



How do children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) enrolled in special ASD classes in mainstream primary schools make sense of themselves and their educational experiences?

Child, parent and teacher insights

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Abstract

Aims: School is a site of critical importance in the construction of sense of self. A corpus of qualitative literature indicates that adolescent students with ASD attending mainstream schools often construe themselves as “different” to typically-developing peers in a negative sense. However, the voice of younger children and those enrolled in special ASD educational provision is largely absent from this qualitative research base. The current study explores how children with ASD, aged eight to twelve years, enrolled in special ASD classes in Irish primary schools, make sense of themselves and their school experiences.

Design & Methodology: An exploratory multiple-case study design was adopted involving five child-parent-teacher triads, with the individual child defined as the “case” or unit of analysis. Interviews with children were mediated via an accessible “Talking Mat” pictorial communication technique and semi-structured interviews were conducted with parents and teachers.

Results: Adopting an experiential approach which foregrounds personal meaning for participants, data was analysed using a multi-perspectival interpretative phenomenological analysis [IPA] (Larkin et al., 2019). Patterns of convergence and divergence were identified in cross-case synthesis. Master themes related to the child’s lived school experience include complex friendship dynamics, a supportive learning environment and navigating the learning process. Master themes related to the child’s sense of self include pockets of positive self-appraisal, a questioning versus an unquestioning self and the impact of inclusive practice.

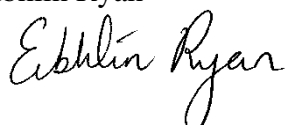
Conclusions: The research addresses an identified gap in the literature by privileging the voice of the primary school-aged child with ASD attending special class provision and eliciting focal perspectives of key adults in the child’s world. In doing so, the research builds an empirical knowledge base about lived experiences within an expanding model of partial inclusion in Ireland- the special ASD class in the mainstream school. Based on the research findings, implications are presented for educational policy and practice and future research directions.

Key words: Autism, special education, child’s voice, school experience, sense of self

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own original research and does not contain the work of any other individual, save those identified and acknowledged in the usual way.

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Glossary of Abbreviations

APA	American Psychiatric Association
AS	Asperger's Syndrome
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
BPS	British Psychological Society
BPVS-3	British Picture Vocabulary Scale (Third-Edition)
CRPD	United Nation's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
EP	Educational Psychologist
ERIC	Education Resources Information Center
ESPEN Act	Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act
HSE	Health Service Executive
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
MIREC	Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
SENs	Special Educational Needs
SIM	School Inclusion Model
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
TD	Typically-Developing
WoE	Weight of Evidence

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview of Topic Area

As a child's primary social arena for peer interactions, school has long been recognised as having a formative influence on a child's sense of self, or how he/she comes to think and feel about themselves (Hodge et al., 2019). Research attests that school can be a particularly challenging social milieu for pupils with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), a neurodevelopmental condition characterised by a dyad of impairments, including social communication and interaction difficulties and restricted and repetitive behaviours or interests (American Psychiatric Association, [APA], 2013). For instance, research attests that pupils with ASD often experience elevated rates of social exclusion and bullying (e.g. Humphrey & Hebron, 2015; Rowley et al., 2012), low levels of peer support (Kasari et al., 2012; Symes & Humphrey, 2010) and may perceive the sensory school environment as overwhelming (e.g. Goodall, 2019; Sproston et al., 2017). In concurrent recognition of school's formative influence on sense of self development and the unique challenges experienced by pupils with ASD in school, recent years have seen an emergent qualitative research focus on exploring how pupils with ASD make sense of themselves within the context of their life at school (e.g., Hodge et al., 2019; McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014; Williams et al., 2019). A recent large-scale review of qualitative studies exploring the lived experiences of pupils with ASD in mainstream post-primary settings indicate that many pupils perceive themselves as "different" from their peers in a negative sense (Williams et al., 2019). This finding is of pertinent concern to Educational Psychologists [EPs] working with pupils with ASD, as negative self appraisal heightens risk of low self-esteem and poor longitudinal mental health outcomes (William et al., 2019).

1.2 Irish Educational Context

The historical context of ASD educational provision in Ireland is unique and complex (Kenny et al., 2020). The past two decades have seen significant change in the educational provision options for pupils with ASD (Bond et al., 2016; National Council for Special Education [NCSE], 2019; Daly et al., 2016). To meet the heterogeneity of individual needs across the ASD spectrum, a continuum of ASD educational provision at primary and post-primary levels has been established (Daly et al., 2016). As part of this continuum, there has been dramatic expansion of ASD special classes within mainstream primary schools, with a 194 per cent increase in special classes in the past decade (NCSE, 2019). However, this expansion has occurred amidst a paucity of research exploring the lived school experiences

and sense of self of children attending such provision. This is likely attributable to the social-communicative difficulties of children with ASD enrolled in special educational settings, which complicates traditional qualitative research methodologies (Fayette & Bond, 2018; Tesfaye et al., 2019).

1.3 Reflexivity Statement

From my background as a primary-school teacher, I have a long-harboured interest in Special Educational Needs (SENs). During my undergraduate degree in Education and Psychology, inclusive education modules and a teaching placement in an ASD class, ignited my interest in “dilemmas of difference” (Norwich, 2008) in educational provision. In particular, I remember much acute reflection on how a child working in a special ASD class within a mainstream school might come to think about themselves in that setting, particularly with increased social awareness in later primary-school that they were working in a different class to their same-age peers.

My first placement as a Trainee EP was in an Early Intervention Disability service, which involved much parental consultation and support. One aspect of these parents’ experience which stuck me was the difficult decision-making process about primary school placement and whether the local mainstream school, a special school or a special class was the best fit for their child. Parents often appeared overwhelmed by, and alone in this decision process, and sometimes sought the psychologist’s perspective to inform their decision. Once more, a personal reflection on “dilemmas of difference” in educational provision arose. While special placements seemed appropriate for the needs of some of these young children, I found myself questioning the longitudinal implications of special class placement in terms of the child’s peer relationships and how that child would come to view him/herself in relation to his/her siblings or same-age peers. Thus, a seed was sown for my doctoral thesis area of interest.

1.4 The Current Study

Adopting an multiple-case study design (Yin, 2018), underpinned by a multi-perspectival Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis [IPA] approach (Larkin et al., 2019), the current research sought to explore how five boys aged between eight to twelve years enrolled in special ASD classes in mainstream schools make sense of themselves and their school experiences. This guiding overarching research question and methodological approach was underpinned by the fundamental theoretical tenets of the constructivist paradigm, in line with the researcher’s ontological worldview that knowledge is socially

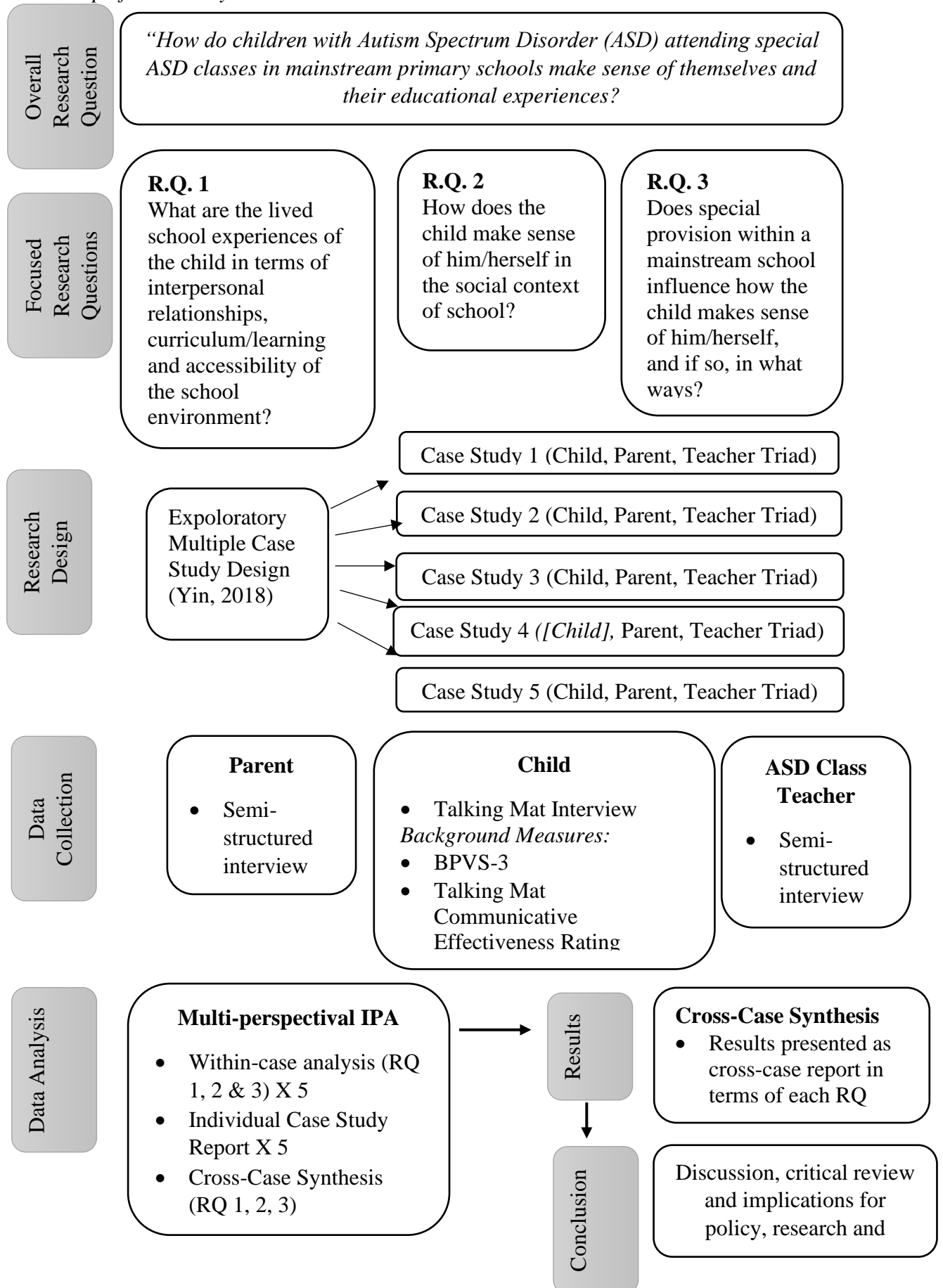
constructed (Mertens, 2010). Qualitative data was elicited in individual case studies from the child, parent and ASD class teacher. Addressing methodological calls for lived experience studies with children with ASD using accessible methods (Tesfaye et al., 2019), child interviews were mediated using a 'Talking Mat' approach. To give direction to the exploratory nature of the overarching research question (Yin, 2018), three focused research questions were elucidated:

- What are the lived school experiences of the child in terms of interpersonal relationships, curriculum/ learning and accessibility of the school environment?
- How does the child make sense of him/herself in the social context of school?
- Does special provision within a mainstream school influence how the child makes sense of him/herself, and if so, in what ways?

Cross-case synthesis presents six master superordinate themes to address the three research objectives in the results section of this thesis. Rich insights into the lived school experiences of case study children are delineated via the master superordinate themes: complex friendship dynamics, a supportive learning environment and navigating the learning process. Master themes relating to the child's sense of self in school include: pockets of positive appraisal, a questioning versus an unquestioning self and the impact of inclusive practice. Noticeable divergence within themes across the case studies are articulated in the results section. The thesis concludes with a reflective critique of the research methodology and implications of results in terms of educational policy, practice and future research directions. A visual map of the thesis structure is provided in *Figure 1.1* to orient the reader.

Figure 1.1

Visual Map of Thesis Layout



Chapter 2: Review Paper

2.1 Introduction

School has long been recognised as a site of formative influence in development of sense of self, or how one comes to describe and evaluate themselves (Harter, 2015; Hodge et al., 2019; Sylva, 1994). School's critical influence on sense of self is empirically supported by a myriad of self and identity theories (eg. Cooley 1902; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Mead, 1934) which converge in grounding internal representations of the "self" as socially constructed through interactions with others (Jones et al., 2015; Williams et al., 2019). As a child's primary social arena for peer interactions, school is therefore deemed to have a profound impact on sense-making processes about the self. The influence of school on the developing self, becomes particularly salient from middle childhood, due to cognitive-developmental advances in the child's social perspective-taking skills and his/her ability to engage in social comparison with peers for the purpose of self-evaluation, skills which play a significant role in shaping self-appraisal (Damon & Hart, 1988; Harter 2015).

Similar to several countries internationally (Bond et al., 2016; Falkmer et al., 2015; Frederickson et al., 2010), a continuum of educational provision exists for pupils with ASD in Ireland at primary and post-primary levels. This continuum includes mainstream provision, dedicated ASD special schools, and special ASD classes within both mainstream and special schools (Bond et al., 2016; Daly et al., 2016; Guldberg et al., 2011). Reflecting current legislative and policy commitments towards the ideals of inclusive education, the majority of pupils with ASD in Ireland at primary and post-primary level are educated within mainstream classes (Daly et al., 2016; Department of Health, 2018), but a significant proportion attend special autism settings. For instance, the past decade has seen a dramatic expansion of special ASD classes within mainstream schools (Banks & McCoy, 2017; Department of Education & Skills [DES], 2019; Kenny et al., 2020; NCSE, 2019). Where pupils are enrolled in special ASD classes in mainstream schools, NCSE (2016) guidelines specify that they should be "meaningfully included in mainstream classes and school activities to the greatest extent possible" (p.13).

Across the continuum of educational provision for students with ASD, there is significant variability in the pupil's potential socialising environment. For instance, dependent on type of provision along the continuum, the pupil may be included in a mainstream class with typically-developing [TD] peers, may be enrolled in a special class context with a small cohort of peers with ASD with the potential for part-time mainstream inclusion, or may be educated

exclusively alongside peers with ASD in a dedicated special ASD school. In concurrent recognition of school as a primary social context for self-appraisal and the varied socialising environments for pupils with ASD across school settings, the current literature review chapter seeks to examine how pupils with ASD make sense of themselves and their school experiences across varying school settings along the continuum of ASD educational provision.

2.2 School as a Context for Development of Sense of Self

2.2.1 Sense of Self Embedded in Social Contexts.

Few topics in the discipline of psychology are more researched than the self, or sense of self (Myers et al., 2010). The expansive corpus of “self” research has led to the proliferation of “self” terminology, including, but not limited to self-concept, self-image, self-esteem, self-worth, self-evaluations, self-appraisals, self-schemas, self-efficacy and self-perceptions (Harter, 2015). While well-researched, the concept of “self” is a fluid and complex construct, overlapping with consciousness, memory and self-awareness (Jackson et al., 2012). The descriptive self-concept, which constitutes a person’s answer to the question “who am I?” is purported to encompass self-representations across physical, active, social and psychological domains (Damon & Hart, 1988; Lee & Hobson, 1998). In parallel to the descriptive self-concept, self-esteem serves as an evaluator of the self (Harter, 2015). Via this evaluative component of the “self” system, a sense of self-worth is assessed, arising in either an overall positively or negatively construed sense of self (Damon & Hart, 1988; Harter, 2015; Hodge et al., 2019; Myers et al., 2010). Therefore, sense of self, encompasses how one might describe oneself in addition to how they appraise their overall self-worth (Harter, 2015; Hodge et al., 2019).

A corpus of psychological theory has long-recognised that the particular content and valence of one’s sense of self is inherently influenced by their socialisation experiences (Harter, 2015; Jones et al., 2015; Lombardo et al., 2010). Cooley (1902), a pioneering theorist on the “self” from a social-cognitive orientation, coined the “looking glass self” model of self-esteem. Cooley (1902) asserted that the perceived appraisal of significant others toward the self comes to define one’s sense of self. According to Cooley’s (1902) theory, one searches for his/her image in the social mirror, internalising the perceived opinions of significant others toward the self (Harter, 2015). Mead (1934) later expanded on Cooley’s (1902) “looking glass self” model, proposed that when a person engages in subjective reflection on the self, he/she implicitly assumes the perspective of another person in the social group, referred to as the “generalised other” to internalise an overall sense of self. As such, Mead (1934) explicitly situated sense of self construction within a social context. The formative influence of social context on the

development of sense of self is also exemplified via comparative self-evaluation processes, which form a core mechanism in the “self” system (Mussweiler, 2003). For instance, Festinger (1954) proposed a seminal social comparison theory, which asserted that humans have an innate desire to evaluate themselves in an accurate manner. Festinger (1954) argued that, in the absence of objective standards, individuals utilise similar others in their social world as a frame of reference against which to inform their self-evaluations. When considered collectively, these seminal theories in relation to the “self”, support the premise that socialisation experiences are crucial in sense of self development. Relatedly, as school serves as a primary social context for the child, socialisation experiences within the school environment are recognised as have a significant impact on developmental sense making processes about the self (Williams et al., 2019).

However, it should be noted that socialisation experiences alone are not the sole proposed theoretical influences on sense of self-development. For instance, Mc Clean et al. (2007) assert that autobiographical narrative construction is a crucial engine for sense of self development. McClean et al. (2007) propose that narrative constructions of autobiographical memories throughout the lifespan serve to both maintain and induce changes in self-perceptions. However, reflecting the complex interrelations between theoretical perspectives on sense of self construction, autobiographical narratives are not exempt from social influences, particularly for children, whose parents usually serve as “conarrators” in personal narratives (McClean et al., 2007, p.266). Relatedly, Nelson (2003) proposes the existence of a ‘cultural self’, asserting that autobiographical narratives are constructed within a broader socio-cultural framework that influences cultural roles, gender stereotypes, values and behavioural norms assigned to the self. As such, while sense of self has long been proposed as a social construction, the theoretical foundations of sense of self construction are dynamic, interrelated and complex.

2.2.2 Developmental Theories of the Self.

While the seminal theories described converge in viewing the self as socially constructed through interactions in the social world, they do not inform us as to the developmental prerequisites to the emergence of a socially constructed, or “looking glass” sense of self (Harter, 2015). More contemporary theorists, including Damon and Hart (1988) and Harter (2015), situate the self within a developmental perspective, providing valuable insight into the normative cognitive acquisitions which endow the developing child an increased facility to engage in social construction of a sense of the self. Furthermore,

2.2.2.1 Early Childhood. From a normative developmental perspective, in very early childhood (two to four years), the child develops the capacity to verbalise simple self-representations (Harter, 2015). The salient content of these self-descriptions are concrete, observable features of the self which are highly differentiated from each other (Damon & Hart, 1988; Harter, 2015). As such, the very young child, is not yet capable of cognitively constructing a concept of global self-esteem (Harter, 2015). The concrete self-evaluations elicited from the child during this period are likely to be overstated in positivity (Harter, 2015; Thompson, 2006), as he/she has not developed the cognitive capacity to engage in social comparison regarding perceived competencies (Ruble & Frey, 1991). Furthermore, due to the egocentric nature of cognitive development at this stage (Piaget, 1960), the child has not yet acquired a ‘theory of mind’, thus lacking the cognitive perspective taking skills to appreciate the mental representations of others (Baron-Cohen et al., 1985; Harris, 2008; Thompson, 2006). These underdeveloped social perspective-taking skills preclude the very young child from accessing and internalising the perceived opinions of significant others toward to self as per the ‘looking glass’ formulation (Harter, 2015). In very early childhood, parent-child reminiscence provides a formative context for the co-construction of the self via development of autobiographical narratives, as the parent recounts the child’s past experiences, and reinforces salient aspects of experience for the child to codify and remember (McClean et al., 2007; Nelson, 2003).

As the child progresses through early childhood (five to seven years), improved perspective-taking skills enable him/her to increasingly recognise that others are actively evaluating the self (Selman, 2003). However, cognitive-developmental limitations impede the child from sufficiently internalising these evaluative judgements for the purpose of self-appraisal (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Harter, 2015). Furthermore, while cognitive developmental advances may enable the young child to utilise social comparison information, this tends to serve the purpose of determining fairness rather than for self-evaluation (Harter, 2015).

2.2.2.2 Middle & Late Childhood. During middle and late childhood (eight to eleven years), cognitive developmental advances contribute to higher-order self-representations which integrate several behaviours (Fischer, 1980; Harter, 2015). For example, the child may describe him/herself via trait labels such as “smart” or “popular”. Salient content of self-representations include competencies/abilities and interpersonal characteristics, particularly in terms of relations with same-gender peers (Damon & Hart, 1988; Harter, 2015). Relatedly, the child’s self-evaluation becomes increasingly linked to others’ appraisal (Ladd & Trooper-Gordan,

2003). A further developmental milestone is the child's ability to formulate an evaluation of global self-esteem, via integration of self-appraisals across core domains including academic and athletic competencies, social acceptance and physical attractiveness (Harter, 2015).

The child typically holds a more balanced view of self, acknowledging positive as well as negative self-attributes, due to cognitive developmental advances in the ability to engage in social comparison assessments with peers (Buunk et al., 2005; Harter, 2015). These self-other evaluations serve as a primary organising principle of the self-system in middle and late childhood (Damon & Hart, 1988). Increased levels of social comparison are also facilitated by the socialisation environment of the school classroom in which children are constantly confronted with same-age peers who provide particularly salient social comparison information (Buunk et al., 2005). Advances in social perspective taking skills enable the child to more accurately access the opinions that significant others hold about the self (Harter, 2015). Parental support scaffolding in autobiographical reasoning for negative experiences at this developmental period is particularly crucial in children's sense of self development, with children of parents who are more expressive and explanatory in discussing negative events, demonstrating higher self-esteem (Bohanek et al., 2006 as cited in McClean et al., 2007). As such, the influence of the child's social context on sense of self development becomes noticeably heightened during this developmental period.

2.2.2.3 Adolescence. Related to the increasing importance of peer relational dynamics and social acceptance for the young adolescent (Jones et al., 2015; McElhaney et al., 2008), interpersonal attributes that determine the nature of one's social acceptance are salient in self descriptions at this developmental stage (Damon & Hart, 1988; Harter, 2015; Jackson et al., 2012; Ladd & Trooper-Gordan, 2003; Rageliene, 2016). Heightened social awareness and concern with the reflected appraisals of peers emerge (Harter, 2015). This preoccupation with the reflected appraisals of others evokes intense introspection or self-reflection, contributing to a decline in global self-esteem (Harter, 2015). There is heightened use of social comparison in early adolescence, via the provision of new social reference groups during the secondary school transition (Harter, 2015).

Middle adolescence (fourteen to sixteen years) evokes a construction of multiple selves across varying social contexts, for instance self with parents, versus self with peers versus self with close friends (Harter, 2015). Cognitive developmental advances enable the adolescent to compare abstract representations of the self across various roles (Fischer, 1980; Fischer &

Bidell, 2006), which can evoke much cognitive conflict and a concern over which attributes represent the true self (Harter, 2015). The internalisation of the opinions toward the self, as communicated by significant others, via the “looking glass” process (Cooley, 1902), continue to represent a significant source of global self-esteem during middle adolescence (Harter, 2015). Varying approval across roles results in differential self-esteem across roles. However, role-specific self-esteem with general classmates most accurately predicts global self-esteem (Harter et al., 1998), as perceived approval from classmates appears to reflect a more objective evaluation of the self for the adolescent than might be provided by close friends or family (Harter, 2015).

2.3 Critical Perspectives on Autism

2.3.1 Dominant Understandings of Autism.

Dominant understandings of autism arise from a medical classificatory paradigm, wherein ASD is conceptualised as a within-person neurobiological disorder (Molloy & Vasil, 2002; Milton, 2013; O’Dell et al., 2016). For instance, the most recent iteration of the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V), defines autism as a neurodevelopmental disorder, which presents as a dyad of impairments including “persistent deficits in social communication and social interactions across multiple contexts” and “restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviours, interests, or activities” (APA, 2013, p.50). Furthermore, the DSM-V stipulates that ASD may or may not be accompanied by an intellectual or language impairment or an associated medical or genetic factor (APA, 2013). Thus, central to the definition of ASD as a neurodevelopmental disorder in the DSM-V, is an acceptance of a “deficient and lacking nature of autism” (O’Dell et al., 2016, p.172). This hegemonic understanding of autism is also legitimised by the sheer dominance of positivist neurobiological perspectives in autism research, primarily undertaken within the fields of psychiatry, psychology and neuroscience (Milton, 2013; O’Dell et al., 2016). For instance, a prevailing contemporary research trend is the identification of brain-based aetiological markers of autism (O’Dell et al., 2016). Further prevalent research trends in evaluating the efficacy of interventions in ameliorating ASD-related difficulties, prioritise the measurement of child variables and outcomes, which arguably reinforces the conceptualisation of autism as an inherently “within the child” disorder (Humphrey & Parkinson, 2006, p.81).

2.3.2 Epistemological Challenges to Dominant Perspectives on Autism.

The afore described research and clinical dominance of neurobiological perspectives of autism likely masks the ongoing and increasing debate about the essential nature of ASD (Flynn & Polak, 2019). For instance, drawing on the complementary fields of critical disability

studies and critical autism studies, recent decades have seen: i). increasing questioning of autism as a socially constructed disorder, ii). a growing momentum to elicit autistic voices from a phenomenological perspective and iii). a concern with advancing more enabling narratives of autism (e.g. Hodge et al., 2019; Milton, 2013; Molloy & Vasil, 2002; O'Dell et al., 2016; Timini et al., 2011).

2.3.2.1 The Social Construction of Autism as a Disorder. In a growing body of autism-related literature written from a social constructivist paradigm, it is asserted that the dominant neurobiological construction of ASD is individualising and pathologising and autism is questioned as a universal diagnostic truth (Molloy & Vasil, 2002; Milton, 2013; O'Dell et al., 2016). Writers within this epistemological context, interrogate the social and cultural influences which legitimise dominant understandings of ASD and propose autism as a neurological/personality difference that has been socially constructed as a disorder (Molloy & Vasil, 2002; Milton, 2013). For instance, it has been argued that the field of psychology has contributed to conditioned concepts of 'normalcy' in terms of social functionality, which have been reinforced by media and service-orientated economies which value sociability (Flynn & Polak, 2019; Milton 2013). Relatedly, Milton (2013) asserts that society's intolerance of difference regarding normative assumptions of sociability has contributed to autism being socially constructed as a disorder. Writers who propose a social construction of autism, highlight the ecological power of referral agents (e.g. schools and special education services) in society's adoption of ASD as a diagnostic category (e.g. Flynn & Polak, 2019; Molloy & Vasil, 2002). Relatedly, it has been contended that ASD has been readily accepted as a diagnostic category, due to the value and currency of ASD diagnoses in securing and co-ordinating scarce special education services (Molloy & Vasil, 2002; Timini, 2010).

Furthermore, some writers have critically questioned the effects of applying a diagnostic autism 'label' on children in terms of identity formation and social repercussions (e.g. Milton, 2013; Mogensen & Mason, 2015; Molloy & Vasil, 2002). For instance, it has been posited that children can become involuntarily defined by an ASD label, which may alter interpretations of their behaviour and identity, thus discrediting their complex personhood (Mogensen & Mason, 2015; Molloy & Vasil, 2002; O'Dell, 2016). Indeed, in an emergent corpus of research which begins to unearth the perspective of adolescents who have received an ASD diagnosis, a sizeable portion of adolescents articulate struggling with their diagnosis and resisted autism as a personal identity due to an associated social stigma of this classified 'disorder' (Jones et al., 2015; Mogensen & Mason, 2015).

2.3.2.2 Phenomenological Perspectives. Research undertaken in the field of autism has long been dominated by studies conducted from a positivist quantitative paradigm, where it has been argued that the researcher adopts an expert role and the child with ASD is treated as a research “object”, rather than a “subject” whose views are actively elicited (Mogensen & Mason, 2015, p.256). Such research has been critiqued due to emphasising deficit-focused constructions of ASD, whilst reductively ignoring the complex personhood of children on the spectrum (Milton, 2013; Mogensen & Mason, 2015; O’Dell, 2016). Inspired by Davidson and Orsini’s (2013) critical autism studies agenda, there have been consistent calls for increased elicitation of the voices of children and adolescents with ASD from a phenomenological perspective with regard to their lived experiences (eg. Milton, 2013; Molloy & Vasil, 2002; O’Dell et al., 2016). Proponents of increased phenomenological autism research recognise that autism is not solely a diagnostic category, but also a lived experience shaped by socio-cultural context and influences (O’Dell et al., 2016). Furthermore, phenomenological perspectives recognise that children with an ASD diagnosis do not possess a universal experience/perspective, thus remediating against “us and them” classificatory processes and respecting the complex personhood of individual children with autism (O’Dell et al., 2016).

2.3.2.3 Neurodiversity Discourse. The dominant deficit-orientated neurobiological narrative of ASD has also been increasingly challenged by a competing discourse of neurodiversity. Similar to traditional neurobiological perspectives, the growing neurodiversity movement also utilises neuroscience to explain autism, however it does so via an enabling rather than pathologising lens (Broderick & Ne’eman, 2008). In a neurodiverse perspective, autism is conceptualised as a neurological difference rather than deficit/disorder. Furthermore, behaviours which have been socially constructed as “atypical” from a non-autistic worldview (e.g. lining up toys) are considered to have functional purpose for a child with autism and are therefore perceived as an adaptive activity (Doan & Fenton, 2013 as cited in O’Dell et al., 2016). It is proposed that the neurodiversity discourse offers enabling narratives of autism with a focus on divergent, yet non-pathologised, “ways of being” (O’Dell et al., 2016, p.173). However, some also caution that the continued cerebralisation of autism, albeit from an enabling lens, can reduce complex individual personhood and reify the complex process of identity formation (O’Dell et al., 2016).

2.4 Sense of Self and Autism

From a historical perspective, the “self” has been at the heart of conceptualising ASD (Lombardo & Baron-Cohen, 2010). Indeed, the term “autism” is based on the Greek word

“autos” which translates as “self”, as reflective of the egocentricity historically associated with autism (Gillespie-Smith et al., 2018; Lombardo & Baron-Cohen, 2010; Lombardo et al., 2010). Seminal clinical accounts anecdotally described children with ASD as experiencing “extreme autistic aloneness” (Kanner, 1943) and being “egocentric in the extreme” (Asperger, 1944).

2.4.1 Proposed ASD-Related Differences in Social Self-Understanding

Among fundamental diagnostic features of ASD are social cognitive deficits which affect reciprocal communication, understanding and behaviour (APA, 2013). These social cognitive deficits have led many theorists to contend that sense of self for those with ASD is less anchored in by social relations and experiences (eg. Farley et al., 2010; Gillespie-Smith et al., 2018; Hobson, 2002; Jackson et al., 2012; Lee & Hobson, 1998; Lombardo & Baron-Cohen, 2010; Lombardo et al., 2010). For instance, the cognitive theoretical paradigm of autism proposes the ‘theory of mind’ deficit as the core underlying impairment in ASD (e.g. Baron-Cohen et al., 1985; Leslie, 1987). This theoretical perspective postulates that individuals with ASD have limited insight into the mental representations of others, making it difficult for them to impute perceptions, thoughts, beliefs, desires and feelings to others (Baron-Cohen, 2001). In principle, such theory of mind difficulties may preclude those with ASD from reflecting on themselves socially via Cooley’s (1902) ‘looking glass’ formulation, by impacting their ability to perceive another’s attitude toward the self. Indeed, Farley et al. (2010) found that adolescents with ASD were significantly less proficient at conceptualising themselves from another’s perspective when compared to TD peers with matched chronological and verbal ages. Reduced capacity for conceptualising self-through-others’ perspectives may therefore impact the ability of the child with ASD to reflect on the self in relation to social interactions in school.

Furthermore, within the affective theoretical paradigm of autism, Hobson (2002) asserts that the ability to perceive the subjective attitude of another towards oneself and to identify with another are prerequisites conditions for sense of self development. However, Hobson (1989; 2002) proposes that individuals with ASD have limited capacity to perceive and process emotional information which affects their ability to achieve emotional relatedness with others and to understand the perspectives of others, which impacts sense of self development. Relatedly, Lee and Hobson (1998) contend that there is a “specific abnormality in the autistic individual’s sense of self in relation to others” (p.1140). Utilising the self-understanding interview developed by Damon and Hart (1988), Lee and Hobson (1998) found that adolescents with ASD articulated significantly less “social-self” statements than their TD peers matched

for general and intellectual ability in their self-descriptions, making no reference to friends or membership of a social group. This finding led Lee and Hobson (1998) to conclude that individuals with ASD may not naturally anchor their self-concepts in their social world nor automatically perceive themselves in relation to others. Farmer et al. (2007) replicated this study with younger children with ASD (9-13 years) and also concluded that children with ASD had an under-developed interpersonal self-understanding.

Expanding on Lee and Hobson's (2002) findings, Lombardo and Baron-Cohen (2010) hypothesise that children with ASD may experience delayed development in the development of the "duality of self", which refers to a context-dependent understanding that one is similar to yet different from others (Brewer, 1991), and that this affects their ability to reflect on the self in relation to others. Lombardo and Baron (2010) point to the corpus of research showing children have marked deficits in imitation and its underlying neural basis, as evidence that children with ASD may not view themselves automatically in relation to others. Furthermore, Lombardo and Baron-Cohen (2010) highlight a lack of self-other distinction in children with autism. For instance, in a drawing study by Lee and Hobson (2006), children with ASD created drawings of self and other that lacked distinguishing characteristics compared to drawings from TD peers. In the communicative domain, the tendency for pronominal reversal by young children with autism (e.g. using 'you' for 'I') is also proposed to be indicative of difficulties with self-other distinction (Lombardo & Baron-Cohen, 2010).

As such, a substantial body of empirical research undertaken within the cognitive and affective theoretical paradigms of autism, indicate that self-understanding in the social context is likely limited in children and young people with ASD. However, while the studies described above show differences in sense of self between children and adolescents with ASD and their TD, they do not elucidate how sense of self is actually experienced by children and adolescents with ASD from a phenomenological perspective (Baines, 2012; King, Williams & Gleeson, 2019; Winstone et al. 2014). Furthermore, the dominant, positivist quantitative research focus on identifying ASD-related differences in self-understanding arguably risks reinforcing a deficit-driven view of autism with regard to sense of self formation (Baines, 2012; King et al., 2019; Winstone et al., 2014).

2.4.2 Eliciting a Social Self in Students via Reflection on Lived School Experience

Collectively, the afore described research suggests underdeveloped social self-understanding in individuals with ASD. Such findings may have led to an assumption that social environments and experiences, including those within the school context are less relevant

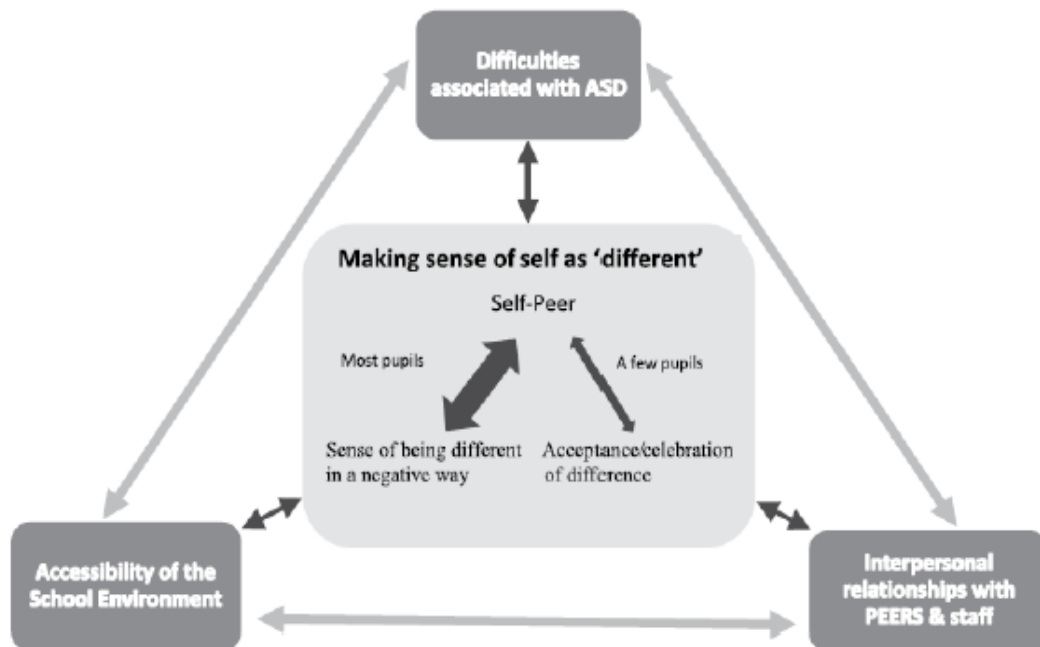
in sense of self development for students with ASD (Bagatell, 2007; Hodge et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2019; Winstone et al., 2014). However, it should be noted that the majority of research from which such conclusions may be extrapolated were conducted within the quantitative paradigm, and often focused on identifying abnormal sense of self-development via incorporation of standardised inventories/methods. Such methods do not provide a voice for those with ASD to express how they think and feel about themselves in their own idiosyncratic ways (Hodge et al., 2019; Kelly & Norwich, 2006; King et al., 2019). Some contemporary researchers have therefore advocated for increased focus on humanist-informed qualitative inquiries which enable those with ASD to more freely express how they construe themselves by reflecting on their lived experiences (Hodge et al., 2019; Winstone et al., 2014). Such calls stem from an epistemological belief that qualitative research provides “people who are often studied but seldom heard” (Ferguson, Ferguson & Taylor, 1992, p.14) a space to inform research discourse surrounding them. Indeed, findings from several qualitative research studies in which young adults with ASD are asked to reflect on their lived experiences, indicate that repeated negative social interactions in school had contributed to a perception of self as “different” to others and that some young adults had internalised the perceived negative attitudes of peers towards the self (Bagatell, 2007; Portway & Johnson, 2005; Punshon et al., 2009; Stevenson et al., 2016). These studies suggest that individuals with ASD experience some negotiation of the self in relation to others when reflecting on their lived social experiences in school.

More recently, Williams et al. (2019) conducted a comprehensive meta-synthesis to systematically integrate findings from the corpus of qualitative research examining the lived school experiences of pupils with ASD in mainstream school settings. They found that pupils with ASD often perceive themselves as “different” to TD peers in an unfavourable sense (Williams et al., 2019). In this meta-synthesis, three intermeshing aspects of lived school experience were found to contribute to most students with ASD articulating an overtly negative sense of self, namely difficulties linked to ASD, interpersonal relationships with peers and staff, and the accessibility of the school environment, as evidenced in the conceptual model in *Figure 2.1*. Most noticeably, across studies reviewed, negative connotations of self as ‘different’, was reported to have arisen from social comparison with TD peers around the concept of normality and also an internalisation of negative peer responses, with persistent reports of bullying and teasing. Furthermore, busy mainstream school environments that were experienced as overwhelming for the senses for pupils with ASD disrupted opportunities for

mutual learning engagement and socialising outside of the classroom, exacerbating negative perceptions of self as ‘different’. William’s et al.’s (2019) findings that many pupils with ASD construe themselves as negatively ‘different’ to their peers is concerning given the significant association between self-reported feelings of ‘difference’ and depressive symptomology in adolescents with Asperger’s Syndrome [AS] (Hedley & Young, 2006). Williams et al.’s (2019) comprehensive qualitative meta-synthesis elucidates the critical role of the school environment and interpersonal relationships in the school context in influencing how pupils with ASD come to describe and evaluate themselves. However, studies reviewed in this meta-synthesis largely drew on the accounts of verbally and cognitively able male pupils with ASD attending secondary school settings (Williams et al., 2019). Consequently, this meta-synthesis does not inform us as to how a wide cohort of pupils with ASD, make sense of themselves within the context of their life at school. Noticeably absent voices in the meta-synthesis include pupils attending special classes/schools, female pupils and primary school-age pupils.

Figure 2.1

William et al.’s (2019) Conceptual Model of Sense of Self Construal for Pupils with ASD in Mainstream Secondary Educational Settings



2.5 Educational and Policy Context

The historical policy context of SEN educational provision in Ireland is unique and complex (Kenny et al., 2020). The past two decades have seen significant developments in the educational provision options available to students with ASD (Bond et al., 2016; Daly et al.,

2016; Guldberg et al., 2011). These changes have occurred amidst a policy and legislative context espousing an increasing commitment towards the ideals of inclusive education (Government of Ireland, 2004; NCSE, 2011).

2.5.1 Historical Context of ASD Educational Provision in Ireland

For much of the twentieth century, the majority of pupils with ASD were enrolled in special schools catering for pupils according to categorical levels of assessed general learning disability, with minimal autism-specific educational provision (Daly et al., 2016; Department of Education and Science [DES], 2001; Kenny et al., 2020). In 1998, the Government announced that formal recognition was to be given to children with autism as a stand-alone group for special educational provision (DES, 1998). Special class educational provision for pupils with ASD on the basis of a six to one pupil-teacher ratio was to be made available, while pupils with ASD enrolled in mainstream classes were to be allocated an automatic entitlement to five hours resource teaching per week and access to a Special Needs Assistant [SNA] (DES, 1998). In 2001, the DES published the report of the Task Force on Autism to inform recommendations in relation to future educational policy, practice and provision for this pupil cohort (DES, 2001). The Task Force deemed the existing range of ASD provision options at primary and post-primary level as inadequate and called for a “flexible continuum of educational options for pupils with ASD” (DES, 2001, p.12). Notably, the Task Force recommended the establishment of special ASD classes/units within mainstream schools which would “ensure appropriate opportunities for meaningful integration/inclusion with their similar aged peers” (DES, 2001, p.11).

2.5.2 Inclusive Education Policy Context

In 2004 the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act [EPSEN] (Government of Ireland, 2004) declared a statutory right for the child with SEN to be educated “in an inclusive environment with children who do not have such needs” so long as their inclusion does not affect “the effective provision of children with whom the child is to be educated” (p.7). As such, the right to be educated in an inclusive setting is, in essence, a “qualified right” (McKeon, 2020, p.160). However, the EPSEN Act did reflect an increased commitment to an international policy trend declaring a commitment towards the ideals of inclusive education (Pellicano et al., 2018). This commitment was further demonstrated via Ireland’s signing and subsequent ratification of the United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [CRPD] in 2017. Article 24(2) of the CRPD obliges that states will ensure that “children with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary and

secondary education with others in the communities in which they live”. While the EPSEN Act has not been implemented in full, one of the primary implications of the adoption of inclusive education policies has been a significant increase in the number of children with SENs enrolled in mainstream schools, with an accompanying dramatic expansion in SNAs, resource teachers and special classes (Banks & McCoy, 2017; NCSE, 2019).

2.5.3 A Continuum of ASD Educational Provision

Current educational provision for pupils with ASD in the Republic of Ireland comprises a multi-track continuum of provision at primary and post-primary levels including mainstream provision, dedicated special schools for ASD, and special ASD classes within mainstream and special schools (Daly et al., 2016; Guldberg et al., 2011; Kenny et al., 2020). ASD special classes in both mainstream and special school settings are established with a staff-pupil ratio of one teacher and two SNAs for every six pupils (Daly et al., 2016). While they are stand-alone classrooms, guidelines for the establishment of special ASD classes state that pupils enrolled in such classes “should be included in mainstream classes to the greatest extent possible, in line with their abilities” (NCSE, 2016, p.2). Reflecting the legislative presumption of including students with SEN in mainstream education, the majority of students with ASD at primary and post-primary level are currently educated in mainstream provision and receive additional resource teaching hours (Department of Health, 2018). However, a significant proportion attend specific autism provision, with a recent dramatic expansion and investment in ASD special classes within mainstream schools (Banks & McCoy, 2017; NCSE, 2019). Indeed from 2011 to 2019, the number of special classes in Ireland grew from 548 to 1,459, comprising 1,200 ASD special classes (DES, 2019). The most significant expansion of ASD classes has been at the primary school level (Banks & McCoy, 2017; NCSE, 2019). Current DES policy appears to signal a continued emphasis on expanding ASD classes within mainstream schools. For instance, recent policy mandates that all new school builds are to include an ASD class when being established (Banks & McCoy, 2017). Furthermore, in 2018 the Minister for Education commenced key provisions of the Education (Admission to Schools) Act, 2018, which endows the Minister the authority to compel a school to establish a special ASD class (NCSE, 2019).

2.6 Rationale for Current Review

Established difficulties in social cognition and emotional relatedness may have led to an assumption that sense of self development for pupils with ASD is less anchored in their experiences within the social context of school. However, William et al’s (2019) qualitative

meta-synthesis of studies examining the lived school experiences of adolescent pupils with ASD reveals a recurrent theme of feeling “different” from peers in a predominantly negative sense, as influenced by ASD-related difficulties, interpersonal relationships with peers and staff and accessibility of the school environment. This meta-synthesis highlights the formative role of school experience in how sense of self is constructed for pupils with ASD. Furthermore, given the deleterious associations between negative appraisal of self as ‘different’ in adolescents with ASD (e.g. Hedley & Young, 2006), the meta-synthesis highlights key areas of school experience requiring intervention to improve the sense of self and wellbeing for pupils with ASD attending mainstream secondary school settings. However, studies included in Williams et al.’s (2019) meta-synthesis largely represented the experiences of verbally and cognitively-able male adolescents attending mainstream secondary settings, and is therefore not reflective of the lived experiences of pupils across the full continuum of ASD educational provision which exists in Ireland. Consequently, little is known about how younger and less cognitively or verbally-able children with ASD attending specialist educational provision perceive themselves in the context of their life at school.

The absence of the voice of the primary-aged student with ASD and those attending specialist ASD provision in studies reviewed in Williams et al.’s (2019) meta-synthesis reflects the methodological challenges associated with eliciting the perspectives of those with verbal/social-communication difficulties. While recently published, Williams et al. (2019) conducted the literature search and retrieval process for this meta-synthesis in 2014. In the interim years, there has been an increased emphasis on participatory, child-centred qualitative research methods to elicit the voice of pupils with ASD who are less able to engage in verbal discussion (Bloom et al., 2020; Fayette & Bond, 2018; Hill et al., 2016; Tesfaye et al., 2019; Tyrrell & Woods, 2018) and were previously considered “hard to reach” (Winstone et al., 2014, p.201). Given this increased emphasis on child-centred research methods, it is possible that a corpus of qualitative research exploring the lived experiences of pupils with ASD in primary-school or special ASD settings have emerged since 2014 and have not yet been systematically integrated. Therefore, the current systematic review endeavours to provide an updated synthesis of qualitative research exploring the lived experiences of pupils across the full range of school placement settings along the continuum of ASD educational provision (i.e. including special school, special class and mainstream primary settings). In doing so, the systematic review aims to delineate an understanding of how varying educational settings may influence lived school experiences and sense of self. Aligning with the review approach adopted in

William et al.'s (2019) meta-synthesis, the review seeks to examine how pupils with ASD make sense of themselves in school via focus on studies which elucidate their lived school experiences. As such, the current review question is:

How do school-age pupils with ASD make sense of themselves in the context of their lived experiences across varying placement settings along the continuum of ASD educational provision?

2.7 Qualitative Systematic Review

2.7.1 Search Strategy

A literature search was conducted on 18th August 2020 using the following electronic databases: Academic Search Complete, British Education Index, ERIC, PsychArticles, Education Source and PsycINFO. *Table 2.1* provides the search term combinations used across all databases. A filter was applied to each individual electronic database to limit searches to peer-reviewed journal papers, written in English, and published after 2004. Following removal of duplicates, 3,743 search results were generated across the databases. These results were screened by the titles and keywords, removing a further 3,647 from further analysis. The abstracts of the remaining 96 studies were screened for eligibility using the exclusion and inclusion criteria outlined in *Table 2.2*, which resulted in 60 studies remaining for full text review. Details of all excluded studies following abstract and full-text reviews are provided in Appendix A. Following full text review, 14 studies were included for the critical literature review, the details of which are outlined in *Table 2.3*. A prisma flow chart outlining the article retrieval process is detailed in *Figure 2.2*. A summary table for included studies is provided in Appendix B.

Table 2.1

Search Terms Used in Database Search

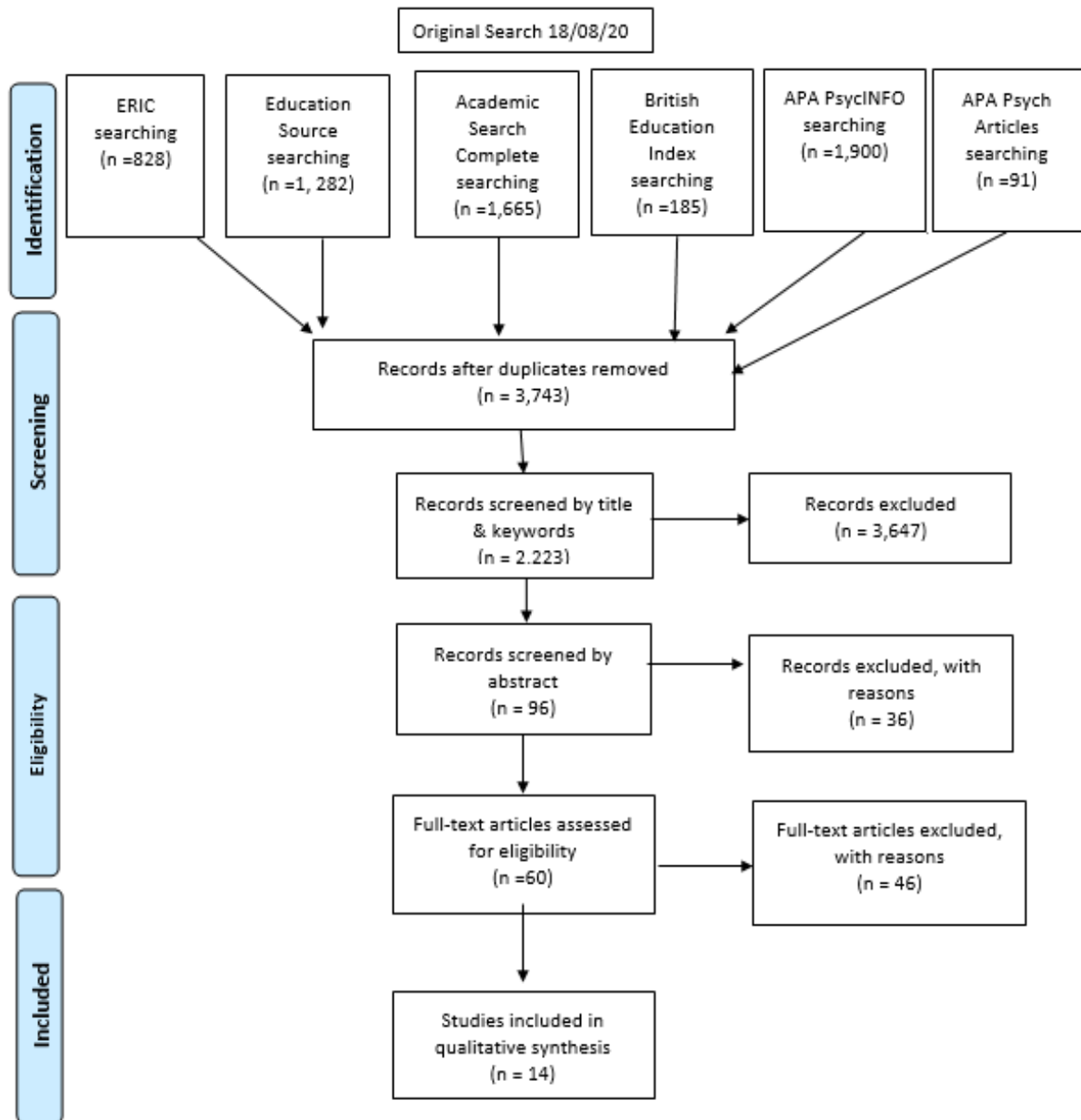
Population		Participants	Terms Related to Gathering Pupils' Voice	Terms Related to Education
Autis* OR ASD* OR Asperger*	AND	student* OR pupil* OR child* OR adoles*	Voice* OR Perception* OR Experience* OR Perspective* OR View*	School OR Education OR Mainstream OR Special education OR Inclusion

*was used to ensure words with all letters before the * would be included in the search, eg. "student", "students"

Table 2.2*Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria	Rationale
1. Type of data	Primary empirical data published after 2004	a). Non-primary data b). Published prior to 2004	To enable comparisons To ensure currency with contemporary ASD educational provision settings
2. Participants	Participants must include school-age pupils with ASD (4-18 years)	a). Pupils in study not limited to those with ASD (ie. Includes typically developing pupils or those with other SENs) b). Pupils in preschool or post-secondary education settings c). Research is based on retrospective accounts of adults with ASD on their school experiences	a). Focus of review is experiences of pupils with ASD b). Focus of review is school-age experiences c). Avoid problems of credibility associated with retrospective accounts
3. Setting/Focus	Study focuses on pupils' lived experiences in mainstream or ASD-specific educational provision.	a). Study describes experience of transition period between two settings rather than experience within an established educational setting b). Study focuses on pupils' lived experiences attending educational provision outside typical continuum of educational provision for Students with ASD (eg. Forest school, residential school, home tuition)	Research is focusing on lived school experiences of pupils with ASD in mainstream or special ASD settings as per continuum of ASD educational provision.

		c) Study does not specify type of educational provision	
		d). Study focuses on pupils' lived experiences outside school context	
4. Perspective Elicited	Study includes pupils' first-hand accounts of their educational experiences. Where other perspectives are also included (parents, teachers, etc.), these must be clearly disaggregated from pupils' perspectives.	a). Study does not include the first-hand view of the pupils with ASD about their lived educational experiences b). The voice of other stakeholders markedly overshadows the voice of the student with ASD (<i>i.e. minimal quotes/primary data artefacts from student with ASD</i>)	The voice of the pupil with ASD is often missing or overshadowed in research examining experience of ASD educational provision (Tyrell & Woods, 2018).
5. Study Design & Data Analysis	Qualitative methods of data collection & analysis utilised.	Quantitative OR Mixed-Methods Data Collection & Analysis	Review aims to synthesise emerging corpus of qualitative studies exploring the lived educational experiences of pupils with ASD
6. Type of publication	Peer-reviewed journal	Non-peer reviewed journal articles, dissertations, book chapters, short reports.	Peer-reviewed journals have high credibility due to rigorous submission process

Figure 2.2*Prisma Flow Chart***Table 2.3***Studies Included for Review*

Cook, A., Ogden, J., & Winstone, N. (2016). The experiences of learning, friendship and bullying of boys with autism in mainstream and special settings: A qualitative study. *British Journal of Special Education*, 43(4), 250-271.

Cook, A., Ogden, J., & Winstone, N. (2018) Friendship motivations, challenges and the role of masking for girls with autism in contrasting school settings. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 33(3), 302-315.

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- Danker, J., Strnadova, I., & Cumming, T.M. (2019). Picture my well-being: Listening to the voices of students with autism spectrum disorder. *Research in Developmental Disabilities, 89*, 130-140.
- Goodall, C. (2019). "There is more flexibility to meet my needs: Educational experiences of autistic young people in mainstream and alternative education provision. *Support for Learning, 34*(1), 5-33.
- Goodall, C. & MacKenzie, A. (2019). What about my voice? Autistic young girls' experiences of mainstream school. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 34*(4), 499-513.
- Hay, I., & Winn, S. (2005). Students with Asperger's Syndrome in an inclusive secondary school environment: Teachers', parents' and students' perspectives. *Australasian Journal of Special Education, 29*(2), 140-154.
- Healy, S. (2013). "Happy and a little bit nervous": The experiences of children with autism in physical education. *British Journal of Learning Disabilities, 41*, 222-228.
- Hill, L. (2014). "Some of it I haven't told anybody else": Using photo elicitation to explore the experiences of secondary school education from the perspective of young people with a diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorder. *Educational & Child Psychology, 31*(1), 79-89.
- Howard, K.B., Katsos, N., & Gibson, J.L. (2019). The school experiences of bilingual children on the autism spectrum: An interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Research in Developmental Disabilities, 87*, 9-20.
- Humphrey, N., & Lewis, S. (2008). "Make me normal": The views and experiences of pupils on the autistic spectrum in mainstream secondary schools. *Autism, 12*(1), 23-46.
- McLaughlin, S., & Rafferty, H. (2014). Me and "it": Seven young people given a diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome. *Educational & Child Psychology, 31*(1), 63-78.
- Moyse, R., & Porter, J. (2015). The experience of the hidden curriculum for autistic girls at mainstream primary schools. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 30*(2), 187-201.
- Myles, O., Boyle, C., & Richards, A. (2019). The social experiences and sense of belonging in adolescent females with autism in mainstream schools. *Educational & Child Psychology, 36*(4), 8-21.
- Saggers, B., Hwang, Y-S., & Mercer, L.K. (2011). Your voice counts: Listening to the voice of high school students with autism spectrum disorder. *Australasian Journal of Special Education, 35*(2), 173-190.
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2.7.2 Appraisal of Quality and Relevance

The fourteen studies included in the current review were evaluated for research quality and relevance utilising Gough's (2007) Weight of Evidence Framework. This framework provides a systematic mechanism to critically compare studies according to methodological quality (*Weight of Evidence A/ WoE A*), methodological relevance (*Weight of Evidence B/WoE B*), and relevance to the review question (*Weight of Evidence C/ WoE C*). Methodological quality (WoE A) was critically evaluated using an adapted version of Brantlinger et al.'s (2005) coding protocol for indicators of quality and credibility in qualitative studies in special education. A specific rubric for determining weighting judgements for each of these elements along with WoE A scores assigned to each study is provided in Appendix C.

Author-defined criteria were utilised to evaluate the methodological relevance (WoE B) and review question relevance (WoE C) of each study, as outlined in Appendix D. A cumulative Weight of Evidence (WoE D) score was calculated by averaging the scores of each of the WoE A-C dimensions (Gough, 2007), as detailed in *Table 2.4*.

Table 2.4

Weight of Evidence Ratings

Study	WoE A <i>Methodological quality</i>	WoE B <i>Methodological relevance</i>	WoE C <i>Topic relevance</i>	WoE D <i>Overall quality and relevance</i>
Cook et al. (2016)	1.84 Medium	1 Low	2 Medium	1.61 Medium
Cook et al. (2018)	1.99 Medium	1 Low	2 Medium	1.67 Medium
Danker et al. (2019)	1.95 Medium	2 Medium	2 Medium	1.98 Medium
Goodall & MacKenzie (2019)	1.65 Medium	3 High	2 Medium	2.22 Medium
Goodall (2019)	1.64	3	3	2.55

	Medium	High	High	High
Hay & Winn (2005)	1.19 Low	1 Low	1 Low	1.3 Low
Healy et al. (2013)	2.04 Medium	2 Medium	1 Low	1.68 Medium
Hill (2014)	1.56 Medium	2 Medium	2 Medium	1.85 Medium
Howard et al. (2019)	2.67 High	2 Medium	1 Low	1.86 Medium
Humphrey & Lewis (2008)	2.39 Medium	3 High	2 Medium	2.46 High
Moyse & Porter (2015)	1.4 Low	2 Medium	1 Low	1.47 Low
Myles et al. (2019)	1.32 Low	2 Medium	2 Medium	1.77 Medium
Saggers et al. (2011)	1.8 Medium	1 Low	1 Low	1.3 Low

Note: 0-1.4= LOW, 1.5-2.4=MEDIUM, 2.4-3.0= HIGH

2.7.3 Characteristics of Included Studies

2.7.3.1 Participants and Setting.

As seen in Appendix E, significant variability existed between the sample sizes recruited, ranging from 2 adolescent pupils with ASD (Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019) to 20 adolescent pupils diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome/High-Functioning Autism (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008). Two studies (Hill, 2014; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008) did not report a gender breakdown of pupil participants. There is a 1.9:1 ratio of male-to-female pupils with ASD represented in the remaining studies. This is a noticeably higher representation of the female

voice than might be expected, as meta-analysis of prevalence studies indicates a 3:1 male-to-female ratio within the population of children meeting diagnostic criteria for ASD (Loomes, Hull & Mandy, 2017). William et al.'s (2019) previous meta-synthesis highlighted the absence of the female voice in the corpus of qualitative research reviewed and called for the educational experiences and sense of self of female pupils with ASD to be explored in future qualitative research. The current systematic review, highlights that this gap in qualitative literature has been redressed in recent years, as four reviewed studies exclusively explored the experiences of female pupils with ASD (Cook et al., 2018; Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019; Moyle & Porter, 2015; Myles et al., 2019).

Noticeably, the corpus of papers included for review predominantly privileged the voices of adolescent pupils, aged 11-17 within secondary education settings. Although three studies (Healy et al., 2013; Howard et al., 2019; Moyle & Porter, 2015) elicited the perspective of pupils with ASD who are younger than eleven, these three studies received a low WoE C score, based on relevance of evidence for the review question (Gough, 2007). These low WoE C scores were due to a focus on lived experience of a single curricular subject (Physical Education) rather than overall educational experience (Healy et al., 2013), a sample not representative of the 'typical' ASD community (all with English as an Additional Language) (Howard et al., 2019), and minimal reflection on sense of self in the educational context (Moyle & Porter, 2015).

Most included studies exclusively elicited the educational experiences of pupils in mainstream educational provision (Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019; Healy et al., 2013; Hill, 2014; Howard et al., 2019; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014; Moyle et al., 2019; Moyle & Porter, 2015). One study included some pupils who were enrolled in ASD support units within a mainstream post-primary school on a part-time basis (Danker et al., 2019), however the majority of participating pupils recruited in this study were enrolled in fulltime mainstream provision. Two studies (Cook et al., 2016; Cook et al., 2018) recruited equal numbers of participants from mainstream and special school settings, facilitating a balanced representation of lived experience across contrasting placements along the continuum of ASD educational provision. A further study (Goodall, 2019) recruited participants from a special school setting who all had previously attended mainstream provision and were therefore able to provide insight into their lived experience across both forms of provision. These three studies (ie. Cook et al., 2016; Cook et al., 2018; Goodall, 2019) received a higher WoE C rating, as they enabled a comparison of lived experience in varying settings across the continuum of ASD educational provision. However, while these three studies included the

voices of students attending specialist settings, these participants were predominantly of adolescent age (all > 11 years of age), whilst the recruitment criteria of two of these studies (Cook et al., 2016; Cook et al. 2018) stipulated that participants had to have sufficiently developed verbal skills to engage in the traditional semi-structured interview methodology. Consequently, the experiences of pupils younger than 11 in specialist provision and those who are less verbally able are largely absent from the corpus of papers included for review. Four of the included studies captured the perspectives of additional adult stakeholders beyond the child including parents (Cook et al., 2016; Cook et al., 2018; Hay & Winn, 2005; Moyses & Porter, 2015) and mainstream and SEN teachers (Hay & Winn, 2005; Moyses & Porter, 2015). Where the number of adult participants disproportionately outnumbered the number of pupil participants (i.e. Hay & Winn, 2005), a lower WoE C score was assigned as themes were shaped predominantly by adult perspectives. Notably, ten studies were conducted within the UK, three studies were undertaken in Australia and one study was undertaken in the Republic of Ireland.

2.7.3.2 Data Collection Methods. The data collection methods varied significantly among studies reviewed. Five studies relied exclusively on semi-structured interviews or focus groups to gather the views of pupils with ASD (Cook et al., 2016; Cook et al., 2018; Hay & Win, 2005; McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014; Saggars et al., 2011). Considering the difficulties in social communication and interaction associated with ASD (APA, 2013), it has been cautioned that relying solely on a traditional semi-structured interview format with pupils with ASD may limit participant engagement and the depth of content elicited (Fayette & Bond, 2018; Hill et al., 2014; Tyrrell & Woods, 2018; Winstone et al., 2014). Harrington et al. (2014) reported additional engagement barriers encompassed in conducting semi-structured interviews with pupils with autism due to associated difficulties recalling past events, staying on the topic and delayed processing of questions. Furthermore, some qualitative researchers caution that the emphasis on maintaining eye contact in the semi-structured interview context may heighten anxiety for pupils with ASD, impacting the quality of responses elicited (Loyd, 2015). As such, studies which relied solely on traditional semi-structured interviews received a low WoE B rating, based on the appropriateness of the research design.

Other studies however, increased the accessibility of the data collection methods by employing additional participatory methodological tools such as photo elicitation/photovoice (Danker et al., 2019; Hill, 2014; Moyses & Porter, 2015), diamond ranking/sorting activities (Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019; Goodall, 2019; Moyses & Porter, 2015), drawings (Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019; Goodall, 2010; Moyses & Porter, 2019), pupil diaries (Humphrey & Lewis)

and visual/electronic aids for semi-structured interviews (Howard et al., 2019; Myles et al., 2019). Research indicates that multi-modal participation options increase the engagement of children and young people with ASD in qualitative research, bringing to the surface abilities and perspectives not typically elicited in the traditional semi-structured interview process (Fayette & Bond, 2018; Tyrrell & Woods, 2018; Winstone et al., 2014). These studies therefore received higher WoE B ratings for appropriateness of research design, as justified in Appendix D.

2.7.3.3 Data Analysis. Across the fourteen studies, three predominant inductive data analysis methods were utilised to define themes from the data. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013) was employed by eight studies (Cook et al., 2015; Cook et al., 2018, Goodall & McKenzie, 2019; Goodall, 2019; Hay & Winn, 2005; Healy et al., 2013; McLaughlan & Rafferty, 2014; Moyle et al., 2019) to generate codes and extract themes from the data. Three studies (Hill, 2014; Howard et al., 2019; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008) adopted an IPA approach (Smith et al., 2009) to descriptively code data for thematic organisation, whilst prioritising the interpretation of meaning held for participants. Finally, grounded theory analyses including the constant comparative approach (Braant & Charmaz, 2008) were employed in two studies (Saggers et al., 2011; Danker et al., 2019) to generate theory from the data. Studies which comprehensively described the coding protocol employed and provided a range of sample codes or emergent themes received higher quality WoE A ratings. High WoE A ratings were also dependent on descriptive participant quotes to support extracted themes and on reflexive approaches to minimise personal views when analysing data such as peer debriefing, member checks and discrepant case analysis (Brantlinger et al., 2005).

2.7.4 Synthesis of Findings

Lockwood, Munn & Poritt's (2015) meta-aggregation review protocol for qualitative research synthesis was followed to collate the findings of studies included for review. This meta-aggregation protocol prompts the reviewer to avoid re-interpretation of included studies, but rather accurately and reliability present the findings as presented by the original authors (Lockwood et al., 2015). Accordingly, meta-aggregation of findings consisted of a three-stage process.

Firstly, the reviewer extracted all findings from included studies relevant to the review question, as evidenced in Appendix G. A finding was defined as “a verbatim extract of the author’s analytical interpretation of the results” (Lockwood et al., 2015, p.183). Each extracted finding was accompanied by an illustration informing that finding such as a direct participant quotation, observation or other supporting data as, as per Appendix F. The reviewer then assigned a level of “plausibility” based on the congruency between the extracted finding and its accompanying illustration. The three plausibility levels are summarised in *Table 2.5*. Extracted findings deemed to be “unsupported” were filtered out from subsequent data synthesis.

Table 2.5

Levels of Plausibility Assigned to Extracted Findings

Unequivocal	“Findings accompanied by an illustration that is beyond reasonable doubt”
Equivocal	“Findings accompanied by an illustration lacking clear association with it and therefore open to challenge”
Unsupported	“Findings are not supported by the data” (Lockwood et al., 2015, p.183)

Secondly, categorisation occurred, where the reviewer collapsed extracted findings into categories based on similarity in meaning (Lockwood et al., 2015). A category was defined as the key concept emerging from the aggregation of two or more related findings (Lockwood et al., 2015). Finally, categories of findings across all fourteen studies relevant to the research question were synthesised. A synthesised finding comprised an overarching description which consolidated two or more categories (Lockwood et al., 2015). The data synthesis process involving categorisation and synthesis of findings is evidenced in Appendix G. Most studies received a medium overall WoE D score, indicating findings of a similar level of relevance and methodological rigor. As such, most studies contributed a comparable number of extracted findings to the final synthesised findings. However, extracted findings from studies which received higher WoE D scores (Goodall, 2019; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008) were given more weight in the overall synthesised findings.

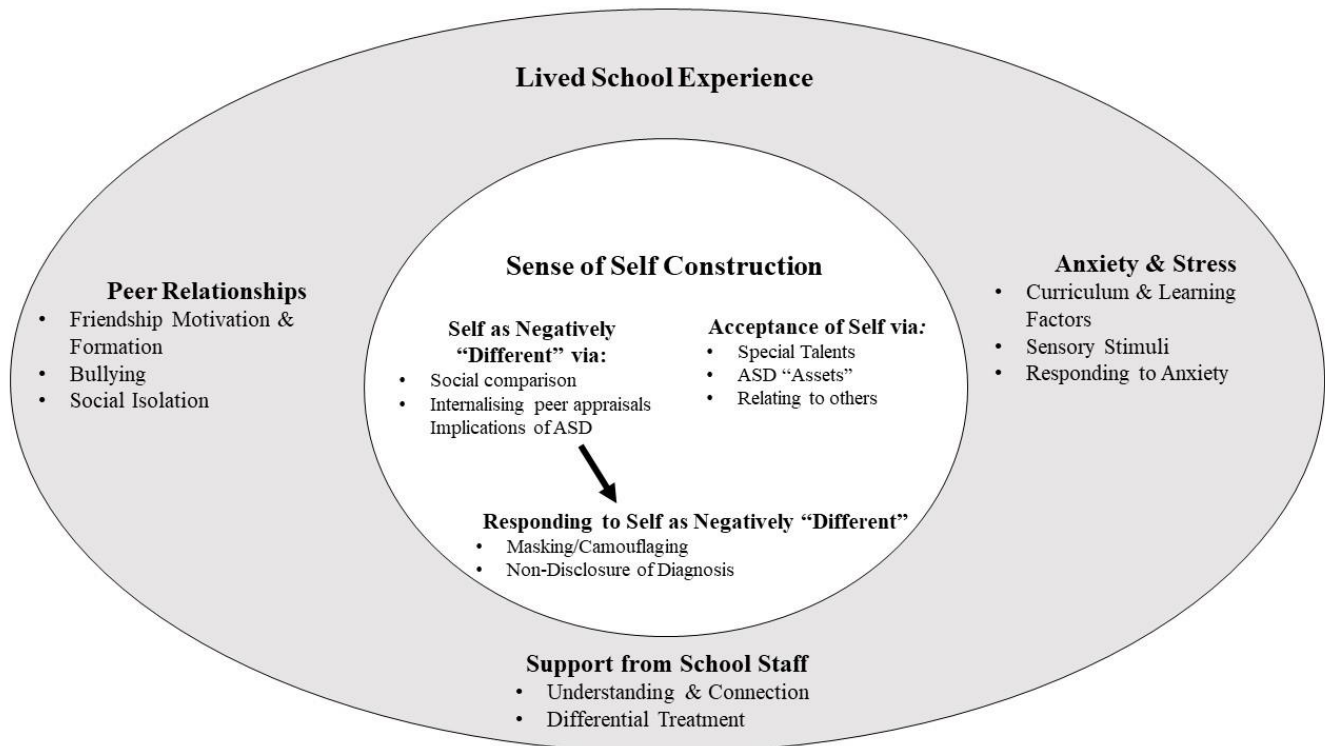
2.7.5 Results

2.7.5.1 Thematic Organisation of Synthesised Findings. The synthesised findings were thematically organised to reflect their relevance to the review question “*How do school-age pupils with ASD make sense of themselves in the context of their lived experiences across*

varying placement settings along the continuum of ASD educational provision?”. As per the thematic map in *Figure 2.3*, synthesised findings relating to sense of self for pupils with ASD were grouped into master themes including: i). self as negatively ‘different’, ii). acceptance of self and iii). responding to sense of self as negatively ‘different’. These themes occurred within the context of the pupils’ lived school experience. Thus synthesised findings relating to lived school experience were also grouped into three master themes including i). peer relationships, ii). anxiety and stress and iii). support from school staff. The synthesised findings relevant to each theme will be examined in detail.

Figure 2.3

Thematic Map of Synthesised Findings



2.7.5.2 Self as Negatively “Different”. Developmental theories of the self highlight the increasing importance of social appeal and acceptance for positive sense of self among peers in middle childhood and adolescence (Damon & Hart, 1988; Harter, 2015; Ladd & Trooper-Gordon, 2003; McElhaney et al., 2008; Poulin & Chan, 2010). As the majority of studies included for review focused on the experiences of adolescent pupils with ASD, it is therefore unsurprising that where pupils construed themselves in a negative sense, the concept of “being different”, “not normal” or “not fitting in” underpinned their self-descriptions (Cook et al., 2018; Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019; Hill, 2014; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; McLaughlin &

Rafferty, 2014). Synthesised findings reveal that negative construal of self, based on connotations of “difference” was a common experience for many adolescent pupils within mainstream settings, as illustrated in pupils’ self-descriptors across studies which included: “different” to peers (Cook et al., 2018, p.307; Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019, p. 507; Hill, 2014, p.85; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.38; McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.67), “an outsider..who didn’t fit in anywhere”, “isolated and separate” (Goodall, 2019, p.597), “freak”, “I have a bad brain”, “mentally disabled” (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.31), and “different from normal people” (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014).

As per the developmental trajectory of sense of self during middle childhood and adolescence, synthesised findings indicate that many pupils with ASD construed a negative sense of self via an internalisation of the appraisals received from school peers, as in the ‘looking glass’ process of self-evaluation (Danker et al., 2019; Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014; Moyses & Porter, 2015). For instance, two female adolescent pupils who described themselves as “different to peers”, reflected on how they felt “judged by peers because of my Asperger’s Syndrome” and recalled feeling like “I had germs and they [peers] weren’t to go near me” (Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019, p. 507-508). Other adolescent pupils described how their behavioural difficulties in primary school had negatively “scarred” how they were perceived by peers and expressed a desire to “turn back the clock” in order to improve how their peers viewed them (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.37). Internalisation of negative peer appraisals toward the self was not exclusive to adolescent pupils. A small subset of primary-aged pupils in mainstream settings also incorporated the reflected negative appraisals of peers in their self-descriptions. To illustrate this process, one primary-aged student described herself as “annoying” in the context of group work (Howard et al., 2019, p.60) another described how, “I treat everyone as normal people..they don’t, they seem to ignore me. I feel like I don’t exist” (Moyse & Porter, 2015, p.196).

Synthesised findings indicate that negative sense of self was also influenced by upwards social comparison with TD peers based on the constructs of “normality” and perceived abilities (Healy et al., 2013; Hill, 2014; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014). Negative sense of self construction for several pupils appeared linked to their focus on the negative implications of their ASD diagnosis including differential treatment by peers, difficulties socialising, and the potential longitudinal impact of ASD on their life choices (Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014).

Such sentiments appear to represent an internalisation of a ‘deficit’ narrative of autism. Relatedly, Howard et al. (2019) attribute the absence of connotations of negative ‘difference’ in the self-descriptions of many primary school-aged pupils in their study to the fact that these pupils had little awareness of their ASD diagnosis.

2.7.5.3 Acceptance of Self. Synthesised findings indicate that negative construal of the self as “different” was not universal for all pupils. A subset of pupils across several studies within the primary, secondary and special school context articulated an acceptance of themselves and their ASD diagnosis (Cook et al., 2016; Danker et al., 2019; Goodall, 2019; Howard et al., 2019; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014). Some pupils overtly described an acceptance of self, “I like being like this you know, that’s the way it is” (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.32) while others described having grown to incorporate ASD as unproblematic in their sense of self (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014). Notably, many pupils explicitly referred to the presence of supportive friends as integral to this process of self-acceptance (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008). Relatedly, in contrast to strong connotations of self as ‘different’ across several studies in the mainstream school contexts, pupils in a special school setting described a strong feel of similarity, relatedness and belonging, attributed to being surrounded by peers who “are similar to me, have had similar problems and I can relate to them” (Goodall, 2019, p. 38).

Having special talents and interests was also a protective factor for sense of self across special and mainstream school contexts (Cook et al., 2016). For some pupils, an appreciation of perceived “assets” associated with ASD served to strengthen their sense of self, by providing them with “all these bonuses” (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.32). For instance, some pupils with Asperger’s Syndrome engaged in downward social comparison with TD-peers based on perceived intelligence, articulating that diagnosis was a positive difference, in terms of providing them with “more intelligence than their peers” (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.67). Another pupil attributed his special talents to ASD (Cook et al., 2016), whilst for some pupils “special interests” associated with ASD were perceived as an advantage (Howard et al., 2019, p.15). These pupils appear to have embraced positive neurodiversity-aligned perspectives rather than a deficit narrative of autism as “not normal” which facilitated increased self-acceptance (Kapp et al., 2013; Riccio et al., 2021).

2.7.5.4 Responding to the Self as “Different”.

2.7.5.4.1 Masking/Camouflaging. Synthesised findings highlight that across several studies, many pupils with ASD try to suppress their perceived differences by observing and mirroring

the behaviour of peers in an effort to “mask” their communication difficulties and blend in with TD peers (Cook et al., 2018; Hill, 2014; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Moyse & Porter, 2015; Myles et al., 2019). Consistent with the emerging literature base on the ‘female camouflage effect’ in autism (Attwood, 2007; Lai et al., 2017; Tomilson et al., 2020), the tendency to mask/camouflage in order to ‘fit in’ was amplified among females pupils with ASD in studies included for review (Cook et al., 2018; McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014; Moyse & Porter, 2015; Myles et al., 2019). Female pupils with ASD described the constant process of trying to “change into someone else” (Cook et a., 2018, p.309) by mirroring the behaviours of peers in order to ensure that peers “like what you’re doing” (Myles et al., 2019, p.14). Research indicates that such constant “camouflaging” can come at a significant cost as it requires substantial cognitive effort which can lead to elevated stress responses and exhaustion (Lai et al., 2017; Pellicano et al., 2014). Relatedly, extracted findings reveals sentiments of exhaustion among one pupil whose camouflaging was a constant endeavour throughout the school day: “I try to fit in as best I possibly can. I really go out of my way in every way” (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014). Furthermore, consistent with research of the secondary impacts of camouflaging, (Hull et al., 2017; Lai et al., 2017), extracted findings indicate that some pupils appear to compromise their true sense of self and identity by exclusive focus on receiving approval from others (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008).

