“WE DIDN’T WANT HER TO DROWN, THROW HER IN THE DEEP END AND FIGHT HER WAY OUT”

AN EXPLORATION OF PARENTAL EXPERIENCE OF CHOOSING A SPECIAL SCHOOL PLACEMENT FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITY

AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

By

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ABSTRACT

Within the education system in England parents are positioned as having a choice, in principle, to request any maintained school within their local authority (Code of Practice, Department for Education/Department of Health, 2015). Existing research has revealed this to be a complex and, at times, stressful experience (Bajwa-Patel and Devecchi, 2014; McNerney, Hill and Pellicano, 2015) characterised by a lack of guidance (Parsons, Lewis and Ellins, 2009) and authentic choice (Mann, Cuskelly, and Moni, 2015) for parents. The research aimed to explore the experience of parents choosing a special school placement for their pre-school children with special educational needs and disability (SEND). Five semi-structured interviews were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to identify unique and shared experiences. This small-scale study identified six subordinate themes related to parental experience describing a complex emotional process. Participants reflected on a range of emotional and interpersonal experiences that supported and hindered their school choice process. The findings are discussed using an empowerment lens to further explore the participants' experiences in relation to personal and professional relationships. Implications for professional practice are recommended based on the identified superordinate themes.

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GLOSSARY

CFA Children and Families Act

CoP Code of Practice

CYP Children and Young People

DfE Department for Education

DfEE Department for Education and Employment

DfES Department for Education and Skills

DH Department of Health

EP Educational Psychologist

EPS Educational Psychology Service

IPA Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

LA Local Authority

LEA Local Education Authority

LO Local Offer

SEN Special Educational Needs

SEND Special Educational Needs and Disability

TEP Trainee Educational Psychologist

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The presented research constitutes volume one of a two-volume thesis to fulfil the academic and research requirements of the Applied Educational and Child Psychology Doctorate at the University of Birmingham.

This chapter provides the context of the presented research at a national and local level. It also presents relevant terminology, the research rationale and the structure of volume one. This research was conducted whilst I was on placement as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) within an Educational Psychology Service (EPS) in a Local Authority (LA) in the West Midlands.

This research explores the experience of parents and/or carers (hereby known collectively as parents) choosing a special school placement for their pre-school children with special educational needs and disability (SEND). This research also explores the concept of parental empowerment in relation to the findings. The intention with this research is not to present a homogenous group of parents of children with SEND but to present a trend of experiences of those involved in this process. Educational psychologists (EPs) work with families in a variety of ways and contexts (Dunsmuir, Cole and Wolfe, 2014). Research that explores the experience of parents therefore may add value to the development of EP practice. Thus, the focus on the views and experiences of parents seems a pertinent addition in understanding placement decisions and parental choice.

1.2 Terminology

1.2.1 Special Educational Needs and Disability

Throughout this research, I have used the term SEND to refer to children and young people (CYP) who have learning difficulties that require additional support. I have used the term SEND as opposed to SEN as a way to acknowledge and include CYP with a disability. This is in line with the definition presented in the SEND Code of Practice (CoP) (Department for Education and Department of Health, DfE/DH 2015, p.15-16) (figure 1).

Figure 1. SEND Definition as Stated in The SEND CoP (DfE/DH, 2015)

- "*if they (CYP) have a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for them,*
- *if they have significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age; or*
- *if they have a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided for children of the same age in schools within the area of the local education authority."*

However, when discussing policy prior to the SEND CoP (DfE/DH, 2015), the term SEN has been used to reflect the terminology of the time. SEN/SEND are contested terms, and have been criticised for continuing to alienate, segregate and promote deficits within the individual (Penketh, 2014; Norwich, 2012; Hodkinson and Burch, 2019). It is not my intention to perpetuate this, but due to its prevalence in legislation, policy and research, it was felt appropriate to continue to use this term for purposes of clarity. Additionally, various terms are used within this research reflecting the policy and legislative language at the time. This does not reflect my personal views in relation to CYP with SEND.

1.2.2 Inclusion

Inclusion and provision are intertwined and relevant in understanding parental choice and experience regarding education, alongside school placement choices. However, the concept of inclusive education is complex and lacks an agreed operationalised definition in literature and policy (e.g. Lindsay, 2003; Florian, 2008). Inclusion and integration have often been used interchangeably which has contributed to a sense of confusion (Farrell, 2000). This ongoing confusion is only compounded by contradictory definitions and a lack of tangible guidance on enacting inclusive principles (Dunne, 2009; Norwich, 2014). This has inevitably led to confusion when considering implementation of principles into practice (Armstrong, Armstrong, and Spandagou, 2011).

It is not the aim of this research to offer a definitive understanding of inclusion. To do so would be counter-intuitive to the philosophical underpinnings of this research, as each one of us will have our own construct regarding inclusion. However for ease of readership I adopted the viewpoint described by Lauchlan and Grieg (2015, p.70) that inclusion means "*CYP are included both socially and educationally in an environment where they feel welcomed and where they can thrive and progress*". Additionally, it is not the aim of this research to determine what type of placement is suitable for teaching children with SEND and therefore is not considered within this research.

1.3 Research Context

1.3.1 National Context (England)

Typically, three to four-year olds in England are entitled to pre-school education, after which they transition into a Reception class when they are, or are 'turning', five years of age. It is for this transition that parents must decide on the primary school educational placement for their children. For parents applying for a special school

place, this journey will usually start with obtaining an education health and care plan (EHCP). The Local Authority (LA) Special Educational Needs (SEN) administration team will then consult with the parents' preferred schools to see if they can meet the needs of the child. Typically a special school placement is sought by parents and/or a LA when it is thought that mainstream education would not be suitable for the level of need or provision that the child has been assessed to require. Despite legislation relating to parental choice, the LA can reject this school preference if it is deemed that the placement is unsuitable (CoP, DfE/DH, 2015). This will be further discussed in chapter one.

There is usually within a LA a range of educational provision available for children with SEND which creates a potentially complex and emotionally taxing process of decision-making for parents. These settings include mainstream schools, mainstream schools with additional resource provision, special schools, and dual placement options. Government guidelines mandates that all LAs must provide families with information on any and all potential providers and services they could access through the Local Offer (LO) (Children and Families Act, CFA, 2014). The LO is promoted to provide information that may enable parents to make the appropriate decisions regarding support and provision for CYP.

An EHCP introduced in the CFA (2014) and CoP (DfE/DH, 2015) is a legal document that describes a CYP's special educational, health and care needs. It is typically for CYP with complex needs who will require support above and beyond what is available within the LO. This process involves an assessment of need relating to the four key areas of need outlined in the CoP (DfE/DH, 2015). Figure 2 provides the four categories of SEND within the CoP (DfE/DH, 2015).

Figure 2. Code of Practice (DfE/DH, 2015) Categorises of SEND.

- Communication and Interaction,
- Cognition and Learning,
- Social, Emotional and Mental Health Difficulties,
- Sensory and/or Physical.

According to the DfE, as of January 2018, 43.8% of pupils with an EHCP were attending state-funded special schools (DfE, 2019b). This was a decrease from 2017 (44.2%), however previously the number of pupils attending special schools in England had increased since 2010 (DfE, 2019b). Therefore, I believe that consideration should be given to the experience of parents making these placement decisions.

1.3.2 Local Context

Ashtown (pseudonym) is a densely populated city within the West Midlands. The prevalence of pupils with an EHCP in Ashtown is similar to the national average figure of 3.2%. There are over 15 special schools and numerous resource bases in Ashtown. Within the Ashtown EPS it is the role of EPs to provide support to early years settings, pre-school children and their families, in line with the CoP aim for early identification and support (DFE/DH, 2015). Part of this role involves working with families to support their understanding of the SEND system, navigate different types of placement options and offer support, where possible, when parents come to consider placement options.

1.4 Researcher Positionality

The methodological approach used in this research is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This approach allows the researcher to examine how participants make sense of their lived experience with a focus on the individual and shared meaning across all participants. It is important within IPA to reflect and

recognise my own influence as a researcher on this study, particularly with regards to the process of analysis and interpretation of data. This requires a process of reflexivity and bracketing of my own values and experiences. In adopting this approach, I endeavour to promote the views of parents through representing their personal and perceived truth (Gadamer, 1975). Table 1 outlines my positionality as a researcher in order to acknowledge my own values and experience. This will be further discussed in chapter three.

Table 1. Researcher Positionality

Researcher Position and Values
- I am on placement within an EPS and therefore may potentially be seen as linked to the LA. - I am not a parent so I have not been through the experience of choosing a school placement for a child. - I have previously worked with parents who have experienced a sense of rejection from mainstream education which in turn may influence my view of participants' stories. - I initially believed that inclusion meant children being educated within mainstream education system, however this view has developed and changed as I have progressed through this research experience. - I believe that parents and CYP are entitled to receive the education that they choose, without others influencing this choice. - I believe that parents know their child's needs and are integral to any educational decisions. - I also believe that it is the responsibility of professionals working within this system and supporting families to make sure that parents are receiving the appropriate guidance and support within the school choice experience.

1.5 Rationale

My interest in this area developed from my TEP placement within an EPS in the West Midlands. During this placement I worked in a range of settings including early years and a primary special school. Within the early years setting, I offered support to families whom were exploring educational placement options and navigating the EHCP process. Many of these families were choosing educational placements for the first time and therefore had to develop an opinion regarding what type of provision would meet their child's needs. Both opportunities shaped my professional values, as parents shared anecdotal stories of their understanding of the process and their experiences. Some of these experiences included a sense of rejection from mainstream schools, as well as a perception of fighting for the rights of their children.

Legislation has positioned parental choice at the forefront to ensure parents have, in principle, the right to request any maintained schools within the LA (CoP, DfE/DH, 2015). This choice of placement may have a significant impact on a child with SEND, including their future options and post-school outcomes (Hirano and Rowe, 2016). Therefore, parents need to be aware of the available placement options for their children. Educational professionals can provide a role in ensuring families have the appropriate knowledge and support to make informed decisions. To do so, we must first try and understanding their experience to offer appropriate guidance.

The CoP (DfE/DH, 2015) and the CFA (2014) were developed to promote engagement and collaboration between families and professionals. It is my hope that focusing this research on parental experience would offer a voice to those involved within this process. To date, there has been limited research in England of parental experience of choosing a special school primary placement for their children with SEND. I propose

that to understand current and future educational placement trends, it is important to understand the view of parents and the decision-making process they encounter.

It is my hope that the presented research will contribute to the literature surrounding the perceptions and experience of parents of children with SEND. Therefore, the overall aim of this research was to explore parental experience of choosing a primary special school placement for their child with SEND.

1.6 Structure of Volume One

This volume compromises of five chapters, beginning with this introductory chapter. Table 2 provides an overview of this thesis, accompanied by a short summary of each chapter.

Table 2. Summary of Chapters in Volume One.

Chapter	Summary
Chapter One **Introduction**	This chapter provides an overview of the research context at a local and national level. This chapter also provides information regarding key terminology, the researcher position within the research project and the rationale for said research.
Chapter Two **Policy and Literature**	This chapter explores policies related to SEND, the education system, and parental choice, as well as two models of disability. This chapter also provides an overview of empowerment in relation to parental experience of school choice and parent-professional partnership. Chapter two also presents a literature review exploring the existing research in relation to parental experience of school choice and factors influencing this choice.
Chapter Three **Methodology**	This chapter provides a rationale for the methodology and methods utilised within the presented research. This chapter also gives details about the research philosophy, IPA and

	alternative methodologies considered. Other factors related to methodology including ethical considerations, sample, data collection and analysis, and trustworthiness are also discussed. Finally, reflexivity and the researcher's role are commented upon.
Chapter Four **Findings and Discussion**	This chapter presents the findings and discussion of the data analysis process, including the superordinate and subordinate identified themes. This chapter also provides an overview of participants' experiences and example quotes related to each theme.
Chapter Five **Conclusion**	This chapter is the conclusion to the presented research and provides a summary of findings, the research critique, implications for practice, future research directions and a concluding comment.

CHAPTER TWO: POLICY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The following chapter explores policy, psychology and literature relevant to the presented research. This chapter is divided in to three parts. Part one outlines policy that has influenced the English SEND education system to provide a context to parental choice. Subsequently, part two discusses the conceptual framework adopted in this research. Finally, part three reviews relevant literature to parental experience and choice of school placement for children with SEND.

The rationale for this structure was to provide the historical and current political context relevant to this research. In order to understand current educational placement, it is important to reflect on the historical context of special schools and legislation which have led to current policies. Furthermore, the conceptual framework discussed was chosen due to its relevance to parent and professional working relationships.

2.2 Part One: Policy

2.2.1 Historical Context of SEND Education Placement

Throughout history legislation has influenced the educational placement of children with SEND. The first specialised institution in England opened in 1892 in Leicester for 'feeble-minded' children. Following this, a school in Manchester opened for the 'crippled' in 1905, and the 'physically defective' in 1918 (Read, 2004). Although outwardly aimed at permitting children with SEND to access education, this movement was underpinned by a desire to segregate individuals with additional needs from society (Atherton and Steels, 2016). The establishment of the Eugenics Education Society in 1907 affords an insight into the attitudes of society at the time. Although the act of eugenics was never legalised in England, it indicates societies' desire to

segregate individuals deemed ‘mentally defective’ and provides a context for the historical significance of educational institutions.

Perhaps the most influential modern-day review of English SEN provision came in the form of the Warnock Report (1978). This report redefined how England conceptualised disability, particularly with the introduction of the term SEN (figure 3).

Figure 3. Warnock Report (1978) SEN terms.

- Mild, moderate or severe learning difficulties,
- Maladjustment (which also incorporated emotional and/or behavioural disorders),
- Physical or sensory difficulties.

Warnock commented that the original intention of the report was to reduce diagnosis rates as well as highlight the fluid nature of SEN and reduce stigmatisation (Warnock, 2008). Furthermore, the report aimed to improve the quality of SEN provision and endorse a model of social acceptance (discussed further in section 2.2.4). This review used the term integration to describe practices that aimed to both physically and socially include children with SEN into mainstream schools (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002). Warnock later expressed her dissatisfaction with the education system and inclusion in the years following the report, but at the time it appeared revolutionary (Shaw, 2017). Subsequently, government policy adopted a narrative of integration as evident through the 1981 Education Act and beyond (appendix one provides further examples of policy change).

The first CoP in 1994 (DfE, 1994) acted as a guide to identify, assess and support CYP who may have SEN. This policy was explicit in its promotion of mainstream

school for most children and placed special schools as a final option (DfE, 1994; Lindsay, 2003). The promotion of inclusion in policy terms continued into the 2000s with the 2001 SEN CoP (Department for Education and Skills, DfES, 2001), the revised version of the 1994 CoP (DfE, 1994). This CoP recommended that schools take a graduated approach to SEN and stated a preference for mainstream schooling for all. This CoP also established the standardised process for assessment in the form of a Statement of Special Educational Needs. Although this CoP referred to SEN and disability largely separately, it did consider the interwoven nature of these terms. Overall this version of the CoP aimed to emphasise the need for all schools to support children with SEN (Bines, 2000). However, it was not without criticism due in part to the lack of additional funding given to schools, and the potential burden it imposed on special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCo/s).

In 2004 Removing Barriers to Achievement (DfES, 2004) was published, and it stated that some children may need specialist provision for severe and complex needs. This policy appeared to promote inclusive education but failed to conceptualise what inclusion should look like in schools (Lloyd, 2008). Providing a more nuanced view of inclusion, Warnock (2008) seemed to take on a position of necessary segregation to ensure children with SEN were being provided with the appropriate education.

The Green Paper (DfE, 2011) called for a reversal of the bias towards inclusion and promoted special schools to accommodate those who would benefit. In response, the Alliance for Inclusive Education (2012) reported that the government were out of touch with education, and had failed to build capacity in mainstream settings to meet the needs of children with SEN. With this ongoing debate it appeared timely for modifications to the SEN system with the revised CoP (DfE/DH, 2015) and CFA (2014) (section 2.2.3).

2.2.2 Historical Context of Parental Choice

Alongside the changing educational rhetoric, the role of parents developed within policy. Parental rights had been alluded to in both the Plowden Report (1967) and the Taylor Report (1977). The 1980s positioned parents as educational consumers with free choice through open enrolment. This approach rose from an economic model of market theory that aimed to create a system driven by choice in order to generate good quality provision (Bagley, Woods and Woods, 2001). However, with the introduction of competition amongst schools, a drive towards market conditions and the adoption of neo-liberal philosophy, the impact on SEN provision was questioned (Lunt and Evans, 1991). Despite a lack of focus on SEN, according to the Education and Skills Committee (ESC, 2006), the number of children attending special schools dropped by 27.5% from 1979 to 1991

By the 1990s, parents were positioned as central to the education of their children. The 1992 White Paper declared parents should "*express a preference for a particular special or ordinary school from within the maintained sector*" (Department of Education and Employment, DFEE 1992, para 1.53). The Education Act in 1993 extended this choice, and the CoP (1994) followed which provided detailed guidance to local education authorities (LEA) and educational institutions on the identification and assessment of SEN. However it was not until the 1996 Education Act (DfE, 1996) that the rights of parents to choose a school for their children was enshrined in law.

The CoP (DfES, 2001) continued to emphasise the partnership between educators, LAs and parents (Wolfendale, 1995). As did the Every Child Matters (Department for Education and Skills, DfES, 2004) agenda which focused on the well-being of CYP with an emphasis on the importance of parent-professional partnership. This agenda

also emphasised the responsibility of parents to make informed decisions in the best interests of their children.

In 2006, the House of Commons ESC (House of Commons, 2006) produced an enquiry into SEN provision. The committee agreed with Warnock (2008) as they questioned the 'bias towards inclusion' as one that was unrealistic for some children with SEN. This committee also reported parental frustration with the quality of available provision, reliable advice and the responsiveness of the LA to their individual situations (House of Commons, 2006). In response, the Lamb Enquiry (DCSF, 2009) was established to explore parents' views regarding the SEN system. Although the enquiry highlighted many positive reports from parents regarding the system, others felt undermined by the bureaucratic delays. This report demonstrated that the system was not working for families. Insufficient information, confusing and stressful situations and lack of opportunity to express their views were just some of the concerns raised. The Lamb Enquiry (DCSF, 2009) also argued for parents to be seen as equal partners with their own expertise within the SEN process.

2.2.3 Current Political Context

The Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government (2010-2015) produced the most significant transformation to the SEND field in England in over a decade (Norwich, 2014); the CFA (2014) and the SEND CoP (DfE/DH, 2015). The CFA (2014) informed the CoP (DfE/DH, 2015), both of which aim to promote engagement between multiagency professionals and families, whilst also increasing opportunities for parental and CYP decision-making (Harris and Davidge, 2019). The CoP (DfE/DH, 2015) operates alongside the statement of inclusion which exists in the National Curriculum (DfE, 2014), to promote access to a mainstream setting for all pupils when and where appropriate. Initially hoped to help define and clarify issues regarding

inclusive practice, it remains to be seen whether this has been achieved (Sales and Vincent, 2018).

A key change within the CFA (2014) and CoP (DFE/DH, 2015) was the reimagining of the term SEN with disability being included in the construction; changing SEN to SEND. Another element of the CFA (2014) is the early identification and intervention for CYP with SEND. Children under the age of five are entitled to an EHCP with the anticipation that they will need additional support when they reach compulsory education. The CFA (2014) assumes that a CYP with an EHCP will be educated in a mainstream setting, unless the parents or young person decide differently, or if this would impact on the education of others. Additionally, the CoP (DfE/DH, 2015) allows a LA to decide the specialist provision within the area, and therefore is not governed by national standards. This could potentially lead to a discrepancy of provision across England.

The CoP (DfE/DH, 2015) continues to promote parental choice. It places emphasis on opportunities and control for parents and young people, including a greater range of schools and colleges for which they can express a preference. The legislation also outlines that parents should be actively involved in the process of assessment and support for their children, and in particular, school choice. Although parent dissatisfaction remains within the SEND system (Harris and Davidge, 2019), evidence suggests that parents and young people now feel better informed about advice and support available (Sales and Vincent, 2018).

As previously mentioned, the parental choice narrative surrounding educational provision has been prominent in policy for some time. The appropriateness of the market theory approach within education has been criticised for presenting parents as

a homogenous group based on the assumption that parents will have the same experience. It also ignores the likely emotional implications of such a decision (Hellawell, 2017). Nevertheless, it is still within this market system that parents must make their choice of school placement today. It remains unclear whether parents truly feel they have a choice within this situation (Lauchlan and Grieg, 2015).

2.2.4 Models of Disability

The societal view of disability has shifted over time under the influence of ideological beliefs and policy changes. Although there are several perspectives and models of disability that influence educational reform and policy, for the purpose of this research only the medical and social models will be discussed. This is due to the prominence of these models over the past 50 years (LoBianco and Sheppard-Jones, 2008).

Policy and practice have been heavily influenced by the medical model of disability. The medical model derives from the view that impairment alone prevents individuals from engaging in society (Oliver, 1990). This model defines individuals based on disability whilst linking said disability with ill-health and impairment. The medical model therefore suggests that disability should be treated as a 'within' person issue (Brisenden, 1986).

This model has been criticised for devaluing individuals and dehumanising individuals with additional needs (Lewis, 1991). In an educational context, a system based on the medical model would need to label and assess children based on their needs in order for them to access specific provision and/or support (Reindal, 2008). Similarly, Rieser (2015) noted that a medical model in an educational setting might mean that a child with SEND could be excluded and placed in a segregated setting to be 'treated'.

By contrast, the social model of disability posits that disability is an act of oppression by society and advocates for the rights of individuals to be respected within a community (Shakespeare, 2013). The social model places the emphasis for disability as socially constructed and due to environmental, structural and social barriers. Policy has in part been influenced by the social model. For example the Equality Act 2010 outlines how schools are required to make 'reasonable adjustments' regarding provision and access to facilities.

Within this model, SEND would be apparent due to ineffective educational practices and provision, with environmental and institutional barriers preventing access to educational opportunities (Bines, 2000; Carrington and Elkins, 2002). Therefore, it is the role of educational professionals to remove such barriers, whilst also ensuring CYP's and parental voices are heard and included in discussions of achieving learning progress and provision. EP practice aims to do just that (Aston and Lambert, 2010; Ingram, 2013; Fox 2015), highlighting the relevancy of this research to the EP profession.

However, the social model is not without criticism. For example, Anastasiou and Kauffman (2011) stated that the model is applied more readily to those with physical impairments, and often ignores the variety of additional needs that may be 'hidden'. Furthermore, Imray and Colley (2017) argued that this model has been misinterpreted in an educational context as meaning that all children should be educated within the mainstream school environment with the same curriculum. They posit that this model should instead promote personalized opportunities for learning and access to education in mainstream or a specialist context.

Nevertheless, the social and medical models are relevant to educational policy and literature, particularly as policy appears to espouse a hybrid of these two models. For example, current policy emphasizes the need for early identification and assessment of need, in line with the medical model. Whilst also promoting an inclusive agenda which is arguably in line with the social model (Hodge and Runswick-Cole, 2008). With regards to parental school choice, their experience may be shaped by their personal ideological views and views of the education system.

2.2.5 Section Summary

This section has explored the different political and legislative contexts that have influenced the education system with respect to school placement choice for CYP with SEND. Parents are placed as consumers within the education market having been granted the apparent right to freely choose educational provision. However, the LA are still positioned as the entity that negotiates and approves placement choices. As governments have changed, so too has the ideology regarding inclusion, however the parental rights agenda has remained. Both the medical and social models of disability have underpinned legislative change within education. However neither are wholly embraced within policy and thus a hybrid framework is apparent.

2.3 Part Two: Psychological Theory

The previous section explored policy and legislation relevant to parental choice and the education system. The following section explores the conceptual lens used within this research. The aim of using a conceptual framework is to provide potential further insight into the phenomena presented. The choice of theory was due to the espoused narrative within policy and literature regarding the empowerment of parents and its possible role in parental choice of school placement (Hess, 1992; Wolfendale, 1992). For example, Taylor (2018) contended that the use of the term ‘choice’ for school

placement implies empowerment within the education system. Furthermore, collaborative working between parents and professionals is explored in this section due to its possible role in parental choice of school placement.

As IPA is an exploratory and inductive research design, theory and literature have been used to further my own understanding within this area. These are once again explored in the findings section. However in order to promote research validity, the analysis of findings is based on the emergent data and not the theory described (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

2.3.1 Parental Empowerment

Parental empowerment has been promoted in both policy and parent-partnership models with relevance to education and choice of school (Vincent, 1996; Wright, 2012). These policies have failed to establish mechanisms and definitions of parental empowerment demonstrating the seeming inability to move from theory to practice (Morrow and Malin, 2004). Nevertheless, parental empowerment has been suggested as central in supporting children with SEND, alongside the development of parental confidence (Dempsey and Dunst, 2004).

Empowerment has been criticized for being a vague umbrella term that has been misused in research (Archibald and Wilson, 2011; Weidenstedt, 2016). Furthermore, Weidenstedt (2016) noted that the process of empowerment can, at times, leave the empoweree resentful towards those who are trying to empower them. Nevertheless, empowerment has been proposed as relevant to psychology (Rappaport, 1981) and may be relevant to the presented research.

Psychological empowerment in its broadest form means "*an intentional, ongoing process … through which people lacking in an equal share of valued resources gain*

greater access to and control over those resources" (Cornell Empowerment Group 1989, p.2). When applied to the presented context, it may mean that parents gain greater control over school choice when given the appropriate resources to do so.

Psychological empowerment refers to the individual level (i.e. parents) of empowerment, as opposed to community and organizations (Zimmerman, 1995). Zimmerman (1995, p.583) also differentiated between empowerment outcomes and processes. He proposed that empowerment processes are experiences in which "*people create or are given opportunities to control their own destiny and influence the decisions that affect their lives".* Whereas empowerment outcomes are the result of empowering processes. Empowerment is not a fixed concept, but rather a process and outcome that can be shaped by various experiences and contexts (Rappaport, 1984). Within the context of the experience of education, empowerment can be conceptualized as parents developing the ability to reach specific goals for their child with SEND, such as securing resources and provision (Murray et al., 2013; Haley, Allsopp and Hoppey, 2018).

Empowerment is also a dynamic and multifaceted psychological construct that has been linked to a myriad of concepts including self-efficacy, locus of control, self-determination and self-esteem (Rappaport, 1987; Hill and Taylor, 2004; Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007). Table 3 describes these concepts.

