data, to make sense of it and to support a way to compare and contrast results.

3.9.3 Publication

Five of the studies were found through data base searches and two studies were found through a grey literature search. Five studies are peer reviewed and two are theses.

3.10 SLR analysis and synthesis of findings

Qualitative data was focused upon from the studies to support the exploration of views and experiences of inclusion. A review of the findings from across the seven studies was undertaken. The researcher chose to compare the results from the studies to look for commonalities and differences to gain an understanding of the existing research base.

3.10.1 The development of themes

The six stages of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012) were applied to each of the research studies (see Table 8. For further details). The

first step in the analysis process is to explore each of the research studies carefully, to become familiar with the findings. Codes were generated first. Subsequently, the codes were developed into themes. The initial themes identified in each study are outlined in Appendix D. The generation of composite themes is achieved by examining and combining pre-existing themes from the chosen studies (Mayor & Savin-Baden, 2010). The second order themes which can be identified as common or re-occurring themes can be found within Table 3., alongside the overarching themes.

Table 3. Overview of themes from the analysis of SLR studies

Overarching themes				
Relationships	Support	Adaptations	Communication	Belonging:
Second order themes				
Peer relationships Relationships with teaching assistants Relationships with pastoral staff Friendships with peers	Interventions Group support One to one support	Additional resources Tailored strategies such as note taking, scribing Teaching and learning Environmental aspects such as quiet spaces	Teachers listening to the views of pupils Communication with staff to share information	Within the classroom Acceptance from others Wider culture and feeling of belonging

3.10.2 Synthesis Analysis

A discussion of each of the overarching themes from across the SLR studies will be discussed below.

3.10.2.1 Relationships

This theme was the most common across all studies. Within this theme pupils talked about their peers, teachers, TAs and other support staff, with the relationships with TAs being the most common. Relationships were highlighted as an important factor for inclusion. The findings also suggest

that the level of understanding and emotional support shown by adults can support interactions. In Kefallinou and Howes (2022) study, pupils described TAs as being understanding and that they have high expectations of them. TAs were positioned as having a possible influence on engagement as they "convince pupils to do better" (Kefallinuo & Howes, 2022, p10). The interactions and words of encouragement were also noted to be important "she tried to make me feel better" and said, "well done" (Beaver, 2016).

There was a notion of emotional support provided by adults across the studies. Pupils identified they could gain support from "trusted adults" in the Porter and Ingram (2021) study with participants identifying they went to them when "feeling overwhelmed or really upset" (p66). Teachers were positioned as helping with problems (Murdoch, 2019; Porter & Ingram, 2021). One pupil identified that a teacher told him "If there's anything like troubling you in class, you can come to me and tell me" (Murdoch, 2019, p180). Teachers were described as "good" when they were "approachable, respectful and made lessons fun" (Kefallinou & Howes, 2022). Other qualities which were identified as fostering relationships were being "supportive" and "approachable" (Dimitrellou & Male, 2020, p93).

Relationships with peers were also fostered by school staff to support the inclusion of pupils with SEND. For example, working in small groups was seen as an opportunity to socialise and interact; "they encourage other people to work together" (Dimitrellou & Male, 2020, p92). Being accepted by others, especially friends, was also noted in one study "friends accept me for who I am" (Porter & Ingram, 2021, p69).

3.10.2.2 Support

Across the studies the notion of "support" was also strong. Different levels of support were identified across the studies in the form of adult support and different types of learning situations. Two studies mentioned small group learning situations. Small groups were seen as positive by pupils "we have English and maths in small groups of up to ten pupils" (Webster & Blatchford,

2019, p106) "you get more attention as there is less of us" (Dimitrellou & Male, 2020, p92). Murdoch (2019) highlighted that the debate over support being delivered in the class or outside is still raised; "we don't extract for subjects. We would go in and try to support in class" (p202). When discussing TAs, pupils shared that they "do help a lot" (Kefallinou & Howes, 2022). Further examples included "when I am stuck the assistant helps me, so I don't get a detention" (Dimitrellou & Male, 2020). There was a positive notion for the support received; "at school they give us as much support as possible" (Dimitrellou & Male, 2020, p92). There was also an emotional level of support highlighted through "encouragement from TAs to do higher papers, and to boost confidence levels" and "if you get a low level, they kind of boost you up and say it's alright" (Beaver, 2016, p95).

3.10.2.3 Adaptions

Pupils identified that how lessons are delivered is important. Some pupils identified that "they (teachers) make it easier for you to learn" (Dimitrellou & Male, 2020). Teachers were described as being "enthusiastic" and making learning better by "not having to write a lot" and there being "no homework" (Porter & Ingram, 2021, p66). Participants said factors which were important included "knowing what to do" and that they "like it when teachers help you and tell you what to do clearly" (Porter & Ingram, 2021, p66). Practical subjects and "being out of the classroom" were also noted as important (Porter & Ingram, 2021, p68).

Specific approaches used in the classroom by TAs and teachers were also prominent across the studies and were indicated to include "differentiation, scribing and reading….whatever the pupil needs" (Webster & Blatchford, 2019, p,107). With specific examples highlighted as "TAs bridge learning in the moment through repetition and modification to their language" (Webster & Blatchford, 2019, p,106). The TA role and support was outlined as "promoting independence, encouraging, clarifying, repeating information, and supporting focus" (Webster & Blatchford, 2019, p,104). Additionally, the provision of strategies such as note taking, e.g., "help from my TAs in case I

have missed anything" which pupils view as "beneficial" and "having a laptop and work being enlarged and typed out" p86 (Beaver, 2016). Porter and Ingram (2021) found that seating plans can also be important; pupils shared that "sitting with people you feel comfortable with" (p66) makes it easier. The importance of differentiation and the purpose of learning were recognised within Humphrey and Lewis (2008) study; "educating every child is not just about GCSE's….or standards that the government is so obsessed with….it is about developing their skills…to help them to be a member of the community" (p.134).

Environmental and physical adaptations were also discussed. Pupils identified "quiet places where people are not shouting" as important (Porter & Ingram, 2021, p66). Furthermore, the "quiet spaces" were highlighted as assisting with emotional regulation and wellbeing; "if I am in a quiet place, I feel more relaxed and calm and it helps to reduce anxiety" (Humprey & Lewis, 2008, p66). These options were also identified as being important at specific times of the day such as break and lunchtime, which is perhaps when the social areas are busier; pupils identified they like "being with friends at break and lunch in a quiet place to chat" (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p66).

3.10.2.4 Communication

Students in some studies highlighted the importance of feeling listened to (Beaver, 2016; Murdoch, 2019). A pupil identified "If I'm stressed about something, I can go to Guidance or the Head Teachers, and say, like what I just stressed about and they'll give a phone home, so my mum knows when I go home, that I've spoken to either of them" (Murdoch, 2019, p162). Pupils also highlighted that they felt their views and ideas were considered when making changes to their support or provision; staff provide "flexible support" "working with you to find a solution" (Beaver, 2016, p85).

Communication was also highlighted in relation to disseminating information to staff. Humphrey and Lewis (2008) found that strategies applied by SENDCos included training, staff bulletins, and pupil profiles.

3.10.2.5 Belonging

A supportive school community was highlighted within studies as being important for inclusion (Beaver; 2016; Murdoch, 2019). Pupils spoke positively about how their schools included them within the wider culture and ethos; "I always feel part of the school. I always feel like I am involved in school life" (Beaver, 2016, p86). Extra-curricular activities were mentioned in two studies: Porter and Ingram (2021) and Beaver (2016) as creating feelings of being connected to the school. A pupil reflected "they really encourage you to join in and they build your confidence" (Beaver, 2016, p80).

Emotional aspects of feeling included were highlighted by participants in Porter and Ingram (2021) study, participants felt "supported and respected" with "teachers giving you praise" (p69). The investment from staff was also noted; feeling included is supported by "teachers who know you and are interested in your life outside of school" (Porter & Ingram, 2021, p72).

Leadership and a whole school approach were identified in two studies. Commitment from the leadership team was identified as facilitating feelings of support and an increased confidence to meet the needs of their pupils; "when the ethos was one of acceptance and valuing diversity" "this permeated from the top down" (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p134).

3.11 Overview and appraisal of SLR

Overall, the themes generated from SLR indicate there are a number of contributing factors which support and facilitate positive experiences of mainstream secondary schools for pupils with SEND, however these positive perceptions are limited to a small range of studies. A transparent representation of the findings across the range of studies was attempted to

support the credibility and validity of the synthesis. Commonalities in findings were found across this set of studies which suggests that the findings may be transferable. However, it is noted that this is a small sample of studies which are focused upon certain inclusion criteria outlined by the researcher. Also, there are limitations within each study such as sample size and generalisability of findings. The trustworthiness and credibility of the SLR can be questioned as the researcher acknowledges they were the sole individual to conduct the search, compare and analyse the studies.

3.12 Literature synthesis

3.12.1 The importance of inclusion

There has been a shift in policy and legislation away from a care model towards equal and equitable educational opportunities for children and young people with SEND. Education Acts and human rights acts enshrine in law the declaration that "everyone has the right to education" (Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights). In the UK governmental agendas and documentation such as the SENDCoP and Green Papers outline the important role that mainstream settings play in meeting the needs of pupils with SEND. With an increasing trend in the number of children and young people identified as having SEND, the number of EHCPs being awarded and the number of pupils attending specialist provision rather than a mainstream setting, the importance of effectively supporting the needs of pupils with SEND is highlighted.

Furthermore, research proposes that pupils with SEND may be more likely to have negative experiences in school including being put on a reduced timetable (OCC, 2017) being off rolled (Ofsted, 2019) and even excluded (DfE. 2019a). On a wider longer term level people with SEND may have more negative life outcomes including a higher chance of unemployment, increased mental health difficulties, and be living in poverty (O'Brien, 2016). The importance of creating inclusive learning environments and supporting pupils with SEND to reach their full potential could possibly reduce or negate the occurrence or impact of these negative factors. If pupils with SEND have

their needs met within their school setting, they may be more likely to have good attendance and achieve their academic potential, have positive emotional wellbeing and enjoy their school experience. These factors may accumulate into supporting pupils with SEND to be prepared for adulthood to be members of their community and from a neoliberalist perspective make a positive contribution to society.

3.12.2 Bioecological model of human development

System theorists including Bronfenbrenner (1979) view a system as being constructed of multiple parts where each part of a system is interconnected to form the whole. This suggests that examining one part of the system in isolation does not provide a rich understanding. The bioecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) postulates that multiple interconnected systems influence how an individual develops. The systems portray different environments and levels that an individual encounters, which include environmental, societal, biological and psychological. The bioecological model emphasises the importance of examining individuals in multiple environments. Bronfenbrenner situates the systems as being interconnected with the view that interactions across the systems are bi-directional. Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggested that if the systems operating around a child or young person are ineffective their development can be negatively impacted or hindered. Examining the multiple environments and how they interact with the child or young person is emphasised within the ecological systems model (Bronfenbrenner,1979).

The research from the literature review and SLR suggest that multiple factors impact inclusion and the application of inclusive practices. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model can be used as a framework to explore and make sense of the different interacting factors.

Figure 2. Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).
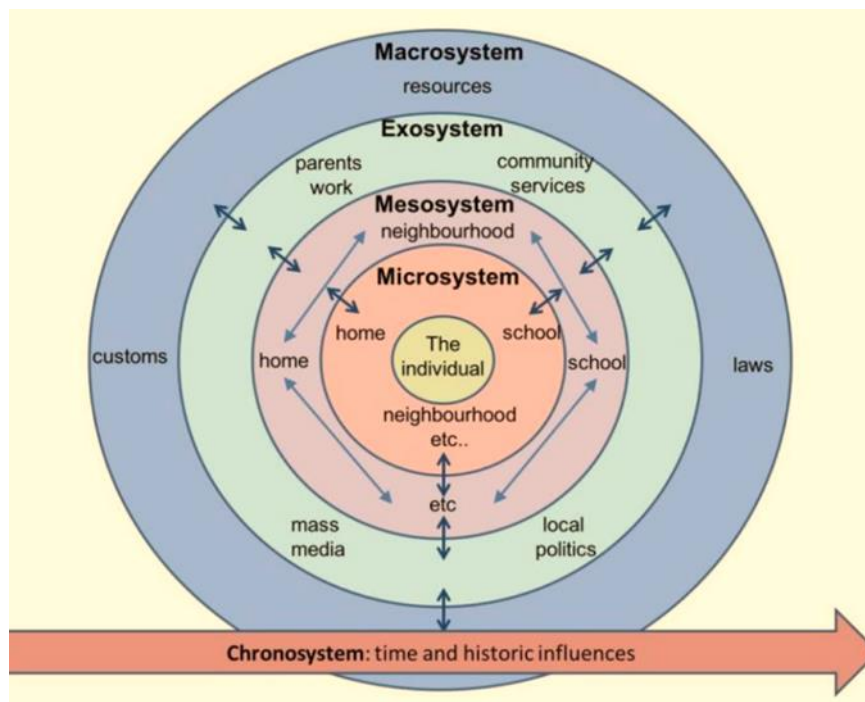
As portrayed in Figure 2. Bronfenbrenner (1979) identifies five systems which form the ecological system: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. The individual is situated at the centre with the systems surrounding them. In the context of this research the "individual" is a pupil with SEND.

The microsystem can be perceived as potentially having a significant impact on the development and behaviour of the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). It encompasses the people and environments which an individual interacts with each day including immediate relationships with family, friends and teachers (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The focus of this research is the school environment. The existing evidence base highlights the importance of relationships between pupils and school staff where supportive relationships are a prominent aspect of creating positive feelings of connection and belonging (Dimitrellou et al., 2020; Grima-Farrell et al., 2011; Webster & Blatchford, 2019). The emotional wellbeing of an individual is also raised in the SLR studies through the support of TAs (Porter & Ingram, 2021). At the classroom level a range of adaptations are highlighted within the research. For example, adaptive pedagogies where teachers employ a flexible

individualised approach is highlighted as an important contributing factor for inclusive learning environments (Woodfield & Ashby, 2016).

The mesosystem is described as encompassing the connections across the microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For example, in the research literature, the perspectives of parents/carers are highlighted in relation to their level of confidence in mainstream settings being able to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. These parent/carer perceptions can influence the decisions made about requesting specialist or mainstream placements (Palmer et al., 2001). Transition from primary to secondary school is also raised as a factor within the literature as a contributing factor for effective inclusion. A positive transition can facilitate feelings of inclusion for pupils with SEND and reduce feelings of anxiety for parents/carers (Hoy et al., 2018).

The third layer of the ecological model, the exosystem, includes systems which can indirectly impact the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005). This is the level of the environment where systemic changes can occur. At a systemic level, the research highlights that a whole school collaborative and shared ethos for inclusion can contribute towards a successful inclusive learning environment. Furthermore, elements such as teacher training and the confidence levels of teachers in meeting the needs of pupils with SEND can also impact the implementation of inclusive pedagogy (Sinz, 2004). School leadership was also raised with SENDCOs positioned in SLT as possibly influencing the effectiveness of inclusion through the dissemination of information.

The macrosystem embodies wider societal values, cultural factors and laws (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In relation to inclusive education, the macrosystem can influence the structure of school systems through broad cultural norms and beliefs. Components such as the national curriculum, OFSTED, the SENDCoP (DfE, 2015) and other regulatory factors can contribute to the perceived possibilities and outcomes for pupils. The research highlights a possible dichotomy where schools are judged on performance outcomes in

terms of academic attainment which may be in conflict with being inclusive of pupils with SEND (Runswick-Cole, 2011).

The chronosystem accounts for time and historical developments. The chronosystem is also influential on inclusive practices as there has been a societal shift away from a medical model towards inclusion and inclusive education which has been operationalised through legislation, policies and human rights over time.

Bronfenbrenner's model highlights the intricate and multifaceted nature of how an individual develops and how their needs are met. In relation to the research topic for this thesis the model highlights the different levels and components involved in inclusion and the contributing factors towards mainstream schools developing inclusive learning environments to meet a wide range of needs for pupils with SEND. There are influences across the different systems which interact and can both help and hinder the realisation of positive inclusive learning environments for pupils with SEND. Some factors appear to be decided by the school and may be perceived as being more able to be controlled by the school and for other factors that are positioned at a level which is "top down" and more regulatory as part of national legislation, these aspects appear to be less adaptable. It is important to use the voices across the participant groups to share their views and experiences across the multiple levels and systems to gain an understanding of how their experiences of inclusion are impacted by the different factors at each level of the bioecological model.

3.12.3. Rationale for the current study

Research indicates that there is an increasing trend in the number of children and young people who are identified as having SEND (DfE, 2019; National Statistics, 2022). Additionally, there is an over-representation of pupils with SEND in specialist provision rather than mainstream at secondary education level (Day & Prunty, 2010; Pirrie et al., 2006).

The drive for inclusive education remains at the forefront of discussion in terms of enhancing experiences and outcomes for pupils with SEND (e.g., DfE, 2022; DfE, 2023). However, despite continued interest and governmental policy there is currently "low confidence in the ability of mainstream settings to effectively meet the needs of children and young people with SEND" from the perspectives of parents (DfE, 2023, p.15). With some schools engaging in practices such as off rolling and exclusion of pupils with SEND, it emphasises how un-inclusive schools and systems can be (Ofsted, 2022).

These factors suggest that currently mainstream schools may not be as successful in including and meeting the needs of pupils with SEND as they could be (Ofsted, 2021; EEF, 2021). Research conducted by Ofsted (2021) suggested barriers to inclusion and meeting the needs of pupils with SEND in mainstream schools includes factors such as a lack of understanding of pupils' strengths and needs, the type of support provided not meeting the needs of pupils, and limited collaboration across key stakeholders to find ways forward. The need to explore further ways to support mainstream secondary schools to enhance their offer of inclusive practices and to find ways to create an inclusive learning environment for pupils with SEND is indicated.

A large proportion of the research base in the area of inclusive education focuses on the barriers to successful implementation (Schuelka, 2018), the theoretical propositions of how to enhance inclusion (Amor et al. (2018) or on the primary age phase (De Vroey et al., 2016). A drive away from theoretical simulations of what constitutes successful inclusive practices and a move towards solution focused approaches are increasing in prevalence (Schuelka, 2018). There were no studies in the SLR which focused solely upon positive experiences or "what works". Parent perspectives are also under-represented within the research data (Armstrong et al., 2016). The SLR found one study which used parent participants (Murdoch, 2019). The Inclusive Data Taskforce (2021) highlighted that the existing data for pupil views was often by proxy rather than direct, first-hand generated information

about their lived experiences. Furthermore, data from groups which are marginalised, including pupils with SEND, are also particularly underrepresented within research (Hodkinson, 2010; Pazey, 2020; Norwich & Kelly, 2004). The SLR highlights a limited amount of research into the experiences of pupils with SEND in relation to positive experiences of inclusion in mainstream secondary schools.

The objectives of the current research are therefore to gather the perspectives and experiences of inclusion from three different participant groups; pupils with SEND, parents/carers of pupils with SEND and SENDCos. The researcher aims to take a bioecological stance (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) to use the voices from these three groups and the individuals within to assist the exploration of the microsystem and the interacting factors which exist in mainstream secondary schools to promote inclusion for pupils with SEND. The existing research base suggests there are multiple factors at the microsystemic level which can contribute towards positive experiences of inclusion. Furthermore, there are aspects from the exosystem which are raised within the existing research base as also contributing towards inclusive educational environments including the role of SENDCos in SLT and a whole school ethos towards inclusion. The exploratory nature of research may mean other aspects of the ecological system are highlighted as contributing towards inclusion. The voices from each group and the voices from all individual participants are equally important to the researcher from a practical, ethical and epistemological stance. Ainscow and Sandhill (2010) concur that starting with a detailed analysis which explores the existing practices and supportive arrangements is a logical initial point for developing inclusive practices.

Chapter 4 Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a detailed methodology and the underpinning philosophical position for this piece of research. The main paradigms underpinning applied research are outlined followed by a focus on the chosen paradigm for this study. The theoretical position of the researcher is addressed through exploration of the ontological and epistemological stance. Subsequently a comprehensive account of the methodological approach and research design are described. This includes details of how participants were recruited, the method of data collection and how the data was analysed. The research design is outlined including the rationale behind the choice of design and the corresponding potential limitations. The quality and trustworthiness of the approaches taken are finally offered. The aim of this chapter is to support a clear, detailed outline of the decisions made and the approach taken to contribute to the robustness and trustworthiness of the research.

4.2 Research aims and goals.

The hopes and goals for this research emerged through discussions with the Principal Educational Psychologist (PEP) and colleagues at team meetings where I was on placement as a trainee educational psychologist (TEP). Within my placement LA there was a drive to improve services for children and young people with SEND. As part of this LA SEND reform, an examination of the inclusivity of the current provision across the LA was proposed to provide support to settings to enhance their offer and to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND. The discussions centred around trends in data in relation to the increased number of pupils of secondary age with SEND attending specialist provisions opposed to mainstream settings in our LA. This correlates with a national trend where there is an increasing number in the pupils with SEND (National Statistics, 2023) and a growing number of pupils of secondary age in specialist settings (Day & Prunty, 2010; Pirrie et al., 2006). This indicated that there was a need

to explore this trend further to see what was happening on the front line to examine why pupils with SEND are in a specialist provision over mainstream at this point of transition in their educational journey. Through the research I hoped to:

- Provide opportunities for a variety of voices to be heard and listened to, for different views, perspectives and experiences to be acknowledged and celebrated.

- Create opportunities for the celebration of what is already in place, to share examples of "good practice", offering a solution focused, positive discussion, rather than a problem saturated discussion. It is already acknowledged that parents and carers often do not feel satisfied or confident with the offer from mainstream settings (Green Paper, DfE, 2022). However, with the need to direct resources, knowledge and support for early intervention and effective, timely support in mainstream settings to break the cycle of increasing numbers of pupils with EHCPs attending specialist settings, a positive focus on "what is working well" is prioritised.

- Offer a vehicle for information to be shared amongst mainstream secondary schools to improve inclusive practice.

- Support educational settings, educational psychology services (EPS) and other services to gain a greater understanding of what is already working well.

- Facilitate change at a systemic level through developing insight and encouraging sharing of experiences of inclusive practices in ways to support pupils with SEND in mainstream secondary schools.

Figure 3. Research goal, aim and question.

Research goal
• To support educational settings to develop greater insight and understanding of how they can support pupils with SEND in mainstream secondary schools

Research aim
• To actively listen to the expereinces and views of what facilitates inclusive practices for pupils with SEND

Research question
• "What facilitating factors are perceived to support the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) within mainstream secondary schools?"

4.3 Research philosophy

Research is underpinned by theory and assumptions of reality (Braun & Clark, 2022; Malterud, 2016). The chosen methods and practical decisions within research can be influenced by the researcher's personal views of the world (Mertens, 2015). This highlights the importance for researchers to consider and outline the philosophical position of their research. Ontology and epistemology form research philosophy which can inform research decisions and need to be aligned with the research design and the researcher's own stance (Pouliot, 2007).

Figure 4. Research philosophy
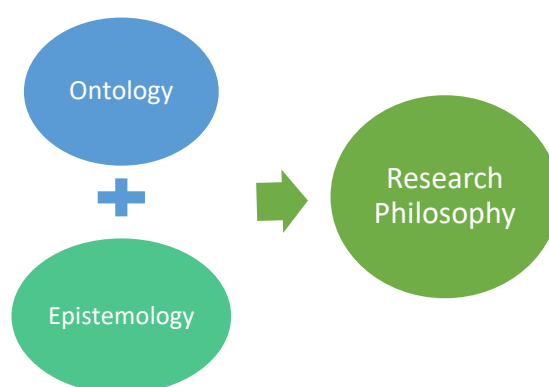
4.3.1 Ontology and Epistemology

Ontology outlines the nature of existence and answers the question "what do we consider as reality?" (Al-Ababneh, 2020; Mertens, 2015; Willig, 2013). Epistemology can be referred to as the theory and study of knowledge and how "we know what we know" (p. 134, Patton, 2002). Epistemology can try to answer the question "how can we know what reality is?" (Scotland, 2012). It can focus on the relationship of the mind with reality and studies the nature, origin and limitations of our knowledge (Barker, Pistrang & Elliott, 2016). It also looks at how knowledge is communicated through research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

4.3.2 Epistemological and Ontological Positions

There are several ontological and epistemological positions which can be adopted by researchers to examine and portray their perspectives on truth and knowledge. There are two principal opposing perspectives when considering ontology. Ontology can be split into realist or relativist positions (Willig, 2013). A realist position proposes there is a reality which is observable, and which is able to be investigated (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Blaikie, 2007; Nola, 2012). In juxtaposition to this, a relativist position believes that multiple realities and interpretations exist for the same event or situation (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Willig, 2013). Relativism challenges the notion that there is a single observable reality (Baghramian & Carter, 2022). It also considers and accounts for the influences of the individual, their prior

experiences, beliefs and how they can shape reality (Hartley, 2006; Nola, 2012).