2.7.5.4.2 Non-Disclosure of Diagnosis. Some secondary pupils who were aware of their diagnosis of ASD attempted to minimise their sense of “difference” by rejecting “labels” and actively choosing not to disclose their diagnosis of ASD in order to be appraised as “normal” by their TD peers and avoid differential treatment (Cook et al., 2018; Danker et al., 2019; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014). Some pupils perceived that disclosure of their diagnosis would render them more vulnerable to bullying, as “when you’re seen as different in this society, you are targeted and bullied” (Danker et al., 2019).

2.7.5.5 Peer Relationships.

2.7.5.5.1 Bullying. Experiences of being bullied, at varying levels of severity, were extensively reported by pupils with ASD, featuring in ten of the fourteen studies included in the review (Cook et al., 2018, Cook et al., 2016; Danker et al., 2019; Goodall, 2019; Hay & Win, 2005; Healy et al., 2013; Hill, 2014; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014; Saggars et al., 2019). Types of bullying frequently reported by students included: verbal, physical and relational bullying, destruction of property and goading/provocation (Cook et al., 2018; Cook et al., 2016; Goodall, 2019; Goodall & Mac Kenzie, 2019; Hay & Winn, 2005;

Hill, 2014; Healy et al., 2013; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014; Sagers et al., 2019). Extracted findings from the two studies which included equal representation of pupils from both mainstream and special school settings (Cook et al., 2016; Cook et al., 2018), indicate that incidents of bullying behaviour in special school settings were often attributed to the complex needs of peers, whereas, bullying by TD peers in mainstream settings was perceived as more intentional and persistent (Cook et al., 2016; Cook et al., 2018). For instance, TD peers were reported as exploiting sensory triggers which would knowingly upset a student with autism such as “things [being] stuck on his back”, “tapping” and “scraping” (Cook et al., 2016, p.259). Relatedly, some adolescent pupils with ASD in mainstream settings reported being bullied for “being different” (Goodall, 2019, p.22) and because they are known to autism (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008).

2.7.5.5.2 Social Isolation. Synthesised findings indicate that pupils across the mainstream primary and secondary settings report experiences of social isolation and loneliness within the school context (Cook et al., 2016; Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019; Howard et al., 2019; McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014; Moyses & Porter, 2015; Myles et al., 2019). Descriptors utilised by pupils which portray their affective experiences of loneliness and social isolation included: “very lonely”, “isolated and separate, in like a bubble...like an outsider” (Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019), “lonely...left on [my] own” (Moyse & Porter, 2015), and “on the outside” (Myles et al., 2019, p.14). While some pupils attributed their social isolation from peers to their perceived difficulties in ‘fitting in’ and engaging in social interactions (Cook et al., 2018, Danker et al., 2019; Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019; Sagers et al., 2011), in several studies pupils reported enforced social isolation due to peer rejection or exclusion (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014; Moyses & Porter, 2015; Myles et al., 2019). Such peer rejection and exclusion were reported by pupils across both the mainstream primary and secondary contexts, with one primary-aged female student articulating how her peers “don’t want me they want somebody else” (Moyse & Porter, 2015). Consistent with previous quantitative research findings (Dean et al., 2014), female pupils often appeared to be overlooked by peers, rather than overtly rejected (Moyse & Porter, 2015; Myles et al., 2019).

2.7.5.5.3 Friendship Motivation & Formation. Contrary to the common perception that many pupils with ASD lack social motivation, some adolescent female students across special and mainstream settings explicitly expressed a strong desire for close friendships and perceived friendships as imperative for a positive school experience (Cook et al., 2018; Myles et al., 2019). Such findings are consistent with emerging empirical research which indicates that girls

with ASD often display similar levels of social motivation to their TD peers (Sedgewick et al., 2016). Relatedly, some female pupils expressed a desire for enhanced social interaction skills to facilitate friendship formation (Cook et al., 2018) and others described how close physical proximity to friends can foster their sense of social security in a large secondary school environment (Myles et al., 2019). However, social motivation was not a ubiquitous finding, and a subset of both male and female pupils expressed either a desire for social solitude (Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019) or a sense of apathy regarding their social solitude: “I don’t really care about friends...I don’t even try [to be accepted] (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.71).

Synthesised findings indicate that successful friendships experiences for pupils with ASD in the mainstream setting often involved befriending peers who were also perceived as “different to other people” (Cook et al., 2018; McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.70), also had a diagnosis of ASD (Cook et al., 2018; McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014), possessed common interests (Danker et al., 2019; McLaughlin & Rafferty) and were accepting, supportive and understanding in their interactions (Cook et al., 2016; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Myles et al., 2019). In instances where friendship formation was successful, students described how this provided support against teasing (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008), facilitated their participation in mainstream activities (Healy et al., 2013), lessened their sense of loneliness (Danker et al., 2019) and fostered a positive sense of self as being accepted, valued and visible: “It’s just nice to have people to ..realise you’re there” (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014; Myles et al., 2019, p.14).

2.7.5.6 Anxiety & Stress. Pupils, across mainstream primary and secondary settings, reported elevated levels of stress and anxiety in school, resulting in them feeling overwhelmed and upset, which impacted their capacity to socialise and work with peers (Cook et al., 2018, Goodall, 2019, Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019, Howard et al., 2019; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008). The sense of being overwhelmed due to persistent stress and anxiety is reflected in pupils descriptions of feeling “on edge” (Goodall, 2019, p.21), “pulling my hair out as I am so stressed” (Goodall, 2019, p. 21), “stressed out” (Cook et al., 2018, p.308), “physically, mentally and emotionally drained”(Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019, p.506), “hard to stop my detonation.. I’ll start blowing up” (Howard et al., 2019, p.16), “very nervous...really nervous...baffled” (Hill, 2014, p. 83) and “upset every second” (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.38).

2.7.5.6.1 Curricular & Learning Factors. Pupils across mainstream primary and secondary contexts reported experiencing anxiety in the context of academic and curricular demands. Some pupils described experiences of distress around making mistakes (Hill, 2014; Howard et al., 2019), exam performance (Hill, 2014), assignment schedules (Saggers et al., 2011) or falling behind in their schoolwork (Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019). Relatedly, a pupil in the primary class setting described periods of lessons in which the mind entered “panic mode” when asked questions (Howard et al., 2019, p.16). In reflecting on their experience of mainstream secondary education, some pupils highlighted that the volume of homework and assignments across curricular subjects which “builds up further and further” as overwhelming (Goodall, 2019, p.22; Saggers et al., 2011).

2.7.5.6.2 Sensory Stimuli. Across several studies, pupils reported experiencing significant stress due to the sensory stimuli inherent in the mainstream school environment (Cook et al., 2016; Goodall, 2019; Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019; Healy et al., 2013; Hill, 2014; Howard et al., 2019; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008). School spaces perceived as noisy, crowded and unstructured by pupils with ASD were prominent sources of anxiety such as school canteens, corridors and playgrounds (Danker et al., 2019; Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019; Hill, 2014; Moyse & Porter, 2015). Furthermore, some pupils described how “noisy” and “overcrowded” mainstream classrooms contributed to a persistent build-up of stress (Danker et al., 2019; Goodall, 2019; Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019; Healy et al., 2013; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008). Excess noise was described as a barrier to their learning, concentration and engagement with peers (Danker et al., 2019; Healy et al., 2013; Howard et al., 2019; Saggers et al., 2011). One pupil described how “..my brain seems to, like, just start pulling itself when there’s loud noises” (Danker et al., 2019, p.135). Navigating transition periods involving the “chaos of the corridor” (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, 38) was frequently described as a particularly stressful experience within the mainstream secondary school context (Goodall, 2019; Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019; Hill, 2014; Hill, 2014; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008).

2.7.5.6.3 Responding to Anxiety. Some pupils described seeking sanctuary from the sensory demands of the busy mainstream secondary school environment from specially designated areas where they could destress and self-regulate such as support bases, garden spaces, lunchtime clubs, resource rooms and libraries (Danker et al., 2019; Hay & Winn, 2005; Hill, 2014; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Moyse & Porter, 2015; Myles et al., 2019). The restricted access policy of designated support bases was reported as an important feature for some pupils, enabling them to “go like away from everybody” (Hill, 2014; Myles et al., 2019,

p.13). Furthermore, pupils attending a special school setting, reported that access to designated areas to “chill out spaces” would have improved their mainstream school experience (Goodall, 2019, p.24). However, while providing space for regulation, such designated withdrawal spaces in mainstream settings often distanced pupils from their mainstream peers during unstructured socialisation periods (Danker et al., 2019; Hay & Winn, 2005).

Some pupils independently made modifications to help them to cope with aspects of the school environment they found anxiety provoking. Pupils described retreating to secluded spaces to “breath in and out and try to relax” (Goodall, 2019, p.24), skipping lines/queues (Hill, 2014) and taking alternative routes to avoid peers in the playground (Hill, 2014; Moyse & Porter, 2015). Furthermore, pupils were observed to withdraw themselves to the periphery of the playground to avoid peer interactions (Moyse & Porter, 2015). While some of these modifications appear to be adaptive coping strategies, others served to further isolate the pupils from their peers.

2.7.5.7 Support from School Staff.

2.7.5.7.1. *Understanding and Connection.* Some pupils in mainstream secondary settings reported feeling unsupported and misunderstood by mainstream teachers (Cook et al., 2016; Goodall, 2019; Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008). In some instances, pupils described how their mainstream teachers lacked understanding of autism and their individual needs (Goodall, 2019; Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Saggars et al., 2011). As a result of their perceived lack of autism awareness, some teachers were reported to unknowingly adopt classroom approaches which exacerbated feelings of ‘difference’ for pupils such as asking the class to “find a partner” (Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019, p.508) or utilise classroom management strategies which exacerbated auditory arousal (Saggars et al., 2011). Furthermore, some pupils described a lack of personal connection with their teachers and described wanting teachers to care more about pupils with SEN rather than focusing on academic results (Goodall, 2019; Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019). Conversely, some pupils in the special school setting reported that small class sizes enable the teacher to build a supportive connection with them and facilitate them to feel “recognised as a person (Goodall, 2019, p.24). Relatedly, some pupils in mainstream secondary settings (Hay & Winn, 2005; Saggars et al., 2011) valued their relationships with SEN support staff. Such findings are consistent with research which highlights the substantial role educators can play in countering the development of negative sense of self through communicating value to pupils (Roffey, 2015). Positive relationships with school staff were also reported by younger primary

aged pupils in mainstream settings (Howard et al., 2019). Examples of supportive strategies referenced included morning “meet and greet” sessions with Teaching Assistants (Hill, 2014) and lunchtime ‘check-ins’ by the student support team (Myles et al., 2019). In these instances, pupils reported that staff support helped to alleviate their anxieties about coping with the demands of the mainstream secondary school.

2.7.5.7.2 Differential Treatment. Synthesised findings indicate that many pupils with ASD in secondary settings expressed discontent about the “differential treatment” which they experienced when staff were informed of their ASD diagnosis (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014; Myles et al., 2019). Some pupils described how differential treatment accentuated their perceived differences to peers; “oh watch out he’s got Asperger’s” (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.68). Others felt their ability was underestimated by school staff treating them in a “babyish manner” upon learning of their ASD diagnosis (Myles et al., 2019, p.15). A recurring theme relating to differential treatment across several studies within the mainstream secondary setting was the visibility of support provided by Teaching Assistants (Hay & Winn, 2005; Hill, 2014; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014; Sagers et al., 2011). Several pupils perceived that the visibility of this support accentuated their sense of being “different” by impeding their ability to “blend in with the rest of the class” (Humphrey & Lewis, p.39; Hay & Winn, 2005). Other pupils described negative social implications arising from visible Teacher Assistant support, such as impacting how their peers view them and acting as a barrier to socially integration with peers (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014). Some pupils therefore emphasised the need for Teaching Assistant support to be provided “subtly and skillfully” when in the mainstream classroom (Sagers et al., 2011, p. 181).

2.7.6 Discussion

2.7.6.1 Critical Reflection on Systematic Qualitative Synthesis Processes.

Over the course of this systematic review, the researcher encountered a number of challenges in conducting a high-quality synthesis of qualitative research, which will each be critically interrogated:

2.7.6.1.1 Primary Study Identification. In line with best practice systematic qualitative synthesis, the researcher endeavoured to undertake an exhaustive search to ensure that all potentially relevant studies were located (Soilemezi & Lincevciute, 2018). However, given the exploratory, qualitative nature of the inquiry, a broadly focused review question was necessary to comprehensively capture phenomena of interest (ie. sense of self, lived experience,

continuum of ASD provision) (Williams et al., 2019). This broadly-focused review question made undertaking an exhaustive search a prolonged process, as a plethora of key search terms across multiple databases were deemed essential to sensitively capture all relevant studies. This endeavour to remain inclusive to all potentially relevant research studies (Shaw et al., 2004), resulted in a significant number of papers for preliminary screening (n=3,743), which was resource and time intensive.

2.7.6.1.2 Appraising Quality and Relevance. In the context of systematic qualitative reviews, there is scant formal guidance on identifying an appraisal instrument to assess methodological research quality (Soilemezi & Lincevciute, 2018). Therefore, the researcher's decision to evaluate the methodological quality (i.e. WoE A) of studies reviewed utilising an adapted version of Brantlinger et al.'s (2005) coding indicators for quality and credibility in qualitative research, was based on the contextual relevance of this framework for the nature of the current review (i.e. specificity for special education research). However, the researcher still needed to devise a specific rubric for determining the weighting judgements for each of Brantlinger et al.'s (2005) quality/credibility indicators. A potential limitation of the weighting rubric devised for methodological quality (i.e. WoE A), is that the numeric scoring of Brantlinger et al.'s (2005) methodological quality indicators may be misleading (Atkins et al., 2008; Soilemezi & Lincevciute, 2018). For instance, some studies may have scored poorly on methodological quality, not because the study was of low quality, but because strict word limits in certain journals meant that there was not sufficient scope to report extensively on specific methodological quality indicators, nor provide evidence of same. Furthermore, in the current review, studies adopted a broad range of qualitative designs (e.g. thematic analysis, grounded theory, IPA). However, despite the significant differences in theoretical perspectives, methodologies and epistemological assumptions, all studies were appraised using the same qualitative research quality (WoE A) appraisal tool (i.e. Brantlinger et al., 2005), which may not have sensitively identified indicators of high methodological quality associated with individual qualitative designs (Erwin et al., 2011). Additionally, researcher-defined criteria were utilised to evaluate methodological relevance (WoE B) and review question relevance (WoE C). While the author provided coherent, transparent and systematic criteria for WoE B and WoE C weightings, the fact that these weighting criteria were both determined and assigned by the author may lead some to question the potential subjectivity inherent in these weightings.

2.7.6.1.3. Aggregating Qualitative Findings- Epistemological Tensions? In the final stages of qualitative synthesis, Lockwood et al.'s (2015) meta-aggregation review protocol was followed to collate the findings of studies reviewed. While this framework provided a rigorous means to amalgamate recurrent findings, it should be remembered that qualitative research is not undertaken for the purpose of systematic synthesis, but rather to explore specific individuals' experiences in specific contexts (Brantlinger et al., 2005). Therefore, it could be argued that there is an inherent epistemological tension in using a meta-aggregation approach to synthesise findings across fourteen qualitative research studies, as this process ignores the unique, socio-cultural contexts in which primary research findings are situated.

2.7.6.2 Summary of Findings. The current systematic review aimed to provide an updated synthesis of the corpus of qualitative literature on the lived school experiences of pupils with ASD. It was hoped that this synthesis would provide insight into how pupils with ASD make sense of themselves in the context of their lived experiences across varying placement settings along the continuum of ASD educational provision. Expanding upon the prior meta-synthesis (William et al., 2019), which was largely limited to studies examining the experiences adolescent male pupils attending secondary school settings, the current review included four studies which focused exclusively on female educational experiences (Cook et al., 2018; Goodall & MacKenzie, 2018; Moyse & Porter, 2015; Myles et al., 2019), three studies which included the voice of pupils in special school settings (Cook et al., 2018; Cook et al., 2016; Goodall, 2019), and an increased number of studies which privileged the voice of primary school pupils (Howard et al., 2019; Moyse & Porter, 2015).

Consistent with findings emerging from William et al.'s (2019) meta-synthesis, pupils across several reviewed studies, particularly adolescents in mainstream settings, construed themselves as negatively "different" to peers, while a subset of pupils across all school settings expressed an acceptance of self. Aligning with the developmental trajectory of the sense of self (Damon & Hart, 1988; Harter, 2015), negative self-appraisal by adolescents was underpinned by social comparison centred around issues of 'normalcy' and 'fitting in' and an internalisation of negative peers responses towards the self, as per Cooley's (1902) "looking glass self" process. Such findings arguably highlight that pupils with ASD are not precluded from reflecting on themselves socially and turn to peers at the stage of adolescence to make sense of themselves (Jones et al., 2015). Notably, some pupils who appraised themselves negatively had also internalised a deficit narrative of autism, highlighting how sense of self can also become constructed around medicalised diagnostic labels (Hodge et al., 2019; Hughes, 2009). To

suppress their perceived sense of “difference”, some pupils, particularly females, described a constant process of camouflaging responses which might mark them out as “different”. Arguably, such constant camouflaging represents a “hyper-sense of self” (Hodge et al., 2019 p.14), as the pupils described a constant process of self-monitoring to ensure they are not coming across as “different”. Furthermore, in line with previous qualitative research on identity construction for young people with ASD across social contexts (e.g. Baines, 2012), some pupils sought to assert control over how they were perceived by others by non-disclosure of diagnosis in order to resist being labelled and adhere to normative social expectations.

However, reflecting the importance of not assuming that all people with autism construct sense of self in an identical manner (Stevenson et al., 2016), a subset of pupils across the mainstream and special school settings described a more positively-valenced acceptance of self. Some of these pupils appear to have embraced neurodiversity-aligned perspectives of ASD. Notably, these pupils referred to the presence of supportive friends, who often had matched interests, as facilitating their self-acceptance. These synthesised findings are consistent with research which suggests that individuals with ASD who can relate to a group of like-minded others tend to perceive autism as a valued dimension of neurodiversity (Jones et al., 2015; Kapp et al., 2013). Furthermore, in contrast to strong connotations of “difference” described by pupils in research conducted in mainstream settings, pupils in a special school setting perceived it to be a place of acceptance based on strong feelings of peer relatedness (Goodall, 2019), consistent with literature describing the protective social “bubble” of special school settings (Stevenson et al., 2016, p.224). It should be stated however, that the limited number of studies capturing the voice of pupils from special school and special class settings hinders a valid comparison of the impact of placement setting on sense of self construction.

Synthesised findings reveal three prominent themes relating to the lived school experiences of pupils with ASD including peer relationships, anxiety and stress and support from school staff. Sense of self construction occurred within the context of these lived experiences, as will now be summarised. In relation to peer relationships, social isolation and bullying were common experiences described by pupils with ASD across school settings. One discernible pattern which emerged to differentiate experiences in special and mainstream settings was that bullying was described as more intentional in the mainstream setting (Cook et al., 2016; Cook et al., 2018). This is consistent with quantitative research which indicates that children with ASD attending mainstream schools who present with low levels of social impairments relative to their ASD diagnosis experience higher levels of peer victimisation than children with ASD

matched for social ability attending special school settings (Rowley et al., 2012). Such findings bear significant relevance to sense of self within the school context, as socialising agents who are rejecting may cause the child or young person to internalise a tarnished self-image (Harter, 2015). Synthesised findings indicate that some pupils felt that they were targets for bullying due to their ASD diagnosis, highlighting how self-identification with the diagnostic term ‘autism’ may be adversely impacted by bullying (De Nigris et al., 2018). Conversely, a subset of pupils across all placement settings described successful friendship experiences, often involving befriending others with matched interests/differences who enabled them to feel accepted and valued in school. Stress and anxiety was a prominent theme for pupils with ASD within mainstream educational settings, particularly at secondary level. Learning and sensory environments were often experienced as overwhelming, leading pupils to avoid places where their peers socialised, which inadvertently exacerbated feelings of social isolation and negative difference. In relation to the theme of support from staff, synthesised findings indicate that many adolescent pupils in mainstream settings felt that “differential treatment” and the visibility of Teaching Assistant support in the mainstream class setting heightened their sense of being “different” and had negative social implications in terms of how they were viewed by peers.

2.6.5.6.2 Implications for Future Research. The current systematic review indicates a growing qualitative research momentum to privilege the ‘insider knowledge’ of an expanded cohort of young people with ASD regarding their lived school experiences, including female pupils, adolescent pupils attending special school settings and primary-pupils in mainstream settings. However, where the voice of students attending special school settings was elicited, this was often refined to verbally-able adolescents (Cook et al., 2018; Cook et al., 2016). Consequently, there remains a dearth in research examining how younger and less verbally able children with ASD attending specialist educational provision (i.e. special schools and special ASD classes) perceive themselves in the context of their educational experiences.

Most striking is the scarcity of research exploring the lived experiences and sense-making processes of pupils attending models of “partial inclusion” (Pellicano et al., 2018, p.2018), such as special classes within mainstream schools, especially considering the dramatic expansion of this form of provision in recent years (DES, 2019; Banks & McCoy, 2017). While one study (Danker et al., 2019) included subset of secondary pupils who were enrolled in an ASD class on a part-time basis, these pupils were underrepresented in the recruited sample in relation to pupils enrolled in full-time mainstream provision. Exploring sense of self-

construction for the pupils attending special ASD classes in mainstream schools may yield unique insight, as these pupils have two reference groups to inform their self-evaluations (ie. ASD class and mainstream peers). Indeed, a recent study exploring the transition experiences of pupils with ASD, aged eight to seventeen, from special schools to satellite classes on mainstream school campuses in the UK indicated that the experience of transitioning to a special class setting on a mainstream campus prompted pupils to “look at themselves differently” (Croydon et al., 2019, p.11) as they attempted to make sense of themselves in comparison to both their peers with ASD in the satellite class and the wider mainstream population. This study did not meet inclusionary criteria for the current review as it focused on the pupils’ experience of the discrete period of transitioning between school settings, rather than their lived experiences in either setting. However, Croydon et al’s (2019) study highlights how unique insights may arise from an exploration of the lived experience of the self in “partial inclusion” models such as special ASD classes within mainstream schools. When combined with the synthesised findings of the current review, further research with younger children in special ASD class provision would elucidate for EPs the key areas of intervention necessary to improve the lived experiences and sense of self of pupils with ASD across the full continuum of educational provision.

2.7 Conclusion

School is a site of formative influence in sense of self development. Established difficulties in social cognition may have led to an assumption that pupils with ASD are precluded from developing a sense of self in relation to their social context of school. However, the current systematic review indicates that pupils with ASD, particularly those in mainstream secondary settings, often make sense of themselves as “different” from peers in a negative sense, evidencing a construal of self in relation to others. Conversely, the subset of pupils in this systematic review who demonstrated an acceptance of self, attributed this to positive socialisation experiences including supportive friends and being able to relate to “similar” others in school. This systematic review identifies the need for further research eliciting the lived experiences of younger children in specialist educational settings including special classes to understand the sense-making processes of pupils across the full continuum of ASD educational provision.

Chapter 3: Empirical Paper

3.1 Introduction

Among the school-age population in the Republic of Ireland, approximately 1.55% of children and young people are estimated to have a formal diagnosis of ASD (Department of Health, 2018). ASD manifests as a dyad of impairments including persistent social communication and interactions difficulties as well as restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviours or interests (APA, 2013). The diversity of individual profiles and needs of children and young people with ASD has led to the development of a continuum of ASD educational provision in the Republic of Ireland at primary and post-primary school levels including special school, special ASD class and mainstream provision (Daly et al., 2016; Guldborg et al., 2011).

Within established psychological theories of the self, sense of self, or how one comes to describe and evaluate themselves, is regarded as being influenced by both cognitive-developmental foundations and social interactions with others (e.g., Damon & Hart, 1988; Harter, 2015; Mead, 1954). As a primary context for peer social interactions, school is therefore recognised as a site of critical importance in sense of self development in childhood and adolescence (Harter, 2015; Hodge et al., 2019; Sylva, 1994). Research indicates that school can be a particularly challenging social milieu for pupils with ASD, with high rates of social exclusion (Dean et al., 2014; Kasari et al., 2011; Symes & Humphrey, 2010), bullying (Ashburner et al., 2019; Humphrey & Hebron, 2015; Schroeder et al., 2014) and low levels of peer social support (Symes & Humphrey, 2010). In concurrent recognition of school's formative influence on sense of self development and the unique challenges experienced by pupils with ASD in daily school life, recent years have seen an emergent qualitative research focus on exploring how pupils with ASD make sense of themselves within the context of their life at school (e.g., Hodge et al., 2019; McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014; Williams et al., 2019). One important facet of inquiry not yet addressed is how primary-aged children with ASD enrolled in specialist forms of educational provision make sense of themselves and their lived school experiences.

3.1.1 School as a Context for Sense of Self Development

School's formative influence on sense of self development is supported by a myriad of established self and identity theories which propose that self-understanding is socially constructed through interactions with others (e.g., Cooley, 1902; Damon & Hart, 1988; Harter, 2015; Markus, 1991; Mead, 1934). The influence of the school context becomes particularly salient from middle childhood due to cognitive-developmental advances in the child's ability to internalise the opinions that others are perceived to hold about the self (Damon & Hart, 1988;

Harter, 2015). As such, the child's self-evaluation becomes increasingly linked to the appraisal of peers in school (Ladd & Trooper-Gordon, 2003). Furthermore, cognitive developmental advances in middle childhood enable the child to engage in social comparison assessment with peers to inform self-evaluation (Buunk et al., 2005; Harter, 2015). Increased levels of social comparison are exacerbated by the socialisation environment of the school classroom in which children are constantly confronted with same-age peers who provide pertinent social comparison information (Bunk et al., 2005). Increased self-other evaluations lead to salient social and academic self-efficacy beliefs for the child (Harter, 2015). In adolescence, school's formative influence on sense of self continues. Related to the increasing importance of peer social acceptance for the young adolescent (McElhaney et al., 2008), attributes that influence the nature of one's social appeal to school peers are central in self-descriptions at this developmental stage (Damon & Hart, 1988; Jackson et al., 2012).

3.1.2 Special ASD Class Educational Provision in the Republic of Ireland

The past two decades have yielded significant developments in the educational provision options for pupils with ASD in the Republic of Ireland (Kenny et al., 2020; NCSE, 2019; Daly et al., 2016). Comparable with provision options in the UK (Frederickson et al., 2010; Guldberg et al., 2011; Hebron & Bond, 2017), a continuum of educational provision has been established at primary and post-primary levels (Daly et al., 2016). The continuum comprises full mainstream provision, ASD special classes within both mainstream and special schools and dedicated special ASD schools (Daly et al., 2016). ASD special classes are established with a staff-pupil ratio of one teacher and a minimum of two SNAs for every six pupils (Daly et al., 2016). Guidelines for the establishment of special ASD classes state that pupils enrolled in such classes "should be included in mainstream classes to the greatest extent possible, in line with their abilities" (NCSE, 2016, p.2). As such, special ASD class may be considered a form of "partial inclusion" (Pellicano et al., 2018, p.386), whereby differing amounts of time may be spent in the ASD class or mainstream class dependent on individual pupil profile. Reflecting the legislative presumption toward inclusion of pupils with SEN, most pupils with ASD are currently educated in full mainstream provision (Department of Health, 2018; Guldberg et al., 2011). However, a recent years have seen increased investment and enrolment in ASD special classes within mainstream schools (Banks & McCoy, 2017; NCSE, 2019).

3.1.3 Sense of Self for Pupils with ASD in the Context of Life at School

Until relatively recently, the examination of how pupils with ASD make sense of themselves within the context of their lived school experience had received scant research focus (Williams et al., 2019; Winstone et al., 2014). Established researchers within the cognitive and affective theoretical paradigms of autism, suggest that children with ASD have difficulties accessing others' opinions about the self (Farley et al., 2010), developing emotional relatedness with others (Hobson, 2002; Lee & Hobson, 1998), have limited insights into the internal mental states of self and other (ie. Theory of Mind) (Baron-Cohen et al., 1985) and delayed development of self-other distinction (Lee & Hobsen, 2006; Lombardo & Baron-Cohen, 2010). Such empirically supported difficulties in social cognition may have led to an assumption that sense of self construction for pupils with ASD is not naturally anchored in their social world, including the school context (King et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2019; Winstone et al., 2014). However, an emerging corpus of qualitative inquiries which provide a space for pupils with ASD to reflect on their lived school experiences suggests otherwise, highlighting the formative impact of the school environment on their sense of self construction.

Most noticeably, Williams et al. (2019) conducted a comprehensive meta-synthesis of seventeen qualitative research studies examining the first-hand lived school experiences of pupils with ASD in mainstream school settings. They found that many of these pupils often perceive themselves as negatively 'different' to school peers with only a subset of pupils articulating an acceptance of self and their perceived differences. Williams et al. (2019) identified specific aspects of lived school experience which contribute to pupils construing themselves as 'different' in a negative sense including social relationships with peers and school staff and the accessibility of the school environment. For instance, negative connotations of self as "different" was attributed to social comparison around the concept of 'normality' and an internalisation of negative peers responses (e.g., Hill, 2014; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014). Conversely, some pupils described the important role of close friendships in engendering an acceptance of self (e.g., Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014). Some pupils reported that school staff accentuated their sense of negative difference via differential treatment and overly visible support (e.g Hill, 2014; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014). Furthermore, the sensory demands of the mainstream school environment led some pupils to avoid socialisation communal spaces in school, exacerbating feelings of negative 'difference' and social isolation (e.g., Hill, 2014; Sagers et al., 2011).

Findings from Williams et al.'s (2019) qualitative meta-synthesis highlights that for many pupils with ASD, school is a most formative context for making sense of living with difference (Mogensen & Mason, 2015). However, studies reviewed largely represented the experiences of verbally-able male adolescents attending mainstream post-primary school settings, and is therefore not reflective of the lived school experiences of pupils across the full continuum of ASD educational provision in the Republic of Ireland. A updated review of qualitative literature since Williams et al.'s (2019) literature retrieval search (conducted in 2014), highlights a growing body of qualitative research on lived school school experiences involving an expanded cohort of pupils with ASD including females (Cook et al., 2018; Goodall & MacKenzie, 2018; Moyse & Porter, 2015; Myles et al., 2019), adolescents in special school settings (e.g. Cook et al., 2018; Cook et al., 2016; Goodall, 2019) and primary-age children attending mainstream provision (Howard et al., 2019; Moyse & Porter, 2015). However, there remains a dearth of qualitative research exploring the lived school experiences of primary-aged children with ASD enrolled in specialist forms of educational provision. This gap in research is likely attributable to associated difficulties in social and verbal communication, which complicate traditional qualitative research methods (Fayette & Bond, 2018; Tyrrell & Woods, 2018). Most striking is arguably the absence of research exploring the lived experiences of children attending special ASD classes within mainstream schools, when considered in the context of the dramatic expansion of this form of provision in Ireland in recent years (Banks & McCoy, 2017).

3.1.4 Current Study

The current research study addresses this afore described gap in qualitative research by exploring the following overarching research question: *“How do children with ASD attending special ASD classes in mainstream primary schools make sense of themselves and their educational experiences?”* Three focused research questions were devised to give purpose to the overarching research question:

- What are the lived school experiences of the child in terms of interpersonal relationships, curriculum/ learning and accessibility of the school environment?
- How does the child make sense of him/herself in the social context of school?
- Does special provision within a mainstream school influence how the child makes sense of him/herself, and if so, in what ways?

3.2. Methodology

3.2.1 Research Design

The research adopted an exploratory multiple case study design (Yin, 2018), which was underpinned by an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis [IPA] approach (Smith et al., 2009). Case study, as a distinctive methodology, arises from the desire to understand complex social phenomena (Yin, 2018). Case studies enable an in depth-investigation of a “case” whilst retaining a holistic perspective on understanding the “case” as it interacts with its broader, contextual environment (Mertens, 2010; Simons, 2009; Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) stipulates that case study is an appropriate methodology when a “how” or “why” research question is being pursued which focuses on a contemporary issue within a real-life context. As the current research involved exploring the complex process of how children with ASD make sense of themselves and their experiences within the contemporary context of special ASD class provision within the mainstream school setting, case study was deemed an appropriate research methodology. Given the established scarcity of prior empirical research eliciting the lived experience of primary-age students with ASD enrolled in specialist provision, the case study was exploratory in nature (Yin, 2018). The research adopted a multiple case study design, utilising replication logic across five carefully selected individual cases to facilitate cross-case synthesis (Yin, 2018). In the current study, the individual child, enrolled in the ASD special class was defined as the “case” or unit of analysis and the contexts were mainstream primary schools with special ASD class provision.

Complementary to the contextualist case study design (Yin, 2018), multi-perspectival IPA was adopted as an overarching approach for data collection and analysis (Smith et al., 2009). IPA is concerned with the detailed, systematic examination of people’s lived experiences and the meanings they attach to those experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Smith et al., 2009). Related to the current research question, sense of self and identity is often a substantive topic of concern in IPA research (Smith et al., 2009). IPA pursues an idiographic commitment, involving detailed analyses of cases of lived experiences and as such, dovetails with a case study approach (Smith et al., 2009).

In contrast to traditional IPA research which commonly involves a homogenous sample of participants, the current research adopted a multi-perspectival IPA approach (Larkin et al., 2019). It has been argued that the traditional, single-perspective IPA approach can be limiting when the overarching research question involves a relational or systemic dimension (Larkin et al., 2019). Aligning with these sentiments, the current study recognised that there were additional significant others within the child’s educational eco-system (Larkin et al., 2019).

Relevant to the social-communication difficulties associated with ASD, multi-perspectival IPA has also been advocated in cases where there may be some constraints among participants to verbalise their experience, in which additional perspectives may enrich their accounts and produce results with increased substance, impact and rigour (Larkin et al., 2019). As such, in the individual case studies, three focal perspectives were pursued: the child, parent and ASD class teacher. However, aligning with seminal phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty's (1962) concerns with subjectivity and embodiment, the current research recognised that while the child's parent and ASD class teacher can observe and empathise with his/her lived experience, they do not fully share the child's experience, which ultimately belongs to the child's "embodied position in the world" (Smith et al., 2009, p.19). As such, in cross-case analysis the children's lived experience through their individual voices were first presented in their own right, so as to honour this principle of embodied experience. A subsequent, parallel account was provided on how this lived experience was received, interpreted and understood by significant perspectives within the child's educational eco-system, i.e., parents and ASD class teachers.

In exploratory case studies, Yin (2018) outlines three tests to establish quality research designs: construct validity, external validity, and reliability. The current study addressed quality criteria utilising specific case study tactics (Yin, 2018) as outlined in *Table 3.1*.

Table 3.1

<i>Test</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Case Study Tactic</i>	<i>Present Study</i>
Construct Validity	Identifying correct operational measures for the concepts being studied	Use multiple sources of evidence. Interpretations reviewed by peers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Qualitative data obtained from child, parent and teacher. ○ Analysis reviewed by colleague ○ Assessment of “communicative effectiveness” of child interviews to avoid over-interpretation of child’s responses.
External Validity	Showing whether and how a case study’s findings can be generalised	Use replication logic in multiple case studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Replication logic via cross-case synthesis: comparing within-case patterns across cases with sensitivity to both convergence and divergence.
Reliability	Demonstrating that the operations of a study can be repeated with the same results	Use case study protocol Develop case study database Maintain a chain of evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Case study protocol developed which specified procedures to be followed during data collection for each case study (see Appendix H) ○ Nvivo 12 database which organised data collected for each individual case study. ○ Comprehensive individual case reports which provide comprehensive chain of evidence for emergent themes

Criteria of Quality Case Study Research

3.2.2 Participants and recruitment

The study adopted a purposive convenience sampling method (Cohen et al., 2018; Mertens, 2010). Five child-parent-teacher triads were purposively recruited according to the following inclusionary criteria:

- The child must have a formal diagnosis of ASD, as evidenced via enrolment in a NCSE-sanctioned ASD special class.
- The child must be enrolled in an ASD class within a mainstream primary school.
- The child must have been enrolled in the special ASD class for at least one previous school year.
- The child must be aged between eight-twelve years.

To initiate the process of participant recruitment, a research invitation letter (see Appendix I) was emailed to principals of mainstream primary schools with ASD classes across six counties in the midlands and south-west regions of Ireland, as per the NCSE list of mainstream schools with special ASD classes. Principals from four schools granted access to

recruit within their schools. In total, five child-parent-child triads across the four school sites were recruited to participate in the research. This amounted to fourteen participants, as the ASD class teacher in ‘*School 2*’ taught two of the case study pupils. All five child participants were male, and all parent and teacher participants were female. Demographic information for the case study pupils is provided in *Table 3.2*. While four of the children had begun their educational provision predominantly based in the special ASD class, as can be seen in *Table 3.2*, there was significant variability in the levels of mainstream inclusion among child participants at the time of data collection. While there were varying levels of functional communication among participating children, no child was minimally verbal (Saul & Norbury, 2020). More detailed demographic information on each case study child and school context is provided in Appendix J.

Table 3.2*Demographic Information of Case Study Children*

Pseudonym	Age	Additional diagnoses/difficulties	Mainstream class level	Level when enrolled in ASD class	Current level of mainstream inclusion
Tom	10 years	N/A	4 th class	Senior Infants	Reverse inclusion (1-1.5 hours per day)
Eoin	11 years	Expressive Language Delay	5 th class	Junior Infants	2.5 hours per day
Jakub	12 Years	N/A	6 th class	Junior Infants	Majority of school day
Max	8 years	Literacy difficulties	2 rd class	Senior Infants	2.5 hours per school day
Seán	11 years	N/A	6 th class	First class	Majority of school day

**Reverse inclusion= mainstream peers partaking in curricular activities within special class context*

3.2.3 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the research was granted by the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC) on 12th March 2020 (See Appendix K). Informed written consent was required by the school principal, child's parent and child's teacher for participation in the research study. Covid-19 safety protocols were significant ethical considerations adhered to throughout in-school data collection sessions with child participants (in compliance with each school's COVID response plan). Child assent was sought at the beginning of the data collection session using a digitally-displayed visual information sheet (to comply with school's Covid-19 response plan), which was read aloud line-by-line with the child (mindful of language/literacy difficulties) to ensure understanding, and to which the child responded to: 'happy' or 'unhappy' assent sheet terms (see Appendix L for informed consent and assent documentation). Given the communicative difficulties associated with ASD, a Special Needs Assistant (SNA)/teacher accompanied the child during data collection, to support the researcher in recognising whether the child required a movement break or was no longer willing to participate. A 'skip question', 'take a break' and 'stop' card was presented throughout data collection, and the child was informed that they could point to the card at any time. To ensure sensitivity to potential unawareness of their ASD diagnosis, no explicit reference was made to autism or any similar diagnostic terms in interview prompts with children. All children were assigned pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

3.2.4 Data Collection

3.2.4.1 Adult Participants.

3.2.4.1.1 Semi-Structured Interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the child's parent and ASD class teacher, resulting in ten semi-structured interview sessions. Noticeably, all parents who opted to participate in the study were mothers. Due to Covid-19 protocols, these interviews were conducted remotely, via video conferencing. The interview schedules (see Appendices M and N) focused on affective school experience, social relationships, experience with the physical/sensory school environment, curriculum/learning, and sense of self development. The interview schedules were piloted with two Special Education Teachers and a parent of a child with ASD. The audio content of these interviews was recorded on a digital voice recorder to enable transcription.

3.2.4.2 Child Participants. A physically-distanced data collection session was conducted in school with each child, in accordance with each school's Covid-19 response plan.

3.2.4.2.1 British Picture Vocabulary Scales (3rd Edition) (BPVS-3). At the beginning of in-school data collection sessions with the child, the BPVS-3 (Dunn et al., 2009) was administered to the case study children in a digitalised and socially-distanced manner. The BPVS-3 is an individually, norm-referenced test of receptive vocabulary. For each item in this assessment, the researcher said a word and the pupil responded by selecting a picture from four options that best illustrates the word's meaning. Scores on the BPVS-3 demonstrate a strong positive correlation with standardised measures of verbal cognitive ability (Dunn et al., 2009).

3.2.4.2.2 Talking Mat Interviews. Individual interviews with children were mediated via a "Talking Mat" interactive pictorial communication technique (Murphy & Cameron, 2008). This technique was developed to enable youth with developmental disabilities and communication difficulties to actively engage in discussions about matters which affect them (Murphy & Cameron, 2008). In the current study, the Talking Mat interview involved the child indicating how he felt about various aspects of school experience by placing a labelled picture depicting the relevant aspect of school experience into "like", "don't like" and "unsure" categories on a "Talking Mat". Following placement of each picture, the child was given follow-up verbal prompts from a semi-structured interview schedule to ascertain the reasoning underpinning his likes/dislikes and related questions regarding his perception of self, including prompts for dyadic comparison between self and nominated peers in school and questions related to how peers and adults in school might describe them (see Appendix O). Provision of an activity-based Talking Mat provided a concrete basis for interviewing and a shared visual

reference point to reduce the pressure associated with face-to-face interaction for children with ASD (Winstone et al., 2014; Tesfaye et al., 2019). All Talking Mat materials were sanitised prior to handling by the child and Talking Mat activities were conducted in a physically-distanced manner. The “Talking Mat” interviews were video recorded to enable them to be coded for communicative effectiveness (Murphy and Cameron, 2008).

3.2.5 Data Analysis

3.2.5.1 Talking Mat Communicative Effectiveness Coding. The video recording of each child’s “Talking Mat” interview was analysed for communicative effectiveness using Murphy and Cameron’s (2008) Communicative Effectiveness Coding Framework (see Appendix P). This enabled the researcher to judge the communicative effectiveness of each child’s “Talking Mat” interview on a five-point frequency scale (scores ranging from zero to four) in terms of five indicators (ie. the child’s understanding, engagement, confidence in articulating views/placing symbols, satisfaction with his/her confirmed views and the interviewer’s understanding of the child’s views). One Talking Mat interview was coded separately by the researcher and research supervisor with an inter-observer agreement rate of 100%. Following subsequent researcher coding of remaining videos, a mean aggregate score of communicative effectiveness was assigned to each “Talking Mat” interview. An aggregate score of twelve or less was deemed to have questionable effectiveness (Bunning et al., 2016).

3.2.5.2. Multi-perspectival IPA. Audio recordings of interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher to ensure immersion in the data (Smith et al., 2009) (see Appendices Q and R for sample transcripts). Nvivo 12, a qualitative data management programme was utilised to co-ordinate data analysis for each individual case study. Data analysis was conducted according to a multi-perspectival phenomenological framework (Larkin et al., 2019). The rudimentary mechanics of IPA are similar to pattern identification-based coding in many types of qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013). However, in IPA research, the analysis has a more idiographic focus, with detailed thematic development completed for each data item and a commitment to the interpretation of meaning held for individual participants (Larkin et al., al., 2019; Smith et al., 2009).

Adopting a multi-perspectival IPA approach, in the current study, following extensive exploratory commentary, emergent themes were identified for each transcript. These emergent themes were synthesised at the within-case level (i.e., Child, parent, teacher) to determine super-ordinate and emergent themes for the individual case study. Individual case-study reports were compiled to provide a comprehensive audit trail of thematic development (see

Appendices S-W). Individual within-case analyses were peer reviewed by a colleague with PhD-level experience in inductivist approaches to qualitative research (Smith et al., 2009). Subsequent cross-case synthesis between groups was conducted to arrive at final master superordinate and sub-ordinate themes (Larkin et al., 2019). In cross-case synthesis, there was first a commitment to identifying thematic recurrence in the embodied voices of children across cases. Subsequently, having comprehensively established the lived experiences of children, patterns of convergence and divergence were identified across cases in terms of how this lived experience was interpreted by the children's ASD class teachers and parents (Larkin et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2009). Analysis encompassed an iterative and inductive cycle to retain an idiographic focus on the individual voice. The nature of the multi-perspectival IPA analysis adopted in the current study is summarized in *Table 3.3*:

Table 3.3

Multi-Perspectival IPA Analytic Procedure Adopted

Stage 1	Data preparation (transcription verbatim)
Stage 2	Reading and re-reading (immersion in an individual transcript taking notes of most striking points of interest)
Stage 3	Exploratory comments (Close line-by-line analysis of individual transcript via descriptive, linguistic and conceptual comments)
Stage 4	Developing emergent themes (within individual transcript)
Stage 5	Repetition of stages 2-4 for other two transcripts in individual case
Stage 6	Searching for patterns of connections across emergent themes within the individual case (ie. parent, teacher, child) leading to superordinate themes for the case
Stage 6	Repeat stages 2-6 for other four case studies
Stage 7	Cross-case synthesis of children's lived experiences
Stage 8	Cross-case synthesis of parent and ASD class teacher perspectives leading to master superordinate and subthemes across entire data set.

3.4 Results

3.4.1 Background Measures

The receptive vocabulary estimates of the children, as measured by the BPVS-3, ranged between the Moderately Low to Low Average ranges (4th to 32nd percentile ranks) (Dunn et al., 2009). Communicative effectiveness ratings (Murphy & Cameron, 2008), for the video-recordings of the Talking Mat interviews, as evidenced in *Table 3.4*, indicated that four of the

five interviews were above the minimum effectiveness rating of 12 (Bunning et al., 2016), indicating that a satisfactory communicative interaction was facilitated via the Talking Mat approach. Noticeably, Max's Talking Mat interview did not reach the minimum threshold for communicative effectiveness. Max reported feeling tired during the Talking Mat interview and did not verbally elaborate following his placement of picture prompts. In response to his expressed fatigue, his interview was concluded prematurely and therefore did not reach minimum communicative effectiveness ratings. As such, within-case IPA analysis in this case study was confined to parent and teacher perspectives.

Table 3.4

Background Measures

Pseudonym	BPVS-3 Score	Communicative Effectiveness (C.E.) Coding Framework					Satisfaction with end Result	Aggregate Score
		Participant Understanding	Participant Engagement	Participant Confidence	Researcher Understanding			
Tom	74	2	4	4	3	3	15	
Eoin	76	3	4	4	4	4	19	
Jakub	80	4	3	4	4	4	19	
Max	--*	3	2	2	2	1	10	
Seán	93	4	3	4	4	3	18	

**Score yielded (71) deemed a significant underestimation of receptive vocabulary due to engagement issues*

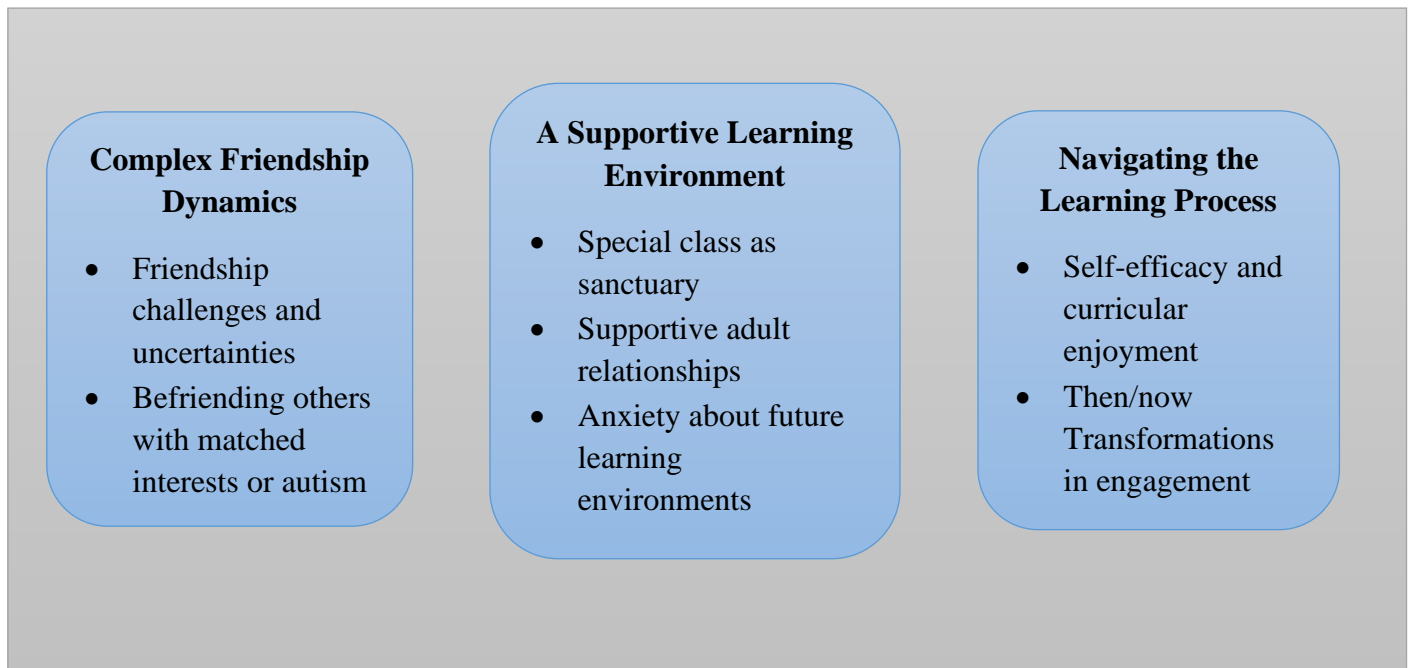
3.4.2 Overview of Cross-Case Synthesis

Master superordinate and subordinate themes arising from the cross-case synthesis will be presented in this section. Themes will be presented as they address each of the three research objectives. An overview of the level of recurrence for each of these themes across the five case studies is provided in the cross-case synthesis summary in Appendix X.

3.4.2.1 Research Question 1: What are the lived school experiences of the child in terms of interpersonal relationships, curriculum/ learning and accessibility of the school environment?

Figure 3.1

Master Superordinate and Subordinate Themes for Research Question 1



Complex Friendship Dynamics.

Friendship Challenges and Uncertainties: “I forget how to make more friends”.

There was a discourse of challenges and uncertainties in three children’s descriptions of friendships, predominantly with the wider mainstream peer cohort. Sources of friendship challenges and uncertainties varied. For example, Eoin articulated personal social difficulties in comprehending the process of friendship formation:

Interviewer: And do you find it easy or hard to make friends in school?

Eoin: [sighs] Emm hard.

Interviewer: Hard, what’s hard about making friends?

Eoin: ((long pause)) When I make friends I don’t know how to (pause), I don’t know how to ((long pause)) do it again [looks downwards]

Interviewer: How to stay being their friend?

Eoin: No, em how to make friends, I mean make a friend I forget how to make (pause) more friends.

A further friendship challenge identified was possessing divergent interests to the predominant mainstream cohort. While Seán describes feeling included and competent to “*play with everyone on yard*” and affirmed that “*no one is mean to me*”, he still perceived authentic

friendship formation in the mainstream context as *“Em, kind of hard because there’s not many people with the same interests as me”*. Jakub, who had high levels of mainstream inclusion, described positive interactions and a wide network of friendships with his peers in the mainstream class setting. However, Jakub still relayed how having divergent recreation preferences to some of these peers compromised his enjoyment during break times: *“Most of the kids they mostly play soccer and the people who don’t play soccer or who don’t play soccer that much, like me, don’t really have nothing to do because most of their friends are playing soccer”*.

Parent and Teacher Understandings: There was some convergence in parents and teachers’ perceptions of challenges and uncertainties in children’s friendships. For instance, Eoin’s mother’s description of instances of perceived social isolation on the school yard augment his account of personal difficulties in comprehending the process of friendship formation: *“Sometimes you know he feels left out. ‘Cause he doesn’t know how to make friends... he doesn’t know how to start a conversation”*. Max’s parent and teacher also perceived there to be some uncertainty in his experiences of friendship in the school context, which was partly attributed to a perceived preference for solitary play: *“So Max is one of those boys who is more content in his own space”* (Max’s ASD class teacher).

Befriending Others with Matched Interests or Autism: “We like the same stuff”

Despite the challenges encountered in friendships dynamics, all children described more successful friendships in school, which both knowingly and unknowingly often involved befriending others with matched interests or autism. For instance, Eoin appeared to find some commonality in play preferences with younger children in the wider school community: *“I have friends in third, fourth class... Yeah [smiles] and some in second class too”*. As a result, he disliked Covid-19 restrictions on the school yard which prevented him from mixing with pupils from younger classes: *“No I preferred to play with everybody, not like, not fifth sixth [classes]”*. Seán, who had progressed to spending most of his time in the mainstream setting appeared to have a close friendship circle with two same-age mainstream peers. Seán emphasised shared interests as a fundamental dimension of this friendship *“Eh, we like video games, we like drawing, we eh, yeah we like the same stuff. We like the same movies as well”*.

Tom, who was primarily based in the ASD-class, articulated a sense of ASD class-based friendship in his description of break-time enjoyment: *“Yeah and I can run and I can play with Alice*, and I can play with Declan”, and sometimes Callum* and Kieran* playing football”*

(*pseudonyms of ASD class peers). Tom seemed to perceive his friendships with his ASD class peers as being reciprocal in nature: “*Well Alice* doesn’t really talk that much but...when I talk to her she talks to me and she listens*”. Relatedly, while Jakub described a wide network of friendships in his mainstream class, peers who had previously been enrolled in the ASD class remained his close friends: “*Some of my best friends, they don’t even go to [names ASD class] at all anymore*” (Jakub).

Parent and Teacher Understandings: Several parents and teachers echoed children’s sentiments of befriending others with matched interests or autism. For instance, Tom’s ASD class teacher described how she perceives that Tom and his classmates gravitate towards each other on the whole-school yard due to a mutual sense of comfort with each other:

“Now our gang, they kind of tend to play together and with the other ASD class...they tend to just click together because I suppose...Their game of football would be different to the mainstream game of football. I think they find their own comfort zone and they’re happy within that” (Tom’s ASD class teacher).

Relatedly, Eoin’s mother reflected that she perceives him to experience more successful interpersonal interactions with ASD-class peers due to a sense of relatedness and mutual understanding of each other’s needs “*Whereas when it’s with the kids from (names ASD class), they’d take ten minutes, they’d give each other a break and they’d understand each other*”. However, social interactions within the ASD class were not universally perceived as unproblematic. For instance, Seán’s ASD class teacher reflected on her perception that the range of needs and abilities within the ASD class context may be difficult for children with lesser severity of needs: “*..but there’s that..the huge kind of spectrum, you know they’re coming in with other kids who are much much higher on the spectrum [in terms of need] and that must be hard for them*”.

A Supportive Learning Environment.

Special Class as Sanctuary for the Self: “His safe place”.

All of the boys, apart from Tom, spent varying amounts of time each day in mainstream classrooms. For some children, the sensory demands of the mainstream class setting were sometimes perceived as overwhelming, with Eoin recalling times where it feels like a “*scream in my ear*”. Conversely, the special ASD class was perceived as a place of sanctuary. For instance, Jakub described his connotations of the ASD class as a place of personal sanctuary to withdraw to when stressed: “*Well mostly I like doing, just relaxing in there*”. Specific environmental adaptations within the special class setting, such as sensory and snoozelen

rooms were also associated as places of regulation. For instance, children relayed feeling emotionally regulated in the sensory room: *“I feel em relaxing”* (Tom) and *“really nice and relaxing”* (Eoin). Conversely, Jakub expressed his frustration, when his opportunities for regulating in the sensory room were disrupted by younger ASD-class peers: *“Yeah, it kind of bothers me ‘cause like it, it mostly involves like relaxing but everyone just uses it as playing”*.

Parent and Teacher Understandings: Complementary to children’s accounts, across case studies, parents and teachers generally perceived the ASD class as a place of sanctuary for children to self-regulate away from the sensory and social demands of the mainstream classroom. For instance, Eoin’s mother perceived the ASD class the serve as a place *“where he goes when he feels overwhelmed...That’s his safe place”*. Relatedly, Max’s ASD-class teacher reflected on the visible difference she perceives the provision of such sanctuary to have on his capacity to engage, based on her previous of experience working with him in his mainstream class setting:

“I had no flavour of his personality based on what I had seen prior, you know. But having worked with him in this setting, ahm, I really see his personality, you know he really seems to just flourish a little bit more or feel freer to be himself, and I’m not sure whether that’s just because of the busyness of the mainstream class, while we have, it’s just more fluid here” (Max’s ASD class teacher)

Supportive Adult Relationships: “He always chats with me”.

Some children described their appreciation of a respectful and open communicative relationship with adult staff in the ASD class context. For instance, Jakub relayed how his teacher *“always chats with me sometimes”*, whilst Tom described his enjoyment of a morning communicative exchange with his ASD class teacher *“..she would say morning to me and my friends and we say morning to her”*. There was variance in children’s openness for additional, visible adult support during independent learning activities, which appeared influenced by children’s developmental stage and whether they were participating within the ASD or mainstream class setting. For instance, Tom, one of the younger children, appeared quite open to seeking additional adult support to help him to cope during independent work: *Well when, when when we used to do ‘Mental Maths’ and ‘Mental English’ on our own at our desk, it was a little bit hard and we ask for help”*. Furthermore, Eoin articulated difficulties experienced when working independently: *Am, it’s very hard when you wo-working alone”*. However, the two eldest children, articulated an emerging sense of agency, describing that although

additional adult support was beneficial when explicitly requested, they valued the increased opportunities provided to them to work autonomously:

“I don’t really have an SNA anymore, it’s just like if they’re dropping me up to class. I do all the work myself...I do all the work myself and I ask my teacher if I don’t really know what to do” (Seán)

“Well, eh, I like working alone...I don’t want to be like constantly saying ‘how do you do this’ or ‘how do you do that’ (Jakub)

Parent and Teacher Understandings: Some parents and teachers perceived the continuity of the child’s adult support network within the ASD class over consecutive school years as facilitating the formation of a close pupil-staff attachment. Tom’s mother articulated this sense of pupil-staff attachment, in her description of the impact of the Covid-19 related school closures for Tom:

“I think that was one of the biggest things of the lockdown for him, it was like he was missing part of his family, because they are sort of a family now they’ve been together for so long. And they’re really close” (Tom’s mother).

Furthermore, some parents felt that the continuity of SNA provision within the special ASD class setting, meant that staff were acutely attuned to their child’s emotional regulation needs and able to respond in a preventative manner. Consistent with the accounts of older case study children, some parents relayed a perception of their child’s increasing desire for agency and autonomy in independent working in school: *“..he doesn’t want to be babied anymore, like he’s wanting to do everything himself now”* (Seán’s mother). Relatedly, Eoin’s mother perceived him to be self-conscious about visibly requesting SNA support in the mainstream classroom, and therefore valued the more discrete, subtle system of requesting adult support, engineered by Eoin and his SNA: *“They have a system, they have a little way- they have little techniques nobody else can see. Like he taps his leg now if he’s having problems and the SNA comes straight over....that’s just less embarrassing for him”* (Eoin’s mother).

Anxiety About Future Learning Environments: “Kind of nervous”.

For case study pupils approaching the post-primary transition, there were palpable sentiments of nervousness about the future transition to post-primary. For example, Jakub, articulated an apprehension about leaving his current school placement: *I’m not looking forward to secondary, I’ll miss this school”*. Similarly, Seán, who was also approaching the

post-primary school transition, reported feeling apprehensive about the social demands of post-primary school. However, despite his expressed nervousness, he appeared self-assured about his capacity to cope with this prospective challenge:

Seán: I'm kind of nervous but I'll get through it.

Interviewer: And what makes you a little bit nervous?

Seán. It's just like, there's going to be loads of different people.

Parent and Teacher Understandings: Some parents and ASD class teachers perceived older case study children to be experiencing anxiety about the upcoming transition to primary. For instance, whilst not articulated by Eoin himself, his mother and ASD class teacher perceived him to be grappling with a growing sense of anxiety about post-primary due to a fear of losing his valued current support system:

"Because he is awful worried about leaving [School] as well....That the support system in [School]...he feels so safe and secure in [School]. It's like what's going to happen to me when I leave [School]?" (Eoin's mother)

However, cross-case synthesis indicated that anxiety about the post-primary transition was experienced more strongly by the adults in the child's life than the child himself. For instance, Jakub's mother described that while she was "*panicking, I'm actually panicking. I don't know what to expect*", Jakub regularly reassures her "*Mammy, don't worry, I'll manage, I'll be okay*". Similarly, despite Max being in the junior end of primary school, his mother relayed how the post-primary placement decision was "*on my mind all the time*". While she felt that Max was "*thriving*" due to his current school support system, she was apprehensive that this would continue in post-primary school, "*And I think secondary school, he's just got to survive it. I think secondary school is just survival*". Much of this adult anxiety seemed to arise from a concern that the child might be vulnerable in the more challenging social milieu of post-primary school: "*...just the big bad world of you know kids from other schools who have never met him before ... you'd just kind of worry about those you know just the not-so-nice kids that are out there*" (ASD class teacher)

Navigating the Learning Process and Curriculum

Self-efficacy and Curricular Enjoyment: "My reading is doing good"

When describing their experiences of engaging with the curriculum, children's enjoyment of curricular subjects appeared highly contingent on their self-efficacy beliefs, which seemed quite salient. Eoin for example, described his dislike for maths, which he

attributed to a regression in his skills over the course of Covid-19 related school closures which appears to have impacted his perceived self-efficacy:

Interviewer: How do you feel about maths in school?

Eoin: [places in dislike column]

Interviewer: Oh you don't like maths? Why?

Eoin: It's very hard. It's very very hard now. Now I forget what I did in maths after we went all home. It just [makes gesture]

Interviewer: Went out of your brain?

Eoin: Yes. And what I don't like is, you have to do l-long division and multiplying is hard.

Conversely, Eoin's described his enjoyment of literacy and art in school, which appeared related to his higher sense of self-efficacy in these domains: *"my reading is doing good" ... "I like art very much...my my art was very talented"*. Relatedly, Tom expressed a personal preference for sports played in P.E., due to his perception that *"I think they're a bit easy"*. Similarly, Jakub articulated how his enjoyment of maths varied according to his perceived self-efficacy in various strands of the curriculum:

"Well, it depends on what the subject is like, I'm not really good at multiplication. So I don't really like it. Like if I have to do it in my head like 'snap, snap', then like no I wouldn't be able to do that. And then the like part is like if it's a subject that is easy-peasy like we were doing yesterday with the addition and subtraction, then yeah, I would like it because, it is very easy" (Jakub).

Parent and Teacher Understandings: Whilst children's accounts indicated an association between low self-efficacy and curricular dislike, parents and teachers perceived that salient low self-efficacy resulted not only in curricular dislike for children, but also in experiences of emotional dysregulation and distress. For instance, Eoin's ASD class teacher relayed her perception that in P.E. with mainstream peers *"he gets very annoyed with himself when he can't hit it or you know can't catch the ball"*. Similarly, Max's ASD class teacher emphasised the emotional upset arising for him in the context of mainstream P.E:

"Am P.E. is a big, big 'no-no' for him. Yeah, he gets very stressed with P.E. I don't know, he's not a fan of it anyway. He kind of feels like he can't do it... he would articulate 'I just can't do it'" (Max's ASD class teacher).

Now/Then Transformations in Classroom Engagement: “I wasn’t really that good at doing work”.

Two of the eldest case study children engaged in a temporal self-reflection, in which they identified and articulated the progress achieved in their capacity to engage in classroom learning activities over the course of their educational placement. Seán, for instance, recognised his increased capacity to attend to table-top tasks since his previous school placement. He attributed this progress to SNA support in scaffolding his attention skills:

Seán: ... ‘cause when I was in junior infants, senior infants, I didn’t really, I wasn’t really that good at doing work, I was always really distracted.

Interviewer: And what do you think helped you to get to the point where you can do work independently?

Seán: Eh, ‘cause of my SNAs

Interviewer: Okay, what did they do to help you?

Seán: They kind of helped me with like questions and to figure out how to do it. And like helped me to ke-, to stay focused.

Relatedly, Jakub, who had experienced significant increases in mainstream inclusion over the past two school years, reflected on his developing capacity to work autonomously in the mainstream class setting “*Because I remember when I was in fifth class....I remember constantly telling [mainstream class teacher] like ‘how do you do this? or ‘how do you do that?’ but since I’m in sixth class, that barely happens anymore”.*

Parent & Teacher Understandings: Consistent with children’s accounts, parents and teachers across four case studies, perceived marked changes in individual children’s capacity to engage in the learning process over the course of their educational placement to date. Seán’s mother elaborated to describe how the transformation she perceives in his capacity and confidence to engage has provided reassurance regarding her school placement decision. She recalled how enrolling Seán in an ASD class had been a difficult decision due to her concerns that special provision may have led to him becoming defined by his diagnosis:

“...if you had met him say like five years ago he was a completely different child like, so it was the right decision but it was a hard decision because you don’t want to kind of leave him with this label either” (Seán’s mother)

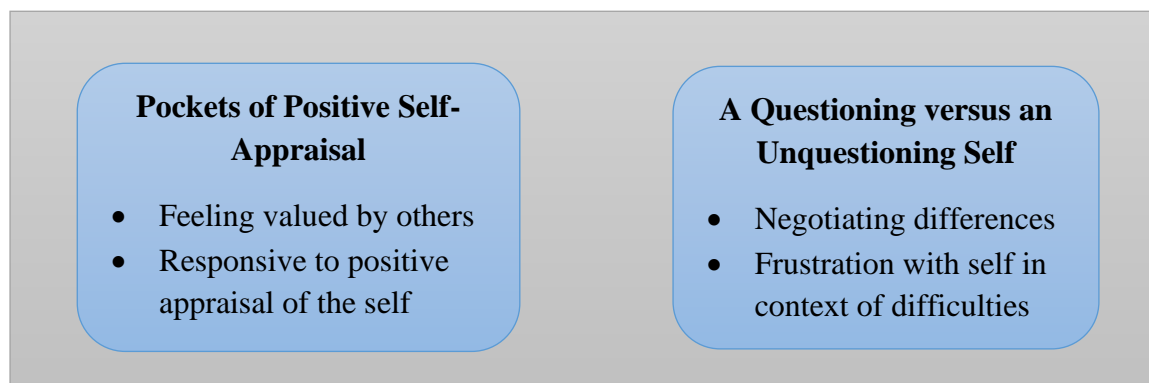
Similarly, Tom’s mother described his engagement difficulties in his previous mainstream placement, relaying how “*it was nearly eh a switch was going off in him in that he was regressing a lot in that setting”.* Tom’s ASD class teacher perceived marked improvements in

his capacity to engage in special class and mainstream inclusion activities, to the extent that she found it difficult to describe Tom without making a temporal comparison to highlight his progress: “*You see I find it hard to describe him without going ‘well there’s the before and the after.....he has come a long way you know’*”. However, Tom’s teacher cautioned that she perceived such progress, particular in terms of capacity to engage in reverse mainstream inclusion opportunities, to have been a gradual, individually-paced process, achieved over time: “*...we weren’t able to go in day one and go ‘oh we’re integrating all over the place’ and we’re you know...It takes time for that to develop and it has to be quite natural’*”.

3.4.2.2 Research Question 2: How does the child make sense of him/herself in the social context of school?

Figure 3.2

Master Superordinate and Subordinate Themes for Research Qusetion 2



Pockets of Positive Self Appraisal.

Feeling Valued by Others: I make people laugh and never sad’.

Across three case studies, children articulated a clear self-through-other description. In these descriptions, children emphasised positive interpersonal qualities of the self which they felt were recognised by close friends and sometimes, general peers, in school:

Interviewer: And if I asked Sarah (pseudonym) to describe Eoin for me, what do you think she would say?*

Eoin: Eoin is my good friend yes.

Interviewer: And what else would she say about you?

Eoin: ((long pause)) I’m nice, I’m friendly, I help people, I make people laugh and never sad.

Interviewer: ...if I asked some of the children in your class to describe Jakub for me, what do you think they would say?

Jakub: Well funny, entertaining. Always wants to chat and doesn't really get bored.

"He'd probably say that I'm a good friend and nice and kind" (Seán)

These self-through-other descriptions portray a sense that children felt they possessed positive interpersonal qualities and that their social selves were valued by close friends and peers in school. Relatedly, while Tom did not directly conceptualise himself from the perspective of a nominated friend in school, his more ambiguous response still conveyed a sense of feeling that his play skills were valued by his nominated friend *"He likes.... eh, he likes playing with me and Conor* [pseudonym]"*.

Responsive to Positive Appraisal of the Self: "I'm a good student".

All case study children articulated a responsiveness to positive appraisal of the self by significant others in school, most noticeably teacher praise and affirmation of the self. The children's responsiveness to teacher appraisal of the self is demonstrated in their self-through-teacher descriptions, which often appear to convey an internalisation of positive affirmation they had heard and received from their teachers:

Interviewer: What do you think [ASD class teacher] would say about you Tom?

Tom: That I do hard work.

Interviewer: What would [ASD class teacher] would say about you?

Eoin: Em his writing is good yes....and he is doing good work.

Interviewer: And what do you think [mainstream class teacher] would say about you?

Jakub: Ah he would say that I'm a good student, I know a lot of stuff..

Interviewer: If I was to ask [mainstream class teacher to describe you, what would [teacher] say to me?

Seán: Em that I'm kind, I'm nice to others.

Parent & Teacher Understandings: In cross-case synthesis parents and teachers, often concurred with children's responsiveness to teacher affirmation of the self. For instance, Tom's mother and teacher perceived him to be a child who *"thrives on praise"*, whilst Seán's ASD class teacher articulated that *"you can see him glowing under praise and encouragement"*. In

some case studies, parents and teachers relayed their perception that children were also acutely responsive to peer affirmation of the self. For instance, Max was described as actively seeking out peer responses to his jokes and humorous stories:

“...he loves that he is funny. Like he knows that he’s very funny and he knows that he has loads of jokes and can make people laugh, and he loves like you can see it in him, he’s so happy when he does tell a joke and everyone is laughing...yeah and he looks for it” (Max’s ASD class teacher).

However, while Max was perceived as being by his teacher as being acutely responsive to overt and explicit peer affirmation of the self, as communicated via laughter, he was described as being less attuned to more subtle forms of peer affirmation: *“..he seems very popular [with mainstream peers], not that he’s aware of it yet...”* (Max’s mother).

A Questioning Versus an Unquestioning Self.

Recognising and Negotiating Differences: “It’s like a giant mix”

Three of the case study children appeared to recognise differences between themselves and some of their mainstream peers in terms of their personalities or interests. However, there appeared to be some subtle divergence in how children evaluated these differences. For instance, Jakub articulated an appreciation of the diversity of personalities in his mainstream classroom:

Interviewer: Okay, so what do you like about the children in that classroom?

Jakub: Uhm, I mean..what I mean about that is that like they’re, they’re entertaining. They have great personalities, some different from mine, some a bit like mine. Like it’s not all about myself.

Interviewer: And the people who have personalities like you, what type of personalities do they have?

Jakub: Like a funny personality, a brainy personality.

Interviewer: So there’s lots of different types of personalities in your class?

Jakub: Yeah, it’s like a giant mix. I like that.

Furthermore, while Jakub articulated that having divergent interests to the mainstream peer cohort on yard compromised his enjoyment, he conveyed a sense of acceptance that others had different interests *“I uhm don’t want them to stop playing soccer, I mean I’m fine with them playing soccer”*. Similarly, while Seán articulated friendship challenges associated with having divergent interests to others, he appeared to accept and even appreciate perceived differences between himself and his peers:

“But it’s fine, I’m like, because it’s fine that other people have different interests to me ‘cause like it wouldn’t be, it would be , it’s nice that we’re all different” (Seán)

However, in contrast to Jakub and Seán, there were some subtle indicators that Eoin’s negatively perceived his divergent interests to mainstream peers, articulating that *“I don’t like, em, em. The only thing fifth, sixth..fifth sixth play is football”*. Categorising his mainstream class as a generic group with divergent interests to him perhaps conveys a Eoin’s sense of feeling somewhat disconnected from them.

Recognition and negotiation of differences between self and others in terms of abstract qualities such as personalities and interests was not universal however. Tom, a younger child in the recruited cohort, appeared to have a less-developed self-other distinction than the older children interviewed, as reflected in his description of similarities and differences between self and school peers which relied on concrete, physical comparisons: *“Eh we all have the same uniform, but eh Sophia* has a skirt, so that’s different”* [*Pseudonym]. Furthermore, while most of the children articulated differences between themselves and their mainstream peers in terms of personalities and interests, all children appeared unquestioning of difference related to accessing special ASD class provision. For instance, while Seán was aware of his diagnosis, he did not associate the ASD class with this diagnosis, simply perceiving it as a smaller learning environment:

Interviewer: And what is different between your classroom down here in [names ASD class] and the sixth class?

Seán: Well it’s just smaller, there’s less people, there’d be just like six people in [names ASD class] but there’s like twenty nine people in my sixth class.

Parents and Teachers: Parent and teacher perspectives reinforced the sense of there being notable divergence how case study children negotiated and evaluated self-other differences. However, stronger sentiments of difficulties in accepting differences were perceived and articulated by adults, most notably by parents. For instance, Max’s mother description of her experience of supporting him in negotiating having divergent interests to peers, indicates an emergent questioning of difference :

“He said recently he wished the whole world was in his image. Yeah, he knows, I think that he knows that he thinks about things different, he has different interests. Em, but we discuss that openly and we say how everyone is different and it would be very boring if everyone was the same... And he says ‘Oh I’ll wish everyone was interested in the

same things I was’...And when I ask him about that, he’ll say ‘Oh well they like superheroes’ or ‘they like sport’ (Max’s mother)

Most noticeably, Eoin’s mother relayed how Eoin engages in a negative hyper-questioning of the differences he perceives between himself and his mainstream peers to her. She linked this negative self-view to a pathologised construal of his autism diagnosis, which he was perceived to resist:

“Oh Mammy, why do I have this, this ...thing? And I’ll say, ‘what do you mean this thing?’ And he’ll say ‘Why do I have autism, why did God give me this?’...You’ll have those moments now in the last couple of years they’ve been getting more. He’s more aware that he’s different to other kids the older he’s getting” (Eoin’s mother)

Eoin’s mother described the challenges encompassed for a parent in navigating such negative self-questioning of self and diagnosis *“A psychologist wouldn’t be able to answer some of the questions he asks me”*. In contrast, the parents of the two other boys who were aware of their ASD diagnosis, perceived that they had grown to accept their diagnosis as unproblematic. For instance, following neuro-diversity aligned discussions with his parents about the assets associated with autism, Seán’s mother perceived that he was accepting and *“not overly worried”* about his diagnosis. Relatedly, Jakub’s mother described her perception that he primarily construes his diagnosis as a means to make sense of past speech and language difficulties: *“Oh I know what kind of problems I had”*. Reflecting the divergence in children’s recognition and negotiation of difference, Tom was perceived as being unquestioning of difference: *“He doesn’t see himself as being any different from any other child”* (Tom’s mother). Further consistent with children’s accounts, parents and teachers generally perceived that children were unquestioning of difference in terms of accessing specialist provision:

“He just knows he’s in a small classroom. That’s all he knows. That it’s a small classroom and that’s his safe place” (Eoin’s mother).

“...It’s just this ‘I’m in a class, and this is my class’ (Tom’s ASD class teacher).

Frustration with Self in Context of Difficulties: “I just can’t do it”.

Most children articulated an awareness of personal difficulties across curricular and social/communication domains. For instance, Seán described writing as something he feels *“I’m not that good at”*, but appeared accepting that this was *“something I work on”*. However, two children articulated a more overt frustration with themselves in the context of personal challenges. For instance, Eoin described his personal frustration when his speech and language difficulties impact on his ability to sing in music class *“Am, no sometimes I can’t say the words*

out [gestures]. It's in my head, I can't say it out". Relatedly, Jakub expressed self-criticism in the context of art lessons. However, this self-criticism appeared exacerbated by perfectionist standards rather than objective difficulties, as he described his preference for template art because "if I done it without tracing I would do a horrible job".

Parent & Teacher Understandings. Parents and teachers generally perceived children to be acutely aware of personal difficulties, primarily in the context of athletic and curricular competencies. For instance, Max's ASD class teacher relayed her perception that *"he knows the things that he finds difficult and he would shy away from them"*. For two case study children, parents and teachers perceived that a frustration with the self in the context of athletic and curricular competencies was oft underpinned by upward social comparison with mainstream peers, which served to accentuate the child's awareness, questioning and negative appraisal of perceived personal challenges:

"cause he's conscious now as well that you know 'they're doing twelve questions and I can't get it done' and you know, he's getting frustrated" (Eoin's ASD class teacher).

"...Now he's not playing [named sport] and he's like 'No, I'm not good enough and that so I'm not going to try again, [names peer] is better" (Jakub's mother).

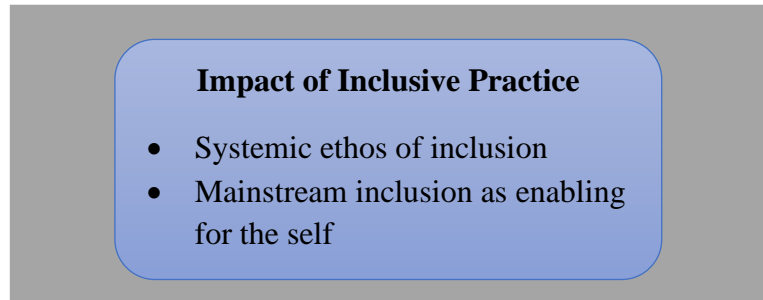
A further factor perceived to exacerbate frustration with the self was perfectionist tendencies. For instance, Jakub's mother described how he berates himself making mistakes due to a entrenched belief that *"everything has to be perfect, not just good, perfect"*. Relatedly, while Tom was perceived by his parent and ASD class teacher to not yet question personal difficulties via peer social comparison, he was still described as becoming easily frustrated with himself in the context of curricular difficulties due to a self-driven perfectionism:

"..he would get frustrated if he feels he can't do something. If he's not doing it good enough he would be quite, em, like with his writing in particular, he would-everything has to be perfect or he'd go and rub it off, or rub it out and go back to it again....and it-he would be quite hard on himself that way, a bit of a perfectionist with his work" (Tom's mother).