Table 3. Psychological Constructs Related to Empowerment

Psychological Construct	**Definition**
Self-Efficacy	Self-efficacy is the belief one has regarding one's own capabilities to succeed (Bandura, 1982). Bandura

	(1997) linked self-efficacy with autonomy which is an individual's perception that they have control over what they do.
Locus of Control	Locus of control is the degree to which an individual believes they (i.e. internal) control their lives, or whether outside circumstances do so (i.e. external) (Rotter, 1954).
Self-Determination	Self-determination is conceptualized as an individual's motivation to grow and change. Ryan and Deci (2000) proposed that self-determination is underpinned by autonomy, relatedness (i.e. experiencing a sense of connection and belonging with others), and competence.
Self-esteem	Self-esteem is seen as a basic human need and relates to one's beliefs about themselves and/or their sense of personal value (Baumeister, 1993).

Theoretically empowered parents should be able to apply their knowledge, expertise and confidence in order to advocate for their children through the development of self-efficacy, self-determination and a sense of control (Connor and Cavendish, 2018). A person with a high degree of self-efficacy and self-determination may believe they can master a task alongside a strong sense of commitment to do so. Furthermore, Wiatrowski and Campover (1996) hypothesized that for individuals to be involved in decision-making, they require a sense of empowerment. Therefore, parents may need to develop a sense of empowerment in order to advocate for their children.

Zimmerman (1995) positioned the development of empowerment as one that includes giving and receiving help in a collaborative manner. This in turn supports an individual to take ownership over their life, or in the context of parents, their lives and that of their children. Page and Czuba (1999), when considering Rappaport (1984), stated that empowerment occurs within relationships as it is a social process that helps individuals gain control over their lives. Therefore, the development of this sense of empowerment is more likely to occur when educational systems actively support parents to do so through the development of their confidence, belief and ability to make decisions (Hsiao et al., 2018).

Research has suggested that experience can either promote or diminish a person's sense of empowerment (Trivette, Dunst and Hamby, 1996; Dempsey et al., 2001), such as when interacting with professionals. Within the parent-professional dynamic, high quality relationships have been linked with empowering benefits for parents (Dunst and Trivette, 1996; Epps and Jackson, 2000). Turnbull, Turbiville and Turnbull (2000) also contend that it is through sharing of knowledge and information between parents and professionals that empowerment occurs.

Dunst (1999) also proposed that parent-professional interactions can be harnessed to promote empowerment. They too described the need for sharing of information and resources, equal collaboration and promoting parental control. Squire et al. (2007) proposed that EPs are well placed to support the development of parental empowerment within the education system. In response to the Every Child Matters agenda, they proposed that EPs should act as key professionals to support parents and ensure their voices are heard.

Trivette et al. (1996) identified specific help-giving styles linked to parental perceived control within relationships with professionals. They described relational (i.e. emotional support and containment) and participatory approaches (i.e. collaboration and autonomy). Characteristics associated with a relational help-giver style included active listening, empathy, and caring. Whereas a participatory help-giver style included supporting parents to make their own decisions, and professionals that acted on parental preferences. Interestingly, they found that it was the participatory help-giver style that provided a greater sense of parental control compared to a relational style. However, Dempsey and Dunst (2004) further explored this research by comparing the experiences of two groups of parents with preschool children with a disability. 141 parents completed a survey that described their sense of empowerment and experience with professionals. They found that the only significant predictor of the development of empowerment for these parents was their experience of professional's help-giving styles. In contrast to Trivette et al. (1996), they found that both approaches were needed in combination to support empowerment.

Conversely, parental advocacy and empowerment have been intertwined in literature (Boshoff et al., 2016). Many parents report a shift in identity in becoming an advocate for their children when faced with challenges, at times to the detriment of relationships with educational professionals (Hess, Molina and Kozleski, 2006). The shift of parental identity is also worth considering from the perspective of parents adopting a 'para-professional' role in order to navigate the SEND system (Hodge and Runswicke-Cole, 2008). This may be a strategy used by some parents to challenge their own sense of powerlessness by exerting control in their lives (Dempsey and Dunst, 2004; Baker et al., 2005; Boshoff et al., 2016). Furthermore, parental advocacy has been cited as a way for parents to cope with frustration, depression and anger, which Luong, Yoder

and Canham (2009) conceptualized as the empowerment phase. Within Luong et al.'s (2009) research, parents gained a sense of control over their lives by "*taking matters into their own hands"* to overcome a sense of helplessness (Luong et al., 2009, p.226).

Research has suggested that parents who do not feel a sense of empowerment can display feelings of stress, frustration and hopelessness (Koegel, Brookman and Koegel, 2003). For parents to develop a sense of empowerment, they will need to view their interactions with others as a collaborative process and feel they are able to exert control over decisions and placement (Dempsey and Dunst, 2004). In order to engage and navigate placement choice and freely decide the appropriate school placement for their children, I would argue that parents will require a sense of empowerment to feel enabled to do so. Consequently, it is the role of professionals, such as EPs, to facilitate the promotion of existing parental strengths in order to encourage empowerment (Dempsey and Dunst, 2004). One may hypothesize a positive experience supported by professionals, such as through the school choice process may strengthen a parent's belief in their ability to engage further in their child's education.

2.3.2 Parent Professional Dynamic

Exploring parental and professional power dynamics is integral to the understanding of parental empowerment (Wolfendale, 1992; Todd and Jones, 2003). These power dynamics will likely impact the overall experience that parents have during the school choice process. The Warnock Report commented that professionals should "*take note of what they [parents] say and how they express their needs and treat their contribution as intrinsically important"* (Warnock Report, 1978, para 9.6). This sentiment has been echoed throughout policy (Wolfendale, 2002) and the CFA (2014) and CoP (DfE/DH, 2015) stress the importance of collaborative partnership between professionals and

parents. Parental views and decisions are also integral to the statutory process and the choice of school (CoP, DfE/DH 2015). As such, professionals and parents should be regarded as equal members within education (Russell, 2003).

Wolfendale (1983) described parent-partnerships as those in which parents are active in the decision-making regarding their CYP typified by a reciprocal relationship with a professional. Dale (1996, p.14) described partnership as "*a working relationship where the partners use negotiation and joint decision-making"*. For parents who are wanting to obtain a specific school placement for their children, a process of discussion and negotiation may occur to find suitable placement. Positive partnerships can offer successful school transition, successful inclusion, support parental engagement and positive outcomes for CYP (Briggs, 2005; Ko, 2015; Francis et al., 2016).

Models have been proposed to understand the potential power dynamic and nature of the relationship between professionals and parents. These models often place parents on a continuum of power, with professionals controlling the access and sharing of knowledge (Hornby, 1995). However, these models have evolved over time and can support professionals to understand and improve collaboration between themselves and parents of children with SEND (Cunningham and Davis, 1985). Examples of these models, as seen in table 4, illustrate an evolution of interaction between parents and professionals.

Table 4. Examples of Parent-Professional Models.

Model	Description	Critique
Expert Model	Parents rely on the expertise of professionals to inform them about appropriate support	This model devalues parents, and places them in a passive role.

Cunningham and Davis (1985)	(Davis and Meltzer, 2007).	
Transplant Model Cunningham and Davis (1985)	Parents are instructed by professionals in ways to support their CYP. Parents are said to adopt a co-educator role within this model (Beveridge, 2013).	This model continues to prioritise the views and opinion of professionals over that of parents (Beveridge, 2013).
Consumer Model Cunningham and Davis (1985)	Parents use their own knowledge and experience of their child to inform their decision-making regarding appropriate provision (Beveridge, 2013).	Parents may need support in order to engage in the consumer process (Beveridge, 2013).
Empowerment Model Appleton and Minchom (1991)	This model emphasises parental power in order to promote a sense of control over decision-making. For parents in the process of choosing school provision, this would be evident for those who felt they had a sense of control over their choice.	This model reflects a positive shift toward recognising and trying to alleviate power dynamics that emerge within the parent-professional relationship. However, little direction is given towards how professionals should promote empowerment (Dale, 1996).
Negotiating Model	This model emphasises the partnership and	Although this model provides a good framework for the different

Dale (1996)	collaborative nature of the parent and professional dynamic.	roles parents and professionals can adopt and contribute to, it still relies on professionals acting as the negotiator. Thus the equal power dynamic can be called into question.
Family Partnership Model Davis, Day and Bidmead (2002)	Professionals are positioned as helpers with qualities and skills, to promote collaborative working (Davis and Meltzer, 2007).	Developed in consultation with parents and therefore is evidence based in relation to how parents would like to be treated by professionals (Davis and Meltzer, 2007).

These models highlight the shifting dynamic of the parent and professional relationship over many years. Additionally, these different dynamics have also been suggested to be dependent on need and context (Thomas and Vaughn, 2004). Arguably, policy places parents within the role of consumer due to the school choice market (Appleton and Minchom, 1991). Therefore these models may be relevant to understanding the school choice process for parents within this research.

However, parent and professional dynamics remain a potential source of conflict and tension for those involved (Cole, 2004; Hodge and Runswick-Cole, 2008). Parents have reported a sense of feeling devalued by professionals in the context of understanding their own children's needs (Dale, 1996). For parents experiencing the process of choosing a special school, one might assume that a collaboration with professionals will be required for parents to explore potential and appropriate provision. Whether this is possible within the education profession has been

questioned as professionalism can at times dictate the hierarchical structure of knowledge and status (Kalyanpur, Harry and Skrtic, 2000). For example, Sewell (2016) discussed the potential power that EPs have regarding the knowledge they share, in the context of SEND assessments. She concluded that EPs should be reflective of their own practice in order to prevent epistemological oppression, and orientate others to do the same (Sewell, 2016). Considering this, parents have previously commented that they believed professionals have used information about their children to influence parental school choice (Mann, Cuskelly and Moni, 2015).

Furthermore, the interplay between professionals and parents may not be as simple as ensuring access to information for parents. In an evaluation of parent-partnership, an LA-funded scheme, found that parents valued a range of differing support from professionals including advocacy and empathy (Wolfendale and Cook, 1997). This is similar to the help-giving styles as described above (Dempsey and Dunst, 2004). Furthermore, Bradbury et al. (1994) reported that not only was the quality of communication important within the interaction, but so was the trust felt by parents towards the professional. Professionals who were perceived as trusting were seen to be more influential than the information itself.

Additionally, Jungerman et al. (2005) also explored the influence between groups that were deemed experts and non-experts. Within education, this may translate into parents within the non-expert role, and professionals as the experts. Jungerman et al. (2005) proposed four factors that influenced whether or not the professional expertise was accepted (figure 4).

Figure 4. Factors Influencing the Acceptance of Professional Advice (Jungerman et al., 2005, P.167).

- *"the judgement of the advisor regarding the recommended option,*

- *the judgement of the client regarding the recommended option,*
- *the advisor's credibility and the extent to which the client trusts the advisor,*
- *and the client's confidence in his/her own judgement."*

This research highlights the potential power dynamic that may form between professionals and parents, particularly if parents do not feel well equipped or confident. Ferreira, Hodges and Slaton (2013) commented on the need for a two-way relationship between parents and professionals built on mutual respect and ethical practice to help empower families to make decisions within their own lives. This anti-oppressive practice and understanding of power dynamics is an integral part of the EP role (Sewell, 2016).

2.3.3 Section Summary

The previous section outlined models that have been espoused within policy and research literature within the context of parental choice, education and wider society. This section described the conceptual framework within the presented research to explore the experiences of parents choosing a special school placement for their children. This section also explored relevant parent-partnership models within education. Interaction with professionals has been cited as a source of stress for parents and without the appropriate interpersonal relationships, may have a negative impact on the education of their children. Furthermore, many of these models have been positioned as a way to empower parents within their interactions with professionals but fail to detail how this empowerment will occur. Parental empowerment is underpinned by a variety of psychological constructs including self-esteem, self-efficacy and self-determination. Without these constructs, parents may feel powerless within these relationships and thus feel unable to enact or exercise their

rights. Experiences with professionals, and through the school choice process as a whole, may promote or hinder a parent's sense of control and ability to engage in future decisions regarding their CYP's education. The following section will explore literature in relation to the parental experience of school placement choice and related factors.

2.4 Part Three: Literature Review

The previous section provided an overview of the educational system and the conceptual framework relevant to this research. This chapter will provide a literature review in relation to parental perceptions and experience of the process of school choice and decision-making for their CYP with SEND. The purpose of the review is to explore current research, identify gaps and formulate the research aim.

A variety of educational and psychology databases were used to provide the discussed literature including EBSCO Education Databases, Proquest Social Sciences, PsycINFO–Ovid and Google Scholar. Additionally, a 'snowballing effect' was used to select relevant research via reference lists. Table 5 summarises the key search strategy, including terminology and inclusion criteria. Appendix two provides an overview of selected research.

Table 5. Search Terms and Inclusion Criteria for Literature.

Search Terms (used in various combinations)	Special Education* Need* + Parent* or Carer or Family + School Choice or School Placement or School Decision* or Placement or Mainstream* or Selection* or Special*
	- Subject to peer review to ensure quality, - Written in English for ease of access, - Related to experience of parental choice,

Inclusion Criteria	- Parents of children with a range of SEND to understand range of experience.

2.4.1 Parental Experience of School Choice

Choosing a school and managing the school transition experience has been acknowledged within research as a critical time in a child's development, and one that can incur stress for parents (Tissot and Evans, 2006; Parsons, Lewis and Ellins, 2009). This seems particularly apparent for children with SEND who may be more vulnerable in comparison to peers, and face discrimination through this transition process (Lilley, 2014). However, before this transition can begin, the appropriate placement must be considered and chosen. Few studies primarily focus on the experience of parents choosing a school for their children with SEND, instead focusing on factors that may influence this decision. Despite this gap, existing research has suggested that this is an anxiety provoking process and one that involves feelings of uncertainty for parents (Bajwa-Patel and Devecchi, 2014; McNerney, Hill and Pellicano, 2015).

Rizvi's (2018) research focused on mothers and their experience of inclusion and school choice. The majority of participants expressed a sense of anxiety regarding the choice of school placement, with many favouring a mainstream school so that their children could have a "*normal school life*" (Rizvi, 2018, p.8). Some of this anxiety stemmed from an unfamiliarity with special school placement and fear of segregation for their children. This is similar to findings by Tissot (2011, p.1), whose participants described the process of choosing a school as "*bureaucratic, stressful and time-consuming".* Perhaps the process was best described by a parent who reported that *"to get educational provision for any autistic child is a nightmare*" (Tissot, 2011, p.8). Participants placed the fault of this within the SEND system itself and acknowledged that the most stressful aspect of this process was interacting with the LA professionals.

Other sources of stress included the limited types of placement available, the complexity of the existing system, and no independent advice and/or support available. Tissot (2011) surmised that before parents engage in this process they have previously determined a preferred outcome and believe the process will be challenging. Tissot (2011) commented that opposition to their preferred outcome would be seen as resistance by LA and therefore a cause for tension between parents and professionals. This may be explained through confirmation bias which is a form of cognitive bias that proposes individuals interpret information that supports or confirms their pre-existing values or ideas (Wason, 1960). For parents within Tissot's (2011) research, parental perception of resistance by the LA may reflect parental bias towards inevitable disagreements within this process. This in turn may impact their behavioural decisions and perceptions of the situation. However, parental experience within this study was collected through questionnaire data and therefore the amount of in-depth analysis regarding experience is limited. As is the capacity to form conclusions without the ability to clarify and check with participants, further emphasizing the relevancy of the presented research.

An interesting feature of Tissot's (2011) research was the conceptualisation of the journey to find appropriate educational placement by parents. Participants reported that their journey often started at the diagnosis of their child's needs. Although not directly related to school choice, models have been proposed to understand the experience and emotional process of parents of children with SEND, most notably the Kübler-Ross (1969) bereavement cycle. This may explain the emotional and psychological process that parents face during this experience. Appendix three provides further information. Connor (1997) extended this model to parental reactions to the choice of special school. Connor (1997) likened the acceptance of attending

special school to that of acceptance stage within the grief cycle for parents. However this appears outdated when viewing it through the social model of disability and inadequate in so-far as to explain the complex and individual experience of parental response to their child's SEND (Roll-Pettersson, 2001). Although it does acknowledge the likely emotional and psychological journey that parents may face, not only during the school choice process, but for understanding their children's needs.

Similarly, a theme within McNerney et al.'s (2015, p.1104) study focusing on choosing a secondary school placement was that of the "*burden of decision-making".* Participants did not make their choice lightly instead likening the importance of the decision to marriage. One parent described the process as "*terrifying*" and that they were in "*panic mode*" trying to decide what to do (p.1104). Parents also discussed the potential long-lasting impact of this choice, demonstrating ramifications of this decision are not considered lightly, for example with one parent commenting "*I don't want the next six or seven years to be my fault"* (p.1104). This comment may reflect an internal attribution style and locus of control on the part of the parents. Interestingly, parents conceptualized their anxiety of making this choice as more difficult than those of parents of children without SEND. Much of this anxiety stemmed from their perception of a lack of information from professionals to support them in their choice. The parents also reported that professionals failed to recognize and respond to their stress. This study again demonstrates the emotional and psychological impact this process may have on parents when choosing a school for their children with SEND. McNerney et al.'s (2015) research focused on decision-making for secondary school placement, therefore, whether these experiences are representative of parents choosing a primary school placement remains to be seen. Furthermore, McNerney et al.'s. (2015) research had only one participant who wanted special school for their child. Therefore,

the experience may not be the same for parents who have obtained a special school placement.

Mann et al. (2015) reported three main themes that were considered by parents within their choice of educational placement. Firstly, whether parents perceived they had the personal freedom to make an authentic choice or whether this was restricted. Parents of children with SEND reported they had limited choices, and that they were often pressured to pursue special education by mainstream educators (Mann et al., 2015). Secondly, parents of children with SEND valued and had the desire to make their own decisions within this process, promoting a sense of control and agency for themselves. Finally, they considered whether educational choice is a rational or emotional experience. For parents of children with SEND this process was characterized by stress and sadness. This study demonstrates not only the desire and need for parental agency, but also the range of different experiences they face in comparison to parents of children without SEND (Mann et al., 2015). However, this research reflected a mixture of parents from different school age groups. Therefore, it is not clear whether these experiences differ for school transition years.

Furthermore, Lilley's (2014) Australian study demonstrates the psychological impact that such an experience can have on the self-concept of parents. The mothers described the psychological impact that rejection from mainstream had on them. This suggests that this process can negatively impact on a person's self-esteem and self-concept through internalization in relation to an individual's own self-worth and values (King, 1997). It is possible that a lack of confidence can lead to parents feeling powerless and reliant on professionals (Ryndak et al., 1996). Therefore parents may not develop a sense of empowerment to successfully engage in becoming active decision-makers in their children's education in such contexts.

The research base has also described the sense of disappointment and vulnerability that parents may experience during this process (Kenny et al., 2005). Kenny et al. (2005) interviewed ten parents of children with Down's syndrome to explore their experience of accessing mainstream education. They reported that parents had to *"beg, plead and negotiate*" their way into accessing mainstream education (Kenny et al., 2005, p.16). Kenny et al. (2005) raises an important reflection on the potential positives to be gained from this experience. Parents within this study reported they felt their confidence and knowledge grew through this experience. Similarly, Rose et al. (2017) described how parents reported feeling reassured when they were potentially able to access the educational provision they wanted for their children. However, research appears to provide minimal attention to positive emotional responses.

2.4.2 Factors Related to School Choice

Although not the primary focus of this research, influential factors regarding school choice are intrinsically intertwined for parents. Factors have been grouped regarding common themes found within the literature. Two literature reviews on the topic have been published to date; Byrne's (2013) review of factors influencing secondary school placement and Mawene and Bal's (2018) review of considerations and socio-economic status (SES) influencing placement decisions. Both of these literature reviews are considered below.

2.4.2.1 Child Characteristics

Parents strongly consider the individual characteristics of their children when considering appropriate educational placement. Leyser and Kirk (2004) reported that parents with younger children (primary school-aged) viewed mainstream education more favourably compared to parents with older children (secondary school-aged). This was in part due to the perceptions of minimal teacher support within secondary

school (Leyser and Kirk, 2004). Similarly, Byrne's (2013) systematic literature review reported that research highlighted a move towards special school when their children became secondary school-aged (for example Kenny et al., 2005).

Linked to the concept of age is the reflection that the child's views are unlikely to be considered in preschool experience for choosing a school placement. However this is a consideration for secondary school options. Bagley et al. (2001) described parental consideration of child preference when choosing secondary school placement. Similarly, within McNerney et al.'s. (2015) research, conflicting views between the parent and young person caused extreme worry on part of the parent, who ultimately had the final choice of school placement.

Furthermore, the nature of SEND has influenced parental placement decisions (Bagley and Wood, 1998; Bagley et al. 2001). Bagley et al. (2001) ranked the five most influential factors for parents of children with SEND, finding unsurprisingly that the child's needs ranked highest for the majority of participants. Similarly, Reilly, Senior and Murtagh (2015) found that parents of children who have a 'severe disability' believed that their children needed more specialist care, in contrast to the views of teaching staff in the study. However, these studies fail to explore the experience of parents when making a school choice. For example, Lilley (2014) proposed that the SEND categorisation of children guided professional opinion and advice with regards to where professionals judged to be an appropriate placement. This in turn influenced parental views regarding school placement.

Additionally, Kasari et al. (1999) found that the type of SEND also correlated with the parents' position on inclusive educational settings. They found that parents of children with Down's syndrome presented more favourably towards inclusion in comparison to

parents of children with autism spectrum condition (ASC). This discrepancy is perhaps explained through different experiences of physical and 'hidden' disabilities. Parents of children with 'hidden' disability, such as ASC, have described difficulty in understanding and explaining the needs of their child and accessing appropriate support (Akbar and Woods, 2020).

Bagley and Woods (1998) proposed a framework to understand perspectives of parental choice encompassing two-value perspectives; instrumental-academic and intrinsic-personal-social. They proposed that parents of children with SEND would be inclined to make a choice regarding school based on intrinsic-personal-social values as opposed to instrumental-academic. That is, parents in their research placed value on the individual child's needs, including their likes, dislikes and strengths. This was ultimately framed to ensure that their children felt safe and secure within an educational environment.

2.4.2.2 Parental Factors

Although not a feature of direct relevance to the presented study, research has acknowledged the potential role of SES may have on school placement (Leyser and Kirk, 2004; Mawene and Bal, 2018). It is possible that middle class families are more likely to have different forms of capital, for example cultural capital, that allows them to have the time and resources to make such considerations (Mawene and Bal, 2018). This in turn means that a group of parents may be more equipped *to "negotiate the [school] market"* (Byrne, 2013, p.139). However, when solely researching pre-school placement, Glenn-Applegate, Justice and Kaderavek (2016) found that there was no significant difference with relevance to SES for parents.

Other factors that have been highlighted as influencing parental choice of placement includes their belief about SEND and models of disability. Researchers have proposed that parents whose values and beliefs align with a social model of disability would be more inclined to favour inclusion and mainstream school compared to special school provision (Runswick-Cole, 2008; McNerney et al., 2015). Runswick-Cole (2008) posited that parents with values in line with the social model of disability conceptualised their needs in relation to inadequate school provision rather than focusing on the child's needs. However, this differs from Rizvi (2018) who reported parents were motivated by wanting to provide the best provision available for their children and that many hoped they would attend a mainstream setting in the future. This calls into question whether parental values are a motivating factor or whether it reflects restricted choice within placement options.

Other considerations and reflections have included parental educational experience (Jenkinson, 1998; Russell, 2003). Parents who have had personally negative experiences in school often view their child's education negatively (Mann et al., 2015). Parents can make subjective predictions regarding the future of their child's education based on their own personal beliefs and experience (Russel, 2003). Russell (2003) found that this expectation also extended to their belief regarding the support parents should be receiving through the choice of school process. If these expectations are not met, this may become a source of conflict and disappointment for parents.

2.4.2.3 Family and Friends

The influence of family and friends has been acknowledged within the research base (Flewitt and Nind, 2007; Byrne, 2013; McNerney et al., 2015). This is perhaps unsurprising as social networks are reported to be a positive coping mechanism for parents of children with SEND (Boyd, 2002). Additionally, McNerney et al. (2015) and

Bajwa-Patel and Devecchi (2014) both describe how parents turn to others in similar situations i.e. parents of children with SEND, for advice with regards to school choice and placement. Similarly, Russell (2003) discussed how parents develop expectations from personal experiences and experiences of their social network. This in turn may generate preconceived beliefs regarding the education system (Tissot, 2011). This is not unlike the literature on parents of children without SEND that demonstrate parents often turn to friends and family for their opinions on school choice (Morgan et al., 1993; Burgess et al. 2009).

2.2.4.4 Professionals Interactions

As discussed previously, parents have reported feeling a sense of powerlessness within this decision-making process and turn to professionals for guidance (Lilley, 2014; Mann et al., 2015). For example, a lack of communication has been cited as a barrier to making an informed choice regarding placement (Parsons et al., 2009). The ability to make an informed choice will depend greatly on the information shared by professionals regarding available and appropriate placement (McNerney et al., 2015).

Professional influence is widely cited within the research base surrounding the issue of school choice (Byrne, 2013). For parents navigating this process, professionals can act as a source of information and support (Rose et al., 2017), or alternatively one of stress and disempowerment (Runswick-Cole, 2007). It is unsurprising that parents would turn to professionals for guidance as there is pressure on parents to select and evaluate educational provision and navigate a system they may not be familiar with. Parents are also placed in a position in which they may regard professionals as gatekeepers to provision, a concern that remains within the EP profession (Miller and Frederickson, 2006; O'Connor, 2008). Within the literature, there appears a sense that

parents can feel that conflict is inevitable with professionals (Hodge and Runswick-Cole, 2008), and as previously mentioned, is a source of stress for families.

Within Rizvi's (2018) research parents acknowledged that professionals influenced placement preferences. Specifically, participants noted that medical professionals and social workers accentuated existing concerns regarding mainstream schools as potentially inappropriate for their children. Interestingly, many of the participants' final placement settings did not reflect their original preference nor did the current placement their child was attending meet their expectations, possibly suggesting a substantial degree of influence held by professionals. However this was not explored within the research and therefore is merely suggestive rather than conclusive. Furthermore, Byrne (2013) highlighted that parents can perceive a lack of choice in this process as they were advised by professionals and others to choose particular placements.

For parents of children in early years settings, research has demonstrated the importance of the relationship between the teacher and themselves (Glenn-Applegate et al., 2016). It is possible that within the presented research early years practitioners may have had a similar influence on the experience of parental choice and thus warrants further exploration. Additionally, research has suggested that parents believed school staff regarded mainstream as inappropriate for their child (Kenny et al., 2005). Lilley (2014) reported similar findings with professionals engaging in deflecting and denial techniques in order to dissuade parents from choosing their school placement. This left parents with a sense of rejection and highlights the potential power differentials that may arise within these experiences.