Along the continuum of epistemological beliefs about what knowledge is, objectivism and constructivism are at opposing ends. An objectivist position proposes that reality exists independently of our own viewpoint (Crotty, 1998) with knowledge that is objective and true. Elements or processes which generate subjectivity are removed as far as possible (Robson & McCartan, 2016). A constructionist position proposes that knowledge, and understanding is constructed through experience and engagement with the world. This position holds the belief that the same situation could generate different views, experiences and outcomes which are influenced by the pre-requisite factors of experience, knowledge and beliefs and how the individual interacts with the situation (Murphy, 1997). Subjectivism and/or interpretivism fall towards the constructionist position along the continuum. Subjectivism and/or interpretivism propose that reality is subjective and socially constructed and that knowledge and understanding are dependent upon the individual's experience. Objective facts are interpreted and evaluated by the human mind. Experience, knowledge and expectation are positioned as important factors (Ritchie & Lewis 2003).

4.4 Major research paradigms

Figure 5. Research paradigm
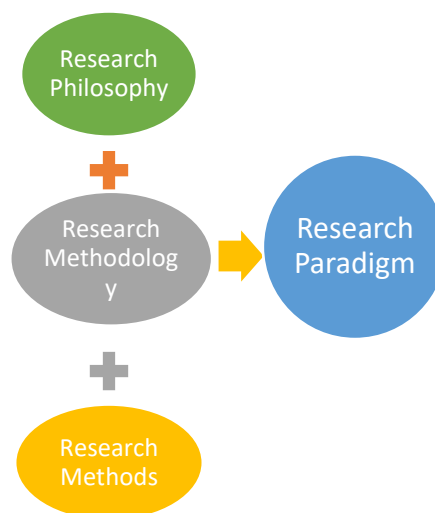
Research philosophy, methodology and methods combine to form the research paradigm (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Within research, a paradigm is described as a shared perspective or worldview within a scientific discipline which guides and informs the subject matter, and the processes employed (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Pickard, 2013). Research paradigms are important as they influence the underpinning values and decisions made. Guba and Lincoln (1998) propose that the starting point for research should be for the researcher to establish the paradigm or position with which their research aligns.

4.4.1 Positivism

Researchers who hold a positivist position believe that a single reality exists which can be measured and examined (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). The ontological position is realism which considers there is a real "truth" (Crotty, 1998; Mertens, 2020). Positivism is more typically associated with quantitative research designs. Hypotheses are generated and tested through controlling variables to generate proposed causal relationships (Scotland, 2012; Tuli, 2010).

The epistemological view within the positivist paradigm is objectivism which proposes that reality can be measured. Researchers aim to objectively view a phenomenon. The use of experimental controls can aid the reliability of the data through the reduction of influential factors. The generation of inferences from the data set can be viewed as an important goal of this type of research (Gresham, 2014). From this position, researchers perceive themselves as separate to what they are investigating and their consideration of potential influence on the research is not incorporated (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

The focus of the present study is not to explore causal relationships between variables, instead it aims to explore relationships and contributing factors and as such it does not align with a positivist paradigm (Ashworth, 2015).

4.4.2 Constructionism / interpretivism

Within these paradigms there is less of a focus on cause-and-effect relationships within the data and a greater interest in the experiences of participants and the different perspectives in relation to a single area of interest. The ontological position of relativism found in these paradigms presents a challenge to positivism (Crotty, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The belief underlying this way of thinking is that there are multiple realities which can be interpreted subjectively by each person depending upon the context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Rehman & Alharthi, 2016; Robson & McCartan, 2016). The reasons "why" things happen or exist are explored through interpretation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Moreover, constructionists believe truth and meaning about the world is constructed through experience and interaction (Crotty, 1998). Constructionism and interpretivism share the same ontology, the belief that multiple realities are created through experiences. However, they have a different epistemology. Although both paradigms believe in multiple realities, how they seek to understand them is different; constructionists focus upon how individuals construct realities, whereas interpretivists focus upon how the realities are individually experienced (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Within a constructionist paradigm an inductive approach opposed to a deductive approach is applied to the data to develop themes and theories (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This paradigm is also more aligned to qualitative research methods such as interviews or case studies which can generate different perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Furthermore, this paradigm proposes that researchers have an active and explicit role within the process of data interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Parker, 2002). It is proposed and acknowledged that researchers bring their own constructions and interpretations to the investigation which contributes to the richness of the data (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As the focus of the present study is on gathering the experiences of different individuals from three different participant groups through the means of semi-structured

interviews, a constructionist paradigm was felt to better align with the proposed research.

4.4.3 Transformative

Although paradigms such as constructionism challenge positivism, it is proposed that they may not actively support the process of change (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). In order to address this, the transformative paradigm proposes that the experiences of people who are actively engaged as participants are placed at the centre where the researcher tries to understand their lived experiences (Mertens, 2010; Schwandt, 2000). Research linked to this paradigm may focus on marginalised or unrepresented viewpoints to expand knowledge and understanding of their world (Mertens, 2014).

The strong focus on transformation and change did not align with the current research focus. Whilst the present research hoped to generate insight into the experiences of inclusive provision for pupils with SEND in mainstream settings with the hope this may ultimately transform CYP experiences, its primary purpose was to explore.

4.4.4 Critical realism

This is a relatively new paradigm. It is positioned between positivism and relativism (Willig, 2008). Critical realism takes an ontological position of realism and an epistemological position of constructivism. The realist ontological position assumes that an external reality exists, it is observable, and it can be investigated (Blaikie, 2007; Nola, 2012). The epistemological position of constructionism proposes that knowledge is subjective which implies that "reality" is constructed by the individual based upon the interactions of previous experiences, events and activities they encounter (Zhang, 2023). Within this paradigm, it is argued that reality is uncertain and needs to be logically and critically debated (Braun and Clarke, 2013; Barker et al., 2016). Critical realism proposes that causal attributions are not always explicit or observable and can be dependent upon the interpretations of

individuals. Observable events are influenced by underlying mechanisms, theories and experiences which are unobservable (Zhang, 2023). Consideration of cause and effect can be undertaken alongside the interpretations of the research topic. Critical realism acknowledges that knowledge is inherently subjective and has a lot of similarities with constructionist positions (Madill et al., 2000). Critical realism seeks to measure the underlying causal relationships between social events to acquire a better understanding of issues and thus being able to suggest strategic recommendations to address social problems (Fletcher, 2014; 2017).

Critical realism methodologies can be flexible to facilitate opportunities for researchers to investigate potentially complex organisational level problems (Fletcher, 2014). Theory is prioritised by critical realists to deduce explanations to support the understanding of the underlying mechanisms to ascertain "why" things happen (Vincent & O'Mahoney, 2016). Whilst it could be argued that this research examines a topic at an organisational level, the focus of this research is not to try to explain "why" practices exist but to be exploratory in nature, and therefore there were other paradigms which better align with this research.

4.4.5 Pragmatism

Pragmatism can be positioned as solving practical problems in the real world (Biesta, 2010). Pragmatists may combine both positivism and constructionism paradigms and use both quantitative and qualitative methods with their research. Mixed-methods or multiple-methods can be common (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). However, this may make the interpretation of data more difficult due to discrepancies between the types of data (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Pragmatists apply the most practical, philosophical and/or methodological approach that is most suited to the research question (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998).

In my research I chose to use a single method of qualitative data collection in the form of semi-structured interviews as this was felt to be the most appropriate for the aim of the study and the underlying beliefs of the researcher. Pragmatism does not therefore align with my research question, aim or methods.

4.5 Theoretical position for this research

4.5.1 Ontological stance for this research

The ontological position adopted within this research is relativist. The researcher believes and positions the research with the assumption that all individuals construct their own reality and therefore there are multiple realities. The researcher believes that each participant will share their own experiences and views of inclusive provision which may differ for each person.

4.5.2 Research paradigm for this research

A constructionist paradigm was adopted for this research as it aligns with the aims of the research question and the underlying beliefs of the researcher. With the research aim to gather individual experiences using a qualitative methodology and to apply an inductive approach to the data analysis, this paradigm felt aligned with this research.

4.6 Method

The methodology applied within research seeks to discover the answer or reality of the topic. The methodology provides a plan of action or a procedure for the research to follow (Crotty, 1998).

This section outlines the research design including the recruitment of participants, the procedure of data collection and the method of data analysis.

4.6.1 Methodological orientation

4.6.1.1 Qualitative verses Quantitative Methods

Across research there are two distinctive methodological approaches quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative methodologies are more allied with positivist paradigms and research questions which aim to find objective truths through testing hypotheses (Weed, 2005). Traditionally, positivist paradigms and quantitative research are more common in psychological research and have been positioned as superior due to perceived enhanced replicability and generalisation of outcomes (Nowell et al., 2017; Yilmaz, 2013). However, qualitative approaches are increasing in frequency and are now being held with a higher regard (Willig & Rogers, 2017). Qualitative research can contribute to the development of theory, policy and practice (Willig & Rogers, 2017). Environmental, political and social factors are also acknowledged and explored in qualitative methodologies, with an aim of forming meaning through participants' experiences and perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The focus of this present research is the exploration of current inclusive practice and provision within mainstream secondary schools for pupils with SEND through the perspectives of SENDCos, pupils and parents/carers. A qualitative methodology was therefore deemed appropriate as a means to facilitate the exploration of views, perspectives and experiences in detail which may not be possible with quantitative methods (Tewksbury, 2009).

4.6.2 Research participants and setting

4.6.2.1 Context

National Statistics (2023) identify that over 1.5 million pupils in England have special educational needs (SEN) (National Statistics, 2023). In June 2023 there were 517,049 EHC plans in place in England. This figure increased by 9% from the previous year 2022. Within this figure, 186,093 pupils aged 11 to 15 and 105,900 pupils aged 16-19 nationally have an EHC plan. 71.8% of children and young people with an EHC plan identify as male and 28.1% identify as female. For children who have identified SEN needs but do not

meet the threshold for an EHC plan but still require and receive additional support in school the figure was 1,183,384 pupils, this was also an increase by 4.7% from the previous year. The most common identified area of SEND need for pupils with an EHC plan is ASD followed by speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) (National Statistics, 2023). Research was undertaken in a LA in a shire county in the Midlands of the UK. In this LA there are approximately forty mainstream secondary schools. In this LA 3.5%– 4% of pupils have an EHC plan, of which over 1% are secondary school age.

The LA in which the research was undertaken follows the SEND code of practice (DfE, 2015) which defines a child or young person as having SEND if 'they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her' (p15). The needs of the individual and additional provision to support them may be outlined within an EHCP. EHC plans are for children and young people up to 25 years old. EHC plans are issued where the level of support required to meet their needs is greater than what is ordinarily available (DfE, 2021). Additionally, the LA has Higher Needs Funding (HNF) which may precede or negate the need for an EHC plan as it aims to offer support and resources.

4.6.2.2 Stakeholder involvement

The stakeholders within this research include SENDCos, young people and parents who took part in the semi-structured interviews. The researcher was a TEP at a UK university completing the Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology course, the university was therefore a stakeholder. LA, where the researcher was a TEP was also a stakeholder as they were hosting the researcher and the research. The researcher met with the PEP from the LA EPS to share the research proposal. The PEP agreed with the proposal and a discussion about recruiting participants took place. The researcher discussed the proposal with university supervisor and the request for ethics was submitted (Appendix E). A transparent research methodology was employed to gain the commitment of the stakeholders. This was partly

achieved through information sheets and consent forms. Colleagues within the EPS supported the research, I also accessed supervision from my placement supervisor and my university academic tutor for guidance and support throughout the research process.

4.6.3 Identification, selection and recruitment

4.6.3.1 Sampling

Convenience sampling is a type of non-probability or non-randomised sampling (Etikan et al., 2015). It uses members of the population who the researcher can easily access. Furthermore, members of the target population may also meet other practicalities to facilitate the research process such as their location, accessibility, availability, and willingness to participate (Dörnyei, 2007; Etikan et al., 2015).

Purposive sampling enables the researcher to intentionally select participants to be part of the research (Sarantakos, 2005). Purposive sampling may be beneficial when the researcher wants to select participants to be informative in relation to the identified research topic, and when the participant group can be difficult to reach (Ishak & Bakar, 2013). This method was used in this research to target pupils with SEND from across the LA mainstream secondary schools. SENDCos were asked to contact the parents/carers of pupils with SEND to ask for expressions of interest to participate in the research. The researcher was reliant upon the SENDCo to identify pupils for the research.

In this research both convenience and purposive sampling methods were used. Convenience sampling was used to approach secondary schools to recruit SENDCos. The SENDCos were from secondary schools which had an EP linked to them from the EPS. This aided the ease of recruitment through EP colleagues. It is recognised that these types of sampling are more likely to be biased as the setting or participants are not randomly selected. There may be more chances of outliers contributing to the data set (Etikan et al., 2015). Using convenience sampling assumes that the

participants are homogenous, which is also applied to the sample in this research. Purposive sampling was used for choosing the schools and for choosing pupils to participate. Additionally, the size of the participant sample groups is non-proportional in relation to the size in the population and are not representative.

Qualitative researchers do not necessarily focus upon the size of the sample or take a large sample size (Neuman, 2009). A sample size which would be considered to be large enough to be statistically representative of the population may be too large to be analysed in-depth, which juxtaposes with the rationale for qualitative methods (Yardley, 2000). Moreover, qualitative researchers choose participants who are relevant to the research topic, rather than because they are representative of the general population (Ishak & Bakar, 2013). Yin (2009) identifies that qualitative studies do not apply the randomisation procedures found in quantitative studies and can be more creative with sample sizing as the aim is not for the sample to be representative of the wider population. The purpose of the research is to gain further insight and understanding on a particular defined topic, rather than generalising findings (Neuman, 2009). Instead, results may be generalised in relation to theory (Yin, 2009) and how the sample illuminates the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2003; Neuman, 2009).

4.6.3.2 Setting selection

All SENDCos are from mainstream secondary schools located in the Midlands of England. Secondary schools cater for pupils aged 11-19 years old.

4.6.4 Participant selection

4.6.4.1 Inclusion and exclusion criteria for participant participation
Due to the nature of the research trying to gather information about first-hand experiences of inclusive practices in mainstream secondary schools, it was paramount that as a researcher I gained participants who volunteered to

share information about inclusive practices. The eligibility criteria for participant participation is outlined below:

Table 4. Eligibility criteria for participants for this research

Included	Excluded	Reason
Special educational need coordinators (SENDCos), Inclusion leads	Support staff, staff without a role that relates to SEND within school.	The focus of the research is related to perspectives and views on inclusive practices for pupils with SEND. SENDCos/Inclusion Leads will have a direct role in promoting inclusivity, whereas other members of staff may not.
SENDCos/inclusion leads from UK mainstream secondary schools	Primary school SENDCos SENDCos/Inclusion leads who are not based at schools within the UK. SENDCos/Inclusion leads from specialist provisions	The research is focused on promoting inclusive practice within mainstream secondary schools in the UK through the collection of perspectives and experiences. SENDCos from primary settings will have different experiences, constraints and ideas about inclusive practices. The systems within primary schools are different to secondary schools and comparisons are not easily made between primary and secondary schools. School settings and systems from other countries may be different to the UK and may skew the data. This research is also focusing upon the potential impact that EPs can have on supporting schools in the UK to be more inclusive for pupils with SEND. SENDCos/inclusion leads from specialist settings may have different adaptations and policies in place to ensure they are inclusive. A

		comparison between mainstream and specialist settings would not be appropriate for this piece of research.
Children and young people of secondary school age (11-19 years old) with SEND (SEN support or EHCP)	Children/young people outside of this age range Children/young people without SEND	The perspectives of children/young people were sought to provide a rich insight into inclusive practices within mainstream secondary schools. This participant group could offer insight and direct experience. This age group is specific as it relates to the age of attendance for secondary schools within the UK. Secondary schools are my focus for this piece of research. The perspectives of pupils outside of this age range would therefore not be included in this piece of research.
Parents/carers of children/young people with SEND aged 11-19 years old.	Parents/carers who do not have a child in this age range or their child does not have additional needs. Family members other than parents/carers.	Parents/carers of children/young people with SEND aged 11-19 years old.
Informed consent obtained from the participant	No consent provided	Informed consent is required from all participants to be part of the research to ensure ethical practice.

4.6.5 Participant recruitment procedure

4.6.5.1 Initial invitation to participate in the research.

At the time of the research, I was a TEP within an EPS in a LA in the UK. After ethics approval was gained for the research study (Appendix E). I shared my research proposal in a team meeting. Following this team meeting with EPs to explain the purposes of the research, each EP agreed to forward the invitation to participate in research to Secondary SENDCos with whom they were linked. A total of 16 secondary schools across the LA were contacted through this method.

If SENDCos were interested in participating in the research, they were asked to contact the researcher via email. The expressions of interest were followed up by the researcher. This provided an opportunity for SENDCo to ask questions and for the researcher to briefly outline the research and the procedures to support an informed decision-making process. The data collection process was outlined, and information and consent forms were sent (Appendix F G H for information forms and Appendix I and J for consent forms). Once participant consent was confirmed, a date for the semi-structured interview was scheduled.

Part of this research sought to gain the perspectives of pupils with SEND and their experiences of being included in mainstream secondary schools. Due to the nature of the topic and the age of the pupils, gaining access to these participants occurred through a gatekeeper which in this instance initially this was the school SENDCo/Inclusion Lead. The SENDCo/Inclusion Lead was asked to share my research request with their Head Teacher to enable transparency, investment in the process and openness to reflect on potential implications for future practice. The SENDCo was asked to send information letters out to parents/carers of all pupils who were on the school SEND register, which is a list of pupils who have additional needs or those pupils with additional needs who were monitored and tracked through provision maps and pupil profiles which highlighted a need for reasonable adjustments, interventions and support. Parents/carers were also

gatekeepers for this participant group as they were asked to provide consent for their child to participate in the research. Parent/carer consent was sought and obtained for all pupils in this research as data was gathered from a vulnerable group in the form of young people with special educational needs (BPS, 2021). If pupils were aged 16 years or older and were deemed by those who knew them well to have the mental capacity to make informed decisions, they would have been provided with the option to give their own consent. However, there were no pupil participants aged 16 or older in this research. All participants had the right to withdraw from the research and so if parents/carers had provided consent, but the pupil did not want to participate they would not have been included in the research.

4.6.5.2 Scheduling interviews

When expressions of interest to participate in the research were received from the SENDCos or parents/carers, I contacted them directly via email or telephone to provide an opportunity to ask questions and to share greater detail about the research intentions and the procedure.

Once eligibility criteria had been checked, if SENDCos and parents/carers were happy to proceed/ for their child to be part of the research then participant information sheets (Appendix F G and H) and consent forms (Appendix I and J) were sent to them via email. Interview dates were then scheduled. All participants who expressed an interest in participating in the research and gave formal written consent were included.

4.6.6 Participants

Three different participant groups were targeted for this research. The meanings which each participant and each group attaches to their experiences may not be the same as other participants and groups. Each group of participants will have unique experiences which are not always accessible by others (Lloyd-Smith & Tarr (2000). The perspectives from all three participant groups support the triangulation of information and a shared

understanding of potential ways forward to further enhance inclusive provision.

The decision by the researcher to include pupils as participants was a conscious decision to avoid power differentials across the research process. This was generated through an equitable data collection procedure and representation of their voices within the data analysis. All participants were positioned as experts on the topic of inclusion through their lived perspectives and experiences (Warren, 2000; Davis et al., 2000). Furthermore, this study also included parents as partners in collaboratively generating an understanding of what is important to them for their children in relation to inclusive practices. School staff, specifically SENDCos, were recruited for this research as they are also pivotal to generating a shared understanding of and exploration of what is already implemented to work towards inclusive practices. As they work directly with pupils with SEND, directly apply strategies in the school environment and are often in leadership roles, they are in a position where they can share the policies and procedures which are undertaken within their own school setting.

A small sample size was used across the participant groups and the sample is therefore not representative. However, qualitative research may be synonymous with smaller participant numbers as the data collected is often rich and in-depth (Smith, 2008). Braun and Clarke (2013) suggest that a sample size of six to ten participants would be sufficient for this type of research.

4.6.6.1 Special Educational Need Coordinator (SENDCo) participants

A total of six SENDCos which consisted of three males and three females participated in the individual semi-structured interviews. Ages ranged from 37 to 63 years old. The number of years within the role ranged from 2 to 30 years. In addition to the SENDCo role, two are also assistant headteachers, one is deputy safeguarding lead, and some have teaching responsibilities

which include teaching P.E, sociology, geography, and R.E. Table 5. shows participant details.

4.6.6.2 Pupils with SEND

A total of five pupils with SEND took part in the individual interviews, two males and three females. Pupils were identified by SENDCos as being possible participants for the research. All pupils were included on the school SEND register. Table 6 shows participant details.

4.6.6.3 Parents of pupils with SEND

Three parents/carers took part in the individual interviews, all three were female. Table 7. shows participant details.

Table 5. SENDCo participant demographics

Participant Number	Role	Gender	Age	Number of years in role as SENDCo	Type of school	Location of secondary school
1	SENDCo	Male	63	30	Secondary mainstream school	East Midlands
2	SENDCo	Male	55	12	Secondary mainstream school	East Midlands
3	SENDCo	Female	57	20	Secondary mainstream school	East Midlands
4	SENDCo	Female	37	5	Secondary mainstream school	East Midlands
5	SENDCo	Female	48	2	Secondary mainstream school	East Midlands
6	SENDCo	Male	49	11	Secondary mainstream school	East Midlands

Table 6. Pupil participant demographics

Participant	Role	Gender	Age	Area of SEND	Primary area of SEND	Communication level	EHCP in place
Pupil 1	Pupil	Male	12	Year 8	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder	Verbal	Yes
Pupil 2	Pupil	Female	13	Year 9	Autism	Verbal	Yes
Pupil 3	Pupil	Male	14	Year 9	Autism	Verbal	Yes
Pupil 4	Pupil	Female	14	Year 10	Autism	Verbal	No
Pupil 5	Pupil	Female	12	Year 8	Autism/ADHD	Verbal	Yes

Table 7. Parent/carer participant demographics

Participant	Role	Gender	Age
Parent 1	Parent of secondary age pupil with SEND	Female	51
Parent 2	Parent of secondary age pupil with SEND	Female	46
Parent 3	Parent of secondary age pupil with SEND	Female	40

4.6.6.4 Potential limitations of participant sample

Some of the pupil participants, parents and SENDCos were linked due to the pupil attending the secondary school where the SENDCo worked. This was true for three sets of participants. However, not all of the schools had pupil participants or parent/carer participants who wanted to take part in the research. This meant there was one school which was not represented by a pupil participant in the data and three schools which were not represented by parent/carer participant data.

The sample sizes for the SENDCos, pupils and parents/carers were also uneven; there were six SENDCos, five pupils and three parent/carers. The SENDCo participant group was therefore the largest participant group and therefore the largest data sample. This could mean that the voice of the SENDCos is represented more strongly than the other two participant groups.