3.4.2.3. Research Question 3: Does special provision within a mainstream school influence how the child makes sense of him/herself, and if so, in what ways?

Figure 3.3

Master Superordinate and Subordinate Themes for Research Question 3



Impact of Inclusive Practice.

A Systemic Ethos of Inclusion: “The school is so inclusive he just feels part of it”

Parent & Teacher Understandings: While not articulated by case study children, a recurrent cross-case theme among parents and ASD class teachers was the perceived role of a systemic school ethos of inclusion in minimising negative connotations of the self as different. For instance, Tom’s mother and ASD class teacher attributed his perceived lack of questioning about difference to the inclusion of the ASD class in school-wide activities:

“..it’s never really come up. He doesn’t see himself as being different from any other child...Em, so I think if they were more segregated and they weren’t included, it would have come up by now....I think that is all down to the ethos of the school” (Tom’s mother)

While this theme was not present in children’s account, sentiments of a systemic inclusive ethos were possibly reflected in most of the children’s tendencies to perceive themselves as very much part of their mainstream class as well as the ASD class: *“I work in [names ASD class] and fifth class”* (Eoin) and *“I’m in fourth class”* (Tom). Aspects of a systemic inclusive ethos perceived as instrumental by parents and teachers in negating negative perceptions of difference and special ASD provision included: a peer culture of acceptance, inclusion of the special class in whole-school initiatives, events and outings and structured yard/playground activities to support children’s social success when included with mainstream peers. Reflective of the fact that the ASD class in all school contexts had been given Irish language names with positive connotations, the language used toward the ASD class was also perceived as an additional important factor in destigmatising difference and diagnosis:

“..that’s one of the things, it’s never called, when they set it up, [names school principal] was very keen that it’s not called ‘the unit’ or, because these are all kind of medical terms and it’s not, it’s just a classroom yeah. Yeah, so they were very keen that it wasn’t a medical place, you know a place of diagnosis” (Max’s mother)

Parents and ASD class teachers also described their perception that creating a ‘permeable’ ASD class, which allowed for fluid movement of mainstream class peers into the special class setting for reverse inclusion play opportunities or to access the sensory facilities fostered a culture of acceptance and positive connotations toward the special ASD class:

“...it’s just so accepted here. It’s just like part of the school and sure before like lockdown we used to have the doors open like and so everybody was up..they [mainstream peers] were only dying to come up and use the sensory room” (Eoin’s ASD class teacher).

In contrast to these descriptions of the role of an inclusive ethos in minimising negative connotations of ‘difference’, Seán’s mother relayed an exception to inclusive practice in the past, which she felt left her son at risk of feeling segregated from his mainstream peers due to his enrolment in the ASD class:

“I don’t know if it upset him but there were a few times where I was a bit annoyed like that he wasn’t included in things like there were a couple of times where they were having a class photo like say for his mainstream class but Seán’s photo was taken with his class in [names ASD class]...So just a few times, I felt he was isolated”.

Mainstream Inclusion as Enabling for the Self: “Good friends, a good education”.

Across cases, there was variability in the extent of children’s mainstream inclusion. The final theme emerging from cross-case synthesis related to the enabling impact which such mainstream inclusion was perceived to have for the self, in terms of curricular opportunities and social inclusion. For instance, Seán who had progressed to high levels of mainstream inclusion, reflected on how mainstream inclusion has facilitated a broadening of his social network:

Interviewer: So how do you feeling about being in a large class with lots of children, like the sixth class room?

Seán: I, I don’t mind it, I like it.

Interviewer: ...what do you like about it?

Seán: It’s just that like when there’s not as many people, it doesn’t, it doesn’t feel as nice, it’s just yeah, if it’s not as many people, you don’t get to know as many people.

Similarly, Jakub had experienced significant increases in his mainstream inclusion levels: *“I used to go to [names ASD class] all the time. As I keep going-I still go to [ASD class] like, I uhm, it’s just that now I go to [names mainstream class] more”*. Jakub appeared to value his increased mainstream inclusion levels in terms of his social inclusion and curricular engagement, relaying how it has provided him with *“..good friends, a good education, all that stuff”*. Furthermore, Tom’s described his appreciation of opportunities to pursue his preferred curricular subject (music) in whole-school activities in the pre-Covid-19 context:

“...we em used to go into [mainstream teacher] to do singing and my friends, we used to do that...I like to listen to the music when [mainstream teacher] plays her piano when we used to do that..when when that virus wasn’t there at that time” (Tom)

Parent & Teacher Understandings: Consistent with the sentiments of Seán and Jakub, across case studies, parents and teachers generally perceived mainstream inclusion opportunities as enabling for the child’s social self. For instance, given the age diversity in ASD-classes, mainstream inclusion was perceived as important for fostering the child’s social coping skills with same-age peers:

“I think it’s very easy to be in a bubble in this type of classroom you know, where you might not, I suppose especially when all the boys are at such different ages and stages of life that it’s very important for Max.. to have time with children his own age. You know, to kind of, to learn to get along with people that maybe are not as mature as his friends are in [ASD class] and that might not be as tolerant as the boys up here are”
(Max’s ASD class teacher)

Furthermore, many parents and ASD class teachers projected forward, describing how they felt that the familiarly with same-age mainstream peers facilitated via mainstream inclusion would be protective for the child’s social self at post-primary school, by providing *“a few friendly faces”* (Seán’s mother), *“social security”* (Seán’s teacher), and *“a layer of acceptance and you know protection maybe”* (Max’s mother). However, mainstream inclusion was not universally perceived as totally enabling for the child’s sense of self. For instance, Eoin’s mother described how increased mainstream inclusion had triggered some negative self-questioning for Eoin, by accentuating his awareness of his perceived difficulties: *“So because he’s started to mix now with the older kids on the playground and with the mainstream school and it’s yeah “Why can’t I do that?” and “How can I’m not able to do what they can?”*

3.4 Discussion

3.4.1 Research Question 1: What are the lived school experiences of the child in terms of interpersonal relationships, curriculum/learning and accessibility of the school environment?

Aligning with previous qualitative research exploring the lived experiences of children and adolescents attending full mainstream provision (e.g. Cook et al., 2016; Cook et al., 2018; Howard et al., 2019; Moyse & Porter, 2015; Myles et al., 2019), challenges and uncertainties in friendship formation with same-age mainstream peers were relayed. However, in contrast to previous qualitative enquiries, these friendship challenges were primarily attributed to personal difficulties managing social dynamics and having divergent interests to peers, with a noticeable scarcity in experiences of explicit peer rejection or bullying which have extensively been reported in previous qualitative research (e.g. Cook et al., 2018; Cook et al., 2016; Hill, 2014; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014). This perhaps alludes to a culture of peer tolerance and acceptance within these particular school contexts, which has been proposed as essential in the context of emotional wellbeing for pupils with ASD (Danker et al., 2016). In the current research, successful friendship experiences often involved befriending peers with autism or matched interests which tended to diverge from the dominant interests of same-age mainstream peers. This finding aligns with previous qualitative research on the perspectives of boys with ASD with regard to friendship, in which sharing interests was perceived as a fundamental prerequisite for friendship formation (Daniel & Billingsley, 2010; O'Hagan & Hebron, 2017).

Consistent with previous research, some children experienced a low tolerance for making mistakes within the context of the mainstream curriculum and for the sensory demands of the mainstream classroom (Cook et al., 2016; Goodall, 2019; Goodall & MacKenzie, Hill, 2014; Howard, 2019; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008). Conversely, the special ASD class was considered a 'safe' sanctuary and associated with feelings of emotional and sensory regulation. Indeed, as reported in previous research on mainstream schools with ASD resource bases in the UK (Hebron & Bond, 2017; Landor & Perepa, 2017), there was a sense that the ASD class and mainstream class were complimentary spaces, with access to the ASD class providing flexibility, sanctuary and perhaps an 'educational crutch' (Travers, 2009) throughout the schoolday, which in turn facilitated the child's engagement when in the mainstream classroom. Noticeably, in contrast to previous qualitative research on the school experiences of primary-aged children with ASD in mainstream settings (Howard et al., 2019) in which children unanimously claimed that teacher support was essential to their academic success, three

children in the current study were more discerning with regard to accessing adult support. These children demonstrated an emerging sense of agency, valuing subtle methods of SNA support and opportunities to work independently, particularly when in the mainstream class context, as is consistent with the sentiments of adolescent students with ASD (e.g. Hill, 2014; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014). This perhaps reflects a desire for autonomy over the representation of the self, which has been proposed as critical in the construction of sense of self and identity (Bagatell, 2007; Baines, 2012).

While older case study children relayed feeling anxious about upcoming transitions to post-primary school, in line with recent research (e.g. Hebron & Bond, 2017; McNerney, 2015; Nuske et al., 2019), parents felt particularly overwhelmed with post-primary placement decisions and worried about the future wellbeing of their child in what they forecast to be a less socially ‘sheltered’ environment. Aligning with the typical developmental trajectory of the self in middle childhood (Harter, 2015), academic self-efficacy beliefs appeared salient in children’s descriptions of engaging with the curriculum, with most articulating an acute awareness of their strengths and weakness across subject areas which some parents and teachers perceived to impact the child’s willingness to engage. Some children engaged in temporal comparisons, perceiving themselves as better able to engage in classroom learning than they were in the past. IPA research with older adolescents/young people with autism suggests that such temporal comparisons may be particularly significant in sense of self development for those with autism, as constructions of more pronounced difficulties in the past enable the current self to be evaluated more positively (Huws & Jones, 2015).

3.4.2 Research Question 2: How does the child make sense of himself in the social context of school?

In light of prior research findings that adolescents with ASD have difficulty conceptualising the self-through the perspective of another (e.g. Farley et al., 2010) and tend to make fewer references to social qualities in self-descriptions (Farmer et al., 2007; Lee & Hobson, 1998), a particularly striking theme in the current research was ‘feeling valued by others’. When asked to conceptualise themselves from the perspective of a nominated school friend/peer, case study children primarily described positive friendship and interpersonal qualities of the social self which they felt were valued by the nominated other. This finding resonates with previous qualitative research suggesting that sense of self for the adolescent with ASD is indeed anchored in social relations, with successful friendship experiences engendering positive self-evaluation (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Myles et al., 2019). Furthermore, the current research

indicates that children were particularly responsive to teacher appraisal of the self, with self-through-teacher descriptions suggestive of an internalisation of positive teacher feedback, highlighting the substantiative role of the teacher in supporting positive self-appraisal (Roffey, 2015).

Most of the children recognised differences between themselves and their mainstream peers in terms of their interests and personalities, conveying a clear self-other distinction (Lombardo & Baron-Cohen, 2010). For a cohort of children for whom there are deficit-driven theoretical perspectives about their ability to reflect on themselves socially, the children's ability to engage in self-through-other descriptions and distinguish between self and peers in terms of abstract qualities such as personality and interests is arguably a valuable finding in and of itself (King et al., 2019; Winestone et al., 2014). There was divergence in how children negotiated perceived differences, reinforcing the idea that while a cohort of children may share a similar diagnosis, making sense of oneself is an inherently personal process (Hill, 2014). Where difference was negatively appraised, this was perceived by parent as being underpinned by the child's internalisation of autism as a pathologised disorder (Hodge et al., 2019). This aligns with research with adolescents, whom for some a diagnostic ASD label was unwanted and resisted as an identity for the self (Gaffney, 2020; Jones et al., 2015; Mogensen & Mason, 2015). Aligning, with theoretical perspectives on the self as narratively co-constructed with parents in childhood (McClellan et al., 2007), in some cases where children were perceived by parents to have accepted their ASD diagnosis as unproblematic in their sense of self, this appeared impacted by how ASD was constructed in parent-child discussions. Noticeably, all five boys appeared unquestioning of difference in relation to accessing the special ASD class, which parents and ASD class teachers largely attributed to a school culture of inclusivity. An alternative perspective may be that children's unquestioning of specialist provision provision may also be impacted by their developmental stage, as in a large-scale survey special class provision in Ireland, only principals and teachers at post-primary level reported tendencies for students to perceive feelings of stigma at being in a special class (Banks & McCoy, 2017).

A further salient theme was most children's self-awareness in relation to their difficulties across academic and athletic domains, which in some cases were sources of frustration with the self. While not articulated by the children themselves, in line with the developmental trajectories of the self at middle childhood (Damon & Hart, 1998; Harter, 2015; Mussweiler, 2003), some parents and teachers perceived that upward social comparison with mainstream

peers accentuated the children's negative appraisals of their perceived difficulties. However, frustration with the self in the context of difficulties was perceived to arise for two children due to perfectionism, consistent with research which indicates that boys with ASD tended to have elevated socially-prescribed perfectionist beliefs than TD peers which become negatively implicated in their self-evaluation (Greenaway & Howlin, 2015).

3.4.3 Research Question 3: Does special provision within a mainstream school influence how the child makes sense of himself, and if so, in what ways?

Meta-synthesis of previous qualitative research on the lived school experiences of pupil with ASD at post-primary level indicated that mainstream settings may inadvertently accentuate rather than minimise negative connotations of difference (Williams et al., 2019). In contrast to these findings, in the current research, parents and ASD teachers perceived that a school-wide inclusive ethos played an enabling role in sense of self development, by minimising negative connotations of difference, as reflected in most children's perception of themselves as very much part of the mainstream class as well as the ASD class. This systemic inclusive ethos was perceived to encompass a commitment toward including the ASD class in mainstream school life, a peer culture of acceptance, inclusive language and the establishment of a 'permeable' ASD class. Such sentiments are in stark contrast to past research on parental perspectives of special class provision in the Republic of Ireland (Grey et al., 2010), which raised concerns about a lack of inclusive processes and attitudes. Indeed, rather than distinct models of special class and mainstream provision, the schools in the current study appeared to have flexible models of provision dependent on the child's individual needs, aligning with Shevlin's (2020) vision for inclusive education.

Children, parents and teachers in the current study relayed the short and long-term benefits of mainstream inclusion for the child's social self, consistent with previous UK research on educational provision in ASD resource bases and satellite classes on mainstream campuses (e.g. Croydon et al., 2019; Hebron & Bond, 2017). However the process of mainstream inclusion was not unanimously perceived as without challenge in terms of the child's sense of self construal, with a perception that increased mainstream inclusion triggered a negative construal of the self as 'different' for one pupil. This divergence perhaps highlights the invariable dilemmas of difference (Norwich, 2008) which can arise in the context of mainstream inclusion in comparison to the protective "bubble" of special ASD provision (Stevenson et al., 2020, p.224). This pupil's experience of struggling with sense of self and difference also aligns with findings reported in Croydon et al.'s (2019) qualitative research

exploring the experience of transitioning from a special school to a satellite ASD class on a mainstream school campus, which was reported to have triggered a subset of pupils to begin “wrestling with issues of difference and autistic identity” (p.11).

3.4.4 Conclusion

The current study addressed an identified gap in the literature by exploring the lived school experiences and sense of self of primary-aged children enrolled in special ASD classes in mainstream schools. Adopting a multiple-case study design, the research sought to give voice to an oft-overlooked cohort of children in addition to key adults in the child’s lived school world. Patterns of connected themes were identified in cross-case synthesis. However, as per a multiperspectival IPA approach, divergence and difference were also identified within shared themes (Larkin et al., 2019). Master themes related to the child’s lived school experience included complex friendship dynamics, a supportive learning environment and navigating the learning process. Master themes related to the child’s sense of self were pockets of positive self appraisal, a questioning versus and unquestioning self and the impact of inclusive practice. While the research addresses a pertinent gap in the literature, it is not without limitations, which will be thoroughly interrogated in a quality appraisal of the research in the critical review paper (*chapter 4*). This paper will also provide a comprehensive reflection on the implications of findings for future educational psychology research and practice.

Chapter 4: Critical Review

4.1 Overview

The final chapter provides a forum for critical reflection on the doctoral research process. This begins with a review of the epistemological stance adopted by the researcher and the implications of this stance in terms of methodological choices. Strengths and limitations of the research project will then be critically appraised utilising Yin's (2018) criteria for exemplary case study research. The distinctive contribution of this research for educational psychology research and practice will then be critically considered.

4.2 Research Paradigm

Mertens (2010) describes a paradigm as a worldview that closely aligns with the researcher's own, and is underpinned by philosophical assumptions that guide thinking and subsequent action. As the paradigm represents the conceptual framework which gives direction to the research methods (Braun & Clarke, 2013), it is imperative that the researcher is explicit from the outset in defining their chosen paradigm based on their basic belief systems about the nature of knowledge, reality and inquiry (Mertens, 2010).

The researchers's core belief system is inherently rooted in the constructivist paradigm. The most fundamental theoretical tenet of the constructivist paradigm, is that reality is socially constructed and does not reflect a definitive true nature of the world (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Mertens, 2010). The constructivist paradigm has its theoretical origins in phenomenological philosophy and hermeneutics (Mertens, 2010). Phenomenology is generally concerned with understanding subjective lived experience whilst hermeneutics proposes that all meaning is fundamentally interpretative (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Smith et al., 2009). The constructivist paradigm therefore asserts that knowledge is tied to our lived social world, and that researchers should attempt to understand the complex world of lived experience (Mertens, 2010; Braun & Clarke, 2013). In the current study, the guiding overarching research question, which sought to explore how children with ASD make sense of themselves and their lived school experience, was grounded in a constructivist approach, as it pursues a commitment to detailed examination of lived experience within a situated social context.

Guba and Lincoln (2005) articulate four basic belief systems which define a paradigm: axiology, ontology, epistemology and methodology. The researcher will critically review how the basic beliefs associated with the constructivist paradigm's are upheld within the current study.

4.2.1 Axiology

According to Mertens (2010), the axiology question asks, “What is the nature of ethics?” (p.10). To this end, Mertens (2010) asserts that trustworthiness and authenticity are central tenets of constructivist axiology, in particular ensuring a balanced representation of views in the study’s findings. In the current multiple-case study research, a comprehensive multi-perspectival IPA approach was adopted, with thematic development occurring within and across the five case studies to arrive at master superordinate and subordinate themes (Larkin et al., 2019). This systematic analytic approach ensured that results encompassed a balanced representation of how the five children’s lifeworlds and experiences interact and overlap (Larkin et al., 2019). Furthermore, aligning with an axiological commitment to a balanced representation of views, accounts were not simply pooled to generate cross-case consensus. Rather, in accordance with a multi-perspectival IPA approach, the researcher was acutely attuned to divergence of perspectives at a within-and cross-case level (Larkin et al., 2019).

4.2.2 Ontology

The ontological question relates to, “What is the nature of reality?” (Mertens, 2010, p.10). According to the constructivist paradigm, reality is socially constructed, with multiple mental constructions which can be apprehended, some of which may be conflictual (Mertens, 2010). These ontological assumptions align with the researcher’s belief that a child’s sense of self is inherently socially constructed through interactions with relevant others in the school context. Research conducted within the quantitative, post-positivist paradigm, has used standardised inventories and measures to identify deficits in the ability of children and adolescents with ASD to reflect on the self in social contexts (e.g. Farley et al., 2010; Farmer et al., 2007; Lee & Hobson, 1998; Jackson et al., 2012). Conversely, the researcher was committed to a more humanist-informed qualitative inquiry of lived school experience as a means to elicit the child’s social construction of self (Hodge et al., 2019). Furthermore, assuming an ontological position which recognised multiple, socially constructed realities, the research was exploratory in nature, with concepts of importance allowed to emerge as they were constructed by participants (Mertens, 2010). For instance, while Williams et al. (2019) meta-synthesis and the researcher’s own updated literature review facilitated the development of three focused research questions to give direction to the overarching research question, theoretical propositions or hypotheses were not pre-defined as in explanatory or causal case study approaches (Yin, 2018). This ensured that the participants’ perspectives and experiences could be expressed in their own terms (Smith et al., 2009).

Furthermore, in recognition of multiple, socially-constructed realities, an idiographic position was adopted in analysis, as per a multi-perspectival IPA approach (Larkin et al., 2019). Idiography is concerned with the particular, and represents a commitment to eliciting individual meanings. Accordingly, a detailed thematic development was conducted for individual interviews from child, parent and ASD class teacher to explore personal perspectives before moving to thematic development at a multi-perspectival level (Larkin et al., 2019). As a consequence of this detailed, idiographic focus, a small, purposively-selected and carefully-situated sample was recruited (Smith et al., 2009). Thus, aligning with the constructivist paradigm, the researcher acknowledges that the results do not provide a definite capture of reality that can be generalised to the general population of primary-aged children enrolled in ASD classes (Mertens, 2010), but rather argues that experiential insights gained may have resonance for this wider cohort.

4.2.3 Epistemology

The epistemology question asks, “What is the nature of knowledge and the relationship between the knower and the would-be-known?” (Mertens, 2010, p.10). According to the constructivist paradigm, the researcher and participants are interlocked in an interactive process of influence (Mertens, 2010). As such, the researcher is actively implicated in producing the findings. Thus, personal researcher reflexivity is imperative as researcher assumptions can influence the knowledge produced (Braun & Clarke, 2013). To ensure reflexive practice, the researcher engaged in ‘bracketing’, a conscious effort to set aside personal assumptions (Watts, 2014). Bracketing occurred on two levels. Firstly, prior to data collection, the researcher utilised a research diary to reflect on personal assumptions, particularly the researcher’s personal philosophy towards full inclusion and sense of dissonance about whether special class provision enables pupils with ASD to feel included within a wider mainstream context or whether this form of provision may be experienced as a space of internal segregation (Banks & McCoy, 2017; Kenny et al., 2020; McKeon, 2021). Setting aside such personal assumptions was imperative to ensure that possible avenues for further inquiry were not ‘shut down’ in semi-structured interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Indeed, reflective of the researcher’s commitment to personal reflexivity, the final results ultimately challenged the researchers’ prior assumptions about special class provision.

Furthermore, prior to engaging in the formal IPA analytic process of exploratory commentary for each transcript, the researcher immersed herself in the transcripts via a process

of reading and re-reading, noting initial and striking observations in a reflective diary (Smith et al., 2009). Doing so supported the researcher to 'bracket' these initial thoughts, allowing subsequent focus to remain on line-by-line analysis to minimise potential of a pre-determined analytic agenda (Smith et al., 2009). One potential constructivist epistemological point of tension in the current research is that participants were not afforded an opportunity to provide feedback on the researcher's interpretations (Mertens, 2010). However, by the time that data analysis was completed, schools had closed due to a Covid-19 resurgence, and so it was not felt appropriate to re-engage with schools for research requests.

4.2.4 Methodology

The methodological question asks "How can the knower go about obtaining the desired knowledge and understandings?" (Mertens, 2010, p.10). According to its ontological assumption that reality is socially constructed, in the constructivist paradigm research can only be conducted via interaction between researcher and participants (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). As the constructivist approach poses that knowledge is socially constructed, the establishment of authentic rapport between researcher and participant is imperative during data collection (Mertens, 2010). Given the social-communication difficulties associated with ASD, the researcher recognised that standard interview approaches which rely predominantly on verbal communication, face-to-face interaction and eye-contact may limit the establishment of rapport (Fayette & Bond, 2018; Tesfaye et al., 2019; Tyrell & Woods, 2018; Winstone et al., 2014). As such, Talking Mat methodology was employed with case study children to provide a concrete point of shared visual reference to reduce the pressure for eye-contact and verbal interaction, thus helping to establish rapport (Teskaye et al., 2019), as central to constructivist methodology.

Mertens (2010) outlines that the interactive process of data collection in the constructivist paradigm is often described as hermeneutical in that efforts are made to obtain multiple perspectives that ensure better interpretations of meanings. While the primary focus was on the lived school experiences and sense of self of the child with ASD, additional focal perspectives belonging to the lifeworld of the child were elicited from the child's parent and ASD class teacher. The use of additional focal perspectives increases the sense of relational, socially constructed and situated meanings, thus aligning with a constructivist, hermeneutical approach.

According to constructivist methodology, the researcher must provide information about the backgrounds of participants and the contexts in which they are being studied, as per the pupil pen portraits in Appendix J (Mertens, 2010). The choice of multiple-case study methodology, which foregrounds the importance of indepth exploration of each case within its real-world context therefore aligns with a constructivist approach. Multi-perspectival IPA (Larkin et al., 2019) was employed for data analysis. IPA is committed to detailed examination of personal lived experience and recognises that analysis is an entirely interpretative endeavour (Smith et al., 2009). Thus, IPA shares with the constructivist paradigm the central philosophies of phenomenology and hermeneutics. Furthermore, aligning with the importance of attending to contextual factors within the constructivist paradigm, IPA pursues an idiographic commitment, situating participants within particular contexts (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, from data collection to analytic choices, the current research methodology was inherently underpinned by constructivist principles.

4.3 Critical Appraisal of Research

4.3.1 Overview of Critical Appraisal

The current research study adopted a multiple-case study design (Yin, 2018), which was underpinned by a multi-perspectival IPA approach for data collection and analysis. The individual child, enrolled in the ASD special class was defined as the “case” or unit of analysis and the contexts were mainstream primary schools with special ASD class provision. Yin (2018) set out five general characteristics of exemplary case study research, as outlined in *Table 4.1*. The strengths and limitations of the current study will be critically appraised according to these five criteria. A visual summary of this critical appraisal is provided in *Figure 4.1*.

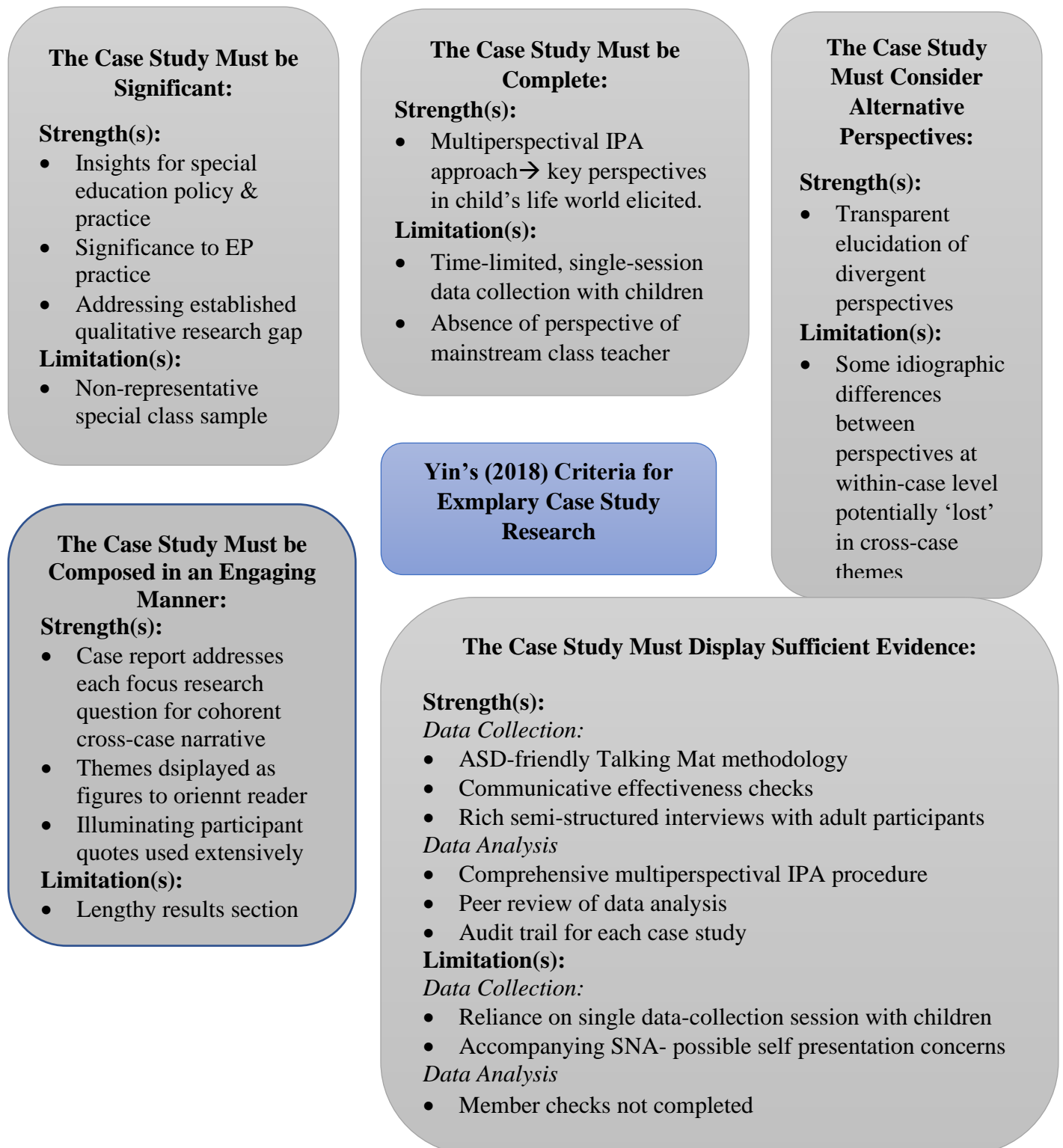
Table 4.1*Yin's (2018) Criteria for Exemplary Case Study Research*

<i>Criterion</i>	<i>Operational Description of Criterion</i>
1. The case study must be significant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The underlying issues explored in the case study hold national interest (i.e. related to theoretical, policy or practice concerns)
2. The case study must be complete	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The researcher attends to the boundaries of the case, i.e. the distinction between the phenomenon being studied and its context • Exhaustive attempt made to collect all relevant data
3. The case study must consider alternative perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration of alternative perspectives in data analysis
4. The case study must display sufficient evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Merits of case study's findings supported by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Comprehensive data collection approach (i.e. evidence that researcher has "become steeped" in issue of inquiry for each case) ➤ Results accompanied by comprehensive chain of evidence.
5. The case study must be composed in an engaging manner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case study report written with clarity • Case study report written in manner which engages reader from outset.

As found in Yin (2018, p.242-247)

Figure 4.1

Summarised Critical Appraisal of Study in Relation to Yin's (2018) Criteria for Exemplary Case Study Research



4.3.2 Strengths of the Current Research

When critically reflecting on Yin's (2018) criteria for exemplary case study research, a primary strength of the current research is its significance (i.e. criterion 1). The past decade has seen a dramatic expansion of special ASD class provision in mainstream Irish primary schools (Department of Health, 2018). However, this expansion in ASD class provision is occurring against a paucity of research exploring the lived experiences of pupils enrolled in such settings. As such, the current study's focus on exploring the lived school experience of primary-aged pupils enrolled in these classes addresses a pertinent research gap related to an topic of national significance in terms of special education practice. Furthermore, an intended audience for the current research is EPs, primarily within an Irish context. EPs across both the National Educational Psychological Service [NEPS] and Health Service Executive [HSE] Disability services are involved at a systemic level in ASD special class provision, making formal recommendations for special class placements and providing consultative support for teachers working with individual pupils (NCSE, 2019). Indeed, as part of the proposed School Inclusion Model [SIM], there has been a commitment to expanding the NEPS service to provide more intensive support for children with complex educational needs, including those in ASD classes (NSCE, 2019). However, in a recent large-scale review of special class provision in Ireland, parents, teachers and principals indicated that they felt professional clinicians, including psychologists, do not fully understand the experiences of pupils in special class which was perceived to negatively impact the viability of the professional recommendations and consultative advice they provided (NCSE, 2019). As such, the current research holds significance for EPs in terms of illuminating insider accounts of lived experience in ASD classes to support their consultative practice. Finally, the current study addresses the significant gap identified in the extant body of qualitative research exploring how pupils with ASD make sense of themselves within the context of their lives at school (Williams et al., 2019) by eliciting the voice of the primary-aged child enrolled in special class ASD provision via the incorporation of accessible, child-centred research methods.

In the current multiple-case study research, the individual child, enrolled in the ASD special class was defined as the "case" or unit of analysis and the contexts were mainstream primary schools with special ASD class provision (Yin, 2018). In exemplary case study research, Yin (2018) advocates that the case study must achieve completeness (i.e. criterion 2). In traditional IPA research there is a commitment to personal meaning, with the relationship between person and social context usually operationalised at an individual level, resulting in a

a focus on cases of first-person accounts of lived experience (Smith et al., 2009). As such, the children's accounts of their lived experiences were foregrounded and presented in their own right in respect of phenomenological principles of first-handed embodied experience (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Smith et al., 2009). However, the researcher recognised that in order to achieve case study 'completeness' in terms of the child's wider educational ecosystem, additional perspectives may be illuminative. Multi-perspectival IPA has increasingly been used to consider experiences from multiple perspectives, in the context of research questions which have a strong systemic or relational dimension (Larkin et al., 2019). Elicitation of the parent and teacher perspective in the current research afforded insight into microsocioal dimensions of the child's sense-making processes (Larkin et al., 2019). For instance, consistent with research on autistic identity in adolescence (Riccio et al., 2021), parental interviews in the current study indicated the child's negotiation of 'difference' was often perceived to occur within the context of parent-child conversations at home, and so these interviews provided rich insights which might not have been ascertained by sole reliance on data collection from children.

Yin's (2018) third criterion for exemplary case study research is the careful consideration of alternative perspectives in data analysis. Exemplifying the complementary nature of case study research and IPA methodology, multi-perspectival IPA also emphasises attention to divergent perspectives (Larkin et al., 2019). Noticeably, in terms of cross-case synthesis, multi-perspectival IPA researchers caution that the objective is not to simply pool accounts to generate consensus, but to attune to how convergence and divergence can co-exist across participants' lifeworlds (Larkin et al., 2019). Thus, a strength of the current research, was the careful attention given to illuminating divergent perspectives, particularly at a cross-case level. For instance, the superordinate theme '*A Questioning versus and Unquestioning Self*' conveys the divergence in case study children's sense-making about the self in terms of their awareness and negotiation of perceived differences and difficulties. Similarly, in the subordinate theme '*Mainstream Inclusion as Enabling for the Self*', the researcher acknowledges that this theme did not resonate for all children, drawing attention to how mainstream inclusion appeared to exacerbate a sense of negative difference for one pupil. These examples demonstrate that the researcher was attuned and transparent with regard to divergence. Indeed, in the context of exploring lived experience of attending special provision within a mainstream setting, 'dilemmas of difference' (Norwich, 2008) were prioritised as particularly illuminating findings.

Yin's (2018) fourth criterion of exemplary case study research asserts that the merit's of the case study's findings are reliant on comprehensive data collection and a trustworthy data analysis approach. In relation to high-quality data collection, previous qualitative research indicates that activity-oriented interview approaches yield increased dialogue about the self for young people with ASD than standard semi-structured interview approaches (Winstone et al., 2014). The Talking Mat approach utilised in the current study was therefore chosen as a means to minimise the pressure associated with face-to-face interaction and ensure an activity-oriented approach (Tesfaye et al., 2019). Furthermore, the use of Talking Mats has also been found to increase the elicitation of views, attention and on-task behaviours in interview settings for children with ASD (Bloom et al., 2020). The use of the structured visual approach also served as a 'thinking tool', enabling children to organise and structure their thoughts so that they could then verbalise them more effectively (Murphy et al., 2013). The visual scale on the Talking Mat comprising 'like', 'unsure' and 'dislike' options supported most children to express positive and negative views, reducing the tendency to acquiescence (Murphy et al., 2013; Winstone et al., 2014). Informed by the literature review, Talking Mat pictures chosen by the researcher represented three broad areas of school experience: accessibility of the school environment, interpersonal relationships with peers and staff and curriculum engagement. Following placement of each picture, the child was asked follow-up prompts from a semi-structured interview schedule to ascertain the reasoning underpinning his likes/dislikes and sense of self, such as prompts for dyadic comparison between self and a nominated peer in school and questions related to how peers and adults in school might describe them (Kelly & Norwich, 2004). A practice Talking Mat, based on hobbies, which included pictures of associated with the child's special interests was used to build familiarity with the approach and capture the child's intrinsic motivation (Tesfaye et al., 2019). The Talking Mat interviews were video recorded to allow them to be analysed for communicative effectiveness (Murphy & Cameron, 2008) to ensure a comprehensive quality check.

IPA requires rich, detailed accounts of experience (Smith et al., 2009). Semi-structured interviews are considered the optimal means of accessing such accounts as they facilitate the elicitation of participants' stories and provide space for the participant to speak reflectively and to elaborate on ideas (Smith et al., 2009). As such, semi-structured interviews were chosen for the elicitation of parent and teacher perspectives in the current research. As per IPA interview approaches, the semi-structured interview schedule was constructed in an effort to

address the research question ‘sideways’, by facilitating the discussion of relevant topics, which would allow the research questions to be subsequently answered in analysis (Smith et al., 2009). Informed by the literature review, the researcher moved between five primary broad areas in the semi-structured interview including the child’s affective school experience, accessibility of the school environment, social relationships, curriculum/learning and sense of self. Questions about sense of self were placed toward the end of the schedule based on the assumption that this would be easier to talk about following the less abstract areas of school experience (Smith et al., 2009).

In relation to comprehensive data analysis approaches, a strength of the current study was its adoption of a seven-stage multi-perspectival IPA (Larkin et al., 2019) analytic procedure. This included transcription, initial note-taking, line-by-line exploratory commentary and development of emergent themes for each individual transcript (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Smith et al., 2019). As the study involved a large corpus of transcripts for an IPA analysis, superordinate themes were first developed at a within-case level (Smith et al., 2009). For an emergent theme to be included within a superordinate theme at a within-case level, it had to be found in at two transcripts within the individual case study to ensure convergence whilst allowing for some divergence as per IPA’s idiographic focus (Smith et al., 2009). Aligning with the researcher’s commitment to foreground the voice of the child, in exceptions where a particularly rich emergent theme arose solely from a child’s transcript, this was included as an emergent theme at the within-case level. Each individual case study analysis were peer-reviewed by a colleague with a PhD involving a grounded theory analysis, which has a considerable overlap with IPA due to its broadly inductivist approach to inquiry (Smith et al., 2009). In cross-case synthesis, ensuring recurrence of final themes was important to support the validity of findings (Smith et al., 2009). As such, all final sub-ordinate themes were present in at least three of the individual case studies (see Appendix X).

Yin (2018) advocates that in an exemplary case study the display of adequate evidence (i.e. criterion 4) is accompanied by a chain of evidence or audit trail. In the current research, sample transcripts with exploratory comments are provided to transparently demonstrate the early analytic stages (see Appendices Q and R). Individual case study reports provide sample transcript extracts for all final emergent themes, providing a comprehensive audit trail of evidence for each case study (see Appendices S-W).

Yin's (2018) final criteria for exemplary case study research refers to the how the case study report is composed for the reader. The researcher decided that addressing the results of the cross-case synthesis for each focused research question was the most effective means to produce a coherent narrative. Short quotes from the data were also used in naming master subordinate theme to provide an immediate sense of what the theme is about whilst staying close to the participants' language and meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Illuminating participant quotes were extensively utilised to allow the reader insight into the lived world of participants and to convey how analytic commentary was grounded in a transparent evidentiary base (Smith et al., 2009; Yardley, 2000).

4.3.3 Limitations of the Current Research

A limitation of the current research in terms of Yin's (2018) criteria of 'significance' is that this small, purposively-selected sample is not necessarily representative of the special ASD class population in Irish primary schools. Noticeably four of the five case study children had high mainstream inclusion levels when compared to the wider special class population in Irish primary schools (Banks & McCoy, 2017; Kenny et al., 2020). Recruitment of additional children with lower levels of mainstream inclusion would have increased the research's representativeness, impact and reach in terms of transferability of findings to the wider special class population in Ireland. However, school-based recruitment was inherently challenging in the uncertain and restricting Covid-19 school context in which this research was conducted. That being said, it should be noted that, four of the five case study children had begun their school placement based in the ASD class on an predominantly full-time basis, and so rich insights into their lived experiences within this setting were still elicited.

A further limitation is arguably the 'completeness' of data collection (criterion 2) with case study children. In initial research design, it was hoped to facilitate two data collections sessions to ensure adequate time for rapport building and facilitation of a "Draw and Tell/Write" activity (Hortsman et al., 2008), as an additional data source to the Talking Mat interview. Due to the Covid-19 context, in school data collection had to be curtailed to time-limited, once-off sessions to minimise risk for participating children and accompanying SNAs. Reliance on the Talking Mat interview with children as the sole source of first-hand data from children, is inherently a limitation in terms of the 'completeness' of the current research study, particularly in the fourth case study with Max, whose Talking Mat interview did not meet satisfactory criteria for communicative effectiveness for IPA analysis.

Furthermore, in designing the research study, it was decided that the ASD class teacher would provide a focal adult perspective from the school context. However, in the final recruited sample, some children had higher levels of mainstream inclusion than was initially anticipated in research design, particularly Jakub and Seán. The absence of the perspectives of their mainstream teachers arguably undermines the potential ‘completeness’ of these two case studies.

Given the positive accounts of educational provision in the current research, most notably in terms of absence of bullying experiences and perceptions of a systemic ethos of inclusion across school sites, it is possible that the four schools were particular sites of best-practice educational inclusion. Indeed, perhaps school principal’s self-awareness that their school exemplified informed inclusive practice influenced their willingness to ‘opt in’ to the current research project. However, such critical inferences cannot be confirmed due to the lack of systematic evaluation of school context regarding ASD educational provision and inclusive practice in the current study. A content analysis of each school’s SEN/Inclusion policy, school self-evaluation reports (DES Inspectorate, 2016), and external DES inspectorate reports with analytic focus on prevailing inclusive ethos, culture and practice would have provided rich contextual insight in which to situate the research findings. This additional contextual information would have also ensured a more ‘complete’ case study as per Yin’s (2018) quality criteria. Given the established association between school leadership and systemic inclusive attitudes (Bank & McCoy, 2017), semi-structured interviews with school principals may also have provided pertinent insights into systemic school factors associated with inclusive and ASD-specific practice (e.g. motivation and impetus to establish ASD class). Such contextual information would have supported the researcher to establish whether the current findings hold transferability and resonance in terms of the broader ASD special class context in Ireland.

Within the confines of a professional doctoral research thesis, the scope for presenting results was limited to a journal length article. As such, the researcher decided to prioritise presentation of the cross-case synthesis in the results section, with within-case analyses presented as individual case study reports (see Appendices S to W). One limitation of primary focus on the cross-case synthesis in the empirical article is that some of the individual nuance and idiographic differences between perspectives at the within-case level may have been lost as the researcher attended to convergence and divergence at a cross-case level. This may be

considered as a potential limitation in terms of Yin's (2018) third criterion of exemplary case study research which foregrounds the importance of considering alternative perspectives. However, Larkin et al., (2019) acknowledge that difficulties in terms of what to foreground and omit are expected as the researcher attempts to move 'outwards' during cross-case multi-perspectival IPA synthesis.

Consistent with previous research (Bloom et al., 2020), in the current study the Talking Mat was deemed to facilitate a successful communicative interaction with children, as previously described in the 'strengths' section of this appraisal. However, the sole reliance on Talking Mats as a data elicitation method, may also be considered a limitation in accordance to Yin's (2018) criterion of ensuring that the case study displays sufficient evidence. Whilst the Talking Mat methodology provided an visual mediation tool to structure the semi-structured interviews, data analysis still relied on recorded verbal responses, which likely limited depth of response from pupils with speech and language difficulties. Furthermore, the structured assignment of pictures into 'like', 'dislike' and 'unsure' categories as a interview prompt, may arguably have imposed implicit constructs on children's verbal responses, thus limiting the scope of their potential responses. Due to the researcher's limited access to school buildings in the Covid-19 context, digitalised illustrations were utilised for Talking Mat picture cards. Photographs taken within each case study child's specific school context may have been more meaningful Talking Mat prompts for pupils, particularly in the context of the 'concrete' cognitive style often associated with ASD (Hobson, 2012). Additional qualitative data sources, integrating further visual methodologies and open-ended approaches would have further enhanced the depth of elicitation of children's views. For instance, several data collection sessions with children using the Mosaic approach which combines diverse methods such as photo elicitation, tours, map making, observations and interviews may have complimented the Talking Mat approach (Bloom et al., 2020; Clark, 2005). Furthermore, open-ended visual methods based on Personal Construct Psychology [PCP] such as the 'Ideal School' drawing technique (Williams & Hanke, 2007) may have provided a more open-ended, less constrained springboard to elicit the children's lived school experiences.

Furthermore, due to some children's unawareness of their diagnosis of ASD, no specific reference was made to autism by the researcher as part of the follow-up questions as part of the Talking Mat interview. While doing so was essential for ethical reasons, it

potentially shut down rich avenues dialogue for children who were aware of their diagnosis. While having a SNA accompany the child was also deemed essential for ethical reasons to help children to feel safe and comfortable in working with an unfamiliar adult, it is possible that children were not as willing to discuss negative perceptions about their experience due to self-presentation concerns in the presence of a member of school staff. A central tenet of IPA is the prioritisation of participants' interpretations of experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Despite acute attention to personal reflexivity including conscious commitment to 'bracketing' prior assumptions utilising a researcher diary, the researcher invariably brought subconscious assumptions to the data analysis (Langdridge, 2007). The use of member checking, or asking participants to comment on the the researchers' interpretations and representation of meanings would have provided another credibility check to enhance the validity of findings (Braun & Clark, 2013; Yardly, 2000).

Within the confines of a professional doctoral research thesis, the scope for presenting results was limited to a journal length article. The results section of the empirical paper is therefore quite lengthy in the researcher' attempts to address each of the research questions and comprehensively illuminate convergence and divergence within each theme, which may be considered a limitation in terms of Yin's (2018) criterion of an engaging case report composition.

4.4 Implications for Educational Psychology Research & Practice

The distinctive contribution of the current research to the field of educational psychology will be critically appraised by considering the implications of the findings in the domains of understanding, research and practice.

4.4.1 Implications for Understanding and Knowledge of Topic Area

4.4.1.1 Research Question 1: What are the lived school experiences of the child in terms of interpersonal relationships, curriculum/learning and accessibility of the school environment?

Previous qualitative inquiries into the mainstream experiences of children and adolescents with ASD has emphasised bullying and overt peer exclusion as primary factors in feelings of social isolation in school (e.g. Danker et al., 2019; Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019; Hill, 2014; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014). Noticeable in the current study was the stark absence of bullying experiences, with sentiments of a culture of peer tolerance and acceptance. However, the current study highlights that the absence of bullying

and overt peer exclusion does not remediate challenges associated with friendship formation for children with ASD in special classes, particularly in terms of socialising with their mainstream peers. For instance, a particularly resonant theme, articulated by three of the case study children was the challenge associated with having divergent interests to the mainstream peer cohort, which often tended to hinder authentic friendships with mainstream peers. The corpus of lived experience research for adolescents with ASD in mainstream settings highlights a recurring concern about the visibility of additional adult support and a desire for agency and independent working (e.g. Hill, 2014; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014; Myles et al., 2019). The current research suggests a downward developmental extension of such sentiments to the later bounds of middle childhood, with older case study children demonstrating a preference for agency and independence where possible and a concern with self-presentation in front of mainstream peers in terms of visible additional adult support. In contrast to student sentiments of negative perception, stigma and dissatisfaction at being enrolled in a special class, as reported by principals and teachers at the post-primary level in Ireland (Banks & McCoy, 2017; Mc Coy et al., 2016), children in the current study appeared to have positive connotations of the special ASD class, highlighting how the special class may be perceived as a place of ‘sanctuary’ rather than ‘stigma’ for primary-aged pupils with ASD. Perhaps the absence of negative perception of the ASD class was also influenced by the fluid movement between special and mainstream classes in the current study, rather than the rigid operation of post-primary special classes reported in Bank and McCoy’s (2017) study.

The global policy shift towards inclusive education has engendered fierce debate in the realm of ASD educational provision (Pellicano et al., 2018). The literature is divided as to whether special classes counter basic principles of inclusive education, by segregating children from peers (Dyson, 2007) or whether they facilitate inclusion by ensuring the child access to an appropriate, specialised placement within a mainstream school (Frederickson et al., 2010; Travers, 2009). This debate reflects Norwich’s (2008) locational dilemma of difference in special education. In the current study, special class provision within the mainstream school appeared to facilitate incremental, stepping stones towards successful mainstream inclusion experiences, providing an alternative perspective to ‘inclusive versus exclusive’ dichotomous debates around special class provision.

4.4.1.2 Research Question 2: How does the child make sense of him/herself in the social context of school?

For a cohort for whom quantitative research evidence suggests that self-understanding is likely to be limited (King et al., 2019), the salience of the children's academic self-efficacy beliefs in the current study was noteworthy. The research illustrates how entrenched negative self-efficacy beliefs can become a barrier for curricular engagement in children with ASD in middle childhood. Previous research, conducted primarily within the quantitative paradigm, indicates that adolescents with ASD have difficulty conceptualising themselves from the perspective of another (e.g. Farley et al., 2010) and make fewer references to social qualities in their self-descriptions (e.g. Famer et al., 2007; Lee & Hobson, 1998), reinforcing a deficit driven perspective about their ability to reflect on the self socially (Hodget et al., 2019; King et al., 2019; Winstone et al., 2014). However, adding to an emerging corpus of qualitative research on lived experience of the self (e.g. Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; King et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2019), the current research suggests that for case study children, sense of self was indeed anchored in their social world in school. For instance, children identified positive interpersonal qualities of the self which were valued by friends and peers in school and appeared to internalise positive teacher appraisal of the self. Further evidencing self-understanding in terms of social relationships, most children demonstrated a clear self-other distinction, recognising differences between themselves and peers, primarily in terms of personalities and interests. The current research highlights that there is marked complexity and heterogeneity in how children with ASD negotiate these perceived differences. While the qualitative nature of the study precludes inference of causality, where children were aware of their ASD diagnosis, appraisal of difference appeared linked to how they negotiated this label within their sense of self, as per qualitative research with older adolescents (Gaffney, 2020; Huws & Jones, 2015; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014; Mogensen & Mason, 2015; Riccio et al., 2021). Previous quantitative and qualitative research has reinforced the salience of social-comparison processes in self-appraisal for adolescents with ASD (e.g. Hedley & Young, 2006; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Huws & Jones, 2015; McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014). Parent and teacher reporting in the current study indicates that social comparison processes may also be salient for primary aged peers with ASD and can exacerbate negative self-appraisal of difficulties in academic and athletic domains.

4.4.1.3 Research Question 3: Does special provision within a mainstream school influence how the child makes sense of him/herself, and if so, in what ways?

Williams et al.'s (2019) large-scale metasynthesis of qualitative studies of lived school experience concluded that mainstream educational settings may inadvertently accentuate rather than minimise sense of self as negatively 'different' for adolescents with ASD. Conversely, the current study highlights the perceived impact of a school-wide, holistic ethos of inclusion in minimising negative connotations of difference. In particular, thematic findings emphasise the importance of socially promoting the special ASD class within the whole school community to negate negative connotations of difference. This is consistent with recent research on SEN provision in Ireland, which found that inclusive practice has started to take root at a systemic level in the primary school sector in Ireland (McKeon, 2020). For most case study children, mainstream inclusion opportunities were perceived as being enabling for the social self, by facilitating opportunities for broadening their social networks with same-age mainstream peers. Parents and teachers projected forward, perceiving that such inclusion experiences with mainstream peers would be a protective factor for the child's social inclusion at post-primary school. Notwithstanding the positive social benefits identified with mainstream inclusion opportunities, as per Croydon et al.'s (2019) qualitative research study, divergent perspectives also highlight how mainstream inclusion may trigger some children to question perceived differences and difficulties.

4.4.2 Implications for Policy & Practice

4.4.2.1 Implications for School Practice.

4.4.2.1.1 Systemic Ethos of Inclusion. The research highlights the importance of a whole-school ethos of inclusion in minimising negative connotations of difference. The inclusion of the ASD in schoolwide initiatives, activities and outings was emphasised as imperative. A 'permeable' ASD class set-up was described across cases, including carefully-planned opportunities for reverse inclusion whereby children from the mainstream class would partake in select lessons in the ASD class, in structured play/social skills activities with a child from the ASD class, or utilise sensory accommodations such as snoozelen/sensory rooms in the ASD class when needed themselves. These opportunities for reverse inclusion of mainstream peers may have fostered a peer culture of acceptance towards the ASD class, as research has identified that the attitudes of TD peers and the involvement of such peers in social interventions supports inclusion of children with ASD in mainstream school life (Kasari et al., 2011; Ranson & Byrne, 2014).

Furthermore, recognising the implications of medicalised labelling and language on sense of self (Hodge et al., 2019; Skovlund, 2014), the current research highlights that importance of inclusive language at a whole-school level. Caution was drawn by adult stakeholders to the use of medicalised terms such as ‘unit’, and all ASD classes were referred to with Irish language names which had positive connotations. Indeed, in *School 2*, all classes were renamed with Irish language names upon the establishment of the school’s ASD, to facilitate a sense of inclusion of the ASD class within the whole-school community. Parental perspective within the research, highlights the need for mainstream teachers to ensure that children in the ASD class, who integrate with their mainstream class on a part-time basis, are included in activities which convey a sense of mainstream class identity and connectedness (e.g. class photographs, class displays). An explicit section on inclusion of the ASD class in the context of certain mainstream class activities should therefore be negotiated and clearly articulated in the school’s SEN policy to ensure a staff-wide understanding of mainstream teacher roles and responsibilities in promoting inclusion of special class pupils, as per NCSE (2016) best practice guidelines.

4.4.2.1.2 Supporting Social Success with Mainstream Peers. Given the friendship challenges and uncertainties articulated by the children in the context of socialisation with mainstream peers, the research highlights the need to explicitly support successful socialisation experiences. In particular, the challenges articulated by children in having divergent recreation interests and preferences on yard suggests a need for provision of alternative structured yard activities or lunchtime club,s centred on diversified areas of interests to support children with ASD to feel socially included (Williams et al., 2019).

4.4.2.1.3 Individually-Paced Inclusion Opportunities. The research highlights the need for carefully-planned and individually-paced inclusion opportunities for children with ASD with mainstream peers. As per Daly et al.’s (2016) review of special class provision, reverse-inclusion was identified by adult participants as an interim stepping stone to traditional inclusion to foster children’s readiness engaging in the mainstream classroom environment.

4.4.2.1.4 Eliciting the Voice of the Child Regarding SNA Support Methods. While children valued adult support when needed, older children in the current research

articulated a preference for independent working where possible and subtle, less-visible methods of SNA support when in the mainstream class, consistent with previous qualitative research with adolescents with ASD in post-primary school settings (e.g. Hill, 2014; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014). This finding indicates the need to facilitate the primary-age child with ASD to exercise self-determination in terms of articulating their preferences on how SNA support is delivered, when devising their Student Support Plan. Particular emphasis should be placed on eliciting the child's preferences regarding SNA support when in the mainstream classroom.

4.4.2.1.5 *Emphasising Process & Persistence in Praise.* The children in the current study appeared to have salient self-efficacy beliefs and were easily frustrated with themselves in the context of their difficulties in academic and athletic domains. Given the children's attunement to and internalisation of teacher appraisal, the current research may therefore reinforce the need for caution in over-reliance on achievement-related comments when working with children with ASD which may be interpreted too rigidly (Greenaway & Howlin, 2010).

4.4.2.2 Implications for Educational Psychology Practice.

4.4.2.2.1 *Support in Negotiating Diagnosis and Difference.* As reported in qualitative research with adolescents (e.g. Gaffney, 2020; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Mogensen & Mason, 2015), there was noticeable heterogeneity in how children negotiated and integrated their diagnosis and/or perceived differences with their sense of self. Particularly striking was one case study, where the child's construal of his diagnosis appeared to have become a totalising identity for him, around which he framed negative school experiences (Hodge et al., 2019; Lauchlan & Boyle, 2007). Direct psychological support may therefore be beneficial to help certain children to understand and accept their diagnosis and perceived differences. Such support may include making links with the neurodiversity movement (Riccio et al., 2021), identification of positive role models who live with difference and education about the positive qualities associated with ASD (e.g. attention to detail, honesty, reliability, sense of social justice) (Hartman, 2014). Indirect consultative support may also be beneficial to support parents when disclosing their diagnosis to their child. Bibliotherapy (Gilmore & Howard, 2016) may be a useful approach for such consultations to support parents in communicating the child's diagnosis in a manner which avoids misconceptions and medicalised stereotypes.

4.4.2.2.2 Methods of Eliciting the Child's Voice in Casework. The National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making 2015-2020 advocates that children have a voice in their "individual and collective everyday lives" across a range of priority areas, including education (Department of Children and Youth Affairs [DCYA], 2015, p. 3). In professional case work practice, it is therefore imperative for the EP to ascertain the child's voice. Indeed, the EP's capacity to meaningfully include the child in decision-making processes is now regarded as a core professional competency (British Psychological Society [BPS], 2019). However, in a large-scale context analysis of multi-disciplinary assessment reports in the UK, Parlikara et al. (2018) highlight marked differences in how the voice of the child is captured in professional casework practice depending on type of educational provision, with significantly more detail provided for children attending mainstream provision than in special placements due to associated social-communicative difficulties. The Talking Mat pictures and semi-structured follow-up probes utilised in the current study may provide an accessible method for HSE and NEPS psychologists to elicit the voice of the child with ASD in school-based casework practice as an alternative to verbally mediated discussions such as the '*My Thoughts About School*' questionnaire (NEPS, n.d.).

4.4.2.2.3 Advocating for Enacting Inclusive Practice. In the current research, individually-paced mainstream inclusion opportunities were facilitated across schools, with two case study children progressing to the point where they primarily identified with their mainstream class. Children, teachers and parents perceived such mainstream inclusion as inherently enabling for the child's social self. However, in contrast to the inclusive practice identified in the current research, a larger scale review of special class provision in Ireland indicates that across many schools at primary and post-primary, day-to-day mainstream exposure for pupils in ASD classes is minimal and there is a longer term 'permanence effect' associated with enrolment in a special class (Banks & McCoy, 2017). An implication arising from contrasting these findings may be the need for EPs to advocate and build capacity for a individually planned mainstream inclusion opportunities for children enrolled in ASD special classes in casework practice. This may involve supporting the ASD and mainstream class teacher to collaboratively plan and set targets for incremental, individually-tailored inclusion opportunities as a fundamental part of the child's Student Support Plan.

4.4.2.3 Implications for Educational Policy.

4.4.2.3.1 Providing Adequate Time for Development of School-Wide Ethos of Inclusion Prior to Establishment of ASD Classes. The Education (Admissions to Schools) Act 2018 provides the Minister for Education with the legislative power to compel a school to open an ASD class to meet regional demand for school places (NCSE, 2019). The current research gives weight to the importance of a school-wide inclusive ethos towards the ASD class to ensure that children with ASD are socially supported and included within the school-wide community. The Minister's power to compel a school to open a special class is intended as a measure of last resort (DES, 2019) when there is acute time pressure for providing school places in regions. The current research's findings may underscore the need for schools, which have been reluctant to open a special ASD class, to be given sufficient time and consultative support from external bodies (i.e., NCSE, NEPS) to plan for the enactment of a systemic ethos of inclusion in relation to how the ASD class will be socially promoted and included at a whole-school level. Therefore, perhaps more pre-emptive co-ordination among agencies is required (i.e., HSE Early Intervention Teams, NCSE) to foresee regional school placement shortages so that adequate time is provided to schools when they are given a directive to open an ASD class to ensure a committed school-wide inclusive policy toward the ASD class prior to its establishment.

4.4.3 Directions for Future Research

4.4.3.1 Eliciting the Perspectives of Mainstream Children. Research attests that the attitudes of mainstream peers are imperative in the social inclusion of children with ASD in school life (Ranson & Byrne, 2014). In the current research, a culture of peer acceptance towards children in the special class was referenced by teachers and parents. However, the first-hand perspectives of mainstream children with regard to their perceptions of the ASD class would be particularly critical and insightful for future research.

4.4.3.2 Longitudinal Research. Similarities and differences between the lived school experiences and sense of self of children in the current study in comparison to adolescents in previous qualitative research have been critically considered throughout this review. Perhaps most illuminating would be qualitative longitudinal studies, tracking the individual school journeys of pupils with ASD to inform how sense of self is negotiated over time in light of school experiences (Riccio et al., 2021; Williams et al., 2019). Such insights into

developmental trajectories of sense of self in school may more accurately identify precipitating factors for negative self-appraisal which emerge over time.

4.4.3.3 Recruitment of Representative Sample & Schools. As previously discussed, the current sample of case study children is not representative of the special ASD class population in Ireland, due to high levels of mainstream inclusion. Further qualitative research, with children with lower levels of mainstream inclusion, utilising a more extensive range of accessible methodologies (e.g. mosaic approach, story completion tasks using images, photo elicitation) would be beneficial in future research. Furthermore, a systematic analysis of prospective school's SEN/Inclusion policies and inspectorate reports with regard to inclusive culture and practice would be useful prior to school selection in future research. This may help to ensure that the voice of children attending school's with varying levels of inclusive practice are elicited, to enhance the transferability of findings across the Irish educational landscape .

4.4.3.4 Sense Making About Diagnostic Label. As some children were unaware of their diagnosis, for ethical reasons the current research did not explicitly ask children about their diagnosis. Recent qualitative research has explored the meaning of the label 'autism' for adolescents and young adults in terms of negotiating sense of self and identity (e.g. Gaffney, 2020; Mogensen & Mason, 2015). Indeed, recent research suggests that adolescents with ASD are supported in positive identity development by open, mindful discussions about autism with their parents at early age (Riccio et al., 2021). Despite a common theme of open, neuro-diversity aligned-discussions about autism and difference in the home context, there was the heterogeneity in how some children negotiated their diagnosis in the current study. Further qualitative research with primary-age children who are aware of their diagnosis might therefore be useful to explore sense-making processes about diagnosis and to identify additional factors which influence acceptance and rejection of diagnosis for this age-cohort. Such research would be particularly helpful for EPs supporting parents in navigating diagnosis disclosure decisions.

4.4.3.5 Interventions for Self-Efficacy Beliefs. The current study highlights how children articulated a sense of frustration with themselves in the context of their difficulties and held salient negative self-efficacy beliefs which in some cases disrupted their curricular

engagement. Cognitive inflexibility associated with ASD may make such negative self-beliefs resistant to change utilising traditional approaches such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (Greenaway & Howlin, 2010). As such, further research is required to identify the effectiveness of alternative approaches with children with ASD, for example growth mindset interventions which have been shown some effectiveness for increasing learner efficacy and motivation to engage in the general primary and post-primary school population (e.g. Fraser, 2018; Burnette et al., 2017).

Chapter 5: Impact Statement

School has long been recognised as a site of formative influence in development of a child's sense of self (Harter, 2015; Hodge et al., 2019; Sylva, 1994). A large-scale synthesis of qualitative research studies exploring the lived school experience of adolescents with ASD attending mainstream settings (Williams et al., 2019) found that they often construed themselves as "different" in a negative sense, as influenced by social relationships, accessibility of the school environment and ASD-related difficulties. Identifying a significant gap in qualitative research literature, Williams et al., (2019) called for more qualitative investigations to elicit the lived experience of primary-age children with ASD and those attending specialist educational settings. The current research endeavoured to answer this call by exploring the lived school experiences and sense of self of primary-aged children enrolled in special ASD classes in Irish primary schools. This research is particularly timely and pertinent for Irish EPs, working across both the NEPS and HSE Child Network Disability Teams who are involved at a systemic level in the expanding ASD class sector (NSCE, 2019).

Adopting an multiple-case study design (Yin, 2018), underpinned by a multi-perspectival IPA approach (Larkin et al., 2019), the research captured the experiences of a cohort of boys aged eight to twelve years enrolled in ASD classes, along with the focal perspectives of their ASD class teacher and parent. Addressing methodological calls for lived experience studies with children with ASD using accessible methods (Tesfaye et al., 2019), child interviews were mediated using 'Talking Mat' approach.

Cross-case synthesis yielded rich insights into the lived school experiences of case study children with master themes including complex friendship dynamics, a supportive learning environment and navigating the learning process. Master themes relating to the child's sense of self in school included pockets of positive appraisal, a questioning versus an unquestioning self and the impact of inclusive practice. Convergene and divergence across cases and between children's and parent/ASD class teachers' perspectives were transparently articulated. The implications of these themes for educational policy and practice have been thoroughly critqued. The transferability and impact of the research findings could be enhanced by increased recruitment of children with lower levels of inclusion in mainstream classes (Banks & McCoy, 2017; Kenny et al., 2020). Nonetheless, the current research involves four children who had began their current educational placements primarily in the ASD class setting, providing rich insights on their lived experiences and sense of self development within

a special class placement in a mainstream school. For the researcher, the most important contribution of the research is the elicitation of the oft-overlooked voice of the primary-aged child with ASD enrolled in specialist provision:

“He came home [after interview] and he thought it was the best thing ever...and it [the research] paints a positive picture for him...that it’s okay to have autism and that people are studying autism and asking kids their views about what it’s like...usually it’s me who has to answer all the questions but like it’s Eoin who should be asked...the fact that you asked Eoin was very important to me as a parent” (Eoin’s mother)

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Appendix A: Rationale for Excluded Studies**Table A.1***Rationale for Excluded Studies*

Study Excluded	Rationale (Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria)
1. Able, H., Sreckovic, M.A., Schultz, T.R., Garwood, J.D., & Sherman, J. (2015). Views from the trenches: Teacher and student supports needed for full inclusion of students with ASD. <i>Teacher Education and Special Education</i> , 38(1), 44-57.	4(a)- Confined to perspectives of teachers.
2. Alverson, C.Y., Lindstron, L.E., & Hirano, K.A. (2019). High school to college: Transition experiences of young adults with autism. <i>Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities</i> , 34(1), 52-64.	2(b)- Focuses on experiences of college-age students with ASD
3. Altomare, A.A., McCrimmon, A.W., Cappadocia, M.C., Weiss, J.A., Beran, T.N., & Smith-Demers, A.D. (2017). When push comes to shove: How are students with autism spectrum disorder coping with bullying? <i>Canadian Journal of School Psychology</i> , 32(3-4), 209-227.	4 (a)- Study focuses on students' suggested strategies for coping with bullying as depicted in cartoons, rather than their own experiences of bullying within their educational setting.
4. Ashburner, J., Saggars, B., Campbell, M.A., Dillon-Wallace, J.A., Hwang, Y-S., Carrington, S., & Bobir, N. (2019). How are students on the autism spectrum affected by bullying? Perspectives of students and parents. <i>Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs</i> , 19(1), 27-44.	5- Mixed-methods study
5. Bolic Baric, V., Hellberg, K., Kjellberg, A., & Hemmingsson, H. (2016). Support for learning goes beyond academic support: Voices of students with Asperger's disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. <i>Autism</i> , 20(2) 183-195.	2(c)- Retrospective accounts for adults with ASD and ADHD aged 20-29 on their school experiences.
6. Bradley, K. & Male, D. (2017). 'Forest School is muddy and I like it': Perspectives of young children with autism spectrum disorders, their parents and educational professionals. <i>Educational & Child Psychology</i> , 34(2), 80-93.	3 (b) - Forest school is outside the typical continuum of ASD educational provision
7. Bradley, B. (2016). Why single me out?' Peer mentoring, autism and inclusion in mainstream secondary schools. <i>British Journal of Special Education</i> , 43(4), 272-288.	4(a)- Study investigated to effects of a peer mentoring programme rather than pupil perspective of lived school experiences.

8. Carter, M., Stephenson, J., Clark, T., Costley, D., Martin, J., Williams, K., Browne, L., Davies, L., & Bruck, S. (2014). Perspectives on regular and support class placement and factors that contribute to success of inclusion for children with ASD. <i>Journal of International Special Needs Education</i> , 17(2), 60-69.	4 (a)- Study focuses on parent and teacher perspectives
9. Chen, P.Y., & Schwartz, I. (2012). Bullying and victimization experiences of students with autism spectrum disorder in elementary schools. <i>Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities</i> 27(4) 200–212.	5- Quantitative data collection and analysis
10. Dann, R. (2011). Secondary transition experiences for pupils with autism spectrum conditions (ASCs). <i>Educational Psychology in Practice</i> , 27(3), 293-312.	3(a)- Study focuses on transition between two settings rather than lived experience within established setting.
11. Danker, J., Strnadov´a, I., & Cumming, T.M. (2016). School experiences of students with autism spectrum disorder within the context of student wellbeing: A review and analysis of the literature. <i>Australasian Journal of Special Education</i> , 40(1), 59–78.	1- Literature Review rather than primary, empirical data
12. Daugherty, B.L. (2019). Parent perceptions of barriers to friendship development for children with autism spectrum disorders. <i>Communication Disorders Quarterly</i> , 40(3) 142– 151.	4 (a)- Study focuses on parent perspectives
13. Davidson, J., & Henderson, V.L. Coming out' on the spectrum: autism, identity and disclosure. <i>Social & Cultural Geography</i> , 11(2), 155-170.	1- Non-primary data (application of discourse analysis to ASD autobiographical accounts)
14. Dillenburger, K., Jordan, J-A-. McKerr, L., Lloyd, K., & Schbitz, D. Autism awareness in children and young people: surveys of two populations. <i>Journal of Intellectual Disability Research</i> , 61(8), 766–777.	2- General child population rather than ASD-specific population
15. Dillon, G.V., Underwood, D.M., & Freemantle, L.J. (2016). Autism and the U.K. secondary school experience. Focus on Autism and Other <i>Developmental Disabilities</i> , 31(3), 221-230.	5- Mixed methods data collection & analysis
16. Dixon, M., & Tanner, K. (2013). The experience of transitioning two adolescents with Asperger syndrome in academically focused high schools. <i>Australasian Journal of Special Education</i> , 37(1), 28–48.	3(a)- Study focuses on transition between two settings rather than experience within established setting.
17. Dodd, J.L., Ocampo, A.L., & Kennedy, K.S. (2011). Perspective taking through narratives: An intervention for students with ASD.	5- Quantitative intervention study

<i>Communication Disorders Quarterly</i> , 33(1) 23–33.	
18. Dyches, T.T., Cichella, E., Frost Olsen, S., & Mandleco, B. (2004). Snapshots of Life: Perspectives of School-Aged Individuals with Developmental Disabilities. <i>Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities</i> , 29(3), 172-182.	2 (a)- Participants included children with an array of developmental disabilities (Autism, Down syndrome, intellectual disabilities, brain abnormalities)
19. Eisenman, L.T., Pell, M.M., Poudel, B.B., & Pleet-Odle, A.M. (2015). “I think I’m reaching my potential”: Students’ self-determination experiences in an inclusive high school. <i>Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals</i> , 38(2) 101–112.	2(a)- No pupils with ASD included in sample
20. Essex, J., & Melham, P. (2019). Experiences of educational transition: young women with ASD, and the staff supporting them, speak. <i>Support for Learning</i> , 34(1), 86-111.	2(b)- Focus is on women with ASD in enrolled in further post-secondary education.
21. Ezzamel, N. & Bond, C. (2017). The use of a peer-mediated intervention for a pupil with autism spectrum disorder: Pupil, peer and staff perceptions <i>Educational & Child Psychology</i> , 34(2), 27-39.	5- Mixed-methods intervention study
22. Falkmer, M., Granlund, M., Nilholm, C., & Falkmer, T. (2012). From my perspective – Perceived participation in mainstream schools in students with autism spectrum conditions. <i>Developmental Neurorehabilitation</i> , 15(3), 191–201.	5- Quantitative data collection & analysis
23. Falkmer, M., Oehlers, K., Granlund, M., & Falkmer, T. (2015). Can you see it too? Observed and self-rated participation in mainstream schools in students with and without autism spectrum disorders. <i>Developmental Neurorehabilitation</i> , 18(6), 365–374.	5- Quantitative data collection & analysis
24. Fayette, R., & Bond, C. (2018). A qualitative study of specialist schools’ processes of eliciting the views of young people with autism spectrum disorders in planning their transition to adulthood. <i>British Journal of Special Education</i> , 45(1), 5-25.	4(a)- Focus is solely on teacher perspectives
25. Fayette, R., & Bond, C. (2018). A systematic literature review of qualitative research methods for eliciting the view of young people with ASD about their educational experiences. <i>European Journal of Special Education</i> , 33(3), 349-365.	1- Systematic literature review
26. Fortuna, R. (2014). The social and emotional	5- Mixed methods data collection & analysis

functioning of students with an autistic spectrum disorder during the transition between primary and secondary schools. <i>Support for Learning</i> , 29(2), 177-191.	
27. Goodall, C. (2015). How do we create ASD-friendly schools? A dilemma of placement. <i>Support for Learning</i> , 30(4), 405-326.	1- Non-primary empirical data
28. Gray, C., & Donnelly, J. (2013). Unheard voices: the views of traveller and non-traveller mothers and children with ASD. <i>International of Early Years Education</i> , 21(4), 268–285.	3 (c) - Type of educational setting not identified 3 (d)- Focus not refined to lived experiences in school context.
29. Hannah, E.F., & Topping, K.J. (2013). The transition from primary to secondary school: Perspectives of students with autism spectrum disorder and their parents. <i>International Journal of Special Education</i> , 28(1), 145-160.	3(a)- Study focuses on transition between two settings rather than experience within established setting.
30. Hebron, J (2018) School connectedness and the primary to secondary school transition for young people with autism spectrum conditions. <i>British Journal of Educational Psychology</i> , 88(3), 396-409.	5- Quantitative data collection & analysis
31. Hedges, S.H., Kirby, A.V., Sreckovic, M.A., Kucharczyk, S., Hume, K., & Pace, S. (2014). "Falling through the cracks": Challenges for high school students with autism spectrum disorder. <i>The High School Journal</i> , 98(1), 64-82.	4(b)- Of 41 participants in focus groups, only 2 were school-age students with ASD
32. Hendrickson, J.M., Woods-Grove, S., Rodgers, D.B., & Datchuk, S. (2017). Perceptions of students with autism and their parents: The college experience. <i>Education and Treatment of Children</i> , 40(4), 571–596.	2 (b)- Participants include college-age students with ASD
33. Hetherington, S.A., Durant-Jones, L., Johnson, K., Nolan, K., Smith, E., Taylor-Brown, S., & Tuttle, J. (2010). The lived experiences of adolescents with disabilities and their parents in transition planning. <i>Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities</i> 25(3) 163–172.	2(a)- Sample not refined to pupils with ASD
34. Howe, F.E.J., & Stagg, S.D. (2016). How sensory experiences affect adolescents with an autistic spectrum condition within the classroom. <i>Journal of Autism Developmental Disorders</i> , 46, 1656-1668.	5- Mixed methods data collection & analysis
35. Hume, K., Sreckovic, M., Snyder, K., & Carnahan, C.R. (2014). Smooth transitions: Helping students with autism spectrum disorder navigate the school day. <i>Teaching Exceptional Children</i> , 47(1), 25-35.	1- Non-primary, empirical data

36. Humphrey, N. & Lewis, S. (2008b). What does 'inclusion' mean for pupils on the autistic spectrum in mainstream secondary schools? <i>Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs</i> , 8(3), 132–140.	3 (b)- Student voice for this study is comprehensively reported on in included study (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008)
37. Humphrey, N. (2008). Including pupils with autistic spectrum disorders in mainstream schools. <i>Support for Learning</i> , 23(1), 41-47.	1- Non-primary data
38. Jarman, B., & Rayner, C. (2015). Asperger's and girls: What teachers need to know. <i>Australasian Journal of Special Education</i> , 39(2), 128–142.	2(c)- Adult participants with ASD based on retrospective accounts of school experience
39. Kasari, C., Locke, J., Gulsrud, Am., & Rotheram-Fuller, E. (2011). Social networks and friendships at school: comparing children with and without ASD. <i>Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders</i> , 41(5), 533-544.	5- Quantitative data collection and analysis
40. Landor, F., & Perepa, P. (2017). Do resource bases enable social inclusion of students with Asperger syndrome in a mainstream secondary school? <i>Support for Learning</i> , 32(2), 129-143.	4(a)- Study does not capture the first-hand voice of student with ASD.
41. Laursen, E.K., & Yazdgerdi, S. (2012). Autism and belonging. <i>Reclaiming Children and Youth</i> , 21(2), 44-47.	1- Non-primary data.
42. Lim Lee, E.A., Black, M.H., Tan, T., Falkmer, T., & Girdler, S. (2019). "I'm destined to ace this": Work experience placement during high school for individuals with autism spectrum disorder. <i>Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders</i> , 49, 3089–3101.	3(b)- Perspectives are elicited about work experience (i.e. settings outside of typical continuum of ASD educational provision)
43. Locke, J., Ishijima, E.H., Kasari, C. & London, N. (2010). Loneliness, friendship quality and the social networks of adolescents with high-functioning autism in an inclusive school setting. <i>Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs</i> , 10(2), 74-81.	5- Quantitative methods of data collection and analysis
44. Lloyd, D. (2015). Gaining views from pupils with autism about their participation in drama classes. <i>British Journal of Learning Disabilities</i> , 43, 8-15.	2(b)- Post-secondary students with ASD
45. MacLeod, A., Lewis, A., & Robertson, C. (2013). Why should I be like bloody Rain Man?!' Navigating the autistic identity. <i>British Journal of Special Education</i> , 41(1), 41-49.	2(b)- Participants with ASD in postsecondary setting
46. Majoko, T. (2016). Inclusion of children with autism spectrum disorders: Listening and hearing the voices from the grassroots. <i>Journal</i>	4 (a)- Voices of students with ASD not elicited.