2.2.4.5 School Environment

When considering the school environment, parents discussed a number of factors related to school choice including school culture, teaching standards, curriculum and resources (Byrne, 2013; Mawene and Bal 2018). Practical considerations such as lack of flexibility within the curriculum, lack of specialised facilities and resources, and large class sizes have all been cited as negative predictors of mainstream school choice (Runswick-Cole, 2008; Bajwa-Patel and Devecchi, 2014; Rizvi, 2018). Special schools have been positioned as a way to enable smaller class sizes with specialist facilities, which parents may believe is likely to be the most supportive and appropriate provision for their child's learning (Rizvi, 2018).

A hostile school culture has been referenced within the literature as being a barrier to accessing mainstream education (Runswick-Cole, 2008). This may link closely with parental perceptions and experiences of inclusion, discussed further below. Parents within McNerney et al.'s. (2015) research wanted staff that would be understanding and accepting of their child's needs. For parents who chose special school, they reported they thought their children would be better understood and catered for. Similarly, Hess et al. (2006) found that parents believed that mainstream teachers would not be able to provide the suitable level of care needed for their children. This is perhaps unsurprising as Parsons et al. (2009) noted greater satisfaction amongst parents of children with SEND who were attending a special school. This was due to the personal and social aspects of support and provision found within these settings. These studies do not present how parents came to develop these views but they do suggest that parents adopt a specialised view of their children's needs.

2.2.4.6 Practical Considerations

Similar to parents of children without SEND, school location and travel have been cited as considerations for school placement (Byrne, 2013; McNerney et al. 2015). For some parents, this meant easing the practical burden on their daily commute (Bagley and Wood, 2001). However school location also offered emotional containment as parents appeared reassured to be able to respond quickly in case of an emergency (Mawene and Bal, 2018). McNerney et al. (2015) also found that parents were concerned with the ability of their children to travel independently, although this may not be relevant for the age group within the presented research.

2.2.4.7 Experience of Inclusion and Social Exclusion

Parents have previously reported they are philosophically in support of inclusion, but practical considerations outweigh the possible benefits (Leyser and Kirk, 2004). This is a noteworthy reflection, as other studies have reported the choice of special school provision is often in response to the fear of, or actual, social exclusion from mainstream peers (Palmer et al., 2001; Runswick-Cole 2008).

Specifically discussing secondary schooling, negative experience of inclusion in primary school can make parents more likely to opt for special school in the secondary phase (Bagley et al., 2001; Byrne, 2013). Byrne (2013) discussed how parents can have positive expectations of school inclusion for primary school, but their confidence of this diminishes within secondary school. This may go some way to explain the discrepancy between age differences in special school placement, as discussed in section 2.4.2.1. Perhaps parents are inclined to believe that social exclusion may be more apparent as children get older. Several studies report the sense of concern parents indicate in relation to inclusion, including fearing their child will be verbally or physically abused by peers and/or socially isolated (Jenkinson, 1998; Leyser and Kirk,

2004; Runswick-Cole, 2008; Tissot et al. 2011). Within Tissot's (2011) research, social exclusion was a concern cited by parents in relation to themselves and their children. One parent reported that "*isolation of children and parents in mainstream is awful*" (Tissot, 2011, p.9). Parents within Tissot's (2011) study may in part have been driven by a desire for social connectedness and relatedness for not only their children but also themselves. Parents within Tissot's (2011) research believed the lack of inclusion was due to inadequate funding within the LA.

As in Kenny et al.'s (2005) study, many parents face fear and defensiveness from educational settings when trying to access mainstream education for their children. This cycle was repeated at every transition point, i.e. preschool to primary, primary to secondary and so forth. Many of these parents framed this experience as a need for wider societal acceptance and promotion of inclusion. Similarly, parents in Lilley (2014) and Mann et al. (2015) also faced pressure from professionals in mainstream education to pursue special education to address their children's needs

2.4.3 Section Summary

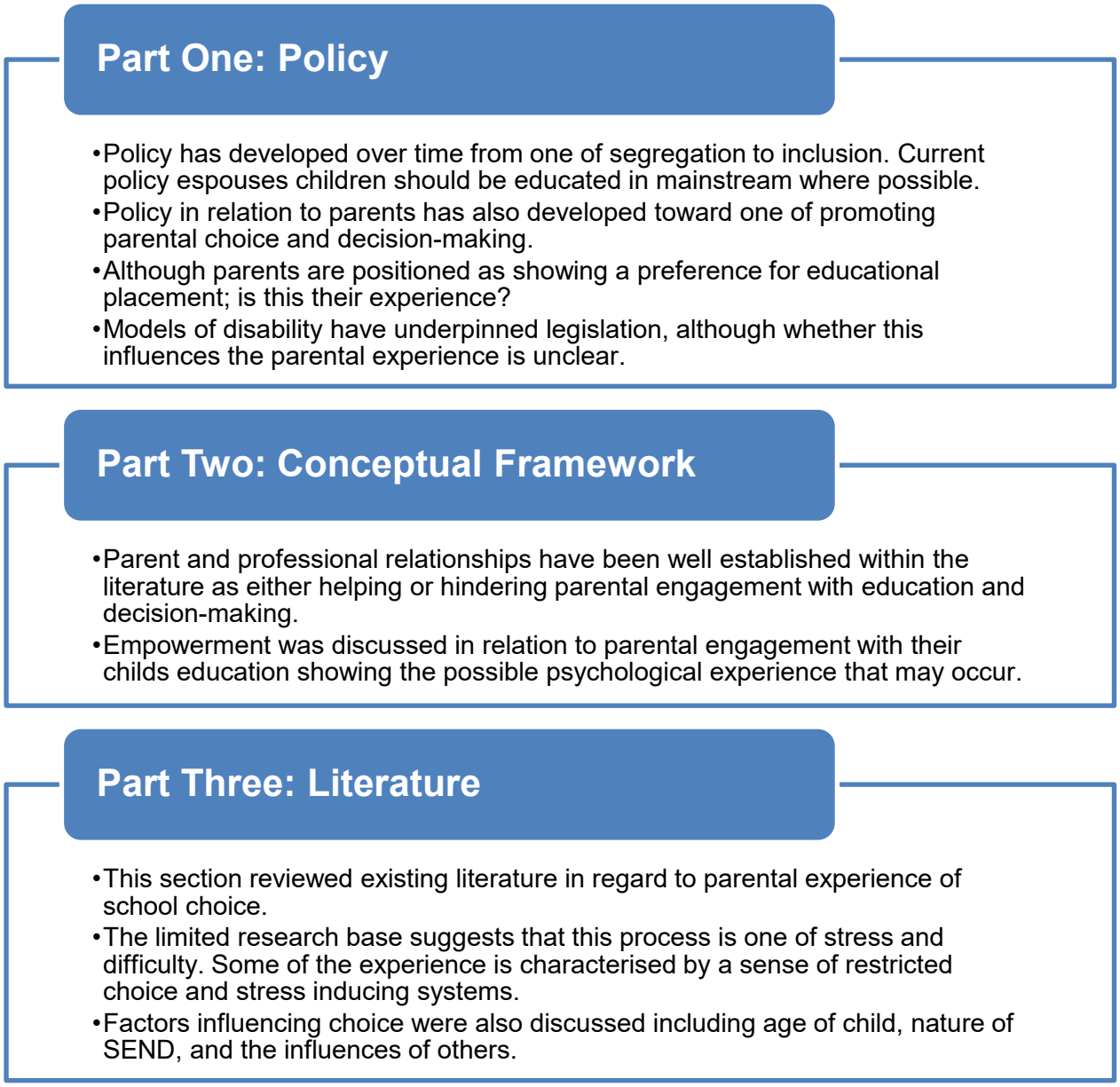
From studying the research above, it is evident that choosing a school placement for a child with SEND can be an emotional and complex experience for parents. Many parents report the negative psychological and emotional impact that such an experience can invoke (Parsons et al., 2009; Tissot 2011; Bajwa-Patel and Devecchi, 2014; Lilley 2014; McNerney et al. 2015; Mann et al. 2015; Rizvi 2018). Much of this research experience stands in contrast to that advocated in policy. Furthermore, it is evident that a variety of systems can influence parental choice, such as characteristics related to their child, their age and type of SEND, to more practical considerations such as distance to school and school curriculum (Palmer et al., 2001; Leyser and Kirk, 2004; Runswick-Cole, 2008; Byrne, 2013; McNerney et al., 2015; Mawene and

Bal, 2018). Moreover, research has highlighted the potential impact that professionals and social networks can have on choice (Runswick-Cole, 2007; Parsons et al., 2009; Byrne, 2013; Lilley, 2014).

2.5 Formulation of the Research Question

Policy has positioned parents as consumers within the education system. However, whether their experience reflects this apparent power of choice remains to be seen. The conceptual framework discussed in section 2.3 may provide an insight into how professionals can influence and impact the experience of parents within placement choice, both positively and negatively (McNerney et al., 2015; Rose et al., 2017). Therefore, I would argue that in order for professionals to effectively support parents through this process, we must first listen and understand their experience. Figure 5 displays the relationship between part one, two and three of this chapter.

Figure 5. Development of Research Question



Despite the research conducted in this area, gaps remain in understanding the experience of the school choice process for parents of children with SEND. The majority of research has focused on the transition point of primary to secondary education, many of which were in an international context. Therefore there seems to be a particular dearth of research in regard to parents choosing primary school placement for their children.

Moreover, Leyser and Kirk (2004) found that parents of children with SEND aged between 0-5 tended to look on mainstream schools favourably. Similarly, Jenkinson (1998) found that parents tended to choose a mainstream setting for primary education, and later move to a specialist setting for secondary education. This is possibly due to the experience of mainstream primary, or perhaps due to concerns over the experience for their children within secondary school. Therefore, more may need to be understood regarding the experience of parents choosing primary special school when this may not be the typical choice.

Furthermore, the majority of research has aimed to explore factors considered within the process and given minimal focus to the experience. To understand whether this experience remains true for parents of children who are transitioning to primary school and within England requires further exploration. Additionally, more research is required to understand this phenomenon in the context of the latest CoP (DfE/DH, 2015) to explore whether these experiences persist. Lastly, much of the research to date has explored parental views from a population of parents who wanted either mainstream or special school placements (McNerney et al., 2015; Rizvi, 2018). Therefore, there may be a need to explore the views of parents who decided they wanted to solely obtain a special school placement for their children. Therefore, the following aspects needed to be considered when developing the research question:

- Parents of children who will be starting primary school,
- Parents who wanted their children to attend a special school,
- Parents of children with SEND in England.

This led me to develop the following research question: ‘How do parents experience choosing a special school placement for their pre-school child with SEND?’

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a rationale for the methodology and methods within the presented research. Firstly, the research philosophy is discussed, including ontology and epistemology. Next, the approach used within this research, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), is described as well as alternative methodologies that were considered. Following this, relevant methodological reflections are discussed, including ethical considerations, sample, data collection and analysis. Furthermore, the trustworthiness of the data is reviewed. Finally, reflexivity and the researcher role are commented upon.

The aim of this research was to explore parental experience regarding the choice of educational settings for their pre-school with an EHCP. Therefore, the research question was:

- How do parents experience choosing a special school placement for their pre-school child with SEND?

Table 6 provides a summary of the research framework for this project. These terms will be discussed in the following sections. See section 4.2 for participant pen portraits.

Table 6. Summary of Research Framework

Ontological Position	Relativism
Epistemological Position	Social Constructionism
Theoretical Foundation	Phenomenology Idiography Hermeneutics
Methodology	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Data Collection Method	Semi-structured interviews
Participants	5 participants (4 females, 1 male)

3.2 Research Philosophy

3.2.1 Ontology and Epistemology

Within educational research there are conceptual issues that need to be considered as they will have practical implications regarding the direction of the research design and approach (Smith et al., 2009). As such, ontology and epistemology need to be considered within the context of this research. Ontology is the nature of reality and what exists (Punch, 1998), whilst epistemology is concerned with the understanding of reality and therefore the relationship between the researcher and reality (Carson et al., 2001).

An ontological stance falls on a spectrum of realist to relativist (Robson, 2011). A realist position posits that there are fundamental objective and observable truths in the world, and therefore cause and effect relationships can be established (Willig, 2013). This contrasts with a relativist stance which states that there are many versions of the truth in the world with individuals having differing perspectives on events dependent on their own experiences and awareness (Robson, 2011). Within this project, I have adopted a relativist ontological position as I believe there are multiple constructed realities by individuals and that all truths presented are valid. However, it has been suggested that ontological and epistemological beliefs cannot be separated (Crotty, 1998), therefore epistemological position is considered.

When considering epistemology, there is again a spectrum of understanding from positivism to subjectivism or interpretivism. Positivism postulates that that there is an

objective measurable reality that is not influenced by the researcher's own context and/or beliefs (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). This would imply that data is 'testable' and repeatable (Thomas, 2009). However, it has been argued as an inappropriate philosophical stance with regards to social sciences as it implies a reductionist view of complex social phenomena (Thomas, 2017). In contrast, interpretivism states that we all construct the world based on our interpretations, and we access said world through social constructions (Pring, 2004). Reality therefore is the interaction between object and subject, and without consciousness, there is no meaning to this reality (Crotty, 1998). Consequently, a measurable and objective reality does not exist, and social phenomena can only be viewed and interpreted through an individual's perspective (Bryman, 2001). This therefore may lend itself towards a qualitative in-depth analysis and interpretation on the part of the researcher (Scotland, 2012).Within the presented research, I adopted a relativist ontological position with a social constructionism epistemological stance, which has been noted to complement one another (Robson, 2011). It should be acknowledged however that I have adopted a 'softer' ontological stance as through IPA I aim to find common themes amongst participant data whilst acknowledge the individuality of their experience.

Research that adopts a social constructionism position is concerned with individual experience and believes a measurable objective world does not exist (Burr, 2003), therefore lending itself towards a relativism position. Through this process, hermeneutic interpretation is adopted as a researcher aims to understand the reality of an individual and their own sense-making through the researcher's interpretation (Smith et al., 2009). As the presented research is concerned with understanding the experience of parents and the discussed phenomena, it was felt that this position best reflected this aim.

3.3 Methodology

The section on methodology considers IPA and the rationale for its use within this research. This section also reflects on alternative approaches that may have been suitable and offers a critique of IPA.

3.3.1 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Developing from the ontological and epistemological position as described above; the theoretical framework within the presented research is IPA. This allowed for the exploration of parental experiences of choosing a school placement. Larkin and Thompson (2012) discussed a variety of relevant philosophical assumptions underpinning IPA, including:

- To access the world, we must do so through understanding a person's experience,
- As researchers, this phenomenon is accessed through intersubjective meaning-making of the account,
- Adopting an idiographic approach facilitates the exploration of the phenomena,
- The researcher's role will influence the data set and analysis, therefore engagement in reflexivity is integral within IPA.

IPA is a theoretically informed framework for undertaking qualitative research that has been developed from the philosophical movements of phenomenology, idiography, and hermeneutics (Smith et al., 2009). Each of these concepts will be considered individually.

3.3.1.1 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is the philosophical study of human experience, developed by Husserl (1900), which is interested in understanding participant's worlds. Phenomenology seeks to place meaning on experiences that are situated within a

particular context (Heidegger, 1962). Within psychology, phenomenology focuses on participant's perceptions of their world and their lived experience (Langdridge, 2007). Interpretative phenomenological analysis aims to understand a phenomenon through an individual's perspective (Creswell, 2009). Smith et al. (2009) discussed the need to adopt a phenomenological attitude when conducting such research, to allow for a degree of reflexivity (discussed in section 3.7.1) to develop. This in turn shifts our focus towards perceptions of objects as opposed to objects in the world.

3.3.1.2 Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the second theoretical underpinning of IPA and is concerned with the theory of interpretation (Langdridge, 2007). Heidegger (1962), a key contributor to this area, argued that we understand the world through interpretation, and thus we bring our own experiences, assumptions and preconceptions to the process. It is our understanding of interpretation that allows us to develop meaning and sense-making from hermeneutic exploration of data (Langdridge, 2007). IPA is also concerned with double hermeneutics described by Smith (2011, p.10) as "*the researcher trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them".* Therefore, the researcher needs to be aware of their biases as part of the analysis process. Gadamer (1975), another key contributor to the study of hermeneutics, discussed the importance of bracketing one's own preconceptions to ensure the data presents its own truth. This involves reflective and reflexive thinking throughout the research process (discussed in section 3.7.1).

The hermeneutic circle is a key concept within hermeneutic theory. It emphasises the interactive relationship between part and whole, i.e. that meaning of the whole can only be understood in relation to the parts, and vice versa (Smith et al., 2009). Within

the presented research, it means that there needs to be an ongoing and repeated engagement with the text to develop understanding.

3.3.1.3 Idiography

Lastly, idiography is the final theoretical underpinning of IPA. Idiography is concerned with the particular, and therefore an individual's perspective and experience (Smith et al., 2009). This is in opposition to nomothetic research that aims to make claims regarding overarching human behaviour (Smith et al., 2009). The idiographic perspective is significant to IPA, as IPA involves a process of in-depth analysis through individual cases within its context, before exploring similarities and differences across participants (Smith et al., 2009).

3.3.2 Alternative Approaches

Bryman (2001) stated that the methodology used within a research project should be driven by the research aims; within this research it is the aim to explore a person's experience. In line with my ontological and epistemological position, only qualitative approaches were considered. Other methodologies that were considered included narrative approach, grounded theory, discourse analysis, and thematic analysis. Table 7 provides an overview of the key features of each methodology, including the suitability of the approach within the context of the presented research.

Table 7. Considerations of Alternative Methodological Approaches

Approach	**Key features**	**Suitability**	**Why it was not chosen for this research.**
Narrative Approach	Narrative relates to sense making of the	Participants describe narrative accounts of their experience to	There is less structure in how analysis process

	world and ourselves (Murray, 2003). Rooted in social constructionism, there is overlap with phenomenology and discursive approaches (Smith et al., 2009).	gain meaning and understanding (Griffin and May, 2012).	should occur (Griffin and May, 2012). The focus tends to be on social aspects of narrative rather than individual experience (Murray, 2003).
Grounded Theory (GT)	Developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Aims to generate account of a particular phenomenon through social interactions (Smith et al., 2009). Aims to identify meaning from data and generate theories from analysis. There are various forms of grounded theory, but all relate to the constructive nature of language (Burr, 2003).	This approach: Includes a self-reflective process. Has an inbuilt theoretical framework (epistemology and ontology assumptions) with particular types of research questions best suited	This approach does not place importance on individual accounts and analyses the data as a collective (Robson, 2002) Large volume of data needed (Pidgeon and Henwood, 1997). The presented research does not intend to propose a theoretical framework from data which is a key aim of GT.
Discourse Analysis (DA)	This approach is focused on the use of language and the role of language in	Power is relevant to the relationship between professionals and parent, including	Focuses on language use rather than individual sense-making (Smith et al., 2009).

	constructing reality (Willig, 2013). There are two prominent types of discourse analysis; discursive psychology and Foucauldian discourse analysis. This approach is primarily interested in power or interaction rooted in social constructionism (Smith et al., 2009)	potential influence professionals may have on parents.	This in turn may limit or shape the interpretation of experience (Smith et al., 2009)
Thematic Analysis (TA)	TA is a flexible approach that can be used both inductively and deductively (Braun and Clarke, 2006). TA identifies patterns and themes within data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It does not have a set pre-existing theoretical framework.	Can be used across epistemological and ontological spectrum and it can be underpinned by phenomenology, therefore may have been suitable to explore experience of phenomenon.	This research project benefits from framework that allows for idiographic method to fully explore sense-making within experience. TA lacks a level of interpretation and is focused more on description or exploration of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

After considering the various approaches above, IPA was ultimately chosen as the most suitable approach to meet the research question.

3.3.3 Rationale for IPA

I have chosen IPA as a methodological framework for this research for several reasons.

Firstly, IPA is suitable for exploring specific phenomena that participants attach significant meaning towards (Larkin, Watts and Clifton, 2006). It is a dynamic and flexible process that explores the meaning that participants attach to an experience through the process of reflection (Smith et al., 2009). The framework allows the researcher to explore multidimensional aspects of the data that helps to develop an understanding of human experience, and the phenomena being explored. This includes affective, linguistic and cognitive aspects which help the researcher to gain further understanding of the meaning being relayed by the participant. IPA also gives the researcher the ability to have an in-depth view beyond the descriptive narrative of participants' accounts. IPA has a dual focus; it is interested in the unique characteristics of individual participants as well as discovering patterns of meaning across participants (Smith et al., 2009). IPA is well placed in psychological research as it allows for participants' own experience and interpretation to be explored (Larkin et al., 2006). Therefore it is relevant for exploring parental experience as participants' individual and shared accounts can be analysed in-depth with a psychological focus.

Furthermore, IPA is suitable for explorative research topics. As this project is exploratory in nature, the researcher can be guided by the data, and not specific theories (Smith and Osborn, 2008). This allows for topics to be explored though inductive analysis i.e. findings emerge from the themes in participants' data (Thomas, 2009). This is in contrast with a deductive approach which is driven by existing theories and literature to find pre-existing theories in the data (Hyde, 2000). This means that although a conceptual framework was discussed in chapter two this was not used as

a pre-existing theme to explore the data set rather as a guide to further understand this particular phenomenon. The data derived from within this research is also positioned as a way to further understand this area and experience.

IPA also does not aim to generalise or extrapolate claims, instead it is concerned with an individual's subjective account of their own experience (Smith and Osborn, 2008). This therefore is relevant to the research area of exploring parental experience. Although IPA does not offer causation or generalisation, it does allow for a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of individuals regarding their sense and meaning making of a particular situation (Starks and Trinidad, 2007; Smith et al., 2009). Furthermore, through this individual analysis process, it promotes the individual as the expert of their own experience, whilst still allowing the researcher to impart their own psychological perspective on the data (Smith et al., 2009).

3.3.4 IPA: A Critique

Although IPA is the chosen framework within this research, is it important to consider the potential limitations of the approach. Firstly, IPA is concerned with understanding meaning and sense-making of participants. However, whether one can communicate such complex experiences is questionable (Willig, 2013), particularly when relying on language as a way to communicate (Smith et al., 2009). Although not the primary focus of IPA, Willig (2008) criticised IPA for not recognising the role of language within the construction of experience and reality, and therefore the possible influence and limitation that language may incur on the data. However, Smith et al. (2009) argue the role of language is integrated into the analysis process through meaning-making and interpretation on the part of the researcher.

IPA has also been criticised as being ambiguous and lacking a standardised approach (Giorgi, 2009). This in turn may affect the quality of analysis without an agreed operationalised method. However, others have stated that the flexibility within IPA analysis is a strength of the approach as it supports the interpretive nature (Smith et al., 2009). Smith et al. (2009) acknowledges that IPA is not a prescriptive process, but it does derive from a theoretical foundation and therefore they offer their own analysis structure (section 3.7).

In contrast to approaches derived from a positivist paradigm, IPA is not a testable or repeatable approach and therefore does not produce generalisable data or theories (Thomas, 2009). Similarly, Willig (2013) argued that due to its exploratory nature, as opposed to understanding the development of such perceptions within the data, data may present itself as a limited view of the phenomena. Additionally, as IPA is concerned with an individual's experience, data will be subjective in nature (Atkins and Wallace, 2012).

A strength of IPA is the acknowledgment that the researcher can and does influence the data set, through the interaction with participants and through interpretation of the data set. A key emphasis of IPA is this interpretation as it should not be a descriptive regurgitation of the data, instead including the researcher's opinions and explanations (Reiners, 2012). However, this hermeneutic cycle may lead to misinterpretation and question the validity of findings (Smith and Osborn, 2008). Therefore, great care and reflection is needed to ensure interpretations and themes are grounded in the data.

Lastly, IPA can produce in-depth and detailed data sets which can make analysis a time-consuming process due to its idiographic nature (Smith, 2011).This idiographic nature has attracted criticism as this in-depth focus may result in the loss of potentially

important contextual factors (Todorova, 2011). However, Smith (2011) argued that appropriate analysis will focus on individual experience within context supporting the quality and validity of the research. Therefore this criticism may be more relevant to novice researchers who may not undertake the analysis process appropriately. Despite this critique, IPA was deemed the most appropriate in order to answer the research question.

3.4 Method

3.4.1 Participants and Recruitment

Purposive sampling was used to select participants for this research. This type of sampling method is suitable for IPA as this analysis process aims to have a group with shared experience related to a phenomenon and involves a process of purposeful selection (Starks and Trinidad, 2007). Smith et al. (2009) also emphasised the importance of obtaining a homogenous group of participants to allow for the study of a particular phenomenon. For this research, this meant recruiting participants who offer insight into a particular shared experience and not necessarily similar demographic information (Smith et al, 2009).

A small sample size is appropriate for IPA due to the in-depth nature of the case by case analysis (Smith et al., 2009). Furthermore, the sample size should be determined by the research aims and context, alongside time and resources of the researcher (Larkin and Thompson, 2012).

To recruit participants, EPs within my professional training placement identified potential participants and shared the initial information letter with interested parties (appendix five). Participants were contacted by the researcher if they had consented

for their details to be shared. The inclusion and exclusion for participants are in table 8.

Table 8. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Parents of children who have an Education, Health and Care Plan.	Parents of children whose child has previously been on roll at a mainstream primary school prior to choosing a special school placement.
Parents of children who are aged 4-5 years old.	
Parents of children who are eligible for Reception Class in 2019.	
Parents who have already decided that they would like their child to attend a special school.	

Ultimately, five participants were identified as suitable to take part in the presented research. This number allowed for an in-depth analysis of each individual case whilst also allowing for the extrapolation of common themes.

3.4.2 Semi-structured Interviews

As IPA is a dynamic process with the researcher as an active participant in the research, a method that produces a rich qualitative data set seems the most appropriate (Smith et al., 2009). IPA requires an open and flexible approach to the data set whilst maintaining an open mind to the knowledge being presented by the participant (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). Semi-structured interviews have been cited

as the most widely adopted method used in IPA research (Reid, Flowers and Larkin, 2005). Semi-structured interviews allow for the flexibility to explore the topic area, whilst also containing a defined structured to ensure the capture of rich data (Thomas, 2009; Robson, 2011). Thomas (2009) described semi-structured interviews as a discussion with a purpose that allows for the giving and receiving of information. Within the process, questions can be adapted or changed in order to focus on certain aspects of the interview (Robson, 2011). This adaptation allows for co-construction of the data set and shared meaning-making in line with IPA. Furthermore, interviews are often completed face to face which allows for the interpretation of body language and emotion (Robson, 2002), all of which is relevant to IPA (Smith et al., 2009). IPA requires interpretation of the data, not just description, which is obtained through empathetic questioning (Smith et al., 2009), again demonstrating semi-structured interviews to be an appropriate choice for the presented research.

Smith et al. (2009) proposed that an interview schedule including 6-10 open questions, with prompts, should yield an appropriate amount of data. The semi-structured interview used within this research can be viewed in appendix eight. The questions explored broad areas related to the research question. A period of rapport building was incorporated prior to the interview alongside a broad initial question to encourage descriptive responses as suggested by Smith et al. (2009) and Thomas (2009). The length of the interviews ranged from 45 minutes to one hour and 30 minutes.