4.7 Data Collection

4.7.1 Semi structured interviews

The researcher's main focus for the data collection was to choose a method which could enable participants to be open about their views and experiences to align with the exploratory nature of the study. Individual interviews on a one-to-one basis were chosen as the method of data collection. This was deemed the most appropriate way to gather individual perspectives as it facilitated opportunities for each individual to have a voice, to share their own personal experiences in a safe manner without other participants hearing them and they could share their own responses without conforming to others (Barbour, 2008). Focus groups had been considered as a method of data gathering, however, due to the potential power dynamics, influences from others and sensitivity of the topic (Morgan, 1997), they were discounted.

The format and structure of interviews can be either structured, semi-structured or unstructured (Edwards & Holland, 2013). Structured interviews may be limiting as the topics are pre-defined. In structured interviews the participants are closely guided in their responses and the researcher is unable to deviate from the set questions to gain further information (Magaldi & Berler, 2020). Unstructured interviews can offer more freedom as the participant generates their own fluid account (DiCicocc-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). However, this was felt to be too wide for the purpose of the study where comparisons and themes were to be drawn across the data set.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the method of data collection as they support the possibility of a rich data set being generated whilst providing flexibility through a loose framework (Howitt, 2016; Magdali & Berler, 2020). In semi-structured interviews a series of questions are presented with possible prompts which can be applied as required (Edwards & Holland, 2013). Semi-structured interviews are positioned as giving flexibility to the researcher to explore a topic but also opportunities for the participants to give detailed responses (Howitt, 2016; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006)

supporting a more balanced approach where both factors can contribute to rich data. Semi-structured interviews were therefore utilised in this research as they align with the researcher's epistemological stance of constructionism where all individual experiences are valued and there is no single viewpoint sought (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Crotty, 1998).

An interview schedule was used (Appendix M). Questions were adapted for each participant group. The questions were generated following the literature review which supported the guidance of the questions. The researcher purposively chose to include open-ended questions to facilitate descriptive and rich responses. Closed questions may also generate a response bias (Wright & Powell, 2006). The researcher also acknowledges the importance of avoiding leading questions. Careful phrasing within the questions was used to reduce this as much as possible (Smith et al., 2009). The questions were also purposively positively framed to try to elicit positive experiences or views of what works well in terms of inclusivity and inclusive practices for pupils with SEND in mainstream secondary schools. This was a conscious decision by the researcher to try to contain the emotionality and negativity of participants which may be linked to this research topic.

It is proposed by some researchers that it can be challenging to include children and young people with disabilities (Nygren et al., 2017) which may be partly due to difficulties with understanding and responding to questions (Kooijmans et al., 2022) Consequently, the views of parents/carers may be more readily gathered (Nygren et al., 2017). The eligibility criteria for pupil participants taking part in this research included that they all have SEND. The data collection method for this participant group needed consideration. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were chosen as they provide a vehicle for children's views, perceptions and experiences to be shared which may differ from adults (Kortesluoma et al. (2003). Moreover, they can allow flexibility to accommodate a range of needs for engagement with the research process (Smith et al., 2009). Furthermore, if pupils had language and communication barriers this could have been overcome using visuals or talking mats to support their understanding and to enable their

contribution to the research. The participants in this research were all verbal and so this was not required in this instance.

4.7.2 Limitations and challenges of semi-structured interviews

Unconscious or intentional interviewer bias is acknowledged as potentially guiding or altering the focus of the interview and therefore the data through the questions posed or the chosen avenues of detailed exploration (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). As semi-structured interviews can be flexible this may compromise the generalisability of the data collected (Diefenbach, 2008). However, it is also noted that generalisability is not an intention of qualitative research, the richness of the information gathered was prioritised (Braun & Clarke, 2023).

4.7.3 Individual interview procedure

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted face to face or virtually via Microsoft (MS) Teams video conferencing software. Face to face interviews were championed as they would allow greater interpretation of social cues which in turn may enhance the collection of information (Opdenakker, 2006). Two of the SENDCo interviews took place on MS Teams due to availability restrictions and four were in person. The five pupil interviews took place face to face in their school setting in a quiet, yet familiar room on a 1:1 basis with the researcher. The three parent interviews took place online using MS Teams. Whilst the researcher expressed a preference for face-to-face interviews due to rapport building and ethical considerations, it is argued that online arrangements can offer a helpful alternative whilst preserving quality (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014).

4.7.4 Interview recording

Permission was obtained from all participants to record the interviews. Interviews were recorded via a digital recording device. The interviews were transferred and stored on a password protected file that only the researcher had access to.

4.7.5 Data Transcription

With the enhancement of technology, there is the option for artificial means to transcribe the data. Although using artificial intelligence to transcribe the data might be quicker, the transcripts will still require checking by the human researcher for accuracy and to edit as required (McMullin, 2023). Ethical factors such as data protection and confidentiality also need careful consideration (Da Silva, 2021). Whilst human data transcription might be considered time consuming, Riessman (1993) argues that transcribing the data is the first step of familiarisation as the researcher can be immersed in the data. The researcher chose to transcribe the interviews rather than using other means such as software or outsourcing the task to another person. Examples of transcriptions can be seen in Appendix N.

There are no standardised criteria for transcription, instead the researcher needs to consider what to include or not in relation to the research question and purpose of the research (McMullin, 2023). Decisions of what to include need to be made prior to commencing the transcription process (Bucholtz, 2000). The researcher needs to decide whether to adapt the oral to written norms for a "naturalised" representation of the data or whether the aim is to leave everything in including repetitions and utterances to create a "denaturalised" representation (Bucholtz, 2000).

The transcriptions were checked several times for accuracy and representation and amendments were made where necessary. The researcher decided not to transcribe all utterances or mistakes and aimed for a "naturalised" representation. To protect the identity of the participants, pseudonyms were used for names and any other information which may have led to their identity being known.

4.8 Analysis Procedure

4.8.1 Choosing a methodology for data analysis.

Different methodologies of data analysis were considered in relation to the theoretical stance and aims of the research which are outlined below.

4.8.2 Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is a complex, structured method which facilitates the discovery of new theories based on the data collected (Tie, Birks & Francis, 2019). This method was discounted as this was not the aim of this research.

4.8.3 Discourse Analysis

Language is at the forefront of discourse analysis. The language used by participants is analysed to gain a deeper insight into their experiences (Burr, 1995). However, in this research the experiences of participants were focused on rather than the nuances in the language used.

4.8.4 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

IPA focuses on the lived experiences of participants and the meaning which can be derived from them (Smith & Eatough, 2011). Smaller, homogenous samples are generally used due to the rich and detailed data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2020). Each narrative is examined and analysed separately before combining them to develop overarching themes (Smith & Eatough, 2011). Individual and group experiences are both important, however individual experiences are positioned as the priority when findings are discussed (Braun & Clarke, 2020).

4.8.5 Thematic Analysis (ThA)

ThA facilitates flexibility within research as it is compatible with a range of paradigms and research topics (Guest et al., 2014; Willig, 2008). There are different types of ThA where each version is guided by underlying philosophy (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Three main distinguished types of ThA are identified as coding reliability, codebook approaches and reflexive ThA (Braun and Clarke, 2018).

4.8.5.1 Coding reliability

Coding reliability places emphasis on the accuracy or reliability of coding through a codebook which is applied to the dataset by multiple coders

(Boyatzis, 1998). Each coder analyses the data by applying the codes and the level of agreement between the coders is measured. A higher value generated using Cohen's Kappa indicates greater reliability through coder agreement (Guest et al., 2012).

4.8.5.2 Codebook approaches

In codebook approaches such as template analysis, framework analysis or matrix analysis a structured codebook is also utilised, however this approach does not focus on measuring the level of coding reliability.

Codebook reliability ThA and codebook approach ThA assume a deductive process where themes are outlined first, and the data is coded subsequently and assigned to the themes (Terry et al., 2017). This type of ThA may be more aligned with traditional positive paradigms of research where replicability and reliability in the coding and themes are sought. Researcher subjectivity is also unaccounted for. The researcher wanted to apply an inductive process to data analysis and to take account of researcher influences on the analysis procedure and therefore these types of ThA were discounted.

4.8.5.3 Reflexive thematic analysis

Reflexive ThA is an approach for analysing qualitative data and a way of reporting patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Reflexive ThA provides an accessible, theoretically flexible approach for qualitative data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2012). Data is interpreted through the development of codes and the construction of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2022). These factors align with the constructionist epistemology which is focused on gathering the subjective experiences and views of the participants.

Some researchers perceive Reflexive ThA as a tool to be used within other methods rather than fully acknowledging it as an approach in its own right (Boyatzis, 1998). However, other researchers argue that it should be positioned as a method of analysis in its own right (Bruan & Clarke, 2006).

Reflexive ThA supports the researcher to take a thoughtful and reflexive approach to analysis (Braun and Clarke 2019). The generation of codes and themes signifies the researcher's interpretation of the data which is flexible and organic and continues throughout the analytical process (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Furthermore, reflexive ThA facilitates researchers to acknowledge, celebrate and reflect upon their active involvement within the data analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2020). Using reflexivity, researchers consider how they may impact and influence the interpretation of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019; 2022).

4.9 Chosen approach of analysis for this research

Both IPA and reflexive ThA were identified as suitable analysis methodologies for this research. Both approaches focus on the experiences of participants, and both could be used to address the research question. Data analysis using ThA supports a rich presentation of participant experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006). IPA focuses on the experiences of the participants; however, the emphasis is on the unique data at an individual level. Reflexive ThA was favoured for the approach of analysis as a patterned meaning across the data set was sought, rather than an idiographic focus which would be achieved using IPA. Additionally, the researcher wanted to actively acknowledge their position within the research and analysis process which is also another reason why reflexive ThA was chosen over IPA for this research. For these reasons it was chosen as the most suitable way to explore participant's experiences and ideas about inclusive practices in secondary schools.

4.10 The position of the researcher within the research process

In this research qualitative methods are used which can position the researcher as an instrument within the data collection and analysis process (Cresswell, 2007). The researcher chose Reflexive ThA as they wanted to take an active role in the analysis procedure and acknowledged that themes do not "just emerge" (Braun, Clarke and Hayfield, 2022). TA may enable

researchers to do more than just "give voice" to the information shared by their participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.7). ThA enables the researcher to interpret the data in relation to the research questions. The researcher actively selects information from the interviews to construct themes in a systematic way to explore meaning and to develop knowledge and understanding for others (Taylor & Ussher, 2001) which aligns with the constructionist paradigm within this research. A limitation of positioning the researcher as contributing to the data is that it may generate researcher bias where the outcome of the study is impacted. Reflexive ThA actively rejects the notion of researcher bias which is a positivist notion of a single way to code data and values the subjectivity of the researcher (Bran and Clarke, 2023), Additionally, to try to aid transparency, the researcher can share personal assumptions, expectations and experiences and how this may influence the research through reflexivity.

4.11 Inductive or deductive (theoretical) approach

There are two main ways to identify themes within the data. An inductive approach where the data leads the theme generation (Frith & Gleeson, 2004) or a deductive, top-down approach where theory leads the process (Boyatzis, 1998). Inductive analysis techniques try to avoid fitting the data into pre-conceived themes or the researcher's pre-existing ideas, instead, the data drives the codes and themes. The researcher's underlying stance and paradigm is acknowledged as this will inherently contribute to the results.

Reflexive ThA begins with the identification of codes which are merged to create overarching themes (Braun & Clarke 2006; 2019; 2022). Codes and themes provide a framework for reporting the findings (Clarke & Braun, 2017). The process of constructing codes and themes appears as linear on paper, however, realistically, the process is more flexible. The researcher actively moved backwards and forwards through the stages of ThA to reach the end themes. A theme is described as "capturing something important about the data in relation to the research question" (Braun & Clarke, 2006,

p.82). Themes can also be likened to patterns and ascribe meaning to the set of data.

Determining if there is enough data within a dataset to be classed as a theme is under the responsibility of the researcher as there are no set rules, cut-off criteria or specified percentages of data to denote it constituting as a theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Rather, subthemes are merged into overarching themes so smaller factors are included within those perhaps (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Furthermore, the significance of a theme is also not necessarily related to prevalence or occurrence within the data set, information may be determined as key if it is important in relation to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Set rules for determining the prevalence of data do not exist, but it is important to note that consistency across transcriptions is key. Qualitative descriptors such as "many, the majority or a number of participants" (Meehan et al., 2000, p372; Taylor & Ussher, 2001, p298; Braun et al., 2003, p249) can be used to convey the frequency or prominence of information within the data. Data can be presented in a nuanced or detailed manner. The whole data set can be presented, or one aspect can be focused upon in more detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4.12 Stages of Reflexive Thematic Analysis

The semi-structured interviews were analysed using Reflexive ThA. Braun and Clarke (2013; 2020) provide guidelines for reflexive ThA which has six stages. The stages are proposed to be applied in a flexible way rather than followed as a set of rules (Braun and Clarke 2013; 2020). Examples of extracts from the interview transcriptions which have been analysed with the application of reflexive ThA can be found in Appendix N. The processes of initial code generation and refinement is depicted in Appendix O.

Table 8. Six stages of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Phase	Aim	Description
1.	Familiarisation of data	The researcher transcribes the individual semi-structured interviews and checks the accuracy of the data against the recordings. The transcriptions are amended as needed. The researcher immerses themselves by reading and re-reading the transcriptions several times. The aim of this phase is to feel as though you "know" the data. Also, the researcher can be curious and question the data in relation to the research question. As the researcher was reading initial ideas and important information was noted down to begin the process of generating codes. Links were begun to be made in relation to the research question.
2.	Generation of initial codes	This phase becomes more systematic. A code signifies something of interest which may be relevant to the research question (Braun et al., 2016). Codes should be brief but also adequately represent the data. Initial codes were constructed by making notes of important features within the data. An unbiased approach was adopted where all of the data was considered. A colour-coding system was used by the researcher when examining the transcriptions which helped common pieces of information to be linked together.
3.	Searching for themes	Themes portray important meaning across a dataset (Braun, et al., 2016). The initial codes were sorted and collated into initial themes. The researcher wrote the codes on pieces of paper and physically moved them around into different groupings to form initial themes. A theme map was also

		constructed electronically to record the themes which could enable easier manipulation in the future if required.
4.	Reviewing themes	The themes are reviewed and checked in relation to the data extracts to see if the themes work. The themes are reviewed and condensed or expanded, depending on the data. Themes were renamed or even discarded depending on the data to support them. The themes were viewed to see if they encapsulated the rich information shared by the participants. Braun and Clarke (2012, p. 65) outline questions that the researcher can apply when reviewing their initial themes: • Is this a theme (it could be just a code)? • If it is a theme, what is the quality of this theme (does it tell me something useful about the data set and my research question)? • What are the boundaries of this theme (what does it include and exclude)? • Are there enough (meaningful) data to support this theme (is the theme thin or thick)? • Are the data too diverse and wide ranging (does the theme lack coherence)?
5.	Review/define themes	The themes were reviewed in the context of existing literature and research. Theme names were checked to ensure they conveyed what the theme encapsulated. A thematic map was produced which would represent the final themes as discussed in the analysis. Checking if the theme represents the data and if the research question is addressed is the focus of this stage.
6.	Producing the report	A written account of the findings is produced to create a story of the data.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) 15-point Checklist for Good Thematic Analysis was also employed which is outlined below.

Table 9. 15-point Checklist for Good Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Process	Checkpoint no.	Criteria
Transcription	1	The data have been transcribed to an appropriate level of detail, and the transcripts have been checked against the tapes for 'accuracy'.
Coding	2	Each data item has been given equal attention in the coding process
	3	Themes have not been generated from a few vivid examples (an anecdotal approach), but instead the coding process has been thorough, inclusive and comprehensive.
	4	All relevant extracts for all each theme have been collated
	5	Themes have been checked against each other and back to the original data set
	6	Themes are internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive
Analysis	7	Data has been analysed, interpreted, and made sense of, rather than just paraphrased or described.
	8	Analysis and data match each other, the extracts illustrate the analytic claims.
	9	Analysis tells a convincing and well-organised story about the data and topic.
	10	A good balance between analytic narrative and illustrative extracts is provided overall.
Overall	11	Enough time has been allocated to complete all phases of the analysis adequately, without rushing a phase or giving it a once-over lightly.
Written report	12	The assumptions about, and specific approach to, thematic analysis is clearly explicated.
	13	There is a good fit between what you claim you do, and what you show you have done i.e., described method and reported analysis are consistent

	14	The language and concepts used in the report are consistent with the epistemological position of the analysis.
	15	The researcher is positioned as active in the research process; themes do not just 'emerge'.

4.13 Reliability, validity and trustworthiness

To support reliability, validity and trustworthiness within this study, the researcher employed principles of sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, coherence and transparency and impact and importance as outlined by Yardley (2008).

4.13.1 Sensitivity to context and data

Sensitivity can be demonstrated via recognising that the context within a qualitative study and may comprise of multiple facets of potentially equal importance (Yardley, 2000). Additionally, acknowledging the perspectives of participants and being sensitive to the sociocultural and linguistic context of the setting is important (Yardley, 2000; 2017).

The chosen data collection method of semi-structured interviews facilitated an opportunity for participants to share their views and experiences. The opportunity for potentially marginalised voices to be heard was carefully executed in the way the questions were asked and how the data was presented. The data was carefully considered, all data was given equal value, and it was considered within the analysis. An inductive approach was applied to the data to prevent pre-conceived categories from constraining the meaning which could be derived from the data (Yardley, 2017).

4.13.2 Commitment and rigour

Commitment can be related to thorough engagement and investment with the research topic (Yardley, 2017). Rigour is described by Yardley (2008) as in-depth data collection which aims to encapsulate the richness and complexity of the data within the analysis and reporting. Rigour is also

assimilated with thoroughness in the processes applied (Yardley, 2000). The appropriateness of the sample used in relation to the research question can also indicate rigour (Yardley, 2008).

The researcher immersed themselves in the data from the transcription process. The researcher also enlisted the support of a fellow TEP colleague in their final year of doctoral study. This supported the researcher to share how they had grouped the codes and provided an opportunity for reflection on their assumptions and interpretations of the data. However, it is acknowledged that this may not create validity as coding is positioned as flexible and organic and there is no "single way to code" (Braun & Clarke, 2017).

4.13.3 Coherence and transparency

Research may be considered to be transparent if the reader can clearly see how interpretations were generated from the data set (Yardley, 2000). Coherence may be achieved through the alignment of the aim of the research, the methodologies applied for data collection and analysis and the underlying philosophical position of the researcher (Yardley, 2008).

The research process applied coherence and transparency throughout each stage from gaining ethical agreement, the data collection procedure, analysis process through to the reporting of findings. Bias within the data collection was reduced with the aid of open-ended questions to facilitate the rich contribution of participant knowledge and experience. The researcher explicitly positions themselves as part of the data analysis and therefore actively contributes to the formation of the findings. Quotes from the participants were included in the analysis to support the interpretation and richness of the discussion. The methodology chapter outlines in detail each step of the data collection and data analysis process to support transparency for the reader including the acknowledgement of limitations.

Limitations may include how the researcher may have influenced the process and outcomes of data collection due to experiences, assumptions, intentions and actions, reflection in relation to these factors may be known as "reflexivity" (Yardley, 2000) and will be included in the analysis and discussion sections.

4.13.4 Impact and importance

Yardley (2008) suggests that a measure of validity for a piece of research can be if it adds information and understanding to the research topic or the possible contribution to social change.

Although it is acknowledged that the findings from the research are not completely generalisable across mainstream secondary schools, the researcher hoped that by undertaking this research it would provide an opportunity for the voices of marginalised children and young people with SEND to share their experiences and views of inclusive provision. Furthermore, it was hoped that the views and experiences of parents/carers of children with SEND and SENDCos would elicit useful information to share with others to inform future ways forward for supporting pupils with SEND in mainstream secondary schools.

4.14 Reflexivity

Berger (2015) identifies reflexivity as a continual internal process that a researcher engages with to acknowledge their role in the creation of knowledge and how they may subconsciously influence the outcomes. In this research, the chosen paradigm of constructivism and the chosen method of data analysis, reflexive thematic analysis positions the researcher as an active component of the data gathering and data analysis process. To examine and monitor their potential influences on the research and the data the researcher kept a research diary. This facilitated a mechanism of reflection for how personal characteristics, beliefs and bias may influence the research, and how to control, reduce or acknowledge them.

As a researcher I acknowledge that I bring my own personal perspectives and experiences to this thesis which will influence the way that data is collected and interpreted. I have my own views which form my personal construct of inclusion. I define inclusion and inclusive practice as the removal of barriers to enable someone to reach their full potential, to provide resources, strategies and approaches which are equitable with their needs which enable them to have equal opportunities as other members of society. I also view inclusion as supporting emotional wellbeing. In relation to a school setting, I view inclusion as working well" when there are feelings of being valued and being happy and regulated within the school environment. generating positive emotional wellbeing. I believe that inclusion can work effectively when the child/young person is placed at the centre of discussions and actions, that flexibility and an individualised approach is paramount for individual needs to be met and that a collaborative ethos from all those involved with the child/young person is crucial. As part of the collaboration I believe that pupil and parent/carer views are fundamental to positive outcomes and inclusive practices.

I wanted to use open-ended questions in my interview schedule to facilitate honest and personal experiences to be shared. I am aware that the questions I chose to ask are influenced by my personal and professional views of inclusion and will therefore guide the discussion in some way. For example, in the interview schedule for SENDCos I asked, "How do you support pupils with SEND to have a good understanding of themselves and their emotions?" This links with my view that inclusion can support emotional wellbeing. I asked this question as I perhaps thought that SENDCos would also share this view, and they would have some experiences to share in relation to the provision they implement within their school settings. Although the questions were influenced by my own personal/professional views to some extent they were also constructed with the findings of the SLR in mind. For example, in the SLR the theme of communication was prominent across the studies and so this featured in one of the questions I asked the SENDCos; "What practices and procedures do you have in place to share information across the school to support inclusive practices? I chose the

questions and how they were worded carefully. The main aim of the interview questions were to gather the views and experiences of the participants in relation to the research question and this was held in mind by the researcher when formulating them.

I also acknowledge that my personal and professional views will influence the analysis of the data and the interpretation of the findings. I have an active role in the process as I chose how to collect and code the data. The values that I hold in relation to inclusion may influence what data I choose to code and take forward into themes. I acknowledge that the themes presented in the findings will be in some way a representation of my underlying views of inclusion. I acknowledge my active role in this analysis and that other researchers may have interpreted the data in a different way.

4.15 Ethical considerations

Within research it is important to minimise the risks that participants are potentially exposed to. As part of the research process, the researcher referred to several guidance documents including The University of Nottingham's research guidelines (2020), the Health and Care Professions Councils standards or Conduct, Performance and Ethics (HCPC, 2021), the British Psychological Society's Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2021) and the BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct (BPS, 2018). These documents outlined the guiding principles of EP work and supported the intrinsic values held by the researcher in conducting an ethical piece of research. The researcher gained ethical approval from the ethics committee at the university where they were studying, which was The University of Nottingham. The request for ethical approval included a robust outline of the study and the ethical factors which required consideration to ensure that no harm would take place to the participants and that the research design was transparent and robust. The ethical approval letter from the ethics committee can be found in Appendix E.