	<i>of Autism Developmental Disorder, 46, 1429–1440.</i>	
47.	De Matos, I.T., & Morgado, J. (2016). School participation of students with autism spectrum disorders. <i>Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs, 16</i> (1), 972–977.	4 (a)- Voices of students with ASD not elicited.
48.	McAllister, K., & Hadjri, K. (2013). Inclusion and the special educational needs (SEN) resource base in mainstream schools: physical factors to maximise effectiveness. <i>Support for Learning, 28</i> (2), 57-65.	1- Non-primary data
49.	Neal, S. & Frederickson, N. (2016). ASD transition to mainstream secondary: a positive experience? <i>Educational Psychology in Practice, 32</i> (4), 355-373.	3(a)- Study focuses on transition between two settings rather than experience within established setting.
50.	Nowell, K.P., Brewton, B.S., & Goin-Kochel, R.P. (2014). A multi-rater study on being teased among children/adolescents with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and their typically developing siblings: Associations with ASD symptoms. <i>Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 29</i> (4), 195-205.	5- Quantitative data collection and analysis
51.	O'Hagan, S. & Hebron, J. (2017) Perceptions of Friendship among Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Conditions in a Mainstream High School Resource Provision. <i>European Journal of Special Needs Education, 32</i> (3), 314-328.	3(d)- Focus of study is not confined to friendship development within the educational/school setting
52.	Pisula, E., & Lukowska, E. (2011). Perception of social relationships with classmates and social support in adolescents with Asperger syndrome attending mainstream schools in Poland. <i>School Psychology International, 33</i> (2) 185–206.	5- Quantitative data collection and analysis
53.	Rose, C.A., Stormont, M., Wang, Z., Simpson, C.G., Preast, J.L., & Green, A.L. (2015). Bullying and students with disabilities: Examination of disability status and educational placement. <i>School Psychology Review, 44</i> (4), 425-444.	5- Quantitative data collection and analysis
54.	Rossetti, Z.S. (2011). "That's how we do it": Friendship work between high school students with and without autism or developmental disability. <i>Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 36</i> (1-2), 23-33.	2(a)- Participants included children with various of developmental disabilities, rather than ASD specifically.
55.	Saggers, B., Campbell, M., Dillon-Wallace, J., Ashburner, J., Hwang, Y-S., Carrington, S., & Tones, M. (2017). Understandings and experiences of bullying: Impact on students on	3 (c)- It is unclear which level of the continuum of educational provision for ASD that students receive.

the autism spectrum. <i>Australian Journal of Special Education</i> , 41(2), 123-140.	3 (d) Topic of bullying not defined as within context of lived school experience
56. Sagers, B. (2015). Student perceptions: Improving the educational experiences of high school students on the autism spectrum. <i>Improving Schools</i> , 18(1) 35–45.	The findings of this study are comprehensively outlined in Sagers et al., (2011) which is included in review- this study focuses on implications of these findings
57. Sciotto, M., Richwine, S., Mentrikoski, J., & Niedzwiechi, K. (2012). A qualitative analysis of the school experiences of students with asperger syndrome. <i>Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities</i> 27(3) 177–188.	2(c) -First-hand account of educational experiences of is based on retrospective accounts of adults with ASD
58. Simpson, C.G., Gaus, M.D., Biggs, M.J.G., Williams, J. (2010). Physical education and implications for students with Asperger's Syndrome. <i>Teaching Exceptional Children</i> , 42(6), 48-56.	2 (c) -Retrospective accounts educational experience of an adult with ASD
59. Stevenson, K., Cornell, K., & Hinchcliffe, V. (2016). 'Let's Talk Autism' -a school-based project for students to explore and share their experiences of being autistic. <i>Support for Learning</i> , 31(3), 208-234.	3(d)-While this study does elicit the first-hand experiences of students with ASD, it is not specifically related to their lived educational experiences.
60. Symes, W., & Humphrey, N. (2010). Peer-group indicators of social inclusion among pupils with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) in mainstream secondary schools: A comparative study. <i>School Psychology International</i> , 31(5) 478–494.	5- Quantitative data collection and analysis
61. Tibbett, J. (2004). The educational experiences of students with Asperger syndrome. <i>Kairaranga</i> , 5(2), 12-18/	5- No identifiable qualitative framework or method of data analysis being subscribed to
62. Tobias, A. (2009). Supporting students with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) at secondary school: A parent and student perspective. <i>Educational Psychology in Practice</i> , 25(2), 151-165.	4 (b)- Student voice markedly overshadowed by parent perspective
63. Van Hees, V., Roeyers, H., & De Mol, J. (2018). Students with autism spectrum disorder and their parents in the transition into higher education: Impact on dynamics in the parent–child relationship. <i>Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders</i> , 48, 3296–3310.	2(b)- Participants are in post-secondary education setting
64. Whitaker, P. (2004). Fostering communication and shared play between mainstream peers and children with autism: Approaches, outcomes and experiences. <i>British Journal of Special Education</i> , 31(4), 214-222.	4(a)- Study does not elicit the voice of the pupilwith ASD.

65. Williams, E.I., Gleeson, K., & Jones, B.E. (2019). How pupils on the autism spectrum make sense of themselves in the context of their experiences in a mainstream school setting: A qualitative metasynthesis. <i>Autism</i> , 23(1), 8-28.	1- Non-primary data, ie. Literature Review
66. Zazzi, H., & Faragher, R. (2018). 'Visual clutter' in the classroom: voices of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. <i>International Journal of Developmental Disabilities</i> , 64(3), 212-224.	3 (d)- Focus on students' experience of visual clutter in classroom rather than lived school experience
67. Griffin, W.B. (2019). Peer perceptions of students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. <i>Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities</i> , 34(3), 183-192.	2(a)- Participants comprise typically developing pupil cohort 5- Quasi Experimental Study
68. Hillary, A. (2019). Am I the curriculum? <i>Curriculum Inquiry</i> , 49(4), 373-386.	2(b)- Focus on educational experience of adult author with ASD in post-secondary university setting
69. Larcombe, T.J., Joosten, A.V., Cordier, R., & Vaz, S. (2019). Preparing children with autism for transition to mainstream school and perspectives on supporting positive school experiences. <i>Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders</i> , 49, 3073-3088.	4(a)- Study does not include the first-hand view of the student with ASD about their lived educational experiences
70. Lloyd, E. (2019). Creating "autism friendly" education in an inclusive mainstream primary school. <i>Good Autism Practice</i> , 20(2), 13-26.	1- Teacher practitioner article making recommendations for inclusive practice
71. Hebron, J. & Bond, C. (2017). Developing mainstream resource provision for pupils with autism spectrum disorder: Parent and pupil perceptions. <i>European Journal of Special Needs Education</i> , 32(4), 556-571.	2 (a)- While study purposes to capture pupil perspectives of mainstream resource provision for pupils with ASD, of the nine students interviewed, five had a diagnosis of SLI rather than ASD.
72. Fayette, R. & Bond, C. (2018). A qualitative study of specialist schools' processes of eliciting the views of young people with autism spectrum disorders in planning their transition to adulthood. <i>British Journal of Special Education</i> , 45(1), 5-25.	3. Focus of study is about processes of eliciting views 4(a) Study does not include first-hand voice of students with ASD
73. Tamm, L., Duncan, A., Vaughn, A., McDade, R., Estell, N., Birnschein, A., & Crosby, L. (2019). Academic needs in middle school: Perspectives of parents and youth with autism. <i>Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders</i> , 50, 3126-3139	4(a) Focus of the study is about executive functioning intervention

74. Crindland, E.K., Jones, S.C., Caputi, P. & Magee, C.A. (2014). Being a girl in a boys' world: Investigating the experiences of girls with autism spectrum disorders during adolescence. <i>Journal of Autism & Developmental Disorders</i> , 44, 1261-1274.	3. d). Study focuses on students' lived experiences outside educational context- e.g. themes including diagnostic process, puberty, sexual relationships & concerns, having a daughter with ASD
75. Gaffney, J.C. (2020). 'It's autism, it's just a name: Exploring the impact of autism spectrum diagnosis with adolescent females using interpretative phenomenological analysis. <i>Educational & Child Psychology</i> , 37(1), 136-149.	3. d). Study focuses on how girls make sense of diagnosis of ASD- no reference to diagnosis in context of lived school experiences
76. Wong, S-W. (2018). Challenges Encountered by 17 Autistic Young Adults in Hong Kong. <i>Support for Learning</i> , 32(4), 375-386.	1(a)- Book summary
77. Richards, N., & Crane, L. (2020). The development and feasibility study of a multimodal 'Talking Wall' to facilitate the voice of young people with autism and complex needs: A case study in a specialist residential school. <i>Journal of Autism & Developmental Disorders</i>	4 a). Study does not include the first-hand view of the student with ASD about their lived educational experiences
78. Rainsberry, T. (2017). An exploration of the positive and negative experiences of teenage girls with autism attending mainstream secondary school. <i>Good Autism Practice</i> , 18(2), 15-31.	1 c) Does not appear to be a full empirical research article- e.g. no discussion of data analysis methods and no direct quotes in findings
79. Skafle, I., Nordahl-Hansen, A., & Oin, R.A. (2020). Short report: Social perception of high school students with ASD in Norway. <i>Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders</i> , 50, 670-675.	1.c) Does not appear to be a full empirical research article- rather a short report- no use of direct quotes in findings.
80. Potter, C. (2014). 'I didn't used to have much friends': Exploring the friendship concepts and capabilities of a boy with autism and severe learning disabilities. <i>British Journal of Learning Disabilities</i> , 43, 208-218.	4(b)- Minimal direct quotes from child in results.

Appendix B: Summaries of Included Studies

A summary table was compiled to illustrate pertinent research design features and emerging themes from each of the included studies.

Citation	Research Aim/Question(s)	Data Collection Methods	Data Analysis Method	School Setting	Country	Participants	Primary Themes Identified
Cook et al., (2016)	To explore school experiences of secondary school-age boys with ASD with a focus on learning, social relationships and bullying and whether this reflects their placement within a mainstream or specialist school	Semi-structured interviews	Thematic Analysis	Mainstream Setting (6 boys) Special School Setting (5 boys)	South East England	11 boys with ASD, aged 11-17 9 of the boys mothers (all aged 40+)	<p>Theme 1: Experiences of Friendships & Bullying <i>Subthemes:</i> -Friendships -Bullying</p> <p>Theme 2: Risk Factors <i>Subthemes:</i> <i>(Internal)</i> -Social Difficulties -Sensory Difficulties -Lack of understanding -Staffing & Resources -Failure to handle bullying</p> <p>Theme 3: Protective Factors <i>Subthemes:</i> -Self-Esteem -Resilience -Disregarding Bullying -Avoiding Bullies -Supportive Friends -School Achievements -Outside Interests -Talents</p> <p>Theme 4: Outcomes -Mental Health Issues -Learning - Relationships</p>
Cook et al. (2018)	To explore the experiences of learning, friendships and bullying in girls with autism attending both specialist	Semi-Structured Interviews	Thematic Analysis	Mainstream (6 girls) & Specialist	Southeast England	11 girls with ASD, aged 11-17 10 mothers	<p>Theme 1: Motivation to Have Friends <i>Subthemes:</i> -Divergence of expectations of friendships with neurotypical peers</p>

	and mainstream schools and those of their parents			Schools (5 girls)		2 father (all aged 40+)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Wanting to fit in but lacking the skills to form and maintain friendships -Befriending those who are different <p>Theme 2: Challenges Faced By Girls with Autism</p> <p><i>Subthemes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Stress and anxiety -Communication difficulties -Friendship group difficulties -Bullying -Absenteeism <p>Theme 3: Masking Their Autism: Both as a solution and a problem</p> <p><i>Subtheme:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Solution: Making personal adjustments -Solution: Concealing their label -Problem: Internalising -Problem: Late/missed diagnosis
Danker et al. (2019)	<p>Aim: To explore the conceptualisation, barriers, and ways to enhance the well-being of students with ASD from their perspectives.</p> <p>Research Questions: -What constitutes well-being for students with ASD? -What do students with ASD identify as barriers to their well-being? -What do students with ASD identify as internal and</p>	<p>Photovoice methodology: Students asked to take 10 photographs representing:</p> <p>-What makes a good life in school? -What assists them in having a good life in school?</p>	<p>Grounded Theory (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007)</p>	<p>Seven mainstream high schools with SEN support units</p>	<p>Sydney, Australia</p>	<p>15 boys; 1 girl ranging from 13-17 years.</p> <p>Diagnoses of ASD (n=13) and AS (n=3)</p> <p>All lessons in mainstream classroom (n=10)</p> <p>Partial time in support units with mainstream inclusion (n=6)</p>	<p>Theme 1: Domains of student well being -Emotional well-being -Social well-being -Academic well-being</p> <p>Theme 2: Barriers to student well-being: -Sensory barriers -Social barriers -Barriers associated with learning</p> <p>Theme 3: Supporting students with ASD to enhance their well-being: -What helps with a good life in school? -Who helps with a good life in school?</p>

	external assessets of well-being?	-What stops them from experiencing a good life in school?					
		Interview based on photographs taken					
Goodall & MacKenzie (2019)	To explore the educational experiences of two teenage girls with Asperger's Syndrome in a mainstream setting in the UK with respect to the school environment, teachers, the curriculum and peers	Semi-structured interviews Participatory research methods: -Beans & Pots -Diamond Ranking -"Good teacher, bad teacher" -"Me at School"drawing	Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2014)	Mainstream	UK	2 teenage girls Aged 16 and 17 Diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome.	Theme: 1 Impact on Wellbeing Theme 2: Bullying & Friendships Theme 3: Inclusion According to Sarah-Jane & Ro
Goodall (2019)	Research Question 1: What experiences have autistic young people had during their mainstream school education? Research Question 2: What experiences have autistic young people had during their time in an Alternative Education Provision?	Semi-structured interviews Participatory research methods: -Beans & Pots -Diamond Ranking -"Good teacher, bad teacher"	Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2014)	Alternative Educational Provision <i>Specialist setting for students with aged 11-17 years with Social, Emotional and</i>	Northern Ireland	7 adolescent boys with ASD between 13.10-1.7 years	Research Question 1: Experiences in Mainstream Education Provision Themes: -Overwhelming environment -Curriculum & Homework -Bullying -Unsupportive teachers -Improving School Research Question 2: Experiences in Alternative Education Provision

		-Me at School” drawing -Design your own school activity		<i>Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD). Around 20% of students have ASD. Class sizes are 6 pupils maximum.</i>			Themes: -Supportive environment -Supportive Teachers -Ideal School
Hay & Winn (2005)	What are the educational issues associated with secondary school students with AS, from their perspectives of general teachers, special education teachers, students with AS, and their parents	Adult participants: focus groups Students participants: focus groups and interviews	Thematic analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994) with frequency counts	Co-educational secondary school catering for students aged 12-18 years. Students with AS spent majority of time in general education classrooms with 3-4 hours of withdrawal per week in the Special Education Unit (SEU) for social skills, living skills and academic support programmes.	Australia	122 participants: 89 mainstream teachers 7 special education teachers 17 parents (9 mothers; 8 fathers) 9 students with Asperger’s Syndrome (AS) (7 males; 2 females)	Theme 1: The nature of the AS condition and its influence on behaviour and social interactions Theme 2: Collaboration and relationships Theme 3: Burnout and lack of services Theme 4: The notion that special education teachers worked hard to assist others Theme 5: The qualities of school facilities
Healy et al. (2013)	To gain an insight into the experiences	Semi-structured Interviews	Inductive thematic analysis	Mainstream PE in primary school without	South West Ireland	12 students with ASD (aged 9–13 years)	Theme 1: Individual challenges <i>Subthemes:</i> -Physical ability

	of students with ASD in Physical Education	“My Ideal PE class” drawing		support of an SNA		11 boys 1 girl	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Physical fitness -Sensory challenges -Fear of Injury <p>Theme 1: Peer Interactions <i>Subthemes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Camaraderie -Initiation of friendships -Social comparison -Bullying <p>Exclusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Being excluded by the teacher -Be excluded due to difficult activities -Students requesting to be excluded
Hill (2014)	To explore the experiences of mainstream school for adolescents with ASD	Photo Elicitation (taking photos of aspects of school life that were important to them to stimulate formal discussions)	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis	2 Mainstream secondary schools	South of England	6 students with ASD	<p>Theme 1: Anxiety <i>Subthemes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Environmental & Social Factors -Curriculum and learning factors -Protective factors <p>Theme 2: Sanctuary <i>Subthemes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The Support Base -One Size Does Not Fit All <p>Theme 3: Young People as Active Agents <i>Subthemes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Making Sense of Self & Others -Creative Problem Solvers -Young People Becoming
Howard et al. (2019)	Research Question 1: What is it like to experience school as a bilingual child on the autism spectrum?	Semi-structured, computer-assisted interviews	Interpretative phenomenological	Mainstream Primary (n=9)	England & Wales	11 children with ASD and EAL, aged 7-14- Most children had little	<p>Theme 1: Identity at School <i>Subthemes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Being bilingual -Learner Identity

			analysis (IPA)	Mainstream Secondary (n=2)		awareness of ASD diagnosis	-Social interaction Theme 2: Experiences of the Classroom <i>Subthemes:</i> -Learning environments -Engaging with the curriculum -Emotion regulation -The role of technology
Humphrey & Lewis (2008)	To explore the experiences and views of secondary school pupils with Aspergers Syndrome about their mainstream educational placements.	Semi-structured interview, drawings & pupil diaries (traditional, electronic & oral)	Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)	4 mainstream secondary schools	North-West England	20 students with Asperger's Syndrome/High-Functioning Autism (ages 11-17)	Theme 1: Constructing an understanding of AS <i>Subthemes:</i> -Being different/not normal -Having a "bad brain" or "mental syndrome" -Being "odd" of a "freak" -Acceptance of AS Theme 2: Characteristics associated with AS and Life in School: <i>Subthemes</i> -Special interests -Good memory -Difficulties "mentalising" including reading moods and emotions "Odd" behaviour -Social 'naivety' -Different use of imagination -Inflexible thinking Themes 3: Relationships with peers: <i>Subthemes:</i> Problems: -Bullying and teasing -Social isolation Solutions?

							<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Peer support & Friendships Theme 4: Anxiety and stress in school <i>Subthemes:</i> -Difficulties concentrating -Noise and disruption -Disliked subjects -Exam nerves -Refuge -Desire for privacy Theme 5: Working with teachers and other staff: <i>Subthemes:</i> -Being treated differently versus being treated the same -Availability of support -Method of support Theme 6: Negotiating ‘difference’: -Desire to remain in mainstream school -Wanting to fit in -The need for independence -The issue of disclosure
McLaughlan & Rafferty (2014)	‘What is life like for you?’.	Semi-structured Interview	Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)	Mainstream-secondary	UK	5 males, 1 female with Asperger’s Syndrome, Year 11-13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Theme 1: Something has been taken from me <i>Subthemes:</i> -Why me? -I hold shame and regret Theme 2: “It” Does Something to Me <i>Subthemes:</i> -‘It’ is there and it stays -‘It’ is there but it changes -“It” is a part of me

							<p>Theme 3: Let me be “normal” <i>Subthemes:</i> -Let me decide how others understand me -The support you give is... not always helpful -The support you give... can reduce my agency</p> <p>Theme 4. “Fitting In”? <i>Subthemes:</i> -Friendships -I can feel alone and isolated -I experience being rejected and bullied</p>
<p>Moyse & Porter (2015)</p>	<p>Research aims to focus on three girls attending mainstream primary schools with a diagnosis of Asperger’s Syndrome and considers the impact on them of the hidden curriculum</p>	<p>Non-structured non-participant observation (18h for each girl)</p> <p>Semi-structured Interviews with pupil’s mothers, class teachers, SENCOs</p> <p>Activity-led sessions with pupils <i>(Drawings, Photograph, Mind maps, Sorting Activities)</i></p>	<p>Organisational framework built from text observations, appears thematic analysis (hybrid approach)</p>	<p>Mainstream Primary school</p>	<p>UK</p>	<p>3 female pupils with a diagnosis of Asperger’s Syndrome/Higher Functioning Autism aged 7-11</p>	<p>Theme 1: Hidden curriculum and areas of difficulty</p> <p>Theme 2: Modifications</p> <p>Theme 3: Perspectives</p>

Myles, et al. (2019)	<p>Overall Research Question: What do adolescent females with autism feel about their social experiences in mainstream secondary schools?</p> <p>Research Question 1(a): In what ways do adolescent females with autism feel they belong?</p> <p>Research Question 1(b): In what ways do adolescent females with autism feel excluded?</p>	Semi-structured interview with hierarchical focusing	Thematic Analysis	Mainstream secondary setting	South-west England	8 female students between ages 12-17 with a diagnosis of ASD/Asperger would could express themselves verbally	<p>Research Q 1a) Theme 1: Reciprocal friendships Theme 2: Feeling safe and supported Theme 3: Encouragement and inclusion Theme 4: Establishing and adhering to social expectations</p> <p>Research Q 1b) Theme 1: Being on the periphery Theme 2: Being devalued</p>
Saggers et al. (2011)	To examine the lived experience of an inclusive education from the perspective of a group of adolescent students with ASD.	Semi-structured interviews	Constant comparative method	Mainstream High School	Brisbane, Australia	9 high school students with autism aged 13-16 years. Seven of the students had diagnosis of Aspergers 7 boys and 2 girls	<p>Theme 1: Teacher Characteristics -Positive -Negative</p> <p>Theme 2: Curriculum-related issues -Workload -Demand for handwriting -Solutions to difficulties</p> <p>Theme 3: Support Mechanisms -Attitude to specialist support -Types of support -Ways of receiving support</p> <p>Theme 4: Friendships -Perceptions towards friends and friendships -Attitudes towards socialising and solitude</p> <p>Theme 5: Environmental Considerations</p> <p>Theme 6: Teasing and Bullying</p>

Appendix C: WoE A Criteria

Criteria

Brantlinger et al.'s (2005) framework of quality indicators that are essential in evaluating the methodological quality of qualitative research in special education was used to code and calculate the WoE A for each included study. A final WoE A was calculated for each included study by averaging the credibility measures and quality indicators detailed by Brantlinger et al (2005). Table 1 provides a detailed account of each credibility and quality criterion and a rubric for scoring included studies for each criterion. In table 2, the scores assigned to each of Brantlinger's criteria and an overall WoE for each included study in the current systematic review is provided.

Table C.1

Coding Protocol

Criteria Name	Explanation from Brantlinger et al., (2005) (p. 201-202)	Coding Criteria (0-3 Ranking)
Triangulation	<p>Search for convergence of, or consistency among, evidence from multiple and varied data sources (observations/interviews; one participant & another; interviews/documents)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data triangulation- use of varied data sources in a study • Investigator triangulation- use of several researchers, evaluators, peer debriefers • Theory triangulation-use of multiple perspectives to interpret a single set of data • Methodological triangulation- use of multiple methods to study a single problem 	<p>For each form of triangulation evidenced, the study receives a tick✓</p> <p>0 ✓ - (No Evidence) 1 ✓ - (Weak Evidence) 2-3 ✓ (Promising Evidence) 4 ✓ (Strong Evidence)</p>
Disconfirming Evidence	<p>After establishing preliminary themes/categories, the researcher looks for evidence inconsistent with these themes (outliers); also known as negative or discrepant case analysis</p>	<p>0 – only presents concurring views 1 – acknowledging when not all views agreed 2 – articulating when divergent views with explanation (no direct quotes)</p>

		3 – articulating divergent views with explanation and quotes to illustrate
Researcher reflexivity	Researchers attempt to understand and self-disclose their assumptions, beliefs, values, and biases (i.e., being forthright about position/perspective).	0 – no evidence of being forthright about own beliefs and potential biases 1 – uses methods associated with reflexivity but in superficial manner e.g. team of researchers looked at the transcripts 2 – references method of reflexivity with the aim of minimising personal biases 3 – explicitly state and describe in detail reflexivity methods and how personal views/biases were minimised.
Checks	Member checks-having participants review and confirm the accuracy (or inaccuracy) of interview transcriptions or observational field notes. * First level-taking transcriptions to participants prior to analyses and interpretations of results. * Second level-taking analyses and interpretations of data to participants (prior to publication) for validation of (or support for) researchers' conclusions	0 – not referenced 1 – states checks did not happen 2 – states checks happened with minimal description 3 – states checks happened with rationale and description
Collaborative Working	Involving multiple researchers in designing a study or concurring about conclusions to ensure that analyses and interpretations are not idiosyncratic and/or biased; could involve interrater reliability checks on the observations made or the coding of data.	0 – not referenced 1 – stated that multiple researchers were involved in research 2 – stated multiple researchers were involved and roles of various researchers 3 – stated multiple researchers are involved and includes discussion about interrater reliability
External Auditors	Using outsiders (to the research) to examine if, and confirm that, a researcher's inferences are logical and grounded in findings.	0 – not referenced 1 – stated external auditors were involved 2 – stated external auditors were involved and who they were 3 – stated external auditors were involved, who they were and outcomes of their involvement

Peer Debriefing	Having a colleague or someone familiar with phenomena being studied review and provide critical feedback on descriptions, analyses, and interpretations or a study's results.	0 – not referenced 1 – mention of multiple researchers 2 – stated involvement of colleague in review of analysis 3 – stated involvement of colleague in review of analysis and details outcomes of their involvement (i.e. were themes revisited?)
Audit trail	Keeping track of interviews conducted and/or specific times and dates spent observing as well as who was observed on each occasion; used to document and substantiate that sufficient time was spent in the field to claim dependable and confirmable results.	0 – not discussed 1 – Provides details about keeping notes of the process/ summaries of key points from interviews/ length of interviews/where interviews were conducted. 2 – explicitly refers to use of an audit trail 3 – explicitly refers to use of an audit trail and rationale for same
Detailed Descriptions (Quotes)	Sufficient quotes and field note descriptions to provide evidence for researchers' interpretations and conclusions.	0 – no quotes to illustrate themes 1 – 1 or less quote used for each theme/very short quotes 2 – full quotes used for each theme 3 – several, illustrative quotes used for each theme from a variety of participants
Particularisability	Documenting cases with thick description so that readers can determine the degree of transferability to their own situations.	0 – no description of the educational placement setting 1 – limited details about the educational placement setting 2 – sufficient details about educational placement setting 3 – detailed description of educational placement setting
WoE Credibility Measures	Average of Triangulation, Disconfirming Evidence, Researcher reflexivity, Checks, Collaborative work, External auditors, Peer debriefing, Audit trail, Detailed Descriptions (Quotes) and Particularisability	Average of the scores for each category.
<i>Interview Studies: Or Interview Components of Comprehensive Studies</i>		
Appropriate Participants	Selected (purposefully identified, effectively recruited, adequate number, representative of population of interest).	0 – does not describe sampling or recruitment process nor adequately describes participants beyond their diagnosis of ASD

	<i>Adequate sample size as per Braun & Clarke (2013) recommendations for sample size per qualitative method of analysis</i>	<p>1 – briefly states who participants are (e.g. 10 participants, aged 7-11 years with ASD diagnosis) OR inadequate sample size (<6 participants for thematic analysis, <3 participants for Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis [IPA] OR participants may not be representative of population of interest (- eg. participants also have EAL as well as ASD) OR reliance on convenience sampling</p> <p>2 – details of participants and recruitment process explained and adequate sample size (> 6 participants for thematic analysis, >3 for IPA)</p> <p>3 – details of participants and recruitment process Explained. Not relying on a convenience sample or opportunity sample. Upper end of recommended sample size (ie. 8/>8 for thematic analysis, 5/> 5 for IPA)</p>
Reasonable Questions	Interview questions are reasonable (clearly worded, not leading, appropriate and sufficient for exploring domains of interest).	<p>0 – content of interview schedule not discussed</p> <p>1 – explains topics covered in interview schedule but no examples</p> <p>2 – explains topics covered in interview schedule and provides samples of questions</p> <p>3 – explains topics covered in interview schedule and full interview schedule supplied</p>
Mechanism to Record	Adequate mechanisms are used to record and transcribe interviews.	<p>0 – not discussed</p> <p>1 – stated recording and transcription happened</p> <p>2 – methods for recording or transcription stated (e.g. digital voice recorder)</p> <p>3 –comprehensively describes methods for recording and transcription (e.g. transcription protocol employed, when transcription occurred)</p>
Representation of Participants	Participants are represented sensitively and fairly in the report	0 – voices of student pupils not represented or overshadowed by other stakeholders

		<p>1 – a few pupil participants represented in results with direct quotes and generalised collective statements</p> <p>2 – around half of pupil participants represented through direct quotes</p> <p>3 – majority of pupil participants represented through direct quotes</p>
Confidentiality	Sound measures are used to ensure confidentiality.	<p>0 – measures to ensure confidentiality not discussed/ evident</p> <p>1 – Participants appear to have been given anonymous labels, e.g. participant 1. School is not identifiable.</p> <p>2 – Researchers explicitly describe how participants and school have been anonymised, eg. names are pseudonyms</p> <p>3 – In detail, authors describe how participants and school have been anonymised and additionally report measures adopted to ensure confidentiality when storing data.</p>
<i>Observation Studies (or Observation Components of Comprehensive Studies)</i>		
Appropriate Settings	Appropriate Settings (s) and/r people are selected for observation	<p>0- Non-educational setting for observation/participants who do not fit criteria of ASD (eg. participants with other SENs)</p> <p>1- Observation in classroom setting of students with ASD for core subject areas (literacy/numeracy)</p> <p>2- Observation in classroom of students with ASD over core and non-core subjects</p> <p>3- Observation in classroom over core and non-core subjects AND during unstructured times of day (lunchtime, playground, yard) of students with ASD</p>
Sufficient time	Sufficient time is spent in the field (number and duration of observations, study time span)	<p>0- One observational session lasting < 3 hours</p> <p>1- Two observational sessions lasting at least 5 hours within single week timeframe</p> <p>2- > 2 observational sessions lasting >10 hours over single week time frame</p> <p>3- >3 observational sessions >15 hours over multiple week time frame</p>

Research-Sit Fit	Research fits into the site (accepted, respected, unobtrusive)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 0- No explanation as to how researcher was accepted into site 1- Brief explanation as to how researcher was accepted into site (eg. teacher explains to students that researcher conducting study is observing) 2- Explanation as to how researcher was accepted into site in addition to methods to ensure observation was unobtrusive (eg. methods of seating/recording) 3- Detailed explanations as to how researcher was accepted into site and methods to ensure unobtrusive
Field Notes	Field notes systemically collected (videotaped, audiotaped, written during or soon after observations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 0- Does not state how field notes were collected 1- States mode of field note collection (ie. written, videotaped, audiotaped) 2- Explains in more detail how field notes were collected (ie. narrative system utilised for written observations) 3- Detailed explanation of how field notes were collected and prepared for analysis (eg. audio-recordings transcribed for analysis)
Confidentiality	Sound measures are used to ensure confidentiality of participants and settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 0- measures to ensure confidentiality not discussed/ evident 1 – Participants appear to have been given anonymous labels, e.g. participant 1. School is not identifiable. 2 – Researchers explicitly describe how participants and school have been anonymised, eg. names are pseudonyms 3 – In detail, authors describe how participants and school have been anonymised and additionally report measures adopted to ensure confidentiality when storing data
<i>Document Analysis</i>		
Meaningful Documents	Meaningful Documents (texts, artifacts, objects, pictures) and their relevance is established	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 0 – No empirical rationale is provided for utilising chosen document (eg. photo elicitation) in literature review/methodology.

		<p>1- Authors provide brief rationale for use of chosen document as data collection method (eg. photo elicitation used to reduce language load for children with ASD)</p> <p>2- Authors provide rationale for use of chosen document as data collection method and describe use of similar methodology in previous research in literature review.</p> <p>3-Authors provide convincing rationale for use of chosen document as data collection method, and extensively describe use of similar methodologies in literature review.</p>
Carefully obtained & stored	Documents are obtained and stored in a careful manner.	<p>0 – measures to ensure confidentiality not discussed/ evident</p> <p>1 –School or participants are not identifiable in documents (eg. photos). Storage of documents is described.</p> <p>2 – Researchers explicitly describe how participants and school have been anonymised, eg. names are pseudonyms. No identifiable pictures utilised. Methods of careful storage are described.</p> <p>3 – In detail, authors describe how participants and school have been anonymised. No identifiable pictures utilised. Very secure methods of careful storage of documents are described (eg. anonymous coding of documents on encrypted hard drive)</p>
Documents sufficiently described & cited	Documents are sufficiently described and cited	<p>0-Minimal description of content of documents (photos, diary entries etc) in results section. Difficult to see how themes emerge from the data. No direct citing from documents.</p> <p>1-Authors provide some description of content of documents. Link evident between themes extract and content of documents. Minimal direct citing from documents.</p> <p>2- Detailed description of content of documents, with direct citing to reinforce key content. Themes extracted are evident from the content of documents described.</p> <p>3- Extensive description of content of the documents, with frequent use of citation to reinforce salient content. Themes</p>

		extracted by authors are clearly evident in content of documents described.
Confidentiality Measures	Sound measures of used to ensure confidentiality of private documents.	0 – measures to ensure confidentiality not discussed/ evident 1 – Participants appear to have been given anonymous labels, e.g. participant 1. School is not identifiable. 2 – Researchers explicitly describe how participants and school have been anonymised, eg. names are pseudonyms 3 – In detail, authors describe how participants and school have been anonymised and additionally report measures adopted to ensure confidentiality when storing data.
<i>Data Analysis</i>		
Coding of Information	Results are sorted and coded in a systematic and meaningful way	0 – not discussed 1 – state they are coded e.g. transcripts are coded 2 – stated they are coded and the transcription protocol employed. 3 – Stated they are coded, the transcription protocol employed and explanation of their steps outlined. A range of sample codes are provided.
Rationale	Sufficient rationale is provided for what was (or was not) included in the report	0 – Not discussed 1 – No discussion regarding rationale for included/excluded data. It is evident that certain participants' data is not represented in report or certain participants' data is over-represented in report but this is not discussed. 2 – Brief explanation re included/excluded data. States where data from certain participants is missing, but does not provide adequate rationale for exclusion 3 – Full explanation, where themes came from and any participants whose data is not represented in the results
Trustworthiness	Documentation of methods used to establish trustworthiness and credibility are clear.	0 – methods to ensure trustworthiness and credibility not documented

		<p>1 – limited methods used to establish trustworthiness apparent but not adequately explained and limited evidence in results, eg. few quotes, no peer/colleagues checking</p> <p>2 – two or more steps are undertaken to establish trustworthiness and these steps are documented sufficiently e.g. worked collaboratively when coding to eliminate bias and utilising quotes to highlight salient points being made</p> <p>3 – several steps are undertaken and explicitly documented to establish a high level of trustworthiness and credibility.</p>
Personal Perspectives	Reflection about researchers' personal position/perspectives are provided.	<p>0 – no evidence of being forthright about own beliefs and potential biases</p> <p>1 – uses methods associated with reflexivity but in superficial manner e.g. team of researchers looked at the transcripts</p> <p>2 – references method of reflexivity with the aim of minimising personal biases</p> <p>3 – explicitly state and describe in detail reflexivity methods and how personal views/biases were minimised.</p>
Quotes from Participants	Conclusions are substantiated by sufficient quotations from participants, field notes of observations, and evidence of documentation inspection.	<p>0 – no quotes to illustrate themes</p> <p>1 – 1 or less quote used for each theme/very short quotes</p> <p>2 – full quotes used for each theme</p> <p>3 – several, illustrative quotes used for each theme from a variety of participants</p>
Related Research	Connections are made with related research.	<p>0 – no connections made to related research</p> <p>1 – few connections made to related research, predominantly focused on own results</p> <p>2 – several connections made to supportive related research</p> <p>3 – several connects bade to both supportive and disconfirming related research findings</p>

WoE Quality Indicators	Average of Appropriate participants, Reasonable Questions, Mechanism to Record, Representation of Participants, Confidentiality, Meaningful Documents, Obtaining & Storying Documents, Describing & Citing Documents, Confidentiality of Documents, Coding of Information, Rationale, Trustworthiness, Personal Perspectives, Quotes from Participants and Related Research	Average of the scores for each category.
Overall WoE A	Average of WoE Credibility Measures and WoE Quality Indicators	Average of the scores for each category.

Table C.2

WoE A Scored Assigned to Studies

WoE A Coding Criteria	Cook et al. (2016)	Cook et al. (2018)	Danker et al. (2019)	Goodall & MacKenzie (2019)	Goodal l (2019)	Hay & Winn (2005)	Healy et al. (2013)	Hill (2014)	Howard et al. (2019)	Humphrey & Lewis (2008)	McLaughlin & Rafferty (2014)	Myles et al. (2019)	Moyse & Porter (2015)	Saggers et al. (2011)
Credibility Indicators														
Triangulation														
Data	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓				✓
Investigator	✓	✓				✓	✓		✓	✓				✓
Theory	✓	✓	✓				✓		✓	✓				
Methodological				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Overall	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	1	1	2	1
Disconfirming Evidence	1	1	3	3	1	2	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	2
Researcher Reflexivity	2	3	3	2	2	0	3	2	3	2	1	0	0	2
Member Checks	2	2	1	2	2	0	0	0	3	3	1	0	2	0
Collaborative Work	2	2	3	0	0	1	2	0	2	2	0	0	0	1
External Auditors	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	0	0	0	2
Peer Debriefing	1	2	3	0	0	1	2	0	1	2	0	0	0	2
Audit Trail	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	1
Thick, Detailed Description	3	3	1	3	3	1	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	
Particularizability	1	1	1	2	3	2	1	2	2	2	1	2	3	3
WoE Credibility Indicators	1.5	1.7	1.8	1.7	1.4	1.11	1.7	1.3	2.5	2.3	1.1	0.9	1.3	1.6

Quality Indicators																
Interview Studies																
Appropriate Participants	3	3	3	1	2	1	3	1	1	2	1	3	1	1		
Reasonable interview questions	2	2	2	1	1	1	2	2	3	1	3	3	0	3		
Mechanisms to record & transcribe	1	2	2	1	1	2	2	3	3	3	3	0	0	3		
Participant representation	2	2	2	3	3	0	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	3		
Confidentiality Measures	3	2	2	1	2	1	1	2	3	2	2	1	2	2		
Observation Studies																
Appropriate Setting															3	
Sufficient Time															2	
Researcher-Site fit															1	
Field notes															2	
Confidentiality measures															2	
Document Analysis																
Meaningful Documents				2	2						3					
Carefully obtained & stored				1	2						1					
Document Description				1	2						3					
Confidentiality Measures				1	2						3					
Data Analysis																
Coding of information	3	3	3	2	2	3	2	2	3	3	1	1	1	2		
Rationale	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	2	2	2	1		
Trustworthiness	2	2	2	2	2	1	3	1	3	3	2	1	1	2		
Personal Perspectives	2	2	3	1	1	0	3	1	2	2	1	0	1	0		

Quotes from participants	3	3	1	3	3	1	2	3	2	3	3	3	2	3
Related Research	2	3	2	2	1	2	3	1	3	3	1	3	2	2
WoE Quality Indicators	2.18	2.27	2.09	1.6	1.87	1.27	2.37	2.0	2.64	2.47	2.0	1.73	1.5	2.0
WoE A Overall	1.84	1.99	1.95	1.65	1.64	1.19	2.04	1.56	2.57	2.39	1.55	1.32	1.4	1.8

WoE A: Overall Ratings: 0-1.5 Low

1.5-2.5 Medium

2.5-3.5 High

Appendix D: Weight of Evidence B & C Criteria and Scoring

Weight of Evidence B (WoE B)

WoE B evaluates the appropriateness of study design for addressing the specific review question (Gough, 2007). A study is required to meet the criteria listed in each category below to receiving that weighting:

Table D.1

WoE B Weight Criteria

WoE B Weighting Criteria	
➤ High (3)	➤ Utilises more than one participatory/accessible research method (eg. Photo elicitation, drawing, diary) in addition to semi-structured interview/focus group to elicit pupil perspectives
➤ Medium (2)	➤ Provides supportive aids/accomodations to semi-structured interviews/focus groups (visuals/computer-assistance) OR ➤ Utilises one participatory/accesible research method (eg. Photo elicitation, student drawing, diary) in addition to semi-structured interview/focus group to elicit pupil perspectives
➤ Low (1)	➤ Relies solely on traditional semi-structured interviews/focus groups to elicit pupil perspectives

Overall weighting for WoE B

Authors	Study
Cook et al. (2016)	1
Cook et al. (2018)	1
Danker et al. (2019)	2
Goodall & MacKenzie (2019)	3
Goodall (2019)	3
Hay & Winn (2005)	1

Healy et al. (2013)	2
Hill (2014)	2
Howard et al. (2019)	2
Humphrey & Lewis (2008)	3
McLaughlin & Rafferty (2014)	1
Myles et al., (2019)	2
Moyse & Porter (2015)	3
Saggers et al. (2011)	1

Weight of Evidence C (WoE C)

WoE B entails a review-specific judgement on the basis of the relevance of the evidence for the review question (Gough, 2007). A study is required to meet the criteria listed in each category below to receiving that weighting:

Table D.2

WoE B Weight Criteria

WoE C Weighting Criteria	
➤ High (3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Equal number of participants are recruited from contrasting educational placements (Mainstream AND Specialist ASD settings) ➤ OR ➤ Participants are recruited who have experience in both mainstream and specialist ASD settings and can reflect on both experiences in data collection. ➤ Student voice is prioritised in findings/discussion ➤ Extensive evidence of reflection on the self in context of lived educational experiences is evident in participants' responses
➤ Medium (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Participants recruited from single type of educational setting (eg. Exclusively mainstream OR exclusively specialist ASD setting). ➤ Participants are recruited from contrasting placements (e.g. Mainstream AND specialist ASD), however not in

- relatively equal numbers (e.g. markedly more students form mainstream rather than specialist provision).
- Some evidence of reflection on the self in the context of lived educational experiences in participant responses.
 - Where the perspective of additional stakeholders is sought, the voices of students are given equal weighting to these stakeholders.
- Low (1)
- Participants' perspective is elicited about a single element of school life (Eg. Particular curricular subject' lunch time activities) rather than their lived school experience.
 - The voice of students is overshadowed/outweighed by additional stakeholders (eg. Parents, teachers, teaching assistants)
 - Participants recruited have an additional need in common beyond ASD (E.g. EAL and ASD) and are not representative of the general ASD student community.
 - Participant responses feature minimal reflection on the self in the context of educational experience.

Overall weighting for WoE C

Authors	Study
Cook et al. (2016)	2
Cook et al. (2018)	2
Goodall & MacKenzie (2019)	3
Goodall (2019)	3
Hay & Winn (2005)	1
Healy et al. (2013)	1
Hill (2014)	2
Howard et al. (2019)	1
Humphrey & Lewis (2008)	2
McLaughlin & Rafferty (2014)	2
Myles et al., (2019)	2

Moyse & Porter (2015)	1
Saggers et al. (2011)	1

Appendix E: Participants and Research Setting

Table E.1

Participants & Research Setting

Study	Participants	Student Diagnosis	Gender	Age/School Year	Educational Context
Cook et al. (2016)	11 students 9 mothers	ASD	11 male	11-17 years 40+ Years	Mainstream (n=6) Special School (n=5)
Cook et al. (2018)	11 students 12 parents	ASD	11 female 10 mothers 2 fathers	11-17 Years 40+ Years	Mainstream (n=6) Special School (n=5)
Danker et al., (2019)	16 students	ASD (n=13) Asperger's Syndrom (n=3)	15 male 1 female	13-17 years	Full mainstream (n=10) Partial enrolment in support unit (n=16)
Goodall & MacKenzie (2019)	2 students	Asperger Syndrome	Female	16-17 Years	Specialist Setting <i>(With previous mainstream primary & secondary experience)</i>
Goodall (2019)	7 students	ASD	Male	13-15 Years High	Specialist Setting <i>(With previous mainstream primary & secondary experience)</i>
Hay & Winn (2005)	89 mainstream teachers	Asperger's Syndrome	Parents: 9 mothers, 8 fathers	N/A	Co-educational mainstream secondary school

	7 special education teachers 17 parents 9 students		Students: 2 females 7 males		with a Special Education Unit (SEU) for withdrawal teachers support for students on the autism spectrum or with learning difficulties
Healy et al. (2013)	12 students	ASD	11 Male 1 Female	9-13 Years	Mainstream without SNA support
Hill (2014)	6 Students	ASD	Not Reported	Secondary Level	Mainstream Secondary School
Howard et al. (2019)	11 Students	ASD & EAL	10 Male 1 Female	7-14	Mainstream Primary (n=9) Mainstream Secondary (n=2)
Humphrey & Lewis (2008)	20 Students	Asperger's Syndrome	Not Reported	11-17	Mainstream Secondary
McLaughlin & Rafferty (2014)	6 Students	Asperger's Syndrome	5 Male 1 Female	Upper Secondary (Years 11- 13)	Mainstream Secondary
Myles et al. (2019)	8 students	Asperger's Syndrome (3) ASD (5)	8 Female	12-17 years	Mainstream Secondary

Moyse & Porter (2015)	3 students Students' mothers, teachers and SENCOs	Asperger's Syndrome	3 female	7-11 years	Mainstream Primary
Saggers et al. (2011)	9 students	Asperger's Syndrome (7) ASD (2)	7 male 2 female	13-16 years	Mainstream high school

(Students

Only)

Total Male:

58

Total Female:

31

(1.87:1 Male
to Female
Ratio)

Appendix F: Extracted Findings from Studies Reviewed

Extracted findings relating to “How do school-age pupils with ASD make sense of themselves in the context of their lived experiences across contrasting placement settings along the continuum of ASD educational provision?”

Table F.1

Extracted Findings: Cook et al. (2018)

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Finding</i>	<i>Accompanying Illustration of Finding</i>	<i>Placement Setting Relevant to Finding</i>	<i>Level of Plausibility</i>
Motivation to have friends	“The girls wanted to have friendships and to fit in with other girls, but their notion of having friendships did not always work out in practice” (Cook et al., 2018, p.307)	“I look towards myself and wish I could get along better with other people, but that’s just not the way I function” (Zara-mainstream school, p.307) “Some say to me that I’m young minded because I don’t wear make-up and I don’t like the same things, and I don’t go out and I don’t think the same way as them. But it’s not that; it’s just, I’m different” (Holly-special school, p.307)	Mainstream and special school	Unequivocal
Motivation to have friends	“The tendency to befriend others with autism or other differences enabled them to [the girls] to feel accepted and to be themselves” (Cook et al., 2018, p.307)	“Well they were kind of just free and didn’t really care too much what other people thought, which is a lot like what I am. So they kind of just resemble me, in a different way, so that’s probably why I got along with them so much” (Sophie-mainstream, p.307)	Mainstream	Unequivocal
Challenges faced by girls with autism	“Many girls reported high levels of stress and anxiety, resulting in them feeling overwhelmed and upset” (Cook et al., p.308).	“My maths class is very noisy and, well, I find the questions quite hard sometimes and I get stressed out...and I remember I uh, broke down and cried in front of my maths teacher (Chloe-special school, p.308)	Mainstream & special	Unequivocal

Challenges faced by girls with autism	“Most found it difficult to fit into friendships groups” (Cook et al., 2018, p.308)	“In mainstream schools, there were reports of best friends, girls leaving groups, re-forming groups and regular falling-outs...those in special school settings had additional challenges due to social processing needs of their peers (Cook et al., 2018, p.308)	Mainstream and special	Equivocal
Challenges faced by girls with autism	“A second challenge regarding relationships was the inability to keep friends, and more generally-social isolation” (Cook et al., 2018, p.308)	“The girls told stories of how they are usually picked last by team captains in PE, how they initiated social events more frequently than their friends and how they no longer got invited to parties” (Cook et al., 2018, p.308)	Mainstream and Special School	Equivocal
Challenges faced by girls with autism	“Girls from both types of school setting reported having been bullied. There was a definite sense, however that many of the incidents in special school settings were due to other children’s special needs...the bullying endured by the girls in mainstream schools appeared more intentional” (Cook et al., 2018, p.308-309)	<p>“Holly experienced some terrible occurrences, but she put it down to the immaturity and mindlessness of other pupils in her class. She described some of these incidents (Cook et al., 2018, p.309) : “I’ve been whacked on the head by the door of a locker when I’m getting my stuff. I’ve been pushed, I’ve been punched, I’ve, I’ve had people call me a [hurtful name], and back then I didn’t even know what it meant (Holly, special school, p.309)</p> <p>“In contrast, the bullying endured by the girls in the mainstream schools appeared more intentional” (Cook et al., 2018, p.309”)</p> <p>“In physics, this boy chucks leaves at my face when we were going outside. And then the same boy, he put glue on my face. And then, there’s a group of boys that always call me [hurtful name]..or they call me other names that they know I don’t like, like “Frankenstein” (Leah, mainstream school, p.309).</p>	Unintentional-Special School Intentional-Mainstream School	Unequivocal
Masking their autism	“Many reported how well their daughters coped or how they made	“I was like ‘oh should I change into someone else?’, because no one actually seems to be in the group so I, I	Mainstream	Unequivocal

	adjustments to their behaviour in order to fit in” (Cook et al., 2018, p.309)	thought if I changed to be like my other friend, they’ll listen to me, and they all did, so I was like I’ll keep it that way..I’m changing because no one’s actually listening to me and I always feel left out” (Leah-mainstream school, p.310)		
Masking their autism	“Some girls were reluctant to be labelled and preferred to conceal their differences” (Cook et al., 2018, p.310)	“Lily talked about how she had only told a few people about her autism and has a different kind of relationship with those she has not told” (Cook et al., 2018, p.310)	Mainstream	Unequivocal

Table F.2

Extracted Findings: Cook et al. (2016)

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Finding</i>	<i>Accompanying Illustration of Finding</i>	<i>Placement Setting Relevant to Finding</i>	<i>Level of Plausibility</i>
Experiences of friendship and bullying	“Boys ranged from having no friends at all to having many” (Cook et al., 2016, p.257)	“He is really connected with the other boys and girls...I mean they just gel. And it’s just, it’s brilliant to see him in a friendship group-he just didn’t have that at Juniors[mainstream]. There was a lot of him being in the playground and you know, kind of just on his own” (Lisa, mother-special school, p.257)	Mainstream & Special	Unequivocal
Experiences of friendship and bullying	“In general, there was a tendency for participants to befriend others with autism, those who respected and accepted them and those of a matched level of with similar interests” (Cook et al., 2016, p.259)	“I usually just have friends in my head...It gets useful at lunchtime...” (Alfie, mainstream school, p.258)	Mainstream & Special	Unsupported

Experiences of friendship & bullying	“Many participants (5/11) reported incidents of bullying including verbal bullying, physical bullying, theft, vandalism and frequent goading. The most obvious disparity identified between mainstream and special schools within this study was the degree of bullying” (Cook et al., 2016 p.259)	“He’s constantly being picked on, verbally, all the time...I know if he comes out ten minutes later than the other children, then there’s an issue” (Lisa, mother, mainstream school). All but one boy from a mainstream setting suffered these frequent provocations (Cook et al., 2016, p.259) “While James was at his mainstream secondary school, he had stationery taken, his tie put in the toilet and his weekly planner put in the shower” (Cook et al., 2016, p.259)	Mainstream	Unequivocal
Experiences of friendships & bullying	“At times the bullying was more subtle and seemed to reflect an understanding by peers of specific actions what would upset someone with autism” (Cook et al., 2016, p.259)	“So it would be things like, things stuck on his back, it’ll be tapping, it’ll be looks, it would be scraping” (Christine-mother-mainstream school)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Risk Factors	“The processing of sensory information can also be challenging” (Cook et al., 2016, p.260)	“Noah experiences extreme anxiety when his personal space is violated” (Cook et al., 2016, p.260) “They sometimes don’t understand how little things, like tapping...it’s like me scraping my finger down a blackboard, see how you feel about that, because that’s how he feels about that tapping. So turning round to a child and saying “just stop the tapping”, or “just forget about it, it’s only tapping”-it’s not just tapping” (Christine-mother, p.260).	Mainstream & Special	Equivocal
Risk Factors	“Risk factors might also be attributable to external factors, including the ways in which their school managed the learning and social needs of pupils with autism. Regardless of setting	“I don’t know what happened, because one came, and then he went, then another one came, and then they left and now there’s none in there which is a bit weird. There’s meant to be one in there but there isn’t” (Jacob, p.261)	Mainstream	Equivocal

	type, some schools were described as neglecting to address these needs. Mainstream schools, however, were less likely to have the understanding to meet their needs of provide sufficient resources, including teaching assistants” (Cook et al., 2016)			
Risk Factors	“Both the boys and their mothers also described the schools’ (mainstream) failure to handle bullying” (Cook et al., 2016, p.261)	“It just didn’t happen. They said “oh we’ll sort it out”. They didn’t...it was probably the equivalent of just giving them a slap on the wrist and that’s about it. It was just like, it’s not helpful, they keep doing it” (James, special school -reflecting on time in mainstream)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Risk factors	“Most of the boys from special settings (five out of the six) liked their schools and their teachers, and benefited from small class sizes” (Cook et al., 2016, p.261)	N/A	Special setting	Unsupported
Protective factors	“Self-esteem...in many incidences was reported as being very low” (Cook et al., 2016, p.262)	N/A	Mainstream & special setting	Unsupported
Protective factors	“One of two boys benefited from having built their self-esteem through their achievements and responsibilities” (Cook et al., 2016, p.262)	“I’m usually the person that people go to if there’s a problem, so I think, I’d say that people are quite confident in my ability to solve problems. And I’m actually a House Captain of my team so I’d say people you know have faith in my leadership skills as well, which I’m happy with” (Oscar-special school”	Mainstream & special setting	Equivocal
Protective Factors	“One significant factor [in enabling more positive experiences at school] was the presence of supportive friends” (Cook et al., 2016, p.263)	“He loses his kit and he puts the wrong kit on, so his friends help him and [Carly’s] boy is a complete support in that. If he didn’t have [Lucas] in there I don’t	Mainstream & special	Unequivocal

		know what we would have done (Laura-mother-mainstream, p.263)		
Protective Factors	“Having a special talent was particularly beneficial as a protective factor” (Cook et al., 2016, p.263)	“Charlie stated that when his peers liked to put him down, he would point out that everyone is good at something, and would tell them he is a good swimmer and is actually better than them. Jacob has perfect pitch and his mother described how she turned his attitude towards Asperger’s syndrome into a positive one, by attributing many of his talents to his Asperger’s syndrome” (p.264)	Mainstream & special	Unequivocal

Table F.3

Extracted Findings: Danker et al. (2019)

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Finding</i>	<i>Accompanying Illustration of Finding</i>	<i>Placement Setting Relevant to Finding</i>	<i>Level of Plausibility</i>
Emotional Wellbeing	“A few students also found several places in school such as the school garden or library useful in generating calmness”. Contrarily Tom did not find any places in school that could effectively alleviate his overwhelming feelings” (Danker et al., 2019, p.134)	“He photographed his room, explaining that he had to retreat to his room when he came back from school, “...because it’s somewhere to be by myself if there’s too much, so I come home and be like...(exhales) phew”(Tom, p.135)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Social Wellbeing	“Friends were important to students, lessening their sense of loneliness” (Danker et al., 2019, p.135)	“”Tim explained that friends assisted ‘in getting through school a lot more comfortably, because you have someone else that you can do it with, and who is close by” (Danker et al., 2019, p.135)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Social Wellbeing	“While discussing their social network, two students shared that they had	“I’m a bit shy to meet other people, because I don’t really know what to say after, hello, nice to meet you’. I	Mainstream	Equivocal

	issues interacting with others, which impeded their ability to form friendships” (Danker et al., 2019, p.135)	don’t know how to keep the conversation going fully, so it’s difficult to meet new people” (George, p.135)		
Sensory Barriers	“Noise and echoes in school posed a barrier to half of the participating students. Students disliked noisy classrooms and echos from canteens and school bells” (Danker et al., 2019, p.135)	“George photographed a school bell claiming that it was ‘too loud echoey’, likewise Matt felt that echoey school bell caused migranes” (Danker et al., 2019, p.135)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Sensory Barriers	“Noise inferred with students’ learning and ability to concentrate” (Danker et al., 2019, p.135)	“Because my brain seems to, like, just start pulling itself when there’s loud noises, because I try to think of something, like I’ll do a mathematics question, and everyone’s yelling. I’m like, wait! No! I for(get)! Grrr! I’ll forget things because I’m trying to block out the noise” (Danker et al., 2019, p.135)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Sensory Barriers	“Seven students felt that mean and annoying peers were barriers to their wellbeing” (Danker et al., 2019, p.136)	“They think of me as a piece of shit, basically...I can tell, literally. I walk into anything, they just tell me to eff off” (Mark, p.136)	Mainstream	Equivocal
What helps with a good life in school	“A few students perceived non-academic clubs as having a positive effect on their well-being by enabling them to establish friendships” (Danker et al., 2019, p.136)	“We often go there, because it’s like quiet-people that you know are there, and you just play with blocks and stuff like that...it works bery well. I met some of my friends there” (Matt, p.136)	Mainstream	Equivocal
What helps with a good life in school	“Students discussed the importance of their own awareness of disability. Half of the students were aware that they have ASD. ..However, their understanding of ASD varied” (Danker et al., 2019)	“Some believe tht ASD was a learning disability, others through that it made them ‘different in a good way’, a few felt that ASD affected their social interactions with peers without ASD. Mark explained: ‘They say everybody’s wired to a red frequency, or something, and they’re all the red wires, but then some people are sometimes born with a disorder that changes their	Mainstream	Equivocal

		frequency from red, say, to blue. And blue interacts with other blues, but when interacting with red, the red has to understand the blue to be able to connect, otherwise it just turns away” (Danker et al., 2019, p.137)		
What helps a good life in school	“Students differed on their decisions to disclose their disability to their friends” (Danker et al., 2019, p.137)	“A few who disclosed shared that doing so stopped teasing from peers, while others felt that it did not change how their friends treated them. Mark and Fred chose not to disclose, believing that when ‘you’re seen as different in this society, you are targeted and bullied” (Danker et al., 2019. p.137)	Mainstream	Equivocal

Table F.4

Extracted Findings: Goodall (2019)

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Finding</i>	<i>Accompanying Illustration of Finding</i>	<i>Placement Setting Relevant to Finding</i>	<i>Level of Plausibility</i>
Overwhelming Environment	Students referred to the “overwhelming nature of mainstream school” (Goodall, 2019, p.21)	<p>“This is me pulling my hair our as I am so stressed at teachers, the work and being suspended. I felt really annoyed...the stress of the day had built up. I felt on edge...it was too overwhelming and every single class was really noisy. It is too crowded..overcrowded” (Thomas, p.21)</p> <p>“It [mainstream] was very noisy. There were always kids banging on doors” (Timmy, p.21)</p>	Mainstream	Unequivocal

		“That other school [mainstream] was mad. Loads of work and loads of classrooms to go to and loads of people about” (Jimmy, p.21)		
Curriculum & Homework	“Homework in itself was one feature of the curriculum that acted as a barrier to enjoying mainstream education” (Goodall, 2019, p.22)	“Too much homework and detentions when I didn’t do it” (Joe, p.22)	Mainstream	Unequivocal
		“They would give you way too much...like every class would give you homework. I hated it” (Thomas, p.22)		
		“It was kind of like a snowball going down a hill. So you go down the hill and you don’t owe too much..but as you go downhill further the work builds up further and further (Robert, p.22)		
Bullying	“Some students experienced bullying in mainstream” (Goodall, 2019, p.22)	“they[pupils] were all assholes as they tried to pick on me for being different” (Thomas, p.22)	Mainstream	Unequivocal
		“Stephen provided a drawing of himself in a mainstream school. Peers are shown to make fun of his shoes, he is called a tramp by one and Stephen has a sad expression on his face (Goodall, 2019, p.22)		
		“Always people who would go around and bully you for things like wearing shoes they didn’t like and all. If you didn’t please them you were going to get hit that day. If I was walking around with my mates...one wee lad would push your bag off or push you. That is one of the reasons why I cracked up in school. The bullying, it made me angry” (Stephen, p.22)		

Unsupportive Teachers	“Feeling unsupported by teachers was common for all seven boys” (Goodall, 2019, p.23)	“The [mainstream teachers] are not understanding of certain individuals and their needs” (Thomas, p.23) “I walked in and walked out half an hour later. They didn’t try and change anything to help out” (Jim, p.23)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Unsupportive teachers	“Personal attributes such as teachers being personable and showing an interest in them are important” (Goodall, 2019, p.24)	“Being recognised as a person is important. The teacher has to want to get to know you” (Thomas, p.24)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Improving School	“Five boys wanted more breaks and areas to go to de-stress within school to recalibrate and refocus” (Goodall, 2019, p.24)	“To get away from it all for a bit” (Jim, p.24) “Time out cards if really annoyed to go to chill out spaces. Comfortable places to hide in the classroom with headphones if stressed” (Thomas, p.24) “A small space to go when annoyed would help in school” (Lee, p.24)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Improving school	“In the absence of a dedicated safe haven [participant] found his own space to de-stress- the toilet” (Goodall, 2019, p.24)	“Sometimes I just went to the toilet to sit and breath in and out to try and relax and get away from all the noise and pressure” (Stephen, p.23)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Supportive Environment	“The participants indicate that the AEP had an ethos and environment which was positive to them” (Goodall, 2019, p.25)	“There is more flexibility to meet my needs” (Thomas, p.25) “Breaks help, yeah and you can get small breaks..do this work and get 5 minutes on the computer” (Jim, p.25)	Special	Equivocal
Supportive Environment	“Benefits of smaller class sizes, in that this affords the teacher time to	“Smaller classes really do help...it makes you feel more comfortable and able to be yourself. In mainstream there would be 30 in one room but here	Special	Unequivocal

	build relationships and be able to help each pupil” (Goodall, 2019, p.26)	there are five in a room...Here everything just feels more natural, it all flows better and easier and feels more natural and genuine” (Robert, p.25)		
		“I can’t work in big classes, with loads of people in the room” (Lee, p.25)		
		“There are too many people and the teachers don’t have time for you, but here there are less people and teachers can help and get to know you” (Jim, p.26)		
Supportive environment	For some, being in an environment with other young people for whom mainstream education was challenging “created a strong feeling of similarity, camaraderie and belonging-a feeling of being included” (Goodall, 2019, p.26)	“Even if you are upset or worried...and you all can tell that...it would be easier walking into a smaller room. Especially here as everyone here has felt things like that, but not in mainstream, and everyone here has something about them that others have had. Whether that be like anger issues, or sadness or whatever. You can feel a connection through everybody because everybody is here for a reason” (Robert, p.26)	Special	Unequivocal
		“They are similar to me, have had similar problems and I can relate to them” (Thomas, p.26).		
Supportive Teachers	“Connection teachers in the AEP make and build with the young people” (Goodall, 2019, p.27)	“The teachers are all really nice and understand you. Teachers know all about you and have an actual connection with you and want to help and want to know who you are [smile] and how to make things better for you” (Robert, p.27) Jim points out that teachers go “the extra mile”, “they go out of their way to help” (p.27)	Special	Equivocal

Table F.5*Extracted Findings: Goodall & MacKenzie (2019)*

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Finding</i>	<i>Accompanying Illustration of Finding</i>	<i>Placement Setting Relevant to Finding</i>	<i>Level of Plausibility</i>
The educational experiences of Ro and Sarah-Jane	“When asked to describe their feelings about school both provided intensely negative words” (Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019, p.596)	Sarah Jane said she was “worried”, “scared”, “angry”, “sad”, “unwanted”, “distressed” and “humiliated”; while Ro said she was “nervous”, “embarrassed”, “unwanted”, “excluded”, “scared”, “unwell”, and “bored”.	Mainstream	Unequivocal
Impact on wellbeing	Participant “highlighted the negative impact mainstream schooling was having on her wellbeing” and “found large numbers of people and general chaos of secondary school to be overwhelming” (Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019, p.506)	<p>“I am not doing this [secondary school] anymore. I am physically, mentally and emotionally drained...I am done with this. Talking about this makes me angry...very angry and upset” (Sarah-Jane, p.506)</p> <p>“I was very stressed trying to cope with the noise, the large class sizes, the constant changing of classrooms..it was awful moving to the next desk. Everybody was coming out and it was just swarmed with people pushing, running, shoving, throwing bottles” (Sarah Jane, p.506)</p> <p>“The night before school I would put off going to sleep to put off school as much as possible...staying in bed as long as possible and getting up at the last minute” (Ro., p.507)</p>	Mainstream	Unequivocal
Impact on Wellbeing	Participant “worried about getting into trouble, getting work done	She “had a huge fear of any kind of repercussion for anything” (Ro., p.507)	Mainstream	Equivocal

	properly or falling behind” (Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019, p.507)			
Bullying & friendships	Participants “spoke readily about these experiences” [of bullying] (Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019, p.507)	“I was bullied when I was younger...verbal physical and these was once...sexual...which is bad. It was a pupil. Some bullies followed me to secondary school which made me feel I couldn’t answer any questions or talk out...it wasn’t just specific bullies. When I was younger it was as if it was okay for everyone to be like that to me...you know germs...if kids have germs...it was like I had germs and they weren’t to go near me” (Ro, p.507)	Mainstream	Unequivocal
Bullying & friendships	“Bullying...led to feelings of social isolation and loneliness which arose from having no close friends, or having no one to whom to relate despite making efforts to build relationship” (Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019, p.307)	“I found I had no close friends and no one to talk to. I felt very lonely and often found myself without anyone to play with” (Sarah-Jane, p.507) “I was isolated and separate, in like a bubble of depression and anxiety...but, I still felt the centre of attention with others looking at me and judging (Ro, p.507) “She [Sarah Jane] felt like an “outsider”, someone who didn’t fit in anywhere” (Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019, p.507)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Bullying & friendships	Participant “highlighted that peers, as has been reported elsewhere in the literature (Sprouston, Sedgewick & Crane, 2017), did not wish to befriend her because of judgements about her disability” (Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019, p.508)	“It is all about themselves and if you have a disability they do not want to know, they look down at you and think ‘no way am I going to be with her” (Sarah Jane, p.507)	Mainstream	Unequivocal

Bullying & friendships	Participant “found the overwhelming nature of the school cafeteria, the social hub of the school, too much. She spoke of the social pressure, the dread of the unknown she felt at break and at lunch times” (Goodall & McKenzie, 2019, p.208)	“The cafeteria...the noise and business and if you don’t have clique to sit with, people in your class would be like ‘what are you doing here?’ and it was so full of people. It was a ...mmm..new piece of pressure each tme going in. I went through whole days without eating to avoid it” (Goodall & Ro, p.508)	Mainstream	Unequivocal
Bullying & friendships	“Seemingly harmless classroom approaches can exacerbate feelings of social isolation” (Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019, p.508)	“As usual, I had no one and I was made to pair up with the teacher. I felt so little having to stand there waiting to pair up with the teacher. I had no one. It was awful”(Sarah Jane, p.508)	Mainstream	Unequivocal
Bullying & Friendship	“Both girls expressed how they felt different from their peers” (Goodall & MacKenzie, p.508)	“I find that when people know that I have Asperger’s syndrome, they think that I’m stupid. I also feel that I’m judged because of my Asperger’s Syndrome. I don’t like having autism. I think it makes me different to other people and I think other people treat me as different. When I was at school I was often called a geek or weirdo (Sarah Jane, p.508)	Mainstream	Unequivocal
Bullying and Friendship	Participant “expressed how she was judged for having Asperger’s, and both [participants] stated that the condition makes it hard for them to socialise” (Goodall & MacKenzie, 2010, p.508)	“For me autism is something you have have...if you are blond or brunette...it is something you live with and deal with. It is a difference. Autism causes me difficulties with socialising and so on (Ro, p.508)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Bullying and Friendship	Participant “expressed how she was judged for having Asperger’s, and both [participants] stated that the condition makes it hard for them to socialise” (Goodall & MacKenzie, 2010, p.508)	“I find that when people know that I have Asperger’s syndrome, they think that I’m stupid. I also feel that I’m judged because of my Asperger’s Syndrome. I don’t like having autism. I think it makes me different to other people and I think other people treat me as different. When I was at school I was often called a geek or weirdo (Sarah Jane, p.508)	Mainstream	Equivocal

		“For me autism is something you have have...if you are blond or brunette...it is something you live with and deal with. It is a difference. Autism causes me difficulties with socialising and so on (Ro, p.508)		
Inclusion according to Ro and Sarah-Jane	Participants referred to “Lack of teacher support experienced in mainstream” (Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019, p.509)	“Teachers didn’t pay enough attention to have an opinion- I was invisible” (Rp, p.509) “No one really made any attempt to ask about how I was doing. They [teachers] didn’t really notice. As I was quieter they out me with the problem children for group stuff. I didn’t talk out much they must have assumed I was okay with it” (Ro, p.509) “The teachers...as I said didn’t ever notice anything or me” Ro, p.509) “Actually start caring about the students rather than the results they give you. It is about teaching the children and not only caring for the results. Really knowing and paying attention to the children” (Ro, p.509)	Mainstream	Unequivocal

Table F.6*Extracted Findings: Hay & Winn (2005)*

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Finding</i>	<i>Accompanying Illustration of Finding</i>	<i>Placement Setting Relevant to Finding</i>	<i>Level of Plausibility</i>
The quality of school facilities	“...concern about classroom noise and the need for the students to have a	“In the SEU the most preferred learning space for the students with Asperger’s Syndrome is the withdrawal room because it’s the quietest place. Unless you have a	Mainstream	Equivocal

	quiet place to work” (Hay & Winn, 2005, p.146)	place where these kids can work by themselves at times, all you are doing is pushing square pegs into round holes. These kids need space. What does it matter if they work on the computer more than the other students, at least this way they are engaged in learning. We need more computers and more individual workstations for these students. We need a place where we can talk to one student at a time” (Special education teacher, p.147).		
The nature of the AS condition and its influence on behaviour and social interactions	“Parents maintained that their children were often isolated in the school and lacked friends” (Hay & Winn, 2005, p.147)	“Lunchtime is the worst, no friends and being teased, no activities. They just hide where they think it is safe, near the SEU” (Parent, p.147)	Mainstream	Equivocal
The notion that special educators worked hard to assist others	“From the students’ perspectives the helpfulness of the special education staff was one of the more valued aspects of their experience” (Hay & Winn, 2005, p.148)	18% of transcripts reported to contain the theme “special education teachers and teacher aides usually supportive” (Hay, & Winn, 2005, p.148)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Collaboration and relationships	“Although many of the students wanted a positive relationship with their teachers, some displayed a lack of understanding of social conventions, poor communication skills, and a somewhat confusing logic for justifying their actions” (Hay & Winn, 2005, p.148)	“If a teacher shouts out, I shout back. I only like to do school things that interest me. If I do not like the teacher I do not try very hard in that class” (Student, p.148)	Mainstream	Equivocal
The nature of the AS condition and	“The students with AS frequently complained of teasing from other students, which for some students	“Group time is just group fight time. They call me names like mental, but I tell them I am not mental. They	Mainstream	Equivocal

its influence on behaviour and social interactions	triggered aggressive responses” (Hay & Winn, 2005, p.148)	keep calling me that, so I put one in a headlock until he said sorry” (Student, 2005, p.148)		
The nature of the AS condition and its influence on behaviour and social interactions	“The students perceived the secondary school environment to be a demanding and complex social environment” (Hay & Winn, 2005, p.148)	“In the primary school I knew what I was doing. In high school it is more confusing. Everything keeps changing and I do not like change.I had more friends in primary school. I would like to have more friends now but I cannot help if I am unpopular” (Student, p.148)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Collaboration and relationships	“Although the students with AS were supportive of the special education staff not all of the adolescent students wished to be ‘identified’ as needing help and did not want to be seen as different by their peers” (Hay & Winn, 2005, p.158)	“I do not always like having a teacher aide around me as I can do the school work and the other students see this as cheating” (Student, p.148)	Mainstream	Equivocal

Table F.7

Extracted Findings: Healy et al. (2013)

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Finding</i>	<i>Accompanying Illustration of Finding</i>	<i>Placement Setting Relevant to Finding</i>	<i>Level of Plausibility</i>
Individual challenges	“Sensory issues seemed to inhibit the quality of participation for some students....Most commonly, these sensory issues resulted in response to	“I feel good cause I’m going to exercise and stuff in a fun way but I hate it when I get all hot and sweaty. When I get all hot my hair starts to itch uncontrollably” (Gillian, p.224)	Mainstream (primary)	Unequivocal

	auditory, heat and tactile sensitivity” (Healy et al., 2013, p.224)	“some people In the hall start screaming at each other...just hurts my ears and ears” (Bill, p.224)		
Peer interactions	“Camaraderie, signifying goodwill and a positive rapport among classmates was a positive peer interaction” (Healy et al., 2013, p.224)	“We all going into a team and I, and people, get happy” “My friends are always with me” (Kyle, p.224)	Mainstream (primary)	Equivocal
Peer interactions	Initiation of friendship, demonstrating the potential of PE to be a catalyst for friendship, was also discussed, demonstrating clearly that PE can socially benefit children with autism”.	“Sometimes we might keep each other in the [the game]” (Christ, p.224) “You can do lots of cool moves and It’s kind of cool and everybody can be your friend and you can make loads of friends...When I’m running and playing with a ball and passing, they say thanks and after that they say do you want to sleep over or something like that” (p.225)	Mainstream (primary)	Equivocal
Peer interactions	“Negative peer interactions were also frequently reported, bullying was the most extreme consequence that resulted from this conflict” (Healy et al., 2013, p.225)	“I can’t catch a ball and they just keep shouting at me saying ‘Bill catch the ball already’ and C’s punching me, my friend C’s punching me, my friend C is punching me for not catching the ball and things” (Bill, p.225)	Mainstream (primary)	Equivocal
Peer interactions	“Negative social comparisons also contributed to difficult PE experiences” (Healy et al.,2013, p.225)	“I always come second last or something like that” (Kyle, p.225)	Mainstream (primary)	Equivocal
Exclusion	“Times when the students were excluded due to a lack of ability” (Healy et al., 2013, p.225)	“Sometimes we do (football) games and I say I can’t catch a ball and they keep, we do ball games so they keep saying that ‘Bill can’t catch a ball’ [in a sing-song voice] (Bill, p.225)	Mainstream (primary)	Equivocal

Table F.8*Extracted Findings: Hill (2014)*

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Finding</i>	<i>Accompanying Illustration of Finding</i>	<i>Placement Setting Relevant to Finding</i>	<i>Level of Plausibility</i>
Anxiety: Environmental and social factors	“Each of the young people had particular areas within the school environment in which they experienced anxiety or stress” (Hill, 2014, p.83)	<p>Corridors: “I feel really, really, really tiny. Cos it’s big; very, very, very, very big. Yeah. Yeah I feel like a tiny man. A tiny man. Yeah....Very nervous (quietly). Yeah (pause) Really nervous (quietly). I feel baffled. Don’t know what’s happening. (pause). Just don’t know, don’t know who is coming. Can’t see them. Don’t know which direction they are coming from. That’s what makes me worry” (Eddie, p.83)</p> <p>School Bell: “I feel more comfortable in that room, cause there isn’t a bell in that room. ..The bell is really, really, loud in there. And it would make you jump quite a lot (Georgie, p.83)</p>	Mainstream	Unequivocal
Anxiety: Curriculum and learning factors	“Anxiety relating to exams was apparent in this group of young people. Whilst some comments related to generalised feelings of performance anxiety, predominantly, discussions focused on the context in which exams were taken” (Hill, 2014, p.84)	<p>Eddie reported finding the sports hall “too loud” (p.84)</p> <p>“You know it better, so you know what all the posters say...so you won’t have to look at all of them. And you won’t have to be surrounded by all the people...it would help me concentrate more” [re. taking exams in support base] (Andi, p.84)</p> <p>“Kit alluded to his fear of ‘of getting the answers wrong’ (p.84)</p>	Mainstream	Unequivocal

Anxiety: Protective factors	“Daily ‘meet and greet sessions’ with their key teaching assistants provided opportunities at the beginning of each day to express any concerns with a trusted adult and to have their timetable discussed in detail. Teaching assistants were seen as a source of guidance when difficulties were encountered, or when schoolwork was too difficult” (Hill, 2014, p.84)	Georgie: “Sometimes you got to go to a lesson and think that the work is really hard” Hill: “What things help when you go to a lesson and the work is really hard?” Georgie: “That I have a TA there” (p.84)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Sanctuary: The support base	“The support based was an area identified by the young people as providing a ‘calm and relaxing’ (Andi) environment in which they were able to spend break and lunchtimes (Hill, 2014, p. 84)	“Several of the students discussed the importance of the quiet atmosphere in the support base, as opposed to the ‘crowded’ and ‘noisy’ atmosphere of the ‘playground’ (Andi), ‘tutor room’, ‘school field’ (Georgie), and ‘canteen’ (Sammy)” (Hill, 2014, p.84)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Sanctuary: The support base	“An important feature of the support base commented on by [participants] was that only identified pupils were able to access it” (Hill, 2014, p.85)	“This is where I go (smiles broadly). It’s nice and quiet there and only students who are allowed can go there. Ones that are quiet and don’t like going outside” (Sammy, p.85).	Mainstream	Equivocal
Sanctuary: The support base	“Outside of break-times and lunchtimes, the support base was viewed as a place to retreat in times of difficulty” (Hill, 2014, p.85)	“If I need to use my time out card, I would probably go here” (Andi, p.85)	Mainstream	Unequivocal
Sanctuary: The support base	“This environment provided a space in which they could fully relax, or perhaps they felt that within this environment their special interests	“Several students spoke of their enjoyment in ‘becoming lost’ (Andi) in their special areas of interests within the support base” (Hill, 2014, p.85)	Mainstream	Unequivocal

	would be better tolerated (Hill, 2014, p.85)	“I can do Mr Men. And this is what makes me happy” (Kit, p.85)		
Sanctuary: The support base	“For several of the young people, having access to areas where they could observe their neuro-typical peers was as important as having access to the security of identified and protected zones” (Hill, 2014, p.85)	“Here’s the stairs, which I always climb to get up to here. I can look out of the window at the top of the stairs. Yeah. I can see what’s happening. I get a better view of the playground. Yeah (Excited gasp). Looking. Enjoy looking through the window (Eddie, p.85)	Mainstream	Unsupported?
Young people as Active Agents: Making sense of self and others	“The young people in this study showed an interest in their mainstream peers and several of them went to great lengths to make themselves aware of the activities in which these peers engaged” (Hill, 2014, p.85)	“It was in the middle of trees, which I liked sort of being hidden; some students got in and when I was just sat there, I could watch them, and they wouldn’t see me” (Andi, p.85) “Elsewhere in his discussion Andi had referred to the fact that he did not ‘want to be different’ from his peers but that he was ‘not sure how to be like everyone really’, suggesting that opportunities to learn through observation were of great importance to him” (Hill, 2014, p.85)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Young people as Active Agents: Making sense of self and others	Student referred to fact that he was “not sure how to be like everyone else really” (Hill, 2014, p.85)	“Elsewhere in his discussion Andi had referred to the fact that he did not ‘want to be different’ from his peers but that he was ‘not sure how to be like everyone really’, suggesting that opportunities to learn through observation were of great importance to him” (Hill, 2014, p.85)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Young people as Active Agents: Making sense of self and others	“Several of the students recounted stories that appeared to involve bullying by their peers, although the students themselves sometimes appeared unsure of how to interpret these experiences” (Hill, 2014, p.85)	“But there is a group of people who [...] they speak to me, but I don’t like that, because they don’t speak to me to be friendly, they speak to me to be funny to their friends. They make funny voices and go “well done” and they (pause), they sort of say “hello” and things and	Mainstream	Equivocal