3.5 Pilot Interview

The value of pilot interviews has been discussed previously as supporting the development of the research approach, questions and interviewer style (Kim, 2011). A pilot interview was conducted within this research prior to the interviews. This afforded me the opportunity to practice my skills as an interviewer, as well as gather

feedback for the interview questions and process. For example, the pilot interviewee asked questions regarding the definition of inclusion. This was an important consideration about how this should be phrased to participants. Providing a definition may influence their own understanding and shape their experience and therefore the language used needed to be carefully considered. Furthermore, the pilot interview also demonstrates the importance of building rapport and starting with an open question to allow participants the time to share their overarching views and story before asking specific questions regarding their experience.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The presented research was approved through the University of Birmingham's Ethical Review Process (appendix four). This research followed the ethical guidelines of The British Psychological Society, Code of Ethics and Conduct (BPS, 2018) and Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2014). Furthermore, the British Educational Research Association (BERA) were also considered to ensure appropriate ethical guidelines were followed. Areas of key ethical consideration derived from BERA (2011) and BPS (2018) are presented in the table 9.

Table 9. Key ethical considerations (BERA, 2011; BPS, 2018)

Ethical Guideline	**Considerations Within This Research Project**
Informed Consent	An invitation letter was shared with potential participants prior to communication from the researcher. This letter outlined the purpose of the research and highlighted the rights of participants. Consent forms were completed and discussed prior to the start of interview. See appendix five, six and seven for information.
Feedback for participants	Participants were given the opportunity to have a summarised document of research findings. They were also given the opportunity to discuss any aspect of the research and findings with the researcher.
Right to withdraw	All participants were given a unique individual ID code which would have been used to identify their data in the event that they would like to withdraw their transcripts. Participants were asked to contact myself or my supervisor if they would like to withdraw from the study. In this event, they would have been asked to provide their name which would be used to identify their unique individual ID code and corresponding data set. All relevant data would have been destroyed. Participants were assured that there would be no consequence of withdrawal. They were told that they do not need to give a reason to withdraw their data. This event would have been managed in a supportive, understanding and non-judgemental way. Participants were assured they were free to make any choice regarding their data and that were not pressured to remain in the project. Participants were reminded of the right to withdraw prior to and during the interview process, without needing to give a reason. Participants were then reminded at the end of the interview that they can request for their data to be withdrawn from the research project within the given timeframe.

Confidentiality and Anonymity	Participants were assured that their data would be handled completely confidentially and were given assigned ID codes to support this. However, as participants were required to complete face to face interviews; they were not completely anonymous to the researcher. Participants were told that their information would be kept confidential and that they had a time frame to request the removal of their data from the project if they so wished. Only information relevant to research questions were asked, information that may make participants identifiable has been removed/redacted. Therefore, when information was recorded and analysed, it was not identifiable to others. For the write-up of findings, participants were assigned a false name that is different to their own, and not connected to the information they previously provided. The interviews took place in a setting that was confidential. Only the researcher had access to real names/contact details for purpose of providing feedback of the research project. All data was kept securely in data storage in line with data management procedure.
Data Management	Initially data was recorded using a Dictaphone and then transcribed. This recording process was optional to participants. If they would not like to be recorded, written notes would have been made. This data (i.e. recordings and transcriptions of interviews) was stored securely using the university's software and only relevant parties (myself and supervisors) had access to this data. Once transcriptions were complete, the recordings were deleted. Any other data, i.e. paper based interview notes, was stored in secure university systems. For each participant, the following data was obtained/stored; initial contact details, signed consent form, participant data set and demographic information. Data will be kept securely for 10 years following completion of the project, my own records will be deleted in the previously outlined methods following completion of the project write-up and graduation from the course.

Risks to participants	One potential risk that this research may have invoked was anxiety/distress to participants when discussing placement and choices of placement for their children. Participants recalling their experience or reflecting on their ideal inclusive educational environment may have caused parents to become upset over the ideal choice of placement in comparison to their reality, thus potentially causing emotional distress. To support this, participants were provided with the contact details of an independent parental advice service and Ashtown Psychology Service if they felt they would like any follow-up support or information. Parents reflected on their own views and experiences retrospectively. Therefore this should not have confused any ongoing decision-making parents were engaging in regarding their placement choice for their child. This would have hopefully avoided any potential sources of stress. Throughout the interviews, participants were carefully observed to ensure that if they did appear distressed, the interviews would have been stopped immediately. The participants were able to withdraw at any stage, and as the researcher, I would have stopped the interview if I felt they were distressed. Full debriefing, follow-up and support was offered. Participants were given the opportunity throughout all stages of the project to ask any questions and to seek support from myself, my supervisor, or the EPS. All those involved were required to complete consent forms which outlined their rights as participants in line with the BPS Code of Ethics (2018). As a researcher, I emphasised the importance of respecting participant's views and experiences, as well as the confidential nature of the interviews.
Privacy and safety	All participants were given the option of where they would like the interviews to be to ensure they felt conformable and safe. All participants requested a home visit for the interview. As a researcher I followed the home visiting guidelines as set out by the EPS. This included ensuring the address of the visit was viewable on my electronic calendar, and that colleagues knew how to contact me before and after the interviews within a set time period.

3.7 Analysis Process

IPA constitutes an interactive and inductive analysis process that can be applied flexibly (Reid et al., 2005; Smith et al., 2009). Within this research, I followed the analysis process as outlined by Smith et al. (2009). Throughout the developing analysis process, considerations were given to the hermeneutic cycle, and the cyclical process of checking and rechecking data interpretations.

Furthermore, throughout the process, supervision was used to discuss examples of free coding and the development of emergent themes. Peer supervision was also utilised to ensure the checking of themes and related examples. Peer validation has been noted as an appropriate way to check IPA data analysis as member checking may not be appropriate due to the interpretative nature (Larkin and Thompson, 2012). Initially, I engaged in a process of transcription which included the Ilistening to recorded data and writing the complete data set case by case. IPA does not require written account of prosodic features (Smith et al., 2009), however relevant pauses and non-verbal utterances were noted. After this, I engaged in the analysis process as described in table 10. Appendix ten to sixteen displays the data analysis process.

Table 10. Steps of IPA Analysis (Smith et al., 2009 p79-80)

Stage	**Description**
Reading and re-reading	This step, after transcription, involves the further familiarisation of the researcher with the data set. This stage started with the close examination of one case transcript. Whilst reading, this would involve listening to the interviews to help develop my understanding of the case. My initial reactions would be recorded separately, in a research journal as recommended by Smith et al. (2009)

Initial noting	This stage includes the line-by-line coding of each participant's data set. This includes examination of the semantic content and language used by participants. The analysis at this stage was divided into three categories, as recommended by Smith et al. (2009), in order to aid my understanding of the data: - ***Descriptive comments***: a description of the main content of the transcript including objects of concern i.e. key words/phrases, events and experiences etc. - ***Linguistic comments****:* a focus on specific words/language used by participants i.e. words, tone etc. ***Conceptual comments****:* a move towards interpretation by the researcher of the participants understanding of the experience, within the context. Again, this stage involved an element of bracketing of my own preconceptions regarding the data. Bracketing is discussed in section 3.7.1 and within the reflexive journal (appendix nine).
Development of emergent themes	This stage requires the use of 'initial noting' of data i.e. the parts, with the aim to gain an understanding of the whole. This stage also involves a level of interpretation to develop emergent themes i.e. statements, that reflect understanding and are grounded in the data. This stage also encapsulates one representation of the hermeneutic circle.
Searching for connections across emergent themes	This stage involves understanding how the emergent themes may fit together to create subordinate themes. This may include discarding of emergent themes depending on the research aims/questions. Overall, the aim of this study is to draw themes together to create a structured account of the

	participants data. Ways in which patterns/connections were sought, included: - ***Abstraction***- grouping similar themes together. - ***Subsumption***- emergent themes becomes superordinate themes. - ***Polarisation***- Looking to differences between themes to identify oppositional relationships within the data. - ***Contextualisation***- Exploring the narrative key facts and/or events, and possible cultural and temporal context within the data. - ***Numeration***- Exploring the frequency of how often a theme emerged within the data. This may indicate the relative importance given by the participant. Smith et al (2009) notes relative caution, as this is not the only indicator that may signify importance. - ***Function***- Exploring the specific function of the data within the transcript. Again throughout this process, it was important to keep a research journal that reflects how this stage of analysis was conducted.
Moving to the next case	The remaining transcripts (4) undergo the same process from 1 to 4 as outlined above. Each case is approached as an individual analysis process to ensure its own individuality. The likelihood being that previous themes would influence the analysis of other cases.
Looking for patterns across cases	Once all individual participant's data have been analysed, the final stage of the analysis process takes place. This involves identifying connections across the cases through reconfiguring and relabelling of themes. It is important within this stage to ensure that individual's unique idiosyncratic data is still represented. The final result included 6 superordinate themes from the data set.

3.7.1 Reflexivity and Bracketing

An integral component of IPA is the reflexivity of the researcher in which he or she needs to be aware of the preconceptions and values they bring to the process. Reflexivity has been defined as "*the capacity of any system of significance to turn back upon itself, to make itself its own object by referring to itself*" (Myerhoff and Ruby, 1992, p. 307). Therefore a researcher must engage in reflexivity to become conscious and reflective on how their own values and presumptions will influence a variety of stages of the research process (Langdridge, 2007). For example, the researcher should be aware of the way questions, method and preconceptions will impact the psychological knowledge produced in the data. Furthermore, Finlay (2003) acknowledged that the relationship between researcher and participant will inevitably be a factor within the data. To support this process, I have provided my own researcher positionality (section 1.4).

To support the validity of the research, one should engage in a process known as bracketing, which should be ongoing and cyclical throughout the research project (Gadamer, 1975). This involves 'bracketing off' one's values and constructions and to not allow assumptions to shape the analysis process. However, whether true objectivity can be achieved in research may be unlikely (Crotty, 1996). Contrary to this notion, Heidegger (1962) discussed how these assumptions can add to the research analysis by bringing forth themes that may have been unrecognisable to the researcher otherwise. I have engaged in reflexivity and bracketing but acknowledge that my own values, experience and position as a researcher will still likely have influenced the presented research.

Wilkinson (1988) described three forms of reflexivity that are relevant to this research: personal, professional, and disciplinary. Personal reflexivity is related to a researcher's

own experience, knowledge, interests, values and beliefs, and the way in which they shape and influence the research topic. This was discussed in section 1.4. Professional reflexivity refers to the interpersonal dynamics that will emerge between participant and researcher, the way in which the researcher communicates with the participant, and the perception the researcher has of the participant. Section 5.3 reflects on this aspect, as well as the reflexive journal (appendix nine). Finally, disciplinary reflexivity, also known as epistemological reflexivity, refers to the theoretical stance of the researcher and their underlying belief of reality and knowledge. This aspect was discussed in section 3.2 and 3.3.1.

Within IPA, there needs to be an awareness of the researcher's thinking and a process of self-reflection to enable the researcher to identify and bracket presumptions (Larkin et al., 2006). This can be a challenging process which is true of my own experience within this presented research (see appendix nine for further reflection). Smith et al. (2009) suggests keeping a reflexive journal which contains the perceptions of the researcher throughout the research project. This in turn supports the transparency and trustworthiness of the data set as a researcher can become more aware of their own influence on the project. This process also helps the researcher understand their position with regards to the data. I used a research journal throughout the research process to record my own reflections, decisions and events (appendix nine). Table 11 provides an example of reflexive commentary I engaged in during the analysis process.

Table 11. Example of Reflexive Commentary

Extract	**Reflexive Commentary**	**Interpretation**

Nicole (Participant): *"If I'm honest it was probably her (NHS Speech and Language Therapist) who led me down the more special school path… You know apart from the experience of our NHS SALT that definitely had an influence on me"*	To me it sounds as if Nicole may not realise the amount of influence that this professional had on her decision; however if she does not feel that this professional persuaded her choice than that is her reality/truth within the experience. My interpretation may be a reflection on my own experience with other professionals, who have told parents the school placement that would be suitable. Thus, taking the choice away from them. Therefore I should be careful to not 'over-interpret' her comments.	Nicole developed a trusting relationship with the NHS SALT worker, which is reflected within her interview. She valued the information and opinion of this professional whom she acknowledged impacted on her school placement decision process.
Nicole *(Participant)*: *"Having met with primary school head teacher and SENCo it became quickly apparent really that whilst they were nice and happy to have a conversation with us…That they…probably couldn't meet his needs. They say it in such a delicate way".*	When interpreting this comment by Nicole, it resonated with my own professional values. I have heard some school staff say the phrase 'we can't meet needs' and I am concerned that it may be a phrase used to reject children without 'officially' rejecting them. This type of language may in turn	This situation for Nicole may have represented a lack of placement options available to her as the mainstream school she was considering did not have the appropriate provision to meet her child's needs.

	make parents feel as if all mainstream school provision is not suitable for their children. This goes against my own personal inclusive ideology.	

3.8 Research Quality and Trustworthiness

As with many qualitative approaches, IPA has attracted significant discussions regarding the validity and trustworthiness of the framework (Shaw, 2011; Smith 2011). Howitt (2010) argued that the principles of quality checking within quantitative research approaches i.e. reliability, validity and replicability, cannot be compared to qualitative research. For example, a neutral researcher in quantitative research may indicate objectivity. Whereas, in qualitative research and IPA in particular, the reflexive analysis process contributes towards interpretation, as does the inevitable contribution of the researcher. Furthermore, Willig (2013) argued that terms such as reliability and validity are in line with a positivist perspective of reality and knowledge, therefore are not in line with the philosophical assumptions of the presented research. As such, the term trustworthy will be used instead to assess research value (Golafshani, 2003).

Consequently, it is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that the research is trustworthy through the sharing of methods, results and transparency (Yardley, 2017). This trustworthiness should also consider the confidentiality and anonymity of participants (Yardley, 2017) which is discussed in section 3.6. Yardley's (2000) well known criteria for assessing trustworthiness of psychological qualitative research has been used in this research project (table 12).

Table 12. Trustworthiness of Qualitative Research (Yardley, 2000)

Area	Description	Consideration within this research project	Potential weakness within research project
Sensitivity to context	This can be established in a range of ways, such as: - Understanding and exploring the wider context of research, possibly through familiarisation of relevant research. - Context relevant to the participants is considered. - Participant data should be presented sensitively and accurately. - The dynamic between researcher and participant should be considered, including the power	- Legislation and relevant policy considered with regards to influence on parents. Local and national context also considered within chapter one and two. - Literature review related to the research area was conducted in chapter two. Gaps in previous research identified to guide aims of research. Identification of theoretical information to support data analysis i.e. IPA. - Participants data was transcribed verbatim, an inductive, idiographic data	- Criticism regarding how much IPA considers social context as discussed in IPA critique section (section 3.3.4). - Possible ethical issues as discussed in section 3.6. - Possible literature not explored due to terminology used in literature search. - Potential power imbalance, as I may have been seen as connected to the LA and not an independent researcher.

	dynamic that may emerge within such a situation.	driven analysis took place to ensure sensitivity to emergent themes. - Ethical considerations presented in section 3.6, including power dynamic between researcher and participant.	
Commitment and rigour	Researcher should demonstrate competence with regards to choice and utilisation of methodology and methods used throughout the process. Researcher should also demonstrate attentiveness to participant during the interview, and consideration of alternative interpretations of data.	- IPA considered appropriate methodological framework suitable to topic area and research aim. Alternative approaches considered and rejected due to suitability. IPA suitable for idiographic nature, and thus commitment to individual accounts. Interview technique reflected upon after each interview. Pilot study undertaken to review	- Novice interviewer may limit potential data collected/interpretation of data. - Interpretative nature of IPA may mean bias with interpretation. - Interpretations were not checked with participants due to time constraint and appropriateness, which may mean they do not represent

		questions and skill of interviewer. - Supervision and peer supervision utilised to check interpretation of data. - Researcher engaged in reflexivity as discussed in reflexivity section.	the experience of participants.
Transparency and coherence	This relates to the clarity in which the research is presented in the write-up of the study and how it comes together (Yardley, 2000). Clear description of methodology, methods and analysis. All data should be presented clearly.	- 'Paper-trail' as advocated by Yardley (2017) is presented, which includes an account of the process from initial research aim to the final product. - Methodology and methods used presented with rationale. Data analysis process presented. Findings presented as themes with examples of extrapolated data as	Reflexive issues as discussed in section 3.7.1.

		evidence to support said theme. Discussion includes links to previous relevant research. Discussion of researcher's interpretation presented alongside the bias in researcher's interpretation.	
Impact and importance	The final principle of Yardley's quality check is concerned with the practical or theoretical importance of the research.	This will be further considered in chapter five regarding the impact of research within an educational context.	Research will be context specific and findings will not be generalisable. This will be further considered in chapter five.

In addition to the above table, and specific to IPA, Smith et al. (2009) proposed a variety of factors that 'good' IPA research should contain. These factors were considered and reflected upon throughout the research project, particularly during the analysis phase (table 13)

Table 13. Considerations of 'Good' IPA Research (Smith et al., 2009)

Considerations as identified by Smith et al. (2009)	**Considerations within the presented research**
Appropriate participants which will yield appropriate data.	Participants were gathered through purposive sampling with an identified criterion (section 3.4.1).
Data that is idiographic in nature.	Individual experience is explored and noted within each theme.
An analysis process exploring meaning and understanding given by participants, and not just descriptive accounts of a phenomena.	Findings and Discussion chapter provides an overview of individual and shared experience, meaning making and relevant themes. Interpretation and meaning have been explored with relevance to themes.
An analysis process that incorporates, as appropriate, phenomenological and interpretative detail to gain an account of the phenomena.	Interpretation of data is based on existing literature and theories. Evidence is provided in the form of quotes to illustrate phenomenological and interpretative data.
Checking of data through supervision and/or peer support.	Peer supervision and tutor supervision used.
Transparent data analysis including commentary of examples of extrapolated data.	Quotations used within findings section. Transcript included in appendix ten.

Engagement with theory throughout analysis process.	Literature and theory reflected on within the analysis and discussion process.
Reflection and interpretation of context.	Pen portraits (section 4.2) provided to reflect the individual experience and context of each participant.
Engaging in reflexivity.	Reflected in chapter three (3.7.1). Research diary kept throughout the process reflecting on decisions and thoughts from conceptualisation of the idea until final write up stage.

The table demonstrates the consideration of Smith et al. (2009) IPA research factors prior to and during the analysis process. These factors are once again considered within the conclusion of the presented research.

3.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the methodology of IPA, with reference to the theoretical underpinnings of this research. The methodology considerations and alternative approaches have also been presented. Furthermore, the data collection, participants and recruitment process have been described. Lastly, the ethical considerations, analysis process and research quality have been discussed within the context of the presented research. The following chapter will discuss the findings in relation to participants' experience and the research question.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings and discussion of the data analysis process. Richardson (2000) argued that writing qualitative analysis in a narrative manner supports the analytical process, whilst Smith et al. (2009) proposed that findings and discussion can be considered together. Thomas (2017) also commented on the difficulty of detangling findings and discussion when writing an interpretive account of qualitative information. As such, the findings and discussion are presented together.

This chapter explores the superordinate themes that emerged across participants data. An overview of each participant's experience is also provided. Finally, this chapter provides links between the findings and the psychological theory and relevant research as discussed in chapter two.

4.2 Participants

Table 14 provides information for each participant regarding their unique experience of the school choice process.

Table 14. Overview of Participant Experience

Participant	Experience
Harshil (Parent) **Bhavik (Child)**	Harshil was married with three boys. He worked full-time. His older sons attended a secondary mainstream school and had previously attended the local mainstream primary school. His youngest son Bhavik has social communication needs and was on the diagnostic pathway for ASC. Harshil and his wife decided that they wanted Bhavik to attend a primary special school. Bhavik was attending a mainstream nursery at the time of the interview as they awaited confirmation of a placement.

	Harshil had previous experience with the EHCP process and the special school system. His nephew had been diagnosed with ASC and had attended a special school placement. Harshil had received support from his brother whom had been through a similar experience to him. His main concern at the point of interview was whether Bhavik would receive a diagnosis of ASC as he felt this would open up resources and provision that were not yet available to him. Harshil discussed how he had independently completed a lot of research and was willing to pay privately for resources, diagnosis and support if this would help his child.
Amy (Parent) **Isabel (Child)**	Amy was married and the mother to two young daughters. She worked part-time. Her oldest daughter (Isabel) had a diagnosis of ASC and at the time of the interview had started attending a special school. Her youngest daughter (Millie) was currently undergoing an investigation for social communication needs. Previously, Isabel had attended a mainstream nursery and had been attending a special school for one week at the time of the interview. Amy's experience of the school choice process was one characterised by stress and anxiety. She received a diagnosis of depression and anxiety whilst looking for a school place for her daughter and had to take sick leave from work. Amy initially wanted Isabel to attend mainstream school after she was advised this would be appropriate by a healthcare professional. When Isabel was four she attended a transition day at the local mainstream primary school which resulted in Amy receiving a phone call from the head teacher requesting her to pick up her daughter from the school. Amy reported that the head teacher told her that the school would not be able to meet Isabel's needs. Amy felt that she and her daughter had been discriminated against by this head teacher and subsequently reported this incident to Ofsted. This left Isabel attending her mainstream nursery for another year whilst Amy went through the statutory process, in order to access a special school placement for Isabel. The EHCP

	experience was characterised by a lack of communication and support from professionals working on the LA SEN administration team. Eventually Isabel received an EHCP and was able to secure a special school place.
Hannah (Parent) **Tom** **(Child)**	Hannah lived with her partner and her four children. She worked part-time. Tom was her youngest child and had a diagnosis of ASC. At the time of interview, Tom was attending a mainstream nursery although was in a smaller group and had secured a special school placement for September of the upcoming academic year. Hannah was concerned about the experience of choosing a school placement before she started looking at special schools. She felt she had been well supported by the professionals around her, in particular the nursery staff. She also talked about a wide support network of family members who helped her through the experience. Hannah was quite emotional during the interview and had been previously throughout the school choice process. She said she was much happier now but wants Tom to have the same school experience as her older children, which still worried her. Her older children attended mainstream schools and did not have any additional needs. She found the process stressful as she was not sure whether she was making the right choice, and did not feel sufficiently supported/guided by the LA.
Kelly (Parent) **Alistair (Ali)** **(Child)**	Kelly was married and had two older stepchildren and one biological child Alistair (Ali). She worked full-time from home. Ali had a diagnosis of ASC. The family had no previous experience of SEND prior to Ali's diagnosis. Previously, Ali had attended a mainstream nursery but at the time of the interview had been attending a special school for one week. Overall, Kelly had found the experience stressful and felt she needed more practical and emotional support and guidance from professionals and other parents. She felt that the support she did receive, in the form of a parent SEND workshop, had been anxiety

	inducing and not emotionally containing. Kelly reported feeling socially isolated from others and did not feel her wider family understood Ali's needs. She wanted to access parent workshops and/or support networks but was unsure where to go. During the school choice experience, she had initially decided to send Ali to the local mainstream primary school before being told she had received a place at a primary special school. Once she had been given this place, both her husband and Kelly decided the best place for Ali was at the special school. She continued to be concerned about what others may think when they are out in public and has received private counselling to support her own emotional needs throughout this experience.
Nicole (Parent) **Carl** **(Child)**	Nicole was married and had two sons. Nicole works part-time. Her oldest son (Richard) attends the local mainstream primary school. Carl, her youngest son, received a post-natal diagnosis of Down's syndrome. The family had no previous experience of SEND prior to Carl's diagnosis. Carl was yet to use words to communicate with others but used a range of signs, pictures and symbols. Nicole felt that everything was 'smooth' throughout the school choice process, which she felt was down to luck and parental knowledge and persistence. She received support from family and friends, some of whom had similar experiences with their own children. Nicole also described how she was active on online forums for parents with children with Down's syndrome. Before this experience, Nicole had felt she would have to fight for an EHCP and a school placement and was willing to go to tribunal to secure provision/placement. Fortunately this did not happen and there were no issues with her process. She reported that she found it stressful to decide between mainstream and special school but ultimately felt special school was the best place for Carl.

4.3 Overview of Themes

Six superordinate themes emerged from the data, with the majority of participants sharing similar accounts and experiences (table 15). Overlap of superordinate and

subordinate themes is a likely occurrence within IPA, and divergent and convergent accounts are included amongst participants to highlight both the individuality and commonality of experience (Larkin and Griffiths, 2004; Smith and Osborn, 2008).

The subthemes nestled within the superordinate themes were chosen as it felt they were representative of the experience of participants. Each superordinate theme will be presented in turn and discussed. Themes are exemplified with quotations from participants' interview data. The research question for this research is:

- How do parents experience choosing a special school placement for their pre-school child with SEND?

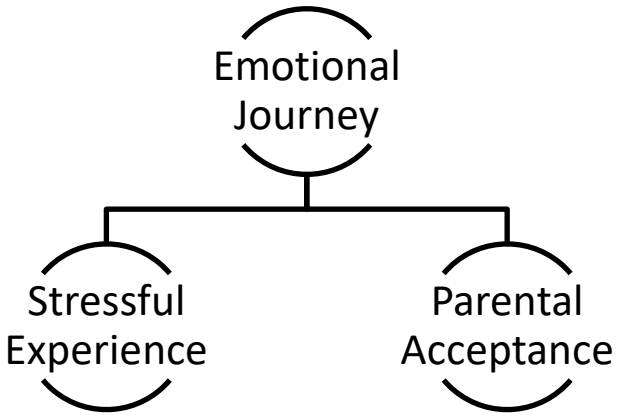
Table 15. Overview of Superordinate and related Subordinate Themes

Superordinate Themes	**Subordinate Themes**
Emotional Journey	Stressful Experience
	Parental Acceptance
A Balancing Act	Apprehension of Peers
	Searching for Belonging
Parental Role	Becoming a 'Fighter'
	Developing own Knowledge
Learning from Others	Support and Guidance from Others
Experience with Professionals	Supportive Relationships
	Unsupportive Relationships
	Professional Power and Influence
Limited Choice	Lack of Placement Options
	Sense of Rejection from Mainstream School

4.3.1 Superordinate Theme One: Emotional Journey

A prevalent theme that emerged from the data was the emotion that parents experienced. All of the parents described negative emotions felt during the school choice process. This emotional response resulted from a number of varying sources which are reflected within this theme and other superordinate themes. The complexity of these sources of stress highlights the nuances and individuality of the experience for parents. Furthermore, this theme also reflects emotional acceptance for some parents with regard to the needs of their children and special school.