Table 10. Ethical considerations

Ethical code	
Informed consent and right to withdraw.	Researchers must provide information about their study to protect their participants. Creswell (2007) identifies that an outline of what the research entails, how information will be collected, stored and used needs to be provided to the participants by the researcher. The participants of this research were supported to make an informed decision to participate or not. The purpose of the study, the research design, possible risks from participation, the data collection methods and the data analysis methods were outlined in the information sheet (Appendix F, G and H). Participants were asked to sign a consent form which asked them to acknowledge that they had received sufficient information about the study, and they were happy to proceed with the interview or not (Appendix I and J). Pupils' parents/carers were asked to sign a consent form on their behalf if they were under 16 years of age. Participants were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point until their data was used within the write up, after which it would be too late to remove their data. The details of the researcher and the researcher's supervisor from university were included on the information sheet to enable the participants to contact them if they had any questions.
Anonymity and Confidentiality	Participants were told that they would not be identifiable form the data. All names and identifiable information have been anonymised. This includes the removal of school names, names of pupils, names of staff and names of parents/carers. Pseudonyms or participant numbers have been used instead where appropriate. Participants were informed of confidentiality procedures as part of the information sheet and consent form. Participants were reassured that they would not be identifiable within the research. Participant safety would be the only exception to breaking confidentiality and disclosing names, for example, potential safeguarding concerns, where school and LA safeguarding protocols would be adhered to. All data was stored on a password protected file and only accessible by the researcher.
Right to withdraw	At all stages of the research process, all participants were reminded of the option to withdraw from the

	study without any detrimental repercussions. SENDCos were reminded that withdrawing would not affect their interaction and support from the EPS.
Continuity of care	A member of staff was identified for pupils to speak to following their interview if they felt they needed to speak with someone. The researcher also provided their own contact details for all participants in case they needed to speak with them or ask questions following their interview.
Data collection and data storage	The method of recording the interviews was shared with participants in the information sheet and again at the start of the interview process. Participants were reminded that the interviews were recorded using a digital recording device. The participants were informed that their data would be stored on the digital recording device and then when the information was transcribed a copy of the interview would be saved in a password protected file. Participants were also informed about data protection and a GDPR statement (Appendix K) was provided to each participant alongside the informed information sheet.
Debriefing	A summary of inclusive practices which promote the inclusion of pupils with SEND was provided and shared with all participants following the research. Key outcomes and potential implications for further development were also shared. See Appendix L.

4.16 Chapter Summary

The underlying philosophical position of the researcher and the aims of the research drove the key decisions about the design and methodology of this research. This chapter outlined the different philosophical paradigms for research. Paradigms were outlined and reasons for accepting or rejecting them for this research were provided. A constructionist paradigm was identified as the most aligned to this research.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the data collection method as they are flexible and open-ended, which enables the experiences and views of participants to be shared and a rich insight into the research topic to be gathered.

Reflexive ThA was chosen as the method for data analysis as it acknowledges the individual and collective experiences of participants. It also positions the researcher as an active role in the process of generating codes and themes and finding patterns in the data.

Chapter 5 Findings

5.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter aims to answer the research question "what facilitating factors are perceived to support the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) within mainstream secondary schools?" expressed through three participant groups; pupils with SEND, parents/carers of pupils with SEND and SENDCos. The views of participants were gathered through semi-structured interviews. The information generated was subsequently analysed using reflexive thematic analysis and will be displayed as thematic maps representing key themes and subthemes. Chosen themes will be defined and enriched with extracts from the interviews.

5.2 Overview of participants

There was a total of 14 participants in this research, Six SENDCos, five pupils with SEND and three parents/carers of pupils with SEND. All SENDCos are from mainstream secondary schools, all pupils have SEND and attend mainstream secondary schools and all parents/carers are parents/carers of secondary aged pupils with SEND. Participant information can be viewed in Tables 5, 6 and 7.

5.3 Reflexive thematic analysis

Each participant was interviewed using a semi-structured interview format. The findings from the semi-structured interviews were analysed using reflexive ThA (Braun & Clarke, 2012; 2020). The processes of semi-structured interviews and reflexive ThA can be found in Chapter 4, section 4.7 and 4.8. Both semi-structured interviews and reflexive ThA were chosen as they align with the researcher's philosophical position of constructionism. The subjective views of a range of participants were sought to explore multiple perspectives and experiences of inclusive practices for pupils with SEND. Furthermore, reflexive ThA was chosen as the approach for data analysis as the researcher is positioned as having an active role in the

generation of codes and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2020). Once the interview data had been transcribed, the researcher applied the six stages of reflexive ThA as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2012) see Table 8. and Table 9.

Participants were asked to outline their definition of the term "inclusion", the themes generated for this question can be seen in Figure 5. The main themes and subthemes generated from the reflexive ThA process for the main research question can be seen in Figure 6. The analysis process resulted in six main themes. Four themes (relationships, responsiveness, provision and sharing information) were shared across all three participant groups (SENDCos, pupils and parents/carers). One theme (belonging) was unique for pupil participants. The researcher felt that the information shared in relation to this theme was too large and too rich to be included as part of another theme such as "relationships". The theme "culture/ethos" was unique to SENDCo participants.

5.4 Representation of the data

The findings will be presented in thematic maps for each of the themes identified. Some sub-themes will be discussed in more detail than others, which will be due to the level of frequency across the data set, the perceived importance within the analysis and subsequently the discussion of the data.

5.5 Participant definition of the term "inclusion"

I asked participants to outline their definition or understanding of the term "inclusion". The participants were asked to share their responses by thinking about the term "inclusion" in the context of mainstream secondary schools and pupils with SEND. As there is no set or agreed definition of inclusion I did not want to impose or provide a definition for them as I felt this aligned with my research which celebrates the views of my participants. This also supported an opportunity for the researcher to gain an understanding of the social construction and participant understanding of the term inclusion. Additionally, this enables the researcher to understand the perspectives of inclusion which the participants are holding and how this may influence their

responses to the questions posed. There were commonalities across the participants in their responses which were gathered into themes. The differences were also noted and will be discussed. The shared themes are visually depicted below, and participant responses will be discussed in more detail. Quotes from participants will illustrate the findings.

Figure 6. Thematic map of participants' definition of inclusion

5.5.1 Equality and equity

Equality and equity were both key components of the definition of inclusion for SENDCo participants. All six SENDCo participants mentioned the term equality and/or equity in their responses. Equal opportunities were positioned as being paramount for inclusion by SENDCos. Furthermore, all SENDCos reflected in some way that the resources, strategies or approaches may be different to achieve an equitable chance for children with SEND to reach their full potential. Perceptions included: "It is not discriminating in any way against any individual. There are equal opportunities in terms of access and outcomes" (SENDCo 2) and "It's the argument of equality versus equity, giving everyone the right steps and the right adjustments and then everyone is on an equal playing field" (SENDCo 5).

Two out of three parent/carer participants used the term "disadvantaged" in relation to equal opportunities. Parent 1 shared: "For me it's making sure my child is not disadvantaged, that they have the same opportunities and experiences in life as anyone else". Whilst Parent 2 stated: "no one is disadvantaged due to their difficulties or differences".

5.5.2 Flexibility, removing barriers, meeting needs and adaptations.

These four themes were identified across the participant groups and appear to be interconnected. Flexibility was highlighted by parents and SENDCos who spoke about how inclusion relates to differences in terms of what is provided for support. Parent 1 identified: "I know their journey might look a bit different with different things in place to get there". Additionally, SENDCo 5 stated: "Inclusion means making sure everyone has what they need to be successful, providing different things for different people". SENDCos in particular spoke about the potential barriers faced by pupils with SEND with statements such as "It's about removing barriers, so that all children have the ability to learn at the appropriate levels" (SENDCo 4). Meeting needs was also linked to the practical resources and to the level of adult support. Parent 1 reflected that: "If someone needs additional support from an adult to complete a task, inclusion means that is what they get". The theme of adaptations reflects the perception of differentiation, for example "you are given things to help you which may be different, I have a coloured overlay, but my friend doesn't" (Pupil 1).

5.5.3 Being part of a group/belonging.

Pupil participants focused on the term inclusion in relation to belonging to a group and not being left out. This felt that there was an emotive link for pupils. For example, Pupil 1 said that inclusion to them is: "What people do to make you feel welcome, included, not left out and that you are valued".

The definition of inclusion as constructed by the participants in this research encapsulates features of the definition in the Oxford Languages Dictionary (2024) which states inclusion is:

1. the action or state of including or of being included within a group or structure.

2. the practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, such as those who have physical or intellectual disabilities and members of other minority groups.

5.6 Shared themes across school staff, parents/carers and pupils

The six main themes generated from the reflexive ThA process are presented below in Figure 6. Three themes ("relationships, responsiveness, and provision") were shared across all three participant groups (SENDCos, pupils and parents/carers), "sharing information" was shared between SENDCos and parents/carers, the theme "belonging" was unique for pupil participants and the theme "culture/ethos" was unique to SENDCos. The thematic maps for each theme and supporting quotes from the data set are presented below.

Figure 7. Thematic map showing shared themes and subthemes across all participant groups.
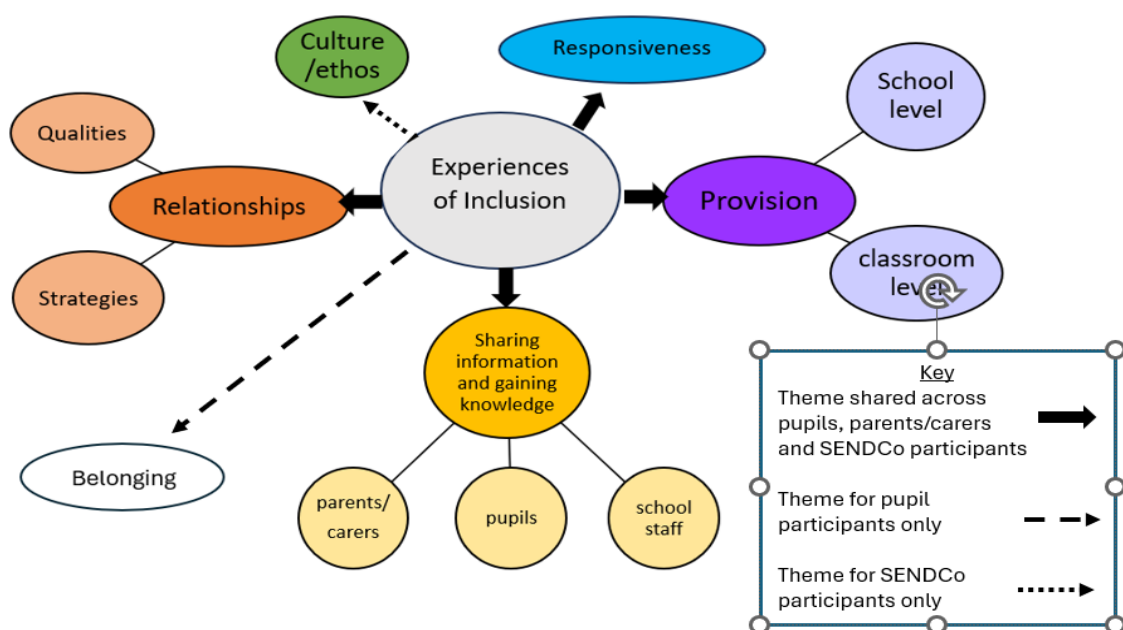
5.7 Theme 1: Relationships

Figure 8. Thematic map showing "relationships" theme.
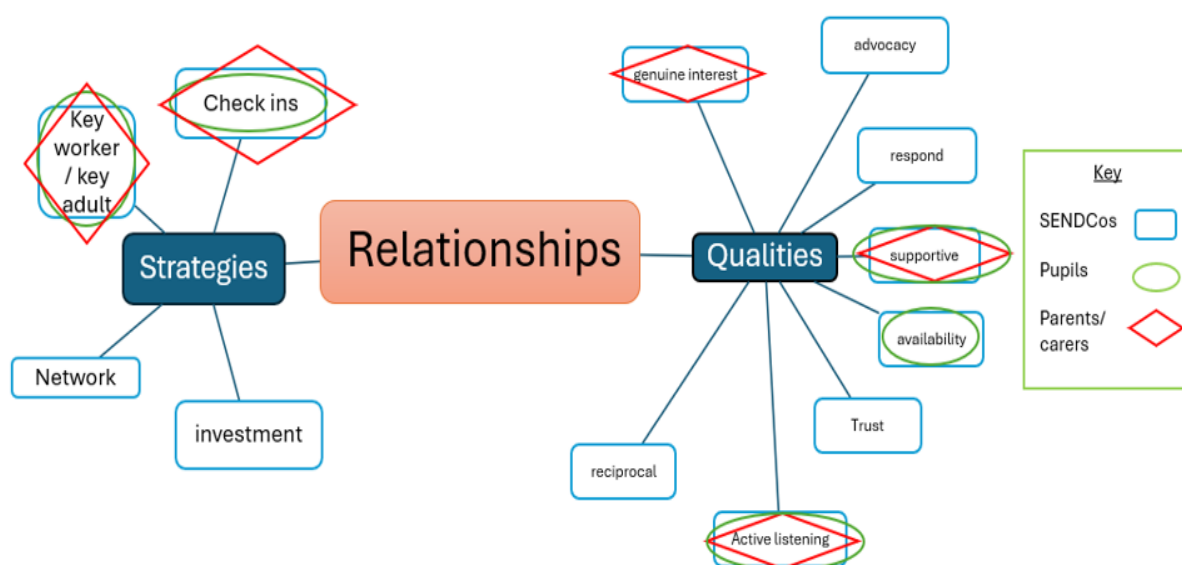
This theme was prominent across all participant groups. Additionally, relationships were highlighted by all individual participants as important to inclusion. Participants valued the investment of time and the methods to create relationships, they identified that there are individuals within the school setting who make significant differences and outlined the personal qualities which create successful relationships. When listening to the participants it was clear that staff make a significant difference in supporting inclusive practices and feelings of inclusivity. SENDCos spoke passionately about how they have a genuine desire to support pupils with SEND in their schools and building relationships is a key part to achieving this. Parents/carers spoke about members of staff whom "go the extra mile" and really make a positive difference to the experience that their child has. Pupils spoke fondly of members of staff with whom they can seek support and how this significantly helps them with their wellbeing and their engagement with their learning.

5.7.1 Strategies

This subtheme outlines the actions or activities which are undertaken to forge and maintain relationships.

5.7.1.1 Check ins

Check ins were highlighted by all participant groups. SENDCos described the strategy as "supporting reassurance and being proactive in preventing the escalation of difficulties" (SENDCo 5). Pupils identified the collaborative and supportive nature of staff through this strategy; "Mrs X meets me each morning and we go through my day. We talk about what might be difficult and Mrs X plans ways around it with me" (Pupil 2). Parents identified that problems may be managed more easily through check ins as they "keep people up to date on problems as they arise to prevent them from becoming bigger" (Parent 3).

5.7.1.2 Key worker / key adult

All participant groups spoke about adults who support pupils with SEND. Key workers (mainly TAs / learning support assistants) were positioned as important factors for inclusion and for pupils to achieve outcomes. SENDCo 5 stated: "Relationships, are at the forefront of support systems." They take on the responsibility to check in with pupils and build a firm rapport. We have found this really effective as problems can be raised early and solutions can be implemented. Pupil 2 reflected: "Mrs X listens to me; I know where to find her and I talk to her about things I need help with". Parent/carer 1 shared: "There are a couple of adults in particular who I know make a real effort to ask how things are going, to raise any concerns, and who would be available if there were any problems" Parent/carer 3 said: "X has Mr C who supports him in a small group for maths and just generally, he is his go to adult in school. If I get a phone call it will be from Mr C. He gets X and fights his corner for him".

5.7.1.3 Network

SENDCos proposed that "it is important for more than one adult to have a relationship with the individual pupil and for there to be a team of adults who work together to support inclusive practices throughout the school" (SENDCo 6).

5.7.1.4 Investment

SENDCos highlighted that staff are passionate about supporting pupils with SEND: "We spend time with our SEND students to build relationships as it can take time" (SENDCo 6).

5.7.2 Qualities

Participants talked about how relationships are formed and maintained and the important features and personal qualities.

5.7.2.1 Genuine interest

Being genuine was highlighted as an important quality by parents/carers and SENDCos. SENDCo 2 reflected: "Our efforts have to be genuine otherwise they see straight through it and disengage". Parent/carer 3 identified: "I do feel that the school are on our side and that they genuinely want to help us. Another parent/carer shared "They put a lot of effort in, and they wouldn't do that otherwise" (Parent/carer 2).

5.7.2.2 Advocacy

This was noted as an important role by SENDCos and adds to the passion to support their pupils. SENDCo 2 noted: "We are advocates for our pupils with SEND within our school and in the wider community so that their needs are heard and met. This means that our relationship is purposeful, and we can be their voice if we need to".

5.7.2.3 Respond

This links to other qualities mentioned such as active listening. This goes further to recognise that acting upon concerns raised or suggestions posed are important for pupils and their parents to feel valued and supported. SENDCo 1 identified: "We listen and respond to the concerns raised by our pupils with SEND. We value their ideas and try to make adjustments when things are not working".

5.7.2.4 Supportive

This quality was clearly highlighted across all participant groups. SENDCos spoke about the drive to be supportive and that it is viewed as part of their role: "We strive to be supportive; I think it's just in our nature." (SENDCo 4). Parent/carers spoke about the level of support they receive and that this feeling is important for communication and relationships. Parent/carer 1 said: "We have a good relationship with school. They have helped X settle in really well and they are looking for more ways to support him". Pupils spoke about the adults in school with a positive tone; "I feel less anxious, and I can complete my reading when I have Mrs X with me" (Pupil 2). Another pupil reflected "I feel good that I can talk to Mrs X and there is no judgement" (Pupil 3).

5.7.2.5 Availability

It was highlighted by pupils and SENDCos that having a member of staff available is important to build relationships and to be responsive to situations and needs as they arise.   SENDCo 2 shared; "We ensure that there is a member of staff available in Inclusion when a student comes to see us. That student may be seeking a brief chat, or a full discussion and we aim to give them our time as much as possible". Pupil 3 said: "I feel they (learning support base staff) have time for me and there is someone I can talk to, even if it is not who I want".

5.7.2.6 Trust

Trust was also highlighted by SENDCos as a factor which supports relationships to be built. SENDCo 4 shared: "You build up that rapport and trust with them so you can read their signals and make suggestions to them". SENDCo 5 shared: "We work hard with parents to get them on board. I just think if that was my child I would want to know and to be supported."

5.7.2.7 Active listening

This quality was positioned as important by all participant groups. Parents/carers were particularly open about how important it was for them to feel listened to. Parent/carer 2 shared: "When I talk to the SENDCo I do feel as though I am listened to, they spend time talking to me and hearing my concerns". SENDCos framed this quality as part of the collaborative process with pupils and their families. SENDCo 6 shared: "We listen to our students, that is something we pride ourselves on as a department". Pupils spoke about being listened to in terms of how it makes them feel and the positive changes that can happen. Pupil 2 reflected: "Things may be changed when I say I need help, so they do listen to me".

5.7.2.8 Reciprocal

As a way to build relationships SENDCos recognised that the process is two-way. SENDCo 3 shared: "I feel that our students work with us, and we work with them, and it is all based on our relationship. We can talk openly with them, and they share information with us." SENDCo 6 stated: "I share personal things about myself such as my hobbies and this is shared back by my students, especially those who I see daily for check-ins".

5.8 Theme 2: Culture / ethos

Figure 9. Thematic map showing "culture/ethos" theme.
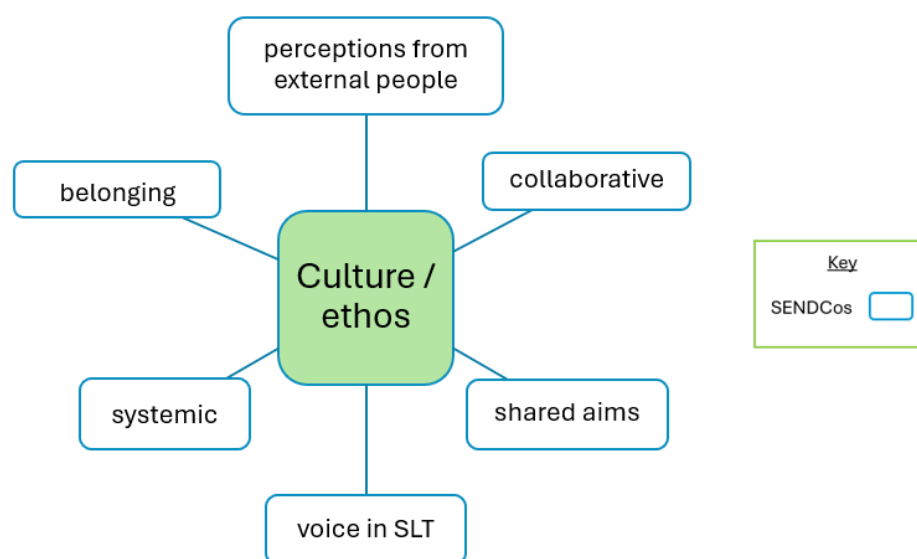
This theme was only generated for SENDCo participants as the responses from the pupils and parents/carers were mostly unrelated. A separate theme of "belonging" was created for pupil participants as there was a considerable amount of information which did not feel as though it would be captured within this theme. SENDCo participants also spoke about a feeling within the school, a way of being, a shared consensus and shared goals. SENDCo participants spoke of inclusion as being the responsibility of all staff across the school to create a shared vision, feeling and way of being.

5.8.1 Perceptions from external people

SENDCos identified that the perceptions from others can influence the wider inclusive culture: "We are perceived to be inclusive by external agencies and external colleagues. We are described as being "there" for the children and families within our community. We have a reputation of being inclusive, it also drives a desire for the perception to continue, so measures are implemented to ensure this might happen." (SENDCo 2)

5.8.2 Collaborative

SENDCos highlighted that to create an inclusive culture in school it is a "joint effort" (SENDCo 6) and a "partnership with pupils and their parents" (SENDCo 1).

5.8.3 Voice in SLT

SENDCos highlighted that being on the senior leadership team (SLT) enabled them to "have a voice in relation to the decisions about SEND" (SENDCo 4). Being part of SLT was positioned as "enabling messages to be filtered down to staff" (SENDCo 1), "to support the generation of a shared vision with all staff" (SENDCo 4) and to "implement changes to the SEND department without needing to go through the proposal process" (SENDCo 5).

5,8.4 Systemic

SENDCos identified that support measures are implemented throughout the school at different levels to "normalise them so that additional strategies are common and part of the school" (SENDCo 3). This was identified to help with inclusion as it "enables support to look different for different people, so the culture becomes less focused on exam results and more on wider outcomes towards adulthood" (SENDCo 1).

5.8.5 Shared aims

SENDCos identified that there needs to be a common goal within the school to be inclusive with "shared aims and goals, working collaboratively with other departments in the school. This includes the pastoral support team and safeguarding team" (SENDCo 5). Furthermore, to develop and implement inclusive practices it was highlighted that "It is not the work of a single person, but for all members of the school community." (SENDCo 6).

5.8.6 Belonging

SENDCos identified that part of the ethos and culture of an inclusive school is developing a feeling of belonging. SENDCos spoke passionately about wanting to ensure that pupils with SEND felt "at home and settled" at school and that they are "part of a community". One SENDCo shared: "We strive to create a feeling that they belong within the school, that they are valued and accepted for who they are by staff and peers alike. That we are invested in them. That they feel safe and supported". SENDCo 2 identified that it is a process to create this: "We try to generate a sense of belonging before they even start through transition work".

5.9 Theme 3: Responsiveness

Figure 10. Thematic map showing "responsiveness" theme.
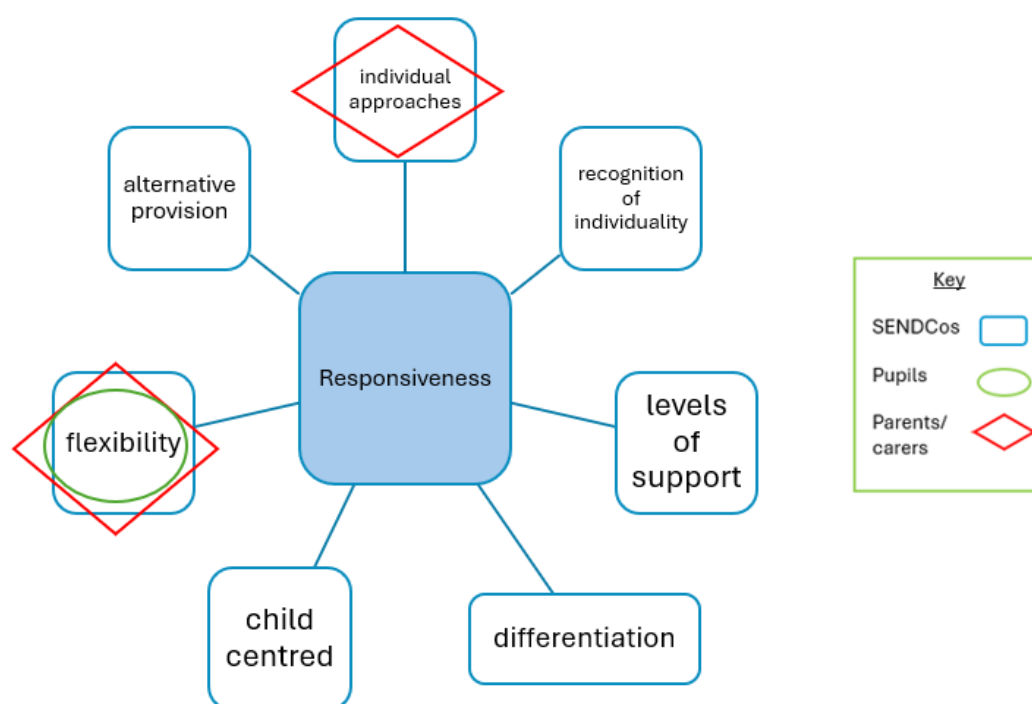
Participants spoke about how every child is an individual and their needs require a tailored approach. This theme captures how SENDCos respond to individual needs.