		I go sort of “hi” and then they just laugh and things and I don’t like that” (Hill, 2014, p.86)		
Young people as Active Agents: Creative problem solvers	“Whilst the young people spoke appreciatively about the supports that had been put into place for them, they had also created their own ways of solving problems” (Hill, 2014, p.86)	“Sammy for example, described how he ‘goes the long way round’ to avoid crowds in the playground. Furthermore, he goes ‘straight t a seat’ in lessons and selects a place to sit ‘where there are not too many people’ to alleviate his anxiety of crowds” (Hill, 2014, p.86)	Mainstream	Equivocal
		“There are like velvet ropes and it keeps you in a line, but I don’t think we should have a line, cos everyone gets crushed in the queue. So I skip the line, I go ‘in’ the ‘out’” (Corin, p.86)		
Young people as Active Agents: Young people becoming	Participants “discussed their emerging sense of independence. It was evident that [participant] valued the support of his TA, but he did not wish to have her support at all times” (Hill, 2014, p.86)	Hill: “Would you like her to be with you all of the time?” Georgie: “No. Because I’m getting older and I can do things more myself. Probably might not need anybody, hardly, when I’m at college” (P.86)		

Table F.9

Extracted Findings: Howard et al. (2019)

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Finding</i>	<i>Accompanying Illustration of Finding</i>	<i>Placement Setting Relevant to Finding</i>	<i>Level of Plausibility</i>
Identity at School: Learner Identity	“Many expressed a fascination for learning and frustration about gaps in their knowledge” (Howard et al., 2019, p.15)	“Gareth expressed a desire to ‘feel like I’m smarter’ not the closed kind of looking smart, but actually being smart’ (Howard et al., 2019, p.15)	Mainstream	Unequivocal

		“I be sad when I want to know, like everything. I want to know everything” (Jokubus, p.15)		
Identity at School: Learner Identity	“Participants often identified making mistakes at school as a distressing experience” (Howard et al., 2019, p.15)	“When asked what he would change at school, Nish responded ‘I wouldn’t make any mistakes because sometimes I make mistakes’ (Howard et al., 2019, p.15)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Identity at School: Learner Identity	“Three children reflected independently on their experiences of autism” (Howard et al., 2019, p.15)	“As the oldest child in the student, Jokubus showed more awareness of autism, describing it as when “you think different to other people” (Howard et al., 2019, p.15)	Mainstream	Equivocal
		Interviewer: What does it feel like? (being autistic) Thomas: [long pause] Mmm. It feels kind of scary. “In contrast Thomas continued by describing an advantage of autism, that ‘you know more stuff about what you like that most people’”. (Howard et al., 2019, p.15)		
Identity at School: Learner Identity	“None of the children interviewed in this study except Jokubus described themselves as “different”, despite the potential “double difference” to their peers of being bilingual and having autism. This is perhaps because most of the children in the current study had little awareness of their autism diagnosis.” (Howard et al., 2019, p.17)	“As the oldest child in the student, Jokubus showed more awareness of autism, describing it as when “you think different to other people” (Howard et al., 2019, p.15)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Identity at School: Social Interaction	“Most children reported having limited friendship circles and found social interaction, both inside and	“Sometimes I have friends. Sometimes I don’t” (Jokubus, p.16)	Mainstream	Unequivocal

	outside the classroom, a challenge” (Howard et al., 2019, p.16)	“Amira, who attends a social group at lunchtime, said ‘ I made just a little bit of friends’, and when asked whether she works well with peers, replied ‘ not really. I’m a bit annoying’ (Howard et al., 2019, p.16) “Unfortunately, I don’t really have many friends but I always surrounded by two bullies who don’t really like me” (Marco, p.16)		
Identity at School: Social Interaction	“All participants reported positive relationships with members of staff” (Howard et al., 2019, p.16)	“All participants reported positive relationships with members of staff, with the exception of Thomas who still conceded that he got along with “some” of the teachers (Howard et al., 2019, p.87)	Mainstream	Unsupported
Experiences of the Classroom: Learning Environment	“Many of the children stated a preference for collaborative work and most claimed that peer and teacher support were essential to their academic success” (Howard et al., 2016, p.16)	N/A	Mainstream	Unsupported
Experiences of the Classroom: Learning Environment	“Excessive or background noise was deemed to be a barrier to learning for some of the children” (Howard et al., 2016, p.16)	“For example, when discussing sitting next to a classmate Gareth commented, ‘I like that he doesn’t make any noise’ (Howard et al., 2019, p.16)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Experiences of the Classroom: Emotion Regulation	“Although not present in every account, anxiety, anger and apathy were also common features of the children’s school experiences” (Howard et al., 2019, p.16)	“Luke described periods of lessons in which ‘my mind goes into panic mode’” (Howard et al., 2019, p.16) “I find it hardest staying calm and then being able to stop my detonation like an exploding kitten. Very often I’ll start blowing up and then I start creating trouble for everyone else and then destroying it for the whole class” (Marco, p.16)	Mainstream	Unequivocal

“I just don’t like going to school”...”school is just a way to make money”(Gareth, p.16)

Table F.10*Extracted Findings: Humphrey & Lewis (2008)*

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Finding</i>	<i>Accompanying Illustration of Finding</i>	<i>Placement Setting Relevant to Finding</i>	<i>Level of Plausibility</i>
Constructing an understanding of AS	“In our sample, we saw a divergence between pupils whose descriptions of themselves and their AS were characterised by negatively valenced notions of their differences, and those for whom acceptance of AS was central (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.31)	“Oh my god I’m a freak!” (p.31) “Sometimes it’s like, ‘make me normal’” (p.31) I like being like this you know, and that’s the way it is” (p.32)	Mainstream	Unequivocal
Constructing an understanding of AS	“Of those who talked about themselves and their AS in negative terms, the notion of ‘being different’ or ‘not normal’ appeared to underlie their comments” (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.31)	“Sometimes it’s like, make me normal” (p.31) “Oh my god I’m a freak!” (p.31) It’s like I have a bad brain” (p.31) “[I am] mentally disabled, well partly mentally disabled” (p.31) “I told them it’s a mental syndrome and they think ‘Ah he’s a retard’” (p.31)	Mainstream	Unequivocal

Constructing an understanding of AS	“It is likely that these pupils have constructed their view of themselves and their AS through the feedback they receive from others” Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.31)	“I’d prefer they didn’t know (re AS) because everyone treats me differently and I don’t like being treated differently. But I don’t like being treated differently as though as if I’m retarded but...That’s how some look at it is that I’m retarded and I really don’t like that, it really bugs me” (p.31)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Constructing an understanding of AS	“A subset of pupils for whom AS was simply part of ‘who they were’: in other words, they had grown to accept and even celebrate” (Humphrey & Lewis, p.32)	I like being like this you know, and that’s the way it is” (p.32) “Sometimes I think I am normal, I’m treating this autism very well. I’m top of the class and doing very well and I’ve got a good future ahead of me and I’ve got a vocabulary, I’ve got very good friends” (p.32) “To be perfectly honest with you I’m fine with it because say I didn’t have it I would have turned out a completely different person and my life would have gone in a completely way. Again it’s yeah I’ve got it and it sometimes it upsets what I do but it’s a small compromise with friends that I’ve got and like the problems they’ve got and basically I have to live with it and it gives me all those bonuses” (p.32)	Mainstream	Unequivocal
Constructing an understanding of AS	“Both pupils in the above examples make reference to their friends when discussing how they have come to accept themselves and their AS”(Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.32)	“Sometimes I think I am normal, I’m treating this autism very well. I’m top of the class and doing very well and I’ve got a good future ahead of me and I’ve got a vocabulary, I’ve got very good friends” (p.32) “To be perfectly honest with you I’m fine with it because say I didn’t have it I would have turned out a completely different person and my life would have gone in a completely way. Again it’s yeah I’ve got it	Mainstream	Unequivocal

		and it sometimes it upsets what I do but it's a small compromise with friends that I've got and like the problems they've got and basically I have to live with it and it gives me all those bonuses" (p.32)		
Characteristics associated with AS and life in school	"One characteristic of AS that appeared to be frequently used for exploitative purposes by other pupils was the social naivety exhibited by many of our sample. The eagerness with which many pupils with AS seek friendship, juxtaposed with their difficulties understanding the subtleties and nuances of social interaction, makes them easy targets for ridicule" (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.33)	<p>Pupil: I was sat next to [female pupil] which is perhaps the worst place to sit.</p> <p>Author: Do you not like [female pupil]?</p> <p>Pupil: No because before Christmas they tried to put make-up on me.</p> <p>Author: Why did she do that? Why did she want to do that?</p> <p>Pupil: I don't know-probably because she's a girl and doesn't like eye make-up so she thought she'd do it on a boy instead. The first time it worked and then I realised it was wrong [after being reprimanded by a teacher] so the next time when she tried to do it again I fought back (p.33)</p>	Mainstream	Unequivocal
Relationships with peers	"Bullying and teasing were experienced at different levels of severity and regularity by nearly all of them" (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.33)	<p>Pupil: They just say 'Oh Harry Potter' often like that is gets on my nerves...but I just ignore them and walk on.</p> <p>Pupil: People in my class know about my autism at school that's why they likely pick on me.</p> <p>Pupil: [male pupil 1] was a person who was always hit someone and also [male pupil 2] is very nasty and keeps punching me.</p>	Mainstream	Unequivocal

		Pupil: Yeah he punched me a lot...Whenever he sees me.		
Relationships with peers	“Pupils experienced increasing levels of social isolation” (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.35)	“People don’t get on with me and I don’t really get on with them and I often try to make friends with them...they often just go against me” (p.35)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Relationships with peers	“The social isolation and bullying experienced by so many of our sample was counteracted in some instances by support from (and often enduring friendships with) peers (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.35)	“I do have friends who very often stick up for me” (p.35)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Relationships with peers	“The importance of such [peer support] in facilitating a positive sense of self cannot be overstated” (Humphrey & Lewis, p.2008, p.35)	“Yeah if people are nice to you, you feel better. When I was in school when people didn’t like me it was rubbish and now many more people like me it’s easier” (p.35)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Anxiety and stress in school	“The school environment itself was a considerable source of anxiety” (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.37)	Author: And why do you want to leave the class sometimes- what happens to make you leave the class? Pupil: When there’s too much noise and noise gets me wound up all of that. Diary: In English there was so much noise. I just wanted to class to me quiet and I can get on with my bus (p.37)	Mainstream	Unequivocal
Anxiety and stress in school	“For some the stress and anxiety seemed to simply overwhelm them” (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.38)	“I’m upset every second, every second I’ve got tears in my eyes” (p.38)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Anxiety and stress in school	“We found evidence of simple adaptations that can help to break down such barriers to learning and	“One school routinely ‘cherry picked’ quiet, well-behaved classes for pupils with AS who had difficulties coping with noise and disruption. In other schools there were often certain areas (such as resource rooms or	Mainstream	Equivocal

	participation” (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.38)	libraries) that were used as a refuge for pupils who wanted to escape the “chaos of the corridor” (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.38)		
Working with teachers and other staff	“Some pupils appeared to perceive the support they received as appropriate and as helping to ease their anxieties about school” (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.38)	“It makes me feel like I’m calm and I’m relaxed and I can get on with my work” (p.38)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Working with teachers and other staff	“The visibility of additional support provided often made the pupils feel that their differences were accentuated” (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.38)...”Having a member of support staff ‘shadowing’ them in lessons immediately impeded pupils’ attempt to blend in with the rest of the class” (Humphrey & Lewis, p.39)	<p>“I don’t want people to treat me differently because people with Asperger’s get treated differently to everybody else and I don’t like it at all. I don’t like this sort of things you know I don’t like people coming to my lessons” (p.38)</p> <p>“If they were following me then the other students know that there’s something different about me and I don’t like it at all” (p.38)</p> <p>“Often it’s like- I don’t really like the extra attention” (p.38)</p> <p>Author: Do you think you’d like some support in some subjects? Pupil: No that’s the worse thing ever-my mum seems to think I want it but I don’t (p.39)</p>	Mainstream	Unequivocal
Working with teachers and staff	“Some teachers appeared to lack understanding of individual pupils’ needs and as a result felt less confident to differentiate their work themselves, instead depending on support staff to prepare work for a pupil...In some cases pupils had little	<p>“Normally none of our teachers really look at my work and none of them come and talk to me like” (p.39)</p> <p>“It is the teachers [that] are rubbish-they know about their subject but they know nothing about us with Asperger’s Syndrome but they why should they-they’ve</p>	Mainstream	Unequivocal

	or no actual interaction with class teachers” (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.39)	never been told-they’re not specially trained to deal with people with special needs” (p.39)		
Working with teachers and staff	“In some instances we saw examples of support being offered in a more ‘subtle way’, wherein support staff would not always sit in the immediate proximity of the pupil..and who also offered more general support to the class” (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.40)	“In these cases, pupils with AS described the support they received as ‘behind the scenes’, which provided immediate reassurance: ‘I know I have someone there to help me” (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.40)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Negotiating “Difference”	“Constant negotiation of their differences in the context of school” (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.30)	Author: So do you think it’s important not to be seen to be different then? Pupil: Yeah school it is it’s very important. Author: Why do you think it’s important not to be seen as different? Pupil: It’s the culture. Everybody’s got to...I get picked on and abused (p.40)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Negotiating “Difference”	Where pupils’ success in submerging themselves in the social world of the school was dependent on the perceived ‘normality’ or ‘abnormality’ of their behaviour, our findings suggests that they feel forced to adapt themselves (and in doing so	“Sometimes it’s like, ‘make me normal”” (p.40)	Mainstream	Equivocal

	compromise their identities) (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.40)	
Negotiating “Difference”	“For some pupils, any level of disclosure was seen as a barrier to their ability to be considered ‘normal’” (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.40)	“I’d rather they not know because then I wouldn’t be treated differently and that’s fine” (p.40)

Table F.11

Extracted Findings: McLaughlin & Rafferty (2014)

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Finding</i>	<i>Accompanying Illustration of Finding</i>	<i>Placement Setting Relevant to Finding</i>	<i>Level of Plausibility</i>
Something has been taken from me: Why me?	“Anger and a desire for change regarding the lifelong nature of AS was communicated by three participants” (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.66)	<p>“I really don’t like it, it’s something that sort of like you can’t change your entire life. You know like people have medical problems and things but they have hope there will be sort of a cure designed for that someday. But this won’t” (Ruby, p.66)</p> <p>“Charlie was angry that he had been given a life with AS while others had not and felt very distant from his peer group..He described ‘...the arrow which is pointing to the path you want to go down...suddenly it points in a different way. You know those signs at street corners which have the arrow. Its basically someone twisting the arrow around so that it goes in a different direction” (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.66)</p>	Mainstream	Unequivocal
Something has been taken	Participants (2) “talked painfully of their memories of their behaviour	“I obviously was so so intolerant of everyone I was just, I was also a bit of a crybaby. I use to, I literally, no,	Mainstream	Unequivocal

from me: I hold shame and regret	during primary school and junior high...impact of previous behaviour on how peers viewed” (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.67)	that’s not funny, that’s just sad...how embarrassed I would be knowing that was me a few years ago. I was really a bit paranoid, I was basically going ‘everybody hated me’ sort of thing. No no no, don’t try and understand. I don’t understand it either” (Charlie, p.67)		
		Charlie “would like to ‘turn back the clock’. He talked of how he felt he had ‘scarred my appearance’ with his peers ((McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.67)		
		“A lot of people my age can’t really take me seriously” due to past behaviour he is “not very proud of” (Jack, p.67)		
“It” does something to me: “It” is there and it stays	“The realisation of the chronic impact of their AS centred around comparison to or reaction from the rest of their peers” (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.67)	“from the way other people get on I’m guessing I think differently from other people” (Jack, p.67)	Mainstream	Unequivocal
		“...you see the world in a different way to other people, and you sort of talk, you sort of almost talk in a different way, on a different line, you think in a different way” (Ruby, p.67)		
“It” does something to me: “It” is there and it stays	“Academically, this was seen as a positive difference, in that it was the source of having more intelligence than their peers” (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.67)	N/A	Mainstream	Unsupported
“It” does something to me: “It” is there and it stays	Participants “described how they felt AS caused them to have difficulty fitting in with their peer group” (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.68)	“Due to not fitting in with popular youth culture and discourse such as: hanging around town (Jack); going out and drinking (Jack & Oliver); understanding sarcasm (Joshua and Ruby); and having other interests that take up your time (Jack & Charlie) (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.678	Mainstream	Equivocal

"It" does something to me: "It is there but it changes	"Constant process of trying to adapt to their social world" (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.68)	"I try to fit in as best I possibly can, I really go out of my way to try to fit in in every way except for the Asperger's Syndrome sort of thing"	Mainstream	Equivocal
"It is part of me"	Participant described how he was "different from the normal people" (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.68)	"When asked to describe himself this same participant referred to how he was different "from the normal people" (p.68)	Mainstream,	Equivocal
Let me be 'normal'	"A desire to be treated like the rest of their peers, perhaps as a way to minimise the perceived impact of 'it' on their lives, was expressed" (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.68)	"Joshua who complained that some of the school staff smiled at him 'a bit more that I would expect' and described 'It's sort of everyone is nice to ya but I don't really want that, so yeah, 'oh watch out he's got Aspergers' (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.68)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Let me be 'normal'	"Participant, at this point of his life did not see having AS as a 'problem'" (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.68)	"Joshua felt that this different treatment was not warranted. At this point in his life he did not see having AS as a 'problem'. However, he noted 'I know other people see it as a problem....maybe impressions they get of people who have it worse, then they base their expectations on that" (p.69)	Mainstream	Equiovocal
Let me be 'normal': Let me decide how others understand me	"All of the adolescents had made a considered and active choice whether to tell their peers about their diagnosis" (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.69)	"Joshua was adamant that his peers never find out about his diagnosis as he felt: they would just, maybe they might treat me subtly different. I don't want that" (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.68) "Jack noted that he only told 'close friends' about his diagnosis and only if they asked why he was getting extra resources in school (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.68)	Mainstream	Unequivocal
Let me be 'normal': The support you	"Only two adolescents not to refer to a negative social implication of having a TA" (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.69)	"She mostly stayed with me during break times, so I couldn't talk to new people sort of thing. And the people started to, all the people which were my friends	Mainstream	Unequivocal

give is...not always helpful		at the start of first year started just purely ignoring me so like I wasn't there sort of thing" (Ruby, p.69)		
		"Alfie also noted that his TA had impacted how his peers view him. He noted that his peers noticed that there was 'this guy just sitting over you taking down your homework for you it's just like...it's patronising" (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.69)		
Let me be 'normal': The support you give is...not always helpful	For two participants "the level of support had been reduced, which they saw as a positive thing" (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.69)	"He [the TA] just sorta floats about and sometimes is like, sometimes he is in the room and sometimes he is not" (Alfie, p.69)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Fitting in?: Friendships	Three participants "were able to identify themselves with an aspect of a peer group" (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.70)	"I know I am lucky to have friends...I think it's cause they're sort of life, they're sort of different to other people in a way" (Ruby, p.70)	Mainstream	Unequivocal
Fitting in: I can feel along and isolated	Three participants -feeling of being "alone and isolated" (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.70)	"For some reason I have more friends this year" (Alfie, p.70) "I'm worried in the future-I'm sort of going 'crap I've lost my childhood' em- but I don't really care at this point...because I'm, I don't really care about friends but I can make it up by sort of giving something to humanity" (Charlie, p.71)	Mainstream	Unequivocal
		"I go there [the lunch room], I take a table usually with no one there cause I like to get away without as much fuss as possible..I don't every try [to be accepted] (Charlies, p.71)		
		Peers "wouldn't normally talk to me" (Oliver, p.71)		

Fitting in: I experience being rejected and bullied	Participants “experience being rejected and bullied” (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.71)	<p>“Both Jack and Joshua referred to receiving unwanted physical attention from their peers, involving punching, showing and the ‘odd nudge’ “(McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.71)</p> <p>“Lots of the girls don’t like me. If I like move seats sort of thing beside them or something, or sort of that’s the last seat in the class they would ask to change sometimes and things like that (Ruby, p.71)</p>	Mainstream	Unequivocal
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Table F.12

Extracted Findings: Moyse & Porter (2015)

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Finding</i>	<i>Accompanying Illustration of Finding</i>	<i>Placement Setting Relevant to Finding</i>	<i>Level of Plausibility</i>
Working Collaboratively	“All three girls struggled to work collaboratively, preferring to work on their own ideas, or to direct a member of the group” (Moyse & Porter, 2015, p.192)	<p>“Gem found it difficult to work in a team to reach common agreement on, for example, a story line (‘No that’s not interesting’)” (Moyse & Porter, 2015, p.192)</p> <p>“I like science but sometimes I find it a bit boring because I don’t really get included in much stuff...sometimes no one listens to me, so um, we don’t really work, they don’t really like my ideas, so I like working on my own most of the time” (Scarlett, p.192)</p>	Mainstream	Unequivocal
Interacting with Peers	“In the playground that the girls’ impairments in social interaction were most apparent” (Moyse & Porter, 2015, p.193)	“During breaks, Scarlett sat quietly on the edge of the group, apparently listening but no joining in. She said that she often felt ‘lonely’ and ‘left on her own’ by her peers; ‘they don’t want me they want somebody else.	Mainstream	Unequivocal

		<p>The relief from lessons felt by most children at break time was not true for Scarlett; it was the inverse: ‘I feel sad when I get left out and then I feel happy when I’m doing lessons because it just gets my mind off break time and lunch time’ (Moyses & Porter, 2015, p.193)</p> <p>“During the interview, she (Amy) talked about not liking lunchtimes or playing, about being bullied and listed crying as one of the things that she does during these times (Moyses & Porter, 2015, p.193)</p>		
Modifications	<p>“The data revealed all three girls presented with behaviours that marked them out from their peers. They appeared to be personal modifications to the demands of the school day and were indicative of high levels of anxiety” (Moyses & Porter, p.194)</p>	<p>“Gem and Amy found different ways to control space during unstructured periods. Gem spend a large amount of time on her own. During lunchtime on Tuesday and Thursday, she spent 40 min and 37 min, respectively, on her own or not communicating. Of the 40 minutes she was in the playground on Wednesday, 34 minutes were spent on her own walking, repetitively, around the raised ledge surrounding the walking frame, silently getting off and on to avoid peers in her path” (p.194)</p> <p>“Some modifications around space were enabled or legitimised by teachers: Scarlett was allowed to stay in and do jobs or go to the library at break time” (p.194)</p>	Mainstream	Unequivocal
Hiding	<p>“(Hiding) was a recurring theme for all three girls” (Moyses & Porter, 2015, p.195)</p>	<p>“All three girls hid when they didn’t understand something in class, by not participating and then observing their peers for clues rather than as for help. Amy had multiple other strategies ranging from trying to hide her work from her peers to writing illegibly in tiny letters on her whiteboard and rubbing her writing out before the teacher had seen it (Moyses & Porter, 2015, p.195)</p>	Mainstream	Equivocal

Hiding	“The girls’ behaviour also masked their true feelings” (Moyses & Porter, 2015, p.195)	“It was clear, for example, that anxiety was a big issue for Scarlett, and that she tried to hide it, ‘I just keep it do myself’ (Moyses & Porter, 2015, p.195)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Hiding	Participants “feelings about school appeared to be directly linked to the quality of social interactions” (Moyses & Porter, 2015, p.195)	“I don’t normally have that much fun usually and I don’t really like coming to school” (Amy, p.196) “I treat everyone as normal people but they don’t, they seem to like ignore me. I feel like I don’t exist here” (Scarlett, p.196)	Mainstream	Unequivocal

Table F.13

Extracted Findings: Myles et al. (2019)

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Finding</i>	<i>Accompanying Illustration of Finding</i>	<i>Placement Setting Relevant to Finding</i>	<i>Level of Plausibility</i>
Reciprocal friendships	“Participants saw friendships as an important basis for belonging and as beneficial for their school experience....Participants suggested that their overall happiness in school was largely impacted by having a friendship” (Myles et al., 2019, p.13)	“Like you know when you’re with someone and you’re comfortable with them, so with it’s quiet it’s not weird” (Scarlett, p.13) “She makes me happy. Cos year 7...I loved year 7 so much but the only bad thing was she wasn’t there. That was the only bad thing I had” (p.13)	Mainstream	Unequivocal
Reciprocal friendships	Participants set apart particular qualities that set apart people who they would consider their friends” (Myles et al., 2019, p.13)	“...true friends...they actually understand and just don’t not like me for my autism” (Zara, p.13)	Mainstream	Unequivocal

Reciprocal friendships	“The companionship that came with having one key friend was seen as particularly important” (Myles et al., p.13)	“She makes me happy. Cos year 7...I loved year 7 so much but the only bad thing was she wasn't there. That was the only bad thing I had” (p.13)		
Feeling safe and supported	“Pupils spoke about the social security that comes through peer relationships. For some, close physical proximity to friends was important to enable them to feel confident in a large secondary school environment” (Myles et al., 2019, p.13)	“Like you sort of have to have friends so you can go around with them and if you don't have friends there's nowhere really to go” (Ella, p.13)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Feeling safe and supported	“Participants also discussed the importance of the safety and support provided by aspects of the school environment” (Myles et al., 2019, p.13)	(re lunchtime club) “It's just a place to go like away from everybody and people from student support run it...So we it there as a place to go and they about like 'how's your week's going' and that's been a nice thing to do” (Myles et al., 2019, p.14)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Encouragement and inclusion	“Participants emphasised social inclusion as a key aspect of belonging, giving examples of instances where their peers had acknowledged them and made them feel valued” (Myles et al., 2019, p.14)	“It's like wanting to be there and feeling that people want you to be there...I guess it's just nice to have people to talk to and sort of like realise you're there and...kind of interact with” (Sophia, p.14)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Encouragement and inclusion	“Pupils explained the social benefits of behaving in a way that pleases others and being able to adapt their behaviour to ensure positive interactions with peers” (Myles et al., 2019, p.14)	“Like every times she sees me, even though she's talking she'll turn and say 'hi' to me” (Jasmines, p.14)	Mainstream	Equivocal
		“For Ella this involved mirroring the behaviour of peers to feel confident that she was adhering to the social expectations of the group: Ella: I do whatever they're doing...		

		... Yeah it helps because then it's doing the sort of thing that they like. They you'll know that they'll like what you're doing" (Myles et al., 2019, p.14)		
Social skills: Being on the periphery	"Participants described experiences where they did not feel part of a social group" (Myles et al., 2019, p.14)	"Well I'm just usually kind of like on the outside and I can step away and no one notices" (Sophie, p.14) "And I join in their conversation and they just look at me and say 'Why are you joining in? You don't need to'" (Zara, p.14)	Mainstream	Unequivocal
Social skills: Feeling devalued	"Participants made reference to social situations where they did not feel listened to, or their contribution not valued by others" (Myles et al., 2019, p.14)	"If I was in the conversation at all I was always like...we always talked about what they wanted to talk about...sometimes I wasn't listened to at all..." (Scarlett, p.14) "I just sat in the corner for the rest of the time cos I just felt...like left out. No one was listening to my ideas" (Ella, p.14)	Mainstream	Unequivocal
Social skills: Feeling devalued	"Participants discussed the ways in which staff spoke to them when they found out they had a diagnosis of autism, and suggested that this could often lead to differential treatment" (Myles et al., 2019, p.15)	"When I first got diagnosed everyone started treating me differently...I got treated differently, like babyish" (Darcy, p.15) "I think everyone thinks that we're stupid but we're not" (Darcy, p.15) "They just talk to us weirdly...Like we're babies...And they sometimes look at us really weird" (Charlie, p.15)	Mainstream	Unequivocal
Social skills	"Participants also discussed their experiences of managing complex social dynamics within groups of friends. Many expressed a preference for having one key friend, or a small	"I was actually pretty content, but at the same time...lonely. Like, I wanted friends that I could talk to, like a group...like a small group. Cos this was a big group, everyone was always moving about. It was hard	Mainstream	Equivocal

peer group, as opposed to being part of a large social network” (Myles et al., 2019, p.15)

to keep a small group together before they broke up and went off to speak to individuals” (Scarlett, p.15)

Table F.14*Extracted Findings: Saggars et al. (2011)*

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Finding</i>	<i>Accompanying Illustration of Finding</i>	<i>Placement Setting Relevant to Finding</i>	<i>Level of Plausibility</i>
Teacher characteristics	“The students conveyed that they had difficulty in dealing with teachers who often expressed their anger by yelling at students” (Saggars et al., 2011, p.178)	<p>“English, my teacher is horrible. She’s very strict and mean. She yells at people” (Don, p.178)</p> <p>“Well, no not really. Most of its loud and it disrupts me a it. Well I do mind sometimes if it is, well I do, wait what was it? Oh yeah, well I do sort of care if people are yelling at other students. Cause it does disrupt me from my work a bit. Yeah (Oscar, p.178).</p> <p>“I don’t like Mrs.H because she’s controlling me”. ..Angry aat me (Steve, p.178)</p>	Mainstream	Unequivocal
Teacher characteristics	“Students related to teachers who related to them; that is, there was a situation of mutual understanding” (Saggars et al., 2011, p.179)	<p>“They were kind. Hardly ever yelled” (Tom, p.179)</p> <p>“I think it’s that feeling where you can talk to them like another student, kind of thing. So you can relate to them, they can relate to you and then they can help you through the hard work as well. So it’s better looking up to them, kind of thing” (Jack, p.179)</p> <p>“First of all they have to be understanding but firm. Any phyrysical attributes I wouldn’t care about...If they</p>	Mainstream	Unequivocal

		actually liked to come to work...Basically they would have to be able to relate to you a lot" (Matthew, p.179)		
Teacher characteristics	"All nine students identified understanding of students' needs as a significant teacher characteristic" (Saggers et al., 2011, p.179)	"I like my (SOSE) teacher. She's my second best teacher...I don't know, she's not strict but she does her job properly and she's just nice and she's understanding...Yeah, like she's not strict but she's not soft- [Interviewer: So she gives people room-] To breathe. But she still makes them do the work" (Don, p.179)	Mainstream	Equivocal
		"For starters, the teachers are a lot more understanding. Well in primary school for instance, like some of my other ones, you try to basically go to school all the time, but then there's certain things-like you tell them something and they just wouldn't listen (Matthew, p.179)		
Teacher characteristics	"Teachers who understood their students appeared to be firm but reasonable. They created a structured but flexible learning environment" (Saggers et al., p.179)	"The teachers were firm but they weren't over the top. They were nice to you. I have nice teachers who still do their job" (Don, p.179)	Mainstream	Equivocal
		"A bit, a bit of structure yeah. I mean our math teacher does have structure, but well he just seems to have less of it than the other teachers I have... Well, I mean he's still, he's a bit lenient, but not as much as my other teachers and he's, well he does, he is a bit, I think he's a bit strict sometimes" (Oscar, p.179)		
		"Maybe not treating everyone the same. Thinking of their own strengths and weaknesses and stuff" (Don, p.179)		

		“My math teacher...because she thinks I’m a good student because I’m really good a maths. If I’ve finished my maths she’ll give me a Suduko” (Rebecca, p.179).		
Curriculum Related Issues	“Of the nine students interviewed, eight found it hard to cope with a tight work schedule such as having exams or assignments due close together and submitting assignments on time” (Saggers et al., 2011, p.179)	<p>“Sometimes it’s a bit crazy how we all have to hand in all the assignments all at once” (Sally, p.179)</p> <p>“The work...well it’s hard and ...If I’m going to dail, sort of, yeah and if I want to hand it in on time” (Oscar, p.180)</p> <p>“Sometimes I get pretty freaked out about assignments” (Sally, p.180)</p> <p>“I don’t really like English all that much. It’s too much work...too much writing, and too much assignments...I don’t like homework” (Rebecca, p.180)</p> <p>“It would be assignments I think. Getting them done I think” (Hudson, p.180)</p>	Mainstream	Unequivocal
Curriculum Related Issues	“The students found their workload overwhelming and stressful” (Saggers et al., 2011, p.180)	<p>“May the stress of knowing that this is what is going to help me get into the workforce and the Ops and homework, that’s about it” (Jack, p.180)</p> <p>“Only if things get overwhelming with work and stuff” (Matthew, p.180)</p>	Mainstream	Equivocal
Curriculum Related Issues	“Most students found the demand for handwriting as a significant problem in their school performance. They found it physically demanding and exhausting” (Saggers et al., 2011, p.180)	<p>“Well my arm, my finger here gets a bit sore because I, you know, I’ve got a callous here...And well it just sort of hurts my arm when I write a lot. Well I, I see my handwriting as neat. Well sometimes it is. Sometimes it isn’t” (Oscar, p.180)</p> <p>“Probably how much there is...Yeah it eventually gets...exhausting” (Tom, p.180)</p>	Mainstream	Equivocal
Support Mechanisms	“The majority of students expressed their appreciation for being able to	“Just if I didn’t have it, I’d probably be in much worse condition” (Matthew, p.181)	Mainstream	Unequivocal

	access specialist support from staff (such as special education teachers) who understood them” (Saggers et al., 2011, p.181)	<p>“They just support me more” (Tom, p.181)</p> <p>“Because you get more help and there’s not that many kids in one class” (Rebecca, p.181)</p> <p>“I think I’m pretty fond of _____. It’s for me, it helps me, so yeah, I’m fine with it” (Jack, 181)</p>		
Support Mechanisms	“Students found support for managing personal matters and developing social skills, in addition to support for academic work, beneficial” (Saggers et al., 2011, p.191)	<p>“Like with some things it’s sometimes not curriculum or stuff like that I need help with. It’s maybe just personal stuff, which is good. It also helps” (Matthey, p.181)</p> <p>“Yeah, yeah...and also unit tutorials we get down here in school, in the unit...And we also do this social skills which helps us socialise” (Oscar, p.181)</p>	Mainstream	Unequivocal
Support Mechanisms	“Although the students appreciated support given by specialists and paraprofessionals, they wanted it to be done subtly and skillfully, especially in the mainstream classroom. Neither Oscar, Don nor Sally liked to be singled out to get help” (Saggers et al., 2011, p.181)	<p>“Well, I sort of feel a bit well, just different, when I get, when I’m the one getting help...No, but I just don’t like it when I get, sort of like, treated differently” (Oscar, p.181)</p> <p>“Sort of, I just don’t like them making it so obvious” (Don)</p> <p>“Sometimes I guess, but I don’t like it sometimes. Actually most of the time. I don’t like teachers sitting next to me. [Interviewer: What if they’re helping everybody in the class, not just you is that okay?] That makes me feel better” (Sally)</p>	Mainstream	Unequivocal
Friendships & Socialising	“The majority of students reported that they had friends at their highschool” (Sagers et al., 2011, p.182)	N/A	Mainstream	Unsupported
Friendships & Socialising	“Some students, however, had difficulty in sharing a friendship” (Saggers et al., 2011, p.182)	“I’ve got a sort of semi-friend, David, although he gets a bit annoyed with me at times	Mainstream	Equivocal

Friendships & Socialising	<p>“Students had mixed feelings about socialising. For many socialising meant conversing, an activity that caused mixed feelings” (Saggers et al., 2011, p.182)</p>	<p>Interviewer: So you sort of hang around with David a little bit? Just a little bit, yeah. You know, depending on which way the wind’s blowing. Interviewer: Whether you feel in the mood or not? “Not really whether it’s my moods, rather it’s his moods” (Hudson)</p> <hr/> <p>“I sit with my friends, but I hardly socialise with them. Interviewer: Don’t you? No. I sort of find that boring...even though it is good to socialise.... Interviewer: When you talk about socialise, what do you mean by socialise? Just, just like say, oh how did such and such go and stuff. Interviewer: Okay, so you don’t tend to initiate anything? Just small talk. Interviewer: Yeah. You don’t tend to...keep things going? No. Cause I just find it a bit, well, difficult cause I can’t really remember...I mean when I say, when somebody says hellp to me I say...I’ll give you an example. It’s just when sombody says hello, I sort of say the wrong thing and well, when they say hello, I hardly every say hellp such and such... (Omission)... Well I do like socialise sometimes, but not that much. Interviewer: When? Like in what sort of situations do you socialise? When it’s about something I like.</p>	Mainstream	Equivocal
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		Interviewer: So things like history or animals ors? Some, yeah, and also military stuff” (Oscar)		
Teasing & Bullying	“All of the students experienced teasing and bullying, from verbal to physical” (Saggers et al., 2011, p.183)	“Everybody’s teasing me” (Steve, p.183) “I know now, never to respond to my name in public. It’s been discarded forever and ever...Don’t respond when someone calls out your name. So I just keep on walking no matter how many times they call it-even if they’re a nice person. I just won’t turn around” (Sally, p.183) “Some of the students just don’t understand certain situations. And some of them call me mentally retarded” (Matthey, p.183)	Mainstream	Unequivocal
Teasing & Bullying	“Students tended to be less sensitive to more subtle forms of bullying such as verbal aggression and were reluctant to disclose information to relevant staff, unless it became persist and extreme in nature” (Saggers et al., 2011, p.183)	“Some of it you just basically don’t really need to, because as long as they don’t do anything physically harmful to me, there’s no point” (Matthew, p.183) “It would depend on the problem” (Hudson, p.183)	Mainstream	Equivocal
Teasing & Bullying	“Students’ reluctance to report bullying and teasing to school staff seemed to be partly related to problems differentiating between an intention to bully and a desire to make a friendship. Students were aware that they often misinterpreted their peers’ interactions as bullying or teasing” (Saggers et al., 2011, p.183)	“There’s on from the same grade, but there’s some of the older ones but I don’t know their names. I just know their faces” (Matthew, p.183) “Well no, once you count the idiots who come over to me at lunch and reckon ‘do you want to go to [unclear] because you’re our friend, come on, you’re my friend’, sort of thing. Interviewer: Do you think that’s teasing? I think it’s a bit annoying, I think they’re being total idiots, but no” (Hudson, p.183)	Mainstream	Unequivocal

		“Well nobody teases me that much. It’s just sort of interpret it the wrong way as teasing, when they’re just jibing me. Just for fun I guess. Yeah. But friendly” (Oscar, p.183)		
Environmental Considerations	“Learning and participation are also affected by the physical learning environment of an inclusive education setting. Some physical factors, such as noise and crowding, make inclusive life harder” (Saggers et al., 2011, p. 183)	“...I think it would have to be-you know some of the children in class like to make a lot of noise and racket and they’re just a bit too noisy and stuff like that. I reckon those types of students that try and stand out; those are the hardest thing here” (Matthew, p.184)	Mainstream	Equivocaldsf
		“I don’t like it when there’s, you know, the rooms are-when they’re cramped, well just small” (Oscar, p.184)		

Appendix G: Synthesised Findings**Table G.1***Data Synthesis Summary*

Extracted Finding	Category	Synthesised Finding	Overall Theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The girls wanted to have friendships and to fit in with other girls, but their notion of having friendships did not always work out in practice” (Cook et al., 2018, p.307) • “Participants saw friendships as an important basis for belonging and as beneficial for their school experience....Participants suggested that their overall happiness in school was largely impacted by having a friendship” (Myles et al., 2019, p.13) • “Pupils spoke about the social security that comes through peer relationships. For some, close physical proximity to friends was important to enable them to feel confident in a large secondary school environment” (Myles et al., 2019, p.13) • “Participants also discussed their experiences of managing complex social dynamics within groups of friends. Many expressed a preference for having one key friend, or a small peer group, as opposed to being part of a large social network” (Myles et al., 2019, p.15) 	<p>Some female students expressed a desire to have close friendships and perceived friendships to be imperative for a positive school experience.</p>	<p>Some female students expressed a desire to have close friends. Where friendship formation is</p>	<p>Peer Relationships</p>

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- “The tendency to befriend others with autism or other differences enabled them to [the girls] to feel accepted and to be themselves” (Cook et al., 2018, p.307)
 - “In general, there was a tendency for participants to befriend others with autism, those who respected and accepted them and those of a matched level of with similar interests” (Cook et al., 2016, p.259)
 - “One significant factor [in enabling more positive experiences at school] was the presence of supportive friends” (Cook et al., 2016, p.263)
 - “Friends were important to students, lessening their sense of loneliness” (Danker et al., 2019, p.135)
 - “A few students perceived non-academic clubs as having a positive effect on their wellbeing by enabling them to establish friendships” (Danker et al., 2019, p.136)
 - “Camaraderie, signifying goodwill and a positive rapport among classmates was a positive peer interaction” (Healy et al., 2013, p.224)
 - The social isolation and bullying experienced by so many of our sample was counteracted in some instances by support from (and
-

When students successfully formed friendships, this helped to facilitate positive sense of self and self-acceptance. Successful friendships often involved befriending others with matched interests/differences who enable them to feel accepted and valued.

successful, a positive sense of self and acceptance was facilitated.

often enduring friendships with) peers (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.35)

- “The importance of such [peer support] in facilitating a positive sense of self cannot be overstated” (Humphrey & Lewis, p.2008, p.35)
 - Three participants “were able to identify themselves with an aspect of a peer group” (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.70)
 - Participants set apart particular qualities that set apart people who they would consider their friends” (Myles et al., 2019, p.13)
 - “The companionship that came with having one key friend was seen as particularly important” (Myles et al., p.13)
 - “Participants emphasised social inclusion as a key aspect of belonging, giving examples of instances where their peers had acknowledged them and made them feel valued” (Myles et al., 2019, p.14)
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- “Most found it difficult to fit into friendships groups” (Cook et al., 2018, p.308)
 - “A second challenge regarding relationships was the inability to keep friends, and more generally-social isolation” (Cook et al., 2018, p.308)
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- “Boys ranged from having no friends at all to having many” (Cook et al., 2016, p.257)
 - “..Students shared that they had issues interacting with others, which impeded their ability to form friendships” (Danker et al., 2019, p.135)
 - “Bullying...led to feelings of social isolation and loneliness which arose from having no close friends, or having no one to whom to relate despite making efforts to build relationship” (Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019, p.307)
 - “Parents maintained that their children were often isolated in school and lacked friends” (Hay & Winn, 2005, p.147)
 - “The students perceived the secondary school environment to be a demanding and complex social environment” (Hay & Winn, 2005, p.148)
 - “Most children reported having limited friendship circles and found social interaction, both inside and outside the classroom, a challenge” (Howard et al., 2019, p.16)
 - “Pupils experienced increasing levels of social isolation” (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.35)
-

Adolescent and primary-aged students described feelings of social isolation and loneliness within the school setting arising from difficulties with social interactions and “fitting in” in addition to isolation arising from peer rejection/exclusion. Experiences of social isolation were described in all studies which focused on the experiences of females with ASD.

Peer Relationships

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- Three participants -feeling of being “alone and isolated” (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.70)
 - “In the playground that the girls’ impairments in social interaction were most apparent” (Moyses & Porter, 2015, p.193)
 - “Participants described experiences where they did not feel part of a social group” (Myles et al., 2019, p.14)
 - “Participants made reference to social situations where they did not feel listened to, or their contribution not valued by others” (Myles et al., 2019, p.14)
 - “Some students, however described difficulty in sharing a friendship” (Saggers et al., 2011, p.182)
-

Social isolation and bullying were common experiences for students. Bullying appeared more intentional in the mainstream setting where the social and sensory vulnerabilities of students with ASD were sometimes purposely exploited by neurotypical peers.

- “Girls from both types of school setting reported having been bullied. There was a definite sense, however that many of the incidents in special school settings were due to other children’s special needs...the bullying endured by the girls in mainstream schools appeared more intentional” (Cook et al., 2018, p.308-309)
 - Many participants (5/11) reported incidents of bullying including verbal bullying, physical bullying, theft, vandalism and frequent goading. The most obvious disparity identified between
-

Experiences of bullying were frequently recounted by students with ASD. Bullying endured in mainstream settings appeared more intentional, where the social naivety or sensory triggers of students were sometimes purposely exploited by neurotypical peers or students perceived themselves to be targeted for being “different” by peers.

mainstream and special schools within this study was the degree of bullying” (Cook et al., 2016 p.259)

- “At times the bullying was more subtle and seemed to reflect an understanding by peers of specific actions what would upset someone with autism” (Cook et al., 2016, p.259)
 - Both the boys and their mothers also described the schools’ (mainstream) failure to handle bullying” (Cook et al., 2016, p.261)
 - “Seven students felt that mean and annoying peers were barriers to their wellbeing” (Danker et al., 2019, p.136)
 - “Some students experienced bullying in mainstream” (Goodall, 2019, p.22)
 - Participants “spoke readily about these experiences” [of bullying] (Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019, p.507)
 - “The students with AS frequently complained of teasing from other students, which for some students triggered aggressive responses” (Hay & Winn, 2005, p.148)
 - “Negative peer interactions were also frequently reported, bullying was the most extreme consequence that resulted from this conflict” (Healy et al., 2013, p.225)
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- “Several of the students recounted stories that appeared to involve bullying by their peers, although the students themselves sometimes appeared unsure of how to interpret these experiences” (Hill, 2014, p.85)
 - “One characteristic of AS that appeared to be frequently used for exploitative purposes by other pupils was the social naivety exhibited by many of our sample. The eagerness with which many pupils with AS seek friendship, juxtaposed with their difficulties understanding the subtleties and nuances of social interaction, makes them easy targets for ridicule” (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.33)
 - “Bullying and teasing were experienced at different levels of severity and regularity by nearly all of them” (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.33)
 - Participants “experience being rejected and bullied” (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.71)
 - “All of the students experienced teasing and bullying, from verbal to physical” (Saggers et al., 2011, p.183)
 - “Students tended to be less sensitive to more subtle forms of bullying such as verbal aggression and were reluctant to
-

disclose information to relevant staff, unless it became persistent in nature” (Saggers et al., 2011, p.183)

- “Many girls reported high levels of stress and anxiety, resulting in them feeling overwhelmed and upset” (Cook et al., p.308).
 - Students referred to the “overwhelming nature of mainstream school” (Goodall, 2019, p.21)
 - Participant “highlighted the negative impact mainstream schooling was having on her wellbeing” and “found large numbers of people and general chaos of secondary school to be overwhelming” (Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019, p.506)
 - “Although not present in every account, anxiety, anger and apathy were also common features of the children’s school experiences” (Howard et al., 2019, p.16)
 - “For some the stress and anxiety seemed to simply overwhelm them” (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.38)
 - When asked to describe their feelings about school both provided intensely negative words” (Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019, p.596)
 - “The data revealed all three girls presented with behaviours that marked them out from their peers. They appeared to be personal
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Students reported high levels of stress and anxiety within the school environment which was often experienced as overwhelming.

**Anxiety &
Stress within
the School
Environment**

modifications to the demands of the school day and were indicative of high levels of anxiety” (Moyses & Porter, 2015, p.194)

- “Participants often identified making mistakes at school as a distressing experience” (Howard et al., 2019, p.15)
 - Participant “worried about getting into trouble, getting work done properly or falling behind” (Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019, p.507)
 - “Anxiety relating to exams was apparent in this group of young people. Whilst some comments related to generalised feelings of performance anxiety, predominantly, discussions focused on the context in which exams were taken” (Hill, 2014, p.84)
 - “Homework in itself was one feature of the curriculum that acted as a barrier to enjoying mainstream education” (Goodall, 2019, p.22)
 - “Of the nine students interviewed, eight found it hard to cope with a tight work schedule such as having exams or assignments due close together and submitting assignments on time” (Saggers et al., 2011, p.179)
-

Students experienced anxiety relating to academic and curricular demands.

Students reported high levels of stress and anxiety within the mainstream school environment which was often experienced as overwhelming. Learning and curricular demands in addition to sensory stimuli were experienced by many as sources of heightened anxiety.

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- “The students found their workload overwhelming and stressful” (Saggers et al., 2011, p.180)

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- “The processing of sensory information can also be challenging” (Cook et al., 2016, p.260)

- “Noise and echoes in school posed a barrier to half of the participating students. Students disliked noisy classrooms and echoes from canteens and school bells” (Danker et al., 2019, p.135)

The sensory stimuli encompassed in the mainstream school environment was a source of stress and anxiety for students with ASD, impeding their participation in school activities and learning.

- “Noise interfered with students’ learning and ability to concentrate” (Danker et al., 2019, p.135)
 - “Sensory issues seemed to inhibit the quality of participation for some students...Most commonly, these sensory issues resulted in response to auditory, heat and tactile sensitivity” (Healy et al., 2013, p.224)
 - “Each of the young people had particular areas within the school environment in which they experienced anxiety or stress” (Hill, 2014, p.83)
 - “Excessive or background noise was deemed to be a barrier to learning for some of the children” (Howard et al., 2019, p.16)
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- “The school environment itself was a considerable source of anxiety” (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.37)
 - Participant “found the overwhelming nature of the school cafeteria, the social hub of the school, too much. She spoke of the social pressure, the dread of the unknown she felt at break and at lunch times” (Goodall & McKenzie, 2019, p.208)
 - “Learning and participation are also affected by the physical environment of an inclusive education setting. Some physical factors, such as noise and crowding, make inclusive life harder” (Saggers et al., 2011, p.183)

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- “A few students also found several places in school such as the school garden or library useful in generating calmness” (Danker et al., 2019)
 - “Five boys wanted more breaks and areas to go to de-stress within school to recalibrate and refocus” (Goodall, 2019, p.24)
 - “...concern about classroom noise and the need for the students to have a quiet place to work” (Hay & Winn, 2005, p.146)
 - “The support based was an area identified by the young people as providing a ‘calm and relaxing’ (Andi) environment in which they were able to spend break and lunchtimes (Hill, 2014, p. 84)
-

Students sought a sense of sanctuary from the sensory demands of mainstream school environment from specially designated areas where they could destress and self-regulate. For some students, the restricted access policy for designated calming spaces/support spaces was an important feature.

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- “An important feature of the support base commented on by [participants] was that only identified pupils were able to access it” (Hill, 2014, p.85)
 - “Outside of break-times and lunchtimes, the support base was viewed as a place to retreat in times of difficulty” (Hill, 2014, p.85)
 - “This environment provided a space in which they could fully relax, or perhaps they felt that within this environment their special interests would be better tolerated (Hill, 2014, p.85)
 - “We found evidence of simple adaptations that can help to break down such barriers to learning and participation” (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.38)
 - “Participants also discussed the importance of the safety and support provided by aspects of the school environment” (Myles et al., 2019, p.13)

Students sought sanctuary in particular areas within school environment in which they could destress and self-regulate including specially designated support bases. Where students made modifications independently to cope with the school environment, they sometimes sought to mark them out as “different” or distance them from peers.

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- “In the absence of a dedicated safe haven [participant] found his own space to de-stress- the toilet” (Goodall, 2019, p.24)
 - “The data revealed all three girls presented with behaviours that marked them out from their peers. They appeared to be personal

Some students independently made adaptations to help them avoid aspects of the school environment they found anxiety-provoking. These adaptations sometimes further distanced them from

<p>modifications to the demands of the school day and were indicative of high levels of anxiety” (Moyses & Porter, p.194)</p>	<p>peers and marked them out as “different”</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Whilst the young people spoke appreciatively about the supports that had been put into place for them, they had also created their own ways of solving problems” (Hill, 2014, p.86) 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Feeling unsupported by teachers was common for all seven boys” [in mainstream] (Goodall, 2019, p.23) • Participants referred to “Lack of teacher support experienced in mainstream” (Goodall & Mac Kenzie, 2019, p.509) • “Some teachers appeared to lack understanding of individual pupils’ needs and as a result felt less confident to differentiate their work themselves, instead depending on support staff to prepare work for a pupil...In some cases pupils had little or no actual interaction with class teachers” (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.39) • “Seemingly harmless classroom approaches can exacerbate feelings of social isolation” (Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019, p.508) • “The students conveyed that they had difficulty in dealing with teachers who often expressed their anger by yelling at students” (Sagger et al., 2011, p.178) 	<p>Some students reported feeling unsupported and not understood by their teachers in mainstream secondary settings.</p>	<p>Some students in mainstream secondary settings report a lack of teacher support and understanding. Conversely, some students in a specialist setting reported that the small class sizes facilitated supportive teacher-student relationships.</p>

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- “Benefits of smaller class sizes, in that this affords the teacher time to build relationships and be able to help each pupil” (Goodall, 2019, p.26)
 - “Connection teachers in the AEP make and build with the young people” (Goodall, 2019, p.27)
 - “Personal attributes such as teachers being personable and showing an interest in them are important” (Goodall, 2019, p.24)
 - “From the students’ perspectives the helpfulness of the special education staff was one of the more valued aspects of their experience” (Hay & Winn, 2005, p.148)
 - “All participants reported positive relationships with members of staff” (Howard et al., 2019, p.16)
 - ““Daily ‘meet and greet sessions’ with their key teaching assistants provided opportunities at the beginning of each day to express any concerns with a trusted adult and to have their timetable discussed in detail. Teaching assistants were seen as a source of guidance when difficulties were encountered, or when schoolwork was too difficult” (Hill, 2014, p.84)
- Some students in a special class setting, reported that the small class sizes enable the teacher to build a supportive connection with them. Positive relationships with school staff were also reported by younger primary-aged pupils in mainstream settings. Supportive relationships with staff were reported by some students as helping to alleviate stress in school.
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- “Some pupils appeared to perceive the support they received as appropriate and as helping to ease their anxieties about school” (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.38)
 - “Participants also discussed the importance and support provided by aspects of the school environment” (Myles et al., 2019, p.13)
 - “The majority of students expressed their appreciation for being able to access specialist support from staff (such as special education teachers who understood them)” (Saggers et al., 2011, p.181)
 - “Students found support for managing personal matters and developing social skills, in addition to support for academic work, beneficial” (Saggers et al., 2011, p.191)

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- “A desire to be treated like the rest of their peers, perhaps as a way to minimise the perceived impact of ‘it’ on their lives, was expressed” (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.68)
 - “Participants discussed the ways in which staff spoke to them when they found out they had a diagnosis of autism, and suggested that this could often lead to differential treatment” (Myles et al., 2019, p.15)
-

Some students discussed the “differential treatment” which they experienced when staff were informed of their ASD diagnosis, which they felt caused an underestimation of their abilities.

**Support
from School
Staff**

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- “Although the students with AS were supportive of the special education staff not all of the adolescent students wished to be ‘identified’ as needing help and did not want to be seen as different by their peers” (Hay & Winn, 2005, p.158)
 - Participants “discussed their emerging sense of independence. It was evident that [participant] valued the support of his TA, but he did not wish to have her support at all times” (Hill, 2014, p.86)
 - “The visibility of additional support provided often made the pupils feel that their differences were accentuated” (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.38)...”Having a member of support staff ‘shadowing’ them in lessons immediately impeded pupils’ attempt to blend in with the rest of the class” (Humphrey & Lewis, p.39)
 - “Only two adolescents not to refer to a negative social implication of having a TA” (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.69)
 - “In some instances we saw examples of support being offered in a more ‘subtle way’, wherein support staff would not always sit in the immediate proximity of the pupil..and who also offered
-

Adolescents described how the visibility of TA support accentuated their sense of being “different” and had negative social implications. A more subtle approach was perceived by some as more acceptable.

Adolescent students described how “differential treatment” from staff following disclosure of their ASD diagnosis and the visibility of TA support accentuated their sense of being “different” and had negative social implications

more general support to the class” (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.40)

- For two participants “the level of support had been reduced, which they saw as a positive thing” (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.69)
- “Although the students appreciated support given by specialists and paraprofessionals, they wanted it to be done subtly and skillfully, especially in the mainstream classroom. Neither Oscar, Don nor Sally liked to be singled out to get help” (Saggers et al., 2011, p.181)

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- Both girls expressed how they felt different from their peers” (Goodall & MacKenzie, p.508)
 - “Of those who talked about themselves and their AS in negative terms, the notion of ‘being different’ or ‘not normal’ appeared to underlie their comments” (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.31)
 - “Constant negotiation of their differences in the context of school” (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.30)
 - Student referred to fact that he did not “want to be different” from his peers but was “not sure how to be like everyone else really” (Hill, 2014, p.85)
-

Adolescent students often construed themselves as “different” peers in a negative sense, considering themselves as not being “normal” or “like everybody else”.

Many adolescent students construed themselves as “different” from peers in a negative sense. This negative self-appraisal was underpinned by social comparison centred around issues of “normalcy” and “fitting in”, internalisation of the negative perceptions of peers towards the self

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant described how he was “different from the normal people” (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.68) 	<p>and a focus on the negative implications of ASD.</p>	<p>Sense of Self Construction</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Anger and a desire for change regarding the lifelong nature of AS was communicated by three participants” (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.66) Participants “described how they felt AS caused them to have difficulty fitting in with their peer group” (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.68) Participant “expressed how she was judged for having Asperger’s, and both [participants] stated that the condition makes it hard for them to socialise” (Goodall & MacKenzie, 2010, p.508) “None of the children interviewed in this study except Jokubus described themselves as “different”, despite the potential “double difference” to their peers of being bilingual and having autism. This is perhaps because most of the children in the current study had little awareness of their autism diagnosis.” (Howard et al., 2019, p.17) 	<p>Students who described themselves as “different” sometimes talked about the implications of their ASD in negative terms.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant “highlighted that peers, as has been reported elsewhere in the literature (Sprouston, Sedgewick & Crane, 	<p>Social comparisons and internalisation of the negative perceptions of peers towards the self were</p>	

<p>2017), did not wish to befriend her because of judgements about her disability” (Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019, p.508)</p>	<p>mechanisms which contributed to negative sense of self construction.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “It is likely that these pupils have constructed their view of themselves and their AS through the feedback they receive from others” (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.31) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants (2) “talked painfully of their memories of their behaviour during primary school and junior high...impact of previous behaviour on how peers viewed” (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.67) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Negative social comparisons also contributed to difficult PE experiences” (Healy et al.,2013, p.225) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The realisation of the chronic impact of their AS centred around comparison to or reaction from the rest of their peers” (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.67) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants feelings about self “appeared to be directly linked to the quality of social interactions” (Moyses & Porter, 2015, p.195) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “A subset of pupils for whom AS was simply part of ‘who they were’: in other words, they had grown to accept and even celebrate” (Humphrey & Lewis, p.32) 	

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- “Participant, at this point of his life did not see having AS as a ‘problem’” (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.68)
 - “None of the children interviewed in this study except Jokubus described themselves as “different”, despite the potential “double difference” to their peers of being bilingual and having autism. This is perhaps because most of the children in the current study had little awareness of their autism diagnosis.” (Howard et al., 2019, p.17)
-
- “Academically, this was seen as a positive difference, in that it was the source of having more intelligence than their peers” (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.67)
 - “Both pupils in the above examples make reference to their friends when discussing how they have come to accept themselves and their AS” (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.32)
 - One of two boys benefited from having built their self-esteem through their achievements and responsibilities” (Cook et al., 2016, p.262)
 - “Having a special talent was particularly beneficial as a protective factor” (Cook et al., 2016, p.263)
-
- being able to relate to peers appeared to be protective factors in facilitating an acceptance of self.
- Having special talents/achievements, an appreciation of “assets” associated with Asperger’s ASD, having supportive friends and being able to relate to peers appeared to be protective factors in facilitating an acceptance of self.

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- “Students discussed the important of their own awareness of their disability” (Danker et al., 2019)
 - For some, being in an environment with other young people for whom mainstream education was challenging “created a strong feeling of similarity, camaraderie and belonging- a feeling of being included” (Goodall, 2019, p.26)
 - “Three children reflected independently on their experiences of autism” (Howard et al., 2019, p.15)

-
- “Many reported how well their daughters coped or how they made adjustments to their behaviour in order to fit in” (Cook et al., 2018, p.309)
 - Where pupils’ success in submerging themselves in the social world of the school was dependent on the perceived ‘normality’ or ‘abnormality’ of their behaviour, our findings suggests that they feel forced to adapt themselves (and in doing so compromise their identities) (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.40)
 - “Constant process of trying to adapt to their social world” (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.68)
 - “(Hiding) was a recurring theme for all three girls” (Moyses & Porter, 2015, p.195)
-

Some students attempt to suppress their sense of difference by observing and mirroring the behaviour of peers and masking their true feelings in an effort to “fit in” with their social world in school.

Many students attempt to negotiate and suppress their sense of difference by observing and mirroring the behaviour of peers and not disclosing their ASD diagnosis in an attempt to “fit in” with social world in school.

**Responding
to Sense of
Self as
“Different”**

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- “The girls’ behaviour also masked their true feelings” (Moyses & Porter, 2015, p.195)
 - “Pupils explained the social benefits of behaving in a way that pleases others and being able to adapt their behaviour to ensure positive interactions with peers” (Myles et al., 2019, p.14)
 - “For several of the young people, having access to areas where they could observe their neuro-typical peers was as important as having access to the security of identified and protected zones” (Hill, 2014, p.85)
 - “The young people in this study showed an interest in their mainstream peers and several of them went to great lengths to make themselves aware of the activities in which these peers engaged” (Hill, 2014, p.85)

-
- “Some girls were reluctant to be labelled and preferred to conceal their differences” (Cook et al., 2018, p.310)
 - “Students differed on their decisions to disclose their disability to their friends” (Danker et al., 2019, p. 137)
 - “For some pupils, any level of disclosure was seen as a barrier to their ability to be considered ‘normal’” (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.40)
-

Some students attempt to avoid being perceived and treated as “different” by others by actively choosing not to disclose their ASD diagnosis.

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- “All of the adolescents had made a considered and active choice whether to tell their peers about their diagnosis” (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014, p.69)
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Appendix H: Case Study Protocol *(Guided by Yin (2018))*

Section A: An Overview of the Case Study (objectives and auspices, case study issues, and relevant readings about the topic being investigated)

Background Information

School has long been recognised as a site of critical importance in the development of sense of self, or how one comes to describe and evaluate themselves (Hodge et al., 2019; Harter, 2015; Sylva, 1994; Mussweiler, 2003). The influence of school on sense-making about the self, becomes particularly salient from around eight years of age, due to increased engagement in social comparison with peers, as per established developmental theories of self-concept (Damon & Hart, 1988; Harter 2012).

Williams et al., (2019) conducted a large-scale meta-synthesis to integrate the corpus of qualitative research examining how pupils with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) make sense of themselves within the context of their school experiences. They found that pupils with ASD often construe themselves as “different” to neurotypical peers in a negative sense due to three intermeshing aspects of school experiences i.e. ASD associated difficulties, interpersonal relationships and accessibility of the school environment. However, studies included in the meta-synthesis largely represented the experiences of verbally/cognitively able male adolescents attending mainstream secondary settings (Williams et al., 2019). Therefore, little is known about how younger and less cognitive/verbally able children with ASD attending specialist educational provision perceive themselves in the context of their educational experiences. To bridge this gap, the proposed study aims to investigate how children with ASD, aged eight to twelve years, make sense of themselves and their experiences in special ASD classes within mainstream Irish primary schools. Parental and teacher perspective on the child’s sense of self and school experiences will also be elicited.

Overarching Research Question

The proposed study aims to investigate the following overarching research question:

How do children with ASD perceive themselves in the context of their school experiences in special ASD classes within mainstream primary schools.

Conceptual Framework for the Study

Scant research has thus far examined how primary-aged children with ASD enrolled in special educational provision engage in the process of sense-making about the self in the context of their educational experiences. As such, there is a distinct absence of

an existing knowledge base which would lend to the development of explicit theoretical propositions or hypotheses to underpin the research design. The proposed multiple-case study is therefore exploratory in its design (Yin, 2018). However, in the absence of explicit theoretical propositions, three research objectives were formulated to give direction to the research:

- What are the lived school experiences of the child in terms of interpersonal relationships, curriculum/ learning and accessibility of the school environment?
- How does the child make sense of him/herself in the social context of school?
- Does special provision within a mainstream school influence how the child makes sense of him/herself, and if so, in what ways?

Criteria for Selection of Cases

Adopting a purposive convenience sampling method (Cohen et al., 2018), five child-parent-teacher triads (n=15) from five separate mainstream primary school sites will be recruited to participate in the study. While data will be collected from the child, his/her parents and teacher, the individual child will remain the “case” or unit of analysis (Yin, 2018). The following inclusionary criteria will be used for the selection of cases:

- ***Criteria 1: The child must have a formal diagnosis of ASD, as evidenced in their enrolment in a NCSE-sanctioned ASD special class attached to a mainstream primary school.***

Rationale: The research aims to explore how children with a diagnosis of ASD perceive themselves in the context of their school experiences.

- ***Criteria 2: The child must be enrolled in the ASD special class in the mainstream school for at least one previous school year.***

Rationale : To ensure that participants can provide insights on the child’s experiences within an established educational setting.

- ***Criteria 3: The child must be aged between eight-twelve years.***

Rationale: The influence of school on sense-making about the self, becomes particularly salient during middle childhood, due to increased engagement in social comparison with peers (Damon & Hart, 1988; Harter 2015).

Section B: Data collection procedures (procedures for protecting human subjects, identification of likely sources of data, presentation of credentials to field contacts, and other logistical reminders)

Procedures for Protecting Human Subjects

The research procedures received Ethics approval from the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC) (Approval Number: A20-015) on the 12th March 2020. Contingency plans due to Covid-19 adhered to research procedures priorly approved by MIREC.

Data Collection Methods

Parents and ASD Class Teachers

- *Semi-Structured Interviews:* Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with parent and teacher participants.

Child Participants

- *Background Measure:* The “*British Picture Vocabulary Scale-3rd Edition (BPVS-3)*” will be administered to each child participant to obtain an estimate of his/her receptive language level.
- “*Talking Mat*” *Interview:* Individual interviews with children will be mediated via a “Talking Mat” pictorial communication technique (Murphy & Cameron, 2008). This will involve the children sorting labelled pictures depicting relevant aspects of school experience (Williams et al., 2019) into “like”, “don’t like” and “unsure” categories on a “Talking Mat”. Children with verbal ability will be asked follow-up questions from a semi-structured interview schedule to ascertain the reasoning underpinning their likes/dislikes and related questions regarding their perception of self. The “Talking Mat” mat interview will also be video recorded to enable the researcher to code the interview for communicative effectiveness (Murphy and Cameron, 2008).

Procedures for protecting safety of participants in Covid-19 Context:

Parents and ASD Class Teachers

- Semi-Structured Interviews conducted via videoconferencing for health and safety reasons

Child Participants

- *Data collection session conducted adhering to school Covid-19 response policy:*
 - Interviewer wearing and chaperoning SNA wearing PPE (facemask)

- Interview conducted with 2 metre social distancing rules
- BPVS-3 and assent information story displayed digitally to facilitate social distancing and minimize transmission.
- All Talking Mat materials sanitized in presence of SNA prior to interview to ensure that Covid-19 is not transmitted via materials.

Data Collection Procedures

- **May 2020:** Recruitment email sent to principals of primary schools with ASD classes as per National Council for Special Education (NCSE) 2019/2020 list.
- **May/June 2020:** Phone call discussion with principals interested in facilitating the research project in their school (School 1, 2, 3, 4). Distribution of Information and Consent Forms to principals.
- **June 2020:** Case 1: Parent semi-structured interview and teacher semi-structured interview
- **September 2020:** Case 2 and Case 3 Data Collection.
- **October 2020:** Case 4 and Case 5 Data Collection. Child Interview for Case 1.

Expectations Prior to Data Collection:

- Return of principal consent form for permission for research to be conducted in school.
- Return of parent and teacher consent forms prior to parent and teacher semi-structured interviews.
- Return of parent consent form for child's participation in research study.

Section C: Protocol questions (the specific questions that the case study researcher must keep in mind in collecting data and the potential sources of evidence for addressing each question)

To explore to the overarching research question “*How do children with ASD perceive themselves in the context of their school experiences in special ASD classes within mainstream primary schools*”, the following protocol questions will be attended to throughout data collection:

Question 1: How does the child make sense of his/her lived experience in a special ASD class within a mainstream school in terms of interpersonal relationships, curriculum/ learning and accessibility of the school environment?

Sources of evidence: Teacher semi-structured interview, Parent semi-structured interview, Talking Mat interview with Child.

Question 2: How does the child perceive themselves in the social context of school? (How does he/she perceive him/herself as viewed by peers? How does the child describe him/herself in relation to peers?)

Sources of evidence: Teacher semi-structured interview, Parent semi-structured interview, Talking Mat interview with Child.

Question 3: Does the child's parent and ASD class teacher think that his specialist provision within a mainstream school influences how the child/pupil perceives him/herself, and if so, in what ways?

Sources of evidence: Teacher semi-structured interview, Parent semi-structured interview, Talking Mat Interview with Child

Section D: A tentative outline for the case study report (e.g. format for the data, use and presentation of other documentation, and bibliographic information)

Data Analysis

- a) Coding video of "Talking Mat" interviews for communicative effectiveness
- b) Scoring BPVS-3 responses
- c). IPA Data Analysis Sequence for Interview (Larkin et al., 2019):

Stage 1	Data preparation (transcription verbatim)
Stage 2	Reading and re-reading (immersion in an individual transcript taking notes of most striking points of interest)
Stage 3	Exploratory comments (Close line-by-line analysis of individual transcript via descriptive, linguistic and conceptual comments)
Stage 4	Developing emergent themes (within individual transcript)
Stage 5	Repetition of stages 2-4 for other two transcripts in individual case
Stage 6	Searching for patterns of connections across emergent themes within the individual case (ie. parent, teacher, child) leading to superordinate themes for the case
Stage 6	Repeat stages 2-6 for other four case studies

Stage 7 Cross-case synthesis leading to master superordinate and subthemes

Presentation of Results

- Presentation of cross-case synthesis themes in empirical paper (5,000 words).
- Individual Case Reports as appendices for within-case analyses.

Appendix I: Principal Recruitment Email

How do children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) attending special ASD classes in mainstream primary schools perceive themselves and their educational experiences?

Dear Principal,

My name is Eibhlín Ryan. I am currently completing a Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. For my doctoral thesis, I am exploring how students with ASD aged 8-12 enrolled in specialist ASD classes in mainstream schools view themselves and their educational experiences. I am undertaking this research under the supervision of Dr. Margaret Farrelly.

I am writing to invite your school to participate in my research project which will run until December 2020. Participation in the research would involve the participation of a child, aged 8-12 years enrolled in the ASD special class, the child's parent/guardian(s), and the child's ASD class teacher. Firstly, interviews would be conducted with the child's parent/guardian(s) and teacher. Due to the COVID-19 situation, these interviews would be conducted remotely via Skype. An interview with the child, would be facilitated in school via a communication technique called a "Talking Mat" interview which uses picture symbols to help children with communication difficulties indicate their thoughts, feelings and preferences about themselves and their school life. Due to the COVID-19 situation, the "Talking Mat" interview with the child would be conducted at a later date in the Autumn/Winter Term 2020, when deemed safe to do so by your school and abiding by all necessary social distancing and public health guidelines. Should it not be deemed safe to do so, the "Talking Mat" interview with the child may be conducted in the presence of a parent(s) via Skype. Parental consent is required for the child to participate in the study. Anonymity of all participating schools, students, parents and teachers is assured.

If you are interested in facilitating this research project within your school or would like to learn more about what participation in this research study would entail for your school, please contact me via return email and we can arrange a telephone call. For further information regarding this research project you can also contact my supervisor, Dr. Margaret Farrelly at margaret.farrelly@mic.ul.ie.

This research study has received Ethical approval from the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC) (Approval Number: A20-015). If you have concerns about this study and wish to

contact someone independent, you may contact: Mary Collins, MIREC Administrator, Research and Graduate School, Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Road, Limerick. Telephone: 061-204980 / E-mail: mirec@mic.ul.ie.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this email. I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to discuss this research opportunity with you further.

Kind Regards,

Eibhlín Ryan (*Trainee Educational Psychologist*)

Appendix J: Pen Portraits for Case Study Children

Case Study 1 Pupil Pen Portrait

Tom is a ten-year old pupil enrolled in an ASD class in School 1 and is at fourth class level. Tom was diagnosed with ASD at five-years of age by a regional Disability Service. He initially attended his local mainstream primary school but due to engagement difficulties in the mainstream setting, he transferred to an ASD class in School 1 towards the end of Junior Infants. Tom travels outside his locality to attend this school. School 1 is a small, rural school which has two ASD classes. The school has designated these two classes with Irish language names. Tom has had the same ASD teacher since transferring to School 1. Tom receives private Speech and Language Therapy support for language comprehension support. When in second-class, Tom began periods of mainstream integration for Religious Education classes. In third class, mainstream integration was expanded for Tom to include S.E.S.E subjects (history, science and geography) and P.E via reverse-integration, with mainstream pupils from third class and the ASD class learning together in the ASD class. Tom is unaware of his diagnosis of ASD.

Case Study 2 Pupil Pen Portrait

Eoin is an eleven-year-old pupil enrolled in an ASD class in School 2 and is at fifth class level. Eoin has a history of speech and language difficulties, and has been receiving speech and language therapy since two and a half years. He was diagnosed with ASD at four years of age. Eoin was enrolled in the ASD class in School 2 from the beginning of primary school. School 2 is medium-sized, rural school which has two ASD classes. The two ASD classes are differentiated according to age. All classes within the school have been designated Irish language names so that the ASD classes do not 'stand out' in terms of the language used to refer to different classrooms within the school. When in third class, Eoin began periods of mainstream integration. Eoin currently attends the ASD class for core subjects (literacy and numeracy) and therapeutic support (Occupational Therapy and Speech and Language programmes) for three hours per day. After lunch-time each day, Eoin integrates with the mainstream class for R.E, S.E.S.E, Visual Art, Music Education and Physical Education.

Case Study 3 Pupil Pen Portrait

Jakub is a twelve-year-old pupil enrolled in an ASD class in School 2 and is at sixth class level. Jakub was diagnosed with ASD at five-years of age by a Regional Disability Service, arising from an early history of speech and language difficulties and concerns about repetitive play patterns. Jakub was enrolled in the ASD class in School 2 from the beginning of primary school and was among the first cohort of children enrolled in this class following its establishment. Jakub travels outside his locality to attend this school, due to the provision of a ASD special class. School 2 is medium-sized, rural school which has two ASD classes. The two ASD classes are differentiated according to ages. All classes within the school have been designated Irish language names so that the ASD classes do not ‘stand out’ in terms of the language used to refer to different classrooms within the school. When in third class, Jakub began periods of mainstream inclusion. Jakub has now progressed to spending the majority of his day in the mainstream class, attending the ASD class for an hour each morning and for repair breaks throughout the day as required. Jackub is exempt from the study of Irish. Jakub will be transferring to a mainstream post-primary school within the forthcoming school year.

Case Study 4 Pupil Pen Portrait

Max is an eight-year-old pupil enrolled in an ASD class in School 3 and is at a second-class level. Max was diagnosed with ASD at four years of age, prior to commencing primary school. In a recent psycho-educational assessment, Max’s general learning ability was reportedly assessed as falling within the Average-High Average range. Max attends School 4, which is a large, urban primary school. When Max was in Senior Infants he was enrolled in the ASD class in this school. The ASD class is referred to within the school, utilising an Irish language term. Max’s school day is split evenly between the mainstream class and the ASD class setting. Curriculum focus during his time in the ASD class is reinforcement of literacy and numeracy skills and social-emotional skills teaching.

Case 5 Pupil Pen Portrait

Seán is an eleven-year-old pupil enrolled in an ASD class in School 4 and is at a sixth-class level. Seán received speech and language and physiotherapy intervention prior to commencing primary school. Seán was diagnosed with ASD at six years of age by an psychologist in private practice. Seán initially attended a mainstream primary-school for Junior and Senior Infants. Following his diagnosis of ASD, Seán’s parents requested a

transfer to School 4 to attend an ASD class there, due to concentration difficulties in the context of the mainstream classroom. School 4 is a large urban primary school which has a number of ASD classes. The ASD classes are differentiated according to age and are referred to using an Irish name. Seán is exempt from the study of Irish. Since fourth class, Seán has spent the majority of his school day in the mainstream class. He currently accesses the ASD class each afternoon for social skills groups and twice a week for independence skills. Seán is transferring to a local mainstream post-primary school, where he will be enrolled in an ASD class.

Appendix K: MIREC Ethics Approval Confirmation



Mary Immaculate College
Research Ethics Committee
MIREC-4: MIREC Chair Decision Form

APPLICATION NO.

A20-015

1. PROJECT TITLE

How do children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) attending special ASD classes in mainstream primary schools perceive themselves and their educational experiences? Child, parent and teacher insights

2. APPLICANT

Name:	Eibhin Ryan
Department / Centre / Other:	EPISE
Position:	Postgraduate Researcher

3. DECISION OF MIREC CHAIR

<input type="checkbox"/>	Ethical clearance through MIREC is required.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ethical clearance through MIREC is not required and therefore the researcher need take no further action in this regard.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ethical clearance is required and granted. Referral to MIREC is not necessary.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ethical clearance is required but the full MIREC process is not. Ethical clearance is therefore granted if required for external funding applications and the researcher need take no further action in this regard.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Insufficient information provided by applicant / Amendments required.