Figure 6. Superordinate Theme One with Two Corresponding Subthemes



4.3.1.1 Subordinate Theme One: Stressful Experience

This theme was prevalent amongst the experience of all of the participants. The most significant emotional experience cited by the majority of participants was anxiety and stress. This has been reflected within the existing literature on the topic (Parson et al., 2009; Tissot, 2011; Lilley 2014; Bajwa-Patel and Devecchi, 2014; McNerney et al., 2015). Some participants commented generally on their emotions related to this choice, others specified areas that had been a source of stress.

Hannah: *"It does get really…yeah it was really difficult and emotional, I would cry and get upset about how to make these decisions but at the end of the day you've just got to. But yeah its daunting and scary, and you never know if you're making the right decision as parent and sometimes you look back and think I should have done something completely different but you just have to do what you can do…"*

Harshil: *"I just expect the worst…"*

Amy: *"It was terrible, my emotions, my sense of duty to myself and my child, to me mentally, everything was in limbo"*

Amy: *"Through the stress of it all I was diagnosed with depression and anxiety"*

Similar themes were discussed within McNerney et al.'s (2015) research as parents described the experience of choosing school as terrifying. For parents in McNerney et al.'s (2015) research, this emotion was the result of uncertainty over whether parents believed they were making the right choice. This mirrors Hannah's comments as she too described uncertainty over whether she made the "*right decision*". A finding that is also reflected in the literature base (Flewitt and Nind, 2007; Mann et al., 2015). This uncertainty in turn appears to have affected Hannah's emotional response and feelings within the situation (Danczak and Lea, 2017), resulting in her experiencing stress. Within Mann et al.'s. (2015) research parents also reported that the choice was characterised by stress and sadness. Again, this was due to a reported sense of guilt due to concerns over whether the parents had made the right choice.

The findings suggest that the group of parents may be demonstrating an internal locus of control which has extended to a sense of guilt and potential blame over their choice. This may hint that the parent group within the presented research felt they had control over their choice, but that control left them with a burden of uncertainty.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the lack of guidance and support from professionals was discussed by a number of participants as adding to this difficult emotional process. This finding is also reflected in the existing research base (Tissot, 2011; Lilley, 2014; McNerney et al., 2015). Although, supportive relationships were also discussed within their experience too. This will be further discussed in superordinate theme five. Furthermore, the timeframes and number of appointments were also commented upon by Harshil, Kelly and Hannah as a challenge during the process. This too has been reflected within the existing research by Tissot (2011) whom reported that parents found the school choice process time-consuming and bureaucratic.

For Amy, this process was conceptualised as being a significantly difficult experience.

Amy*: "I had a terrible breakdown"*

Amy*: "I ended up taking off time from work for more stress and anxiety. It was horrendous"*

Amy's experience was characterised by a perceived lack of communication and guidance from professionals, which she felt made her experience *"horrendous".* Her experience also resonates with Kelly, who sought private counselling as *"there isn't help for parents"* within the process. Their experience was similar to parents in Lilley's (2014) study whom discussed experiences of prejudice and rejection during the school choice process, leading to stress. This had a negative impact on their wellbeing, self-esteem and self-concept (Lilley, 2014), which may have occurred for Amy and Kelly.

When considering this within a framework of empowerment, Amy's perception of a lack of support may have impacted on her confidence and self-belief (Brown et al., 1986) within this process. This emotional experience for Amy may suggest she was feeling disempowered within the process as those who feel such a way can display

signs of stress (Koegel et al., 2003). Amy's earlier comment of feeling "*in limbo"* could also provide evidence that she was lacking a sense of control over the situation at this point, again contributing to her anxiety and stress and therefore leaving her feeling disempowered. This lack of control was reflected within Mann et al.'s. (2015) research as parents valued the ability to make their own decisions and have a sense of agency within the school choice process. Therefore, tentative links suggested from Amy's experience may have acted as a barrier to the development of empowerment.

For Hannah and Nicole, their experience was also characterised by stress and a negative emotional reaction. For these parents a prevalent aspect of the emotion attached to the school choice experience was when visiting a special school.

Nicole*: "It was quite a big decision to actually go into the special school I've probably cried in front of the EP, you know I have my moments where I get upset, and I did when I was going in there…it's different"*

Hannah*: "It's quite overwhelming to see children like Tom all together"*

This sense of feeling overwhelmed is also reflected within the literature (Bajwa-Patel and Devecchi, 2014; McNerney et al., 2015). This finding is similar to the experience of mothers in Rizvi's (2018) research who indicated that their unfamiliarity with special educational provision contributed to their sense of anxiety. Perhaps this can be explained through the expectations that Hannah and Nicole had developed for education. Russell (2003) discussed how previous experience can create expectations of school environments for parents. Both these parents had previously had children attend a mainstream school and therefore may have had pre-existing beliefs regarding education. Neither parents were familiar with special school placements which may have added to this anxiety.

In addition, the following comments by Kelly may also add credibility to this interpretation and indicate she had a similar experience when exploring special schools.

Kelly*: "The environment the atmosphere. It was a school. If I didn't know where I was. I would just think it's a private school"*

This view may indicate that Kelly also felt apprehensive about visiting a special school and was surprised by what she encountered. If we consider this view of special school through a disability framework, perhaps Kelly expected a place of segregation and an institution more in line with the medical model of disability (Rieser, 2015). Rieser (2015) previously commented that through the medical model of disability, a child may be segregated into a setting to be 'treated'. Perhaps the experience of visiting this setting reflected an environment that understood the needs of her child, reflecting an institution more in line with a social model of disability (Carrington and Elkins, 2002).

4.3.1.2 Subordinate Theme Two: Parental Acceptance

A subtheme that emerged within the emotional process of this experience was the acceptance of their children's SEND. Due to the young age of the children, it is likely that understanding and accepting of SEND co-occurred at a time where parents were reflecting on school placement options. For some parents, it may have been the experience of choosing a school placement itself that supported them to understand the needs of their children. Similar themes were identified within Tissot's (2011) research as parents described their journey to provision starting from understanding and accepting their children's needs. This research is mirrored in comments by Hannah and Nicole.

Hannah: *"That's where it all started, when I think back I think I always knew it before but as a parent you put it away and think…"*

Hannah: *"You start thinking maybe he will just start acting like them, but inside you know that's not right, but you do cling on to that hope sometimes, but yeah that's the only bit that was holding me back from special (school)"*

Nicole: *"I think deep down we always expected (special school) would be the right place for him"*

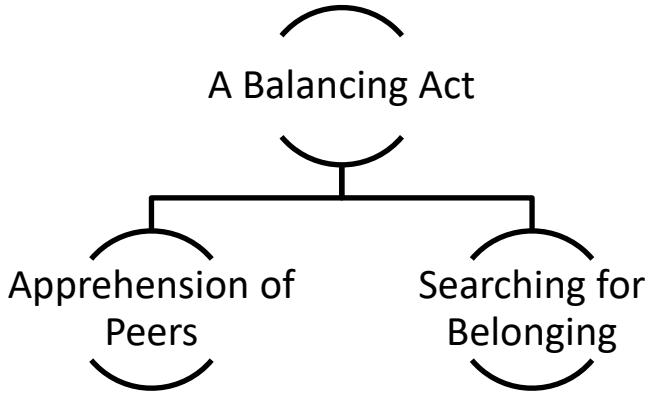
This finding is reflected in Rivzi's (2018) research with mothers who also discussed the process of acceptance of their child's SEND. Furthermore, parents within Hess et al. (2006) discussed the initial shock, fear and confusion they had after receiving a diagnosis of SEND for their children. However, in the experiences of parents in Hess et al. (2006), this feeling resulted in an adoption of an advocacy role.

The presented experience also echoes the final stage of the bereavement model, as discussed in relation to the parental acceptance of SEND (Connor, 1997; Roll-Petersson, 2001). The negative connotations associated with this model have been discussed in chapter two, but nevertheless it recognises the range of emotional responses parents may experience. Nicole and Hannah both appeared to engage in a level of avoidance before ultimately being faced with the options of school placement. However, for Nicole, this experience is presented as an inevitability. This may suggest that for Nicole special school was not a desirable choice, and instead one that she had to learn to accept.

4.3.2 Superordinate Theme Two: A Balancing Act

This theme reflects the experience of some of the parents in wanting to protect their children from negative social experiences whilst also wanting to find a place for them to belong. This included a sense of 'weighing up' options. Taking a holistic lens to the experience of school choice, the data suggests an emotionally complex situation, some aspects of which derived from specific concerns for their children. This desire may represent a recognition of the psychological need to belong; a fundamental need for human development (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). Although this theme will have likely influenced their choice of school placement, their experiences during the process of school choice is reflected below.

Figure 7. Superordinate Theme Two and Two Corresponding Subthemes.



4.3.2.1 Subordinate Theme One: Apprehension of Peers

Hannah and Nicole reflected on their apprehension of their children's peers. This concern seems to have shaped their experience, and although not the research question itself, influenced their choice of placement. This apprehension was both reflected within their concerns over the school environment, as well as their future-orientated thinking. This is perhaps unsurprising as research has suggested that children with SEND have fewer friendships and lower ratings of peer acceptance

(Webster and Carter, 2013), and has been cited as a concern for parents when considering schools (Jenkinson 1998; Leyser and Kirk, 2004).

Leyser and Kirk (2004) reported that one quarter of respondents in their survey of 437 parents were concerned about the social isolation their children may encounter within a mainstream school. Another quarter of respondents were uncertain about whether their children would face social isolation within a mainstream school. This research mirrors the comments of Nicole and Hannah.

Nicole*: "That's what with mainstream and integration and inclusion I was worried, very quickly, children would not play with Carl"*

Hannah*: "I just… the fear of his peers when he gets older…it's what pushed me towards specialist"*

It can be interpreted that parents' fear of social exclusion for their children was a key emotional response within their school choice experience. Interestingly, Hannah did not reflect on the possible opportunities of forming friendships within special school, suggesting her concerns were due to social isolation and not that of developing meaningful relationships. A similar theme was presented in Bajwa-Patel and Devecchi's (2014) research discussing negative factors of schooling. This finding may also reflect concerns felt by parents considering secondary school placement (Byrne, 2013; McNerney et al., 2015).

It can be speculated that previous personal beliefs and experience may have caused Hannah and Nicole to make subjective predictions regarding their children's futures, in line with parents within Russell's (2003) research. As previously described, Russell (2003) reported that direct experience with their children, significant others and societal views shaped parental expectations. From this viewpoint, perhaps the

concern for the social isolation of their children felt by Hannah and Nicole derived from their expectations of their child's ability to form friendships, and that of their experience of others. Further comments by Nicole may lend credibility to this interpretation.

> **Nicole**: *"So I thought well how could a non-verbal child possibly go to mainstream? I thought about how Richard had been when he started school, you know he made friends with the other boys who like superheroes and football. You know if Carl can't say I like football how can he mix?".*
>
> **Nicole**: *"It's for you know, children to understand that there are other children out there with additional needs…they might do things a bit slower than other children"*

Nicole espouses that it would be Carl's lack of communication that would act as a barrier in forming friendships, a view reflected in Bagley et al. (2001) on the influence of SEND on placement choice. Nicole appeared to adopt a within child view of Carl's possible difficulty to form friendships. However, Nicole also offers that it is the responsibility of peers to understand, and adapt, suggesting a view more in line with a social model of disability. Runswick-Cole (2008) and McNerney et al. (2015) both proposed that parents adopting a mindset in line with a social model of disability may be more inclined to favour mainstream. However, the data presented here suggests this as a complex process, in line with Rizvi's (2018) findings signifying she holds both beliefs simultaneously.

Notably, Nicole described a positive inclusive experience for her child within the nursery setting before ultimately choosing special school. Similarly, for Hannah, despite positive experiences of Tom and his peers, and the potential for positive role models for social interaction, she too remained apprehensive of a mainstream environment for developing peer relationships.

Hannah: *"He's able to learn from his peers and I just think children at the age of 3 and 4 are so inclusive and welcoming"*

Nicole: *"It definitely made me think I'm the one who's trying to…separate…not separate…. but almost separate from other people…I was worried about how people would react to him…so probably I didn't include him as much as I should have done"*

This is an interesting addition to the research as previous literature has suggested that negative experiences of inclusion in school can make parents more likely to choose a special school placement (Bagley et al., 2001; Leyser and Kirk, 2004). Whereas for Hannah a positive experience did not facilitate an expectation that primary school for Tom would be similar. This difference can perhaps be explained through negative bias which describes how individuals are more likely to ascribe more importance to negative experiences compared to positive experiences (Kanouse et al., 1972).

4.3.2.2 Subordinate Theme Two: Searching for Belonging

A subtheme that emerged reflected a sense of belonging. As discussed, humans are said to have a need to form a sense of belonging (Baumesier and Leary, 1995). The desire for their children to be accepted appeared to not only include acceptance within the school environment, but also at a wider societal level. This theme was apparent within Nicole's, Kelly's and Hannah's experiences, and has been previously reflected in the literature (Hess et al., 2006).

Nicole: *''And I always thought that I don't want Carl to go to a school where he is not wanted''*

Similarly, McNerney et al.'s (2015) participants reported a desire for school staff to understand and accept their child's needs. Nicole's choice of special school may be

her way of trying to find a community and staff accepting of Carl. Therefore, this finding may be construed as Carl's acceptance leading to a greater sense of social connectedness and belonging within a school community for both parent and child. This is similar to parents in Hess et al. (2006) who wanted to find a school that was welcoming and accepting of their children's needs.

For Kelly, as part of her school choice experience, she reflected on the feeling that her child was "*on the edge"* of society due to his needs.

> **Kelly***: ''You know 'they're not normal' that kind of …you know that they're not capable…with autism is very not true…it's kind of a bit hard to say, behind the borderline of society…on the edge''*

Kelly is commenting on how she feels society views her child. The medical model of disability may also provide some insight into her comments. With this view, Ali is defined by his needs, in this case ASC, and therefore he is segregated because of this (Oliver, 1990). This may suggest that Kelly believes the medical model of disability is a still a framework that others use to view her child.

Leyser and Kirk (2004) reported concerns from a quarter of parents surveyed, regarding being treated negatively by teachers and other parents within a mainstream school. Perhaps this affords us an insight into Kelly's concerns too. If previous experience has made Kelly feel her child is not seen as "*normal*" by society, then she may have construed that society will not accept him. Parents within Rizvi's (2018) research were also concerned about segregating their children and wanting to belong. However, the parents in Rizvi's (2018) research and Kelly differ in regard to how their experience has shaped their held beliefs. Within Rizvi's (2018) research, parents sought mainstream in response to this concern, whereas Kelly decided special school

placement was more suitable. Furthermore, when exploring placement options, a moment within a mainstream primary school seemed to be prominent for Amy and Kelly. For Kelly, it was seeing how mainstream primary school staff interacted with a child.

Kelly*: "We were visiting (a primary school)…We had a moment whilst waiting in the reception area, there was a boy crying in the corner who didn't want to go outside. I could spot it straight away that he was autistic. And these teachers, because the children have to be outside during the break, dead-end. Well he didn't want to move, autistic if they don't they don't. I think for them it's just too many kids for them in the playground. And nobody could…nobody was understanding… And they were just brushing him without looking. It really hurt my heart because I could see that child needed help…After that experience I thought, my son will not be dealt like this"*

Kelly*: "There wasn't any screaming or crying. We even had experience of how they deal with things. Because one little boy… he was upset with something…nobody was dragging him out of the classroom; no one was making a big deal out of it. On the way back, in two minutes he was already laughing in there. We just saw how differently it can be dealt"* (discussing special school placement)

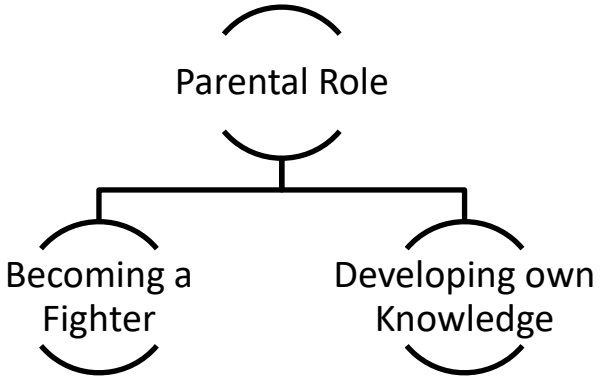
For Kelly, this experience seemed to shape her view of primary schools, and how well equipped they may be in supporting her child. This echoes the concern in various studies of whether mainstream schools can meet the needs of children with SEND (Bagley et al., 2001; Hess et al., 2006; Byrne 2013; Reilly et al., 2015; McNerney et al., 2015; Glenn-Applegate et al., 2016). In McNerney et al.'s. (2015) research, parents wanted a school with staff that were understanding and accepting of their child's needs. For Kelly, being able to directly compare a mainstream school experience to

one she had in a special school may have led her to construe that the special school was better equipped to support her child.

4.3.3 Superordinate Theme Three: Parental Role

Superordinate theme three represents the sense of personal and psychological growth amongst the participants. A prevalent experience for the group of parents was the adoption of a role of 'fighter' in order to access resources and provision for their children. Furthermore, parents developed their own knowledge to navigate the school choice process.

Figure 8. Superordinate Theme Three with Two Corresponding Subthemes.



4.3.3.1 Subordinate Theme One: Becoming a 'Fighter'

A convergent subtheme across participants was the construction of the parent as a fighter, categorised as the need to "*fight*" professionals for access to services and provision. Kelly (2005) reflected that parents of children with SEND often adopt parental advocacy skills in order to support their children. This theme is reflected in the existing literature (Hess et al., 2006; Tissot, 2011; Bajwa-Patel and Devecchi, 2014; McNerney et al., 2015, Mann et al., 2015).

Harshil: *"I've prepared for the worst, like a battle. I know we will have to fight. It's very tiring but the only solace that I've got is that I know if he gets what he needs it will all be worth it"*

Kelly: *"I think this year… journey we were ready to fight to the end; we were ready to go to tribunal"*

Nicole: *"I was expecting a fight which we ended up not having to have. I kind of built in contingency time for a battle"*

Similar findings were reported by Tissot (2011) who indicated that parents often expect this process to be challenging and therefore have to 'fight' for their rights. From Harshil's and Kelly's comments it can be inferred that they had developed expectations that the process was going to be difficult. For parents, this expectation may suggest a cognitive bias that proposes any challenges faced within the process will ultimately confirm the parents' view of their need to "*fight"*. The formation of this belief is further speculated in superordinate theme four.

Furthermore, this theme also reflects a similar argument suggested within McNerney et al.'s. (2015) research; choosing a placement for a child with SEND is arduous on the part of parents. Likening such an experience to that of "*fighting*" suggests a level of determination on the part of the parents to access a school placement. Moreover, similarities can also be seen within the Lamb Inquiry (2009). The Lamb Inquiry (2009, p.2) reported that parents can adopt "*warrior parents*" personas as parents view themselves as needing to fight for the rights of their children. When interpreting this data, it is important to consider this within the emotional process as discussed above. This construction of fighting may be the way parents would take a sense of control over the situation and reduce feelings of helplessness (Luong et al., 2009). Although most participants reported feeling a sense of control regarding the final placement

decision, this control may have developed through their own assertiveness and fighting. This is reflected in Knox et al.'s (2000) study which described the development of empowerment for parents of children with SEND. For parents in Knox et al.'s (2000) research, it was not the support of professionals that facilitated the development of empowerment, but rather the parents' own ability to assert their views, gather information and make their own decisions.

The literature has also cited how parents often adopt an advocacy role in order to gain access to resources for their children (Hess et al., 2006). However, what is noteworthy of Nicole's experience is, although she discussed fighting for provision, she also commented that she did not view herself as an advocate. Therefore, although interpretive in nature, caution needs to be taken when extrapolating such identity formation from the data.

This sense of fighting may also suggest an increased sense of self-efficacy and self-determination. Parents with a high level of self-efficacy may perceive they have a high ability to obtain certain provision and/or school placements by putting in greater effort. Both self-efficacy and self-determination have been linked to parental advocacy (Connor and Cavendish, 2018) and the development of a sense of empowerment.

Furthermore, Nicole and Kelly discussed the need for parents to be proactive within the situation.

Nicole*: "I wouldn't say it's down to us, but it almost was really because we started the process so early"*
Kelly: *"We were preparing for it and really researching. But I know that's not what many parents do from my experience"*

This distinction is interesting of how parents within this study constructed themselves compared to others. This may reflect how Kelly and Nicole have come to understand the way they have obtained a placement for their child and reflects an internal locus of control over the situation (Rotter, 1954). An internal locus of control has also been linked with self-efficacy (Rotter, 1966) and therefore may lend support towards the interpretation above.

4.3.3.2 Subordinate Theme Two: Developing own Knowledge

A subtheme within the role of the parent was the determination and development of knowledge through the school choice experience. There was a sense amongst the group of parents that independently researching the placement options was a part of the experience of school choice. Harshil, Amy, Kelly and Nicole all discussed how they had received minimal guidance regarding placement options.

Harshil*: "They literally just gave us a printout of all the schools. So what I've done is- so what I've looked at is the types of provision, OFSTED reports… I've done a lot of research myself. I've read a lot of books"*
Amy*: "No one told me (about provision) but I researched"*
Kelly*: "To be honest most of the information about everything we found out ourselves"*
Nicole*: "We had done a lot of reading, we got everything there was off the council website about the local offers. We felt that eventually we could navigate…the system"*

Similar to the theme above, it can be interpreted that the group of parents developed their own knowledge in order to support their sense of control and reduce negative feelings associated with this process (Luong et al., 2009). Additionally, these comments perhaps reflect the adoption of the 'para-professional' role as discussed by

Hodge and Runswick-Cole (2008) as an identity that parents form to help navigate the SEND system. For some parents within Hodge and Runswick-Cole (2008), this development of knowledge was empowering, but for others it was viewed negatively. Furthermore, the comments suggest that the presented group of parents did not receive knowledge and information from professionals, an act that has been shown to enable the development of empowerment and promote positive parent-professional relationships (Dunst, 1999; Turnbull et al., 2001). The capacity to feel a sense of determination in searching for the appropriate provision may therefore be in response to the lack of guidance provided by professionals.

A noteworthy finding is Nicole's comment regarding the process.

Nicole*: "I think, unusually, we had a fairly smooth process but I think that's probably because we were self-taught"*

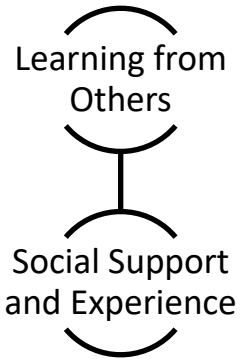
Nicole suggests that it was her own research and ability to navigate the school choice system which meant her experience was "*smooth*". This may indicate a high sense of internal control over the situation and that it was her own knowledge that ensured the experience went well. This can also be linked to comments made in Tissot's (2011) research that suggested parents had developed an expectation of the difficulty of the process. Therefore, Nicole's comments may suggest that she too had formed an expectation of the process. Again cognitive bias may explain how despite a *"smooth process*", Nicole did not believe that her experience was the norm.

4.3.4 Superordinate Theme Four: Learning from Others

The fourth superordinate theme reflects the learning and experience of family and friends. This theme discusses how participants learned and gained support from those around them. The influence of family and friends has been previously discussed within

the literature (Flewitt and Nind, 2007; Bryne, 2010; Bajwa-Patel and Devecchi, 2014; McNerney et al., 2015; Mann et al., 2015). The function of social support as a coping mechanism for parents of children with SEND has also been previously discussed (Boyd, 2002).

Figure 9. Superordinate Theme Four and Corresponding Subtheme.



4.3.4.1 Subordinate Theme One: Support and Guidance From Others

This subordinate theme was reflected in the experience of Harshil, Hannah, Nicole and Kelly regarding the social support and experience, or lack thereof, that they received. Russell (2003), using Bronfenbrenner ecological system theory (1979), proposed that parents develop expectations of school from the experience and opinions of those within their microsystem. This resembles the findings within the presented research as parents reflected on developing knowledge based on the opinion and experience of others.

Harshil: *"Because of my nephew. We don't know what's out there, but we had a bit more of an understanding than a household that doesn't have a special educational needs child in the house"*

Harshil: *"My brother has obviously gone through this whole situation. He's gone through a tribunal because they wouldn't add on ABA on to his EHCP"*

Nicole: *"But they told her they don't really want children with additional needs so you know the kind of options were based on schools that we knew, having spoken to parents"*

Learning from others can be explained through social modelling (Bandura, 1977). For Harshil, his brother had been through a similar experience which left him with knowledge of the system. Again, this theme may reflect why parents form expectations of the process as one that will be difficult, as they did within the presented research and within Tissot's (2011) research. For Harshil, Kelly and Nicole this meant expecting and preparing to be turned down for a placement and/or an EHCP which did not occur. This preparation may have led to a high sense of self-efficacy as they may have felt prepared to face challenges. This in turn may contribute to the development of a 'fighter' persona as discussed above. Therefore, it may be inferred that these expectations were developed from learning from others and reading online accounts and experiences.

The parents discussed how they utilised family and friends support and experience to help guide them during this process. This is a theme well documented within the research (Flewitt, and Nind, 2007; Byrne, 2013; McNerney et al., 2015). Of note, however, is how Nicole differentiated her experiences with friendships with other parents who did and did not have children with SEND. When discussing her friendships Nicole commented the following.

Nicole: *"They've been supportive when I've moaned, but they don't really know, don't understand"*

Nicole: *"It's really just from what I know from having spoken to parents in the area"*

For Nicole, empathy was not enough from her peers, she also wanted shared experience. This also reflected the view of Snow (2001) who reported that one can never truly understand the experience of parents of children with SEND without having a child with SEND themselves. McNerney et al. (2015) and Bajwa-Patel and Devecchi (2014) described how parents turned to others in similar situations i.e. parents of children with SEND, for advice with regards to school choice and placement. Therefore for Nicole a distinction of support and guidance was made dependent on the experience of the parents she spoke with. This can be explained through McNerney et al.'s (2015) finding that parents of children with SEND can feel that their decision is more difficult to make with regards to provision compared to parents without children with SEND. It is possible that Nicole placed a higher value on the information received from parents who have shared a similar experience. This theme also appears in line with Bradbury et al. (1994) finding that parents place higher value on information received from individuals who they have a trusting relationship with.

In contrast, a lack of social support and understanding was noted by Kelly resulting in her seeking professional help to support her own mental health needs.