5.9.1 Flexibility

This facet was identified by all three participant groups. SENDCos identified the need for flexibility to ensure that the needs of each individual pupil are met. They recognised that for pupils with SEND measures need to be implemented which are beyond reasonable adjustments and tailored to each pupil. Whole school procedures such as behaviour management systems are adjusted; "We use learning support, so instead of spending the day in internal isolation, they will come to learning support where staff can help them to complete work and put plans in place to try to prevent a repeat of what happened. This helps to break cycles of non-attendance linked to the incident" (SENDCo 1). How lessons are accessed are also individualised; "We have four students who have been out of mainstream education for two

to four years. To reintegrate them they come in and work individually with a TA, but they use Microsoft Teams to be in the lesson, so they are accessing the mainstream lesson content with the subject teacher, but they are not in the physical classroom, they are in inclusion" (SENDCo 5).

Flexibility is exercised across many different aspects of the school day and for many different activities. Parents/carers and pupils also highlighted their experience of strategies which are implemented to support them/their child with SEND. Flexibility was highlighted by one pupil in the form of flexible start times: "On days when I am really struggling, I can come in a little later" (Pupil 1).

5.9.2 Alternative provision

This was recognised by some SENDCos as a response to individual needs; "Some pupils just need something different" (SENDCo 3). SENDCo 1 shared: "We have been sending one of our pupils to horse therapy. It has been very successful in helping them to engage with school and with their wellbeing".

5.9.3 Individual approaches

This links to flexibility and outlines the need for an individual approach to be taken to support individual needs. Parent/carers also reflected the importance of individual approaches which enable their child to attend school, for example "X does not do P.E at the moment as this was triggering their anxiety and avoidance of school on P.E days. P.E has been removed from their timetable for now which has had a positive impact." (Parent/carer 1). Individual approaches were also identified across other areas such as alternative uniforms; "school allow a black trainer instead of a shoe which reduces sensory difficulties" (Parent/carer 2).

5.9.4 Recognition of individuality

Individuality was celebrated positively by SENDCos. SENDCos shared that an individual approach is paramount for successful inclusion. Additionally,

this was highlighted in terms of diagnoses and not using the same approaches for different children just because they share a label: "Treating each child as an individual is key, not using a blanket approach, not using the same strategies for all pupils with that need" (SENDCo 5). Each child is treated as an individual and the approaches used are in line with this.

5.9.5 Levels of support

SENDCos shared that they apply the "assess, plan, do, review" cycle from the SENDCoP (DfE, 2015) to identify and implement interventions to meet individual needs. This can be in the form of screeners and subsequent interventions. A wide variety of interventions were shared. One SENDCo highlighted: "Reading is a focus for interventions in our school as it supports across to all subjects, it empowers pupils and builds their confidence too" (SENDCo 4).

5.9.6 Differentiation

Differentiation within lessons enables pupils to experience success with their learning. This is directly in response to the information gained about a pupil, their strengths and their difficulties. SENDCo 4 identified: "We closely monitor how pupils with SEND are engaging with their work and we can give additional support or different strategies as needed".

5.9.7 Child-centred

All SENDCo participants spoke about pupils being at the centre of the work they undertake including the decisions they make and the approaches they employ. SENDCo 4 outlined: "The child is right in the middle of the discussions we have and the strategies we put in place".

5.10 Theme 4: Provision

Figure 11. Thematic map showing "provision" theme
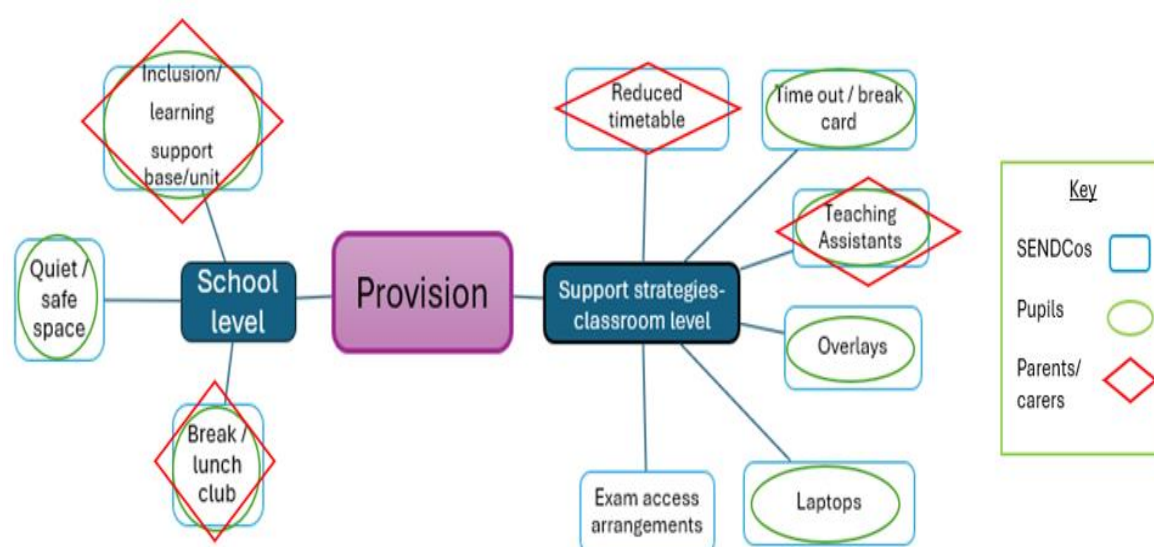
Participants described the different aspects within school which support engagement, wellbeing, success within the classroom and the regulation of emotions. The discussions outlined different features in terms of the physical rooms or areas in school which are allocated to serve different purposes to meet needs. Figure 1. above shows how these aspects have been grouped and named as "school level". Participants also discussed the strategies within the classroom which enabled them to be in the room and to engage with their learning, which have been grouped together and named "support strategies - classroom level".

5.10.1 School Level

Participants highlighted the importance of the physical spaces available within the school building. They outlined different school areas which serve different purposes. Participants also conveyed the impact that the areas have on their feelings of inclusion, how the areas support their inclusion in a practical manner and how they use the different areas. There seemed to be a purposeful, conscious decision in each school to consider the need for different spaces to respond to the needs of pupils with SEND.

5.10.1.1 Quiet / safe space

SENDCos and pupils spoke about how the school can be busy and loud and recognised the importance of quiet spaces to help with emotional regulation in particular; "Getting a safe space is crucial of course so that we can be there for them to talk to, or they can use the space to regulate." (SENDCo 2). SENDCo 1 identified: "We have the learning support area which is used by some pupils as a safe space, however it can be a little busy. We also have another small area in a different part of the school, which is much quieter, almost a sensory space. There is coloured lighting, beanbag style chairs, and a music system. It is still grown up though, so like an adult sensory room".

Pupil participants spoke about how the quiet areas within school help them to regulate their emotions. Pupil 2 shared: "I like to go and sit with my Air Pods on for a few minutes. Sometimes I will do breathing exercises if I need to. But mostly I just like to be in the quieter, less busy space, it's nice". Pupil 3 identified: "We have the inclusion base which has a quiet chill out zone in one of the rooms. "It has cosy chairs, sometimes there is calming music playing. Sometimes I sit and read my book". "The corridors and classrooms can be too much for me to manage and I often need a break".

5.10.1.2 Break and lunch clubs

This links to the previous point of how noisy and overwhelming school can be, particularly for pupils with SEND. All participant groups recognised the need for an alternative, predictable and safe space at these times SENDCo 2 shared: "Some pupils find lunchtime and break time particularly challenging due to the number of pupils in the shared areas and the lack of structure." SENDCo 3 identified: "There is a member of staff available for support, to talk to and to interact with. We want it to feel safe and it is a chance to foster social interactions and to check in". Pupil 5 said: "I don't go outside I don't like it. I go to SEND where I feel safe and read my book". Parent 1 identified: "X goes to a colouring club at lunchtime, it's quiet and they can colour which is calming for them".

5.10.1.3 Inclusion/ learning support base/unit

All schools identified as having a space in school which was specifically for pupils with SEND. The terminology used to describe it was different with labels of "SEND base" "inclusion" or, "learning support". SENDCo 1 shared "inclusion is a safe space where pupils with a range of needs are supported with learning tasks, and where they can come and seek emotional support too". "Our SEND base means that pupils who are finding the mainstream classrooms difficult can come and finish tasks, sit in quieter sessions and be supported by familiar adults of trust" (SENDCo 3). The purpose of the space was common across settings which was to provide a "smaller learning space, somewhere which is perhaps less busy and quieter than the mainstream lessons with extra support from adults" (SENDCo 4). Parents and pupils also recognised the importance of this space as an option which supported the emotional regulation, wellbeing and success for pupils with SEND. Parent/carer 2 shared: "I am glad there is a smaller teaching area in school as I know X can get overwhelmed in mainstream lessons". "I know X would not attend school without this option" (Parent/carer 3). Pupils shared "The base is less busy; the staff really help in there too" (Pupil 1). Pupil 3 shared: "I use learning support most days, sometimes it can be for a short time, other days I can be in there most of the day, it depends how I am feeling."

5.10.2 Support strategies

Participants described the specific strategies, approaches or resources which support engagement with learning, emotional regulation and assist outcomes. They recognised that these may be different for pupils with SEND in order to optimise their chances of being in school, completing learning tasks and reaching their full potential.

5.10.2.1 Teaching assistants (TAs) /support assistants

All participant groups recognised the role of a supporting adult as an important source of support for pupils with SEND within learning contexts. SENDCo 2 identified: "Support staff are key to implementing additional

support to those who need it the most. They do a great job of supporting within the classroom for those pupils who would not otherwise access mainstream lessons. When they are absent the pupils they support may feel unable to attend mainstream lessons". SENDCo 5 reflected: "In lessons TAs can help with concentration, differentiation, motivation and ultimately support the outcomes of pupils". Pupil 1 shared: "I won't go to my lessons without Mrs P as I can't read or answer the questions". Pupil 2: Mrs X reads the questions and makes sure I understand. I don't like it when I don't get it, so this helps me to stay in the classroom. Pupil 4: "Its broken down so I can do it, I like it that way. Then x might write my answer for me". Parent/carer 1 reflected: "I know that Mrs P really helps X to be in lessons, to read the questions and to complete his work."

A range of specific support strategies used within the classroom were also noted which included:

5.10.2.2. Timeout/break cards

Timeout/break cards were identified by all pupil participants. "I use my card when it gets too noisy to go somewhere quieter" (Pupil 1) or to "leave lessons when I need to, and I go to inclusion if it gets too much" (Pupil 2). One SENDCo also identified that additional support was provided to pass users to help with their emotional regulation skills to optimise the effectiveness of the pass; "Some pupils have timeout passes to come to learning support or to have a break in the corridor if they are getting overwhelmed in lessons. As part of this we make sure they have strategies to help with their emotional regulation, otherwise these students are in the corridors just as dysregulated as they were when in the classroom. So, we put interventions in to teach them regulation skills first before they are allowed a pass" (SENDCo 4).

5.10.2.3 Exam access arrangements

SENDCos highlighted that exam access arrangements can "prevent our students feeling disadvantaged and the extra support strategies can help

students with SEND to feel that they are able to show their progress, skills and knowledge" (SENDCo 3). "This support can facilitate equal opportunities, and equitable measures are provided for pupils with SEND to maximise their outcomes" (SENDCo 5). One SENDCo reflected that "We have started screening for exam access needs on entry to the school. This means that from Year 7 any assessments and exams undertaken by students with SEND have additional measures in place, so it creates equality right from the start, rather than waiting for GCSEs" (SENDCo 6).

5.10.2.4 Reduced / flexible timetable.

A reduced timetable was highlighted by SENDCos and parents as supporting pupils to remain at school when pupils were finding it particularly challenging. Reduced timetables were described as "short-term measures to promote successful engagement and positive school experiences" (SENDCo 3). One parent also recognised this as a positive approach as it "helped X to re-set and gradually build up to full time again" (Parent 1).

5.10.2.5 Overlays

Another support strategy to assist pupils in the classroom was identified by SENDCos and pupils as overlays. SENDCo 6 said: "We screen for Dyslexia and provide coloured overlays for those who require them All teachers are aware of who should have them as the information is included on their pupil passport". Pupil 2 identified: "I use a coloured card when I am reading, it helps".

5.10.2.6 Laptops

Pupil participants recognised how technology can support them within the classroom and with their learning. Pupil 2 identified: "I use a laptop in lessons, I have the work on my laptop which helps me to concentrate". Pupil 3 shared: "I find it easier to type than to write, so I can do this in some of my lessons".

5.11 Theme 5: Sharing information and developing knowledge

Figure 12. Thematic map showing "sharing information and developing knowledge" theme.
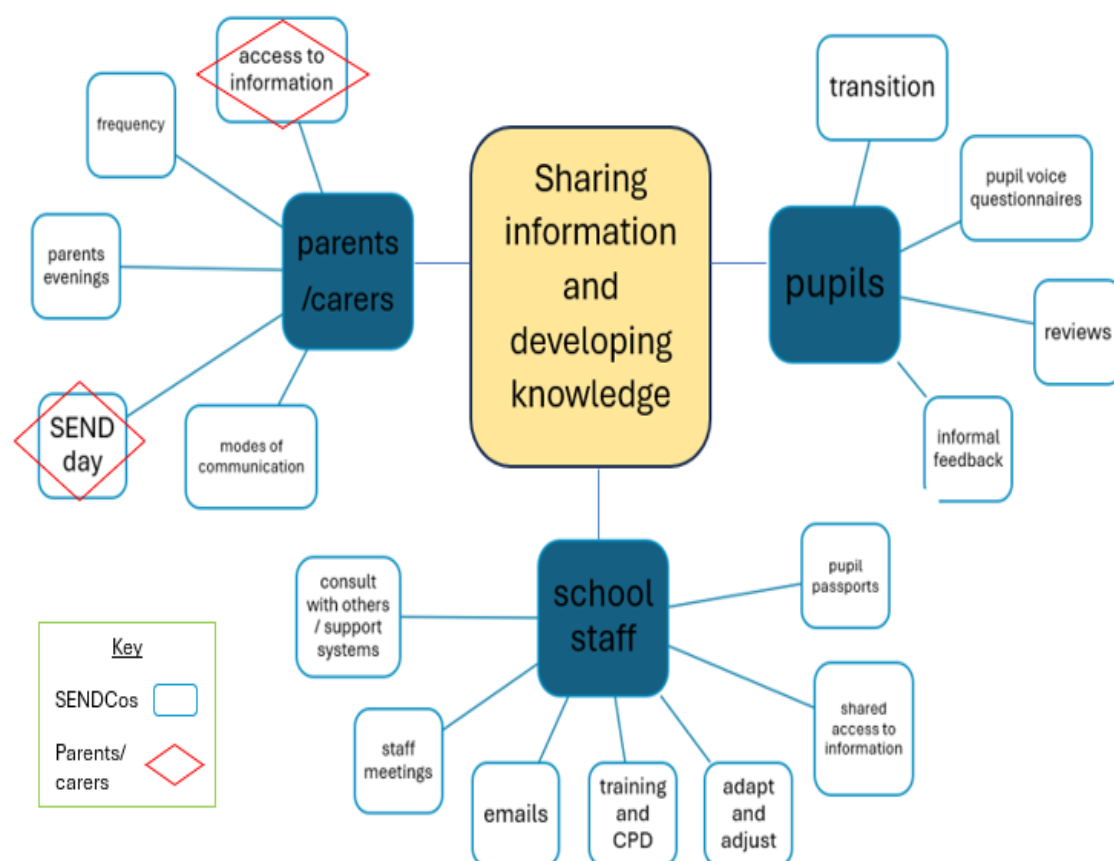
This theme positioned information gathering, the dissemination of information and the development of knowledge as central components of inclusive practice. Three subthemes are identified to represent the different recipients or contributors of the information.

5.11.1 Parents/carers

This subtheme outlines how information is shared with parents/carers to enhance relationships, to build trust and to work in collaboration to ensure the needs of each child is met.

5.11.1.1 Modes of communication

SENDCos shared a range of different ways in which they try to gather information from parents/carers and share information with parents/carers. This included "asking parents to fill out sections on the pupil profile so they can directly contribute to support strategies and outcomes" (SENDCo 1). Another SENDCo shared "we see parents as the experts on their children and we need their knowledge to help shape what we implement, particularly when children first join the school, and they are new to us". SENDCo 4 highlighted: "It is important to have that open communication and to update parents. I do this through quick emails, phone calls and brief meetings".

5.11.1.2 SEND day.

SENDCos shared the importance of providing a space and time for parents/carers to ask questions. SENDCo 3 shared: "We have an information morning for parents/carers with pupils with SEND who are thinking about transitioning to our school. We invite the pupils to attend if they are able to, if not we have made videos of our school to help them find out more". SENDCo 5 highlighted: "We hold a SEND Day with parents/carers. It is a chance for them to ask questions and for us to give them key information about how our systems work". Parent/carer 1 identified: "The information day was helpful to find out about the different support options in place and who to contact for help. There was a meeting with other parents in the summer which went through how the school worked, what strategies and adaptations they put into place, what we could expect for support".

5.11.1.3 Parents meetings

SENDCos acknowledged that "parents/carers need to be an active part of the collaboration process" (SENDCo 3) and one method to achieve this is through effective communication. Parent meetings were identified as an effective way to share key information and to have open discussions. SENDCo 6 said: "We have meetings with parents/carers regularly to share information and to see how things are going. This helps us to act as early as possible."

5.11.1.4 Frequency

SENDCos reflected that "We have an open-door policy. We speak to some parents on a regular basis. Other parents we check in with as they need us to approach them. This happens weekly for some parents depending on the nature of the discussion. Some parents will contact us at least weekly. There is the option for all parents to contact us" (SENDCo 6).

5.11.1.5 Access to information

SENDCos and parents/carers identified that sharing information such as support plans helps parents to be part of the support process. Parent/carer 1 identified: "We have copies of the support plans and how the school are supporting X in class and in the bigger sense. She gets help with how to cope with school and people to talk to".

5.11.2 School staff

This subtheme acknowledged the importance of sharing information with staff and developing knowledge and understanding of how to support pupils with SEND. A variety of approaches and systems were shared to enable this to be successful at different levels and in different forms. SENDCos also reflected about the role of teaching staff and that they try to promote that all staff are teachers of pupils with SEND and that it is not just the role of the SENDCo. SENDCOs highlighted the number of ways they support the dissemination of information.

5.11.2.1 Consult with others / support systems

SENDCos identified that information can be shared between members of staff, and they support one another. SENDCo 3 shared: "Staff are good sources of information for one another. I encourage staff to problem solve with each other".

5.11.2.2 Staff meetings

Staff meetings were also identified as an avenue for sharing information and focusing on particular topics or pupils. SENDCo 5 reflected: "I pick four or five students each week to focus on, I raise them in our staff meeting and go through any changes to support plans or any other need to know information." The regularity of these meetings was also noted as a continual opportunity to reinforce messages to staff.

5.11.2.3 Emails

Emails were recognised by SENDCos as an effective way to share information with a wide number of staff. It enables them to highlight particular children who need additional support, to reiterate key information such as changes to support plans and to signpost staff to key documents. SENDCo 4 identified: "Each week I send out a brief email with pictures of any children that have been finding things difficult or those who have acquired lots of negative points in class for behaviour. This reminds staff of the child's needs, and I reiterate the strategies on their plan".

5.11.2.4 Training and CPD

SENDCos highlighted that to continue to expand their understanding of how to support a wide range of needs, they engage in both internal and external training. SENDCo 1: "We use a range of services to ensure that we are providing the best possible support, the most effective approaches and the most relevant research to ensure that what we are doing will have a chance of having impact". SENDCo 5 shared: "We did a skills audit for our LSAs and identified where the gaps were. We then planned our training around that. For example, they were not versed in supporting anxiety which is an ever-growing area of need in our school population and nationally, so we identified that need for training to upskill our TAs so they can offer better support".

5.11.2.5 Adapt and adjust.

Adaptability was identified by SENDCos as a key skill for developing skills, knowledge and strategies that changes with the needs of the pupils. SENDCO 6 shared: "We are continually revisiting our practice to ensure it is the best fit for all of our learners and their individual needs. We don't stay still."

5.11.2.6 Shared access to information

Ensuring that key information is readily accessible to those who require it is important in the views of SENDCOs. This was highlighted by SENDCos in terms of the systems which are in place: "Staff access documentation such as pupil passports, medical reports and any other documentation which will enable them to respond in the most effective way to support the pupil".

5.11.2.7 Pupil passports

This was a common and important approach discussed by all SENDCo participants. All six SENDCos identified that pupils with SEND have a document which outlines their strengths, difficulties, likes, dislikes and support strategies. This document is populated in collaboration with the pupils and key adults such as parents/carers and it is shared with members of staff. SENDCo 1 shared: "I ensure that the information is taken from a range of sources such as parents/carers/ staff and the pupils." SENDCo 2 identified: "I ask the primary school to complete the pupil passport ready for transition. It helps us to find out about them and the things which were successful in their previous school in the hope we can continue them in secondary".

5.11.3 Pupils

5.11.3.1 Transition

All six SENDCos highlighted how important this was for pupils with SEND. They identified that change can be difficult to manage, particularly when they have been in their primary setting for many years with familiar staff.

SENDCos outlined that additional measures are implemented for pupils with SEND to assist with their transition. These measures can include social stories, colour-coded maps, colour-coded timetables, pictures of the school and key members of staff. SENDCo 1 highlighted "We know that transition can be challenging for pupils with SEND so we have a package that we offer which includes a pictorial picture book of key places and key staff in school and a colour coded map which are sent prior to any visits". Transition was positioned as a significant event and opportunity for the generation and sharing of information. SENDCo 2: "We give parents/carers a contact email for a named member of staff so they can flag things up or other things before their child starts in September". All SENDCo participants spoke about how they support the transition process early for pupils with SEND. SENDCo 3: "We publish the timetables before the summer for new starters. We also do this for existing students where there are changes to rooms or teachers for their subjects. We know that change can be difficult for some to manage". Many SENDCos recognised the importance of the primary school setting in sharing knowledge with them and using their expertise and knowledge of the pupil to help with transitioning into secondary school.

5.11.3.2 Pupil voice

SENDCos reflected that it is important to gather information directly from pupils as they are a great source of information. SENDCos identified that they value pupil views, and they do not gather their voice in a tokenistic manner. SENDCo 2: "We do use templates for 1:1 sessions, so there is a chance for pupils to share concerns or how things are going, there is a template to fill in with staff. We ask for that feedback and involve them as much as possible in changes and their reviews. We get feedback more formally in student questionnaires. We value their voice and take it on board to change our practice, we need to unpick what it is and try to change things". SENDCo 6 reflected: "We get the students to fill out their own pupil profile with support from a familiar adult. We want to hear their views on how to support them. We find this is helpful as some students are really honest in

declining support, this also prevents vital people or resources being implemented when they are not wanted or will not help".

5.11.3.3 Reviews

Another opportunity to share information with pupils and about their progress was identified as the annual review of their EHCP. SENDCo 1 identified: "We always make a conscious effort to seek genuine views from pupils before their annual reviews. They are included in the decisions made about them as far as possible. We aim to be transparent about what is working and what is not working so that there are no surprises when it comes to the review meeting. It is a good opportunity to showcase how well they are doing at school, to share their achievements and to plan next steps".