4. REASON(S) FOR DECISION

A20-015 - Eibhlin Ryan PGR – How do children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) attending special ASD classes in mainstream primary schools perceive themselves and their educational experiences? Child, parent and teacher insights

I have reviewed this application and I believe it satisfies MIREC requirements. It is, therefore, approved in full.

Suggestions: Eibhlin might like to note the following:

P.37 – Include line on SNA being present.

Ps. 41/42 – Include “guardian” wherever “parent” is written, including Titles of pages.

P.44 – How will this information be used/disseminated?

“The audio recording of the interview **will be** transcribed”

How will anonymity and confidentiality be kept?

“The anonymity and confidentiality of all participants and the school is assured. **(full stop)** All participants will be assigned a pseudonym.

P.49 – 3rd statement – typo - “pupul”

5. DECLARATION (MIREC CHAIR)

Name (Print):	Dr Áine Lawlor
Signature:	
Date:	12th March 2020

Appendix L: Informed Consent/Assent Documentation Principal Information Sheet



How do children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) attending special ASD classes in mainstream primary schools perceive themselves and their educational experiences?

Child, parent and teacher insights

What is this project about?

This study aims to explore how children with ASD, aged eight to twelve, who attend ASD classes within mainstream schools view themselves and their school experiences. Child-centred research methods are being employed in this research to capture the voice of children with ASD. Parent and teacher interviews are also being conducted as part of this research project, to elicit the insights of key adults in the child's life.

Who is undertaking it?

My name is Eibhlín Ryan and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist attending Mary Immaculate College. I am presently completing my Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology. The current research project will form part of my doctoral thesis. This research project is being supervised by Dr. Margaret Farrelly, a lecturer in the Department of Educational Psychology, Inclusive & Special Education, Mary Immaculate College.

Why is it being undertaken?

This research aims to capture the voice of primary-aged children with ASD who attend specialist educational settings, whose first-hand perspectives are largely absent in educational research. The research also aims to examine whether non-traditional interview approaches (ie. The "Talking Mat" visual communication tool) can enable children with ASD to express their views and opinions in a meaningful way.

What are the benefits and risks of this research?

It is hoped that this research will enhance our understanding of how children attending specialist ASD classes come to describe themselves and their school experiences. In doing so, this research may inform future educational policy and practice, in terms of how mainstream schools with ASD classes can foster a positive self-concept in children with ASD. By exploring the use of non-traditional interview approaches to capture the view of children with ASD, it is hoped that this research may provide teachers, psychologists, and other professionals with alternative approaches to listen to the first-hand perspectives of children with ASD. There are no foreseeable risks for children, parents or teachers participating in the study.

Exactly what would be involved for my school and pupils?

- ***Pupil Interview:*** With parental consent, one pupil with ASD, aged 8-12 years, enrolled in the ASD special class would be invited to engage in an individual face to face session (1 hour) with the Principal Investigator (Eibhlín Ryan). The pupil would first complete a short receptive vocabulary assessment. The pupil would then participate in a “Talking Mat” interview. This involves the pupil categorising pictures representing different aspects of school life into “like”, “unsure” or “dislike” categories. If verbal ability allows, the pupil may be asked follow-up questions about his/her “likes” or “dislikes” and how they view themselves in relation to peers in school. A Special Needs Assistant (SNA) who is familiar to the pupil would be asked to be present in the room throughout the session. A video recording would be taken of the session on a digital camcorder to allow the Principal Investigator (Eibhlín Ryan) to analyse the pupil’s verbal and non-verbal responses. Audio content from the video recording will also be transcribed and anonymised. This interview would be conducted in the Autumn/Winter 2020 term, adhering to Covid-19 Public Health Guidelines. Should it not be deemed safe for this research to be conducted in school, the “Talking Mat” interview with the pupil may be conducted in the presence of a parent/guardian(s) over Zoom.
- ***Teacher & Parent Interviews:*** The principal investigator (Eibhlín Ryan) would conduct separate interviews with the pupil’s parent /guardian(s) and ASD class teacher regarding their perspectives of the pupil’s school experience and perception of self. Due to the Covid-19 situation, these interviews may be conducted via Zoom, with the audio content of the interview recorded on a digital voice recorder. The interviews will be transcribed and anonymised. Each interview will last approximately 40-45 minutes.

Right to withdraw

All schools and participants are free to withdraw from participation in the research project at any time without giving a reason and without consequence. A red “stop” card will be provided for the child to indicate that they wish to cease involvement in the face-to-face session at any point.

How will this information be used/disseminated?

The Principal Investigator (Eibhlín Ryan) will review the video recording of the pupil interview to analyse his/her verbal and non-verbal responses. The audio content of the video recording will be transcribed. The audio-recordings of parent and teacher interviews will also be transcribed. Names of participants and schools will not be used when transcribing. A photograph of the pupil’s completed “Talking Mat” will be analysed for themes. The perspectives of the child, teacher and parent/guardian(s) will be combined with those of other participants to form the results/findings section of my doctoral thesis. Following completion of my thesis, these findings may also be published in articles in journals relating to inclusive education and autism.

How will anonymity and confidentiality be kept?

The anonymity and confidentiality of all participants and the school is assured. All participants will be assigned a pseudonym. These pseudonyms will be used during transcription of video (audio content) and audio-recordings to ensure anonymity of participants. Video and audio recordings will be encrypted and stored electronically on the researcher's password-protected computer. Following transcription of interviews, the video and audio recordings will be securely deleted. Prior to deletion, these recordings will only be viewed by the Principal Investigator (Eibhlín Ryan) and Research Supervisor (Dr. Margaret Farrelly).

What will happen to the data after research has been completed?

In accordance with the MIC Record Retention Schedule all anonymised research data will be stored indefinitely.

Contact details:

If at any time you have any queries / issues regarding this study, relevant contact details are as follows:

Principal Investigator: Eibhlín Ryan 10164561@micstudent.mic.ul.ie

Supervisor: Dr. Margaret Farrelly margaret.farrelly@mic.ul.ie.

This research study has received Ethics approval from the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC) (Approval Number: A20-015). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent authority, you may contact: Mary Collins, MIREC Administrator, Research and Graduate School, Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Road, Limerick. Telephone: 061-204980 / E-mail: mirec@mic.ul.ie

[PLEASE RETAIN THIS INFORMATION SHEET FOR YOUR RECORDS](#)

Principal Consent Form



How do children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) attending special ASD classes in mainstream primary schools perceive themselves and their educational experiences?

Child, parent and teacher insights

	<i>Please tick</i> ✓
I have read and understood the Principal Information Letter outlining the nature of the research project.	
I understand what participation in the research project involves for my school.	
I am aware that written parental consent must be provided for the child to participate in the research and for the child to be discussed during the researcher's interview with the ASD class teacher.	
I know that my school's participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw my consent for the research to be conducted within the school at any stage- without giving any reason and without consequence.	
I am aware that all data arising from the research will be anonymised to ensure that the school and participants are not identifiable.	
I understand that a SNA is required to chaperone the child during interview with the researcher.	
I consent for my school to participate in the research project " <i>How do children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) attending special ASD classes in mainstream schools perceive themselves and their educational experiences?</i> ".	

Name (PRINTED): _____

Name (Signature): _____

Date: _____

**Please return the signed consent form to Eibhlín at
10164561@micstudent.mic.ul.ie**

Thank You

Parent/Guardian Information Sheet



How do children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) attending special ASD classes in mainstream primary schools perceive themselves and their educational experiences?

Child, parent and teacher insights

What is this project about?

This study aims to explore how children with ASD, aged eight to twelve, who attend ASD classes within mainstream schools view themselves and their school experiences. The research will use child-centred research methods to capture the voice of children with ASD. Parent and teacher interviews will also be conducted as part of this research project, to gain the insights of key adults in the child's life.

Who is undertaking it?

My name is Eibhlín Ryan and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist attending Mary Immaculate College. I am presently completing my Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology. The current research project will form part of my doctoral thesis. This research project is being supervised by Dr. Margaret Farrelly, a lecturer in the Department of Educational Psychology, Inclusive & Special Education, Mary Immaculate College.

Why is it being undertaken?

This research aims to capture the voice of primary-aged children with ASD who attend specialist educational settings, whose first-hand perspectives are largely absent in educational research. The research also aims to examine whether non-traditional interview approaches (ie. The "Talking Mat" visual communication tool) can enable children with ASD to express their views and opinions in a meaningful way.

What are the benefits and risks of this research?

It is hoped that this research will enhance our understanding of how children attending ASD classes describe themselves and their school experiences. In doing so, this research may inform future educational policy and practice, in terms of how mainstream schools with ASD classes can foster a positive self-concept in children with ASD. It is hoped that this research may provide teachers, psychologists, and other professionals with alternative approaches to listen to the perspectives of children with ASD. There are no foreseeable risks for children, parents or teachers participating in the study. The researcher is aware that many children with ASD are unaware of their diagnosis, and so no questions/activities will refer specifically to

ASD.

Exactly what would be involved for my child and I should I consent?

- **Child Interview:** Your child would be invited to engage in an interview session (45 minutes-1 hour) with the Principal Investigator (Eibhlín Ryan). He/she would first complete a short receptive vocabulary assessment. Your child would then participate in a “Talking Mat” interview. This involves him/her categorising pictures representing different aspects of school life into “like”, “unsure” or “dislike” categories. If verbal ability allows, your child may be asked follow-up questions about his/her “likes” or “dislikes” and how they view themselves in relation to peers in school. A Special Needs Assistant (SNA) who is familiar to your child would be required to be present in the room throughout the session. A video recording would be taken of the “Talking Mat” interview on a digital camcorder to allow the researcher to analyse your child’s verbal and non-verbal responses. Audio content from this video recording would also be transcribed and anonymised. This interview would be conducted in school, adhering to Covid-19 Public Health guidelines. Should it not be deemed safe for this research to be conducted in school due to Covid-19 situation, this interview may be conducted in your presence over Zoom.
- **Teacher Interview:** The Principal Investigator (Eibhlín Ryan) would conduct an interview with your child’s ASD class teacher regarding his/her perspective of on your child’s school experience and perception of self.
- **Parent Interview:** You would be invited to partake in an interview with the Principal Investigator (Eibhlín Ryan) regarding your perspective on your child’s school experience and perception of self. Due to the Covid-19 situation, this interview may be conducted via Zoom, with the audio content of the interview recorded on a digital voice recorder. The interview will be transcribed and anonymised. This interview will last approximately 40-45 minutes.

Right to withdraw

All schools and participants are free to withdraw from participation in the research project at any time, without giving a reason and without consequence. A red “stop” card will be provided for your child to indicate that they wish to stop the “Talking Mat” interview at any point.

How will this information be used/disseminated?

The Principal Investigator (Eibhlín Ryan) will review the video recording of your child’s interview to analyse his/her verbal and non-verbal responses. The audio content of the video recording will also be transcribed. The audio-recordings of parent and teacher interviews will also be transcribed. Names of participants and schools will not be used when transcribing. The perspectives and insights of the child, teacher and parents will be combined with those of other participants to form the results/findings section of my doctoral thesis. Following completion of my thesis, these findings may also be published in articles in journals relating to inclusive education and autism.

How will anonymity and confidentiality be kept?

The anonymity and confidentiality of all participants and the school is assured. All participants will be assigned a pseudonym. These pseudonyms will be used during transcription of interview recordings to ensure anonymity of participants. Video and audio recordings will be encrypted and stored electronically on the researcher's password-protected computer. Following transcription of interviews, the video and audio recordings will be securely deleted. Prior to deletion, these recordings will only be viewed by the Principal Investigator (Eibhlín Ryan) and Research Supervisor (Dr. Margaret Farrelly).

What will happen to the data after research has been completed?

In accordance with the MIC Record Retention Schedule all anonymised research data may be stored indefinitely.

Contact details:

If at any time you have any queries / issues regarding this study, relevant contact details are as follows:

Principal Investigator: Eibhlín Ryan: 10164561@micstudent.mic.ul.ie

Supervisor: Dr. Margaret Farrelly margaret.farrelly@mic.ul.ie.

This research study has received Ethics approval from the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC) (Approval Number: A20-015). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent authority, you may contact Mary Collins, MIREC Administrator, Research and Graduate School, Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Road, Limerick. Telephone: 061-204980 / E-mail: mirec@mic.ul.ie

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Parent/Guardian Consent Form (For Child's Participation in Research)



*How do children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) attending special ASD classes in mainstream primary schools perceive themselves and their educational experiences?
Child, parent and teacher insights*

	<i>Please tick</i> ✓
I have read and understood the Parent/Guardian Information Sheet.	
I understand what the research project is about and what my child's participation in the research project involves.	
I know that my child's participation is voluntary and that he/she can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason and without consequence.	
I am aware that data arising from my child's interview will be anonymised.	
I am aware that the researcher will not refer to autism/ASD in questions asked to my child in case he/she is unaware of his/her diagnosis.	
I agree to video recording of my child's "Talking Mat" interview. I understand that this video recording will be immediately deleted once the Principal Investigator (Eibhlín Ryan) has analysed it and the audio content has been transcribed.	
I consent for a SNA to chaperone my child in the "Talking Mat" interview.	
I consent for my child to be discussed in an interview with his/her ASD class teacher as part of this research project.	
I consent for my child to participate in the research project " <i>How do children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) enrolled in special classes in mainstream schools perceive themselves and their educational experiences?</i> ".	

The researcher will not mention autism/ASD to your child. However, if your child is aware of his/her diagnosis and brings it up during interview, which of the following protocols would you like the researcher to follow:

If my child mentions his/her diagnosis of ASD during interview, I would like the researcher to move on to the next question.	
If my child mentions his/her diagnosis of ASD during interview, I am happy for the researcher to discuss this with my child.	
N/A- My child is unaware of his/her diagnosis.	

Name Parent/Guardian (PRINTED): _____

Name Parent/Guardian (Signature): _____

Date: _____

Parent/Guardian Consent Form (For Parent/Guardian Interview)



*How do children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) attending special ASD classes in mainstream primary schools perceive themselves and their educational experiences?
Child, parent and teacher insights*

	<i>Please tick</i> ✓
I have read and understood the Parent/Guardian Information Sheet.	
I understand what my participation in the Parent/Guardian interview involves.	
I know that my participation, and that of my child, is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason and without consequence.	
I am aware that my interview will be anonymised to ensure that my child, his/her school community and I will not be identifiable in results.	
I agree to the audio recording of my interview. I understand that this audio recording will be immediately deleted following anonymised transcription of the interview.	
I consent to participate in the parental interview for the research project “ <i>How do children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) enrolled in special classes in mainstream schools perceive themselves and their educational experiences?</i> ”.	

Please provide telephone contact details, for Eibhlín to contact you to schedule a time for parent interview:

Telephone: _____

Name Parent/Guardian (PRINTED): _____

Name Parent/Guardian (Signature): _____

Date: _____

**Please email the signed consent forms to Eibhlín at
10164561@micstudent.mic.ul.ie**

Thank You

Teacher Information Sheet



*How do children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) attending special ASD classes in mainstream primary schools perceive themselves and their educational experiences?
Child, parent and teacher insights*

What is this project about?

This study aims to explore how children with ASD, aged eight to twelve, who attend ASD classes within mainstream schools view themselves and their school experiences. Child-centred research methods are being employed in this research to capture the voice of children with ASD regarding how they perceive themselves and their school experiences in special ASD classes. Parent and teacher interviews are also being conducted as part of this research project, to elicit the rich insights of key adults in the child's life.

Who is undertaking it?

My name is Eibhlín Ryan and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist attending Mary Immaculate College. I am presently completing my Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology. The current research project will form part of my doctoral thesis. This research project is being supervised by Dr. Margaret Farrelly, a lecturer in the Department of Educational Psychology, Inclusive & Special Education, Mary Immaculate College.

Why is it being undertaken?

This research aims to capture the voice of primary-aged children with ASD who attend specialist educational settings, whose first-hand perspectives are largely absent in educational research. The research also aims to examine whether non-traditional interview approaches (ie. The "Talking Mat" visual communication tool) can enable children with ASD to express their views and opinions in a meaningful way.

What are the benefits and risks of this research?

It is hoped that this research will enhance our understanding of how children attending specialist ASD classes come to describe themselves and their school experiences. In doing so, this research may inform future educational policy and practice, in terms of how mainstream schools with ASD classes can foster a positive self-concept in children with ASD. By exploring the use of non-traditional interview approaches to capture the view of children with ASD, it is hoped that this research may provide teachers, psychologists and other professionals with alternative approaches to listen to the first-hand perspectives of children with ASD. There are no foreseeable risks for children, parents or teachers participating in the study.

Exactly what is involved for me (time, location etc.)?

As parents have provided written consent for their child to be discussed in a teacher interview, you are invited to engage in an interview with the Principal Investigator (Eibhlín Ryan), to gain your perspective on the child's school experience and perception of self as his/her ASD class teacher. The focus of the interview will be your perception of the child's school experience in terms of his/her general feelings about school, his/her social relationships in school and his/her academic progress. You will also be asked about your perspective on how you feel the child perceives him/herself in relation to peers. Due to the Covid-19 situation, the interview may be conducted via Zoom, with the audio content of the interview recorded on a digital voice recorder. The interview will be transcribed and anonymised. This interview will last approximately 40 minutes.

Right to withdraw

All schools and participants are free to withdraw from participation in the research project at any time without giving a reason and without consequence.

How will this information be used/disseminated?

The audio recording of the interview will be transcribed. Names of participants and schools will not be used when transcribing to ensure anonymity. This transcription will be analysed for themes. Your perspectives will be combined with those of other participants to form the results/findings section of my doctoral thesis. Following completion of my thesis, these findings may also be published in articles in journals relating to inclusive education and autism.

How will anonymity and confidentiality be kept?

The anonymity and confidentiality of all participants and the school is assured. All participants will be assigned a pseudonym. These pseudonyms will be used during transcription of interviews. The audio recording of the interview will be encrypted and stored electronically on the researcher's password-protected computer. Following transcription of interviews, the audio recording will be immediately deleted. Prior to deletion, the recordings will only be accessible to the Principal Investigator (Eibhlín Ryan) and Research Supervisor (Dr. Margaret Farrelly).

What will happen to the data after research has been completed?

In accordance with the MIC Record Retention Schedule all anonymised research data may be stored indefinitely.

Contact details:

If at any time you have any queries / issues regarding this study, relevant contact details are as follows:

Principal Investigator: Eibhlín Ryan 10164561@micstudent.mic.ul.ie

Supervisor: Dr. Margaret Farrelly margaret.farrelly@mic.ul.ie.

This research study has received Ethics approval from the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC) (Approval Number: A20-015). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent authority, you may contact: Mary Collins, MIREC Administrator, Research and Graduate School, Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Road, Limerick. Telephone: 061-204980 / E-mail: mirec@mic.ul.ie

PLEASE RETAIN THIS INFORMATION SHEET FOR YOUR RECORDS

Teacher Consent Form



*How do children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) attending special ASD classes in mainstream primary schools perceive themselves and their educational experiences?
Child, parent and teacher insights*

Consent Form (Teacher Interview)

	<i>Please tick</i> ✓
I have read and understand the Teacher Information Sheet.	
I understand what the research project is about.	
I understand what my participation in the research project (Teacher Interview) involves.	
I am aware that written parental consent has been provided for me to discuss the pupil during the teacher interview.	
I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason and without consequence.	
I am aware that my interview will be anonymised to ensure that my pupils, school and I will not be identifiable in results.	
I agree to the audio recording of my interview. I understand that this audio recording will be immediately deleted following anonymised transcription of the interview.	

Please provide telephone contact details, for Eibhlín to contact you to schedule a time for the interview:

Telephone: _____

Name (PRINTED): _____

Name (Signature): _____

Date: _____

**Please email a copy of the signed consent forms to Eibhlín at
10164561@micstudent.mic.ul.ie**

Thank You

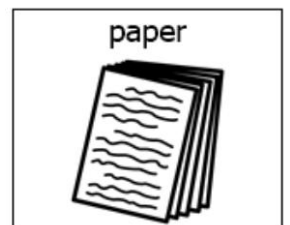


Child Information Letter

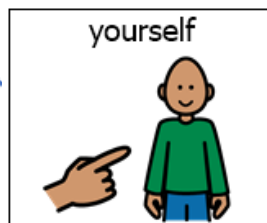
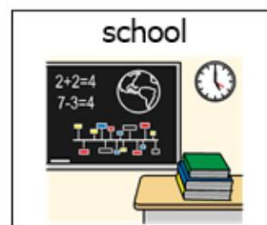
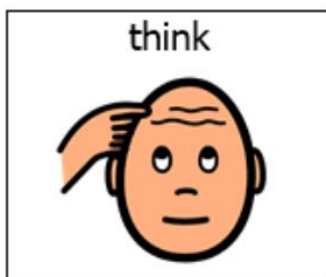
Hello! My name is Eibhlín.



I am writing a paper about what pupils your age think about school and themselves.



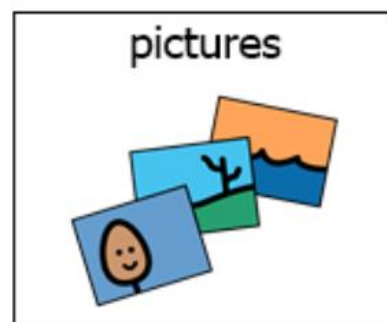
I am visiting your school today because I would like to find out what you think about school and yourself.



I will also be having a conversation with your teacher and your parent.



I would like us to do two things today. First I will ask you to do a picture quiz. This will help me get to know you a little better.



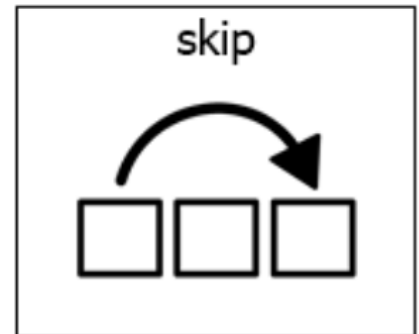
Then I will show you how to use a "Talking Mat" to tell me what you like or dislike about school. I may also ask you some questions about your "Talking Mat"- there are no right or wrong answers.



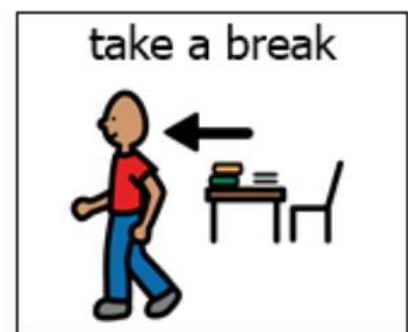
When we work together, I will video record us working together so I can remember what we talked about when I am writing my paper. I will not put your name, your friends' names or your teachers' names in my paper. I may write what you say in my paper.



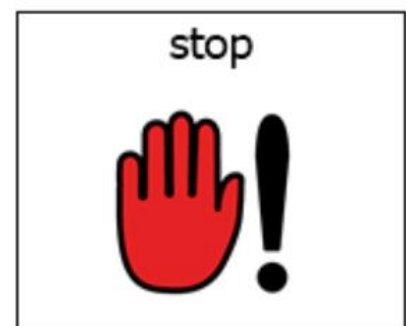
You do not have to work with me if you do not want to. You do not have to answer all my questions and you can point to my "skip" card if you want to move on to the next question.



You can tell me that you would like to take a break if you are getting tired by pointing to the "break card".

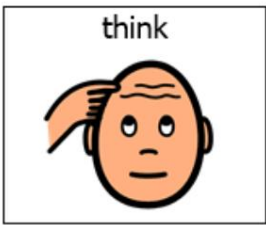
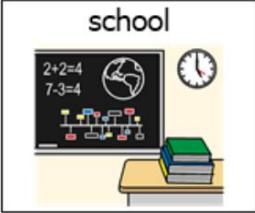
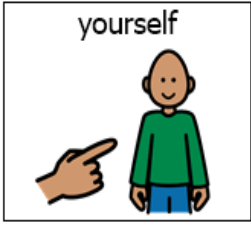
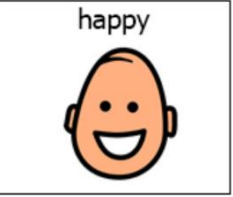
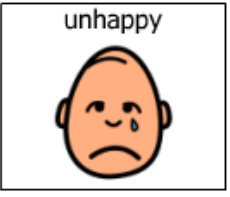


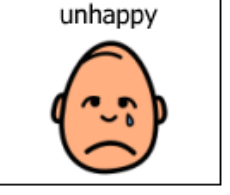

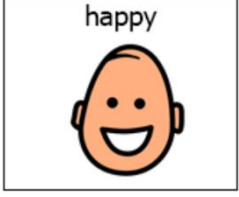
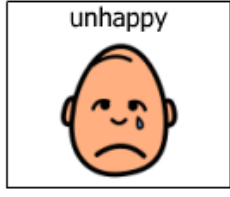

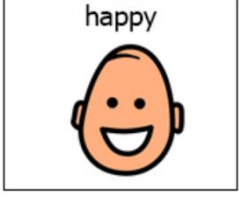
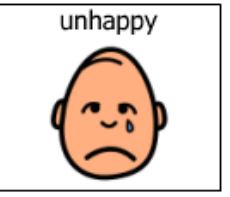


If you want to stop working with me you can point to the "stop" card.





Child Assent Form

Name:	Tick ✓	
<p>Are you happy to tell me how you think about school and yourself?</p> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-right: 20px;"> <p>think</p>  </div> <div style="font-size: 2em; margin-right: 20px;">}</div> <div style="display: flex; flex-direction: column; gap: 10px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <p>school</p>  </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <p>yourself</p>  </div> </div> </div>	<p>happy</p> 	<p>unhappy</p> 
<p>Are you happy for me to record you working and talking with me?</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin: 10px auto; width: 150px;"> <p>recording</p>  </div>	<p>happy</p> 	<p>unhappy</p> 
<p>Are you happy for me to write what you say in my paper?</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin: 10px auto; width: 150px;"> <p>paper</p>  </div>	<p>happy</p> 	<p>unhappy</p> 
<p>Are you happy for me to take a picture of your Talking Mat?</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin: 10px auto; width: 150px;"> <p>talking mat</p>  </div>	<p>happy</p> 	<p>unhappy</p> 

Appendix M: Parent Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

DOB:	Class level:	Class level when enrolled in special ASD class
-------------	---------------------	-------------------------------------------------------

Background Information

1. Tell me a little about *M...* (*if need prompting personality, hobbies/interests*)
2. At what age did *M...* receive a diagnosis Autism Spectrum Disorder?
3. In addition to a diagnosis of ASD, has *M...* ever been assessed as having any other learning, emotional/behavioural or physical difficulties? (SEN)
4. Has *M...* ever had a psychoeducational assessment- would you know his/her level of intellectual ability?
5. Is *M's...* current placement in a special ASD class/unit within a mainstream school your educational setting of choice?
6. What influenced your decision to enrol *M...* in an ASD special class/unit within a mainstream school?

Child's Affective School Experience

1. What kind of an experience has primary school been in general for *M...* to date?
2. How does *M...* communicate to you how they feel about school? Do you feel that he/she is generally happy in school?
3. When is *M...* at his/her happiest in school?
4. Are there circumstances in school which create any unhappiness for *M...*?

Accessibility of the School Environment

1. Are there any elements of the physical or sensory school environment that cause difficulty for *M...*?
2. Are there elements of the physical or sensory school environment which help *M...* to cope with daily school life?

Social/Interpersonal School Experience

1. Can you describe *M...* relationships with the other children in the ASD class/unit?
2. Does he/she socialise with those children outside of the school setting?
3. To what extent is *M...* included in schoolwide activities/mainstream classes outside of the special ASD class/unit?

4. Does *M...* interact or meet up with same-age children from the mainstream class outside of the school setting?
5. Do you feel that inclusion with children in the mainstream setting important for *M...*?
6. Does *M...* have a best friend or close friends from school?... How would you describe their friendship?
7. There are a number of adult staff within the ASD class/unit set up. What are your experiences of this support structure for *M...*?

Academic School Experience

1. How would you describe *M...* academic progress in school?
2. Are there subject areas in which he/she has strengths/difficulties?
3. In terms of literacy and numeracy, how satisfied are you that *M...* is fulfilling his/her academic potential?
4. Do you feel that *M...* sufficiently challenged in terms of his/her academic ability?
5. To what extent does *M...* have access to the general primary curriculum?

Child's Sense of Self

1. How would you describe *M...* sense of his/her self -how do think he/she views him/herself?
1. Do you think *M...* compares him/herself with other children in school? If so, in what ways? (e.g., social status, academics, behaviour)
2. Does *M...* ever show his/her feelings or talk about being in a special class/unit? → Do you think he/she is aware that it is a special class/unit?
3. Do you think *M...* compares him/herself with other children in school in terms of being in a different room/part of the school?
4. Do you believe that *M...* school experience has influenced how he/she comes to view him/herself? Can you tell me in what way?
5. Are there practices in *M...* school which you think support him/her in developing a positive sense of self?
6. Generally, what would be your hopes/concerns for your child moving on from his/her current school placement?

Appendix N: Teacher Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

Class level:	Class level when enrolled in ASD class:
---------------------	------------------------------------------------

Background Information

1. Describe *M...* as a pupil... (*if need prompting personality, hobbies/interests*)
2. How long have you been teaching *M...* within the special class setting?
3. In addition to a diagnosis of ASD, to your knowledge has *M....* been assessed as having any other learning, emotional/behavioural or physical difficulties?
4. To your knowledge, has *M....* ever had a psychoeducational assessment- would you know his/her level of intellectual ability?

Pupil's Affective School Experience

1. How does *M....* communicate to you how they feel about school? Do you feel that he/she is generally happy in school?
2. When is *M...* at his/her happiest in school?
3. Are there circumstances in school which create any unhappiness for *M...?*

Accessibility of the School Environment

1. Are there any elements of the physical or sensory school environment that cause difficulty for *M.....?*
2. Are there any elements of the physical or sensory school environment that help *M.....* to cope with daily school life?

Social/Interpersonal School Experience

1. Can you describe your *M....?* relationships with the other children in the special class/unit?
2. Is *M....* included in schoolwide activities/mainstream classes outside of the special ASD class/unit? If so, for which subjects/activities and how often?
3. How does *M....* cope with mainstream integration? Do you think that such mainstream peer integration is important for *M.....?* Why so?
4. Describe *M's* relationships with mainstream peers.

8. Does *M....* appear to have a best friend/close friends in school?... Can you describe their friendship?

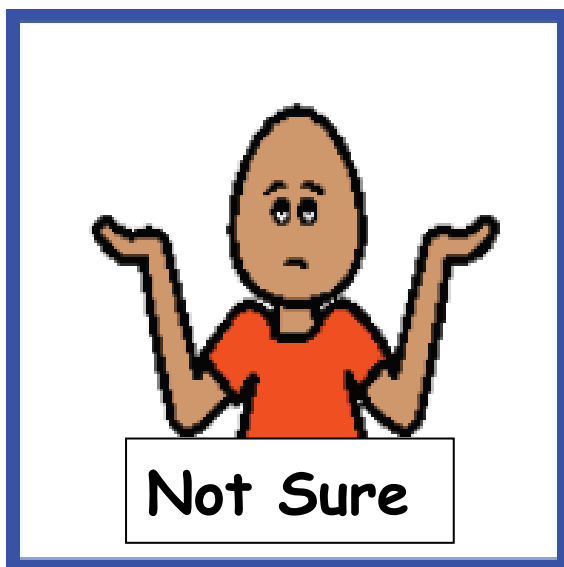
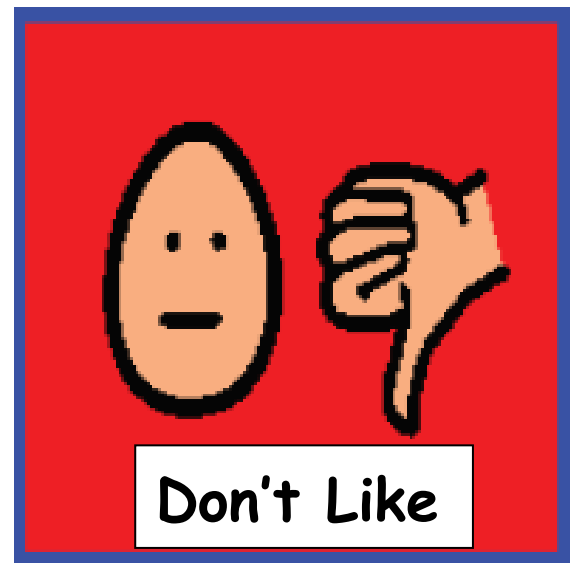
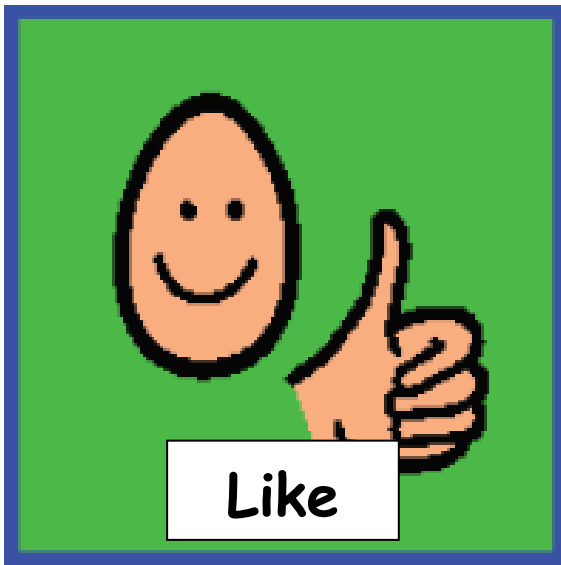
Academic School Experience

1. How would you describe *M....* 's academic progress in school?
2. In terms of the core curricular areas of literacy and numeracy, how satisfied are you that *M....* is fulfilling his/her academic potential?
3. Are there subject areas in which *M....* has strengths/difficulties?
4. To what extent does the primary curriculum need to be differentiated for *M....*?

Pupil's Sense of Self of Self

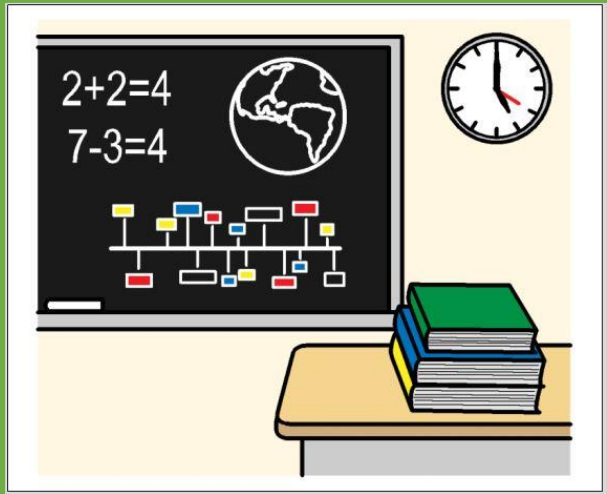
1. How would you describe *M....* 's sense of the self -how do think he/she views him/herself?
2. Do you think *M....* compares him/herself with other children in school? If so, in what ways? (e.g., social status, academics, behaviour)
3. Does *M...ever* show his/her feelings or talk about being in a special class/unit?→ Do you think *M...is* aware that it is a special class/unit?
4. Do you think *M...compares* him/herself with other children in school in terms of being in a different room/part of the school?
5. Do you believe that *M....* 's school experience has influenced how he/she comes to view him/herself? Can you tell me in what way?
6. Are there practices in this school which you think support *M....*? in developing a positive sense of self?
7. What would be your hopes/concerns for *M....* going forward from this school setting?

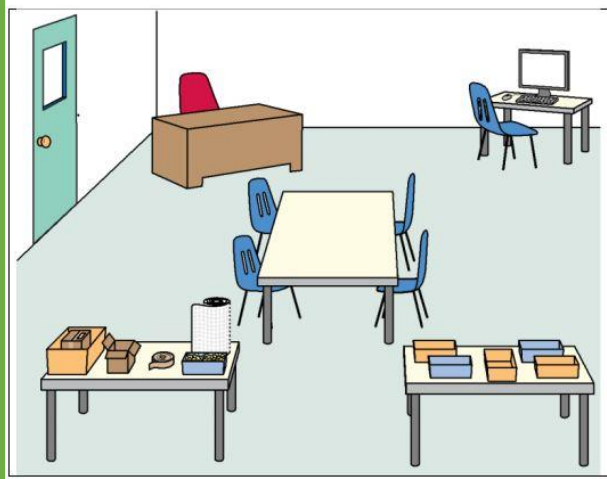
**Appendix O: Talking Mat Interview Schedule
Top Scale**



Talking Mat Interview Schedule

Part 1: Physical/Sensory School Environment

 <p style="font-size: 24pt; font-weight: bold; margin-top: 10px;">School</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">Talking Mat Question</p> <p>1. How do you feel about School? (Researcher ✓)</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; margin-top: 10px;"> <tr> <td style="width: 33%; text-align: center; padding: 5px;">I Like</td> <td style="width: 33%; text-align: center; padding: 5px;">Not Sure</td> <td style="width: 33%; text-align: center; padding: 5px;">Don't Like</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="height: 40px;"></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table> <p>Follow-Up Prompts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do you like/ not like most about school? (If unsure- is there anything you do like about school) What class(es) do you work in? Do you also spend time in another class? What do you do in ___ class? 	I Like	Not Sure	Don't Like			
I Like	Not Sure	Don't Like					

 <p style="font-size: 24pt; font-weight: bold; margin-top: 10px;">My Classroom</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">Talking Mat Question</p> <p>2. How do you feel about your classroom? (Researcher ✓)</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; margin-top: 10px;"> <tr> <td style="width: 33%; text-align: center; padding: 5px;">I Like</td> <td style="width: 33%; text-align: center; padding: 5px;">Not Sure</td> <td style="width: 33%; text-align: center; padding: 5px;">Don't Like</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="height: 40px;"></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table> <p>Follow-Up Prompts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do you like/not like about your classroom? Is there anything you would like to change/be different about your classroom? 	I Like	Not Sure	Don't Like			
I Like	Not Sure	Don't Like					



Sensory Room

Talking Mat Question

3. (a). How do you feel about the sensory room? (Researcher ✓)

I Like	Not Sure	Don't Like

Follow-Up Prompts:

- What do you like/not like about the sensory room?
- When/why do you go to the sensory room?
- How to you feel in the sensory room?



Calming Corner Room

Talking Mat Question

3. (b). How do you feel about the calming area? (Researcher ✓)

I Like	Not Sure	Don't Like

Follow-Up Prompts:

- What do you like/not like about the calming corner?
- When/why do you go to the calming corner?
- How to you feel in the calming corner?



Yard/Playground

Talking Mat Question

4. How do you feel about the school yard/playground?

I Like	Not Sure	Don't Like

Follow-Up Prompts:

- What do you like/not like about the yard/playground?
- What do you do when you are in the school yard/playground?
- How do you feel when you are on the school yard?



Children in my class

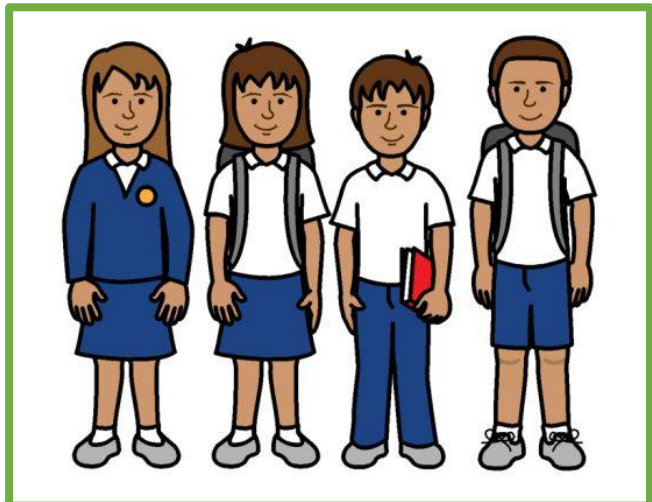
Talking Mat Question

5. How do you feel about the children in your class?

I Like	Not Sure	Don't Like

Follow-Up Prompts:

- How many children are in your class?
- What do you like/not like about the children in your class?
- **Let's choose one person in your class. In what ways are you the same (similar/alike) to _____?**
- In what ways are you different to _____?



Playing with Friends

Talking Mat Question

6. How do you feel about playing with friends in school?

I Like	Not Sure	Don't Like

Follow-Up Prompts:

- Do you have friends in school? Who are they? What class are they in?
- Is it easy/hard to make friends in school?
- What do you play with your friends?
- Choose one friend that you play with. In what way are you the same (similar/like) to (friend)?
- In what way are you different to ____?
- What would (friend) say about you? (What does __ like about you?)



Adults helping me

Talking Mat Question

7. How do you feel about adults helping you in school in school?

I Like	Not Sure	Don't Like

Follow-Up Prompts:

- Which adults help you in school?
- How do they help you?
- What do you like/ not like about ____ helping you?
- What would ____ (teacher/SNA) say about you? (Further prompt- what would ____ say is the best things about you?- would he/she say anything else?)



Being in a large class

Talking Mat Question

(Due to Covid-19, pupils may not be integrating in mainstream classrooms and so this question may not be appropriate to ask-check in teacher interview)

8. How do you feel about being in a large class with lots of children, like ___ class?

I Like	Not Sure	Don't Like

Follow-Up Prompts:

- What do you like/not like about being in a class with lots of children like in ___ class?
- How do you feel when you're in ___ classroom?
- What is different about ___ class and ___ class?



Working with other children


Talking Mat Question

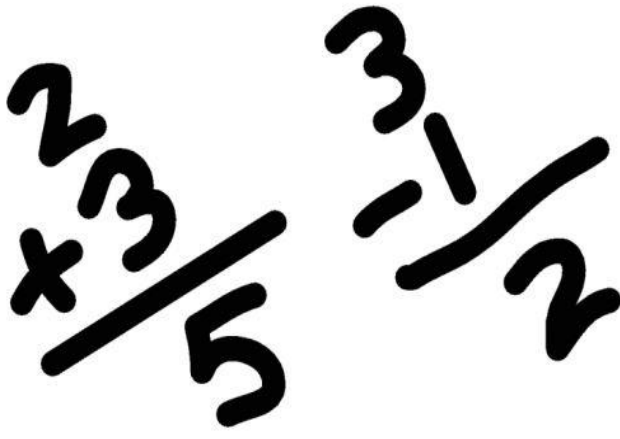
10. How do you feel about working with other children?

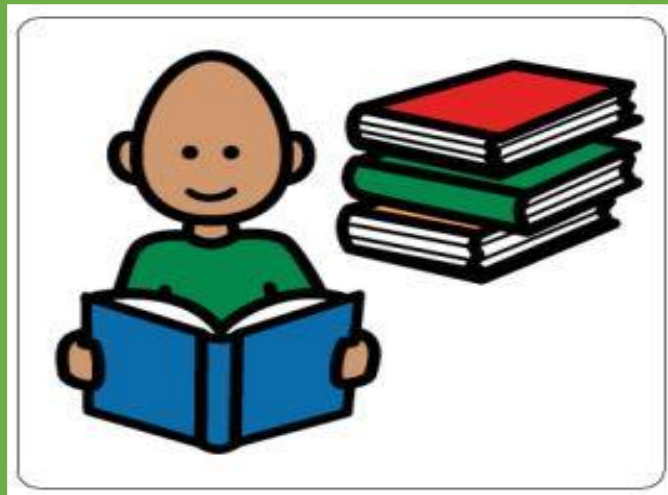
I Like	Not Sure	Don't Like

Follow-Up Prompts:

- What do you like/not like about working with other children?
- What makes it easy/hard to work with other children?

	Talking Mat Question		
11. How do you feel about working alone in school?			
I Like	Not Sure	Don't Like	
Follow-Up Prompts:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you like/not like about working alone in school? 			
Working alone			

	Talking Mat Question		
12. How do you feel about maths?			
I Like	Not Sure	Don't Like	
Follow-Up Prompts:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you like/not like about maths? • Is maths easy/hard for you? • How do you feel when you do maths? 			
Maths			



Reading

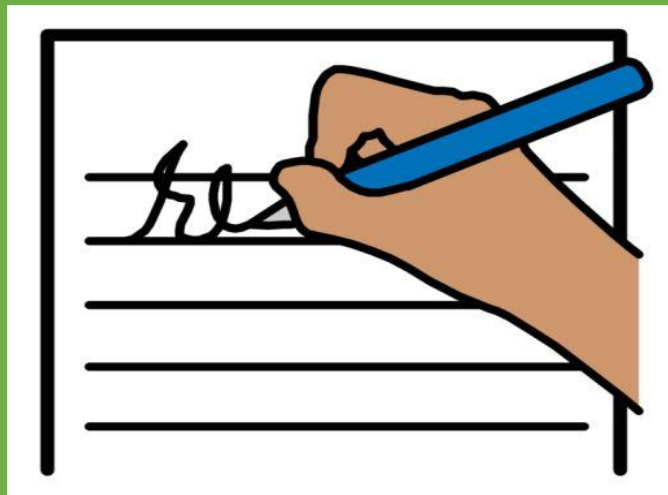
Talking Mat Question

13. How do you feel about reading?

I Like	Not Sure	Don't Like

Follow-Up Prompts:

- What do you like/not like about reading?
- Is reading easy/hard for you?
- How do you feel when you read?



Writing

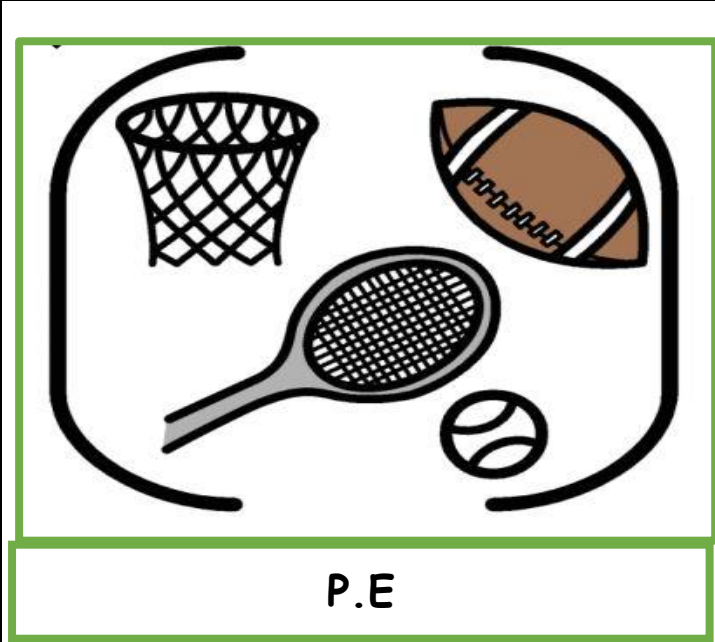
Talking Mat Question

14. How do you feel about writing?

I Like	Not Sure	Don't Like

Follow-Up Prompts:

- What do you like/not like about writing?
- Is writing easy/hard for you?
- How do you feel when you do writing?



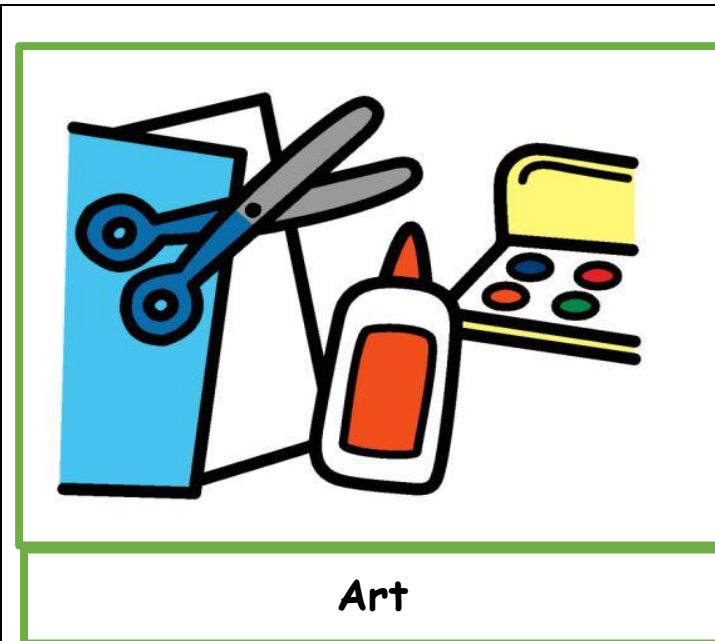
Talking Mat Question

15. How do you feel about P.E?

I Like	Not Sure	Don't Like

Follow-Up Prompts:

- What do you like/not like about pe?
- Is writing easy/hard for you?
- How do you feel when you do PE?



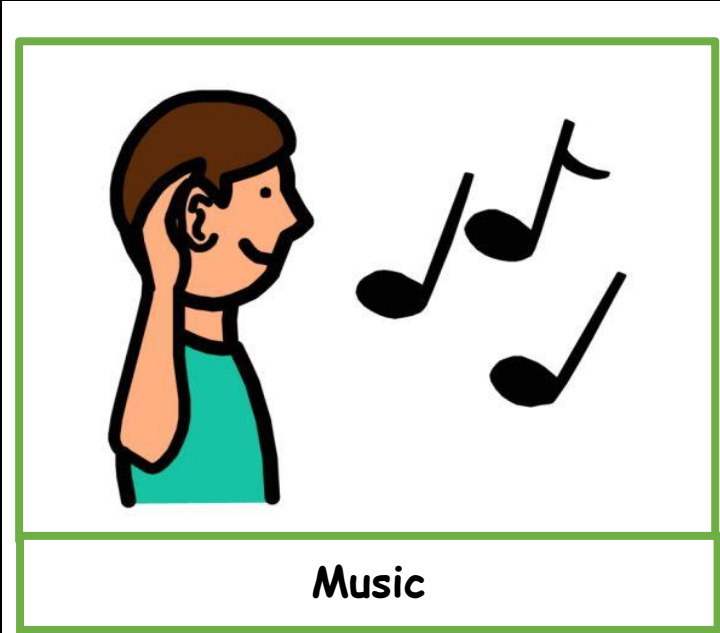
Talking Mat Question

16. How do you feel about Art?

I Like	Not Sure	Don't Like

Follow-Up Prompts:

- What do you like/not like about art?
- Is art easy/hard for you?
- How do you feel when you do art?



Talking Mat Question

17. How do you feel about music?

I Like	Not Sure	Don't Like

Follow-Up Prompts:

- What do you like/not like about music?
- Is music easy/hard for you?
- How do you feel when you do music?

Appendix P: Talking Mat Communicative Effectiveness Coding Framework

Talking Mat Communicative Effectiveness Coding Framework

Case Study Child:

<i>Communication Effectiveness Areas</i>	<i>Always (4)</i>	<i>Often (3)</i>	<i>50:50 (2)</i>	<i>Occasional (1)</i>	<i>Never/None (0)</i>
Participant's understanding issue for discussion					
Participant's engagement with person					
Confidence of participant					
Researcher's understanding of client's views					
Participant's satisfaction with end result					

Aggregate Score of Communicative Effectiveness: ___

Definitions from coding framework (Murphy & Cameron, 2008, p.234)

- **Participant's understanding:** Based on verbal and non-verbal responses.
- **Engagement:** The social closeness that is established in the interaction and maintained through rapport and joint attention.
- **Confidence in articulating view/placing symbols:** Confidence is demonstrated by the manner in which the participant responds and the pattern of responses, e.g. hesitancy in articulating views, dropping symbols on mat in random manner, filling in gaps.
- **Interviewer's understanding of participant's views-** shown by non-verbal and verbal responses of the interviewer
- **Participant's satisfaction with their confirmed views-** primarily demonstrated non-verbally, e.g. giving thumbs up at the end of the interview or occasionally verbally, e.g. "that was great".

**Appendix Q: Sample Transcript with Exploratory Comments
Case 2: Transcribed Parent Semi-Structured Interview**

Pseudonyms:
School: School 2
Parent: Sarah
Child: Eoin

Introductory Conversation- outlining project, rights to withdraw/anonymity, consent to record audio.

Original Transcript	<i>Exploratory Comments</i> Descriptive Comments= Normal Text Linguistic Comments= <i>Italics</i> Conceptual Comments= <u>Underlined</u>
<p>Interviewer: Okay, so do you want to start off Sarah with just telling me a little bit about Eoin- so maybe his personality, hobbies- those types of things.</p> <p>Sarah: ((long pause)) Oh my god (.) where to start.</p> <p>Interviewer: I know- a really broad question to start ((laughs))</p> <p>Sarah: Yeah (.) ahm, ((pause)). Eoin, eh, where the hell do you start. Ahm, he's, he's always outgoing, he's always smiling and happy and you know, he was always an easy child to look after when he was young- very calm ((pause)). Ahm, do you know he never, even when he, you know he never had any issues sleeping or eating or anything like that. It wasn't until he was a bit older that his frustration came because he couldn't talk- he couldn't get his point across.</p> <p>Interviewer: Mmm</p> <p>Sarah: So mainly down to his behaviour then that we found out that he had (.) autism, cause, he-he ..stopped speaking when he was about two and a half.</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay..</p>	<p><i>'Oh my god'- nervousness about interview? Hesitation</i></p> <p><i>'where the hell do you start'- overwhelmed when thinking about complexity of Eoin's journey/needs</i></p> <p>Eoin as having positive affect Easy, calm temperament <u>Sense of timeframe when thinking of child- connotations to journey as parent with child</u></p> <p>Frustrations with communication difficulties</p> <p>Road to diagnosis Speech difficulties as leading to diagnosis</p>

Sarah: He stopped reaching his ((pause)) milestones

Interviewer: At that point okay

Sarah: And then other things then started to creep up like , ahm, he didn't know how to play with his toys properly, he wouldn't say goodbye to people, he didn't like crowds- he used to hide behind me the whole time

Interviewer: Okay

Sarah: Some content reacted for confidentiality But he's always smiling, always happy, always trying to make other people happy

Interviewer: ((in overlap)) well that's definitely the boy I met last week

Sarah: Oh he's a people pleaser- is the best way to describe him. Always trying to make other people happy- he doesn't like to see other people upset, you know he'll go over and tries to say, you know, tries to tell them a joke

Interviewer: ((in overlap)) Mmm, cheer them up

Sarah: He doesn't like to see other people upset, that's the way he is- an outgoing personality and he just likes doing things his own way. Ahm, he can get frustrated now if he feels ((long pause)) you know other kids might play sport, he might give up too easily. So you have to push him a small bit. He might come home then to me and he'll say "Oh Mammy, why do I have this, this ((pause)) thing".

And I'll say "What do you mean this thing?" And he'll say "Why do I have autism, why did God give me this?" and "Is God punishing me for being bold?". You'll have those moments now in the last couple of years, they've been more ((pause)). He's more aware that he's different to other kids the older he's getting.

Interviewer: Okay. And what

'creep up'-sense of accumulation of signs/indicators leading to diagnosis

repeated use of 'always'- emphasising a general positive affect

Eager to please- Is social appeal an issue of importance?

People pleaser

Attuned and reactionary to emotional states of others?

Frustration with self in comparison to peers in terms of physical abilities

Social comparison as affecting perseverance, self-esteem?

"Why me?"- Wrestling with autistic identity.

Major issues of questioning the self?

An almost hyper-sense of self?

Diagnosis and self-questioning clearly linked

Negative connotations of autism- perceived as punishment

Self-questioning as increasing of late- Self-questioning associated with clear temporal/developmental dimension.

<p>Sarah: ((in overlap)) But other than that now he's grand, he's fine-</p> <p>Interviewer: Yeah, of course yeah, and what you said about him being so pleasant and outgoing, that's definitely the child I met last week. And at what age, I know you mentioned the speech difficulties, at what age did Eoin receive his diagnosis of ASD?</p> <p>Sarah: ((pause)) He was four (quietly).</p> <p>Interviewer: He was four, okay.</p> <p>Sarah: He was late- he was late getting diagnosed. He was about two and a half when he started getting speech therapy. Some content redacted for confidentiality . And, and I told this to the therapist and she said, and she referred us on then to (children's service) because something else was going on.</p> <p>Interviewer: Yeah, yeah</p> <p>Sarah: So then we went over to (service) then and that was when I first heard that he had autism, he might have autism or autism was brought up.</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay, so it was before primary school then, yeah.</p> <p>Sarah: Yeah, just before primary school 'cause they had no- Some content redacted for confidentiality. So the speech and language therapist did a lot of work with him and so did the occupational therapist. So if it wasn't for those two, I don't know where we'd be. Some content redacted for confidentiality So it was actually [provides exact date] I think ((pause)) am two thousand am, I'm trying to remember the year.. I know it was [exact date] was the day he was diagnosed with autism anyway- just before he went to school.</p>	<p>Increased awareness of difference from others with age- <u>Connotations of self as 'different' clearly linked with peer social comparison</u></p> <p><i>Hesitation, softly spoken- indicative of difficulty of diagnostic process for parents?</i></p> <p>Late Diagnosis</p> <p>Information for Pen Portrait/Background Information</p> <p>Diagnostic journey and referral for parent</p> <p>Recalling first time autism was mentioned</p> <p>Information for Pen Portrait/Background Information</p> <p>Importance of early therapeutic supports</p> <p><i>'I know it was the [exact date]- a sense of a 'milestone' day for parent- → diagnostic journey for parent</i></p>
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Interviewer: Okay, and in addition to ASD, were there any other learning, behavioural or emotional difficulties that were identified? I know speech you had mentioned.

Sarah: No just when he was younger, his speech was the first thing I noticed. And then he had a few problems then with eg ((pause))- **some content redacted for confidentiality**- and we were told there was nothing wrong with him he was just, wasn't a very confident child and everything else was checked out and his allergies was checked out and he has [names medical conditions] as well and we got all of that checked out and so it's just mainly autism...**some content redacted for confidentiality**- and he blames all of that on having autism- That's Eoin's view of it

Interviewer: That's Eoin's view of it, aw...okay

Sarah: ((in overlap))) Yeah he blames all of that on having autism

Interviewer: And would he ever had had a cognitive assessment or a psychoeducational assessment? Like an IQ test a lot of people would refer to them as.

Sarah: Am I know they did things in school with him, but I don't think he actually sat down and did one. I don't think he's ever actually sat down with a psychologist yet himself.

Interviewer: Okay, and sometimes it might just arise in cases where there's a need for it. And would Eoin's current placement in an ASD class within a mainstream school have been your setting of choice for him?

Sarah: Ahm, ((long pause)). He was, well like there were a few areas around and you'd hear like 'Oh my child goes to (names special school)' and "my child goes here" and we thought they were too severe. Then when we seen him then

Information for Pen Portrait/Background Information

Blames any difficulties on autism.
Construing self around a diagnostic label → every difficulty framed by diagnostic label → indicates very negative connotations of autism as something almost pathologised?

Information for Pen Portrait/Background Information

Educational placement decision process for parent- special school as too severe yet mainstream playschool as unsuccessful

in playschool, in mainstream playschool, he was (.) – that wasn't working for him either.

Interviewer: ((in overlap)) Mmm, okay

Sarah: He needed something in between, where he could be supported and taken out of the class if he needed it. And have that one-to-one, and then go back when he was able to do the mainstream part. 'Cause when he, when he was in playschool he got entitled to six hours of em ((pause)). From [names service] he got, an assistant to help him. So she did two full days with him, and he worked better on those days and wanted to go to school more on those two days than he did every other day because he was getting the one to one, and you know he was actually learning something.

Interviewer: So that gave you the..

Sarah: ((in overlap)) Ah?

Interviewer: I was just saying, that sounds like it gave you a good indication of under what circumstances he worked well?

Sarah: Yeah, yeah and then we talked more to his speech therapist and to his occupational therapist and they said it was too severe for him to be going say somewhere like (special school) but to put his name down for School 2 because they had a unit at the time being built, and that his ideal setting would be an ideal unit (.) and em ((pause)) because he learns from other people, he learns- that how he learns. I had to teach him how to play with his toys, his [names sibling] had to teach him how to play with his toys as well. We all, everything he has is all learnt behaviour. We had to teach him how to do everything. Because he just didn't, he didn't know how to do it. Even getting dressed in the morning or playing with his toys (.) because you know

ASD class as an 'in between' option with one-to-one support and mainstream opportunities – connotations of 'just right' balance between special and mainstream placements?

Provision of 1:1 support in mainstream playschool as more successful

Professional involvement in educational decision making process

Special placement perceived as 'too severe'

Parent making sense of and rationalising educational placement choice

Perception by parents that ASD class placement in mainstream school enables social learning

Explicit teaching of play skills

Absence of intrinsic play skills

he got toys off Santa and off his family and they were all still in boxes for years (.) because he just didn't know what to do with them. So it wasn't until he got diagnosed and we were in the middle of doing his play therapy and he didn't know how to play with the trains so he put them back in the box because I shown him that's what you do with the toys if you don't want to play with them.- you put your toys away. So then I remember (names play therapist) taking out books and he just put them into the box because he said he was tired, his eyes were sore. And then she took out a doll, and the doll had a blanket and a pretend bowl of food, pretend bottle, pretend cup. And she took, he emptied out the box and he put the baby into the box and put the blanket over the baby and put the baby to bed. And (play therapist) was like 'Do you not want to feed the baby?' and he was like 'No food in that, no drink in that'. The only thing that was real to him was the blanket, that was fact

Interviewer: He could see that

Sarah: He couldn't pretend, and then she took out a hairbrush and was like 'Do you want to brush the baby's hair?' and he was like looking and her and looking at the doll and looking at her as if 'The doll has no hair'.

He just had no imagination, no imaginary play at all. ((long pause)) Until he went to the ASD unit and when he went to the ASD unit he just ((pause)) flourished. And he came out of his shell, and he became more confident, and he just became so much more, he was more ((pause)). And then behaviour then just started disappearing as well and the speech came on, and he was able to speak for himself and he just (long (pause)) he just came on so, so well. ((Long pause)). I never actually thought he'd get as far as he has. Like just in himself, and making friends ((pause)) and you

(temporal dimension)

Literal thinking, limited imagination
(temporal dimension)

Flourished in ASD class- sense of transformative impact of provision- and 'then/now' transformation.

Increased social confidence.

Improvements in behaviour

Improvements in speech

Exceeding parental expectations- connotations of a provision as a transformative experience for parent and child. Temporal dimension too

know all the conversations we've been having about Boris Johnson, and what's going on now. Like he's highly in-like this are the things he wants to talk about, he doesn't want to talk about normal teenager or, or child stuff, he wants to talk about the news and what's going on every day.

Interviewer: Mmm.. and I suppose you've touched on it there already, but broadly what kind of experience has primary school been for Eoin? So, he's in fifth class now so if you are to look back in general.

Sarah: Oh yeah, he loved going, he loved the first- he loved junior infants, senior infants, because he had a few words and he was confident ((pause)) he was more confident than the rest of his classmates. So he was kind of seen as the leader, and he was in charge, and he was in control. And then in around third class, we seen a few issues because the other people then, started to catch up to him, and then he realized 'Oh I'm not in charge anymore, they can do things for themselves'. And they weren't looking for his help anymore. So that kind of knocked his confidence a small bit.

Interviewer: Was that with the (names ASD class)?

Sarah: Yeah that was in the (ASD class). They started catching up to him, and making their own decisions and he started trying to take control, because that's what he- he feels safe when he has control over situations and...then he thought then they didn't want to be his friend anymore and he just didn't understand that 'no, they're just doing their own thing this day'. And he thought on Monday that they weren't friends he'd get awful upset and come home and I'd have to go 'No Eoin just because they didn't want to play with you today, they'll play with you tomorrow or

here in terms of reflecting on child in the past

Improved social skills and ability to engage in intellectual conversations?

Diverging topic of interests to TD peers

Positive affect towards school in early years linked to confidence

Confidence conferred by ability relative to special class peers affording him opportunities for leadership- aspects of downward social comparison here?

Confidence in being able to help other peers in special class

Safety with control over situations

Questioning of friendships- Is Eoin perceived to have an understanding of friendship and what it entails?

Difficulty navigating peer relationships and understanding friendships

they'll play with you Friday. He's just tired today, he wants to play with somebody else today". He just couldn't understand that for a while. So yeah he finds that hard.

Interviewer: Mmm

Sarah: And then, the older he's getting then, he's realising that he can't do as much as his peers can. So because he's started to mix now with the older kids on the playground and with the mainstream school and it's yeah "Why can't I do that?" and "How can I'm not able to do what they can do?" and "How come it takes be longer to do something they do?" So he's more aware now so am ..

Interviewer: And I suppose he's having more, the more he's progressing in (names ASD class), he's getting to interact with them more isn't he?

Sarah: Yeah, that's it and yeah that's it you see. Ahm they tried to integrate him when he was in third class and that's when all the issues came up and up and all the anxiety came up and ((pause)) he was just coming home every day crying from school because he couldn't understand what was going on and why he couldn't he do what everybody else was doing because he felt he was in third class and he was ((pause)) intent to be treated like everybody else and how come he wasn't being treated like the same. And how couldn't he understand what was going on like everybody else. Ahm, like even playing sports like am he the ASD unit goes to (names town) for [sport] now on one incident and the mainstream class goes to (names town). And he wanted to go to (names town) with the other class because he felt he was like them.

Interviewer: Mmm

Sarah: Because the lessons are giving differently in the ASD unit in (names first town), they actually get in the

Making sense of peer interactions in home context with parent

Increased realisation of difficulties in comparison to peers with age

Self-questioning and mainstream inclusion- a triggering factor?
Mainstream inclusion triggering self questioning and looking at self-differently. Upward social comparison?

Major issues of self-questioning Upward social comparison with mainstream peers → awareness of difficulties

Self perceived as different via interaction with mainstream peers

Mainstream inclusion as triggering issues re anxiety and self/identity

Major issues of questioning self

Social comparison with mainstream peers-"Why me?" connotations

Desire to be treated like everybody else

Desire for inclusion activities with mainstream peers

Trying to relate to mainstream peers

pool with them, there's no shouting and it's a small group. While in (names second town) it's all shouting, and the instructor doesn't get into the pool with them and it's too much chaos and. So we tried him one day with it, with the mainstream class, and it just didn't go down well, at all.

But then he got out then and realised "How come I'm not able to do that, and say (names peer) can?". And then he was like "why can't I do a big group like that?" And so he asks himself questions and then again, he's like "Why did God?" and it's 'God' again- there's a big reference to God, "Why did he punish me like this?" and "Was I bold?" and you now he just sees this negative attitude towards autism.

Interviewer: And he's trying to make sense of it I suppose and himself

Sarah: Yeah, yeah. So he's still up and down, but he's- he's getting better at it now.

Interviewer: Okay

Sarah: ((in overlap)) He met em ((pause)) ...this year he met a boy as well with autism in secondary school and he asked him about secondary school and he's more confident now about going to secondary school and you know he's seen other kids now who have autism who are older than him and he's like "Oh I'm fine, oh this is okay" and he didn't have such a negative attitude then about his autism.

And this young chap helped him a lot in that regard, about moving on from primary school to secondary school and that things are okay, it's going to be okay, things aren't going to change- you're still going to have support, you're still going to be Eoin, you're still going to be ((pause)) who you are, it's-it's just a different school.

Interviewer: Mmm, yeah

Desire for mainstream inclusion and activities yet difficulty succeeding in same. Dilemmas of difference in provision of individualised accommodations without connotations of difference?

"Why me?"- Questioning self in terms of social comparison with mainstream peers

Negative construal of autism, perceived as punishment

Pathologizing diagnosis of ASD?

Connecting with older students with ASD for reassurance

Seeing older students with ASD in secondary as role models to provide reassurance- helping to foster a more positive relationships with autistic identity?

Reassurance re secondary school-older student with ASD as role models

<p>Sarah: Because he was awful worried about leaving School 2 as well, that's another issue we have as well.</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay..</p> <p>Sarah: ((in overlap)) That the support system in School 2. He feels it's so safe and secure School 2, it's like "What's going to happen to me when I leave School 2?" And it's getting closer and closer now to that so he's a bit anxious about that as well.</p> <p>Interviewer: Yeah, of course (softly). And would you feel that he's generally happy in school?</p> <p>Sarah: ((Long pause)). Ahm, yeah. My god, like during this lockdown he just did not cope well. He didn't sleep, he stopped eating</p> <p>Interviewer: ((in overlap))</p> <p>Sarah: He just would leave, he wouldn't leave to go anywhere, he hates going outside the place. And since going back to school now he's getting back into his sleeping routine, he's getting back to eating the way he used to eat. And he's more willing to get into the car with me to go off someplace but he's still a bit ((pause)) he still uses the Covid a bit as an excuse not to go anywhere.</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay, ugh</p> <p>Sarah: And I'm like, come on Eoin, you have to get into the car, you have to go shopping again because the first time I took him shopping he was absolutely petrified. Because he wasn't used to- he forgot about the lights and he forgot about people in the shop and he forgot about the noise...Like I had all this like trained up with him and like cause we had to teach him how to go to the shop and teach him to get used to the lights and get used to the people and you know it's just so when he's older he can go to the shop himself and he can go to the post office, he can use the</p>	<p>Trepidation & anxiety re. post-primary transition</p> <p>Safety and security in primary school due to support system</p> <p>Questioning availability of supports in secondary- <u>questioning ability to cope?</u></p> <p>Difficulty coping during school closures 'My god'- emphasising the enormity of <i>difficulty coping during school closures</i></p> <p>School routine as improving coping skills</p> <p>Anxiety and fear</p> <p>Sensory difficulties in busy places</p> <p>Requirement for explicit training of life skills for coping</p>
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bank, he can use all these facilities. In (town) after we train him now again, so that he feels safe that (town) is his place to shop and go to the post office and stuff so that's...that's something we have to work on now again like.

Interviewer: Yeah, it's hard isn't it, after all the progress it's hard to have to reset again.

Sarah: Yeah.

Interviewer: And are there any circumstances in school which would create some unhappiness for Eoin?

Sarah: ((Pause)) Ahm ((long pause)). (Sighs) I know in am (pause) if the kids, sometimes you know he feels left out. 'Cause he doesn't know how to make friends. And he's very socially awkward, he doesn't know how to start a conversation and then if he gets ahm, if one child tells him to go away, he feel like "Oh nobody wants to talk to me at all". He won't try again, he just feels like, he won't, you know, he just feels like ((long pause))

Interviewer: He's easily knocked?

Sarah: He'll get upset and he won't understand and then he'll think "Oh nobody likes me?" and "This is 'cause I've got autism, nobody wants to talk to me". So I have to keep telling him, "Go to somebody else, go to somebody else. It's just they're having a bad day or not everybody has a good day Eoin, they could be having a bad day". But he just takes it to heart and he takes it so seriously, it's like "It's, it's because **I** have autism". That's what he thinks.

Interviewer: Okay, ah that's tough on him isn't it, absolutely.

Sarah: Well it is, it's bad enough with hormones as a child but then you have social (.) social issues on top of that, it's-it's worse again. He just he doesn't have the confidence to make friends. He doesn't know how to start conversations

Aspirations for Tom going forward regarding life-skills and independent

Feeling left out in school

Difficulty making friends 'socially awkward'- difficulty initiating conversations

Generalising negative social experiences

Feeling socially excluded?

Feelings of social rejection

Every negative experience framed by autism.

A social self- "Nobody likes me"- internalising negative appraisals of others? Importance of social context in school in sense of self construal- connotations of 'look glass' self?

Framing negative experience as caused by autism. Identification with diagnostic category as all-consuming in terms of sense of self.

<p>and then (.) with this whole Covid 19, he hasn't had the opportunity to practice that. Because you can't do social distancing and you can't do this, and you can't go to this bubble.</p> <p>Interviewer: Mmm.</p> <p>Sarah: And he can't go to his normal friends and it's hard on him now, that way.</p> <p>Interviewer: Absolutely.</p> <p>Sarah: But other than that now, other than that now he loves school. He hates holidays, hates the weekend, yeah they don't like holidays at all ((laughs)). So I have to explain to him, teacher has to go, teacher has to have her break as well: "They have a break on Saturday and Sunday, the way I have a break on Saturday and Sunday".</p> <p>Interviewer: ((laughs))</p> <p>Sarah: And I'm like Eoin, you've got to have a holiday. "But I don't need a holiday, they don't need a holiday" – that's how he views school.</p> <p>Interviewer: Wow, so school is his holiday!</p> <p>Sarah: School is his life, yeah.</p> <p>Interviewer: And lockdown then must have been tough if he's ..</p> <p>Sarah: Yeah it was really ((pause)) really, really hard.</p> <p>Interviewer: And are there any elements of the sensory or physical school environment that cause difficulty for Eoin?</p> <p>Sarah: Yeah, it's mainly the large crowds, it's mainly in big classrooms. Mainly when there's a lot of people. He just can't concentrate or he just gets overwhelmed and ((pause)) he prefers to work in small groups, he doesn't like big classroom environments. Never did and it- it never works out for him that way. But, but so far it is working okay in (mainstream teacher's name) class because again,</p>	<p>Emphasizing severity of consequences which arise from social difficulties in terms of self.</p> <p>Poor confidence in making friends</p> <p>Difficulty with social skills in terms of initiating interactions.</p> <p>Impact of Covid-19 restrictions on social skills- <u>connotations of regression?</u></p> <p>Positive affect towards schools</p> <p>Difficulty with unstructured times and holidays- sense that school provides important structure for Eoin.</p> <p><i>Repetition of 'really' to emphasise the difficulties experienced during Covid-19 school closures</i></p> <p>Mainstream classroom environments as overwhelming</p> <p>Concentration difficulties</p> <p>Small groups as more accessible</p>
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they're in little pods so he's not in a big classroom in certain ways, he's in a little group.

Interviewer: Yeah, I hadn't thought of that, in a way does that make it a little bit easier I suppose, the smaller groups?

Sarah: Yeah because when he's in a little group of four or five in school he still feels safe in his little group and then in a classroom then nobody would sit, you know you'd have twenty kids you know, ten in a row, ten in a row, ten in a row. Would he be the same way if he wasn't socially distancing and having those little pods that they're in in school. I don't know, I think it's making it easier for him.

Interviewer: And are there any elements of the physical or sensory school environment that helps him to cope in school?

Sarah: ((Long pause)) He am, for him in school, I know they have the ((pause)) em, he can just put his hand up for the, or he has a sign that he has with the teacher so that the other kids don't see-because he gets embarrassed sometimes, and the SNA will come over to him and ask him "do you want to leave the classroom or what do you want to do?" Or he might say "I want to go to the bathroom, can I please go to the bathroom?" And then he'll go out the door, that's his cue of saying "I need time out". And he might go down to the em [names sensory room] Room and relax there but if he does he usually – he just needs to get out of the classroom for ten minutes so, and then he'll go back in again.

Interviewer: Yes, to reset himself. And could you describe Eoin's relationships with other children in the (names ASD class)?

Sarah: Am, he loves the (names ASD class). He likes ahm ((pause)) like there's another boy now John *

Repetition of never- emphasising engrained belief?

Covid-19 modifications as making mainstream learning environments more accessible

Covid-19 modifications as making mainstream learning environments more accessible due to smaller group contexts

Discrete signs with staff when help is needed in mainstream

Impression management- not wanting visible support in mainstream setting

Restorative, repair breaks from mainstream class in ASD class- sense of sanctuary there?

Impression management- use of toilet as excuse rather than saying he wants a break- element of masking/camouflaging?

Brief repair breaks in sensory room as facilitating re-regulation for return to mainstream class.

(*pseudonym) and they're around the same age so he- they relate to each other, because they like the same things. And they kind of have the same issue-they have the same issues so he can relate to him. Am, and some of the kids then are smaller than he is, and he likes to look after them and take charge and show them 'this is what you do'. He likes to be in charge so, there's a mixture now of different ages now in his class and different abilities but a lot of the kids now would look up to Eoin and he likes that because, again that's the control thing he likes to have.

Interviewer: Yeah

Sarah: Am, but if there was, there's a few issues when the child is older than him, if a child was a bit more stronger than him, and he didn't like that... So they had to teach Eoin like how to be nice to people, it doesn't matter if you're in a job or in school- you still have to be nice to people. And Eoin had to learn that- and he did, in all fairness to him. He did learn, ahm but he does find it difficult... Yeah am if there's a stronger personality in the class he finds that bit difficult.

Interviewer: And would he socialise with children from the (names ASD class) outside of the school setting?

Sarah: Am ((long pause)). Ah yeah we do, his best friend is John* (pseudonym), and he'd meet him outside school and he'd meet Leanne* (pseudonym) outside school. But some of the other kids, ahm, he mightn't because they wouldn't be able to meet him and he wouldn't feel comfortable then in some settings that they go to. Like you'd say, he was fine going to [names indoor play area] and going to John's house, but that's where he feels safe- he doesn't really feel safe anywhere else. And if I take him somewhere new, I'll know within five or ten minutes

Positive affect towards ASD class

Relating to special class peers due to interests/difficulties- Sense of relatedness/similarity as conferring friendship

'Looking after' younger others in special class- deriving sense of competence in same?

Asserting control in social context of special class

Difficultise interpreting social overtures?

Difficulty negotiating peer relationships in special class

Best friend in special class
Socialisation with subset of special class peers outside school setting

whether he'll feel comfortable or not. And then he'll do his stimming thing- he does this ((demonstrates)) or he'll walk up and down the hall or he'll be into me every five minutes and then I'll know "It's time for us to go". So it's kind of hard to find an environment where he feels comfortable or where he feels safe so yeah, but yeah there's three or four that he would go with yeah. And he'd be there all day, he wouldn't mind at all.

Interviewer: He's very safe and comfortable with them so?

Sarah: Yeah but you see they kind of have the same interests as him and they'd have the same issues as him. Like you know the crowds and the anxiety and they, they'd ask him questions, it's all intelligent, and it's all "Oh my God, I don't know what you're on about" ((laughs))

Interviewer: Wow ((laughs))

Sarah: Like I feel dumb sometimes when I hear the conversation that's going on- yes talking about Boris Johnson and Donald Trump and who was the worst. And they all had these facts to back up and – ((laughs))

Interviewer: And to what extent is Eoin included in mainstream activities outside of the (names ASD class)?