Kelly*: "Not everyone will get their own family support from family or friends. We as a family felt very isolated"*

Kelly*: "It's just a big unknown land and it would be enough to just have other parents sharing their own experience"*

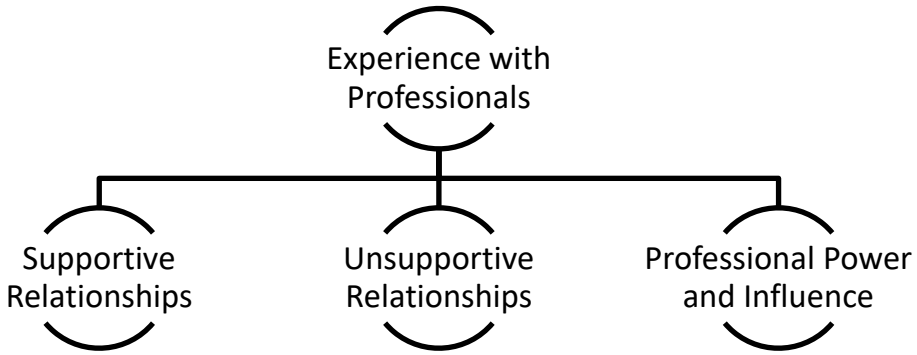
This sense of isolation was mirrored in findings by both Flewitt and Nind (2007) and Tissot (2011) and is thematically connected to subtheme 'Searching for Belonging'. However, in Tissot's (2011) research, this sense of isolation was experienced by parents of children with SEND attending a mainstream school. Perhaps, like

participants in Tissot's (2011) research, it is the lack of relatedness with others shared experience that has left Kelly feeling isolated. Interestingly, Amy also did not discuss a social network of support, which may have contributed to her high levels of stress. Kelly also reflected on ways that their stress could be improved, such as through parental networks, greater guidance from professionals and a wider form of understanding of SEND needs. Of note, Kelly appeared hopeful that with Ali starting at school, this would allow her to form connections with others which may lend weight to this interpretation.

4.3.5 Superordinate Theme Five: Experience with Professionals

The fifth superordinate theme that emerged was the experience of interacting with professionals. From these interactions, convergent and divergent experiences emerged within the data. For some parents, this offered an opportunity for support and guidance, for others it added to their experiences of stress. The power and influence that professionals exerted over participants was also reflected in the parents' accounts. This superordinate theme has been widely cited within the literature as impacting the parental experience of school choice, and the wider experience for parents of children with SEND (McNerney et al., 2015; Lilley, 2015; Rose et al., 2017).

Figure 10. Superordinate Theme Five and Three Corresponding Subthemes.



4.3.5.1 Subordinate Theme One: Supportive Relationships

Many of the parents discussed positive and collaborative experiences with nursery staff. This finding is consistent with existing literature (Bajwa-Patel and Devecchi, 2014; McNerney et al., 2015; Rose et al., 2017). Positive relationships with professionals have been previously linked with empowering parents (Dunst and Trivette, 1996; Epps and Jackson, 2000). This may echo the findings of Hess et al. (2006) who found that parents and school professionals that shared power promoted a sense of parental empowerment.

Specifically, nursery staff were highlighted as being supportive throughout the process for Amy, Hannah, Kelly and Nicole, for example:

Amy*: "The nursery….the professionals there are caring, we learned together"*
Amy*: "They really got behind us and recognised the need for a school place. They did their job but they offered me support because they clearly saw that I needed it and wasn't getting any"*

Hannah: *"Considering she (nursery carer) knew Tom the most and about the educational environment, what he's like at nursery and nursery is still the most like school"*

Similarly, parents within Bajwa-Patel and Devecchi's (2014) parental survey revealed that parents sought advice from their child's previous educational placement. This may be due to the formation of relationships with school staff, the importance of which was discussed by Glenn-Applegate et al. (2016). Amy, Hannah, Harshil, Kelly and Nicole all developed supportive relationships with the nursery staff. These relationships were characterised by good communication and proactive help as described by the participants. Amy's use of the phrase "*we learned together*" suggests it was a collaborative process between herself and the professionals, perhaps with a diminished power hierarchy as they were both perceived to be "*learning"*. For Amy, there was a common characteristic amongst the professionals that she found supportive within her school choice experience. This reflects the characteristics that have been regarded as important to the promotion of empowerment (Dunst, 1996; Turnbull et al., 2000; Dempsey and Dunst, 2004). These researchers proposed that it is through sharing of knowledge, empathy, active listening and promotion of parental participation in decision-making that empower parents.

Zimmerman (1995) also contended that empowerment involves a collaborative process of giving and receiving support. Dempsey and Dunst (2004) described different help-giving practices that were linked with higher levels of parental empowerment. The comments by Amy echo the relational style as described by Dempsey and Dunst (2004) as one that provides empathy and connectedness. It is also worth considering Jungerman et al. (2005) whom suggested people are more inclined to accept the advice of professionals who they view as credible and

trustworthy. It is possible that due to the formation of trusting relationships the parents were therefore more inclined to accept the advice and support from nursery staff.

In contrast, Nicole valued practical support from professionals mirroring findings from Mann et al. (2015). This highlights the individuality of the experience for each parent, and the importance of professionals adapting their response to suit parental needs (McNerney et al., 2015).

4.3.5.2 Subordinate Theme Two: Unsupportive Relationships

In contrast to the theme above, but consistent with the research base (Flewitt and Nind, 2007; Tissot, 2011; Bajwa-Patel and Devecchi, 2014), all of the participants discussed the challenges they faced with professionals. This in turn seemingly added to the stress of the experience for Hannah, Amy, Kelly, Harshil and Nicole, as discussed in superordinate theme one. Most notably it seemed to be difficulties with the LA SEND administration team, including a lack of communication and guidance.

Amy*: "(The LA SEND administration Team) communication was atrocious"*

Nicole*: "Nobody from the council ever said to me, you know these are the options…"*

Kelly*: "When it goes to (the LA SEND administration Team) it is a dead end. The don't keep to their deadlines, they will find a way to postpone the official deadlines or even backdate their official papers"*

Harshil*: "No one is actively supporting (us)"*

The LA has been cited as a source of information and guidance for parents when exploring school placement (Bagley et al., 2001), and can become a source of stress when this does not occur (Hess et al., 2006; Runswick-Cole, 2007; McNerney et al., 2015). For participants within Hess et al.'s (2006) research, parents felt they did not

have a voice within decision-making. This lack of communication and information has also been cited as a barrier to making an informed choice regarding provision (Parsons et al., 2009). In a comparison of parents of children with ASC and non-ASC needs, the parents in the ASC group were significantly less likely to perceive that they had received enough information to make an informed decision regarding school options. Furthermore, within Tissot's (2011) research, participants also reported that their most stressful experience was interacting with LA professionals. This appears to be similar to the experiences presented in the current research. Parents within Runswick-Cole's (2007) research also reported they believed that the LA seemingly withholding information had made parents feel devalued.

Tentatively the experience of parents suggests they may have perceived the interaction with professionals as one likened to the expert model of parent-partnership (Cunningham and Davis, 1985). This type of experience can lead to a reemphasising of the expert role of LA professionals through the control of sharing and access to knowledge for parents (Hornby, 1995; Runswick-Cole, 2007). These comments also represent the desire of parents to access advice and information from services, which too is reflected in the literature (Mann et al., 2015).

These findings are reminiscent of Runswick-Cole (2007) who commented that a feeling of conflict between parents and professionals is inevitable. Furthermore, Russell (2003) commented that parents can have expectations regarding the support they should be receiving from professionals. Experiences such as the ones described in this research may in turn mean parents form beliefs that professionals will not provide or will withhold support and guidance. Conversely, such experiences possibly will also provide further credence for parents in the belief that the school choice process will be difficult (Tissot, 2011).

Particularly focusing on Amy's experience, she commented on how she pursued professionals for further information.

> **Amy**: "*I tried calling (the LA SEN administration team) but I was told they weren't able to help. I went and tried to speak to them myself but again was fobbed off*"
>
> **Amy***: "I don't know if I expected too much but its modern days, this is not just education for special children, vulnerable children…it was if the authority didn't care"*

This lack of support in turn may have affected her sense of ability to control her circumstances. It is also relevant when considering Amy's experience to reflect on the findings of McNerney et al. (2015). McNerney et al. (2015) discussed how professionals working with parents can fail to recognise when they need support. A similar experience seems to have occurred for Amy. Furthermore, negative support from professionals has been noted as being counterproductive in supporting the development of parental empowerment (Hogan, Linden and Najarian, 2002).

4.3.5.3 Subordinate Theme Three: Professional Power and Influence

Another subordinate theme that emerged was the power and influence of professionals. For example, Harshil and Amy were referred by professionals to seek specific placements based on the professional's perception of the needs of their children. For Harshil, this meant exploring alternative provision to mainstream, whereas Amy was directed towards a mainstream school placement. This reflects the literature base as studies have highlighted the professional influence on parental choice (Flewitt and Nind, 2007; Byrne, 2013; Lilley, 2014). Parents of children with SEND reported feeling that professionals would use information to try and influence their choice (Mann et al., 2015; Rizvi, 2018).

Amy: *"Specialist paediatrician said it was okay for her to go to mainstream school…you know it was my first time so I was like I don't know"*

Positioning theory (Van Langenhove and Harré, 1999) could explain Amy's experience. Amy seems to have positioned the "*specialist*" as being more informed than herself, and therefore placing high value on the medical professional's knowledge. Within positioning theory, people devalue their own knowledge and skills (Van Langenhove and Harré, 1999), and therefore rely on professionals to guide their decision-making. This seems particularly apparent with Amy's use of "*I don't know*". Furthermore, Amy's language here may also reflect a sense of powerlessness within the situation and therefore a reliance on professionals (Ryndak, 1996). It also suggests that Amy relied on the expertise and knowledge of the professional, placing her in a passive position in line with the expert model of parent-partnership (Cunningham and Davis, 1985).

Similarly, parents may position themselves in such a way as needing specialist support, in this case special school provision. As a result, neither they, nor mainstream provision would be sufficient to meet the needs of their child. This appears reflected by comments made by Hannah and Kelly.

Hannah: *"We've decided specialist, it's available for him and I'd be a fool not to take it"*

Kelly: *"You know we were very aware that if we didn't take special school now we wouldn't get another chance"*

Therefore, the parents may have positioned special school placement within an expert role and feel that it would be the best place for their children.

Moreover, Harshil, Kelly and Nicole all discussed their experience of advice and influence from professionals regarding provision.

Harshil*: "We kind of are going on what his teachers at nursery are saying and they have emphasised that in terms of educational settings he won't be suitable for mainstream"*

Kelly*: "We were very close to nursery carers. His main carer had an autistic child herself so she had a lot of explicit knowledge herself. We had some people who had prior knowledge; they were indicating he will need special education"*

Nicole*: "If I'm honest it was probably her (NHS Speech and Language Therapist) who led me down the more special school path… You know apart from the experience of our NHS SALT that definitely had an influence on me"*

Parents within Rizvi's (2018) research reported that professionals accentuated their existing concerns regarding mainstream school as being unsuitable for their children. This is reflected in Harshil's comments.

The influence of professionals has been noted previously (Kenny et al., 2005; Lilley, 2014), often with professionals within mainstream education encouraging parents to explore specialist settings. For Harshil, Kelly and Hannah, they had formed relationships with the nursery staff, a finding that was discussed by Glenn-Applegate et al. (2016). As discussed, Jungerman et al. (2005) suggested people may be more inclined to accept the advice of professionals who they view as credible and trustworthy. From the examples above, each parent had formed a relationship with the professional giving them advice and so may have afforded more value to their views. Additionally, research has suggested that a trusting relationship can be more influential than actual information when interacting with professionals (Bradbury et al., 1994). Although the parents did not report that they lacked autonomy, these

interactions still raise a potential ethical consideration regarding the interactions and power dynamics between parents and professionals.

The manner in which the participants discussed the role of the EP is relevant to my practice. Amy, Hannah and Kelly commented on the supportive role of the EP within the process.

Amy*: "The EP was key…when EP came along everything made sense and it was the actual help my child needed"*

Hannah*: "EP was really good; she did explain to me and so did the SENCo at Tom's nursery because this was completely new to me"*

Kelly*: "And I would say, it was long wait until the EP came in, he came in and he was very brilliant"*

This finding is noteworthy as there has been documented research on the potential dissatisfaction of the working relationships between parents and EPs (Squire et al., 2007). However, these comments could also be interpreted as the EP being viewed as a 'gatekeeper'. Similarly, parents within Rose et al.'s (2017) research believed EPs were required in order to access support and resources. This seems particularly evident with Amy who discussed how the EP was "*key*" to accessing a special school placement. This 'gatekeeper' role may perpetuate the limiting of parental control and access to knowledge and information. Furthermore, the idea of "*key*" also has implications regarding who has the power and/or authority to give access to resources to others. This is similar to the view of Sewell (2016) when discussing power in relation to the information shared by EPs. This in turn may lead to the disempowerment of parents.

Of note is the reflection that Nicole discussed in regard to the potential power of professionals within this situation.

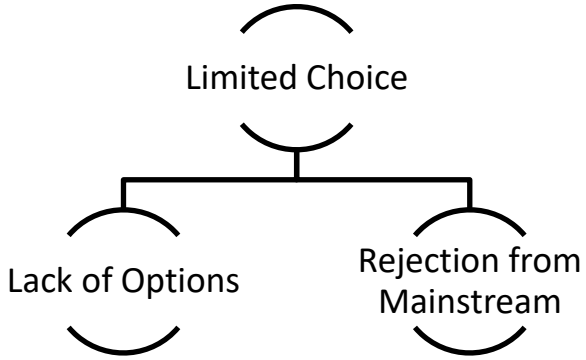
> **Nicole***: "EPs are all so different so we may have had an EP who went 'no your child can will be fine in mainstream'. That would have skewed the process if they're saying mainstream and we want special"*
>
> **Nicole***: "When I met the EP 'are you friend or foe?'. I didn't ask her that directly, but I wanted to know 'whose side are you on?'. Are you on the side of the council?"*

It is interesting to see how Nicole made sense of the professionals within her experience. For the professional she was unfamiliar with (EP), she constructed this person as a potential barrier or influence on her decision, or in her own words "*a foe*". This also further strengthens the earlier interpretation of parents adopting a 'fighter' role. This may be a reflection on the potential power dynamic that can form between professionals and parents. This also may be indicative of the uncertainty over the EP role that has been documented previously (Lawrence, 2014).

4.3.6 Superordinate Theme Six: Limited Choice

The final superordinate theme reflects the lack of choice perceived by the parents. This included the lack of placement options, and a sense of rejection from mainstream education. This theme is also echoed within the literature with parents finding a lack of authentic choice for educational placements (Kenny et al., 2005; Byrne, 2013; Lilley, 2014; Rizvi, 2018).

Figure 11. Superordinate Theme Six and Two Corresponding Subthemes.



4.3.6.1 Subordinate Theme One: Lack of Placement Options

A lack of placement options has been previously discussed in research in relation to parental choice of school placement (Flewitt and Nind, 2007; Glenn-Applegate et al., 2016). Parents in Flewitt and Nind's (2007) research indicated they felt limited in their options due to geographical location. This mirrors comments by Kelly and Nicole (below) who reported that it was the area they lived in that left them with limited choice.

> **Kelly**: *"We are not very lucky with the area here… Uh so we saw what was by our postcode. There was nothing suitable whatsoever"*
>
> **Nicole**: *"They happen to be at a (mainstream) school where there's only 12 in the class… exactly how you would hope mainstream might work but I don't think that's the reality, certainly not in this area"*

This lack of choice has previously been cited as a source of stress for parents (Tissot, 2011). In Nicole's experience, she was able to compare her school options to the options available to her peers. Again, this seems reminiscent of Russell's (2003) ecological perspective of the expectations of schools, as discussed above. This comparison therefore indicated she felt that she did not have the same options compared to others. It also may suggest that if mainstream schools were able to cater

for smaller class sizes then she may have considered this choice. The desire for small class sizes has also been cited as an influential factor for parents when choosing school placement (Runswick-Cole, 2008; Bajwa-Patel and Devecchi, 2014; Rizvi, 2018).

Harshil*: "I mean PECS is great but with the way ABA was it seemed like the way to go. It seemed to like fast track kids' development, so we were kind of looking at that… I don't think many other schools' round here do it"*

For Harshil, it was the comparison of available provision that left him feeling that there were limited options available. This may be likened to Glenn-Applegate et al.'s (2016) study of 54 parents of pre-school aged children with SEND. They found 30% of parents reported that their current pre-school placement was their only option, indicating a lack of choice. They hypothesised it was due to location, and a limited number of special education programmes that caused this outcome. When reflecting on this finding within the context of policy, it can be argued that the market theory approach has not extended towards SEND provision if parents lack options.

4.3.6.2 Subordinate Theme Two: Sense of Rejection from Mainstream School

This subtheme reflects the experience of parents feeling a sense of rejection from mainstream school, a finding that is prevalent within the literature (Bagley and Woods, 1998; Kenny et al., 2005; Runswick-Cole, 2007; Bryne, 2010; Bajwa-Patel and Devecchi, 2014; Lilley, 2014; Mann et al., 2015).

Kelly*: "Some schools when you mention special needs, the teacher's sort of freak out and getting scared"*

Nicole*: "Having met with primary school head teacher and SENCo it became quickly apparent really that whilst they were nice and happy to have a*

conversation with us…That they…probably couldn't meet his needs. They say it in such a delicate way"

Amy*: "There was no inclusion. I thought there would be inclusion"*

Amy*: "We didn't want her to drown, throw her in the deep end, and fight her way out"*

Kelly, Nicole and Amy also seemed to share a similar experience when interacting with mainstream school staff, as discussed by participants in Lilley's (2014) and Mann et al.'s (2015) research. Parents in Lilley's (2014, p.6) research discussed disclosing to mainstream staff the needs of their child. Staff responded with *"panic at the potential disorder being unleased on their school*". Lilley (2014) surmised that 'school gatekeepers' react in such a way to keep children out. This narrative has also been discussed in other literature, speculating that school-based professionals may act in such a way due to the academic drive from the government (Bagley and Woods, 1998; Bajwa-Patel and Devecchi, 2014).

Kenny et al. (2005, p.16) also discussed how parents have had to advocate and "*beg*" to access mainstream school. When considering this within the context of superordinate theme two (A Balancing Act), and specifically the subtheme 'Searching for Belonging', parents may interpret such experiences as unwelcoming. This may have left Kelly, Nicole and Amy feeling a lack of school options and with a sense of rejection from mainstream. For Amy her experience of considering mainstream primary school resulted in her reporting the head teacher to Ofsted for discrimination. This reflects an extreme example of a similar theme identified in Flewitt and Nind (2007) as parents commented on the sense of rejection when visiting possible school options. Amy made sense of this experience as a lack of belief or investment in inclusion on the part of some mainstream schools. Similarly, Runswick-Cole (2008)

discussed how a hostile school culture acts as a barrier to mainstream education, which seems relevant to the experiences presented.

Previous experience of the mainstream education system also provided insight for Hannah and Harshil.

Hannah*: "I had an idea of what mainstream was like because of my older children. I went to look at a couple of special schools"*
Harshil*: "Like my other two boys go to mainstream and I've seen how they handle kids who need extra development"*

Harshil and Hannah's comments suggest that this previous knowledge may have acted as a deterrent to choosing a mainstream setting.

Mann et al. (2015) reflected on the need for parents to feel that they have an authentic choice in decision-making for school placement. Without this choice, and with this rejection, parents will likely lack a sense of control within this process. Finally, when Amy did choose her special school placement options she reported that she *"wasn't given any of the choices I wanted"* contrasting further with the choice market ideology of the education system.

4.4. Reflecting on Parental Empowerment

Reflecting on the psychological theory as discussed in chapter two may allow further insight into the experiences of the group of parents presented within this research. As previously stated, the experiences described are unique to the participants and therefore no generalisations can, or should, be made.

Parental empowerment is described as the way parents use their own skills and knowledge in order to reach a goal or gain a sense of control (Dempsey and Dunst,

2004). As previously discussed, Zimmerman (1995) contended that for empowerment to develop, there needs to be a collaborative dynamic of giving and receiving support. Positive and negative experiences with others can promote or attenuate this development (Hogan et al., 2002; Dunst and Dempsy, 2009). Therefore within the presented research, empowerment is viewed within the social interactions and relationships occurring through the school choice experience (Page and Czuba, 1999). When considering the relationships described above, the parents received this type of support through professional and personal relationships. Shared learning, practical and emotional guidance and support reflect characteristics that have been deemed important to the promotion of empowerment (Dunst, 1996; Turnbull et al., 2000; Dempsey and Dunst 2004). Dempsey and Dunst (2004) hypothesised that practical and relational help-giving styles can promote a sense of empowerment. This seemed to reflect the value that parents placed on the emotional and practical guidance they received from others. High quality parent-professional partnerships have been described as fundamental to empowering parents (Dunst and Trivette, 1996; Hess et al., 2006), and seemed to occur between some of the parents and professionals, for example between Hannah and the nursery staff. In turn, these collaborative relationships may have supported the development of characteristics associated with empowerment such as self-efficacy, self-determination and a sense of control (Rappaport, 1987).

Many of the parents displayed determination in the form of gaining information and knowledge in order to guide their choice. For example, Harshil was determined to find the right placement for his son through any available means. However, this can be viewed as a response to the lack of guidance and support reported by some parents. This perception may have led to a sense of self-efficacy as parents may have felt they

were prepared to face challenges, although the emotional experiences of uncertainty and stress may suggest that this did not occur. More specifically, Dempsey and Dunst (2004) hypothesised it was the sense of control that would lead to empowerment for parents. All of the parents reported that they believed the choice was their own in regard to educational placement. Furthermore, the uncertainty and guilt displayed by some parents may also suggest an internal locus of control. They placed blame and pressurised themselves as to whether they were 'making the right choice'. However, not all of the experiences described appeared in line with the promotion of empowerment. Some of the parents spoke of a lack of support from professionals. For example, Amy reported feeling *"in limbo*" suggesting this did not occur within her experience, which in turn may have been a barrier to the development of empowerment. Dempsey and Dunst (2004) also suggested that this process should be collaborative in order to promote a sense of parental control which did not always occur within the accounts of the parents.

Previous research has suggested that parents who do not have a sense of empowerment can experience stress and frustration (Koegel et a., 2003). Tentative links can be made between this hypothesis and the feelings experienced by parents within the presented research. Although, a variety of reasons were suggested for this stress, a key source was that of a lack of communication and support from professionals.

Empowerment has been noted as being time and context specific, but past experience can impact on the development of empowerment (Dunst et al., 1999). Therefore, the accounts reflected within the presented research may suggest that within certain relationships, the parent group displayed characteristics in line with developing a sense of empowerment. However, this was not true for all dynamics or parental

experiences. Furthermore, the experiences described here may shape future expectations and feelings of control and self-efficacy for further engagement with professionals and the educational system as a whole.

4.5 Reflecting on Parent-Partnership Models

The following section discusses the parent-partnership models as described in section 2.3.2 within the context of the presented findings. Parents navigating and experiencing the process of choosing a special school were likely to interact with professionals to understand and explore potential and appropriate provision. This is reflected within superordinate theme five ‘Experience with Professionals’.

Parent-professional partnership models have been proposed to reflect the differing power dynamics that may emerge within the parent-professional relationship. This dynamic has also been positioned as integral to understanding the development of parental empowerment (Wolfendale, 1992; Todd and Jones, 2003). Thus, reflection regarding the presented findings may offer further insight into the presented phenomena

An interesting finding within the experience of participants was the dynamic between parents and professionals that appeared to be reminiscent of an Expert Model of working. The Expert Model (Cunningham and Davis, 1985) positions parents within a role of passivity in which they are reliant on professionals for their expertise (Davis and Meltzer, 2007). Tentative links can be made between the parents’ experiences and some of the relationships they had with professionals which may have led to a sense of disempowerment as described above. This appeared particularly relevant for Amy’s experience as her reliance on professional opinion may have left her lacking a sense of control within the school choice process. Moreover, the lack of collaboration

and the perception of the LA professionals withholding information may also have led to accentuating an expert dynamic between professionals and parents. This in turn may have led parents to devalue their own knowledge, which may have occurred for Amy within her school choice experience. This can also perhaps explain the perception of conflict by participants when discussing the school choice process as parents may have felt devalued by this dynamic (Dale, 1996).

Alternatively, the experiences described may also relate to the Transplant Model of parent-partnership (Cunningham and Davis, 1984). Like the Expert Model, parents within this model are instructed on the best way to educate their children by professionals (Beveridge, 2013). This places parents within a co-education role and can lead to the devaluing of parental knowledge as professional opinion is respected more. It can be speculated that parents adopted similar views as the professionals they worked closely with in the presented findings. For example, Nicole appeared to be influenced by the views of the SALT professional she worked closely with. This may suggest a dynamic like that of the Transplant Model was occurring within this interaction. This may also echo how parents appeared to adopt a para-professional role to ensure they are listened to and given rights. Through the development of a relationship with professionals and the transferring of knowledge, the parents own views may have changed to be more in line with the professionals they worked closely with. Conversely, many of the parents discussed a sense of rejection from mainstream schooling as teaching staff reported that they could not meet the needs of their children. Parents may too have adopted this opinion as their own suggesting a transference of viewpoint on how best to educate their children.

A further model that was discussed within chapter two as potentially relevant to the school choice experience was the Consumer Model (Cunningham and Davis, 1985).

This was due to the school choice narrative and market values espoused in policy and literature. However, the limited choice felt by parents suggests that this model was not apparent as participants lacked authentic choice and a sense of inclusion within their school options. Vincent (2000) criticised the use of this model as placing parents within a position where there could be a mismatch between what they actually want and what professionals believe they want. Perhaps the lack of placement options, as reflected in superordinate theme six, was in part due to this disconnect between what parents wanted from a school and what professionals believed they wanted. This may suggest that policy positions parents within this consumer model but is failing to meet the needs of service users.

Conversely, another critique of this model was the reliance on parental knowledge and experience of their child to inform their decision-making regarding appropriate provision without the appropriate support from professionals (Beveridge, 2013). The lack of information and guidance that parents felt they received may suggest that professionals adopted elements of this model as they placed parents in a consumer role and not one of collaborative working. This again suggests that although a consumer market is apparent, professionals working with parents are not ensuring their needs are met in order to make well informed decisions.

The Empowerment Model (Appleton and Minchom, 1991) was also discussed within chapter two as potentially relevant to the experience of parents. This model was positioned as a way for professionals to promote a sense of control for parents (Appleton and Minchom, 1991). As reflected above, aspects of the positive dynamics may have helped to promote a sense of empowerment for parents as they reported they felt a sense of control over their choice of school placement. However, many of the experiences described were not empowering and thus parents may have adopted

certain skills to overcome this sense of disempowerment, as described in section 4.4. This model fails to outline how professionals should promote empowerment when working with parents (Dale, 1996), therefore it is difficult to speculate beyond section 4.4 as to whether this dynamic emerged within the parent-professional relationship.