5.11.3.4 Informal feedback

Another way to share information with students and parents/carers was identified as informal conversations. These conversations support the development and maintenance of relationships, trust and transparency in the approaches being used. It also enables changes to be made regularly and information to be shared easily. SENDCo 4 shared: We have lots of informal conversations with students and their parents. They also contact us and tell us information or make requests too. I think having an "open door" or approachable feeling within our setting makes students feel comfortable to share information and to receive information from us too".

5.12 Theme 6: Belonging

Figure 13. Thematic map showing "belonging" theme.
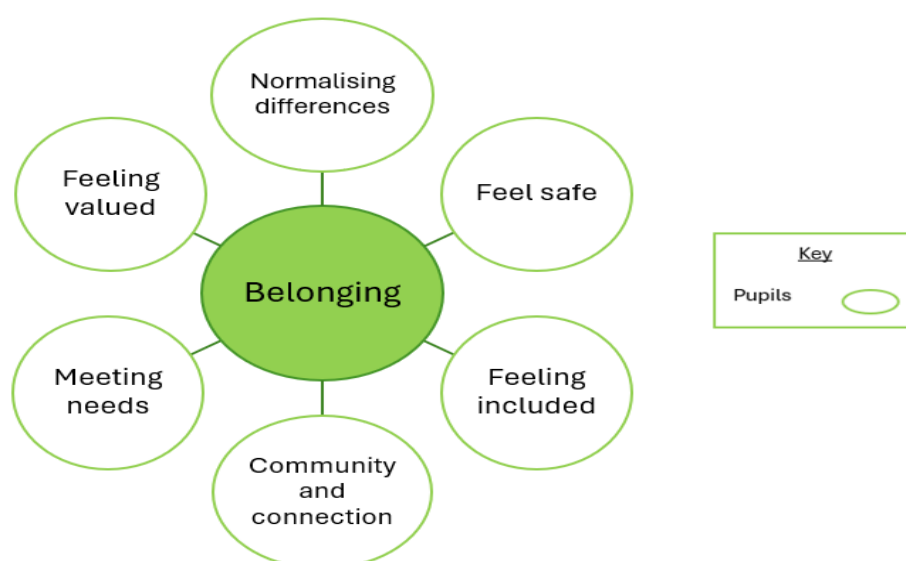
Although SENDCos discussed creating a sense of belonging and it was included as a code within the culture/ethos theme, a separate theme of belonging seemed appropriate for pupil participants. The pupil participants all talked about components of belonging in more detail. It felt that the richness and importance for this participant group would not be captured as a code within a theme and that it needed to be a separate theme.

Pupils spoke positively about their schools and the support they receive. They highlighted a range of strategies which make a difference to their wellbeing, engagement in the classroom and positive outcomes. Pupil participants shared feelings of belonging to their school on an emotional and practical level.

5.12.1 Normalising differences

Pupils spoke about how their schools tried to be inclusive through informative measures such as normalising the need for different support strategies or sharing information about different conditions such as ASD. Pupil 2 reflected: "We have sessions to explore current affairs and differences, healthy living, that kind of thing. We have had speakers in about Autism, Downs Syndrome

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and Tourette's Syndrome so far. Information booklets were given out and people asked questions. My friend even spoke about his own Tourette's Syndrome."

5.12.2 Feel safe

Pupils also spoke about how their school made them feel. They recognised the importance of a positive feeling linked with school which enhances school attendance and their level of engagement with learning activities. Pupil 1 reflected: "I know I can manage at school, there are places I can go to like the calm room and I can spend time out if I need to, it helps me to feel safe and calm".

5.12.3 Feeling included

Pupils also spoke about being included within their school setting. This. includes being accepted for who they are and for having things which are different and this is ok. Pupil 1 highlighted: "It's on my pupil passport so everyone knows about me, they just accept that I need something different sometimes and that it's ok. No one makes me feel stupid or weird". Pupil 2 outlined: "I feel good that people just don't bother about me having an overlay, handouts etc. I think most people just get it and that's ok. More and more people are having different things in the classroom or more people are going to inclusion for support and then it becomes that is just how the school is".

5.12.4 Community and connection

Pupils also spoke about feeling as though they were amongst other pupils who also had needs too; "I like knowing that I am not the only one who needs extra help or needs to go to learning support when it gets too much" (Pupil 4). Another pupil reflected that "school feels like we support eachother, like I am not the odd one out, particularly in inclusion" (Pupil 5).

5.12.5 Meeting needs

Pupils identified that their schools have improved on how they are supporting them and their needs by putting different strategies into place. This includes creating a designated SEND space and being more adaptive when needed. Pupil 5 shared: "I have different things which help me at school. I know that there has been a lot of work to make this happen and it helps. I have things in the classroom which I can use or which the teacher does or doesn't do. Without them I wouldn't come to school. I have what I need now. I really like inclusion, it is calm and I like the teachers too".

5.12.6 Feeling valued

Pupils spoke about how their views were valued by their school and how their views were used to improve the provision further. Pupil 4 shared: "I can share what is not working with my mum and then she calls a meeting with the SENDCo. The SENDCo will then call a meeting to go through what is on my support plan and we talk about what I would like to be different. My plan is then updated and it gets sent out". Pupil voice was also identified as being important. Pupil 3 reflected: "They ask us what is working and what is not working, they listen and they make changes. I have been part of meetings and they have questions they ask us to fill in".

Chapter 6 Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to bring together the key findings from the data in relation to the research question and the existing research base. First, the themes identified in Chapter 5 will be discussed in relation to the existing literature and research outlined in Chapters 2 and 3. The methodological limitations of the approaches undertaken from the data collection and analysis will then be examined along with researcher reflexivity. Consideration of the aims and original contribution of the research will follow on. The possible implications of this research for mainstream secondary schools and the practice of EPs will then be outlined. Finally, future avenues of research will be suggested.

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather information from pupils with SEND, parents/carers of pupils with SEND and SENDCos. The information gathered was analysed using reflexive ThA. The research aimed to:

- provide opportunities for first-hand experiences and views about inclusive practices to be listened to and gathered from groups which may otherwise be marginalised.
- gather the perceptions of "what works" to promote the inclusion of pupils with SEND in mainstream secondary schools as part of a detailed exploration of existing practices and supportive arrangements.

6.2 Summary of findings in the current study

6.2.1 Construct of inclusion

It is suggested that a lack of consensus on the definition of inclusion can impair perspectives and actions taken to achieve inclusive environments (Avramidis et al., 2002). The subjective nature of the construct may mean that the information provided by participants could vary based on their interpretation of the construct of inclusion. To address this the researcher asked the particpants to share their own defintion of inclusion. This enabled the reseacher to gain insight into individual and collective constructs of

inclusion and consider how this may have impacted the responses provided in the interviews. The participants in this research appeared to hold a similar construct of inclusion with common features identified across participant groups (see Figure 5, and sections 6.5, 6.6). In this research, the construct of inclusion appears to evoke an emotive response from pupil participants as they related it to feeling accepted by others and a sense of belonging. Equality and equity featured in all SENDCo responses. Flexibility, differentiation and removing barriers were features included by both SENDCOs and parents. Although there is no single definition of inclusion in relation to inclusive education, the constructs generated by parents/carers and SENDCo participants for this research correspond with previous findings within the literature (see Chapter 1 section 1.3.9, and Chapter 2 section 2.4 for constructs within research and Chapter 5 section 5.1 for the constructs generated by the participants in this research). Pupil participants generated responses that were more emotive in nature e.g. "feeling valued" (Pupil 1), which did not appear to be prevalent in the existing research or definitions.

This study aimed to answer the question:

What facilitating factors are perceived to support the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) within mainstream secondary schools?

The findings from this study suggest that there are numerous strategies and approaches employed within mainstream secondary schools which support the inclusion of pupils with SEND which are discussed below:

6.2.2 Positive relationships

This research suggests that positive relationships with staff are prominent features of inclusive learning environments. The information shared by participants suggests that relationships can assist wellbeing and engagement with learning. It appears that staff and pupils build genuine rapport where pupils' needs are placed at the centre and staff take time to understand them in order to offer attuned support. For example, one pupil

shared "Mrs X listens to me; I know where to find her and I talk to her about things I need help with". This was also highlighted by a parent/carer participant who recognised the effort made by staff "Mr C gets X and fights his corner for him". Parents also acknowledged the value that positive relationships have for their children in relation to the reduction in anxiety levels, supporting transition into school and engaging successfully in lessons. This is also iterated in the wider research which suggests that student-teacher relationships have a greater impact on wellbeing and academic outcomes than perceived levels of staff competence (Hattie, 2008) and contribute towards perceptions of successful inclusion (Rallis & Anderson, 1994).

What appears to be a unique contribution of this research is that the research offers insight into how these relationships might be established. Strategies suggested by participants which seem to forge relationships with pupils include check-ins, the use of key adults, a network of support and the investment of time. Pupils also shared that they use check ins to share their difficulties and to problem solve; "I talk about what might be difficult and Mrs X plans ways around it with me". Whilst these strategies were shared by participants in this research, they did not appear to feature within the wider literature or in the studies included in the SLR. This may be due to previous research being deficit focused or focusing on attitudes towards inclusion.

The personal qualities of staff which contribute to the creation of effective relationships were also featured in this research. Qualities including a genuine interest in forging relationships, empathy, advocating, availability, being supportive and active listening were identified. Active listening seemed to be a key component to effective relationships reported across all participant groups. Parents and pupils reflected that they "feel listened to". Pupils reflected that they felt things were changed as a result of being listened to. Pupils also shared that they felt staff had time for them and were there to listen to them. Pupils also used descriptives such as "trusting", "supportive" and "helpful" to describe how they perceive the adults supporting them. School staff were also positioned in a supportive or helping

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role across three of the studies featured in the SLR (Dimitrellou & Male, 2020; Murdoch, 2019; Kefallinou & Howes, 2022).

Interestingly, relationships with peers were not raised by pupils in this research, however they do feature in previous studies (Beaver, 2016; Porter & Ingram, 2021; Murdoch, 2019). The pupil participants in previous studies identified that peer relationships were important to their engagement in the setting and their emotional wellbeing. This may suggest that the pupils in this research do not view their peers as contributing to their inclusion or alternatively it is possible that the way in which the interview questions were posed did not evoke these responses.

6.2.3 Responding to individual needs

The construct of "flexibility" was highlighted by all participant groups in this research. "Flexibility" in this research appeared to relate to aspects of the whole school system such as behaviour policies, accessibility of lessons, learning aids, uniform criteria and timetable modifications. The commonality across the adaptations reported could be described as aiming to create conditions which facilitate the engagement and emotional regulation of pupils with SEND and helping them to reach their full potential. Some thoughts on "how" this is achieved were highlighted within some of the subthemes. For example, the use of alternative provision, differentiation, placing the child at the centre and applying different levels of support. All of these strategies appear to acknowledge that one-size does not fit all and the need for a variation in approach when responding to individual needs. This aligns with legislation which stipulates that reasonable adjustments must be made in lessons (SENDA, 2001). It could also be argued that these approaches should be considered as part of quality first teaching, rather than specialist pedagogy (Lewis & Norwich, 2004).

6.2.4 Knowledge and understanding of pupils.

All participant groups highlighted the notion of investment as a positive factor. Pupil participants shared that they felt staff were invested in them and

their needs. SENDCos also spoke about how they identified the needs of individuals and developed an understanding of how to support them.

6.2.5 Physical school environment

The information provided by participants in this research suggests that adaptations to the physical environment support the social and emotional wellbeing needs of pupils with SEND. An underlying notion of trying to create feelings of safety is suggested through the delivery of quiet spaces and specific provision at break and lunchtime by all participants. This was echoed in the existing research also where pupil participants identified that having a space to go to at busy times such as lunchtime was important (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Porter & Ingram, 2021). Furthermore, all of the SENDCos in this research identified their school as having an area which is quieter and less busy than the mainstream classrooms which can support pupils with learning tasks in smaller groups. Parents view these areas as important in supporting emotional regulation and facilitating attendance. This perhaps suggests that having flexibility within the school environment may enable more pupils with SEND to feel comfortable, safe and able to engage in learning. The studies in the SLR did not explore these areas as a feature of inclusive provision which suggests this is a novel insight coming from this research.

6.2.6 Support in the classroom

The importance of deploying a range of strategies to support pupils with their learning is raised within this research. Practical support measures shared by participants in this research include laptops, overlays and timeout cards. Using a range of strategies is also acknowledged within the existing literature (Farell, 2007; Woodfield & Ashby, 2016). The strategies raised in the existing evidence base include check-ins during lessons, clear explanations and using multi-modalities for activities (Whitburn, 2014).

The role of TAs in supporting pupils with SEND has a large research base (Webster & Blatchford, 2013; 2015). The positive impact of TA support was

recognised within this current study, particularly in relation to pupil participation, facilitating experiences of success with learning tasks and helping them to recognise and regulate their emotions so that pupils can engage with their learning. The practical application of TA support in the classroom was highlighted to include reading, scribing and supporting pupils to understand tasks. Research indicates that TAs are a pivotal factor in enabling pupils with SEND to access learning tasks and the wider school (Webster & Blatchford, 2013; 2015), however research also suggests the downside of receiving support from TAs is that academic outcomes can be restricted or reduced (Webster & Blatchford, 2015).

6.2.7 Communication

Communication was a key feature of generating inclusive environments across all participant groups. Parents/carers indicated that communication with school staff, having information shared with them and being part of the process of supporting their child contributed to the perception that the school was inclusive. SENDCs in the present study highlighted how much they valued the input of parents, for example in creating pupil profiles to outline potential ways forward. The concept of collaboration and working in partnership with pupils was also conveyed in this research by SENDCos through the use of pupil passports and pupil questionnaires. Pupils identified that they were encouraged to share their ideas and to inform ways forward. This links with research conducted by Beaver (2016) who also found that pupils felt consulted by staff to gain their views about their school setting and what could be improved.

Sharing information with staff was highlighted as an area of priority by SENDCos to facilitate the needs of pupils with SEND being met and to contribute towards an inclusive ethos. In the present study this appears to be achieved in a variety of ways; both formal, such as training from outside agencies and informal ways such as internal newsletters and emails. This aligns with the findings of Humphrey and Lewis, (2008) who noted the

importance of the dissemination of information to staff via pupil profiles and staff bulletins.

6.2.8 Transition

All six SENDCos in the present study raised transition as a vehicle for creating an inclusive environment. Transition was positioned as pivotal to establishing understanding of pupils and supporting their emotional wellbeing when moving up to secondary school. Specific strategies highlighted included providing maps of the physical environment, timetables, pictures of key pupils and areas of the school. The importance of transition from primary to secondary school was found within the wider literature which highlights how a supportive transition can reduce parental concerns (Hoy et al., 2018) and aid the transition process through the sharing of information to gain an understanding of the child.

6.2.9 Whole school approach to inclusion

Historically, there has been a shift in how difficulties are perceived with a movement away from traditional "within child" models to more holistic, interactive approaches (Bronfenbrenner, 1976), which emphasise the importance of systems around an individual. This perhaps reinforces participants' perspectives in the present study of the importance and impact of the wider school system on meeting the needs of pupils with SEND. At an emotional level, the information shared by participants in this research suggests there is an investment in creating a "feeling" of being included. SENDCos reflected "we strive to create a feeling that they are valued and accepted for who they are". There is also the notion of a collaborative, joint investment from all staff in creating an inclusive environment.

In this research four out of six SENDCOs raised SLT as a positive contributing aspect of facilitating inclusion. The SENDCos discussed that they felt strongly about their position on SLT to be able to influence the wider implications of SEND in the school. There appears to be limited research in this topic, however a study by Lin et al. (2022) suggests that if SENDCos are

part of SLT they can be involved in strategic level decisions. In the SLR leadership and a whole school approach were identified as important in two studies (Webster & Blatchford, 2019; Beaver, 2016). Commitment from the leadership team was also perceived as filtering down to staff which perhaps increased their confidence in meeting needs (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008).

6.2.10 Belonging and connectedness

This theme suggests that connections within school are important for pupils both on a practical and emotional level. The prominence of this theme for pupil participants perhaps aligns with the importance placed on belonging by Maslow (1943) as a fundamental need. Feelings were also at the forefront of the discussions with pupils. With several different emotions highlighted as important including feeling safe, feeling included and feeling valued. These findings suggest some alignment with existing research which portrays belonging as having an impact upon mental wellbeing (Millings et al., 2012). Pupils' sense of belonging also seemed to be related to feelings of acceptance and recognition of individuality within the school community.

6.2.11 Normalising differences

Pupils in this research highlighted measures that had been taken by their schools to make "differences normalised" which in turn made them feel safe and included in their school. These approaches included information sessions on different special educational needs to facilitate greater understanding within the school community. The application of support strategies being encountered more frequently in classrooms also seemed to contribute to a sense of "normalisation" or "just how the school is". The concept of "normalising differences" was not found in the other literature or the studies in the SLR which suggests that it may be unique to this study and add to ways in which schools can create inclusive environments.

6.3 Strengths and limitations of the current study

6.3.1 Evaluation of the methodology

The evaluative framework for qualitive research by Yardley (2008) was applied to the methodology to enhance the trustworthiness of the study considering the sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; coherence and transparency and impact and importance (see Chapter 4 section 4.13). In this section reflections are provided on the limitations of the methodology as well as the ethical challenges that were encountered. Reference to Chapter 4 will be made where appropriate to prevent repetition.

6.3.2 Data collection

6.3.2.1 Participant sample

The epistemological and ontological position adopted by the researcher meant that generalisability of results was not an aim of this study. Instead, this research aimed to provide an opportunity for participants to be empowered to share their personal experiences and views on what facilitates inclusion in mainstream schools for pupils with SEND. The inclusion of parents/carers and pupils in this research was a conscious decision by the researcher as the current evidence base identifies these groups as marginalised and under-represented in research (Hodkinson, 2010; Pazey, 2020; Norwich & Kelly, 2004). There were six schools and fourteen participants altogether, (five pupils, six SENDCOs and three parents/carers). The researcher acknowledges that this could be viewed as a small sample size. However, Braun and Clarke (2013) suggest that a sample size of six to ten participants is sufficient for this type of research. The data collected may be viewed as rich and in-depth, which also supports the small sample size.

The voluntary nature of participating in this research was an important factor for the researcher from a moral stance. However, the researcher also acknowledges that the participants who chose to participate may not be representative of the wider population of pupils with SEND, parent/carers of pupils with SEND or SENDCOs from mainstream secondary schools. This

may also have limited the inclusive strategies that were highlighted by the pupils, parents and staff.

In relation to the recruitment of participants, the researcher acknowledges that they were partially reliant upon colleagues to generate interest. The SENDCos which signed up to participate were from schools with a link EP from within the EPS. There may have been more schools and participants if the researcher was able to reach the schools that did not have a link EP. The researcher tried to contact these schools but as there was no link EP there was no one to confirm the contact details or to follow up with the invitation to participate in the research.

6.3.2.2 Semi-structured interviews

The choice of semi-structured interviews aligned with the aim of the study which was to use an exploratory approach to gather views and experiences of inclusive practices for pupils with SEND. An interview schedule was constructed in collaboration with my university academic supervisor which can be viewed in Appendix M. Open ended questions were used with careful phrasing to prevent leading answers. Semi-structured interviews facilitated a person-centred approach where the researcher could respond to the information shared. The order of the questions and the prompts varied for each interview depending on the natural discussion and the generation of information.

The interviews were conducted in a variety of ways including face-to-face and online. The preference for face-to-face interviews by the researcher was not always possible due to time constraints and other commitments of the participants. Online interviews offered an alternative method, one which was becoming more familiar to pupils SENDCos and EPs in particular due to the global COVID-19 pandemic where many aspects of life were supported through online service delivery.

Although I have conducted numerous consultations as a TEP which involve asking questions and gathering information, it is acknowledged that conducting semi-structured interviews is a skill (Barriball & While, 1994) which is relatively new to the researcher. The topic of inclusion could generate unpleasant memories as participants and their families may have experienced practices which are exclusionary and even discriminatory. I held these considerations at the forefront of my mind when conducting the interviews, in what I hoped was a sensitive and considerate manner. I tried to acknowledge that answering my questions may be difficult and I tried to give enough time for responses without moving on too quickly, however this is a skill which perhaps became more comfortable and embedded as the interviews progressed. This means that in the earlier interviews I may have moved through the questions more quickly and could have missed opportunities to obtain more information.

6.3.3 Data analysis

6.3.3.1 Reflexive ThA

To briefly reiterate, Reflexive ThA provides an accessible, theoretically flexible approach for qualitative data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2012). Data is interpreted through the development of codes and the construction of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This method was chosen as the researcher believed it was the most appropriate for addressing the research question and aligned with the chosen constructionist and subjective epistemology. Using reflexive thematic analysis enabled the researcher to examine the information gathered from each participant to look for themes within each data set, but also across data sets. This method facilitated an active role in the data analysis for the researcher and empowered the researcher to own their decisions when interpreting the data. The analysis was therefore subjective and based upon the researcher's constructions and interpretations of the data. Different researchers may have asked different questions, chosen different aspects to focus on, coded information differently and generated different themes. Throughout the research process the researcher sought discussions with their tutor, fellow TEPs and EPs in the placement LA

to share their interpretations of the data to use them as sounding boards. The researcher was not seeking approval or to change their analysis based upon this feedback, but it helped them to process the information and to explore their interpretation of the data by talking about it out loud.

6.4 Researcher reflexivity

Research may be viewed as a product of the researchers' values (Mertens, 2015). As the researcher I actively engaged with the participants to gather their views and experiences, which was facilitated through the adoption of a constructivist epistemology. As a researcher, I recognise the importance of my own experiences, views and constructs and how these may influence the interpretation of the findings. Throughout this research, I was mindful of the possible impact I had on data collection, interpretation and analysis. My position as a researcher was considered at every point. This involved ensuring my own feelings, views and constructs about how the participants were describing their experiences of inclusion did not affect the interpretations of them. A number of strategies and approaches which promote inclusion have been identified by the participants. It is important to note that the findings are my interpretation, which may differ from other researchers if they had the opportunity to examine the data. The skills I developed throughout my Doctoral training enabled me to quickly build rapport and relationships with the participants. This helped me to create a feeling of a safe environment for them to share their personal views and experiences with me. My verbal and non-verbal responses to participants in the moment within the interview may also have influenced the information shared by the participant.

I acknowledged potential power imbalances between participant groups and the researcher and held in mind that the purpose of the research was to provide an opportunity for the potentially marginalised voices of those with SEND parents school staff to be heard. I was thankful for the training I had received in my doctorate which facilitated rapport to be established quickly

with participants and what I believe to have aided the gathering of information.

My experiences of working with pupils with SEND in mainstream schools and in my role as a parent will have influenced how I interpreted and applied the theoretical underpinnings from the existing research base and how I interpreted the information gathered from the interviews in this study. My drive for a more inclusive education system and inclusive settings will also have influenced the interpretation of data.

6.5 Implications for future research

There is limited research into "what works" to promote inclusive practice for pupils with SEND in mainstream secondary schools from the perspectives of pupils with SEND, parents/carers of pupils with SEND or specifically SENDCos. This suggests that further research on the topic of inclusion in mainstream secondary schools is required to continue the drive and implementation of effective practice.

A reflexive thematic analysis of the information provided by participants (pupils, parents/carers and SENDCOs) has identified several themes and features in relation to facilitating factors of inclusive practices for pupils with SEND in mainstream secondary schools. SENDCos within this research identified being part of the senior leadership team (SLT) as important to supporting the facilitation of strategies, dissemination of information and encouraging an inclusive ethos within school. Topics for future research could include a focus on the role and value of SENDCos as members of the SLT and how this can positively impact the inclusive practices which are implemented within school.