Sarah: ((Pause)) Not a lot. He's just not, there's not a lot of activities he can do outside (names ASD class). He has to have an SNA, he has to have a small crowd, he has to have have support. And am, there's not actually many facilities for children, you know for instance the [names summer camp] he wanted to go to the [names summer camp] but he doesn't want me to go there either. He wants to go himself like his friends. But then there's no one there to support him there. He'd need an SNA or he'd need someone there to keep an eye on him and do one-to-one

Restricted in places he is comfortable for socialisation

Discomfort in unfamiliar social situations apparent.

Repetitive movements and stimming when anxious

Feelings of safety with small cohort of special class peers Is is a sense of familiarity with them or more of a connectedness, ability to relate to them that makes him more comfortable in their company?

Safety with special class peers due to similar interests and 'issues'- is it that a 'safer' play environment is facilitated in their company or that he can relate to having the same 'issues' as them?

Perceived as intelligent in nature of his interests

Parent response to this question really falls outside the educational context- not necessarily relevant to research question.

Requiring modified environment

with him. But [summer camp]don't have that facility and that's where he misses out. They wouldn't have the same support he would have in (names ASD class).

Interviewer: And would he get daily access to the mainstream class, to the 5th/6th class?

Sarah: Yeah he goes up now, it's working out so far this year. He's going up at 12 o'clock everyday to the mainstream class. And he'll take part in the class there.

Ahm, and he has his one-to-one in the morning with (names ASD class). And he goes out cooking and whatever they can do together, like the art and they're preparing now for the Confirmation- he does that up in the mainstream class and he likes that bit.

Interviewer: And how do you think he copes with that mainstream integration?

Sarah: ((Long pause)) So far it's working this year. But again, I think that's because they're all in small little groups and they're not in the big classroom setting. I think that's working to Eoin's advantage this year.

Interviewer: It's an interesting perspective, because I hadn't thought about this.

Sarah: You see, they were showing us on one of the Zoom meetings, you know what the kids have. And they're actually little groups of four. So they're not in a proper laid-out classroom, so I'm thinking, that's working to Eoin's advantage. Like he's not sitting as if you would in a normal classroom that we'd be used to or that kids would have been used to last year, before Covid-19. I feel that's working to his advantage at the minute, the small little group.

Interviewer: He seems to be coping well with it. And would he ever socialise with children from the mainstream

Disliking visible support- impression management a concern

Desire to be like peers

Missing out on extra-curricular opportunities due to lack of availability of supports

Daily mainstream integration
Pen Portrait/Background Information

Covid-19 school modifications as making mainstream class less overwhelming

Parent makes sense of Covid-19 school modifications as making mainstream class less overwhelming for Eoin

class outside of the school setting, or is it mostly those children in (names ASD class) that you mentioned whom he would meet up with?

Sarah: Mainly really (ASD class) because the other kids would be too boisterous, too rough, am, they'd be going to [names club] and he doesn't go to [names club], so he'd miss out that way. So, he wouldn't really meet up with them outside school. But at parties now, he'd go to parties, birthday parties- the small birthday parties they'd have, he'd play with them and that, but he'd last about an hour and that would be it. That's it an hour max would be what he'd last with a child from the mainstream school. Whereas when it's with the (names ASD class) kids, they'd take ten minutes, and they'd give each other a break and they'd understand each other, they'd have their own, like they could sit side by side and not talk for an hour and that would be fine by them. But if you say with someone from mainstream school and you didn't talk like it would be "Eoin like, why aren't you talking to me?". And Eoin would be like "I just need.." and yeah they'd take it up wrong.

Interviewer: Yeah, they have, it sounds like they understand each other's needs a bit more. And do you think the inclusion with children in the mainstream setting is important for Eoin?

Sarah: Yes I do, yeah. Yeah I do yeah, for his social skills anyway and for his confidence, because you know, because I want him to be able to know that just because he has autism doesn't mean that he can't be ((pause)) like everybody else. ((Pause)) And that's what he told me when he was a small child, "I want to be like everybody else". So when he says to me "Oh Mammy I don't want to do this", I

Mainstream peers as too boisterous
Divergent interest to mainstream peers

Sense that Eoin misses out on
socialisation opportunities

Difficulty sustaining social
interactions with mainstream peers

Special class peers as understanding
and facilitating each others' needs

Mutual understanding with other
children with ASD

say “Well you want to be like everybody else, you have to do chores like everybody else, you have to do this like everybody else”. Because he might use the excuse “Oh mam, my autism is bad today” ... And then he ends up seeing his friends from school and it’s like “See there are all your friends from school and they’re shopping as well, they all have to go shopping. And he’s like “okay” and then he feels like “right”.

Interviewer: And in the ASD class set-up, there are a number of adults to support Eoin. What are your experiences of that support structure for him?

Sarah: Really, really good. I actually like the way they do it. They swap, am SNAs- they’ll have an SNA for one week and then an SNA for the next week, and they all have different skills. And he works on those skills every week so that actually works for him. And then plus because they’re changing, he’s used to teacher changing, so if a teacher is out sick, he doesn’t mind a new teacher coming in. Whereas when he was in junior infants, he didn’t like change at all. He wouldn’t be able to cope with change at all. But because the teachers are changing, they’re teaching Eoin “it’s okay when things change”- things will still be okay for him, he’ll still have his lunch at the same time, he’ll still do his school work, and even though it’s a different teacher, it’s still the same for him so he doesn’t mind that way. So that actually has, I feel has worked for him to cope with change better. Because when he gets to secondary school or normal school- yeah secondary school especially, he’ll have a different teacher for every subject, so this way he’s actually becoming used to change. He’s able to cope with somebody new and he won’t mind

Inclusion as important for social skills and confidence

Inclusion as important for minimising sense of being different

Long term desire to ‘be like everybody else’

Use of autism as an excuse- sense that Eoin is somewhat grappling with how to make sense of diagnosis.

Variety of SNA support provided

Variety of SNA support as building flexibility for change

Then/Now transformation- capacity for coping with change improved

because he gets the same work done. So that works for him.

Interviewer: Okay. And I suppose is the SNA support important for him in terms of that mainstream integration?

Sarah: Yeah- they're there and they don't. They don't even have to go near him. He just knows they're there and he feels more confident, he feels more safer. Because there was a time there (.) when he first started going up, I don't think the SNA was there all the time. And that was a bit of an issue with Eoin then in the classroom, he was kind of- he wasn't coping well. And then he wasn't listening, and he was always looking for that support. So then a teacher sat in and just watched Eoin to see what was going on, so then it was decided to bring up a SNA full time for him up to the classroom for him. So he went up to the mainstream and (names SNA) would go with him or (names SNA) would go with him or somebody would go with him. And just sit back and just be there so that he'd be okay and it worked out that way.

Interviewer: Okay

Sarah: But he has to have a SNA there so for him to be able to feel safe there and so he can do what everybody else is doing. And then he'd have to have somebody there in case he's losing concentration like who can prompt him in a way that isn't going to embarrass him or make him feel like other kids are looking at him. They have a system, they had a little way- they have little techniques nobody else can see. Like he taps his leg now if he's having problems and the SNA comes straight over. So they'll come over and say "Are you okay Eoin" and he can say "Oh yeah this now is a bit..", you know instead of him calling the SNA over, he taps his leg and he has a little

Building capacity to cope with secondary school changes

Language- use of 'normal school' here interesting?

SNA not in immediate proximity- subtle support to minimise sense of being different?

SNA presence as conferring safety leading to confidence in mainstream integration

Past difficulty coping in mainstream setting

SNA as associated with safety and security

Sensitivity to visibility of SNA support in mainstream classroom- attuned to how he is perceived by mainstream peers

thing and then the SNA comes over straight away and that's just less embarrassing for him

Interviewer: ((in overlap)) Okay, yeah

Sarah: it's not as much of a big deal made for him that way.

Interviewer: Yeah, and it's not an adult constantly by his side in front of peers

Sarah: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, and how would you describe Eoin's academic progress in school?

Sarah: Oh, em. Oh god, this is hard. He finds some things... Well in some things he's really, really ahead of his game, he's way ahead at stuff. And then other stuff is it then like em ((pause)) like em maths now he loves numbers and that's how I got him to do speech therapy because he loves working with numbers, like maths was his strong-sorting out patterns and doing patterns in maths, that was his strongest and so we always worked on that first to get his confidence up and we could say "Eoin now we'll move onto English" ((pause)) you see because of his speech, his English then wasn't much- he wasn't very confident in his speech and his English.

Interviewer: Okay

Sarah: And so I feel that kind of brought him down a good bit when he comes to English work, he has to, he had to work so much on his speech and building up his confidence to be able to talk out in class and for the other kids to understand what he was saying. It took him a long time, because it wasn't until he was about seven that other people could actually understand him without me having to talk for him or teacher talk for him. He was actually able to do it for himself and he was so since he turned seven he's

Innocuous, subtle methods of SNA support- minimising sense of difference to peers

Sense here that Eoin is highly attuned to visibility of his support and impression management

Sense of Eoin being academically ahead in some aspects

Positive affect towards maths

Effect of speech difficulties on literacy progress and confidence. Speech difficulties as affecting academic self-efficacy?

Speech difficulties as affecting literacy performance and self-efficacy?

coming on really, really well in English now it's- he can read a book now in his head but yet he can't get some of the words out but he can still read it in his head and like I'd never actually though he'd get that far where he could actually read a book that was fit for his own level. Like he comes on, he mightn't do something for so, you know he mightn't show progress for ages but then he'll just show progress within two, three weeks and he'll come on strides. And then he might slow down then and come on strides again like ((pause)). But at the minute now, he's just kind of getting lazy at the minute I think ((laughs))

Interviewer: Okay ((laughs)) And he's probably more motivated by things that interest him at the moment I suppose

Some content redacted for confidentiality

Interviewer:

Interviewer: And do you feel in the key areas like literacy and numeracy, do you feel that he is fulfilling his academic potential at the moment?

Sarah: Am, no, I don't think ahm ((pause)). Eoin learns differently. Do you know am, when I'd be doing his homework here with him now, he'd only learn what he needs to learn for life. Like for instance now going the spelling, like he went into school one day and said "what do I need to use that word for", like "why do I need that word?", "Am I going to use that word when I'm ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen?". And he was only like six or seven doing this like. He was asking "Do I need that word?" And then we'd have to give him words he'd use every single day to do his spelling homework. And then when you'd have to put the spellings into sentences, and that was fine. But he'd learn more from me saying the

Significant temporal dimension here- Parent placing heaving emphasis on Eoin's journey and progress to date

Increased communicative ability as facilitating improved literacy performance

Ability for silent reading

Exceeding prior parental expectations in literacy- Sense of a Then/Now transformation?

Peaks and troughs of progress?

Sense of Eoin learning differently

Needing to see purpose for learning.

Rationale for learning required- logical, rigid thinking patterns? i.e ASD-related characteristics

spellings to him. I'd write down the sentences and he found that hard copying my sentence out, so he has a different way of learning like. He, oh how do I say this now, he learns better from me saying the sentence to him than when he has the words, he learns better that way instead of him reading from a book. He learns better from somebody actually telling him or reading the question to him than he does reading from the book. It takes him longer to process the sentence, reading himself from the book

Interviewer: Okay

Sarah: And I feel that's where am mainstream kind of falls down because the child has to do it themselves and they can't have any help. And all he needs is someone beside him- you know when they're doing their, their end-of-year test thing

Interviewer: The standardised tests? The Dromcondra...

Sarah: Yeah them! Am because they did it in school with Eoin, he did it by himself first with no help and then he did it and he didn't do really well, he didn't show his academic achievement, like he didn't show what he could actually do. So then an SNA actually sat down with him and she read out the sentence to him and he got, what was it, 7 nearly 8 out of ten? Instead of getting like three out of ten, he got like nine out of ten. Because somebody actually sat beside him and, they didn't help him, they just read out the sentence to him

Interviewer: Mmm

Sarah: So instead of him having to read it out himself, so I feel that's where mainstream falls down for him. Because it's not showing how well ((pause)) how well he actually is and what he actually does know. And those tests don't show Eoin's potential

Different way of learning

Reading for comprehension as difficult

Mainstream provision perceived as unsupportive and 'falling short'
Mainstream provision as not individualised

Inflexible standardised testing procedures as leading to underestimation of ability

Mainstream provision as falling short for Eoin

Interviewer: Yes, at least in secondary I think they do have the facilities for you know for those readers in exams, so hopefully his potential might show. And my last set of questions are about Eoin's view of himself, so I'm trying to touch on how you think Eoin views himself. So broadly speaking, how would you describe Eoin's sense of himself, how do you think he might view himself?

Sarah: ((Pause)) Em ((pause)) I think over the last couple of years, I think he views himself as negative. He has a negative view of himself because when he's asking questions like you know "Why do I have this?" and "Why do I have that?" He kind of puts everything on having autism. And so I'm trying to give him ((pause)) a more positive perception of him- like what's good about Eoin. Like I keep saying to him like "Eoin, like that doesn't make you who you are, you're still Eoin at the end of the day, and you just happen to have autism". **Some content redacted for confidentiality.**

So it's all directed at himself and at times it can get really bad where he's like "you all don't like me because I have autism" or "nobody likes me because I have autism" or "it's because I have autism that nobody likes me". Yeah you see he has a negative view at the moment of autism and of himself and how he mightn't be able to do these things.

Interviewer: Mmm

Sarah: But then em, other times then he'd be grand, he'd be great with himself. I've a photograph now of him

Standardised testing a 'one-size fits all' approach leading to underestimation of skills?

Negative self view with age.
Temporal, developmental dimension of the self- increased self awareness

'Why Me?' questions- Questioning self, elements of a hyper-sense of self, constantly grappling with it.

Blaming autism- diagnosis and self-questioning linked ? Construing self around a diagnostic label, with all difficulties attributed to diagnosis, led to negatively entrenched view of autism

Efforts to foster more positive sense of self

Can't do what peers can. Downward social comparison with mainstream peers based on abilities in particular physical/sporting abilities

Internalising difficulties
Internalising difficulties arising from negative appraisal of self

Feeling unliked by others
Linking perceived negative appraisals of others to autism.

All difficulties framed by diagnostic label

Negative view of autism
Negative view of self

getting his hair cut after lockdown and he'd lovely chinos on him and a shirt he'd picked out himself and he said to me "Mam look at me,...I Look like a man, I look like an adult". And I was like "you do, look at you, look how handsome you are". So you have to kind of keep encouraging him the whole time and take him off making sure to tell him "You're Eoin and everybody loves Eoin and what would you do without Eoin". And you know just concentrating on the positive, looking for when he's doing something positive and say something positive to him then, praise him. And if he says anything negative I ignore it. But then if he gets upset over it, I'd try explain it to him "like why do you keep saying these things" and I try to find out what's causing it, and it could be just something small in school, like somebody could have said something small to him in school and he just took it up all the wrong way and it's on his head then trying to figure out like what does it mean and like emotionally what does it mean and does that mean something's wrong with me and so that's what we're dealing with at the minute. Yeah he's asking a lot of questions about himself and a lot of it is negative when he does start.

Interviewer: Okay, and his awareness of his diagnosis of autism, is that recent?

Sarah: No, oh he's been aware ((pause)) god he's been aware on and off since he's started primary school or actually in ah there was an incident in playschool actually he came home to me one day and this is when he wasn't able to talk properly but I could understand him. And he goes to me "Sarah", he was never able to call me mammy until he got older and he goes to me "Sarah, why me no words?" in other words "why can't I talk?" like "why me

Perceiving self as unable-social comparison
Diagnosis, down-ward social comparison and self-questioning linked

Exceptions to negative self-appraisal

Need for constant encouragement and reassurance as perceived by parent

Importance of catching the positive and providing praise

Difficulty processing social information

Making sense of self in context of social interactions in school

Difficulties processing social information/interactions leading to negative self-questioning?

Increased self-questioning in negative context

Long-term awareness of difficulties

no words?” And that was the first thing he seen in himself as a bit different. Then we got talking and I just told him “It’s okay it’s just going to take you a bit longer to talk because of the muscles in your mouth and you’ve to do all these exercises and then you’ll feel a bit better then and then you’ll be okay in class”. So when he was seven then and he was able to talk himself, then other issues started coming up where he was like ((pause)) so once he could talk himself when he was around seven or eight I think was when he realized “okay like he’s different to me” and that’s when he realized it.

Interviewer: Okay

Sarah: Yeah and I think when they started integrating him into the big school and then watching the big lads on the big yard, I think he was like “Yeah I’m different to them” and that’s when he realized, so yeah when he was around seven or eight when he started realizing it about his autism and he started questioning me about his autism. “What do I have?” and “what do you call it?” and “what is it?” and “how does it affect me?” and all this kind of, and all these questions. A psychologist wouldn’t be able to answer some of the questions he asks me and so it can be so difficult at times. And then he’s got a really good memory and so when he puts, when something happens to him when he’s four, I actually think back and think “oh god what happened to him when he was four?” And so he keeps everything in a little box in his head and he’ll be like “when I was four this happened” and he’ll just be very, very detailed in what he does say to me like. Like “when I was five, you said this and daddy said this” and he’ll be able to relay the whole conversation and I’ll be thinking “Oh my good god”.

Long-term awareness of speech/language difficulties

Questioning self in context of difficulties

Realisation of difference to others at middle childhood

Integration as triggering awareness of ‘difference’ to mainstream peers and causing him to look at himself difference.

Mainstream integration as triggering social comparison around concept of ‘normalcy/difference’?

Questioning of diagnosis middle childhood

‘psychologist wouldn’t be able to answer some of the questions he asks me and it can be so difficult at times’ - use of psychologist as almost a metaphor to emphasis how difficult it can be for a parent to respond to issues of the questioning self?

Good memory

<p>Interviewer: And you're probably even more conscious of what you say because you know he'll remember it. And I think you have touched on my next question- do you think Eoin compares himself to other children in school, and if so in what ways does he compare himself?</p> <p>Sarah: ((in overlap)) Oh yeah- now mainly when it comes to playtime and when he's seeing kids doing something that he's not able to socially do or he doesn't feel confident to do. That's when he-that's when he- he compares himself constantly, on a daily basis like. "But if they can do that and I can't". You see, he's eleven and they're eleven and he's thinking how come he's not able to do it and they can. And they're able to do it like straight away and he can't, he's like ((pause)) "Why can't I do it straight away?" or "What's wrong with me?" or (.) do you know he questions, like instead of trying it again and trying again, he just gives up on it really easily. And I feel like that's what happens to him sometimes, his, his confidence just gets knocked if he can't do it straight away.</p> <p>Interviewer: Is it the children in the mainstream setting you think he is comparing himself to a lot?</p> <p>Sarah: Am ((pause)) yeah I think so. I, I think it's mainly in mainstream when he's out on the school playground, on the playground. I think that's when he really, really does it.</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay, and em does Eoin every show his feelings or talk about being in a special class? Do you think that he is aware that (names ASD class) is a special class in comparison to classes in the mainstream setting?</p> <p>Sarah: Em, ah (.) no, no ((sighs)) no he wouldn't no. No, they wouldn't, he doesn't even. He just knows he's in a small classroom. That's all he knows. That's it's a small</p>	<p><i>'keeps everything in a little box in his head'- metaphor as to how he retains information and experiences which he uses to make sense of self?</i></p> <p><i>"Oh my good god'- parent emphasising how careful she needs to be in discussing issues with Eoin, as he will retain conversation for later processing with regard to making sense of self</i></p> <p>Playtime with mainstream peers as triggering social comparison based on competencies/abilities</p> <p>Social comparison leading to self-questioning</p> <p>Mainstream age-equivalent peers as benchmark for social comparison</p> <p>Questioning self</p> <p><i>"What's wrong with me"- pathologising of self</i></p> <p>Poor self-concept affecting perseverance with task</p> <p>Playground as primary context for negative social comparison with mainstream peers</p>
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classroom and that's his safe place. That's where he goes to when he feels overwhelmed ((Pause))

Interviewer: Okay

Sarah: That's his safe place, because you see, there's other kids with autism in the mainstream school as well, and they might come up, they go up and down to the unit as well. So he feels that this is just somewhere for us to go to have a "time-out", and calm down and do our work one-to-one. He just feels like it's another classroom.

Interviewer: And that it's open to other people in the school?

Sarah: Yeah, that's the way he sees it just, yeah.

Interviewer: And do you think that Eoin's school experience has influenced how he comes to view himself?

Sarah: ((Pause)) Ahm ((pause)) mainly with his peers. I think mainly with the mainstream kids, that's when either has a negative view of himself or a positive view of himself. Depends on what happens that day, depends on what a kid says to him and depends on what activities they're doing. Ahm, whether they understand him or not or (.) some kids have great patience with him, other kids don't. Other kids then would have no tolerance of autism and other kids you know, every child is different. And, ahm, that's where he mainly has issues, mainly when he's in bigger social circles and in bigger groups, that's when he questions himself and thinks to himself like "Why are they talking to me" and "Why did they say hello to me?" and "What did I do wrong?" and "Is it me?" or you know, that kind of thing. He blames it all on himself, it's all inward on himself.

ASD class as simply 'small class' for Eoin. Despite hyper questioning self, interesting that there is no questioning of provision?

ASD class as safe place when overwhelmed. Connotations of a place of sanctuary

ASD class as safe place

Open door of ASD class to all children with autism in school- flexibility of movement in and out of ASD class

ASD class as place of sanctuary

ASD class as 'just another classroom'- doesn't seem to be negative connotations of difference in terms of provision

Sense of self in school as primarily construed in social context of mainstream peers- What does this say about the importance of the social context in self-construal for a child with autism, for whom the social context is often considered to be less relevant in self-appraisal

Varying level of acceptance, tolerance, understanding by mainstream peers

Mainstream social circles as triggering self questioning

Difficulties in social context contributing to self-questioning and negative self-construal

Interviewer: Okay, and em, are there practices in Eoin's school that you think support him to develop a more positive view of himself?

Sarah: Ahm ((pause)) they always ((pause)) like last year now they did a project on [names inclusive book] and every child in the school had to put down what they want to do themselves and what qualities they felt they had themselves and it was all put up on one big board on the school, and it wasn't just the (names ASD class), it was every single child in the school had to put up what they felt good about themselves. And then he was able to see other children's views of themselves and that kind of helped him a lot. Ahm, when the school does big projects like that about self-concept and personality, the whole school comes together, it's not just the (names ASD class) and so he sees other kids having difficulties like he would have.. And then he'll see others and it's like "Oh they like the same things that I do" and that will start his conversation then and give him the confidence to go to that person and say "Oh I see you like the same thing as I like" and then he'll make a new friend that way. So when he sees it on the board, he knows then, well he uses that to his advantage then to say "Oh I like this and so do you", and that starts the conversation for him.

Interviewer: Oh and it probably makes starting conversations less daunting for him as well.

Sarah: Yeah, like you know they had match attacks there another year and he started playing match attacks and then he had something to talk to other kids about.

Interviewer: The very last thing Sarah which I was hoping to touch on is, I know Eoin is coming towards the end of primary school, I know that he still has two years. What

Pathologising self- attributing all difficulties encountered on self

School-wide projects on self -concept and personality beyond ASD class

Parent repeats twice the 'whole school coming together, not just [ASD class]' -the emphasis appears to be on inclusive school-wide practices.

School-wide projects enabling him to relate to others, seeing that others have difficulties too

would be your hopes and concerns for Eoin moving on from his current placement?

Sarah: Ah, I'm worried he won't have the same support network that he has in School 2. Because School 2 is such, like they have such (.), such a high-quality service that they provide for the kids with autism, so kids feel they're like everybody else. And they support them every single way, if one thing doesn't work, they'll try a different thi-, they'll try a different approach. They're constantly in touch with me if anything goes wrong. Am, you know and we all try to work together to try to keep things positive in school. And I feel that when he goes to secondary school, he won't have that same support. And he won't have that same safety environment or that same ((pause)) ah level of support that he has in primary school. And I feel that I won't get that support either as a parent. Or that they won't tell me everything that's going on in school with him. So that I can help as well like, so I feel, ahm, ((pause)) School 2 are too good to us I think ((laughs)) and the school, they're, they're a you know too good. Do you know, and I feel that won't happen to us in secondary school. And I feel he won't progress academically in secondary school because of that. And that he won't have his SNA full time or that he won't. And you know things are changing, and things are improving but I feel like he won't have that same support. And I feel like it will make him really, really unhappy. And he won't want to go to school and then his bad behaviour then will start reoccurring and start showing up again and meltdowns will happen more often again, and that's what I'm worried about.

Apprehension that post-primary school will not entail the same support network

Primary school as supportive for children with autism- high-quality service provide

Willingness in primary school to try different approaches

Parent-teacher collaboration in primary school

Apprehension that support system won't be there in post-primary school

Apprehension of diminished parent support and communication in post-primary school

Primary school as being 'too good'- are there connotations that the school's level of support is somewhat disempowering?

Fear of academic regression in post-primary because of reduced support

Apprehension regarding reduced SNA support

Apprehension of post-primary transition having reduced supports leading to unhappiness and regression

Real, palpable sense of anxiety and trepidation for parent about post-primary transition in this extract

Interviewer: And would you be hoping for a placement with a similar set up to School 2, with an ASD class with the ability to integrate in mainstream.

Sarah: ((in overlap)) Yeah that's what we're hoping for. Named Secondary School* is the closest secondary school to us and he wants to go to Named Secondary School*.... And he wants to be like everybody else, he wants to go somewhere in his own home town. And he wants to see other people who he knows from School 2 who are going there, because that's where they go to. And he wants to feel normal, again it's this "normal" thing again that's been brought up the whole time. Ahm, and they're supposed to have a autism unit, but I don't think it's full-time or it's ran differently to full-time, and em, I don't know would he have his own full-time SNA, I'm not too sure yet, because I know parents have had a hard time trying to get a full-time SNA, especially for their child themselves, people have to share SNAs, I'm not too sure. So that is a bit of a worry like, because he will need someone full-time. And I'm scared that if he doesn't get that full-time SNA, that the school mightn't take him in and he'd have to go somewhere different and then he'd probably have to take a trip to like (names town with special school) or somewhere different, and he'll take twenty steps back and it won't do him any good. And do we're still worried and, and his dad is really worried as well about secondary schoolwe won't know until he goes to secondary school, we just don't know.

Interviewer: Well it sounds like he's made so much progress so hopefully that will continue.

Sarah: ((in overlap)) Yeah and we don't want to, like you know he usen't know how to dress himself and he didn't

Desire to be like everyone else

Desire to be 'normal'- recurring theme of desire for 'normalcy' in Eoin's life

Foreseeing difficulties acquiring full-time SNA support

Perception that Eoin will require full-time SNA support

I'm 'scared'- palpable trepidation on parent's behalf about post-primary transition

Special school placement as a 'step backwards'

Repeated used of 'worried', emphasising extent of worry, trepidation arising from post-primary transition.

Temporal dimension- parent emphasising progress made, a 'then/no transformation' is there apprehension about the fragility of his progress?

<p>know how to do anything for himself....., but no I just want him to be independent, and I want him to be happy. And to live in the real world like everybody else.</p> <p><i>End of Interview Close Up</i></p>	<p>Desire for Eoin to be independent and 'in the real word'- Aspirations for him.</p>
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**Appendix R: Sample Talking Mat Interview Transcript with Exploratory Comments
Case 2: Transcribed Talking Mat Interview**

Pseudonyms:

School: School 2

Teacher: Aine (Pseudonym)

Child: Eoin

Prior to Transcription:

- Informed Assent Process
- BPVS- 3 Assessment
- Demonstration of Talking Mat Procedure
- Practice Talking Mat Tasks Based on Special Interests

Original Transcript	<i>Exploratory Comments</i> Descriptive Comments = Normal Text Linguistic Comments = <i>Italics</i> Conceptual Comments = <u>Underlined</u>
<p>Interviewer: So you’ve used a Talking Mat to tell me all about your hobbies, so because you used it I know lots about you.</p> <p>Eoin: Yeah (laughs)</p> <p>Interviewer: So the last thing we’re going to do today is a Talking Mat but instead of hobbies we’re going to talk about school.</p> <p>Tom: Yes</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Directions about setting up Talking Mat</i></p> <p>Interviewer: So the first one is school. So how do you feel about school?</p> <p>Eoin: (Places in ‘not sure’). I’m ‘not sure’. I don’t like the ((long pause)) being on the different yard.</p> <p>Interviewer: Oh are you on a different yard this year?</p> <p>Eoin: Yes like we have to swap yards all the time.</p>	<p><i>Hesitant and unsure about affect to school?</i> <i>Long pause</i> Yard time as source of negative affect</p> <p>Making sense of Covid-19 related school changes</p>

<p>Interviewer: Okay, and that's something that you're not liking as much?</p> <p>Eoin: Yes</p> <p>Interviewer: Why don't you like the yard this year as much?</p> <p>Eoin: Em, sometimes we have to go the the equipment and the equip, you can't play (.) no no games on it. It's too small.</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay, so it's not the same. You preferred the other yard was it?</p> <p>Eoin: No I preferred to play with everybody, not like, not fifth sixth. Em, I don't like (.) em, em (sw- inaudible). The only thing fifth sixth, some fifth sixth play is football (pause).</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay, with fifth, sixth is it?</p> <p>Eoin: Yeah</p> <p>Interviewer: And what classes do you work in Eoin?</p> <p>Eoin: I work in (names ASD class) and fifth class.</p> <p>Interviewer: So you work in two classes</p> <p>Eoin: Yes</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay will we pick the next one. So the next one is 'My Classroom'. And when we're thinking of this one, will we think about (names ASD class) first. So how do you feel about (names ASD class)?</p> <p>Eoin: [places on 'like' column]</p> <p>Interviewer: Oh what do you like about (names ASD class)?</p>	<p>Negative affect towards Covid-19 related changes on school yard</p> <p>Preference for playing with younger mainstream peers- <u>is there a sense perhaps that Eoin is better able to relate to younger peers and difficulty relating to mainstream peers?</u></p> <p>Divergent interests from mainstream age-equivalent peers</p> <p><u>Difficulties with social interactions with mainstream peers in terms of divergent interests, feeling disconnected/unable to relate and join in? Sense of being on social periphery with mainstream peers?</u></p> <p><i>Hesitant language used here- sense that this is something that is particularly difficult for Eoin? Also brings it up immediately in terms of opening conversation about school, ie. a primary concern for him.</i></p> <p>Positive affect towards ASD class.</p>
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<p>Eoin: Em ((long pause)) I like doing work there.</p> <p>Interviewer: Oh you like doing work there. And is there anything you would like to change or be different about your classroom?</p> <p>Eoin: [Shakes head] No.</p> <p>Interviewer: You sound happy with (names ASD class). Do you have lots of space to work in (names ASD class)?</p> <p>Eoin: Yes, yes.</p> <p>Interviewer: And is that a good thing about it, your own big table?</p> <p>Eoin: Yes, yes.</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay, the next one is 'Multisensory room'. So how do you feel about the multisensory room?</p> <p>Eoin: [places on 'like' column] Yes.</p> <p>Interviewer: Oh what do you like about the multisensory room?</p> <p>Eoin: ((pause)) The swing, (pause) and the ball pool.</p> <p>Interviewer: Oh you've a ball pool there too. And when do you go to the multisensory room?</p> <p>Eoin: Em, em when we take a break or it's on our, on our board or you get to on reward chart.</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay. And how do you feel when you're in the multi-sensory room?</p> <p>Eoin: Good.</p> <p>Interviewer: You feel good.</p>	<p>Positive connotations with sensory room-room is associated with a 'break' time.</p>
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<p>just [gestures swinging motion], you have to move it first and then lie down.</p> <p>Interviewer: And how do you feel when you're on that?</p> <p>Eoin: Good (pause) sometimes I almost fall asleep on it</p> <p>Interviewer: Wow, you almost fall asleep on it, that sounds nice. And when you're on the yard who do you play with?</p> <p>Eoin: Em [taps table] Sarah* (pseudonym)</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay, and what class is Sarah* (pseudonym) in?</p> <p>Eoin: She's in the same class em (pause), the same class.</p> <p>Interviewer: Is she in fifth class?</p> <p>Eoin: Yes (pause) she's in the same class yes</p> <p>Interviewer: And does she like to go on the swings with her or what do you play with her?</p> <p>Eoin: Em, we played, we played [smiles] family games with third, fourth class, when we were in fourth class, now we can't any more</p> <p>Interviewer: Oh because you all have to stay in your class bubbles?</p> <p>Eoin: Yes</p> <p>Interviewer: Oh so it's a bit different this year</p> <p>Eoin: Yes, yes</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay, the next one is 'children in my class'. And we'll think about children</p>	<p><u>Feeling regulated, calm</u></p> <p>Preference for play with younger mainstream peers</p> <p><u>Sense of being able to better interaction and relate to them?</u></p>
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<p>in the (names ASD class) first. How do you feel about children in your class?</p> <p>Eoin: [places in 'like' column]. Hmm</p> <p>Interviewer: What do you like about children in the (names ASD class?)</p> <p>Eoin: Em ((pause)) I like playing with Daniel* (pseudonym) with the the jigsaws.</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay, so Daniel* (pseudonym) is someone you like playing with in your class?</p> <p>Eoin: Yes and Calum* (pseudonym)</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay, and could you pick one of those boys for me Eoin. Who do you want to pick?</p> <p>Eoin: Calum* (pseudonym)</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay, in what ways are you and Calum* (pseudonym) alike?</p> <p>Eoin: We have in common about (inaudible) playing games, the same Youtube and we have some in common</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay, and are you and Callum* different from each other in any ways?</p> <p>Eoin: Em ((long pause)) I don't know</p> <p>Interviewer: Is that a tricky one?</p> <p>Eoin: Yes</p> <p>Interviewer: So the next one we have is 'Playing with friends'. Where would you put playing with friends? In school</p> <p>Eoin: In school, em [doesn't yet place card]. I have friends in third, fourth class and some friends in sixth class too.</p>	<p><u>Shared enjoyment with special class peers? (i.e. naming two peers he enjoys playing with)</u></p> <p><u>Similarities with special class peers attributed to concrete interests and hobbies</u></p> <p><u>'I don't know' - perhaps he hasn't thought too much about their differences or has difficulty in comparing self with other?</u></p> <p>Perceives self as having friends in different class levels- mostly younger class levels. <u>No reference to having friends in own mainstream class level- connotations of difficulty relating to mainstream class peers, divergent interests?</u> Friends in second class- significantly younger than him, <u>what confers a</u></p>
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<p>Interviewer: Okay so you have friends in different parts of the school?</p> <p>Eoin: Yeah [smiles] and some in second class too.</p> <p>Interviewer: Oh, so from all over the school?</p> <p>Eoin: Yes</p> <p>Interviewer: And how do you feel about playing with friends? Where would you put that?</p> <p>Eoin: Like.</p> <p>Interviewer: And so who are your friends in school?</p> <p>Eoin: Who is my friends in school? Padraig*, Jacob*, [hesitates], Ciara*, Finn*, Lewis*, Hollie*, Ger*, Ciaran*, Greg* em [taps table] (pause) Emily*, Declan (pseudonyms) and a different Declan is (names ASD class 2)</p> <p>Interviewer: Wow, it sounds like you have a lot of friends?</p> <p>Eoin: Yes.</p> <p>Interviewer: And are they all from the one class or from diff-</p> <p>Eoin: ((in overlap)) No different classes. Emily*, Gavin* [nods and smiles]</p> <p>Interviewer: And do you find it easy or hard to make friends in school?</p> <p>Eoin: [sighs] Emm hard.</p> <p>Interviewer: Hard, what's hard about making friends?</p>	<p><u>connection here? Relating to younger peers, or competence in 'looking after' and taking charge</u></p> <p><i>Repetition of question- do friends automatically come to mind?</i></p> <p>Long list of friends including younger children, and those from different classes? <u>Does Eoin make sense of acquaintances as friends?</u></p> <p>Recognises difficulty making friends in friendship formation</p> <p><i>Hesitancy, pausing and look downwards- reflecting something that is particularly difficult for Eoin at school and affecting him emotionally?</i></p>
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<p>Eoin: ((long pause)) When I make friends I don't know how to (pause), I don't know how to ((long pause)) do it again [looks downwards]</p> <p>Interviewer: How to stay being their friend?</p> <p>Eoin: No, em how to make friends, I mean make a friend I forget how to make (pause) more friends.</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay, so how to keep making more friends?</p> <p>Eoin: Yeah</p> <p>Interviewer: That's something that's tricky for you?</p> <p>Eoin: Yes</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay, and what do you play with, with your friends in school?</p> <p>Eoin: Em ((long pause)) play on the slide or play on the monkey bars. And sometimes I know where my friend John* live</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay, okay.</p> <p>Interviewer: And I want you to choose one friend who you like to play with. So maybe your best friend.</p> <p>Eoin: My best friend. I pick ((long pause)) I pick em ((long pause)) I pick em, I don't know</p> <p>Interviewer: You can just choose one friend, it doesn't have to be a best friend, someone who you play with</p> <p>Eoin: I play a lot with Sarah outside.</p>	<p>Recognition of difficulty making friends <u>Acute awareness of social interaction difficulties in context of friendships?</u></p> <p><u>Preference towards structured games with peers?</u></p> <p>Difficulty articulating a best friend. <u>Is there a sense that while Eoin considers many school peers as friends, there are few that he is very close too?</u></p> <p>Difficulty finding similarities between self and friend/peer</p>
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<p>Interviewer: So are you and Sarah like each other in anyways? Are you similar to each other in any ways?</p> <p>Eoin: Not really</p> <p>Interviewer: Not really, are you kind of different to you other?</p> <p>Eoin: Yeah</p> <p>Interviewer: What's different about ye?</p> <p>Eoin: Em, she likes LOL dolls and I don't.</p> <p>Interviewer: And if I was talking to Sarah, what would she say about you? If I asked Sarah to describe Eoin for me, what do you think she would say?</p> <p>Eoin: Eoin is my good friend, yes.</p> <p>Interviewer: And what else would she say about you?</p> <p>Eoin: ((long pause)) I'm nice, I'm friendly, I help people, I make people laugh and never sad.</p> <p>Interviewer: Make people laugh and never sad?</p> <p>Eoin: Yeah</p> <p>Interviewer: That sounds like a lovely personality there you have.</p> <p>Eoin: Yes.</p> <p>Interviewer: And would she say anything else?</p> <p>Eoin: Em, just I think only them things</p> <p>Interviewer: Well those would be nice things to have said about you. Okay we'll move onto the next one. So the next one is</p>	<p>Differences between self and peer based on preferences/interests</p> <p>Perceives self as reciprocal friend</p> <p>Feeling valued by friend-</p> <p><u>Considers reflected appraisal of peer in positive terms</u></p>
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<p>‘Adults helping me’. How do you feel about adults helping you in school?</p> <p>Eoin: [Places in ‘like’ column] Good.</p> <p>Interviewer: And which adults help you in school?</p> <p>Eoin: Mary* (SNA), Ciara (SNA), Áine (ASD class teacher) and Sarah (SNA)</p> <p>Interviewer: And how do they help you?</p> <p>Eoin: Em (pause), em ((long pause), em ((long pause))</p> <p>Interviewer: With your work and things like that?</p> <p>Eoin: Yeah</p> <p>Interviewer: And let’s pick one teacher, let’s pick Áine. What would Áine say about you, if I asked her to describe you?</p> <p>Eoin: Em his writing is good yes.</p> <p>Interviewer: And would she say anything else about you?</p> <p>Eoin: And he doing good work.</p> <p>Interviewer: And you’re doing good work. Will we pick up the next card. So the next card is ‘being in a large class’. So how do you feel about being in a large class with lots of children like the (names mainstream class)?</p> <p>Eoin: [Places in ‘Not Sure’]. Not sure</p> <p>Interviewer: Not sure, what are you kind of not sure?</p> <p>Eoin: And when I got there, it just scream in my ear.</p>	<p>Positive affect towards adult support</p> <p>Recognition of SNAs as helpful adults in school. <u>Positive affect toward provision of additional adult support in school</u></p> <p>Feeling positively appraised by teacher in terms of work ethic/academic performance- → <u>fostering a sense of ompetency?</u></p> <p>Mainstream class as somewhere I feel unsure about.</p>
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<p>Interviewer: Oh when you got there it was loud?</p> <p>Eoin: [Nods]</p> <p>Interviewer: So is that something that's different between the large class and the [names ASD class]? It's a bit louder</p> <p>Eoin: [Nods] Yes, yes</p> <p>Interviewer: And do you like when things are loud like that?</p> <p>Eoin: [Shakes head]</p> <p>Interviewer: And is there anything nice about when you go to a large class?</p> <p>Eoin: [pause] Am, doing P.E. like, like P.E. Like doing P.E. in fifth sixth.</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay we can pick up the next card, it is 'working with other children'. So how do you feel about working with other children?</p> <p>Eoin: [places in 'like' column) Like.</p> <p>Interviewer: That's something you like doing?</p> <p>Eoin: Yes, yes.</p> <p>Interviewer: And what do you like about working with others?</p> <p>Eoin: Am, I like to, woah (pause) allow them to help me allow me to help them and talk to them.</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay and talking with them. And the next one is 'working alone'. How do you feel about working alone or working by yourself?</p>	<p>Mainstream class as overwhelming for senses <i>'scream in my ear'</i>- use of <i>'scream'</i> here, emphasizing how noise intrudes his threshold for coping</p> <p>Sensitivity to heightened noise in mainstream class</p> <p>Social otivation for peer interactions in classroom context Positive associations with co-operative working</p>
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<p>Eoin: [Places in 'don't know] Am, huh ((long pause)). I'm not sure.</p> <p>Interviewer: You're not sure?</p> <p>Eoin: Hmm</p> <p>Interviewer: So you think you prefer walking with others rather than working alone?</p> <p>Eoin: Hmm [nods in agreement]</p> <p>Interviewer: Can it be hard to work alone sometimes?</p> <p>Eoin: Yeah</p> <p>Interviewer: And what makes it hard</p> <p>Eoin: Am, it's very hard when you wo-working alone (pause)</p> <p>Interviewer: And the last things we're going to talk about is different subjects in school. So 'maths'. How do you feel about maths?</p> <p>Eoin: [places in 'dislike' column] Eff</p> <p>Interviewer: Oh you don't like maths? What do you not like about maths?</p> <p>Eoin: It's very hard. It's very hard now. No I forgot (pause) what I did in maths after we went all home. It just [makes gesture indicating going out of head]</p> <p>Interviewer: Went out of your brain?</p> <p>Eoin: Yes. And what I don't like, you have to do l-long division ((pause)) and multiplying is hard.</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay, those are tricky. And the next one is 'reading'. How do you feel about reading in school?</p>	<p>Hesitancy, confusion. <u>Indicative of difficulty in working without adult/peer support</u></p> <p>Working alone as difficult, challenging</p> <p>Maths as difficult. <i>Repetition of 'very hard'- emphasizing extent of difficulty</i> Awareness of regression of skills since school-closures</p> <p>Specific elements of maths as difficult-creating negative connotations</p>
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<p>Eoin: Reading? I like it [places in 'like' column]</p> <p>Interviewer: Oh you like it. And is reading easy or hard for you?</p> <p>Eoin: Easy (pause) my reading is doing good.</p> <p>Interviewer: So how do you feel about the next one- it's 'writing'?</p> <p>Eoin: Writing- I don't like [places on 'dislike' column.</p> <p>Interviewer: And why is that?</p> <p>Eoin: You have to put your hand on the page and write [demonstrates writing while holding page down page with other elbow] and I don't do that I just [demonstrates writing with one hand] put one hand.</p> <p>Interviewer: Is it hard to do the two things at the one time?</p> <p>Eoin: Yes, yes. And I don't like doing [demonstrates putting elbow over page] and writing, I just use my right hand just write.</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay. And how do you feel about P.E.?</p> <p>Eoin: I like [places on 'not sure'] not sure because we play games and some one game I don't like.</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay, and what game is that?</p> <p>Eoin: It's this game we played yesterday with the tennis ball thing and I didn't like. I got hit, I got hit by a tennis ball in my chest.</p> <p>Interviewer: Oh and did it take a little time to feel better?</p>	<p>Competence in reading, recognition of positive progress in reading <u>Positive self-appraisal in domain specific area</u></p> <p>Motor-coordination demands for writing as difficult. <u>Awareness of difficulties in context of expectations</u></p> <p>Motor-coordination demands for writing as difficult. <u>Awareness of difficulties in meeting expectations</u></p>
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<p>Eoin: Yes and then I didn't, I didn't took a break I just stayed in [yawning and rubbing eyes]</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay and were you playing with [names mainstream class] for tennis was it?</p> <p>Eoin: Yes. No you had to [gestures throughout], the other team had to, had to catch the ball or get the ball into the cone and the other team had to hit the tennis balls far away</p> <p>Interviewer: Oh, was it rounders?</p> <p>Eoin: Rounders yes [smiles]</p> <p>Interviewer: Oh I know that game, people have to hit the ball really strongly too don't they?</p> <p>Eoin: Yes, yes. That's how I got hit by a tennis ball yesterday. No my team mate just didn't know I was here, he just throw it at my chest by accident very hard [gestures throughout]</p> <p>Interviewer: And do you like going for P.E. with [names mainstream class] usually?</p> <p>Eoin: Yes, yes I like manhunt and yes (pause) the banish game.</p> <p>Interviewer: And how do you feel about art?</p> <p>Eoin: Art I like art [places in 'like' column]. I like art very much.</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay, and you had said you liked drawing earlier on?</p>	<p>Perceiving some P.E. activities as too boisterous, <u>fear of injury, sense of dangerous</u></p> <p><u>Feeling resilient?</u></p> <p><u>Recurrent emphasis on incident yesterday-perceiving P.E. as somewhat dangerous, fear of injury as a result?</u></p>
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Eoin: Yes. In fourth class I done (pause) we were doing this my my (pause) art was very talented.

Interviewer: Well done Eoin. And the last one. How do you feel about music in school?

Eoin: I like music [places in 'like' column]. I like to sing. When they come on the music box I sing.

Interviewer: Oh you can sing too?

Eoin: Yes, yeah. Am, no sometimes I can't say the words out [gestures]. It's in my head, I can't say it out.

Interviewer: Well do you know what, you had a lot of things in your head today and you managed to say them all out to me so well.

Eoin: Yes, yes [smiles]

Interviewer: And let's look on the 'like side'. Are you okay with everything that you have on the 'like' side?

Eoin: Yes [smiles and nods]

Interviewer: And are you happy with the things you put on the 'unsure' side?

Eoin: Yes [smiles and nods]

Interviewer: And are you happy with the things you put on the 'don't like' side?

Eoin: Yes [smiles and nods]

Interviewer: That's great work Eoin. And is there anything else you'd like to tell me about school?

Eoin: I said everything I said.

"My art was very talented"- Feeling of competence arising from curricular strength

Acute awareness of speech and language difficulties in context of curriculum. "*It's in my head, I can't say it out*"- acute awareness of needs and difficulties here, is there an element of frustration too?

<i>End of Interview Wrap Up</i>	
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**Appendix S: Case Study Report 1
Case Study 1 Report**

Talking Mat Visual Summary



Within Case Analysis

Superordinate themes were devised at the case level to group connected emergent themes from individual transcripts.

For an emergent theme to be included within a superordinate theme at case level, it had to **emerge from at least two transcripts within the individual case study** to ensure convergence whilst allowing for some divergence as per IPA’s idiographic focus (Smith et al., 2009). Final super-ordinate themes and emergent themes at the within-case level with accompanying sample extracts from transcripts are illustrated below:

RQ: What are the lived school experiences of the child in terms of interpersonal relationships, curriculum/learning and accessibility of the school environment?

SUPER-ORDINATE THEME: FRIENDSHIP DYNAMICS

Emergent Theme	Illustrating Theme (from at least two participants) Child, Parent, Teacher
Friendship Motivation	<p>Child:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “Eh we like to play some games and we like to play with some friends and I like to talk to them and I like to play with them” <p>Parent:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “We try to organize play dates as much as we can, em and he would be em. He would love that”...“He loves socialising and he- his birthday is in (names month), so he’ll be all talk about his party and who he’s inviting” ○ “Em yeah, he does, he misses them a lot. Especially in the last few weeks he’s been talking a lot about them.... But, em he definitely misses them”. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “...he loves his friends (.)” ○ “He’d give little hugs to ahm (.) there’s another boy in the class and they would

	<p>hug quite regularly, you know they're very comfortable around each other"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "Ahm, he would be close to (.) two of the boys in the room and one of them ahm in particular. You know, ah, as I- they'd hug each other and they're "you're my best friend" you know ahm...It's a comfort kind of, I think to both of them" ○ "He would, he likes having the company out there" ○ "I think he likes that, you know 'You're my best friends, you're my friend' you know that kind of thing"
<p>Befriending others with autism: "They're very united"</p>	<p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "Tom: Will I tell you what their names are [children in my class]? Interviewer: Oh please do, thank you Tom. Tom: So there's me, Kieran* (pseudonym), Alice* (pseudonym), Rory* (pseudonym), Declan* (pseudonym), Donal* (pseudonym) and Thomas* (pseudonym)" ○ "Well we eh, Conor* (pseudonym) had a mario hat so I played supermario with him and sometimes I play with some other friends as well" ○ "Yeah and I can run and I can play with Alice* (pseudonym), and I can play with Declan* and sometimes Callum* (pseudonym) and Kieran * (pseudonym) playing football" ○ "Interviewer: Okay Tom, so do you have friends in school? Tom: I do. Interviewer: Who are they? Tom: ((Pause)) Eh, in my class Kieran, Alice, Rory, Declan, Donal, Thomas and me (Pseudonyms). Interviewer: Okay, and do you find it easy or hard to make friends in school? Tom: Eh, I find it easy... We play some like eh some toys or like going to the Quiet Room and we play outside" ○ "Well Alice (pseudonym) doesn't really talk that much but I tell her when she when I talk to her she talks to me and she listens" ○ "Interviewer: Okay. And what do you think Declan likes about you? Tom: He likes ((long pause)) eh, he likes playing with me and Conor*" <p>Parent:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "Em, they're would be some kids that he would be closer to I would say, am he gets on well with all of them. ○ Yeah, I-I , there's definitely kids that he would talk about more, am, than others say. And, and he would refer to them as his best friend. Em, so I- I'm not sure how much interaction within the classroom he does with them, but as far as I know, he-he does a lot. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "He would be well liked by his classmates (.)" ○ "Ahm ((pause)) so it is very much class-based. And they play together out on the yard. Now our gang, they kind of tend to play together and with the other (ASD) class they do play, and then some of the children, because there's no special area of anything, they're all playing together. But they tend to just (.) click together because, I suppose, they're not into going into- their little game of it. Their game of football would be different to the mainstream playing a game of football. I think they find their own comfort zone and they're happy within that" ○ "Tom would never, ahm ((pause)) come in from the yard like complaining or

	<p>he'd never be on his own out there"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "I said there's one or two in mainstream that would join in, you know that I know he's comfortable with, that's he's found a little friendship with" ○ I suppose the way we're dealing with it is all, you know it's positive and like "this is our class". ((Pause)) They're very united.
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SUPER-ORDINATE THEME: SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Emergent Theme	Illustrating Theme (from at least two participants) Child, Parent, Teacher
<p>Supportive Adult Relationships: "It's a really great bond there":</p>	<p>Child,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "<i>Interviewer:</i> Okay, Tom so the next one is 'Adults Helping Me', so how do you feel about adults helping you in school? <i>Tom:</i> Oh it's good (places in 'like' column) <i>Interviewer:</i> Which adults help you in school? <i>Tom:</i> Eh Ms. Smith* (pseudonym), Síle* (pseudonym for SNA) and Ciara* (pseudonym for SNA)". <i>Interviewer:</i> "And if I asked Ms. Smith to tell me about Tom, what would she say? <i>Tom:</i> She would say morning to me and my friends and we say morning to her" ○ "<i>Interviewer:</i> Okay, and how do you feel Tom about working alone? So working by yourself. <i>Tom:</i> (Places on 'like' column). Yeah kind of good. <i>Interviewer:</i> Okay kind of good, do you want to tell me a little bit more about that? <i>Tom:</i> Well when, when when we used to do 'Mental Maths' and 'Mental English' on our own at our desk, it was a little bit hard and we ask for help". <i>Interviewer:</i> Oh and then you'd get some help. Would that make it any easier? <i>Tom:</i> Yeah" <p>Parent:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "And they're great to kind of read him now, when they feel he needs movement breaks or a bit of quiet time or to be kind of stimulated. It, it's-there's a really great bond there" ○ "Yeah, that's it. I think that was one of the biggest things of the lockdown for him, it was like he was missing part of his family, because they are sort of a family now that they've been together for so long. And they're really close so yeah" ○ "Yeah, I think he (.) he needs that support, em it, it's supportive without being kind of over-intrusive and doing things for him" ○ "But, em, yeah he's- it's like there's a kind of mutual respect there that em (.), the adults will respect him and he will respect them back. So it's kind of a two-way street" ○ "I-I think that support makes him feel comfortable to be honest" <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ I suppose the way we're dealing with it is all, you know it's positive and like "this is our class". ((Pause)) They're very united and you know they've had me for all those years and they know the SNAs so well and things like that. ○ [on reverse mainstream integration] You know, you would have to be down one-

	<p>to-one, but you have an SNA in the room, if they're doing if they're looking, if they're doing a worksheet, or if they're doing something like that, an SNA can go over, help him, guide him, have a little look, you know- he will need that support.</p>
<p>“I feel em relaxing” Sensory room as sacntuary from the self</p>	<p>Child:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Interviewer: “How do you feel about the “[names sensory room]”?” Tom: (Places on ‘like’ column) Interviewer: “And what do you like about the ‘[names sensory room]”?” Tom: “The ((long pause)) the beanbag. Because it’s the pink one is nice and comfy and you can lie down on” Interviewer: “And how do you feel when you’re in the [names sensory room]?” Tom: “I feel em relaxing.” ○ “I feel nice and stretched and awake so that we can eh do more work when eh well I didn’t actually say that but I’m going to say that.” <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “He was a child who couldn’t sit down, he would, even still now he would- movement is his thing, he needs movement to kind of regulate himself and to motivate himself” ○ “But it’s, again it would be kind of crowds, a lot of noise, they would be the ahm (.) the biggest challenge he would have. But I, I think the school are very good for preparing him for it...They’ve the sensory room, and then they’ve the quiet room that they can kind of, if they need time to just chill out or just a little bit of quiet time even. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ahm, he loves quiet time, like downtime...So he would, he would actually like look for it. Like he’ll ask you know, which is great, you know, that’s a big development that we found that he (.) would seek it and say “I’d like to go in”, and we’ve little headphones or lulls with nice soft music...And he could look to go in and have that downtime. ○ So it’s, and we have our own [sensory room] in our room so that’s where he likes to go and he- some of the children would like the lights in there but he’s happy with them off. And we have nice lighting and things like that and he’ll (.) go on the little couch or down on the bean-bag.ahm sometimes he likes (.) to lie completely flat on the ground or sometimes on his tummy, you know, it’s whatever, whatever mood or whatever he seeks or sensory needs he’s looking for..

<p>Emergent Theme</p>	<p>Illustrating Theme (from at least two participants) Child, Parent, Teacher</p>
<p>Mainstream inclusion as a process</p>	<p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Em, he (.) in the last two years I think, he’s started to go down to the mainstream class for religion. Since they made their communion, they went down for religion. And he would go into another class for music. So he’s getting more and

	<p>more of that so that like now he’s partaking in emm, history and geography they go to the mainstream class as well.</p> <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ I mean obviously we weren’t able to go in day one and go ‘oh we’re integrating all over the place’ and we’re you know (.). It takes times for that to develop and it has to be quite natural (.) ○ But as I say look you cannot go in day one, when they’re in infants and just start that. It is a process. ○ Tom would have been (.) there was no problem going down there [mainstream class] but he wasn’t ((pause)) he wasn’t getting enough out of it to warrant just going down for the sake of (.) he wasn’t integrating, he was down sitting in a classroom with third and fourth class but he wasn’t integrating because he wasn’t taking part...So then we relooked at that and went, ‘well how will we make this work?’ So the other children weren’t ready to go down, the room was too big, so then we were like “Okay let’s do the reverse integration”.
<p>Safe and sheltered now, but anxiety about future learning environments.</p>	<p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Em, my fear would be (pause) that in a secondary setting, there’s a lot more expected of kids. There’s more pressure, probably a bigger building, probably more kids in it. Em (.) things like that that I, I (.) they would be my biggest fear for him. That, em, that he’d be able to cope in that setting. ○ Everything is going to be new and there probably will be more pressure on him. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ I would never put him with one of the [mainstream] children who is a bit “too cool for school”, you know what I mean?.. Now it, none of the kids would ever, that’s the one thing (.) The kids are so brilliant in the school...But that’s a small primary school, he’s well looked after here. ○ Tom will be fine in primary school, you know he’s got another three years and (.) he’ll be well looked after and I know he’s happy and there’ll be loads of opportunities given to him. ○ I would have concerns for when Tom would go to secondary school, yeah (.) I would have concerns over bullying ((pause)), over Tom not being able to stand up for himself, over not understanding what people are saying to him, ahm ○ But you know secondary school is a different kettle of fish and they’re just not going to be as sheltered as they are in primary school

SUPERORDINATE THEME: NAVIGATING THE LEARNING PROCESS

<p>Emergent Theme</p>	<p>Illustrating Theme (from at least two participants) Child, Parent, Teacher</p>
<p>Self-efficacy and enjoyment in the active curriculum: “In his happy place”</p>	<p>Child:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> Oh you like your classroom. What do you like about your classroom? <i>Tom:</i> I like the, eh ((pause)) the activities. <i>Interviewer:</i> You like the type of activities you do in your classroom, and what’s your favourite activity that you do in your classroom? <i>Tom:</i> Em, uhm, I like to eh do the

	<p>magnets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Interviewer: So how do you feel about working with children from other classes? Tom: Em (places on 'like' column) yeah I liked that as well. Interviewer: And what did you like about that? Tom: Em ((long pause)) when we em used to go into (names principal) to do singing and my friends, we used to do that. ○ Interviewer: No, Tom P.E., how do you feel about P.E.? Tom: (Places on 'like' column). Interviewer: Oh you like that, what do you like about P.E.? Tom: I, eh basketball. And is P.E. easy or hard for you? Tom: They're both the same but I think they're a bit easy. ○ Interviewer: So art, how do you feel about art? Tom: (Places on 'like' column) Interviewer: And what do you like about it? Tom: Painting: And how do you feel when you're doing painting? Tom: Amazing ○ Interviewer: And why do you feel good about music? Tom: Because I like to listen to the music when (names principal) plays her piano when we used to do that. When, when that virus wasn't there that time. <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ I think it's more the manual-type work that he prefers than sitting down doing English- would definitely not be one of his favourite subjects so, I think it's more the hands-on (.). Am, he loves PE (.). he loves when they do chasing and that kind of thing (laughs) ○ Music was, he was always em, music was always a big thing for him. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Regards worldly knowledge, like S.E.S.E you know history, geography, science, would be very abstract to him. You know he will (.). He will switch off. Ahm like we would have done things like the Romans, Stone Age, all that kind of thing but I doubt Tom could tell you one thing about ((pause)) any of those topics, you know. He'll sit and he might (.). kind of look like he's kind of listening a little bit but there's very little sinking in because it's not (.). He's very much like ((pause)) what, still in that egocentric phase of well "it's just the things I'm interested in" (.), like the tractors and the farm and ((pause)). ..If it's too abstract for him, he's literally completely switched off. ○ Loves the physical activities.. And just doing like ball skills, or games or you know, he loves, he'd have a great sense of fun playing you know like simple tag games or things like that, you know. He'd be real giggly and (.). you know, full of energy, loves that, and would be, would good like, ahm, (pause) you know, a lot of his gross motor would actually be quite good.....So he would be really good with the physical activities. ○ Art, also he would be really good at. Loves colours and would put (.). put a lot of work and detail. He'd never rush something. It would always be (.).it would look really good and he'd be very proud of his work. And would love speaking about it, ahm. So definitely, anything physical like our games, PE, dance (.), you know, he would be very good, he'd have good coordination... and he'd
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	<p>loved that, or music. So it's like basically, you know, those are the subjects that excites him.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Like, yeah, he'd have a good musical ear, I'd feel. So, ahm, so anything musical, dance, physical activity, art, he'd really excel at. Like would be, you know, he'd be in his happy place. That love that he does have for even different types of music. ... Which is brilliant, and Tom really kind of you know, as I said has a good ear, even some of the, the phrases, the Latin words and things like that, he would have picked up you know, quite easily.
<p>Self-Driven Perfectionism</p>	<p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ahm ((pause)) but he (.) he would get frustrated if he feels he can't do something. If he's not doing it good enough he would be quite, em, like with his writing in particular, he would-everything has to be perfect or he'd go and rub it off, or rub it out and go back to it again. And he will (.) he might have moved on but he'll still be thinking about "I need to rub that out" and it- he would be quite hard on himself in that way, a bit of a perfectionist with his work. (.) ○ Yeah I think it is, it's kind of a self-driven perfectionism I guess ((Pause)). It's like if he feels that there's something wrong with it, it'll just kind of bug him until he corrects it so it, it's- I don't think it's even the fact that he is doing it wrong, it's just that in his own mind, he wants everything to be, I think to be the way that her perceives it should be. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Tom is ext-like he is very neat, and wants his work to look perfect. He'd never rush something.
<p>Then to Now Transformation in engagement</p>	<p>Parent,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ So yeah, we would have loved for him to stay in mainstream but it just wasn't (.) wasn't the right place for him and he was regressing a good bit and wasn't engaging...He had to change school in junior infants, so eh prior to changing school he, eh, I would say he really struggled with school, em he ((pause)) it was like nearly eh ((pause)) a switch was going off in him in that he (.) he was regressing a lot in that setting. And then when he move to to (School 1) it was, eh, a big transition for him. It was, eh-it took him a long time to settle. But I would say, since he settled, school is a really good experience. He loves going, he interacts and engages really well, he gets great support there... <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ahm (.) okay (.) Do you want like (.) just now, like Tom now? ○ Yeah, oh def- like (.) yeah you see I find it hard to describe him without going "Well there's the before and the after" kind of, you know that kind of way. ○ The big classroom doesn't (.) faze him anymore, you know, whereas before he would have found it hard going into different classrooms and things like that difficult...He has come a long way you know, he has ○ ...He has made huge progress from where he has been.

RQ2: How does the child make sense of him/herself in the social context of school?

ASPECTS OF SOCIAL SELF-AWARENESS IN SCHOOL

Emergent Theme	Illustrating Theme (from at least two participants)
<p>Responsive to adult affirmation of the self</p>	<p>Child, Parent, Teacher</p> <p>Child,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> Okay, and what do you think Ms. Smith would say is the best thing about you Tom? <i>Tom:</i> That I do hard work. ○ I, I like to write about the good things I do <p>Parent,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ He would be he thrives on praise, always (.) in in school and at home, praise is the way to am, get him to do something (.) ○ He would be em ((pause)) he-what way would I put it? He doesn't like to be criticised, he would kind of take that as being hurtful to him. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Tom is (.) a very pleasant boy, he ahm (.) would be very eager to please (.) ○ Like he would be aware principal is the principal and we want to please, you know what I mean? ○ He just thrives on praise ○ He doesn't like being in trouble, you know he doesn't like you to feel that you're-(.) he doesn't like to feel that you know, you were disappointed or you know just, he's a pleaser, he likes- he likes to please ○ You know I ((pause)) I think he has a kind of a view of himself, you know that he's you a good boy ○ Tom would be ((pause)), have a fairly good awareness of himself and (.) that he is, you know in his own kind of words "a good boy" and that he's kind and that he always like you know speaks very nicely ○ And he would get a lot of praise and a lot of kind of affirmation and everything, and he loves that so he's confident about that

UNQUESTIONING ASPECTS OF THE SOCIAL SELF

Emergent Theme	Illustrating Theme (from at least two participants)
<p>Unquestioning of 'difference' between self and other</p>	<p>Child, Parent, Teacher</p> <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Yeah I think so, Tom doesn't, Tom as never questioned why he is in the class that he's in. He's never, em, he doesn't know of yet that he has autism we haven't had that conversation with him. Because, it's never really come up. He doesn't see himself as being different from any other child. ○ Yeah, he-he's never really questioned it. No he's never said, he's never questioned why em he's there. ((Pause)) He, he, that's his class and his teacher is his teacher and his friends are his friends. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Yeah Tom would, there's no, no awareness that "I'm- oh I'm in a different class" it's just "I'm in a class, and this is my class". Ahm and he's kind of

	<p>blissfully unaware, I don't think that would ever be ((long pause)) ah (sighs) I can't see it being an issue for him.</p>
<p>Limited social awareness for self-appraisal</p>	<p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> And are you and (names friend) different from each other in any way? ○ <i>Tom:</i> Well yeah, eh we all have the same uniform, but eh Sophia has a skirt, so that's different. ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> And if I asked Declan (pseudonym) to describe you, what would he say? <i>Tom:</i> He would say that ((long pause)) <i>Interviewer:</i> What would he say about you, about Tom? <i>Tom:</i> He, he would say 'how are you today?' and I would say 'good' and I would say to him 'how are you Declan' and he said he was good as well. <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ I guess the only way he would compare would be if someone got a new game or someone got a toy or something, it would be that kind of a comparison. I don't think on an academic level, I don't think he does. Em (.) he-he's never said it, he's never compared himself to anyone at home so. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ He would never try to be cool, you know like some other kids his age would be like "Uh I'm too cool for that". ○ He's not in the class going "Oh god, I don't have a clue of this". Whereas, I know some of the children in mainstream who are not as good at maths as somebody else and they're looking at the person beside them going "oh my god they're getting all of them right and I'm not", you know they have that self awareness of "I'm not good at this" but Tom would have no awareness that this other boy beside him is getting them all wrong, and I'm getting them all right. You know, he's not, he (.) he doesn't have the awareness to look at somebody else and say "Oh look they're getting them all wrong, and look at me, I'm brilliant, I'm getting them all right"...It's not that, it's just still all about being egocentric and himself, you know what I mean? Ahm ((pause))

RQ3: Does special provision within a mainstream school influence how the child makes sense of him/herself, and if so, in what ways?

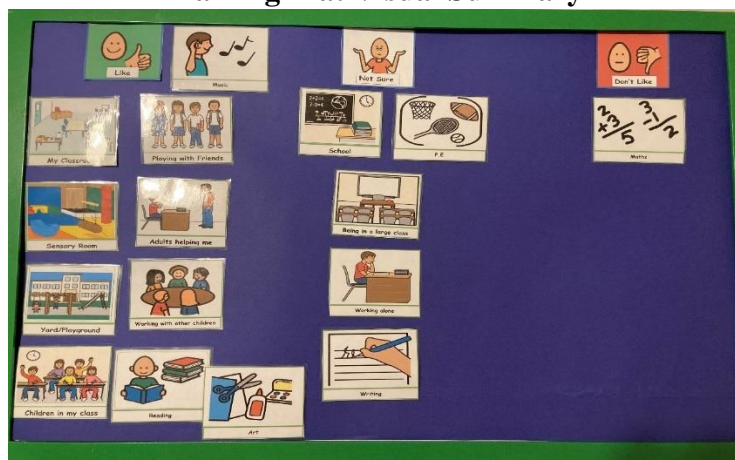
IMPACT OF INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

Emergent Theme	Illustrating Theme (from at least two participants)
<p>Systemic ethos of inclusion</p>	<p>Child, Parent, Teacher</p> <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ So it's not a case where they're excluded from anything or but they're included in everything but they just get extra a bit of support to help them. ○ Yeah I think so, Tom doesn't, Tom Has never questioned why he is in the class that he's in..... Because, it's never really come up. He doesn't see himself as being different from any other child. Em, so I think if they were more segregated and they weren't included, it would have come up by now. I think it is, it's

	<p>definitely very important for him, because he is quite a sensitive child, so if he felt he was being excluded- I, I think it would really hurt him</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Em (.) they ((pause)) they would have a big ethos of inclusion, of everyone has different qualities, everyone has different strengths and weaknesses and to grow those strengths and if there is a weakness to help people with them. Em, every kind of a success be it- colouring a picture or whatever it is. It's celebrated and and, no matter how small or big it is, it's celebrated. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. And I think that might be why he doesn't he doesn't see himself as being different. Because there's no such think as different really within the school and I think that is all down to the ethos of the school. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Then in the context of the classroom and (.) the work, you know you have to remember we're in an ASD class, like he's doing the best he can (.) with having the integration and everything, you know so (pause) I feel look he's definitely fulfilling his potential ○ There's no special area or anything, they're all playing together. ○ So they're going to both classes, you know all of the children are kind of mixed up and I'm getting the fourth class children and they're working in my room. ○ Now it, none of the kids would ever, that's the one thing (.). The kids are so brilliant in the school, and so accepting ○ I do think in school there are so many opportunities for Tom you know that it's okay to be in [named ASD class], which is the name of our class, that it's not seen as different because from day one they were integrating out on the yard, you have school tours together, the school play is always done, you know together, our end-of-year songs, Christmas concerts were al-we're integrating for all of them. There's no 'oh you're doing this now, because you're different... I think that's really important
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**Appendix T: Case Study Report 2
Case Study 2 Report**

Talking Mat Visual Summary



Within Case Analysis

Superordinate themes were devised at the case level to group connected emergent themes from individual transcripts.

For an emergent theme to be included within a superordinate theme at case level, it had to **emerge from at least two transcripts within the individual case study** to ensure convergence whilst allowing for some divergence as per IPA’s idiographic focus (Smith et al., 2009). Final super-ordinate themes and emergent themes at the within-case level with accompanying sample extracts from transcripts are illustrated below:

RQ1: What are the lived school experiences of the child in terms of interpersonal relationships, curriculum/learning and accessibility of the school environment?

SUPER-ORDINATE THEME: COMPLEX PEER DYNAMICS

Emergent Theme	Illustrating Theme (from at least two participants) Child, Parent, Teacher
Friendship challenges and uncertainties: “I forget how to make more friends”:	<p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> And I want you to choose one friend who you like to play with. So maybe your best friend. <i>Eoin:</i> My best friend. I pick ((long pause)) I pick em ((long pause)) I pick em, I don’t know ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> And do you find it easy or hard to make friends in school? <i>Eoin:</i> [sighs] Emm hard. <i>Interviewer:</i> Hard, what’s hard about making friends? <i>Eoin:</i> ((long pause)) When I make friends I don’t know how to (pause), I don’t know how to ((long pause)) do it again [looks downwards] <i>Interviewer:</i> How to stay being their friend? <i>Eoin:</i> No, em how to make friends, I mean make a friend I forget how to make (pause) more friends. <i>Interviewer:</i> Okay, so how to keep making more friends? <i>Eoin:</i> Yeah <i>Interviewer:</i> That’s something that’s tricky for you? <i>Eoin:</i> Yes <p>Parent,</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ahm ((long pause)). (Sighs) I know in am (pause) if the kids, sometimes you know he feels left out. ‘Cause he doesn’t know how to make friends. And he’s very socially awkward, he doesn’t know how to start a conversation and then if he gets ahm, if one child tells him to go away, he feel like “Oh nobody wants to talk to me at all”. He won’t try again, he just feels like, he won’t, you know, he just feels like ((long pause)). He just he doesn’t have the confidence to make friends. He doesn’t know how to start conversations and then (.) ○ Mainly really (ASD class) because the other kids would be too boisterous, too rough, am, they’d be going to G.A.A training and he doesn’t go to G.A.A training so, (.) he’d miss out that way. So, he wouldn’t really meet up with them outside school. ○ It could be just something small in school, like somebody could have said something small to him in school and he just took it up all the wrong way and it’s on his head then trying to figure out like what does it mean and like emotionally what does it mean and does that mean something’s wrong with me and so that’s what we’re dealing with at the minute. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ And so, yes, that can lead to a little bit of contention and like, yeah,...but you know when... he wants it his way, and you know I mean on the yard he, you know, he gets on well, but if it’s not played his way, it can cause problems yeah.
<p>Befriending others with autism or matched interests</p>	<p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No I preferred to play with everybody, not like, not fifth sixth. Em, I don’t like (.) em, em (sw- inaudible). The only thing fifth sixth, some fifth sixth play is football (pause). ○ Em, we played, we played [smiles] family games with third, fourth class ○ [Special Class peers] I like playing with Daniel* (pseudonym) with the the jigsaws. <i>Interviewer:</i> Okay, so Daniel* (pseudonym) is someone you like playing with in your class? <i>Eoin:</i> Yes and Calum* (pseudonym) ...<i>Interviewer:</i> Okay, in what ways are you and Calum* (pseudonym) alike? ...<i>Eoin:</i> We have in common about (inaudible) playing games, the same Youtube and we have some in common ○ I have friends in third, fourth class. <i>Interviewer:</i> Okay so you have friends in different parts of the school? <i>Eoin:</i> Yeah [smiles] and some in second class too [smiles]. <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ He likes ahm ((pause)) like there’s another boy now [*pseudonym] and they’re around the same age so he- they relate to each other, because they like the same things. And they kind of have the same issue-they have the same issues so he can relate to him ○ Am, and some of the kids then are smaller than he is, and he likes to look after them and take charge and show them ‘this is what you do’. He likes to be in

	<p>charge so, there's a mixture now of different ages now in his class and different abilities but a lot of the kids now would look up to Eoin and he likes that because, again that's the control thing he likes to have.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ [on socialising with ASD class peers] Yeah but you see they kind of have the same interests as him and they'd have the same issues as him. Like you know the crowds and the anxiety and they, they'd ask him questions, it's all intelligent, and it's all "Oh my God, I don't know what you're on about" ((laughs)) ○ [on socialising with mainstream versus ASD class peers] Whereas when it's with the (ASD class) kids, they'd take ten minutes, and they'd give each other a break and they'd understand each other <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ [on ASD class relations] Well I suppose, Jayden (pseudonym), another boy is in the unit with him and they go about together...Like I don't know would he actually have just one best friend, like he'd have a few friends but and you know and they'd all look out for one another [in ASD class] ○ And I mean they're all friendly as I say...he gets on with all of them really in general in this class moreso.
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SUPERORDINATE THEME: SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Emergent Theme	Illustrating Theme (from at least two participants)
	Child, Parent, Teacher
Special class as sanctuary for the self	<p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Em ((long pause)) I like doing work there ○ [on mainstream class] And when I got there, it just scream in my ear. <i>Interviewer:</i> Oh when you got there it was loud? <i>Eoin:</i> [Nods] <i>Interviewer:</i> So is that something that's different between the large class and the [names ASD class]? It's a bit louder <i>Eoin:</i> [Nods] Yes, yes ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> Okay. And how do you feel when you're in the multi-sensory room? <i>Eoin:</i> Good. <i>Interviewer:</i> You feel good. <i>Eoin:</i> Yes, really nice and relaxing ○ <i>Eoin:</i> ...it's relaxing and then when we go outside for movement break we have a new swing set am ((long pause)) the [gestures] circle and the relaxing thing, you have to relax on it, you have to lie down [demonstrates with eyes closed] and it will just [gestures swinging motion], you have to move it first and then lie down. <i>Interviewer:</i> And how do you feel when you're on that? <i>Eoin:</i> Good (pause) sometimes I almost fall asleep on it <p>Parent:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Yeah, it's mainly the large crowds, it's mainly in big classrooms. Mainly when there's a lot of people. He just can't concentrate or he just gets overwhelmed and ((pause)) he prefers to work in small groups, he doesn't like big classroom environments. Never did and it- it never works out for him that way ○ He just knows he's in a small classroom. That's all he knows. That's it's a

	<p>small classroom and that's his safe place. That's where he goes to when he feels overwhelmed ((Pause)) <i>Interviewer:</i> Okay <i>Sarah:</i> That's his safe place. So he feels that this is just somewhere for us to go to have a "time-out", and calm down and do our work one-to-one.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ [on mainstream inclusion] Or he might say "I want to go to the bathroom, can I please go to the bathroom?" And then he'll go out the door, that's his cue of saying "I need time out". And he might go down to the em Snooze Room and relax there but if he does he usually – he just needs to get out of the classroom for ten minutes so, and then he'll go back in again. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ [on mainstream integration] And then if they need a break, there's an SNA who goes with them. So eh, if they need a break they can come up here and he can reset himself you know [to ASD class] ○ Yeah the breathing and the sensory room. Even the breathing you know, like he knows to take a break because he can be you know, he can be doing his breathing. He's able to cope, but to a certain extent and yeah ((pause)) and then he might need a break in the Snoezelen and then we have a sensory room as well... Yeah, he might ask for it yeah, yeah. <i>Interviewer:</i> And he's able to seek it out himself when he needs it? <i>Teacher:</i> Well, sometimes, yeah, yeah. And sometimes you just need to remind him like "You know Eoin, lets try to calm down and do your breathing"... You know the breathing, when you teach him that you know he learns that he'll cope and nothing is that bad
<p>Supportive Adult Relationships</p>	<p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How do you feel about adults helping you in school? Eoin: [Places in 'like' column] Good. <i>Interviewer:</i> And which adults help you in school? Eoin: Mary* (SNA), Ciara (SNA), Áine (ASD class teacher) and Sarah (SNA) ○ How do you feel about working alone or working by yourself? Eoin: [Places in 'don't know'] Am, huh ((long pause)). I'm not sure... Am, it's very hard when you wo-working alone (pause) <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <u>[on mainstream inclusion]</u> I know they have the ((pause)) em, he can just put his hand up for the, or he has a sign that he has with the teacher so that the other kids don't see-because he gets embarrassed sometimes, and the SNA will come over to him and ask him "do you want to leave the classroom or what do you want to do?" ○ <u>[on mainstream inclusion]</u> Yeah- they're there and they don't. They don't even have to go near him. He just knows they're there and he feels more confident, he feels more safer. Because there was a time there (.) when he first started going up, I don't think the SNA was there all the time. And that was a bit of an issue with Eoin then in the classroom, he was kind of, he wasn't coping well. ○ But he has to have a SNA there so for him to be able to feel safe there and so he can do what everybody else is doing. And then he'd have to have somebody there in case he's losing concentration like who can prompt him in

	<p>a way that isn't going to embarrass him or make him feel like other kids are looking at him. They have a system, they had a little way- they have little techniques nobody else can see. Like he taps his leg now if he's having problems and the SNA comes straight over. So they'll come over and say "Are you okay Eoin" and he can say "Oh yeah this now is a bit..", you know instead of him calling the SNA over, he taps his leg and he has a little thing and then the SNA comes over straight away and that's just less embarrassing for him</p> <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ And when something is too hard, he won't even try it like. And so you have to really break it down and you know "You can do this Eoin", and you know the power of 'yet' and so and so yeah, that's it really yeah... Yeah he just needs that extra bit of encouragement or extra bit of help yeah, Eoin he does yeah. He would talk about his feelings or if you give him a chance to you know ask him what's bothering him. He will tell you like yeah ○ Yeah, you know, he knows that he can talk to people you know and if he can take that with him you know. Like he knows he has difficulties, but if he can talk about it to adults
<p>Anxiety about future learning environments</p>	<p>Parent:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Because he was awful worried about leaving School 2 as well, that's another issue we have as well... That the support system in School 2. He feels it's so safe and secure School 2. It's like "What's going to happen to me when I leave School 2?" And it's getting closer and closer now to that so he's a bit anxious about that as well. ○ Ah, I'm worried he won't have the same support network that he has in School 2. Because School 2 is such, like they have such (.), such a high-quality service that they provide for the kids with autism, so kids feel they're like everybody else. And they support them every single way, if one thing doesn't work, they'll try a different thi-, they'll try a different approach. They're constantly in touch with me if anything goes wrong. Am, you know and we all try to work together to try to keep things positive in school. And I feel that when he goes to secondary school, he won't have that same support. And he won't have that same safety environment or that same ((pause)) ah level of support that he has in primary school. And I feel that I won't get that support either as a parent. Or that they won't tell me everything that's going on in school with him. So that I can help as well like, so I feel, ahm, ((pause)) School 2 are too good to us I think ((laughs)) and the school, they're, they're a you know too good. Do you know, and I feel that won't happen to us in secondary school.. ... And you know things are changing, and things are improving but I feel like he won't have that same support. ○ So that is a bit of a worry like, because he will need someone full-time. And I'm scared that if he doesn't get that full-time SNA, that the school mightn't take him in and he'd have to go somewhere different and then he'd probably have to take a trip to like (names special school) or somewhere different, and

	<p>he'll take twenty steps back and it won't do him any good.but we just don't know- we won't know until he goes to secondary school, we just don't know..</p> <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ And that he's becoming aware that he's only one more year left and the anxiety of secondary school is probably, yeah you know, he'd be aware of that and conscious of it yeah. And I suppose he's so used to it here and it feels so safe and you know..
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SUPERORDINATE THEME: NAVIGATING THE LEARNING PROCESS

Emergent Theme	Illustrating Theme (from at least two participants)
	Child, Parent, Teacher
Self-efficacy and curricular enjoyment	<p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> How do you feel about maths? <i>Eoin:</i> [places in 'dislike' column] Eff <i>Interviewer:</i> Oh you don't like maths? What do you not like about maths? <i>Eoin:</i> It's very hard. It's very hard now. No I forgot (pause) what I did in maths after we went all home. It just [makes gesture indicating going out of head] <i>Interviewer:</i> Went out of your brain? <i>Eoin:</i> Yes. And what I don't like, you have to do l-long division ((pause)) and multiplying is hard. ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> How do you feel about reading in school? <i>Eoin:</i> Reading? I like it [places in 'like' column] <i>Interviewer:</i> Oh you like it. And is reading easy or hard for you? <i>Eoin:</i> Easy (pause) my reading is doing good. ○ <i>Eoin:</i> Writing- I don't like [places on 'dislike' column]. <i>Interviewer:</i> And why is that? <i>Eoin:</i> You have to put your hand on the page and write [demonstrates writing while holding page down page with other elbow] and I can't do that I just [demonstrates writing with one hand] put one hand. ○ Art I like art [places in 'like' column]. I like art very much... Yes. In fourth class I done (pause) we were doing this my my (pause) art was very talented. <p>Teacher:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Yeah Eoin doesn't really enjoy P.E., I don't know did he put that on the list. Yeah he doesn't really like the physical or the running. ...he gets annoyed with himself when he can't hit it or you know can't catch the ball and all. ○ As I said, he struggles with English writing, I suppose that's the speech as well- he probably doesn't hear the sounds and with Maths, and the confidence drops then. So yeah he struggles with those two subjects especially and you know the confidence just isn't the same.