An alternative model to the Empowerment Model is the Negotiating Model proposed by Dale (1996). It is possible that a process of discussion and negotiation may have occurred to find suitable placement with professionals, however this was not reflected by participants within the findings. The interactions described as collaborative, an aspect that this model emphasises, may be more fittingly represented by the Family Partnership Model (Davis, Day and Bidmead, 2002). Nevertheless, perhaps the expectations of the school choice process that parents had may suggest they believed a period of negotiation would occur. The participants described a belief that they would have to fight for their rights which suggests that they thought an aspect of consultation and discussion should occur. Although their use of the phrase ‘fight’ as discussed within superordinate theme three also suggests that they did not believe this would be a positive and collaborative process.

The Family Partnership Model (Davis, Day and Bidmead, 2002) emphasizes the importance of helper qualities and skills by professionals. Skills that are promoted within this model include active listening, problem solving, empathy, emotional attunement and good communication. This model proposes that with these helper qualities, accompanied by knowledge and respecting individual family differences, families will become equal partners with professionals (Davis, Day and Bidmead, 2002). This in turn will promote shared decision making (Davis, Day and Bidmead, 2002).

Positive relationships described by participants can be likened to that of professionals adopting aspects of the Family Partnership Model. For example, parents described collaborative working styles and positive communication with professionals. This in turn appeared to support the development of positive working relationships. These skills can also be likened to those described above as reminiscent of the relational skills of empowerment (Dempsey and Dunst, 2004). Furthermore, the parents also described how professionals were knowledgeable regarding the needs of their children which may suggest the adoption of this model by professionals through respecting individual family difference. However, this model also proposes that professionals should support families in accessing information, which did not appear to occur within the presented findings. The school choice process, as described by participants, did not reflect a helping process and therefore suggests that although some professionals appeared to adopt skills in line with this model, not all did or were able to do so.

When reflecting upon the experiences of participants and the relationships discussed with professionals, many elements of the models discussed seem apparent. This may suggest that in the views of participants, professionals are not working from a universal and collaborative model of parent-partnership. These models have been suggested to be context and need specific (Thomas and Vaughn, 2004*)* and therefore the participants may have experienced a variety of differing professional interactions and power dynamics. Interactions reminiscent of the Family Partnership Model that embraced helper qualities appeared to promote positive and collaborative relationships. Those that were perceived as negative seemed to be underpinned by the characteristics likened to the Expert Model of professional practice. Therefore, perhaps further support is needed to support professionals in developing and promoting parent-professional partnerships in line with the needs of parents.

4.6 Answering the Research Question

How do parents experience choosing a special school place for their pre-school child with SEND?

This chapter has explored the superordinate and subordinate themes identified within the interview data using IPA methodology. This small-scale study revealed that for the participants within this research, choosing a special school placement was a multifaceted experience. The participants' stories emphasised the individuality of their experience but, nevertheless, common and overlapping themes emerged.

Overall, the experience varied for the participants however many reported that was a stressful period of time. There were a multitude of factors contributing to this emotional response consistent with the literature, including:

- Limited social support (Flewitt and Nind, 2007; Tissot, 2011);
- Limited professional support and communication (Parsons et al., 2009; Tissot 2011; Lilley, 2014; McNerney et al., 2015);
- Bureaucratic nature of process (Tissot, 2011);
- Uncertainty over choice (Flewitt and Nind, 2007; Mann et al., 2015; McNerney et al., 2015);
- Enormity of the decision (Bajwa-Patel and Devecchi, 2014; McNerney et al., 2015).

Some of the parents related their stress to the lack of support and guidance from friends, family and professionals throughout their experience. Many of the parents reflected on the difficulty and enormity of the decision, and for Kelly and Amy, this meant turning to mental health professionals for support. This raises an ethical consideration for parents who may need such support but are unable to access it during the school choice process.

Many of the parents discussed positive and collaborative experiences when working with professionals, as discussed in the literature (Bajwa-Patel and Devecchi, 2014; McNerney et al., 2015; Rose et al., 2017), offering both practical and emotional support. The group demonstrated variability in what they would want from professionals, demonstrating the significance of respecting the individuality of each parent's experiences, and the importance of professionals adapting to said experience.

In contrast, the parents also discussed incidences when they believed professionals were not supportive within their school choice experience. Consistent with the literature, the participants discussed the lack of appropriate guidance and communication that they encountered (Tissot, 2011; Bajwa-Patel and Devecchi, 2014). Despite the call for accessible and transparent support within the Lamb Enquiry (2009), and collaborative working promoted in the latest CoP (DfE/DH, 2015), some of the parents' comments suggest that this was not always their perceived experience. The power and influence of professionals also appeared salient within their experience, which too reflects the existing literature (Kenny et al., 2005; Lilley, 2014). Some parents reported that they had received advice from other professionals regarding placement, whilst others reflected that they had been explicitly told what type of placement was suitable, or not suitable, for their children. Although parents did not report that they lacked autonomy, professional practice should consider and reflect on the potential power dynamic that may emerge within this experience. This discrepancy between the varying experiences with professionals may suggest a lack of 'joint-up working' as espoused in the CoP (DfE/DH, 2015).

The parental group within this research also reflected on instances where they had felt rejected by mainstream school educators. This mirrors the findings of Lilley (2014) and

Rizvi (2018) who found that professionals would try and persuade parents not to choose mainstream education for their children. Byrne (2013) also highlighted that parents can perceive that they do not have a choice in this process, and that they were advised by professionals and those around them to choose particular provisions. This too suggests that despite the CoP (DfE/DH, 2015), parents are not being given an authentic choice of types of educational placements. Furthermore, despite the school choice market, the experience is often characterised by a lack of options and compromise.

The sense of acceptance of their child's needs was also discussed by some parents. This reflects Tissot's (2011) research who found that parents often conceptualised their journey of school choice as starting from when their child's needs were professionally recognised. It is possible that these two experiences i.e. deciding on school provision, and accepting the needs of their children, are occurring simultaneously (Rizvi, 2018). Therefore, professionals should be mindful about the kind of emotional and practical support they provide. Thematically related was the apprehension some parents experienced when visiting a special school for the first time. This unfamiliarly was also mirrored in Rizvi's (2018) research.

Concern regarding their child's social relationships within primary school was a consideration within the experience of many of the parents. This concern has been reflected by Jenkinson (1998) and Leyser and Kirk (2004) who noted that this can influence parental placement decisions. What is interesting is how parents' views within the presented study differed to that of parents in McNerney's et al.'s (2015) research. McNerney et al. (2015) reported parents were concerned with excluding their children from their peer group within the community in which they lived if they attended a special school, in contrast to the views of parents presented here. The

parents also reflected on the ability of their own children to develop relationships due to their additional needs, seemingly making sense of their needs through both a social and medical model of disability.

Additionally, the parents also reflected on the desire to form a sense of belonging within a school community, for both themselves and their children. This reflects a need to belong (Baumesier and Leary, 1995) and has been related previously to school choice (Hess et al., 2006). However, their previous experience of inclusion with peers did not seem to provide comfort or hope that their child's peers would be accepting. For parents within the presented research the concern regarding social isolation happened earlier within the educational life of their children, in comparison to the parents within McNerney et al. (2015).

The experience also signified a change in role for the group who felt they needed to adopt the persona of 'fighting' for a school placement. This theme has been previously discussed in the existing literature (Hess et al., 2006; Tissot, 2011; Bajwa-Patel and Devecchi, 2014; Mann et al., 2015; McNerney et al., 2015). When considering how this view was formulated, the group discussed learning from other parents through social and family networks, as well as online accounts. The group of parents placed importance on the information received from parents who had shared a similar experience. This may have created a perception that the process was going to be difficult, as discussed within Tissot's (2011) research. Some of the experiences that they had whilst liaising with professionals and the overall stress of the situation may therefore have confirmed this view of difficulty. The group of parents demonstrated high levels of effort and determination in order to access knowledge and information to help inform their choices. Similarities can be drawn with the Lamb Inquiry (2009) which also discussed the need parents felt to 'fight' for their children's rights. It is

interesting to reflect that these experiences are continuing under the latest CoP (DfE/DH, 2015).

Overall, this experience for parents remains complex with differing individual accounts and priorities. Amongst the majority of participants was a need for further support and guidance throughout this experience, and a level of emotional distress. Although most participants reported feeling a sense of control regarding the final placement decision, it seemed this was through their own effort and determination that they have been able to do so (Knox et al., 2000). Furthermore, this final decision of placement was viewed as their choice by the parental group, but it should be acknowledged that their experiences suggest that it was a choice made with constraints.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a conclusion to this research study with reference to the main findings. This chapter also provides a critical review of the research. These findings are discussed in relation to possible implications for practice for both educational psychologists and educational professionals. Finally, possible directions for future research are considered.

5.2 Summary and Unique Contribution

This small-scale study reflects the unique and shared accounts of five individuals regarding their experience of choosing a special school placement for their pre-school children with SEND. This research contributes to the understanding of parents choosing a special school placement for primary-school aged children which has had limited research within England (Parsons et al., 2009; Tissot 2011; Bajwa-Patel and Devecchi, 2014; Lilley 2014; McNerney et al. 2015; Mann et al. 2015; Rizvi 2018). As discussed above, the parental experience was complex and nuanced with a variety of interpersonal interactions both supporting and hindering the process.

The experience for the parents was characterised by stress, worry and uncertainty regarding their school choice. These emotional challenges were also compounded by varying levels of guidance and support from professionals involved within this process. A reflection on the level of influence and power that professionals had within this experience was also apparent, and an important consideration for the ethical practice of professionals. An adoption of a ‘fighter’ identity was experienced by the majority of parents, and seemed a way in which to take control over the situation they found themselves in.

The experience for this group of parents was also characterised by a high level of independent learning. Although many parents characterised their experience as one of isolation and self-learning, others reflected on the families, friends and professionals who worked with them throughout the process. Many parents turned to others who had been in a similar situation to seek guidance and support. For those who were supported by professionals, this relationship was developed on a basis of mutual collaboration and support, a finding previously highlighted within the literature (Bajwa-Patel and Devecchi, 2014).

IPA cautions against making generalised claims regarding findings due in part to its small sample size and interpretive nature (Noon, 2018), as previously discussed in chapter three. However, this does not mean that IPA does not have value as findings are situated within relevant psychological models and theories. Furthermore, theoretical generalisability, also known as theoretical transferability, has been discussed in relation to IPA. Theoretical transferability has been described as the degree to which qualitative findings can be transferred to other contexts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Smith and Osborn (2003) discussed theoretical transferability as a way in which links can be drawn between the research context, existing literature, research findings, and a reader's professional and/or personal experience. Therefore, an in-depth understanding of the research context and process provided by the researcher will help to facilitate the potential to generate transferable findings (Smith et al., 2009). To support the transferability of the presented research, participant information has been shared to allow readers to reflect on whether the findings and implications are applicable to other contexts (Smith et al., 2009). Furthermore, relevant literature in relation to the sample and phenomena have been discussed and applied to the findings, which again supports the transferability of the research (Smith 2009).

Additionally, the transparency of the research process has been previously reflected upon in section 3.8.

Caution should be taken when considering the unique contribution of the research findings due to the small sample size and uniqueness of experience. Nevertheless, the value in the presented findings lie in the contribution to the limited research base within England to date. This is particularly true for research after the latest CoP (DFE/DH, 2015) and CFA (2014). Additionally, empowerment was used as a framework to explore the experience of parents within this unique process. This research also further supports IPA as a methodology helpful in eliciting views and experiences of parents.

5.3 Research Critique

5.3.1 Strengths of the Research

A strength of this research is the potential contribution to the existing studies regarding the experiences of parents making school choices for their children with SEND (Tissot, 2011; Lilley, 2014; McNerney et al., 2015; Rizvi, 2018). Although the aim of this research was not to produce generalisable results, the findings can contribute to the existing knowledge base. Previous research has predominantly focused on the factors and influences on this decision-making process. Although a clear theme within the data, this research provided attention to the emotional and psychological processes that parents have experienced. Furthermore, this study has contributed to the voice of parents within wider research and supported them to share their individual views.

Yardley (2000) discussed the importance of a transparent analysis process to provide validity to data. As a novice researcher in IPA, I sought guidance and support from others familiar with the method through supervision to reduce researcher bias and

review themes. Research positionality and potential bias have been commented on within this research, and a process of bracketing occurred to provide further transparency. I have also presented the analysis process to aid readers in their understanding of the superordinate and subthemes within the findings. The trustworthiness of the data has been reflected on in chapter three with the use of the Yardley (2000) framework. In addition, I reflected on the considerations of IPA as outlined by Smith et al. (2009) to review the presented research (chapter three and table 16).

Table 16. Smith et al. (2009) post-analysis considerations for IPA research.

Considerations as identified by Smith et al. (2009)	**Considerations within the presented research**	**Reflection on the presented research post-analysis**
Appropriate participants which will yield appropriate data.	Participants were gathered through purposive sampling with an identified criterion (chapter three).	Further attention should have been afforded to demographic information, including gender and SES. Mawene and Bal (2018) demonstrate that this may influence experience. Additionally, more attention should have been afforded to the nature of the needs of the children as this has been seen to also influence the views of parents. For example, parents of children with ASC have had higher rates of dissatisfaction with school provision (Parsons et al., 2009). Additionally, participants were English speaking due to the limitations of the interviewer. Therefore, this will have prevented some participants from being included.

Data that is idiographic in nature	Individual experience is explored and noted within each theme.	Due to the nature of the data, and restrictions of the thesis, relevant experiences had to be restricted and therefore potentially valuable data was lost.
An analysis process that explores meaning and understanding given by participants, and not just descriptive accounts of a phenomena.	Chapter four (Findings and Discussion) section provides an overview of individual and shared experience. Interpretation and meaning have been explored with relevance to themes.	This analysis is likely to have been restricted due to the researcher's knowledge. Analysis is likely to have benefited from further conceptual and theoretical ideas but this is dependent on the researcher's skills.
An analysis process that incorporates, as appropriate, phenomenological and interpretive detail to gain an account of the phenomena.	Interpretation of data is based on existing literature and theories. Evidence is provided in the form of quotes to illustrate phenomenological and interpretative data.	Allowing participants to review and feedback on their themes may have provided further validity to the process (Yardley, 2017). However this was not possible due to the restraints of the process. Instead a process of checking with peers and supervisors was utilised.
Checking of data through supervision and/or peer support.	Peer supervision and tutor supervision used.	Likely researcher bias still occurred. Themes could have been shared with participants as discussed above.

Transparent data analysis including commentary of examples of extrapolated data,	Quotations within chapter four included. Transcript included in appendix ten.	Analysis process described with quotations. However, it is still likely that the researcher's own bias influenced the analysis process.
Engagement with theory throughout analysis process.	Literature and theory reflected on within the analysis and discussion process.	This is potentially limited, again due to the skills of the researcher. Furthermore, potentially relevant theories were not explored due to thesis restrictions as discussed below.
Reflection and interpretation of context.	Pen portraits provided to reflect the individual experience and context of each participant.	Discussion and critique offer reflection on the findings and participants experiences.
Engaging in reflexivity.	Reflected in chapter three.	Appendix nine offers further insight.

5.3.2 Limitations of the Research

In addition to the above, there are also a variety of limitations apparent. Reflecting on the literature review, the search was restricted due to word limitations and terminology used. Therefore, relevant areas have potentially been missed. For example, research relevant to the general parental experience of children with SEND and research focusing on the transition experience may have afforded relevant areas of insight. Furthermore, decision-making cognitive processes were not discussed but may have supported the findings. Similarly, the conceptualisation of empowerment used within this research constructs a limited view of this process. For example, it ignores the likely influence of race, gender, culture, religion and SES (Vincent, 1996). Caution is warranted when interpreting evidence to document an empowerment process. However, it was not possible to reflect on all these areas within this thesis and therefore may need to be further explored in the future.

Conversely, the literature and conceptual lens could have been further utilised within the construction of the interview schedule and research aim. The choice of an exploratory question was partially guided by Smith et al.'s (2009) suggestion of exploratory IPA research, and partially due to my status as a novice researcher. Nevertheless the research question could have been further refined to reflect themes already identified within the literature. However, this could have led to a deductive process of analysis, contrary to the research aim. Similarly, it was felt that further research was needed in this area before including refined theory-driven questions. An open-research question was used as an initial exploration of this topic area. Future research may include secondary theory-driven questions to expand on this area.

Furthermore, a research question was removed from the original project at the point of analysis as it felt that it was not suitable for the data. Additionally, it was felt that the

research question warranted further exploration which was beyond the restrictions of the presented thesis. However, the interview schedule was constructed with two research aims and therefore this question will have influenced the data gathered.

The choice of IPA suited my theoretical foundation and aim to demonstrate the experience of participants. This process allowed for the shared experience to be reflected on within the findings whilst maintaining an idiographic focus. However, IPA is not without its faults. Firstly, large quantities of data were produced and therefore needed to be restricted to fit thesis specifications. It is likely that key themes related to parental experience at both an individual and group level were lost. Furthermore, moving from individual to shared themes was challenging to myself as a researcher as I attempted to keep the individuality of participant experiences within larger themes. Wagstaff et al. (2014) discussed this issue but noted that variation within themes is expected due to keeping a focus on the individual. Therefore, this convergence and divergence within individual shared themes reflects the variation of accounts from participants.

Additionally, as reflected above, my novice researcher status using IPA may have impacted the research. Although great care was taken to ensure bracketing, it is likely that my own values and interpretations influenced aspects of the research. Although a summary of findings will be shared with participants, due to time restrictions and the scale of the research, it was not possible to 'check' themes with participants to see if this was reflective of their experience. This checking process may have contributed to the rigour of the data (Smith et al., 2009).

Moreover, a possible influence of my novice researcher status may have been the participants' view of EPs. All participants discussed positive aspects of the EP involved

in their experience, despite a more nuanced view of other professionals. Participants were initially contacted by an EP they had worked with which may have influenced their understanding and view of my role. This can possibly be interpreted as my identity as a researcher not being accepted by the participants, instead viewing me as an EP or EP adjacent. A need for an awareness of potential power imbalance between service users, in this case parents, is established in the EP profession (Division of Educational and Child Psychology, 2002). Therefore, perhaps I needed to place more emphasis on my role as a researcher and ensure there were no power imbalances occurring during the research process.

With reference to the analysis process, the aim of the research was to focus on the experience of the school choice process, and how participants made sense of this for themselves. However, throughout the data collection and analysis, it was apparent that considerations around factors and influences were fundamental to their experience and thus are presented within themes. It did not always feel feasible to detangle overall school choice experience and influential factors e.g. curriculum and resources, on this choice as both were salient within the parent's accounts. Therefore, I felt in order to honour the views of parents, such factors should be included to be representative of their experience. Additionally, the participants reflected on their school choice experience as well as the statutory assessment process for their children. Both situations occurred simultaneously for all of the participants and consequently their experiences are likely to be integrated together. Therefore, some of the emotions and experiences described may be relevant to the statutory process rather than solely choosing a school.

Another criticism is the potential ethical consideration regarding terminology, as discussed in the introduction chapter. SEND has been a contested term and it has

been argued to contribute towards discrimination against marginalised groups (Norwich, 2012). It was not my aim to perpetuate this but this may be a consequence of singling out groups and therefore perpetuate 'difference' in this regard.

Lastly, the findings should be considered with an awareness that interviews provide only a small window into the experience of participants. Although the experiences discussed are consistent with the literature, alternative questions and alternative researchers may have yielded different findings. The accounts of the participants were reflective of their personal 'truth', in line with the ontological and epistemological stance of this research. However, the interaction between researcher and interviewer may have influenced the view of participants. Furthermore, participants may be familiar with sharing their stories as they have interacted with numerous professionals. Therefore, there is a concern that participants will begin to develop scripts of their experience (Silverman, 2001) which do not accurately reflect their actual views but instead what they believed I, as a researcher, wanted to hear.

5.4 Implications for Professional Practice

The presented findings demonstrate the need for practical changes to ensure parents have an authentic choice of schools, feel empowered to engage in the school choice process, and are able to take ownership over their own and their children's lives.

In line with the identified superordinate themes, and in particular the superordinate theme 'Emotional Journey', further support regarding emotional containment is needed in order to appropriately support parents within the school choice process. Legg and Tickle (2019) proposed deriving emotional support from research within bereavement management. This would include preparing practitioners for the potential emotional reactions from parents, as well as sharing this information with parents.

Additionally, Legg and Tickle (2019) found within their research that increased knowledge regarding SEND in turn supports parents in their acceptance of their children's needs. This too reflects the subtheme 'Parental Acceptance'. Similarly Jones and Prinz (2005) found that knowledge can increase self-efficacy and a sense of competency. Information and emotional containment therefore should be used in combination to support parents, as well as supporting the recognition of their strengths and existing knowledge. Key workers (e.g. educational professionals) should also be utilised in order to support parents through this process. This professional should be the access point for information and support for parents through this experience.

A key concern of parents within the presented research was that of social isolation from peers for their children as reflected in superordinate theme 'A Balancing Act'. From a social model perspective, bullying can be viewed as a barrier to an individual's development and self-identity (Chatzitheochari et al., 2014). Therefore, in order to support CYP with SEND in school, and alleviate concerns of parents, mainstream schools should offer further disability awareness and support. Mainstream schools have previously been criticised for the lack of positive promotion of additional needs (Beckett and Buckner, 2012). Armstrong et al.'s (2017) review demonstrated evidence for both direct and indirect contact theory in order to improve children's attitudes towards disability. Furthermore, this contact for preschool and primary school-aged children, alongside the development of social interaction skills, has been found to improve social interaction between peers with and without SEND. Mainstream schools should utilise these findings and raise further awareness of children with SEND. For example, with guest speakers, or including stories and topic areas featuring characters with additional needs. EPs may be well positioned to provide support in this area.

For school staff, the findings suggest a need for continued support regarding their confidence, self-efficacy and ability to meet the needs of pupils with SEND within a mainstream setting. It can be inferred from the findings that despite the legislation depicting all teachers as teachers of children with SEND (CoP, DfE/DH, 2015), there is still ongoing rejection or uncertainty amongst mainstream school staff regarding their feelings of professional competence to meet the needs of CYP. Therefore, this may be an area that EPs can support school staff with through further training and ongoing consultative support to develop not only their skillset and knowledge, but their own self-efficacy and confidence within delivering support to CYP with SEND. Furthermore, some of the findings demonstrate a desire for an environment that meets the needs of the social and academic development of children in a safe and accepting community. Mainstream and special schools should work together to promote best practice and shared resources in order to promote the best outcomes for children with SEND.

Similarly, Webster and Blatchford (2014) reported a need for teachers to be given further support and/or training in meeting the needs of children with SEND. This in turn may facilitate a sense of acceptance and belonging and ease parental worry in this regard. Webster and Blatchford (2014) proposed that this should be incorporated within teacher training to promote inclusive practice. Similarly, EPs may be well placed to support with this training.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that often the role of supporting parents falls to that of their child's nursery as they have established trusting relationships. Therefore, nursery staff may need to promote parental strengths and knowledge in order to support the development of empowerment (Dempsey and Dunst, 2004). Douglas-Osborn (2017) discussed that there is a greater role for EPs in early years settings. Wolfendale and Robinson (2001) proposed a framework at the macro and micro level

for EPs to work. This would include training on the macro level and offering family support on the micro level. Training and supervision provided to nursery school staff in relation to schooling systems, inclusive practice and the promotion of parental strengths may be beneficial, alongside individual case work and parental consultations.

A further implication for professional practice in supporting parents through this experience is the need for independent guidance and advice. Parents within this research adopted the role of 'fighter' as described in the superordinate theme 'Parental Role', in order to gain knowledge and support. As proposed in the Lamb Inquiry (2009), a need for an independent support professional is required to help guide parents. Parent advocacy services exist to offer this support. However, no parents in this study discussed the use of this; therefore, professionals may need to actively promote this service in order to support parents. Clarity regarding the type of guidance and support parents will require needs to be defined, where possible, on an individual basis to ensure the unique individuality of parental experience is respected. If this is not provided by an advocacy service then perhaps it is the role of the educational professional supporting this process, such as EPs to consider how they can offer further support. Additionally, careful consideration should be given as to how this information is disseminated to parents to ensure it does not cause further anxiety when not followed with individual support. EPs may be well positioned to offer psychological support and understanding regarding professional-parent power, parental empowerment and other areas of psychological concepts outlined in this research.

Another implication for professional practice is the social support that parents receive during the school choice process as parental resilience has previously been linked with social support (Peer and Hillman, 2014). An avenue to support the ongoing

development of social networks is through support groups. This was discussed by Kelly within this research and is further explored within the superordinate theme 'Learning from Others'. Soloman, Pistrang and Barker (2001) found that a support group for parents of children with SEND promoted the following:

- Development of a sense of control,
- Supported parental agency,
- Supported the development of parental confidence,
- Promotion of self-efficacy,
- Developed a sense of empowerment,
- Promoted a sense of belonging amongst participants.

Parents within Soloman et al.'s (2001) research believed the support group reduced their sense of isolation through the ability to share knowledge and experience with other parents within similar situations. Additionally, parents also reported feeling more confident within their interactions with professionals due to the support of the parental group. Professionals within education are well placed to support the development of such groups. These professionals should act in a facilitating and/or consultative capacity in order to ensure parental autonomy remains. In turn, professionals could support the development of knowledge and promote positive working relationships. This too would help to prevent misinformation and challenges that may occur due to the emotional complexity of the experience. This type of network would help parents to gain knowledge and advice regarding SEND and the education system.

The identified themes also reflected a variety of experiences with professionals. Professionals working within early years are responsible for the early identification and assessment of children with additional needs to ensure swift and appropriate support (CoP, DfE/DH 2015). On reflection, it may be necessary for professionals engaged in

this process from education, health and social care sectors, to develop an awareness of their own role and that of others. Professionals may need to reflect on the ethics and values that they espouse within their individual roles to form a shared understanding of the boundaries of their professional role. Jungerman et al. (2005) suggested individuals may be more inclined to accept the advice of professionals who they view as credible and trustworthy, and Bradbury et al. (1994) has also commented on the influence of trusting relationships. Therefore, professionals need to consider the way they share information and the guidance they provide. For EPs, this may mean ensuring parents are aware of the nature of the EP role and the guidance that can be offered. Discussing the expectations of parents and professionals openly may further support this process.

As professionals working within the education sector, EPs should be aware of the unique experiences of parents and how these experiences, such as those presented in this research, can impact on their psychological functioning. EPs need to be aware of their own interaction with parents. Additionally, EPs should also challenge, where appropriate, the unethical practice of other professionals.

A final implication is the need for the further development of parent and professional working partnerships. Evidence based frameworks have been proposed to support the empowerment of families and to develop positive working relationships, for example the Family Partnership Model (Davis and Day, 2007). Further reflection and training on the use of these models may support professional working. Fundamentally, professionals should ensure that parents feel listened to and understood, an essential aspect of showing families respect (Cunningham and Davis, 1985). Similarly, the different types of help-giving styles (Dempsey and Dunst, 2004) may also be relevant

to improving the relationship between parents and professionals. Therefore further evidence-based training may promote positive working relationships.