Due to the limitations and scope of this research and the chosen methodology of semi-structured interviews to gain the perspectives and experiences of participants there was no transformatory aspect within this study. Future research could include the application of alternative

methodologies which adopt an action research approach and promote change at both an individual and an organisational level and assist a transformatory element (McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 2003; Robson, 2002). Frameworks such as PATHS (planning alternative tomorrows with hope) (Pearpoint, et al., 1993), or Appreciative Inquiry (AI) (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987) could be applied in these methodologies in an action orientated approach. Gathering the views and experiences of pupils, parents/carers and school staff would provide a useful first step in this action research process. The information gathered could then be used to examine current practices and to plan for changes and enhancements. This would mean the information gathered could be used to inform changes which would be planned and executed as part of an over-arching action orientated research process.

6.6 Summary of key findings and the original contribution of the study

6.6.1 Summary of key findings

There appear to be many studies which focus upon the perceived barriers to inclusion (e.g. Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019; Ferriday & Cantali, 2020). This study used a solution-orientated approach where only positive and supportive experiences or strategies were gathered. The researcher consciously decided to adopt this approach to prevent a problem saturated, and deficit focus to information gathered.

The findings from this study suggest that there are several key elements which interlink to contribute towards inclusivity for pupils with SEND in mainstream secondary schools from the perspectives of pupils with SEND parents/carers of pupils with SEND and SENDCos. Themes were highlighted relevant to individuals and at a school level. This aligns with Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model (1979) which emphasises the importance of examining multiple systems and their interactions. The influences at a microsystemic level highlight the role that different adults can have on an individual's experience of inclusion. At the heart of the participant responses appeared to be a sense of genuine investment in pupils with

SEND being included in secondary school settings and, to achieve and to reach their full potential. There is a strong sense of collaboration and communication as being positive features of inclusive settings. Relationships and how to forge them through practical strategies and personal qualities were also highlighted. Sharing information with staff and parents, feeling valued, adjustments in the physical environment were raised as providing quieter, smaller spaces for learning, strategies such as overlays and laptops in the classroom, an in-depth knowledge of each participant, a requirement to respond flexibly to individual needs, and training were all identified by participants. Furthermore, transition was suggested as helping with communication, relationships and emotional wellbeing of pupils. Finally, at a whole school, exosystemic level the culture of the school and SENDCos as a member of the SLT were raised as positive facilitating factors to creating a positive inclusive environment.

6.6.2 Original contribution of the study

This study adopted a positive solution focused approach with the aim of exploring "what works" to support the inclusion of pupils with SEND in mainstream secondary schools, rather than focusing on the deficits and barriers as there is a vast amount of research which already offers this (e.g. Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019; Ferriday & Cantali, 2020).

This current study appears to be unique in gathering together the voices of SENDCo participants, pupils and parents/carers on what facilitates inclusion. There is only one other study which used parents, and this was another doctoral thesis (Murdoch, 2019). Additionally, this research study included the views of parents/carers in exploring "what works" to promote inclusive provision for pupils with SEND. This contrasts with existing research which gathered parent voices about the perceived barriers to inclusion, (e.g. Rogers, 2007; Waddington, 2007), or studies about parent attitudes towards inclusion (e.g. Wilson et al., 2024).

Pupils in this research raised "normalising differences" as a key aspect to them feeling as though their school promotes inclusion. This seems to be a novel insight generated by the present study which adds to the existing evidence on what supports pupils with SEND to feel included in secondary schools. The "normalisation of differences" appears to facilitate feelings of safety and being accepted. This could also be an area of further research in relation to the measures taken by schools to share information about differences at a whole school level and how this can be achieved.

Moreover, positive relationships were highlighted as a prominent feature of inclusive learning environments in this research. Practical methods of establishing rapport such as check-ins and also personal qualities of staff such as genuineness were highlighted as contributing towards effective reciprocal relationships. These practical factors also seem to be a further original contribution of this study to the existing research base for "what works" in supporting pupils with SEND to be included in secondary schools.

6.7 Implications for practice

6.7.1 Implications for schools

The information gathered in this research celebrates the current inclusive practices across six mainstream secondary schools. By applying a positively framed line of enquiry schools could engage in a constructive self-evaluation process to identify positive examples of existing inclusive practices. It was hoped by highlighting "what works" in each school it was hoped it would invigorate an inclusive culture and further enhance processes and strategies employed to support the inclusion of pupils with SEND.

This research gathered the voices of those who are in direct receipt of inclusive practices and those who are involved with promoting inclusion in mainstream secondary schools. Gathering these voices highlights the importance of gathering the views and experiences of those who may be considered as marginalised to reduce power differentials and to promote collaboration when planning and evaluating practice and provision. Schools

may already have robust procedures in place for gaining feedback from pupils, parents/carers and staff. However, schools may need to revisit the method used and the purpose for which the information is gained. In this research the voices were gathered for an exploratory purpose to gain an insight and understanding as suggested below voices can also be gained for transformatory purposes too. Schools could consider how the information they gather will be used to inform and change practices and policies.

6.7.2 Implications for EPs

This research adopted a constructionist epistemology and a relativist ontology which focused on gathering the subjective experiences and views of inclusion from three different participant groups. The researcher positioned each participant and each participant group as equal in the data gathering and analysis process. The belief that all members of a school system including parents/carers have unique but equal expertise to contribute to the research was held (Hanko, 1995; Wagner, 2017). This research has highlighted the value of constructive conversations with pupils with SEND, their parents/carers and SENDCos about their experiences of inclusion and the current inclusive practices which are useful and supportive for them. The importance of pupil voice and the voices of key stakeholders are recognised by EPs who place gathering these voices as a foundation for their work (Farrell et al., 2006). The findings from the present study suggest that it could be helpful for EPs to hold conversations in their link schools with pupils, parents and SENDCos about the positive features of existing inclusive practices and to act as a conduit for these voices being heard.

The culture and ethos within a school was raised within this research as a contributing factor for promoting inclusion. The role of the SENDCo as part of SLT was also raised as a potential factor which positively impacts inclusive practices. There is a drive for EPs to work more systemically, rather than with individual children (DfEE, 2000; Farrell et al., 2006). EPs may need to adopt this indirect model of delivery where to help individual pupils work is undertaken at a wider systemic level (Gutkin, 1999; Sheridan & Gutkin,

2000). The themes generated from this research study could be used as a discussion tool by EPs with SENDCos to examine the wider culture and ethos of inclusion and the approaches which could be adopted to enhance systems and strategies at a whole school level. EPs could adopt the role of facilitator guiding schools through this process with schools bringing contextual expertise and EPs bringing process and domain knowledge expertise (Truscott et al., 2012; Wagner, 2000). Additionally, pupil participants raised the aspect of "normalising differences" across the school setting. Ways to share information with pupils and staff could be explored further and the possible impact of this on the school culture and feelings of belonging could be explored.

7. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the views and experiences of what promotes inclusive provision for pupils with SEND in mainstream secondary schools from the perspectives of pupils with SEND, parents/carers of pupils with SEND and SENDCos. With an increasing trend in the number of pupils attending specialist settings (Norwich, 2019), transferring to specialist settings at the end of primary school (Day & Prunty, 2010; Pirrie et al., 2006) and a high proportion of secondary aged pupils in specialist settings (DfES, 2004), the rationale for focusing on the inclusionary processes for pupils with SEND in mainstream settings was highlighted. Semi-structured interviews with a solution-orientated approach were utilised to gather rich information about positive experiences and views of inclusive practices in mainstream secondary schools for pupils with SEND. As far as the researcher is aware, this is the first occasion in which the perspectives of the three participant groups (parents/carers SENDCos and pupils with SEND) have been combined through reflexive thematic analysis with a focus on positive practices only. This generated new insights into the concept of normalising differences, SENDCos being part of SLT and the personality traits of school staff and the approaches used to forge relationships. Reflexive thematic analysis was used to make sense of the data and to generate themes. The voices of marginalised groups were placed at the centre to use their

expertise on inclusion of pupils with SEND to add to the growing knowledge base and approaches for how best to support this group of pupils. The findings in this research highlighted the importance of relational-based approaches, responsiveness to individual needs, the importance of adjustments to the provision, the culture and ethos of the school and feeling valued as key features from the perspectives of the participants in this research. It is hoped that the findings of this research will be used to inform school and EP support for the inclusion of pupils with SEND in mainstream secondary schools to engage in conversations and self-reflection to celebrate current practices and to consider further enhancements.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Database searches including the search terms and the returned results for the SLR.

Date	02/11/2022 – 05/11/2022
Timespan	To date
Search language	English
Database	Web of Science (OVID)
Search terms/results	Inclusive practice AND secondary school AND special educational needs (136 results, 2 saved)
	Inclusion AND special educational needs AND school (312 results, 0 saved)
	Inclusion AND special educational needs AND mainstream AND voice (73 results, 5 saved)
	Inclusion AND special educational needs AND mainstream AND student AND voice (16 results, 1 saved)
	Inclusion AND special educational needs AND mainstream AND child AND voice (18 results, 0 saved)
	Enhance AND inclusion AND special educational needs AND school (132 results, 0 saved)
	Increase AND inclusion AND special educational needs AND school (328 results, refine)
	Increase AND inclusion AND special educational needs AND mainstream school (62 results, 2 saved)
	Raise AND inclusion AND special educational needs AND mainstream school (28 results, 1 saved)
	Improve AND inclusion AND special educational needs AND mainstream school (38 results, 0 saved)
	Inclusion AND secondary school (318 results – refined)
	Inclusion AND secondary school AND special educational needs (20 results, 0 saved)
	Enhance AND inclusion AND mainstream AND secondary school (20 results, 5 saved)
	Inclusion AND special educational needs AND student voice (73 results, 5 saved)
	Inclusion AND special educational needs AND student voice (243 results, 3 saved)

	Inclusion AND special educational needs AND pupil views (83 results, 2 saved)
	Inclusion AND special educational needs AND pupil voice (24 results, 0 saved)
	Enhance AND inclusion AND mainstream AND secondary (20 results, 3 saved)
	Inclu* AND special AND secondary (443 results, 5 saved)
	Inclu* AND special educational needs AND parent AND views (73 results, 1 saved)
	Inclus* AND special educational needs AND staff AND views (259 results, 2 saved
Date	01/05/2024 - 30/07/2024
Search terms/results	Inclusion AND mainstream school AND UK (20 results, 0 saved)
	Parent AND views AND inclusion AND SEND (1 result, 1 saved)
	Staff AND views AND inclusion AND SEND AND mainstream school (6 results, 0 saved)

Date	02/11/2022 – 05/11/2022
Timespan	To date
Search language	English
Database	Psych info
Search terms/results	Inclusive practice AND secondary school AND special educational needs (1 results, 0 saved)
	Inclusion AND special educational needs AND school (312 results, 5 saved)
	Inclusion AND special educational needs AND mainstream AND pupil AND voice (4 results, 0 saved)
	Inclusion AND special educational needs AND mainstream AND student AND voice (4 results, 0 saved)
	Inclusion AND special educational needs AND mainstream AND child AND voice (2 results, 0 saved)
	Enhance AND inclusion AND special educational needs AND school (6 results, 0 saved)
	Increase AND inclusion AND special educational needs AND school (21 results, 0 saved)
	Raise AND inclusion AND special educational needs AND mainstream school (2 results, 1 saved)

	Improve AND inclusion AND special educational needs AND mainstream school (0 results, 0 saved)
	Inclusion AND secondary school (27 results, 0 saved)
	Inclusion AND secondary school AND special educational needs (27 results, 0 saved)
	Enhance AND inclusion AND mainstream AND secondary school (0 results, 0 saved)
	Inclusion AND special educational needs AND staff voice (2 results, 0 saved)
	Inclusion AND special educational needs AND parent voice (0, results 0 saved)
	Inclusion AND special educational needs AND pupil views (83 results, 2 saved)
	Inclusion AND special educational needs AND pupil voice (6 results, 0 saved)
	Enhance AND inclusion AND mainstream AND secondary (4 results, 0 saved)
	Inclu* AND special AND secondary (2104 results, 5 saved)
Date	01/05/2024 - 30/07/2024
Search results	Inclusion AND mainstream school AND UK (2 results, 0 saved)
	Parent AND views AND inclusion AND SEND (1 result, 1 saved)
	Staff AND views AND inclusion AND SEND AND mainstream school (6 results, 0 saved)

Date	02/11/2022 – 05/11/2022
Timespan	To date
Search language	English
Database	EBSCO
Search terms/results	Inclusive practice AND secondary school AND special educational needs (24 results, 0 saved)
	Inclusion AND special educational needs AND school (747 results, 14 saved)
	Inclusion AND special educational needs AND mainstream AND pupil AND voice (7 results, 0 saved)
	Inclusion AND special educational needs AND mainstream AND student AND voice (12 results, 0 saved)

	Inclusion AND special educational needs AND mainstream AND child AND voice (8 results, 0 saved)
	Enhance AND inclusion AND special educational needs AND school (3 results, 0 saved)
	Increase AND inclusion AND special educational needs AND school (19 results, 1 saved)
	Increase AND inclusion AND special educational needs AND mainstream school (10 results, 1 saved)
	Raise AND inclusion AND special educational needs AND mainstream school (8 results, 0 saved)
	Improve AND inclusion AND special educational needs AND mainstream school (4 results, 0 saved)
	Inclusion AND secondary school (2159 results, refined)
	Inclusion AND secondary school AND special educational needs (146 results, 8 saved)
	Enhance AND inclusion AND mainstream AND secondary school (14 results, 1 saved)
	Inclusion AND special educational needs AND student voice (11 results, 0 saved)
	Inclusion AND special educational needs AND student voice (8 results 1 saved)
	Inclusion AND special educational needs AND pupil views (11 results, 0 saved)
	Inclusion AND special educational needs AND pupil voice (6 results, 0 saved)
	Enhance AND inclusion AND mainstream AND secondary (14 results, 0 saved)
	Inclu* AND special AND secondary (203 results, 7 saved)
Date	01/05/2024 - 30/07/2024
Search terms/results	Inclusion AND secondary AND UK (3 results, 0 saved)
	Staff views AND inclusion AND mainstream school (3 results, 0 saved)
	Parent views AND inclusion AND SEND (2 results, 0 saved)

Date	02/11/2022 – 05/11/2022
Timespan	To date
Search language	English

Database	Ethos
Search terms/results	Inclusive practice AND secondary school AND special educational needs (41 results, 4 saved)
	Inclusion AND special educational needs AND school (230 results, 1 saved)
	Inclusion AND special educational needs AND mainstream AND pupil AND voice (7 results, 0 saved)
	Inclusion AND special educational needs AND mainstream AND student AND voice (12 results, 0 saved)
	Inclusion AND special educational needs AND mainstream AND child AND voice (13 results, 0 saved)
	Enhance AND inclusion AND special educational needs AND school (143 results, 3 saved)
	Increase AND inclusion AND special educational needs AND school (42 results, 0 saved)
	Increase AND inclusion AND special educational needs AND mainstream school (28 results, 0 saved)
	Raise AND inclusion AND special educational needs AND mainstream school (10 results, 0 saved)
	Improve AND inclusion AND special educational needs AND mainstream school (24 results, 0 saved)
	Inclusion AND secondary school (320 results, refined)
	Inclusion AND secondary school AND special educational needs (55 results, 0 saved)
	Enhance AND inclusion AND mainstream AND secondary school (15 results, 0 saved)
	Inclusion AND special educational needs AND staff views (12 results, 0 saved)
	Inclusion AND special educational needs AND student voice (36 results, 0 saved)
	Inclusion AND special educational needs AND pupil views (34 results, 0 saved)
	Inclusion AND special educational needs AND parent views (15 results, 0 saved)
	Enhance AND inclusion AND mainstream AND secondary (17 results, 0 saved)
	Inclu* AND special AND secondary (85 results, 7 saved)

Date	01/05/2024 - 30/07/2024
Search terms/results	Inclusion AND secondary AND UK (3 results, 0 saved)
	Staff views AND inclusion AND mainstream school (3 results, 0 saved)
	Parent views AND inclusion AND SEND (2 results, 0 saved)

Appendix B. Articles examined at a full-text level for the SLR and discounted or saved with the reasons provided.

Article	Discounted	Saved
Jorgensen & Allan (2020)	Free school which chooses the curriculum, approaches, staffing and admissions. Not representative of mainstream secondary schools	
Wood & Legg (2020)	Barriers focus	
Dimitrellou & Male (2020)		Secondary school aged pupils with SEND sharing their experiences of mainstream
Lehane (2012) (Thesis)	TA views but a deficit and barriers focus	
Webster and Blatchford (2019)		Exploring support for children with SEND in mainstream secondary schools
Dimitrellou, Hurry & Male (2020)	Assessed the inclusiveness of different schools looking at statistical data	
Norwich and Kelly (2004)	Focus on views of bullying and their current school, mixed participant sample of pupils from mainstream and special schools	
Nind, Boorman & Clarke (2012)	Specialist / pupil referral unit setting	
Ferriday & Cantali (2020)	Barriers focus and the secondary school had a specialist provision unit	
Blatchford & Webster (2018)	Classroom size, barriers focus	
Leifer, Borg & Bölte (2022)	Swedish	
Belli (2021)	Focus on adult views, barriers focus	
Bond & Hebron (2016)	Focus on staff views in a mainstream resource provision, not a mainstream school	
Thomson (2013)	New Zealand	
Dimitrellou & Hurry (2019) school belonging	Statistical measures from questionnaires	
de Boer & Kuijper (2021)	New Zealand	
Whitburn (2017)	Australia	
Efthymiou & Kington (2017)	Based in Primary school settings	
Hebron & Bond (2017)	Enhanced resource provision schools in Scotland	
Humphrey & Symes (2013)	Deficit / barriers to inclusion focus and teacher attitudes focus	
McNerney, Hill & Pellicano (2015)	Exploring what could work as inclusive provision, not what is happening currently	
Kefallinou & Howes (2022)		Young people's views of school
Kendall (2019)	Lived experiences review paper	

Rogers (2007)	Parental views of barriers to education focused upon	
Hodson et al (2005)	Project piece of research comparing pre and post project stages. Ratings of inclusiveness were compared pre/post project.	
Florian & Rouse (2001)	Review article, not a research article. Furthermore, there is a deficit and barriers to inclusion focus	
Humphrey & Lewis (2008)		Teacher and pupil views
Goodman & Burton (2010)	Behaviour, emotional and social difficulties focus	
Jerwood (2001)	Teacher views on the impact of inclusion on teachers	
Hannah (2001)	Looking at the concept of SEN	
Beaver (2016)		13 pupils with SEN in a mainstream secondary. Focusing on aspects such as support in classroom, making friends, sense of belonging
Lythgoe (2015)	Barriers focus, primary and secondary aged pupils	
Grey (2001)	Focuses on the role of the local authority	
Mudoch (2019)		Pupil views (with SEND) from mainstream secondary school
Waddington (2007)	Parent and teacher views on the key factors for inclusion in mainstream versus special settings. Barriers and deficits highlighted	
Black (2012)	What could work, not what has worked or what is working	
Porter & Ingram (2021)		Pupils with SEND exploring experiences of inclusive practices
Goodall & MacKenzie (2019)	Negative experiences of mainstream education	
Hoy, Parson, & Kovshoff (2018)	Transition from primary to secondary – exploring support strategies for pupils with ASD to an enhanced resource provision within a mainstream secondary school site	
Additional articles from updated search		
Wilson et al., (2024)	Parental beliefs towards inclusion, discounted as parents with and without pupils with ASD, differences in attitudes	

Dunleavy & Sorte (2022)	Parents/carers voices in relation to their experience of inclusion and the process of their child attending mainstream school, negative experiences and barriers rather than ways forward or positive what works	
Grey literature search 2022		
Murdoch (2019)		Thesis exploring the inclusive practices of secondary schools for pupils with SEND from pupils, parents and teachers
Beaver (2016)		Thesis exploring the views of pupils to improve the experiences of inclusion for pupils with SEND
Grey literature search 2024		
Greany et al (2024)	Study on belonging, not focusing on inclusive practices for pupils with SEND	

Appendix C. CASP (2018) screening questions and appraisal for SLR studies.

	Webster and Blatchford (2019)	Humphrey and Lewis (2008)	Dimitrellou and Male (2020)	Kefallinou & Howes (2022)	Porter and Ingram (2021)	Murdoch (2019)	Beaver (2016)
1. Are the results valid?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2. Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
5. Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
6. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?	Unsure	Unsure	Yes	Unsure	Unsure	Yes	Yes
7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	Unsure	Unsure	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Unsure	Yes	Yes
9. Is there a clear statement of findings?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
10. How valuable is the research?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Overall "yes" screening score	8/10	9/10	10/10	9/10	8/10	10/10	10/10

CASP screening questions and prompts for decisions

1. Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research? The goal and relevance of the research was considered and why it was important.

2. Is a qualitative methodology appropriate? The research goal was considered in relation to the methodology.

3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research? Consideration was given as to whether the researchers had given justifications for their methods and research design.

4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research? It considered how participants were selected, why the participants were selected, if the participants were the most appropriate in relation to the type of information sought for the study.

5. Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue? It was considered if the setting for the data collection was justified, it if was clear how the data was collected e.g. interviews, focus groups, if the methods chosen were justified, how clear the process for data collection was and if this was made explicit and if it was justified.

6. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered? It was considered if the researcher had critically examined their own role for potential bias and influence during the initial phase of the research formulation and the data collection process.

7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration? Consideration as to whether the research was explained to participants, how the research handled informed consent or confidentiality and if approval had been sought from the ethics committee.

8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous? Consideration was given to if there was an in-depth description of the analysis process, how themes were derived, if data is presented to support the findings and if the researcher critically examined their role in the process.

9. Is there a clear statement of findings? Consideration was given to whether the findings were explicit, with an adequate discussion of the evidence both for and against the researcher's arguments and if the credibility of the findings were discussed.

10. How valuable is the research? Consideration was given to the contribution of the study in relation to existing knowledge, policy, or practice, if new areas for research are identified and if there is a discussion about how the research may be used.

Appendix D. Appraisal and synthesis of the selected studies for the SLR to generate themes of interpretation.

	Overarching themes				
	Relationships	Support	Adaptations	Communication	Belonging:
	Second order themes				
	-Peer relationships -Relationships with teaching assistants -Relationships with pastoral staff -friendships	-interventions -group support -one to one support -additional resources		- listening to views	- within the classroom, - acceptance
Webster and Blatchford (2019)		-Support from teaching assistants seen as critical for facilitating inclusion -high ratio of support - support is helpful			
Humphrey and Lewis (2008)	-Support from teaching assistants		-Quiet classrooms		
Dimitrellou and Male (2020)	-Working in groups provides opportunities for interactions and to develop friendships -fun teachers -positive relationships with teachers -gratitude to TAs for their support, compassion and encouragement	-Attention and help provided -staff approachable to talk to and respect their privacy - interactive lessons -	-Taught in a way that facilitates their learning -Skills of teacher to manage behaviours		
Kefallinou and Howes (2022)	-Positive relationships with support staff	-Support from support staff is welcomed within lessons	-flexibility in support received		

Murdoch (2019)	-home-school relationship -relationship between teachers and young person		- recognition of difficulties such as transitions	- being listened to	-perception of the pupil by the school
Beaver (2016)	-positive relationships with peers -positive relationships with staff	-support from teachers -support from teaching assistants -support outside of the classroom -		-being consulted with	-feeling included in the school
Porter and Ingram (2021)	-Emotional support from staff - staff seen as trusted adults and helping with problems -being accepted by peers		- enthusiastic teachers -no homework -minimal writing - clear instructions and understanding of tasks - Practical activities		-extra-curricular activities -feeling supported and respected -investment from staff in the "whole person"

Appendix E. Ethics Approval.