Then to now transformation in engagement	<p>Parent,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ He just had no imagination, no imaginary play at all. ((long pause)) Until he went to the ASD unit and when he went to the ASD unit he just ((pause)) flourished. And he came out of his shell, and he became more confident, and he just became so much more, he was more ((pause)). And then behaviour then just started disappearing as well and the speech came on, and he was able to
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	<p>... speak for himself and he just (long (pause)) he just came on so, so well. ((Long pause)). I never actually thought he'd get as far as he has. Like just in himself, and making friends ((pause)) and you know all the conversations we've been having..</p> <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Obviously he has speech difficulties like, but you know, he's very aware of that as well. Am but he's come on great, like he's really overcome it and he's really a lot more confident to partake now. ○ And I mean, he is learning, because (mainstream teacher) will say, you know, that he's amazed at how much he is actually learning like when he integrates now. And I mean he is having difficulty writing but he's retaining it all like, yeah. And he's interested in it as well, you know and asking questions and you know, more and more. ○ But yeah I suppose he's maturing as well now and he seems much happier in himself...but as I said, he's maturing, he's getting older and he seems to be coping much better in class yeah.
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RQ2: How does the child make sense of him/herself in the social context of school?

QUESTIONING DIFFICULTIES AND DIFFERENCES

Emergent Theme	Illustrating Theme (from at least two participants)
Frustration with self in context of difficulties	<p>Child, Parent, Teacher</p> <p>Child,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Interviewer: And do you find it easy or hard to make friends in school? Eoin: [sighs] Emm hard. Interviewer: Hard, what's hard about making friends? Eoin: ((long pause)) When I make friends I don't know how to (pause), I don't know how to ((long pause)) do it again [looks downwards] Interviewer: How to stay being their friend? Eoin: No, em how to make friends, I mean make a friend I forget how to make (pause) more friends. ○ Eoin: Am, no sometimes I can't say the words out [gestures]. It's in my head, I can't say it out. <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ahm, he can get frustrated now if he feels ((long pause)) you know other kids might play hurling or sport, he might give up too easily ○ So because he's started to mix now with the older kids on the playground and with the mainstream school and it's yeah "Why can't I do that?" and "How can I'm not able to do what they can? How come it takes be longer to do something they do?" So he's more aware now so am .. ○ "How come I'm not able to do that, and say (names peer) can?". And then he was like "why can't I do a big group like that?" ○ But he feels like he can't run and he can't do a lot of stuff other kids are doing and so, then he kind of gets upset with himself and he gets cross with himself. A lot of it now is really inward... ○ Oh yeah- now mainly when it comes to playtime and when he's seeing kids doing something that he's not able to socially do or he doesn't feel confident to do. That's when he-that's when he- he compares himself constantly, on a daily

	<p>basis like. “But if they can do that and I can’t”. You see, he’s eleven and they’re eleven and he’s thinking how come he’s not able to do it and they can. And they’re able to do it like straight away and he can’t, he’s like ((pause))) “Why can’t I do it straight away?” or “What’s wrong with me?” or (.) do you know he questions, like instead of trying it again and trying again, he just gives up on it really easily.</p> <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Obviously he has speech difficulties like, but you know, he’s very aware of that as well. ○ And when something is too hard, he won’t even try it like. ○ ... You know he gets annoyed with himself when he can’t hit it or you know can’t catch the ball and all. ○ ‘cause I mean he’s conscious now as well that you know ‘they’re doing twelve questions and I can’t get it done” and you know, he was getting frustrated and you know ○ I think, I suppose he’s aware of his weaknesses you know and ah, he probably gets frustrated at that you know and gets annoyed. Yeah you know he gets annoyed with himself ... ○ You know he would imitate you know like the other kids and he would try and but he’s aware of you know of his (.) his (.). He’s aware of you know, his difficulties I suppose.
<p>Negotiating Difference: “What’s wrong with me?”</p>	<p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Em, I don’t like (.) em, em (sw- inaudible). The only thing fifth sixth, some fifth sixth play is football (pause). (<i>Recognising differences between hobbies of self and peers</i>) <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “Oh Mammy, why do I have this, this ((pause)) thing”. And I’ll say “What do you mean this thing?” And he’ll say “Why do I have autism, why did God give me this?” and “Is God punishing me for being bold?”. You’ll have those moments now in the last couple of years they’ve been more ((pause)). He’s more aware that he’s different to other kids the older he’s getting. ○ He’ll get upset and he won’t understand and then he’ll think “Oh nobody likes me?” and “This is ‘cause I’ve got autism, nobody wants to talk to me”. ○ But he just takes it to heart and he takes it so seriously, it’s like “It’s, it’s because I have autism”. That’s what he thinks. ○ And that’s what he told me when he was a small child, “I want to be like everybody else” ○ I think over the last couple of years, I think he views himself as negative. ○ He kind of puts everything on having autism. Like I keep saying to him like “Eoin, like that doesn’t make you who you are, you’re still Eoin at the end of the day, and you just happen to have autism”..... Yeah you see he has a negative view at the moment of autism and of himself and how he mightn’t be able to do these things.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Yeah he’s asking a lot of questions about himself and a lot of it is negative when he does start. ○ Yeah and I think when they started integrating him into the big school and then watching the big lads on the big yard, I think he was like “Yeah I’m different to them” and that’s when he realized, so yeah when he was around seven or eight when he started realizing it about his autism and he started questioning me about his autism. “What do I have?” and “what do you call it?” and “what is it?” and “how does it affect me?” and all this kind of, and all these questions. A psychologist wouldn’t be able to answer some of the questions he asks me and so it can be so difficult at times. ○ And he wants to be like everybody else, he wants to go somewhere in his own home town. And he wants to feel normal, again it’s this “normal” thing again that’s been brought up the whole time. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Yeah no he likes to partake with them, with them and playing [names popular game in school], he has to be , you know he wants to be part of the group ○ You know he would imitate you know like the other kids and he would try to act like them and but that you know he’s aware of you know of his (.) his (.). He’s aware of you know, his difficulties I suppose.
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POCKETS OF POSITIVE SELF APPRAISAL

Emergent Theme	Illustrating Theme (from at least two participants)
Feeling valued by others	<p>Child, Parent, Teacher</p> <p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> And if I was talking to [names nominated friend], what would she say about you? If I asked [nominated friend] to describe Eoin for me, what do you think she would say? <i>Eoin:</i> Eoin is my good friend, yes. ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> And what else would she say about you? <i>Eoin:</i> ((long pause)) I’m nice, I’m friendly, I help people, I make people laugh and never sad.
Responsive to affirmation of the self	<p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> And let’s pick one teacher, let’s pick Áine. What would Áine say about you, if I asked her to describe you? <i>Eoin:</i> Em his writing is good yes. <p><i>Interviewer:</i> And would she say anything else about you? <i>Eoin:</i> And he doing good work.</p> <p>Teacher</p> <p><i>Interviewer:</i> And when would he be at his happiest in school? <i>Teacher:</i> Ah praise, like you know. All kids do I suppose, but with Eoin definitely, yeah... And when something is too hard, he won’t even try it like. And so you have to really break it down and you know “You can do this Eoin”, and you know the power of ‘yet’ and so and so yeah, that’s it really yeah... Yeah he just needs that extra bit of encouragement or extra bit of help yeah, Eoin he does yeah and he loves that praise and encouragement, he really needs it.</p>

RQ3: Does special provision within a mainstream school influence how the child makes sense of him/herself, and if so, in what ways?

IMPACT OF INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

Emergent Theme	Illustrating Theme (from at least two participants)
Systemic ethos of inclusion	<p>Child, Parent, Teacher</p> <p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ I work in (names ASD class) and fifth class (identifying with both classes) <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Em, ah (.) no, no ((sighs)) no he wouldn't no. No, they wouldn't, he doesn't even. He just knows he's in a small classroom. That's all he knows. That's it's a small classroom and that's his safe place. That's where he goes to when he feels overwhelmed ((Pause)) ..That's his safe place, because you see, there's other kids with autism in the mainstream school as well, and they might come up, they go up and down to the unit as well. So he feels that this is just somewhere for us to go to have a "time-out", and calm down and do our work one-to-one. He just feels like it's another classroom. ○ Ahm ((pause)) they always ((pause)) like last year now they did a project ... and every child in the school had to put down what they want to do themselves and what qualities they felt they had themselves and it was all put up on one big board on the school, and it wasn't just the (names ASD class), it was every single child in the school had to put up what they felt good about themselves. And then he was able to see other children's views of themselves and that kind of helped him a lot. Ahm, when the school does big projects like that about self-concept and personality, the whole school comes together, it's not just the (names ASD class) and so he sees other kids having difficulties like he would have. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Interviewer: Do you think he is aware I suppose that he is in a special setting? Teacher: Well he does, he knows that yeah. Interviewer: And would you think that that is a difficulty for him, his awareness of that? Teacher: No I don't think so, like I mean you know it's always been the way you know and it's, it's just so accepted here. It's just like part of the school and sure like before lockdown we used to have the doors open like and so everybody was up, like the whole school they were only dying to come up and use the sensory room and ((long pause)). ○ You know because the school is so inclusive he just feels part of it as well I think.

**Appendix U: Case Study Report 3
Case Study 3 Report**

Talking Mat Visual Summary



Within Case Analysis

Superordinate themes were devised at the case level to group connected emergent themes from individual transcripts.

For an emergent theme to be included within a superordinate theme at case level, it had to **emerge from at least two transcripts within the individual case study** to ensure convergence whilst allowing for some divergence as per IPA’s idiographic focus (Smith et al., 2009). Final super-ordinate themes and emergent themes at the within-case level with accompanying sample extracts from transcripts are illustrated below:

RO: What are the lived school experiences of the child in terms of interpersonal relationships, curriculum/learning and accessibility of the school environment?

SUPER-ORDINATE THEME: COMPLEX PEER DYNAMICS

Emergent Theme	Illustrating Theme (from at least two participants) Child, Parent, Teacher
Negotiating friendship challenges	<p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Well I like hanging out with my friends ‘cause I don’t really, cause ugh none of the people that in my estate don’t live eh near me, near me as in like, they live in the other place (names rural location of school 2) or something and I live in (names town). And even if my friends do live in (names town) is just that I live a bit far away from them. ○ Most of the kids... they mostly play soccer and the people who don’t play soccer or who don’t play soccer that much, like me, don’t really have nothing to do because most of their friends are playing soccer. <i>Interviewer:</i> So how do you feel when everyone else is playing soccer when you’re out on yard? <i>Jakub:</i> A bit bored. ((Long pause)) I mean I have some friends that don’t play

	<p>soccer....But like it gets boring for people who don't play because like every day</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Interviewer: All in your class, okay. And do you find it easy or hard to make friends in school? Jakub: Well, it depends [grimaces]. Well, I don't really like when you're first meeting them, like you have to get used to what they do.. <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Interviewer: And would he socialise with children from the 'big class' or the mainstream class outside of school? Parent: No only those two boys, from (names ASD class) because like all the kids are from (names school location) and we are living in (names town) so he doesn't get to see them outside of school.
<p>Forging close friends with others with matched interests and autism</p>	<p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Well, we both like telling jokes, we both like video games, we like going outside. We like talking to each other about literally anything. ○ Interviewer: And in what ways are you and Jayden (pseudonym) like each other or similar to each others? Jakub: Well we both watch YouTube a lot [smiles] ○ And like, some of my friends, they don't even go to [names ASD class] at all anymore. <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Oh yeah, he has like two best friends, even during the lockdown when actually we could finally meet, it was the first day! ((laughs)) but they were like on the skype or on the other like messengers every second day, sometimes like two, three hours. They even play in the room but the phone was next to them so they could see. Interviewer: And are those boys in the (names ASD class) as well? Parent: Yes, yes. Now I think one of them is in the big class. Completely finished (names ASD class). Yeah, yeah. ○ We just bring the kids, they all meet together and go together, and so it's really like- it's big fun for them. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Well, I suppose, he's coming down [to ASD class] with another child whom he's close to as well, you know they've been together the whole way up together, starting out in the [ASD class] from the beginning.
<p>A sense of mainstream belonging: 'In the gang'</p>	<p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Interviewer: And what do you think if I asked some of the children in your class to describe Jakub for me, what do you think they would say? Jakub: Well funny, entertaining (.). Always wants to chat and don't really get bored. ○ Interviewer: And who are they? [friends] Jakub: Well, well should I say all of them? Interviewer: Give it a try! Jakub: Seán*, Ciara*, Jayden*, Daniel*, em ((pause)) like Darren*, Ci- I already said Ciara*, like Liam*, Emily* (* all pseudonyms), like basically anyone. Interviewer: Anyone, okay. And are they all in your class? Jakub: Yeah ○ Interviewer: And how would he [teacher] say you get on with other children in

	<p>the class? Jakub: Great, yeah.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Interviewer: Okay, and what do you like about the [names mainstream class] then? Jakub: Well they have good friends.. <p>Parent,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ..it's better like when they are all together and sometimes I think he's in the middle of everything- he wants to be everywhere like. ○ Because, eh, all his friends, they will all go to the same school, and so he's happy that it will be big group of kids being again in the same school. And so they can even go together to the school <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Yeah, he would seem to have more friends like [than others in ASD class]. And I suppose because he's interested in computers and he's athletic as well like, he's more "in the gang" kind of thing with the others [mainstream] I suppose.
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SUPER-ORDINATE THEME: SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Emergent Theme	Illustrating Theme (from at least two participants)
	<p>Child, Parent, Teacher</p>
Supportive adult relationships	<p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Interviewer: So how do you feel about adults helping you in school? Jakub: [Places in 'like' column] Interviewer: So which adults help you in school? Jakub: Well, we have Joe [mainstream class teacher] and Áine [ASD class teacher] and the SNAs Interviewer: And what type of things do they do to help you? Jakub: Well they like, if I'm stuck on a question, I raise my hand up and like ask them like "how do you do this" or "how do you do that", or "how do you tie a knot" [laughs] Interviewer: And they'll help you with all of those things? Jakub: Ah, yeah, they wouldn't like tell me the answer, they would help me how to figure it out and stuff. Interviewer: So they still make you do the hard work do they? Jakub: Yeah Interviewer: And do you like that they make you do the hard work? Jakub: Mmm yeah, so that like you don't sit back and relax and let the teacher do everything (Pause). ○ Well, eh, I like working alone, it's just that eh I don't want to be like constantly saying 'how do you do this' or 'how do you do that' and all that stuff. ○ [on mainstream class teacher] like he always chats with me sometimes. <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Yeah they had some kind of meetings, also when he was like not going to Irish, he just sit with them, I think it was (names principal) who it was last year, and they were kind of, they had some kind of meetings about behaviour and all the kind of life stuff, there were just kind of sitting and talking and he could say how he feels and I think it work as well. ○ Yeah. It's, well the school is great so, like if he has any problems, they try to talk to him and sometimes there were like small things and for him it was big problem and he was just, he didn't even like say what happened, he would just sit and he was really sad and so the teachers, they know straight away like

	<p>something is wrong they try to talk to him and so.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Yeah I think they talk a lot, not just in a group, they talk like as students teacher, just like face to face only. If they have any problems, they know they can go to teacher and tell them everything. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ He'll get anxious, even when you really try talk it through with him in a one on one setting ○ And you know he knows that he can talk to us in school when he is anxious about things.
<p>Special class as sanctuary</p>	<p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Interviewer: Okay, and is there anything else you like about it? Jakub: Emm, yeah. Well mostly I like doing, just relaxing in there. Interviewer: Is it a relaxing space? Jakub: Emm, yeah. Interviewer: What makes it relaxing? Jakub: Well, like I mean at the start of the day I do a bit of work, not like I mean it's a bit hard but like it's, working there it's grand. ○ Jakub: Yeah, it it kinds of bothers me cause like it, it mostly involves like relaxing but everyone just uses it as playing. Interviewer: And what do you like to do when you go there? Jakub: Emm, like well, well if I was alone, I would like just (.) do anything relaxing. <p>Parent:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No I think he actually likes to go to (names ASD class). So he will have a time like for himself. Just kind of like to relax. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ He can become anxious you know if things aren't, you know if he gets something wrong. And that's when he'll come back up [to ASD class] just or just for five-minute movement breaks to help him to calm and regulate ○ And it's just, if he needs a movement break, he might say to the SNA that he needs to come up [to ASD class], he knows himself, he needs a break. You know if he's anxious or like that...you know it's a help for him being able to seek out the sensory needs in school. ○ He knows that (names ASD class) is here for him if he needs it. ○ You know and he might say to us like "Oh [mainstream class teacher] won't like that ...and you know, he feels safer I'd say up in [ASD class]"
<p>Anxiety about future learning environments "I'm not looking forward to secondary"</p>	<p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ I'm not looking forward to secondary. I'll miss this school. <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Yeah, I'm already actually shaking. I don't know ○ He's only like panicking that he will have more homework. That's the only thing he's afraid of. ○ ...but he's kind of start thinking already that like "oh I will have like more homework" ○ He's panicking that he will have lots of homework.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Interviewer: And how do you feel about him going completely into the mainstream setting? Parent: ((Pause)) I'm panicking, I'm actually panicking. I don't know what to expect. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Well he'll get on fine I suppose in secondary academically but (.) you know you'd still kind of worry for his anxiety in secondary school like you know. It's just you still would feel that he would need ((pause)) some sort of eh (.) additional support base or something like he has here.
<p>Mainstream inclusion as a process</p>	<p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Interviewer: And do you find it easy or hard to make friends in school? Jakub: Well, it depends [grimaces]. Well, I don't really like when you're first meeting them, like you have to get used to what they do, they might be a bit different, but over time you know them more and more until you can get used to them. ○ Yeah, from like (pause) like, like I uhm well some teacher like, like, I used to go to [names ASD class] all the time. As I keep going- I still go to [names ASD class] like, I uhm, it's just that now I go to [names mainstream class] more. <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Yeah I think in the beginning for him I know the the teacher said like when they say like "open the books on this page", he never opened the book because he was waiting for say like "Jakub, can you open the book" because in (names ASD class) there's only six children like so they were kind of like, so the teacher was kind of like only for him. And now he has to like follow different rules. ○ He couldn't as well like eh concentrate when too many people like start talking. You know, like not loud, but just between them so teacher could not hear them but he start to be kind of confusing and he couldn't concentrate as well but after a while in the big group he was fine. That's why that keep putting him for longer and longer and now he's nearly all day in the big class. ○ First they put him for just like one hour and then longer and longer and then last year they were even thinking to move him to completely to mainstream but we said like, maybe we wait and we see how it goes <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ...like he's progressed to integrating for everything only the Irish. ○ [re coping with mainstream inclusion] That other people might, you know, if the place was messy or that might trigger him but I mean not so much now as before, I mean he's more able to cope most of the time yeah. ○ Yeah he seems to get on well with them like. And I suppose, he's two years, well he's all through the school with them even when he was more in (names ASD class)...But em, I suppose, they understand him now as well as they spend more time together

SUPERORDINATE THEME: NAVIGATING THE LEARNING PROCESS

Emergent Theme	Illustrating Theme (from at least two participants)
Self-efficacy and curricular enjoyment	<p>Child, Parent, Teacher</p> <p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> How do you feel about maths? <i>Jakub:</i> [Places in ‘not sure’ column). Not sure <i>Interviewer:</i> You’re not sure. <i>Jakub:</i> Well, well it depends on what subject it is like I’m not really good at multiplication. So I don’t really like. Like if I have to do it in my head like ‘snap, snap’ [clicks fingers], then like no I wouldn’t able to do that. And then the like part is like if it’s a subject that is easy-peasy like we were doing yesterday with the addition and subtraction, then yeah, I would like it because, it, it’s very easy. You know everyone knows how to do it. ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> Okay, and so the next one is ‘writing’. How do you feel about ‘writing in school’? <i>Jakub:</i> I like it. [places in ‘like column] <i>Interviewer:</i> You like it, is it easy or hard for you? <i>Jakub:</i> Easy, yeah. ○ <i>Jakub:</i> [Places in ‘not sure’ column] Well like it depends, like if it’s a sport that either I, I really like and I’m used to it a lot or if it is a sport that I’m not too sure of or like I ((pause)) wouldn’t really be used to. ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> What did you not like about that? <i>Jakub:</i> It’s just that the notes, like ‘D, F. G’, I was kind of like ‘what?’ And I can’t just be like closing my eyes and playing things. <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ And I think maths, sometimes when he has a problem, I try to explain him again and again and he finds out how everything is works and he just flying and he so happy then.
Perfectionist-driven curricular anxiety	<p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ [on Irish] So the first two years it was okay, but then when it gets harder, then he got closed to it, he was really like nervous because he’s kind of perfectionist. ○ Every Friday they have a test, some kind of test, and he will have, if he will have any trouble then he start panicking.....so he didn’t finish the test so it cause he like so much, really like he was so nervous ○ She [teacher] was like “he’s perfect at Irish” and I was shocked because at home it was nightmare ○ Yeah it was like too much for him and then when it gets harder, oh my god, he was really like stomach pains and everything <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ He can become anxious you know if things aren’t, you know if he gets something wrong. ○ Yeah, he would be, but as I said, if he gets something wrong, he can get very anxious and upset you know.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Yeah, yeah because he's very particular, and it has to be exactly right and neat and precise....Yeah, academic stress about getting things right more than anything else, yeah, yeah. ○ Well he knows that he's an anxious child I suppose as well and (.) as I said you know he likes to get everything right and he knows that. ○ It's only if he was doing Irish probably he'd have been able to manage as well, but he'd be so anxious about it as well.
<p>Then to now transformations in engagement</p>	<p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Because I remember when I was in fifth class, I like for the first couple of days, I remember constantly telling [mainstream class teacher] like 'How do you do this?' or 'How do you do that' but since I'm in sixth class, that barely happens anymore, I don't need to. <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Likes he loves to read now (.) all the lockdown, he was actually like reading the books which I was like so surprised and happy ○ But after while I was like, I was in shock when he start- first I was in shock when I didn't knew he could read and then he open, like brought a small book and his homework was like to read two pages. And he read full book and we were like 'oh my god like' I didn't- I was always reading book for him and I didn't know he can read. And he just start reading like an adult. He didn't talk but he could read like adult. And so we were in shock ○ Then after like two, three months he start like opening, he starts talking ○ Yes, yes because before he was like sitting, standing, sitting, standing, sitting, standing like and walking like around... ○ But yeah when it was really, really noisy. ...But he kind of get used to, now it's no problem. It could be really loud and he will be fine ○ he couldn't concentrate as well but after a while in the big group he was fine. ○ In the beginning when he start talking like I could see the progress like between his reading and his writing and maths I was like, I was actually in shock. ○ Interviewer: and are there any subjects in which he has particular difficulty in? Parent: No, not now. Everything is just like, flying through. ○ Yes from a small baby that didn't even talk and now he is like "Mammy don't worry, I'll be fine", it's like oh my god. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ You know and, like he's getting better as well in that he's more aware of when he needs a break in (names ASD class) and that helps him then to engage..

RO2: How does the child make sense of him/herself in the social context of school?**SUPERORDINATE THEME: A QUESTIONING SELF**

Emergent Theme	Illustrating Theme (from at least two participants)
<p>“I would do a horrible job”: Frustration with self in context of perfectionist standards</p>	<p>Child, Parent, Teacher</p> <p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Well like drawing like I said, I like tracing but like if, if I try to draw alone without tracing it, I am pretty bad at it... It's just that like it shows you how to draw properly instead of like if you're, if just you say there is a cartoon character I want to draw, if I trace I would do it step by step but if I done it without tracing I would do a horrible job.. <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ((Long pause)) He's always like, eh, he thinks he didn't do enough. For example, even on the test, he will get like ninety points not a hundred, he will be not happy. He's kind of like “Oh I didn't, I wasn't good enough”. ..But he's really like perfectionist like ○ everything has to be like perfect, not just good, perfect. ○ Yeah, em ((pause)) I think so yeah, sometimes he's just saying what his two best friends kind of like, how they going and he's not like sometimes oh like they are better in like hurling and before he used to play, now he's not playing and he's like “No I'm not good enough and that so “I'm not going to try again, (names friend) is better” <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Like academically like he would and he'd be hard on himself then. And he'd be well up there with the others but he'd be very conscious of that yeah. Yeah ((long pause)). Probably too conscious of it really you know..Yeah, and even sports-wise he'd be (.) comparing himself too much like. He'd be too- like that is his problem really, he's too much of a perfectionist really you know.. ○ <i>[on hopes for Jakub]</i> And not to be too hard on himself, because he can be very hard on himself and critical of himself. So that he knows you know, nobody is perfect, nobody gets it all right you know, because he feels like he should.
<p>“It's like a giant mix”: Negotiating differences</p>	<p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>[on divergent interests to peers]</i> Yeah, because I don't want the children to like play, to play, (.) like what I mean is that like, I don't ,what I was going to say is that, I uhm don't want them to stop playing soccer, I mean I'm fine with them playing soccer. ○ Interviewer: <i>[laughs]</i> Okay so the next picture is ‘children in my class’. So how do you feel about children in your class? And we'll think about the children in the fifth and sixth classroom, because you spend a lot of time up there. Jakub: <i>[Places in ‘like’ column]</i> Interviewer: Okay, so what do you like about the children up in that classroom? Jakub: Uhm, I mean ((pause)) what I mean about that is that like they're, they're entertaining. They have great personalities, some

	<p>different from mine, some a bit like mine ((long pause)). Like it's not all about myself...Interviewer: And the people who have personalities like you, what type of personalities do they have? Jakub: Like a funny personalities, a brainy personality. Interviewer: Oh, you're funny and brainy? Jakub: Yeah Interviewer: So there's lots of different types of personalities in your class. Jakub: Yeah, it's like a giant mix, I like that.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ [on difference between self and friend] Well [looks upwards as if thinking] well I mean he plays sports, I don't. He plays games that I don't play. He watches some movies that do-he watches some tv shows that he likes but I absolutely despise. <i>Interviewer:</i> Okay, so you've got some different interests and hobbies? <i>Jakub:</i> Yeah. <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ [on sense of difference in terms of specialist provision] But like ((pause)), no I think he don't really mind being in the big class and then go to (names ASD class) or compare like that no, he's fine to go there he doesn't think about it as being negative. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ [on interactions with special class peers] Well, I suppose, he's coming down with another child whom he's close to as well so there's two of them that are, so, like, and we have the older kids so in (names ASD class) so I suppose he doesn't feel too bad about coming down. I know I suppose he did feel maybe some bit of (.) stigma ○ Interviewer: do you think he'd ever compare himself to other children in terms of being I suppose linked to the (names ASD class) <i>Teacher:</i> Eh like he probably does like now as they get older, he probably does.
<p>Growing to accept diagnosis</p>	<p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ You're here to talk to me about my autism and stuff (in later interview, never mentions autism in self-descriptions- doesn't seem to internalise autism as central part of identity) <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ One day, this was like two maybe three years ago he ask me why he has autism and I was like, oh we never actually talk that,...And so I said "that's the autism but for every kid it's completely different, like look at you, you didn't talk and now you're talking" ○ And so he was even watching some movies on YouTube about autistic children and how to play with them and so he was kind of like "Oh I know what kind of problems I had" and so ... it's kind of like, yeah yeah, he really understand the problem like. ○ Yeah, first he was kind of sad "why, why?" And I said "we don't know, it just happen like, you know we didn't choose". So first he was kind of sad about it ..I said "look you have everything, you are so happy" and so after that he kind of like start thinking differently, like "yeah I am happy actually, I am happy, I am lucky".

	<p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ I suppose he knows and understands that he has autism as well like and he knows he knows he has difficulties with it or you know or that he'll just have to live with it and you know use his coping skills and that.
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POCKETS OF POSITIVE SELF APPRAISAL

Emergent Theme	Illustrating Theme (from at least two participants) Child, Parent, Teacher
Feeling valued by others	<p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> And what do you think if I asked some of the children in your class to describe Jakub for me, what do you think they would say? <i>Jakub:</i> Well funny, entertaining (.). Always wants to chat and don't really get bored. He would say like eh 'Jakub's a good friend, he listens to me and stuff' <i>Interviewer:</i> And would he have anything else to say about you? <i>Jakub:</i> Well he would say like I'm a good friend to him. ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> And what do you think [mainstream class teacher] would say about you? <i>Jakub:</i> Ah he would say that like I'm a good student, I know a lot of stuff.... He would say that like ((long pause)) em, well it depends really like I would say he would be a good student, at least he like learns and knows what to do <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If he has any problems, they try to talk to him and sometimes there were like small things and for him it was big problem, so I think he knows that they will always listen to him

RO3: Does special provision within a mainstream school influence how the child makes sense of him/herself, and if so, in what ways?

IMPACT OF INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

Emergent Theme	Illustrating Theme (from at least two participants) Child, Parent, Teacher
Mainstream inclusion as enabling for the social self	<p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> Okay, and what do you like about the [names mainstream class] then? <i>Jakub:</i> Well they have good friends, a good education, all that stuff. <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> And do you as a parent think Jakub being included with children in the mainstream setting, in the big class, do you think that is important for him? <i>Parent:</i> I think so yeah, yeah because I don't want him to be like left alone and it will be like big group of kids and he will be alone, it's better like when they are all together and sometimes I think he's in the middle of everything- he wants to be everywhere like. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ But em, I suppose, they understand him now as well and I suppose there's a lot

	<p>of kids with autism in the school anyway and I suppose they just get on with it and ((pause)), so it is really quite accepted by the kids here.</p>
<p>Fostering positive connotations of special class</p>	<p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ But like ((pause)), no I think he don't really mind being in the big class and then go to (names ASD class) or compare like that no. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Well, I suppose, he's coming down with another child whom he's close to as well so there's two of them that are, so, like, and we have the older kids so in (names ASD class) so I suppose he doesn't feel too bad about coming down. I know I suppose he did feel maybe some bit of (.) stigma but you know you kind of do like today I did lego with him, you do different things and you know he loves computers, so I would do typing skills or we'd do things on the computers on a Friday and we do cooking on a Wednesday as well, you know to make it enjoyable for them. So that coming down is a positive experience for them. ○ And I suppose that's why you try to do things like that they can enjoy you know like as well as their learning they'll still need to cook, and he enjoys that. And as he said, you know the computers he likes as well to build the positive associations. ○ There is I suppose yeah and I mean the (names ASD class) it's so it's just so accepted here. It's just like part of the school and sure like before lockdown we used to have the doors open like and so everybody was up, like the whole school they were only dying to come up and use the sensory room and ((long pause)).

**Appendix V: Case Study Report 4
Case Study 4 Report**

Talking Mat Visual Summary



Within Case Analysis

Superordinate themes were devised at the case level to group connected emergent themes from individual transcripts. For an emergent theme to be included within a superordinate theme at case level, it had to **emerge from at least two transcripts within the individual case study** to ensure convergence whilst allowing for some divergence as per IPA’s idiographic focus (Smith et al., 2009). Final super-ordinate themes and emergent themes at the within-case level with accompanying sample extracts from transcripts are illustrated below:

RO: What are the lived school experiences of the child in terms of interpersonal relationships, curriculum/learning and accessibility of the school environment?

SUPER-ORDINATE THEME: COMPLEX PEER DYNAMICS

Emergent Theme	Illustrating Theme (from at least two participants) Child, Parent, Teacher
Friendship uncertainties: “Happy in his own space”	<p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ You know, but I can’t say, he engages a lot with the boys here but I don’t know if it’s a friendship I suppose. ○ He can be a bit withdrawn sometimes so he wouldn’t maybe actively am engage with you all of the time, he’s quite happy in his own space and in his own, em, he’s content in himself. ○ So Max is kind of one of the boys who is more content in his own space. <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ He’s not really interested in other kids as such or he’s a bit shy, I don’t know which it is. ○ [on socialisation with peers] Sometimes, em, he doesn’t ask very often. And (.) in the past we’ve had children over and he’ll play with them for half an hour and then for the next hour and a half, they’ve nothing, you know they have to go

	entertain themselves.
Social engagement in special class context	<p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ I suppose, he actually knows all the names of the boys in (names ASD class). ○ But he does know them and he does get on with them. He'll choose to do activities with them and he will engage with them. He does you know. Ah and he can tell them jokes and if they're upset, he'll try to help them. So he does engage in (names ASD class) as far as I'm aware. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ahm but he does, throughout the day he would seek out am (.) I suppose company. Yeah, he would seek out company throughout the day as well. ○ Yeah and he would like you know, if a boy said something and he thought 'oh', like for example, during circle time one boy said that he felt lonely and Max was like "I feel sad for that boy because he said he was lonely, why does he feel lonely?" You know, but I can't say, he engages a lot with the boys here but I don't know if it's a friendship I suppose is my answer. ○ Because they are, I mean in fairness, all of the boys in this classroom are so kind to each other, it's a beautiful classroom. Yes, they're so kind to each other. But that might not be the case in the mainstream classes.

SUPER-ORDINATE THEME: SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Emergent Theme	Illustrating Theme (from at least two participants)
Accommodating sensory and regulation needs	<p>Child, Parent, Teacher</p> <p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> And you put the sensory room over here [points to like]. What do you like about the sensory room? <i>Max:</i> It's quiet <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> And when would you say that Max is at his happiest in school? <i>Parent:</i> Well he loves the sensory room, so probably when he gets the sensory room ○ Well he gets lots of movement breaks and so I think that really helps him and eh, even in his mainstream class, he has a special stool to help him sit. ○ Yeah, so movement breaks, he has a stool in his mainstream class, there's a lap blanket if he needs it. Em in (names ASD class), there's a peanut ball and so he can roll up and down the room on that while telling the teachers whatever he needs to be telling them or counting or doing his maths. Em and if he needs a break in the sensory room, he has the sensory room. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ So am, we do quite a bit of am, we do a lot of academic work but we do have a lot of sensory play as well, in particular there's like bouncing balls, we have a sensory room, am and lentil play and things like that and he would be very content and happy when, when he's doing those activities ○ I suppose his 'go-to' if he needs a break and he's distressed about something would be the sensory room. He would go there, he would actively ask to go

	<p>there if he is feeling overwhelmed or upset or just wants a bit of down time. Now it would not be for long, it could be as little as five minutes and he would be fine. He would regulate himself after that. And it's kind of an area where he does his own thing, there's very little staff input to it. Em, it would just be you know his space for that time.</p>
<p>Supportive adult relationships</p>	<p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ..so they're aware of that and they're aware of everything like...they're very good to him ○ this morning I dropped him in and he had a huge smile on his face when he saw (.) eh the SNAs and everything like that so he seems very happy. ○ I think it's brilliant em the ratio is very good, he gets on very well with them and I think at this stage, they know him really, really well. Em, they are all very fond of him. ○ Everyone in there is really, really good and he really engages with them now at this stage and they know him really well and they if he's starting to get frustrated and they know how to stop him from you know moving up to the highest level of intense frustration and anger, em which doesn't happen very often thankfully. But they do know how to cope with that now. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Yes, but you'd know, you'd know visibly if he was upset. Like he wouldn't maybe tell you or be able to articulate that he was sad or upset but we would see by him that he was you, from working closely with him. ○ he he can keep up with the class with support...So he would find it difficult to stay on task for, but with a little bit of assistance, it's not you know he can fly through it ○ You know, ahm because (pause) the adults who work with him in (names ASD class), I think we see a different side to him than I think the adults who work with him in the mainstream do you know ○ SNAs have been here since the start, so they have a fantastic relationship with him and all the boys, you know. Ahm, like you can really see it, it's really amazing, it's great for them that they have 'their people' you know?
<p>Special class as a sanctuary for the self: "Freer to be himself"</p>	<p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Em, and then that he would yeah move into it if he was upset as well do you know what I mean, that's what we envisioned the (names ASD class) to be for him you know, so that it would support him to be in his mainstream class. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ So if, like (names ASD class) is always here if he does need a bit of extra, a bit of an extra break, the door is always open, you know, ○ the only thing you'd ever see from Max is when you go to collect him from his mainstream class and he sees who it is he just smiles. Whether it's me or the SNAs, he's just "awh" and he goes out with a big smile on his face. ○ The adults who work with him in (names ASD class), I think we see a

	<p>different side to him than I think the adults who work with him in the mainstream do you know. Because last year, I was in the school last year, but I wasn't working in (names ASD class), I was just a resource teacher and I would have seen Max quite a bit and I had no flavour of his personality based on what I had seen prior, you know. But having worked with him in this setting, ahm, I really see his personality, you know he really seems to just flourish a little bit more or feel freer to be himself, and I'm not sure whether that's just because of the busyness of the mainstream class, while we have, it's just more fluid here. And I'm not even sure whether he has an awareness that he's like that, I'm not sure to be honest. But, ahm yeah I would say and I would say that Max would not be as content maybe as he is without having the flexibility that having (names ASD class), time in (names ASD class) affords him.</p>
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SUPERORDINATE THEME: NAVIGATING THE LEARNING PROCESS

Emergent Theme	Illustrating Theme (from at least two participants)
Self-efficacy and curricular engagement	<p>Child, Parent, Teacher</p> <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ he won't, he could never, I guess he has no confidence to sit down and read for me at home ○ So when they're doing P.E., if they're doing hurling or football or something like that, he does find that difficult and frustrating... and so then he doesn't engage quite so well you know. ○ Eh so because he's struggling to read, if there's something on the board, he's just not going to bother reading it and try to keep up you know. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If I have to read a book with him, he'll go "I don't want to do it", he'll tell me so yeah. ○ Am P.E. is a big, big 'no-no' for him. Yeah, he gets very stressed with P.E. I don't know, he's not a fan of it anyway. He kind of feels like he can't do it. And he does that with his mainstream class. Am, so he would be very upset when it is P.E. time on his timetable. ○ Things that he finds difficult and he would shy away from them...Am, both with his peers and also with teachers and SNAs and helpers, he would kind of say "Well I can't do that", "I'm not able to do that"
Special class withdrawal and curricular trade-offs	<p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Parent: ((Pause)) I don't know, I don't know because I guess being in (names ASD class) is a bit more, he probably misses out on a fair bit that goes on in his own classroom. So I'd say that he does miss out on a fair bit. But then he's learning other skills in (names ASD class) as well, you know. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ And then for his other subjects, some of his withdrawal time would be during Gaeilge, so em, he would miss a good bit of that so I would say he probably

	wouldn't be very proficient
SUPERORDINATE THEME: SCHOOL ATTACHMENT	
Emergent Theme	Illustrating Theme (from at least two participants) Child, Parent, Teacher
Positive school attachment	<p>Parent,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ But he (.) he loves it in there ○ Well he skips in every morning, he loves it. He never says he doesn't want to go to school, he seems to really enjoy it. ○ But no, he's really enjoying it and is thriving in there. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ But he came down here with his tummy pain, because he's quite well integrated between his mainstream class and (names ASD class) and he came down here and he said "I'm really sorry but I think I'm going to have to go until I'm better but I'll come back as soon as I'm better". So yeah (pause), I think that just says it in a nutshell.
Anxiety about future school attachment	<p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ He's still so young, but it's on my mind all the time ○ And I think secondary school, he's just got to survive it. He's just got to yeah, so it's like picking the school that will give him the support as I think at time point...it's when it's all going to kick off with we'll say he's very easy now, he's a very, very easy child to have around but things could really change, em and it's about finding a school that supports him. ○ It's just I think secondary school is just survival. ○ Em, but yeah. Am, yeah and it needs to be a school, one of the schools here has [gives specific number of pupils]. ...Whereas if I send him somewhere where he knows nobody, then he's just (.) yeah. He'd just be thrown into it. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ I suppose my concern for him would be that a negative experience in either (names ASD class) or his mainstream class could set, could set him, em could build up a wall, he could build up a wall and that he might shut down in himself. That would be my concern for him. ... So I would be concerned that he would just say "no" and that's it. Ahm, and I'd hate for that to happen for him because he has so much to offer and so much to give. And so much to receive from school life you know.

RO2: How does the child make sense of him/herself in the social context of school?**A QUESTIONING VERSUS AN UNQUESTIONING SELF**

Emergent Theme	Illustrating Theme (from at least two participants)
Frustration with the self in context of difficulties: “I just can’t do it”	<p>Child, Parent, Teacher</p> <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ And if you ask him, he’ll tell you he can’t read, em (.) ○ Em he does find sport a challenge. So when they’re doing P.E., if they’re doing hurling or football or something like that, he does find that difficult and frustrating...And it’s a problem for him. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ I think so, because he would articulate “I just can’t do it”. That’s the way he would say it “I just can’t do it, I can’t do that” is kind of you know the format in which it would be said “I can’t do that”. ○ So for example, he knows the things that he finds difficult and he would shy away from them. Am, both with his peers and also with teachers and SNAs and helpers, he would kind of say “Well I can’t do that”, “I’m not able to do that”.
Recognising and negotiating differences between self and peers	<p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ So, he has a good sense of self. He said recently he wished the whole world was in his image. Yeah, he knows, I think he knows that he thinks about things differently, he has different interests. Em, but we discuss that openly and we say everyone is different and it would be very boring if everyone was the same. ○ And he says “Oh I wish everyone was interested in the same things I was” or there’ll be other days when he’ll say “I wish I was like everybody else”. And when I ask him about that, he’ll say “Oh well they like superheroes” or “they like sport” and that’s what he means, he doesn’t mean anything else, he just means he wishes he had the same interests as the other boys.Ah, but we discuss the fact that everyone has different interests and that’s okay...I wonder is he starting to get a little bit of a negative, I wonder. But he’s not upset about it you know, but he does say he wishes everybody was like him rather than he wishes he was like everybody else. ○ [on recognition of ASD class as special class] Em, I don’t know. I think he feels lucky to be in it. Em, but he just accepts that that’s his place. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Am (.) he has never, ever said that he has autism or that he is in any way different to anybody else, ever. ○ Mmm, yeah no, he has never, ever acknowledged it or ever, the only thing you’d ever see from Max is when you go to collect him from his mainstream class and he sees who it is he just smiles.
Limited social self-appraisal	<p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ so he seems very popular, not that he’s aware of it yet. .. he isn’t aware of all of that though, he’s aloof about it I suppose. ○ I don’t you know think that he compares himself with other children in school so

	<p>he would never say to me you know such and such is really good at sport or such and such is really good at reading. He would never, I don't think he has an awareness as to what a lot of the other boys are doing</p> <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ [on source of frustration] I think it's more with himself. Am, yeah if I had to, it's hard to say but I do think it's more with himself, I don't think he would be upset because someone could do something better than him...he'd be more annoyed that he wasn't doing it, rather than annoyed that the other person could.
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POCKETS OF POSITIVE SELF APPRAISAL

Emergent Theme	Illustrating Theme (from at least two participants) Child, Parent, Teacher
Responsive to affirmation of the self	<p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Yeah, so Max is very funny, he's very witty, eh he's a bit of a joker and he enjoys making people laugh you know. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Max is quite possibly one of the most hilarious children you will ever meet in your life like he just has the best sense of humour and sense of devilment ○ Am, now in saying that, if he had a funny story, like which he does generally quite often...he would come in and say "I have this story" and he would say, he would actively say to another boy, call them by their names to tell them the story in the morning ○ And gas, he's just so funny. And he loves that he is funny. Like he knows that he's very funny and he knows that he has loads of jokes and he can make people laugh, and he loves like you can see it in him, he's so happy when he does tell a story and everyone is laughing. <i>Interviewer:</i> So he really kind of accepts that feedback? <i>Teacher:</i> Yeah, and he looks for it. You know so even if someone didn't hear all of the story, he'd tell them again. Do you know, so.

RO3: Does special provision within a mainstream school influence how the child makes sense of him/herself, and if so, in what ways?

IMPACT OF INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

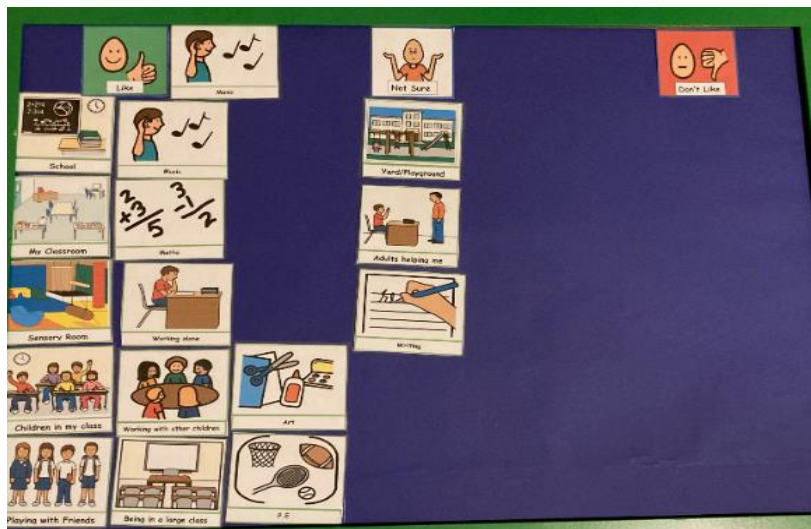
Emergent Theme	Illustrating Theme (from at least two participants) Child, Parent, Teacher
Systemic ethos of inclusion	<p>Parent,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Everyone seems to know him, boys in all the years know him, everyone says "Hi Max". ...and so he seems very popular ○ I guess the fact that he is in a mainstream school and it's inclusive and no one is allowed to make any difference..Yeah, yeah and I think the principal is very, is very keen on that and I think if anyone stepped out of line they'd be pulled up on it very quickly. ○ Yeah, yeah, that's one of the things, it's never called, when they set it up (names principal) was very keen that it's not called "the unit" or, because these are all

	<p>kind of medical terms and it's not, it's just a classroom yeah. Yeah, so they were very keen that it wasn't a medical place, you know a place of a diagnosis.</p> <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Teacher: We don't refer to (names ASD class) as the ASD unit, we just call it (names ASD class) ○ Ahm, it's kind of structured yard time really. Like the option for children that maybe feel like, especially for the older classes that might not know what games or who they want to play with. There's a game going ahead on each yard whether it's ball game, or a game called four square or hoop games or races or something like that. And I think that's very positive for the boys and Max who go to (names ASD class) as I suppose yard can be a time when it's very unstructured. And can be very difficult for children on the spectrum. So I think having that structure there helps kind of you know feel like "I know what I'm supposed to do on yard, I can do this, even if I don't know who I want to play with, I can do this". You know?...Yeah, and "I'm playing with other people even though I'm not actually playing with them, I'm playing beside them". You know? So I think that was, that was fantastic for the boys here.
<p>Schoolwide SEN provision destigmatises 'difference'</p>	<p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ But the school is, you'll see, it's a very, it's quite a big school and it's very busy with lots of special needs teachers and now (names ASD class) and so there's boys moving in and out all the time and boys for extra work because they're behind but boys for extra work because they're ahead as well and so nobody knows why anyone is coming and going really you know. ○ There's lots of movement yeah, so there's boys moving all the time, so no one, I think a lot of the boys don't even know where everyone is going...I think there's so much going on and so that no one can really pull out. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Am so his timetabled day is structured between (names ASD class) and his mainstream class. And he would not, I suppose, if a child was in receipt of resource hours, (pause) am it would be fairly similar. ○ it's kind of they're only all together in the morning and that's only for half an hour and then it's then you know, everyone is kind of doing their own thing after that for the rest of the day
<p>School-wide positive connotations of special class</p>	<p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ I think they would all like to be in (names ASD class) and he does bring boys up there with him to play, he gets to choose a boy to go up with him and that gives him popularity, do you know what I mean because they're all delighted if Max chooses them. ○ So that was, yeah, lovely, so every kid in the school is dying to get in there to play

	<p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ And I suppose just the fact that am everybody knows about (names ASD class), they might not know what it's for, but everybody knows that (names ASD class) is here and that certain boys go to (names ASD class) and that it's a very positive thing. And I think that influences a positive sense of self. And I think there's kind of a "Well I go to [names ASD class]" thing you know? (laughs) yeah a little bit.
<p>Beyond the 'bubble': Mainstream inclusion as enabling for the social self</p>	<p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Yeah, absolutely, I don't think it should be a separate entity. I think he should be in his mainstream class, these are the boys that if he lives in (names local area) or if he's going to secondary school, he's going to know them all and they need to know him and he needs to be familiar with them. And so I do think it's important. And so I think that's the whole point of an ASD class, so that you can have integration ○ but then if he goes into that school and he already knows (.) it's the school that most of the kids from School 3 go to, and then he goes in there and lots of the boys already know him, then there's already a layer of acceptance and you know. And protection maybe. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ I think it's very easy to be in a bubble in this type of a classroom you know, where you might not, I suppose especially when all the boys are at such different ages and different stages of life that it's very important for Max in particular to have time with children his own age. You know, to kind of, to learn how to get along with people that maybe are not as mature as his friends are in (names ASD class) and that might not be as tolerant as the boys up here are. Because they are, I mean in fairness, all of the boys in this classroom are so kind to each other, it's a beautiful classroom.... Yes, they're so kind to each other. But that might not be the case in the mainstream classes. ○ So, am, and even just to learn how to communicate as well with his peers as well, I think it's important. And to feel like he's a part of that class as well.

**Appendix W: Case Study Report 5
Case Study 5 Report**

Talking Mat Visual Summary



Within Case Analysis

Superordinate themes were devised at the case level to group connected emergent themes from individual transcripts.

For an emergent theme to be included within a superordinate theme at case level, it had to **emerge from at least two transcripts within the individual case study** to ensure convergence whilst allowing for some divergence as per IPA’s idiographic focus (Smith et al., 2009). Final super-ordinate themes and emergent themes at the within-case level with accompanying sample extracts from transcripts are illustrated below:

RO: What are the lived school experiences of the child in terms of interpersonal relationships, curriculum/learning and accessibility of the school environment?

SUPER-ORDINATE THEME: COMPLEX PEER DYNAMICS

Emergent Theme	Illustrating Theme (from at least two participants)
<p>Friendship challenges: “There’s not many people with the same interests as me”:</p>	<p>Child, Parent, Teacher</p> <p>Child,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> And would you find it easy or hard to make friends in school? ○ <i>Seán:</i> Em, kind of hard because there’s many people with the same interests as me. ((Pause)) <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Yeah he’s kind of happy, and now he wouldn’t be great for making friends, he only has one or two friends ○ I’d say to them, “Seán! why wouldn’t you not try to talk to such a lad?” and he’d just say “Oh he just plays football at lunchtime” and I’d say “would you not

	<p>try to play it?” and he’d say “no, no, no, no”. He won’t even attempt like to try and be friends with them. Because he knows they play football at lunch, so there’s no point like.</p> <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ [on mainstream class peers] And they are very good at making sure he joins in and stuff but they’re not his best friends do you know what I mean?..they are great for looking out for him and you know but if people aren’t your best friends you’re still going to miss your best friends so.
<p>Fixed friendship circle with those with matched interests</p>	<p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Seán:</i> Eh, I missed um talking to my friends. ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> And do you have friends in school Seán? <i>Seán:</i> Uhm Michael* and Josh* (pseudonyms) but they’re in another class so I can’t really play with them. But, but I play with everyone on yard. Just like, yeah. But Michael* and Josh* are my best friends yeah. But they’re in the other sixth class, so I don’t really get to see them that much. <i>Interviewer:</i> Okay, I understand. And thinking of those two friends. In what way are you and those two friends similar or alike? <i>Seán:</i> Eh, we like video games, we like eh drawing, we eh, yeah we like the same stuff. We like the same movies as well. <i>Interviewer:</i> And are you and those friends different from each other in any way? <i>Seán:</i> Uhm, no, no I wouldn’t say so. <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ And he has two friends in the school, and he kind of sticks to them but the school are getting him to kind of try and broaden his horizons a little bit. ○ ...even when he was in the other school, he only had one friend like, once he’s gels with someone that’s it like. He would be very single-minded like he wouldn’t want to, the teachers would be kind of they’ve tried on numerous occasions to do this buddy system where he brings somebody up to the autism unit and they play games and stuff but he never keeps it going like he just, he might play for that hour and then that’s it. ○ I don’t really mind sure if he has one or two good friends that’s all he really needs anyway, ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> And when do you feel Seán would be happiest in school? I suppose like, it would have been lunch time when he got to see his friends... maybe those little social groups there doing with him because he does love seeing his friends. ○ I suppose just Seán he just has his way of meeting friends and that’s not going to change (pause) <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ he made two very good friends in that class ...and they all get on really well together. And em, he sees them after school and all that and always played with them on yard because the classes had their own, each eh stream had there own breaks together ○ Like as I say, I suppose it’s just that he has those two boys in the other class that

	<p>are his closest friends outside of school and they would have similar interests you know... Yeah he'd be very friendly with those boys you know.</p>
<p>Mainstream peers as accepting and inclusive</p>	<p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ So how do you feel about the children in your class? Seán: Yeah they're (pause) they're fine, no one is mean to me so I'll put it here [places in 'like' column] ○ But, but I play with everyone on yard. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ And like his class [mainstream] ..I know they really are so kind to him, they are a lovely class. And they are very good at making sure he joins in and stuff but they're not his best friends do you know what I mean? ○ ...he really enjoys basketball and eh some of the kids would kind of em, were conscious that he was feeling left out so he was kind of consciously being brought into the group with the basketball...they were all congratulating him do you know and it was lovely to see ○ But as I said, most of the time the class are very good, they're aware of him you know and his sort of that he's sensitive and they're sensitive to him and so they're good at kind of just including him and watching out for him ○ His class are so accepting of him and so lovely to him now
<p>Negotiating interactions across the special class spectrum</p>	<p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Yeah he gets on well with them like ○ Yeah, so you know he seems to get on well with them all, you know. He's the oldest of the children in (names ASD class), I suppose like I don't think [names ASD class peer] would be a hundred per cent his cup of tea, do you know what I mean like, he just, you know like he gets on with [peer] for the sake of it but I'd say like, [peer] might be a bit too loud for him as well. ... ○ See they would have been maybe on, you know on the hyperactive side of autism, whereas Seán would be a very quiet, chilled out lad do you know. So he wouldn't be into anyone who is too noisy or crazy. But like he gets on with them like, he's fine like. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Actually in particular the other [ASD class peer] who comes here is exactly the same as him in terms of when she comes and they're both in the same class and like his [mainstream] teacher said to me that [ASD class peer] actually really, really looks out for him... ...but they kind of relate to each other and [peer]'s a very kind child as well ○ but there's that (pause) the huge kind of spectrum, you know that they're coming in with other kids who are much much higher on the spectrum and that must be hard for them. ○ very kind towards them and very understanding..., do you know what I mean, they're very kind of I suppose accepting

SUPER-ORDINATE THEME: SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Emergent Theme	Illustrating Theme (from at least two participants)
Supportive adult relationships	<p>Child, Parent, Teacher</p> <p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Interviewer: And what do you think helped you to get to the point where you can do work independently? Seán: Eh, ‘cause of my SNAs Interviewer: Okay, what did they do to help you? Seán: They kind of helped me with like questions and to figure out how to do it. And like helped me to ke-, to stay focused. <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ..the teachers are all always, you know they’ll always work with me as well if Seán’s struggling with something as well like ○ And like he has a little journal that he can write in every day if there’s anything that’s bothering him and they’ll write something back if they think, if Seán’s told them something, and it’s a good way of communicating, ○ Oh definitely like, they’ve done, they build on his confidence the whole time. Like they’re constantly like, even like when he comes back after the summer the teachers, they all just seem to love him like and I’m not just saying that, they genuinely do <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ whereas in the mainstream class, sure you know there’s thirty kids in the room for you know, that’s what I’ve always liked about [names ASD class], you know they have another adult there they can talk too and you know maybe really relate to.
Special class as sanctuary	<p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> Okay, and what type of things do you do in (names ASD class)? <i>Seán:</i> Uhm, we just do activities, like we do stuff like playing conkers, and we do like painting and art as well. ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> And what do you like about it? <i>Seán:</i> It’s just nice, it’s nicer than my sixth classroom because it’s just kind of like newer. .. <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ But at the same time, it’s nice for him to have somewhere to go if he’s having a bad day or anything. ○ Yeah, he didn’t that was one of the major things at lunch time, he didn’t like the noise...So they kind of made an arrangement that if he wanted he could go up to (names ASD class), which is the unit like at lunch...But he has the option like if he wants to go there at lunchtime, well not so much this year, but last year. Like he did have the option. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Maybe for a break. Maybe, see you see such a difference in the kids down in [names ASD class] because they’re so much more comfortable down there. You know and they’d be a lot more chatty because you know like they can be

	<p>because it's kind of one on one with the teacher whereas in the mainstream class, sure you know there's thirty kids in the room for you know..</p>
<p>Mainstream inclusion as a process</p>	<p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ..so like I think it was just really his concentration and the SNA would bring him, like I don't even think he really has access as much any more like he shares one with two others. But like, it's only really like maybe the odd little reminder and maybe if he had a little bit of trouble with maths or something like that they might help him but generally he's fine you know. ○ [on happiness in school] Em, I'm trying to think now. Like I suppose he used to love going up to the unit and they've kind of reduced that as much now, like last year he was kinda em giving out because he wasn't getting to go as much but I think he's got used to that now and he wasn't expecting it this year. ○ Yeah, I suppose to the first two maybe three years I suppose, it's only really the last two years I suppose that he's been more in his mainstream class you know. Sometimes I don't even hear him talk too much about being in (names ASD class) as much really. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ And he had an SNA with him quite a good bit who used to just make sure he had the right copies out and stuff but by the end of the year, really he didn't need it. ○ It was more, it was more someone to remind him to to do what he was supposed to do and once he did, em he actually doesn't have an SNA now in the class... I think so like even that gradual thing of having the SNA within mainstream and now not you know what I mean. ○ Yeah and like I suppose the sense that he would always have been included, I mean the whole way up along and then I suppose it was gradually more and more em into mainstream ((long pause)).
<p>Anxiety about future learning environments</p>	<p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Seán:</i> Yeah I'm kind of nervous, but (pause) but I'll get through it. ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> And what makes you a little bit nervous? <i>Seán:</i> It's just like, there's going to be loads of different people. <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sixth class, he's going to secondary next year, scary...I'd say he's going to miss School 4 next year..like I'd say it's going to be a big transition for him like but we'll have to just try and get him ready for it, do you now that's all we can do, do you know ○ I suppose just like the whole thing with secondary school ...I suppose I'm just worried about that but like I don't know now Seán, he's kind of, I hope he would stay, that's one thing I would worry about is that he wouldn't be able to communicate it to me, that he might just hold it in and say nothing...But yeah he's, no I suppose and just the fact that if he's not with friends will he kind of get a lot you know quieter and will that affect his mental health and stuff like

	<p>that so.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ And plus I'd say he's really going to miss School 4 <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ I suppose you're just thinking about secondary school aren't you and just the big bad world of you know kids from other schools who have never met him before and you have that thing of, his class are so accepting of him and so lovely to him now and you do see him, he he's such a gentle soul and such a lovely person, you'd just kind of worry about those you know just the not-so-nice kids that are out there em, but I don't know. We're preparing him as much as we can but I know mam and dad are worried about that as well of just him making friends and keeping friends you know and being confident
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SUPERORDINATE THEME: NAVIGATING THE LEARNING PROCESS

Emergent Theme	Illustrating Theme (from at least two participants)
	<p>Child, Parent, Teacher</p>
Intrinsic learning motivation	<p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ I like, uhm different subjects that I like doing and eh English especially and all that ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> So you know maybe think of group work. <i>Seán:</i> I like that [places in 'like' column] <i>Interviewer:</i> And what do you like about it? <i>Seán:</i> It's just like fun to share your thoughts about different things ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> And what do you like about maths? <i>Seán:</i> It's just, it's interesting and fun to do. ○ <i>Seán:</i> Reading, eh, I like reading [places in like column] <i>Interviewer:</i> Okay, and what do you like about reading. <i>Seán:</i> Eh, I just like reading books. I have loads of books at home, I have a big shelf of books. <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ But like I know he's happy in class, he's he like even the teacher told me he has discussions with, like if they're having discussions about something like he loves learning about kind of like the environment and he'd be very interested in everything that's going on in the world..So like he'd be very interested in like current affairs and if there's a discussion going on in class I know he does take part like. ○ [on access to curriculum] Yeah, yeah, just Irish. He does everything else, he's happy to do everything else
Then to now transformation in engagement	<p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> So do you like that feeling of now being able to work alone? <i>Seán:</i> Yes, yes 'cause when I was in junior infants, senior infants, I didn't really, I wasn't really that good at doing work, I was always really distracted <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ...and I know a few of them when you do meet Seán if you had met him say like five years ago he was a completely different child like, so like it was the right decision but it was a hard decision because you don't want to kind of

	<p>leave him with this label either, you know that way so.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Oh it's been fantastic like, I've never like, since he's gone to School 4, I don't, like I used to be constantly worrying about him in school because like every single day his teacher was calling me over like.... ○ So like he'd be very interested in like current affairs and if there's a discussion going on in class I know he does take part like. And like that's all to do with his confidence, like it's gone up one hundred percent since he's gone to that school like it's amazing really. Whereas before he would have just sat there and said nothing like and never would have spoken out in class whereas now he's literally speaking the whole time. ○ [on academic progress] Oh it's fantastic like, he's just come on so much like compared to like when he first went to School 4, he's flying it like, his reports are always brilliant. ○ I think for Seán like that school made him like and it's totally changed his life <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Like you know I would say Seán has come a long way you know in being able to attend and participate..
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SUPERORDINATE THEME: PERSONAL CHALLENGES

Emergent Theme	Illustrating Theme (from at least two participants)
Sensitivity to noise, crowds and disruptions	<p>Child, Parent, Teacher</p> <p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ [on yard time] I mean sometimes you can't really go on the grass and there's not that much room so I'll put it here on not sure ○ Interviewer: You play with your friends okay. And how do you feel when you're out on the school yard? Seán: Yeah it's fine, I like it. But yeah, I'm not sure about some things, it's like, it can be, it can be like ((long pause)) because sometimes it's ((inaudible)) and you don't get to go on the grass and so there's not much room. Yeah.... Yeah, it's just that everyone is in the same place. ○ Interviewer: Okay, and you don't like when it's like that, is it? Seán: Eh yeah, I prefer to be out on the grass where there's more space. ○ [on group work] Eh it's not hard, well eh sometimes it can be hard if like, if like everyone else is talking and sometimes you can't really hear each other sometimes <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ..if it was raining they might have to stay in and eh, these boys were literally like running in and out of the bathrooms and messing with water and knocking people over and he was really upset about that ○ Yeah, he didn't that was one of the major things at lunch time, he didn't like the noise. ○ Except for em, he didn't like the tin whistle or the violin. The noise just drove him crazy. So we couldn't go with that.
Masking and	Parent

internalising feelings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ But Seán would be the type, he mightn't tell you something like, he mightn't, like it could take him a few weeks before he'd tell you if something's upsetting him, like he holds it in a bit you know. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ well he's such an easy-going kid, like he's sooo laid back that sometimes he he he doesn't want to bother anyone, like he'd be very like that. He'd hate to bother anyone so he would make out that everything is okay even though he was a bit sad about something, do you know.
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RQ2: How does the child make sense of him/herself in the social context of school?

SUPER-ORDINATE THEME: A QUESTIONING SELF

Emergent Theme	Illustrating Theme (from at least two participants)
Negotiating differences	<p>Child, Parent, Teacher</p> <p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> Okay, and are you and that boy similar or alike each other in any way? <i>Seán:</i> Ah no [shakes head] <i>Interviewer:</i> Okay you're different from each? <i>Seán:</i> Yeah <i>Interviewer:</i> And in what way are you different from each other? <i>Seán:</i> It's just like he always does sports and I don't. Yeah, he loves sports. ○ But it's fine, I'm like, because like it's fine that other people have different interests to me cause like it wouldn't be, it would be, it's nice that we're all different. ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> And what is different between your classrooms down here in [names ASD special class] and the sixth class? <i>Seán:</i> Well it's just smaller, there's less people, there'd just be like six people in [names ASD class] but there's like twenty nine people in my sixth class. <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ I suppose he would look at the lads and see them playing football...Like he wouldn't be sporty, and I think he kind of feels that that's why he didn't really gel with a lot of the boys in his class because all they want to do is play football and like he just said, because I'd say to them, "Seán wouldn't you not try to talk to such a lad?" and he'd just say "Oh he just plays football at lunchtime" and I'd say "would you not try to play it?" and he'd say "no, no, no, no". He won't even attempt like to try and be friends with them. Because he knows they play football at lunch, so there's no point like. ○ "Mam, do I have autism?" and I said "Yeah you do Seán" and then we had a chat and I just said to him "look, it's not a bad thing, it's a good thing because you're really good a some things like you know, you're really good with computers and stuff like that. But it also means you might struggle with certain things like sport and different things like that" but I said "it's not a bad thing, it just means that your mind works a little bit different" and he was happy enough with that like and we've had a few little chats since, but like he doesn't seem to be overly worried about it. ○ So that's just one thing I suppose for me, but I don't think he notices it, I don't

	<p>think it really seems to bother him like. He's happy once he gets to do his little thing he enjoys it. But maybe as he gets older and like he will</p> <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Do you know, I'd say he's confident enough that he probably doesn't [compare self to peers]. He doesn't really care that much, do you know that he's happy being himself.
<p>Emerging sense of agency and autonomy</p>	<p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Interviewer: So how do you feel about adults helping you in school? Seán: They don't really, I don't really have an SNA anymore, it's just like if they're dropping me back to class. I do all the work myself. Interviewer: You do all of the work for yourself. Okay and do some teachers help you in school? Seán: Well yeah, eh no yeah I do all the work myself and I ask my teacher if I don't really know what to do. ○ Interviewer: And the next card is 'working alone'? So how do you feel about working alone in school? Seán: I like. Interviewer: Okay, and what do you like about working alone? Seán: Em, I just, it's just that like because I don't really need any help 'cause now that I'm older 'cause when I was in first class I had to have a SNA help me with work. So yeah. ○ Interviewer: Okay, so how do you feel about getting to the stage now where you don't need a SNA? Seán: It's not that hard, I just do my work and then read my book if I'm finished. <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Exactly and he wants to do it, like he's kind of, he kind of he doesn't want to be babied anymore like he's wanting to do everything himself now which is great you know so. ○ So he, he's kinda come on great like that, he's able to speak up for himself which is good you know. He he doesn't like people messing like that but then I suppose at the same time he was able to kinda come up with a solution which was good. ○ Initially I was planning on sending him to a different school and kind of came to me and said no he wanted to go to the same school [as particular person]. <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ I think he's matured enough to kind of know you know to have everything out and you know to ask if, that was a big thing just to put up your hand and ask if you're lost and we'll put you straight again and I think he's kind of matured to do that, yeah I think so. ○ And he was, but he was well able to tell, he didn't tell her now but he told me you know ○ I mean even the way he dealt with the little one today and yesterday, you know he was well able to say you know "Hey look that's not on" you know or whatever, now maybe not to herself at the time but we'll work on that do you know.

SUPERORINATE THEME: POCKETS OF POSITIVE SELF APPRAISAL

Emergent Theme	Illustrating Theme (from at least two participants)
Feeling valued by others	<p>Child, Parent, Teacher</p> <p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> And if I was to meet [names friend] and I asked him to describe you, what would he say about you? <i>Seán:</i> He'd probably say that I'm a good friend and nice and kind, I'd say yeah. ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> And the other friend,[names friend]. If I asked [friend] to describe you, what do you think he might say? <i>Seán:</i> The same as [friend], that I was nice and helpful. ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> Okay, and if I was to ask [names mainstream teacher] to describe you, what would she say to me? <i>Seán:</i> Em that I'm kind, I'm nice ((pause)) eh yeah. <i>Interviewer:</i> Kind and nice, you sound like you have some lovely personality traits <i>Seán.</i> <i>Seán:</i> Eh yeah [smiles and laughs] ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> And if I asked [names ASD class teacher] to describe you, what do you think she would say? <i>Seán:</i> Eh that I'm kind, nice and friendly. <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ I'd say he kind of, he sees himself as kind of, I'd say he finds you know he knows he's a good person and that people would think that he is. ○ I'd say he views himself that he's kinda he's quite a you know, what's the word I'm looking for, you know he's very kind to people and he's a fair person and honest and that you know
Responsive to affirmation of the self	<p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Because I know before, one time the teacher had sent something back and it was like stuff that the class had said about him and when I said that they said he was intelligent and that he was kind and friendly, he was delighted that people perceived him as that. ○ And he was saying to me "oh do you think I'm like that?" And I was like "yeah, do you think you're kind?" And he was like "yeah I do like". <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ He responds really well to praise, you can see him glowing under praise and encouragement like ○ I saw him and he scored two baskets while I was walking past and he was thrilled with himself and they were all congratulating him do you know

RO3: Does special provision within a mainstream school influence how the child makes sense of him/herself, and if so, in what ways?

SUPERORDINATE THEME: FACILITATING SOCIAL INCLUSION AND INDEPENDENCE

Emergent Theme	Illustrating Theme (from at least two participants)
	<p>Child, Parent, Teacher</p>

<p>Mainstream inclusion as enabling for the social self</p>	<p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Interviewer:</i> Okay, and Seán the next card is ‘being in a large class’, so like the sixth class room. So how do you feel about being in a large class with lots of children? <i>Seán:</i> I I don’t mind it, I like it [places in ‘like’ column] <i>Interviewer:</i> You like it, okay, and what do you like about it? <i>Seán:</i> It’s just like when there’s not as many people, it doesn’t, it doesn’t feel as nice, it’s just yeah, if it’s not as many people, you don’t get to know as many people <p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>[on use of ASD class in post-primary]</i> Well I hoping he won’t need it too much because obviously I don’t want him kind of shielded all his life, he’s going to have to get used to the big, bad world as well. ○ I’m hoping that he will kind of like you know when he goes to secondary he mightn’t be in with his friends so like I think the [names friends] are going to the same secondary but like there’s no guarantee that they’ll be in the same class so I think the fact that he knows all the people in class that that will benefit him when he goes forward to secondary because at least he’ll know and have a few friendly faces you know? <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ahm, yeah like I suppose he’s always been included, he’s always been encouraged. You know I know all his teachers would have encouraged him and pushed him. ○ <i>[on impact of mainstream inclusion on PP transition]</i> Yeah so hopefully that will provide him some security, going with people he’ll know.
<p>Fostering independence</p>	<p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ And then I suppose the life skills thing would have been good for him, because like a few times they taught him how to make things and then he was able to do that at home and I suppose it showed me that I shouldn’t be doing everything for him like ○ I’d have a meeting with the teachers once or twice a year and they’d often say that to me like you have to try get him to do things himself. And he’s got a lot better at that, you know and it’s probably because I backed back a little you know <p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ but I really felt like at sometimes he he was better off nearly being given the responsibility to do it himself. ○ <i>[on staying in mainstream class for Irish lessons]</i> So she doesn’t, she really felt he was much better to have that time up there and to be confident I suppose to do that and em, it’s good for him to build his independence in that he knows ‘okay I need to finish that now’. To achieve the end of a task you know.

Illuminating parental perspective

<p>Feeling like Seán was excluded</p>	<p>Parent</p> <p>I don't know if it upset him but there were a few times where I was a bit annoyed like that he wasn't em included in things like there were a couple of times where they were having a class photo like say for his mainstream class but Seán's photo was taken with his class in (names ASD class) which (.) I suppose I probably should have said something at the time but I suppose it just happened and I suppose the photo was taken and I mightn't have noticed what day it was getting taken, you know that way?...So just a few times, I was felt he was isolated, and like I don't know if Seán's noticed this but he's never really, I think he might have been invited to like one birthday party. I feel like they kind of leave him out because of that, but like that...maybe they're not given Seán on the list when there is a, when the teacher is asked for a list of names, I don't know. You know the way. So that's just one thing I suppose for me, but I don't think he notices it, I don't think it really seems to bother him like</p>
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Appendix X: Cross-Case Synthesis Summary of Thematic Recurrence

Master Superordinate and Subthemes

RQ 1: Lived School Experiences

Master Superordinate Theme	Subordinate theme (s)	C1 Tom	C2 Eoin	C3 Jakub	C4 Max	C5 Seán
Complex Friendship Dynamics	○ Friendship challenges and uncertainties.		✓	✓	✓	✓
	○ Befriending others with matched interests or autism	✓	✓	✓		✓
A Supportive Learning Environment	○ Special class as sanctuary for the self	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	○ Supportive adult relationships	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	○ Anxiety about future learning environments	✓	✓	✓		✓
Navigating the Learning Process	○ Self-efficacy and curricular enjoyment	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	○ Then/Now transformations in engagement	✓	✓	✓		✓

RQ2: Sense of Self

Superordinate Theme	Subordinate themes	C1 Tom	C2 Eoin	C3 Jakub	C4 Max	C5 Seán
Pockets of Positive Self Appraisal	○ Feeling valued by others		✓	✓		✓
	○ Responsive to affirmation of self	✓	✓		✓	✓
A Questioning vs. Unquestioning Self	○ Negotiating differences	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	○ Frustration with self in context of difficulties		✓	✓	✓	

RQ3: Impact of Provision on Sense of Self

Superordinate Theme	Subordinate themes	C1 Tom	C2 Eoin	C3 Jakub	C4 Max	C5 Seán
Impact of Inclusive Practice	○ Systemic ethos of inclusion	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	○ Mainstream inclusion as enabling for the social self			✓	✓	✓