Thursday 4th May 2023
Ref: **S1522 Chair Approval Minor Amendments**

Dear Katie Roots and ▮▮▮▮▮▮
Your name and contact details:- Katie Roots, ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
Today's date:-28/04/2023
Title of the revised project:- An exploratory study of the factors which facilitate the inclusion of students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in mainstream secondary schools.
Are you an undergraduate, postgraduate or staff? PGR
Details of the previous study:
Applicant: Katie Roots
Title: An appreciative inquiry of facilitative factors within mainstream schools which are perceived to support the inclusion of students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).
Date of approval: 21/12/2022
Reference number (if known):
S1469
As Chair of the Ethics Committee I have considered your request and I am happy to grant approval for the following changes:

List of significant changes in the proposed study. This list should include any changes which could potentially impact on ethical risks of the work e.g. moving from student participants to vulnerable adults; use of sensitive stimulus materials; changes in remuneration or consent procedures:

1. This proposal will focus on one research question only which will gather the views of parents/carers/school staff and pupils. The research question for this proposal will be:
Research question 1 (RQ1)
What facilitates the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) within mainstream secondary schools?
a) according to the views of pupils?
b) according to the views of parents/carers
c) according to the views of school staff
The focus group interviews with school staff have been removed.
The appreciative inquiry process with school staff has also been removed. This means that the second research question has also been removed.

Independently of the Ethics Committee procedures, supervisors also have responsibilities for the risk assessment of projects as detailed in the safety pages of the University web site. Ethics Committee approval does not alter, replace, or remove those responsibilities, nor does it certify that they have been met.

Yours sincerely

*Jackson Chair, Ethics
Committee*

Appendix F. Information sheet for SENDCo participants

The University of
Nottingham

UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Katie Roots, and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of Nottingham. I am also currently on placement with the Educational Psychology Service in ███████████████. As part of my Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology I am conducting research which explores the perceptions of inclusive provision in mainstream secondary schools for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). I will also be approaching pupils with SEND and their parents to gather their views too. I am hoping to collate examples of inclusion and celebrate what is already in place.

I am hoping to gather your views of "what works" in your school to support inclusion for pupils with special educational needs. Solution orientated approaches will be used to guide the interviews.

Individual interviews will be conducted via Microsoft Teams or face to face. Interviews will take approximately 30-60 minutes.

The interviews will be audio recorded to enable analysis to occur. Information will be stored securely. All data will be anonymised to ensure confidentiality.

If you feel you would be interested in participating in the individual interview, to share the ways in which your school supports inclusion for pupils with SEND, I would appreciate it if you would email me back with your expression of interest. Also, if you have any questions about the research, please get in touch using the contact details below.

This research is being overseen and supervised by ███████████, Programme Director for the Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology. He can be contacted using the details below.

Your expression of interest will be greatly appreciated and will not put you under any further obligation nor affect any future interactions with the Educational Psychology Service.

If possible, please could you reply via email before the 1st June, I would ideally like to collect data before the end of July.

Contact details
Please email me: ███████████████████ or ███████████████████████ or call me: █████████
Research supervisor: █████████████████████████████████

Thank you for your time.
Yours Sincerely,
Katie Roots,
Trainee Educational Psychologist, University of Nottingham

Appendix G. Information sheet for pupil participants

The University of Nottingham

UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

Hello,

My name is Katie Roots, and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of Nottingham. I am also currently on placement with the Educational Psychology Service in ▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇. As part of my Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology I would like to conduct some research exploring the perceptions of inclusive provision in mainstream secondary schools for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

This study aims to capture your experiences of inclusive practices within mainstream secondary schools in ▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇. Solution orientated approaches will be used to guide the interviews.

I would like to gather your views in an Individual interview. The interview will be completed via Microsoft Teams or face to face in person.

The interviews will be audio recorded to enable analysis to occur. Information will be stored securely. All data will be anonymised to ensure confidentiality.

If you feel you would be interested in participating in the individual interview, to examine and consider ways to enhance the inclusive provision within secondary schools, I would appreciate it if you would let your parent/carer or school know. If you have any questions about the research, please ask your school to contact me on your behalf. This research is being overseen and supervised by Nicholas Durbin, Programme Director for the Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology. He can be contacted using the details below.

Contact details
Please email me: ▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇ or ▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇ or call me: ▇▇▇▇▇▇
Research supervisor: ▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇

Thank you for your time.
Yours Sincerely,
Katie Roots, Trainee Educational Psychologist, University of Nottingham

Summary
My name is Katie.
I am from the University of Nottingham.
I am exploring what makes secondary schools inclusive for pupils who receive extra support in school.
I would like to hear your views and experiences.
I will ask you some questions.
I will record our discussion and use your answers in my research. I will make the information confidential so that no one will know that the information came from you. I will only tell someone at your school about something you have said if I am worried about your safety.
Interviews will take about 30 minutes.
The interview will take place at your school.
You can choose if you want to take part or not.

Appendix H. Information sheet for parent/carer participants

The University of
Nottingham

UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

Title of Project: An exploratory study of the positive perceptions and experiences of inclusion in mainstream secondary schools for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) from the perspectives of pupils with SEND, parents and carers of pupils with SEND and special educational needs coordinators.

Ethics Approval Number: S1522
Researchers: Katie Roots   *Supervisors:*

Contact Details:

This is an invitation to take part in a research study as part of a doctoral thesis and forms part of the researcher's Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology at the University of Nottingham. Before you give consent to take part it is important for you to understand why the research is being conducted and what your role may be. Please read the information carefully. Please ask if you would like further information.

Who will conduct the research?
Katie Roots, Trainee Educational Psychologist, University of Nottingham.

Why have you been chosen?
You have been chosen as your child receives additional support within school. They may have an education and health care plan and may have special educational needs or disabilities.

What is the aim of the research?
This study aims to explore the positive factors and supportive strategies within the school environment and aims to build upon these to support positive change for children with special educational needs. The process will involve gaining the views of school staff, students and their parents/carers.

What will you be asked to do?
You will be asked to take part in an individual interview. The interview will take approximately one hour. You will be asked questions about positive experiences of inclusive practice within your child's school.

Your engagement with the research is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw at any point without giving a reason. The interview will be audio recorded. The audio recording will be saved and will be password protected. The data from the interview will be transcribed. Your identity will remain anonymous, and all information will remain confidential. All data collected will be held in a secure manner with password protection for 7 years and will remain confidential when written up.

Can your child still be involved in the research even if you do not want to?
If you do not wish to participate but you would like for your child to participate, this is still possible if you give your consent. There is a separate consent form for you to sign in relation to your child's participation.

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to ask now. We can also be contacted after your participation at the above address.

If you have any complaints about the study, please contact:

█████████████████████████████████████

Appendix I. Consent form for SENDCos and parent/carer participants

<table>
<tr><td>School of
Psychology

Consent Form</td><td>The University of
Nottingham

UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA</td></tr>
</table>

Title of Project: An exploratory study of the positive perceptions and experiences of inclusion in mainstream secondary schools for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) from the perspectives of pupils with SEND, parents and carers of pupils with SEND and special educational needs coordinators.

Approval Number or Taught Project Archive Number: S1522
Researcher: Katie Roots ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
Supervisor: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Please read the following statements and indicate YES or NO

- Have you read and understood the Information Sheet?   YES/NO

- Have you had the chance to ask questions about the research?   YES /NO

- Have all your questions been responded to satisfactorily?   YES/NO

- Do you understand you are able to pull out from the study   YES/NO
  at any time and without giving a reason?

- Do you give permission to be part of a solution focused approach?   YES/NO

- Do you give permission to be part of an individual interview?   YES/NO

- Do you agree for your interview to be voice recorded, and the   YES/NO
  Information transcribed?

- Do you give permission for the data from this study to be shared   YES/NO
  with other researchers for them to check my analysis of the data?

- Do you agree to your anonymised data being used as part of a thesis   YES/NO
  and possible future publications based on the thesis

- Do you agree to take part in the study?   YES/NO

I agree to take part in the study.
Signature of the Participant: Date:

Name (in block capitals)

I have explained the study to the above participant, and he/she has agreed to take part.
Signature of researcher:

Date

Appendix J. Parent/carer consent form for their child

School of Psychology

Consent Form

The University of Nottingham

UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

Title of Project: An exploratory study of the positive perceptions and experiences of inclusion in mainstream secondary schools for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) from the perspectives of pupils with SEND, parents and carers of pupils with SEND and special educational needs coordinators.

Approval Number or Taught Project Archive Number: S1522
Researcher: Katie Roots ███████████████████████
Supervisor: ██

Please read the following statements and indicate YES or NO

- Have you read and understood the Information Sheet?   YES/NO

- Do you agree to your child participating in an individual interview?   YES/NO

- Do you agree to your child participating in generating ideas for   YES/NO
  inclusive provision as part of the solution focused focus?

- Do you agree to the interviews with your child being voice recorded   YES/NO
  and their responses transcribed?

- Do you agree to your child's data being used as part of a thesis and   YES/NO
  any publications based upon this thesis?

- I have explained the study to my child and they have given verbal   YES/NO
  agreement to take part.

- I understand that my child does not have to take part in the research   YES/NO
  And that I and/or my child can withdraw any time up to the point of
  writing up without giving a reason.

- Do you agree for your child to take part in the study?   YES/NO

This study has been explained to me to my satisfaction, and I agree for my child to take part. I understand that I can withdraw my child from the study at any time. I also understand that my child can ask to withdraw at any time.

Name of child (please print)

Your name: Relationship to child:

Parent/Carer signature: Date:

Verbal consent check with child

Are you happy to participate in this research?   YES/NO

Appendix K. GDPR privacy notice shared with participants

The University of Nottingham

UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

GDPR privacy notice for participants

Title of Study: *Title of Project: An exploratory study of the positive perceptions and experiences of inclusion in mainstream secondary schools for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) from the perspectives of pupils with SEND, parents and carers of pupils with SEND and special educational needs coordinators.*

Name of Researcher(s):

Katie Roots (Trainee Educational Psychologist)
Supervised by ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ Programme Director of Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology

We would like to invite you to take part in our research study. Before you decide we would like you to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. We will go through the information sheet with you and answer any questions you have.

Why have I been invited?

You are invited to take part because you have a child with special educational needs. Additional support needs who attend a mainstream secondary school.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form (completion and return of a Questionnaire can be taken as implied consent). If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. This would not affect your legal rights.

Expenses and payments:

Participants will not be paid an allowance to participate in the study.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Sharing your views about inclusive schooling and your child's experiences may be uncomfortable and may generate a range of emotions.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

We cannot promise the study will help you but the information we get from this study may help to enhance inclusive provision for children with special educational needs within mainstream schools, including your child's school. This information may also encourage professionals working within the education sector to evaluate their own practice and the provision on offer within their own educational setting to enhance outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs.

What if there is a problem?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you should ask to speak to the researchers who will do their best to answer your questions. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally, you can do this by contacting the School Research Ethics Officer. All contact details are given at the end of this information sheet.

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

Your participation is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without your legal rights being affected. If you withdraw then the information collected so far may not be possible to extract and erase after three months and this information may still be used in the project analysis.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results from the study will be written up as part of a thesis research project for the Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology. Future publications may be based upon this write-up. All information will remain confidential.

Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is being organised by Katie Roots, a Trainee Educational Psychologist studying a Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology at the University of Nottingham.

Who has reviewed the study?

All research at the University of Nottingham is looked at by a group of people, called a Research Ethics Committee (REC), to protect your interests. This study has received a Favourable Ethical Opinion by the School of Sociology and Social Policy Research Ethics Committee.

Further information and contact details

Researcher: Katie Roots email: ███████████████████████
Supervisor/PI: ███████████████, Director of Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology, email: ███████████████████████
██

Section 2 -
Privacy information for Research Participants
For information about the University's obligations with respect to your data, who you can get in touch with and your rights as a data subject, please visit:
https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/utilities/privacy.aspx.

Why we collect your personal data
We collect personal data under the terms of the University's Royal Charter in our capacity as a teaching and research body to advance education and learning. Specific purposes for data collection on this occasion are your name, your child's name and their special educational need or additional support they are receiving at school.

Legal basis for processing your personal data under GDPR
The legal basis for processing your personal data on this occasion is Article 6(1a) consent of the data subject

How long we keep your data
The University may store your identifiable research data for a minimum period of 7 years

after the research project finishes. The researchers who gathered or processed the data may also store the data indefinitely and reuse it in future research. Measures to safeguard your stored data include encryptions processes of files with password protection, the use of pseudonyms and anonymisation of all data.

Who we share your data with
Extracts of your data may be disclosed in published works that are posted online for use by the scientific community. Your data may also be stored indefinitely on external data repositories (e.g., the UK Data Archive) and be further processed for archiving purposes in the public interest, or for historical, scientific or statistical purposes. It may also move with the researcher who collected your data to another institution in the future.

Appendix L. Debrief form for participants

The University of Nottingham

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Debrief Form

Title of Study: *Title of Project: An exploratory study of the positive perceptions and experiences of inclusion in mainstream secondary schools for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) from the perspectives of pupils with SEND, parents and carers of pupils with SEND and special educational needs coordinators.*

Thank you for participating in my research.

I hope you enjoyed sharing your views, they are really important for my research.

If you have any questions about the research, you can contact me or my supervisor by email:
Researcher:
Supervisor:

All information will be anonymised and no identifiable information will be used in the write up. Pseudonyms will be used for any names in the interview transcripts and numbers or pseudonyms will be given for describing each case study in the write up. All written information, for example, consent forms or notes will be securely locked away. All electronic files will be given a password to ensure only the researcher can access them. Data will be held for 7 years until it is deleted/destroyed.

The results from the study will be written up as part of a thesis research project for the Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology. Future publications may be based upon this write-up. All information will remain confidential.

The information we get from this study may help to enhance inclusive provision for children with special educational needs within mainstream secondary schools. The information may also encourage professionals working within the education sector to evaluate their own practice and the provision on offer within their own educational setting to enhance outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs.

You still have the right to withdraw your information until 31st August 2023, after which it may not be possible to extract your information and it may still be used in the write up.

If you have any questions, please contact me at the email address above.

Kind regards

Katie Roots
Trainee Educational Psychologist
University of Nottingham

Appendix M. Interview schedules for SENDCos parent/carers and pupil participants

Interview Schedule for SENDCos

Firstly, I want to thank you for taking part in this research. Through a solution focused approach, we will be exploring what supports children with special educational needs to be included within mainstream secondary schools.

Today, I would like to explore your views on inclusive practices within your school setting. I would like to gain an understanding of what is already in place to support pupils with special educational needs.

I just wanted to remind you that this interview will be recorded so I can transcribe it later. However, your name and any other potentially identifying information will be replaced with a pseudonym in order for this to remain confidential. If for any reason you decide that you no longer wish for your information to be used, you are able to withdraw your data until August 2023. The interview should last no longer than 45 minutes, are you happy to proceed? Do you have any questions before we start?

Inclusion

I am asking all participants to give their own definition/ understanding of the term "inclusion".

How would you define or describe the term inclusion or inclusive practice?

The Oxford Languages Dictionary defines the term *inclusion* as…."the state or action of being included within a group or structure… the practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalised, such as those who have physical or intellectual disabilities and members of other minority groups".

Positives and strengths

I want to focus on the positives and strengths of your school in relation to your inclusive practice/inclusion.

What works well in your school to support pupils with SEND?

- What practices and procedures do you have in place to share information across the school to support inclusive practices?
- How do you support staff to work with pupils with SEND?
- Describe a time when you felt you supported a student with SEND. When and how did this happen?

What is it about your school which helps children and young people with SEND to thrive and to make progress?

- What has the school achieved that makes a difference to pupils within this area? What are you proud of?
- Thinking about the last year, what has worked really well in terms of support for pupils with SEND?
- How do you support pupils with SEND to have a good understanding of themselves and their emotions?

What do you think a child or young person would say about the school? How do you think they view the support / strategies? What would pupil voice identify in relation to what

happens in school?

Thank you so much for your time today, I really appreciate it. Is there anything else that you think would be useful or that you would like to share? Any final thoughts or comments?

Interview Schedule for parents/carers

Firstly, I want to thank you for taking part in this research. Through a solution focused approach, we will be exploring what supports children/young people with special educational needs to be included within mainstream secondary schools.

Today, I would like to explore your views on inclusive practices within the setting your child attends. I would like to gain an understanding of what is already in place to support pupils with special educational needs.

I just wanted to remind you that this interview will be recorded so I can transcribe it later. However, your name and any other potentially identifying information will be replaced with a pseudonym in order for this to remain confidential. If for any reason you decide that you no longer wish for your information to be used, you are able to withdraw your data until August 2023. The interview should last no longer than 45 minutes, are you happy to proceed? Do you have any questions before we start?

Inclusion

I am asking all participants to give their own definition/ understanding of the term "inclusion".

How would you define or describe the term inclusion or inclusive practice?

The Oxford Languages Dictionary defines the term *inclusion* as…."the state or action of being included within a group or structure… the practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalised, such as those who have physical or intellectual disabilities and members of other minority groups".

Positives and strengths

I want to focus on the positives and strengths of the school your child attends in relation to your inclusive practice/inclusion.

- How is your child supported at school?
- What additional support strategies or resources does your child have to help them in school?
- What works well in your child's school to support pupils with SEND?
- What has made the most positive difference for your child in school?

Thank you so much for your time today, I really appreciate it. Is there anything else that you think would be useful or that you would like to share? Any final thoughts or comments?

Interview Schedule for pupil participants

Thank you for taking part in my research.

I want to hear about how your school supports you to do well and to be included.

I just wanted to remind you that this interview will be recorded so I can write it up later. However, no one will be able to identify that it is your information as I will change your name and any other details. The interview will last up to 30 minutes, are you happy to take part? Do you have any questions before we start?

Inclusion

I am asking everyone to give their own definition/ understanding of the term "inclusion".

How would you define or describe the term inclusion or inclusive practice?

Positives and strengths

I want to focus on what works well in your school to help you to be included.

How are you supported to be part of your school?

What supports you in the classroom?

How are you supported by the staff in your school to manage your emotions?

What works well in school to support pupils who are different or who might have special educational needs?

Who helps you in the classroom and in school?

> Thank you so much for your time today, I really appreciate it. Is there anything else that you think would be useful or that you would like to share? Any final thoughts or comments?

Appendix N: Examples of Annotated Transcripts for Analysis

Interview transcript

Speaker 1: Could you just tell me about your role in school?

Speaker 2: I am a SENCo, assistant principal, senior leadership team, and then I'm also one of the safeguarding officers and then I'm also in charge of EAL as well.

Speaker 1: Looking at the strengths, what does work well in your school in relation to the practices that you have to make it inclusive for pupils with SEND?

Speaker 2: Before this I was in an inner city school before, not even a city. But I was on middle leadership and my job was so much harder. I think I might be a little bit less here but like but I've gone up to senior leadership and my role is so much easier once you're on senior leadership as you can kind of just make decisions without going through other people and having to kind of ask all of the time to people who don't really understand the decisions and the response is no. Whereas now I just kind of decide to do something

Speaker 2: I've had a real push on getting the parents involved we work closely with parents, we have a partnership. I think the biggest thing for inclusion is your parents need to be involved because we need their support to understand their child and to invest in what we are doing to make it inclusive in school. The views of parents are really important to us and we have a good communication system with them right from transition. At the end of the day, if you haven't got the parent on side, then it doesn't matter what you put in school, it's not going to be successful

Speaker 2: We do a lot of staff training to share information about different approaches which enables messages to be filtered down to staff.

Speaker 1: What support do you have in place in the classroom?

Speaker 2: With our children got loads of interventions like lots of different interventions we have lots of reading focus and writing interventions. We have a significant amount of children with a reading age of seven or less. Boosting reading skills is massive to help inclusion because reading and writing is in every subject so like if these children can't read, then they're not doing any learning.

We listen and respond to the concerns raised by our pupils with SEND. We value their ideas and try to make adjustments when things are not working.

Speaker 2: The strategies we put into place are becoming more common in school and it enables support to look different for different people, so the culture becomes less focused on exam results and more on wider outcomes towards adulthood.

Speaker 1: How do you support emotional wellbeing?

Speaker 2: So we find lots of children get overwhelmed more at break time and lunch times than their actual lessons. So we have lots of children. We leave early passes, which work really well so they can leave lessons 2 minutes early before the corridors get busy.

Handwritten annotations:
SENCo role in senior leadership team
→ decisions
→ share info
parents as partners
communication with people
communication with staff → staff training
wider school culture
classroom support / provision / Interventions
→ Pupil voice + what is not working
wider school culture. "normalising"
flexibility
adaptations cards to leave

Interview transcript extract from a pupil participant

Speaker 1: How would you describe inclusion?

Speaker 2: Inclusion is what people do to make you feel welcome, included, not left out and that you are valued.

Speaker 1: Thank you that's really helpful. We are going to tal about inclusion in school now and what you thin wors well in your school.

Speaker 1: Can you tell me about the support you might have in school?

Speaker 2: I have a coloured overlay but my friend doesn't. I won't go to my lessons without Mrs P as I can't read or answer the questions. I have a card I can use to avoid the busy corridors a few minutes before the end of lessons. I like that. "it's on my pupil passport so everyone knows about me, they just accept that I need something different sometimes and that its ok. No one makes me feel that stupid or weird.

Speaker 1: Is there anything else you have access to in school which helps you?

Speaker 2: They let me come in a bit later if I have had a bad day or when I am really struggling.

Speaker 1: Is there anywhere in school you can go to for help?

Speaker 2: The base is less busy; the staff really help in there too. I know I can manage at school, there are places I can go to like the calm room and I can spend time out if I need to, it helps me to feel safe and calm.

Handwritten annotations:
classroom provision
sharing info
culture/ethos / "normalising"
relationship with pupil & staff TA's
Flexibility / adjustments for individuals
→ feeling of safety
→ Quiet spaces
→ physical environment provision

Interview transcript extract from a parent participant

Speaker 1: I am asking all participants to share their own descriptions of the term inclusion, how would you describe inclusion or inclusive practice?

Speaker 2: "For me it's making sure my child is not disadvantaged, that they have the same opportunities and experiences in life as anyone else".

Speaker 1: What support is in place for your child at school to help them to be included and to be successful?

Speaker 2: I know their journey might look a bit different with different things in place to get there. For X they have interventions, they have support with their emotions, they have coloured overlays in the classroom. If X needs additional support from an adult to complete a task, inclusion means that is what they get there is that flexibility and adjustment in place. X goes to a colouring club at lunchtime, it's quiet and they can colour which is calming for them. They have support from inclusion when they need to, they can go there.

Speaker 1: So a range of different strategies which are in place to support them, that's really positive.

Speaker 1: Are there any things which help with their emotional wellbeing?

Speaker 2: Yes, they also have a pass to get out of the classroom if they need to and they can go to a quiet room to relax and stop them from becoming more anxious or upset. I know that staff also help X often by talking to them they have a good relationship and understand X's needs. I do get call and emails from school so I now if they have had a particularly good or bad day and why. X has been on a reduced timetable in the past which was a positive approach as it helped X to re-set and gradually build up to full time again.

Speaker 1: Can you tell me more about the relationships which support your child to be included at school?

Speaker 2: Yeah Mr X can be really helpful and a go to if X is particularly unsettled. I thin most staff now X well and can offer support when it is needed as X cant always do that for themselves. There are some staff who really care.

Handwritten annotations:
individual support
TA / adult / teacher
→ Inclusion Base → provision
communication betwn parents + school
relationships
Parent / Flexibility
communication culture
relationship with staff

Appendix O: Analysis Process

Examples of working through the themes and code generation process.

Classroom strategies (blue):
- oaps / break cards
- Laptop
- nmebdee
- T.A
- Combine → both types of provision
- area/culture messages — wrong location
- Wider School Strategies → quiet spaces
- Clubs
- Inclusion base SEND

Communication (green):
- with parents → SEND days
- transition
- more than just this / shared consensus / sharing information & develop knowledge
- into Pupils
- Pupil Voice remit transition — Separate? no leave... in this context/ purpose
- parents
- with staff
- CPD → to training → meeting

Relationships (purple):
- Staff ↔ Pupils
- How → check ins Network
- Rapport trust genuine listening — qualities
- Impact on Wellbeing engagement
- School ↔ home — Strategies

Whole School (green):
- messages sent/shared with staff
- culture ethos → shared
- senco role
- culture/ shared approach
- belonging → pupils? Needs to be a separate theme.

Approaches (yellow):
- Flexibility
- Individual
- Responsiveness
- In class in school
- Adaptations
- child centred

Belonging (orange):
- normalising language/ approaches/ differences
- connect → school
- Included
- Pupils
- Feelings → sharing Novel
- Safe
- Valued

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