5.5 Future Research

Reflecting on the limitations described above, two key areas may warrant further research. Exploration encompassing the withdrawn research question 'How do parents make sense of inclusion?' may be useful in understanding how parents construct their views regarding educational provision and placement. Furthermore, additional exploration of themes could be extrapolated and researched with a larger population. For example, it seems important to understand whether a lack of placement options is felt by a larger number of parents, and if so, what can be done on a systemic level to support this. This future research should be considered in line with the existing theory and literature.

As discussed above, SES was not a feature within the research and thus may warrant further exploration to understand the influence of such factors on experience. Although two of the five participants identified themselves as from an ethnic minority, this was not a consideration within the findings. Mawene and Bal (2018) and Rizvi (2018) discussed possible SES factors influencing parental school choice, including race and ethnicity. They reported only a minimal impact of SES and school choice for children with SEND, however this may warrant further exploration.

Furthermore, the uniqueness of this study is in part due to the exploration of views of parents who were decided on obtaining solely a special school placement, as opposed to a mix of mainstream and special school placements which is prevalent within the research base. Further research may look to directly compare the experiences of

parents who have chosen special, mainstream or a resource base for their children with SEND.

It would also be interesting to return to the same participants at varying transition points for their children, for example primary to secondary transfer, to see whether similar themes are identified within their experience. This longitudinal aspect would provide a further understanding to the dimension for 'Parental Role' theme, particularly when considering an adoption of an advocacy role. This would also provide an insight into whether parents have continued to conceptualise themselves as 'fighting' for provision. Additionally, collecting the views of professionals engaged in this process also seems valuable to understand any similarities or differences in the accounts of this process. This would also help us to understand how professionals view their role within this process which may support the development of practical guidance for professionals and parents. Similarly, further research exploring the development of parental empowerment in early education decision-making may be valuable to provide guidance to professionals on how best to support parents.

5.6 Concluding Comment

The presented research provided an account of five parents' experience of choosing a special school for their children with SEND. Despite the identified limitations, this study contributes to the existing research on the topic. The findings indicate that this is a complex process, underpinned by a variety of emotions and interactions. Overall the research hopes to support professional understanding and practice in supporting parents through this experience. Further reflection may be warranted to continue to explore this experience for parents. For parents within this research however, perhaps the experience is best summarised by Amy's comment "*we didn't want her to drown, throw her in the deep end, and fight her way out".*

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APPENDIX ONE: FURTHER EXAMPLES OF POLICY CHANGES

The 1918 Education Act made school compulsory for all children and required LAs to provide educational provision for children who were categorised as blind, deaf, epileptic, mentally and/or physically disabled. By 1921, there were over 300 institutions aimed at educating those who were considered 'handicapped' under the act. Consequently, the 1921 Education Act specified that children with a 'handicap' should only be educated in special schools.

The 1944 Education Act shifted this perspective and stated that children have the right to be educated in line with their age, ability, and aptitude, and where possible, in a mainstream school. This Act also saw the widening of the understanding of disability with the introduction of 10 categories of 'handicap'. This Act was later criticised for the continued stigmatisation of children with a disability (Warnock, 1978). The 1972 Education Act ensured that all children, regardless of need or disability, had the right to be educated. This introduced a policy of 'zero rejection' and transferred the responsibility of educating children with additional needs from health to education authorities.

Influenced by the Warnock Report (1978), the 1981 Education Act (DfE, 1981) critiqued segregated education and emphasised the need for mainstream settings to create provision to educate children with SEN. This Act attempted to change the concept of SEN from one of 'treatment' to that of 'need'. This Act also saw the introduction of statutory assessments, previously known as statements, but now known as EHCP's, as a way to determine the needs of children and potential provision needed to accommodate said needs. In addition, and perhaps most pertinent to this research, the 1981 Act also introduced parental rights to appeal decisions regarding educational provision made by the LA.

With the 1988 Education Reform Act, and the introduction of national requirements to reach certain academic standards at particular stages and ages, this inclusive pedagogy seemed to be overlooked once more. Difficulties were once again conceptualised as that of a within child problem, with children with SEN being expected to adapt to the service and not the other way around (Copeland, 1991).

The 1996 Education Act and the 1998 Education Reform Act continued to promote standards and competition amongst schools, but made important changes regarding schooling for children with SEN. The CoP and SEN tribunals were two significant changes made, alongside the continued emphasise of inclusion.

The UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989) protects the rights of CYP to access mainstream education, underpinned much of this legislation and policies that followed. Similarly, the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) was a powerful declaration that once again had a drive towards inclusive practice and educating children with SEN in a mainstream setting. This statement shifted the language of ‘integration’ towards one of ‘inclusion’ and was adopted by national policies. It once again emphasised that every child has unique characteristics and a fundamental right to education.

Special Education Needs and Disability Act (2001) and the Equality Act (2010) both outlined the legal responsibility of schools to include CYP with SEN and further strengthened the rights of the child. This is not to say that there was not ongoing criticism regarding the lack of clarity on what was meant be inclusion or the failure of policy to address ongoing issues related to SEN and education (Lloyd, 2008).

APPENDIX TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW TABLE

Authors	Country	Aim	School Year	Description and Finding	Gaps in Study
Bagley and Woods (1998) Bagley, Woods, and Woods (2001)	UK	To explore the impact of the implementation of the governments school choice policy.	Secondary School	As part of a larger 3-year project of three case studies. 128 interviews overall. Participants were recruited from survey part of project. The participants included parents of children with/without SEND. All parents spoke about needing a setting to meet their child's needs. Bagley and Wood (1998): Interviews of parents with SEND; value perspective classified as intrinsic-personal-social for what is important when choosing a school for their children. Bagley, Woods, and Woods (2001): Parents discussed how they looked to the LA for support	Not all children had statements, therefore special education would not have been a choice for them at the time of interview. This study focused on secondary school placement and may not be representative or primary school transition.

				and guidance through the school choice process. For parents of children with SEND, five influential factors included: - SEND type - Travel - Childs preference - Childs friends - School reputation	
Bajwa-Patel and Devecchi, (2014)	England	To explore parental school choice/factors for children with a statement in England.	Primary and Secondary School	Survey data reported which was part of a doctoral study. The survey was developed from Bagley and Woods (1998) research. 380 parent surveys were analysed (age group of children 4-5 years old, and 12-13 years old). The majority of participants had children in Year 7. 51% of the children attended a	Survey data so unable to further explore experience of choice.

				special school, 34% a mainstream and 15% mainstream with resource base. Results varied on whether parents felt they had a choice in placement. Parents reporting having to fight the LA for their choice. Factors influencing choice included: - Headteacher - School staff - Specialist facilities - Family/Friends - Ofsted and league tables - Small classes - Local school choice	
Flewitt and Nind (2007)	UK	To explore parents of young children with SEND who opt for a combination of both inclusive and	Early Years	Questionnaire (19) and Interviews (5) of parents. Parents reported a sense of limited choice due to location; conflicting advice from professionals; support from preschool providers and	Combined special school and inclusive placement so may not represent parents obtaining primary special school placement.

		special early years settings.		family/friends. Parents reported attitude of staff when visiting settings would influence their placement choice.	
Glenn-Applegate, Justice, and Kaderavek (2016)	USA	To explore how parents and other caregivers conceptualize preschool quality, or what factors they prioritise when selecting a preschool	Pre-school/Early Years	Large scale study of 407 caregivers. Caregivers prioritised teaching characterises, hours/costs of provision, higher teacher- student ratios and relationships between schools and caregivers.	Pre-school setting so may not be relevant for primary education. USA based so again may not be relevant to English context. Focuses on factors and not experience.
Hess, Molina and Kozleski (2006)	USA	To explore parent voice and views on advocacy in relation to special educational	Primary School	Focus groups of 27 families in USA. 13 focus groups held with varying number of participants (1-8). Parents identified by psychologist with children in primary schools. Findings show	School choice not the primary focus of the study. USA study so may not be relevant to English context.

		decision making and outcomes.		that parents defined school as a place for a child to belong and not just an academic environment. Parents discussed varying levels of compliance and advocacy. They also discussed how they turn to teachers for support. The school climate was also important in finding a place for their child to belong.	
Jenkinson (1998)	Australia	To explore factors influencing school placement for children with a disability.	Mixture of primary and secondary school	Parental questionnaire (193) was used to gather the views of parents in relation to their children's current school provision, and future school choice. Children attended either mainstream or special school placements. Many parents reported being satisfied with child's current school provision. Similarities between the two	Dated study, may not be relevant to current context, as well as not being in an English context. This research focused on factors and not experience of school choice.

				groups were found including their child's wellbeing. However differences were apparent between these two groups. Parents of children with additional needs prioritised: - Class sizes - Teaching staff - Meeting the needs of their children through resources/facilities. Some parents decided to move children to a special school from a mainstream school as they wanted them to acquire independent living skills.	
Kasari, Freeman, Bauminger,	USA	To explore parent perceptions of inclusion.	Mixture of school-ages.	Parents of children with either ASC or Down's syndrome (DS). Children ranged in age from 2-18 years old. Many of the children	School choice not the primary focus of the study. USA study so may not be relevant to English context.

and Alkin, (1999)				attended special school (72% children with ASC; 63% children with DS). 113 parents of children with ASC, and 149 parents of children with DS completed the questionnaire. No significant difference in satisfaction of school provision found between the parental groups. However, parents reported feeling less satisfied with school provision as their children grew older. Over ½ of parents with children of ASC believed mainstream schools could not meet the needs of their children. Parents of children with DS viewed mainstream and inclusion more favourably compared to parents of children with ASC. One quarter of respondents would have	Questionnaire data so can not further explore views.

				preferred a mainstream and specialist combination for school.	
Kenny, Shevlin, Noonan-Walsh and McNeela (2005)	Ireland	To explore the views of parents in their pursuit in obtaining a mainstream school placement for their children with additional needs.	Secondary School	The participants (10) included parents with children with DS. Mixture of mainstream and special school placements. They completed semi-structured interviews that revealed a sense of isolation through their school choice experience. The authors discussed the resilience of the parents. The parents described a sense of fear of rejection for their children. Majority of parents reported their children had made positive progress at school.	This study focused on secondary school placement and may not be representative. This study also was completed in Ireland which have a different school system to England.
Leyser and Kirk (2004)	USA	To explore parental views on school choice and inclusion	Primary school	Questionnaire of 437 parents of children with disabilities. Parental views varied dependent on age of child. Parents of children who	Survey data limited in understanding experience and exploring data. USA

				were younger (below 5) were positive about mainstream school, and mainstream school capabilities of meeting the needs of their children. This appeared to change when children grew older (13+). Parents of children with 'mild' additional needs were more favourably towards mainstream in comparison to parents with children with 'moderate to severe' needs.	based so again may not be relevant to English context.
Lilley (2014)	Australia	To explore the professional guidance provided to mothers, searching for primary school education.	Primary School	Semi-structured interviews over 3-year period with a range of participants with differing ages/socioeconomic backgrounds. There were multiple sources of professional involvement with their children. Conflicting information from professionals regarding	Australian study so may not be applicable to England. This study focused on parents and professionals, although relevant, seems limited to what the study can tell us

				placement. The differing advice also seemed to relate to the nature and severity of their needs.	about overarching experience.
Mann, Cuskelly, Moni (2015)	Australia	To explore parental decision making when special school is an option.	Mixture of primary, secondary and special school	This study included 30 parents in 6 focus groups. Mixture of parents of children with/without SEND. Mixture of parents of children attending primary, secondary, special schools. For those wanting a special school placement for their children, it was an emotional choice. They also reported that the choice was constrained. Furthermore, parents reported that they valued practical information. Parents accessed support from professionals and other parents. Parents of children with SEND reported feeling that	Mixture of parents from different school age groups. Parents with/without children with SEND. Additionally, this study was in Australia. Therefore findings may not be relevant for parents obtaining primary special school placement in England.

				professionals would use information to try and influence their choice. They also reported feeling a sense of rejection from mainstream school, stress and guilt over the choice and concerns whether the decision of provision would have a negative impact on their children.	
McNerney, Hill and Pellicano (2015)	UK	To examine the nature of school choice for young people with autism from the perspective of young people, parents, parent advisors and secondary school professionals.	Secondary School	Research completed in London Local Authority using semi structured interviews. There were conflicting perspectives regarding what is important for school choice and the transition process. Parents reported a sense of anxiety and the 'burden of choice' throughout process. Participants differed in what they wanted from a school environment; academic,	Only one parent had wanted special school provision, the rest of the participants had chosen mainstream. This study focused on secondary school choice which may not be representative of parents seeking primary school placement.

				nurturing, and/or life skills were discussed.	
Palmer, Fuller, Arora, and Nelson (2001)	USA	To explore the views of parents of children with 'severe disabilities' regarding inclusion	Mixture of ages	140 parents of children with 'severe disabilities' completed a questionnaire in relation to their view of inclusion and choice of special school. All of their children attended a special school. The age range of children was 3-23 years old. Parents reported fears of their children being socially isolated and mistreated within mainstream schools. They also believed that mainstream schools could not meet the needs of their children. The parents choose special school because of considerations around curriculum and class sizes.	Questionnaire data so limited in exploring parental views.

Parsons, Lewis, and Ellins (2009)	UK	To explore the views of parents regarding experience of educational provision for children with special educational needs.	Mixture of primary and secondary aged children.	There were 125 respondents (parents) who completed an online survey. This included (66) parents of children with ASC compared to those with children with other disabilities (59). Majority of children were between 5-16 years old. Majority of parents reported that children attended school of their choice. Most satisfied were those with children attending special school. This was based on personal and social aspects rather than academic. Group of parents of children with ASC reported having a lack of information/guidance when making placement decisions.	69% of children had statement of need and therefore not all may have been able to access special school. Included a mixture of settings and therefore may not represent views of parents who wanted to obtain a special school placement.

Rizvi(2018)	UK	Focuses on the experience of British-Pakistani mothers on the school choice and inclusion	Varied age	Semi structured interviews were used to explore mothers experience. Mothers decided on a mixture of mainstream and special schools. The parents reported feeling a sense of rejection from mainstream and stress making a choice. This study used an intersectional perspective to explore themes.	Perspective of parents who wanted special and mainstream school, not solely special school.
Rose et al. (2017)	Ireland	Views of parents in accessing early years provision	Primary, Secondary, Special Schools	Mixed method design using survey and case study. 107 interviews exploring assessment and resources provision in the context of Ireland. Interviews included parents and professionals. Findings suggest a lack of confidence within the assessment system for parents, and a view that a report from an EP was needed in order to	Irish education system so may not represent the views of the English system.

				access support and/or provision. Parents described feeling satisfied when they had gained access to provision and resources.	
Runswick-Cole (2007) Runswick-Cole (2008) Hodge and Runswick-Cole (2008)	UK	Three research articles as part of two doctoral studies (Hodge and Runswick-Cole). To explore the experience of parents with children with additional needs.	Mixture of ages	Hodge and Runswick-Cole (2008): explored the parent-professional partnership. They reported unequal power imbalance between parents and professionals. Parents positioned as passive and professionals as 'experts'. Parents reported valuing open minded professionals. Runswick-Cole (2008): semi-structuerd interviews with 24 parents and 7 professionals took part in the process. The parent group wanted to obtain a variety of school setting placements for	Mixture of parents wanting mainstream and special school setting therefore may not be representative. Not all of the research was specifically about obtaining a special school placement.

				their children. The author proposed that parents who wanted a special school placement viewed needs through a medical model of disability. Runswick-Cole (2007): Explored the tribunal experience of parents who have children with additional needs. They reported this was stressful. Some reported a sense of empowerment through the development of advocacy skills.	
Russel (2003)	UK	To explore how the expectations of school for parents has developed.	Not specified	Used ecological model to explore parental views of expectation of schools. Findings suggests personal, beliefs and social interactions influence expectations of parents.	Not specifically about school choice but gives a good insight to the potential ways in which views/expectations are formed.
Ryndak, Downing,	USA	To explore parental views regarding	Age range 5-19 years old so	Semi-structured interviews were used to explore views of parents	This research was based in the USA and therefore

Morrison and Williams (1996)		educational placement for their children with additional needs.	mixture of school settings.	of 13 children with additional needs. Parents reported that they did not feel valued within the educational system. The author reported parents felt anger and frustration at the lack of understanding from professionals. Parents valued time when they were able to engage with professionals regarding provision.	may not be relevant to England. Additionally, the study focused on inclusive settings and not special school settings.
Tissot (2011) and Tissot and Evans (2006)	UK	To explore parental and LA professionals' views regarding the experience of determining school provision for children with ASC.	Age of children included 8-9 years old, but also included parents of 5-year olds	Tissot and Evans (2006) reported on 738 survey respondents, identifying four themes: -parental opinion on gaining placement, -Satisfaction with the process, -Relationships with professionals, -Impact of process on family.	Survey method used with parents so unable to further explore experiences of parents. Although some parents had decided special school, many had chosen a range of settings including boarding school, mainstream school and independent. Therefore their experience may not

				Tissot (2011) reported findings and included professional interviews. A mixed-method approach, including parental questionnaire (738) and semi-structured interviews with LA professionals. Range of school choice including mainstream, boarding, special school. Most of the children had a statement of special needs (90%). Parents reported: - 65% stressful experience choosing school, - 36% straight forward obtaining placement, - 80% educated in choice of placement. Majority of parents received their school preference choice but	represent that of parents who want special school setting.

				found the process time-consuming, bureaucratic and stressful. They reported they believed the issue is with the school choice system. The authors highlighted the need for better communication between professionals and parents.	

APPENDIX THREE: BEREAVEMENT CYCLE

The bereavement cycle is a model to understanding experiences of grief (Kübler-Ross, 1969). It has been applied to the parental experience of having a child with SEND but has faced heavy criticism (for example Allred, 2015). The stages are posited as a reciprocal process, in which a parent may move between stages until the final acceptance and understanding stage is met.

Recently, Haley et al. (2013) applied this model to understanding the process of acceptance for parents regarding their children's diagnosis of SEND. They described a variety of emotional responses that parents discussed including anger, denial, shock, guilt, depression and isolation, before finally hope and understanding once they had learned to accept the diagnosis. Allred (2015) heavily critiqued this model however suggesting there were a variety of methodological weaknesses due to the lack of transparency of the analysis process on the part of Haley et al. (2013). They also suggested a confirmation bias on part of Haley et al. (2013) in determining to search for evidence in favour of the bereavement model through open-ended questioning and a focus on participants who fit in the model as opposed to those who did not. However, Haley et al. (2013) are not the only researchers to liken this process for parents to grief; perhaps more relevant is Connor (1997) likening the acceptance of attending special school to that of the grief cycle for parents.

This model may be derivative and place parents in a devalued position when working with professionals, as well as conforming to a potentially harmful view of SEND (Snow, 2001). However, it may help our understanding of how professionals, particularly educators, and parents interact with one another through this experience. Professionals may be primed to view parents through a lens of tragedy and therefore may explain parental choice and preferences as a process of grief (Ferguson and

Ferguson, 2006). Attribution theory and confirmation bias may help us to understand how professionals may justify the choices of parents, such as wanting their child to attend a mainstream setting for example, as evidence of a lack of acceptance within this model (Allred, 2015).

APPENDIX FOUR: ETHICAL REVIEW APPLICATION

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL REVIEW

Who should use this form:

This form is to be completed by PIs or supervisors (for PGR student research) who have completed the University of Birmingham's Ethical Review of Research Self Assessment Form (SAF) and have decided that further ethical review and approval is required before the commencement of a given Research Project.

Please be aware that all new research projects undertaken by postgraduate research (PGR) students first registered as from 1st September 2008 will be subject to the University's Ethical Review Process. PGR students first registered before 1st September 2008 should refer to their Department/School/College for further advice.

Researchers in the following categories are to use this form:

1. The project is to be conducted by:
    - staff of the University of Birmingham; or
    - postgraduate research (PGR) students enrolled at the University of Birmingham (to be completed by the student's supervisor);
2. The project is to be conducted at the University of Birmingham by visiting researchers.

Students undertaking undergraduate projects and taught postgraduate (PGT) students should refer to their Department/School for advice.

NOTES:

- An electronic version of the completed form should be submitted to the Research Ethics Officer, at the following email address: aer-ethics@contacts.bham.ac.uk. Please **do not** submit paper copies.
- If, in any section, you find that you have insufficient space, or you wish to supply additional material not specifically requested by the form, please it in a separate file, clearly marked and attached to the submission email.
- If you have any queries about the form, please address them to the Research Ethics Team.

X Before submitting, please tick this box to confirm that you have consulted and understood the following information and guidance and that you have taken it into account when completing your application:

- **The information and guidance provided on the University's ethics webpages (https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Ethical-Review-of-Research.aspx)**

- **The University's Code of Practice for Research (http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/legislation/docs/COP_Research.pdf)**

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL REVIEW	*OFFICE USE ONLY:* Application No: Date Received:

1. TITLE OF PROJECT

An Exploration of Parental Views Regarding Educational Placement for their Preschool Children and Inclusive Educational Practice: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

2. THIS PROJECT IS:

University of Birmingham Staff Research project ☐
University of Birmingham Postgraduate Research (PGR) Student project ☒
Other ☐ (Please specify):

3. INVESTIGATORS

a) PLEASE GIVE DETAILS OF THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS OR SUPERVISORS (FOR PGR STUDENT PROJECTS)

Name: Title / first name / family	Dr Huw Williams
Highest qualification & position held:	Ed. Psy. D Academic and professional Tutor
School/Department	School of Education
Telephone:	[redacted]
Email address:	[redacted]

Name: Title / first name / family	
Highest qualification & position held:	
School/Department	
Telephone:	
Email address:	

b) PLEASE GIVE DETAILS OF ANY CO-INVESTIGATORS OR CO-SUPERVISORS (FOR PGR STUDENT PROJECTS)

Name: Title / first name / family	Dr Colette Soan
Highest qualification & position held:	Ed. Psy. D Academic and professional Tutor
School/Department	School of Education
Telephone:	[redacted]
Email address:	[redacted]

c) In the case of PGR student projects, please give details of the student

Name of student:	Rachel Hunt	Student No:	[redacted]
Course of study:	Applied Educational and Child Psychology Doctorate	Email address:	[redacted]
Principal supervisor:	Dr Huw Williams		

4. **ESTIMATED START OF PROJECT** Date: September 2018

ESTIMATED END OF PROJECT Date: June 2020

5. FUNDING

List the funding sources (including internal sources) and give the status of each source.

Funding Body	***Approved/Pending /To be submitted***
N/A	

If you are requesting a quick turnaround on your application, please explain the reasons below (including funding-related deadlines). You should be aware that whilst effort will be made in cases of genuine urgency, it will not always be possible for the Ethics Committees to meet such requests.

Due to the participants within this research (as outlined in section 9), data will need to be collected before participants children have begun attending their school setting in September 2019. This is to ensure that participants are not influenced by their current experience, and are able to provide an accurate perception of their journey through deciding on educational provision.

6. SUMMARY OF PROJECT

Describe the purpose, background rationale for the proposed project, as well as the hypotheses/research questions to be examined and expected outcomes. This description should be in everyday language that is free from jargon. Please explain any technical terms or discipline-specific phrases.

The aim of my research is to explore the views and experiences of parent/carers who have decided that a specialist school placement is the best setting for their child due to their needs. I also want to explore what the term educational inclusion means to parents/carers and how this view has been shaped. Therefore my research questions are;

- How did parents experience choosing special school provision for their children?
- How do parents/carers make sense of educational inclusion?

I will be interviewing 4-5 parents using a purposive sampling method due to various inclusion and exclusion criteria. This research will use semi-structured interviews to explore these views before using Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to analyses the data.

With the development of the Children and Families Act (2014), and the emergence of the new Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice (CoP) 2014, the guidance for schools in relation to Special Educational Needs (SEN) was revised. Education, Health and Care plans (EHCP) replaced Statements of SEN and families were positioned more at the centre of the assessment process. The legislation outlines that parents know their children best and must be actively involved in the process of assessment and support for their children, and in particular the decision making process. The SEND CoP also focuses on an increase in person centred planning and support for children and young people (CYP) with SEN. In addition to these changes, the Children's and Families Act stated that the Local Authority (LA) is required to provide families with information on any and all potential services that they could access for support, known as the Local Offer. The Local Offer is again promoted as a way to involve with children with additional needs, and their families. It is also there to aid them in their decision making and knowledge regarding the provision that their CYP can access.

The concept of inclusive education is one that is complex and lacks an agreed operationalised definition in the literature. Inclusive education has been described a variety of ways. The Salamanca World Statement issued by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Culture Organisation (UNESCO), highlighted the fundamental principles underlying inclusive education as "those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child-centred pedagogy capable of meeting these needs" (UNESCO, 1994, p.8). The Alliance of Inclusive Education, drawing on the framework for UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities describe it as "education that includes everyone, with non-disabled and Disabled people (including those with "special educational needs") learning together in mainstream schools, colleges and universities". This is just two examples of the different, way in which inclusive education has been interpreted.

If those within inclusion research do not have an agreed definition, then it stands to reason that parents will also not have a uniformed understanding or view of what inclusive education means to them. I believe that it would be beneficial to explore what parents believe inclusive means to them in the context of the English education system.

This research will take an in-depth look into how participants have formed their view of educational inclusion and how this they experienced deciding the choice of special school provision for their children. This would mean exploring their individual views linked to their decision and sense making of specialist provision for their child. Therefore, this research will focus on 4-5 parents/carers of preschool aged children who have decided to send their children to a specialist school setting. By collecting these views, I hope to understand what different parents/carers think of educational inclusion and provision for their child. Specifically, when parents have chosen a non-inclusive specialist setting for their child's first school placement. Additionally, I want to explore the various push and pull factors that may be influencing a parents choice and decision making in regards to provision.

7. CONDUCT OF PROJECT

Please give a description of the research methodology that will be used

I will be using a qualitative methodological approach in this study as this will allow me to collect data that will reflect experiences, views and the underlying beliefs of participants. I will do this in the form of semi-structured interviews (Appendix D) as this will allow participants to share their experience in their own words. I will also be collecting demographic information from participants including their children's special educational need, and type of school provision selected. The data collected will be analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to find themes within and across participant data.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is an idiographic methodology that aims to gain insights into a persons lived experience and meaning making in regards to a specific phenomenon, in this case educational inclusion and specialist school provision.

Data will be transcribed and interpreted by the researcher where themes will be extracted to try and make sense of the phenomena being discussed. Individual themes will first be explored for each individual case. After this, themes will be identified across participants to see if they have any commonalities or shared meaning and differences in their sense making and/or experience.

8. DOES THE PROJECT INVOLVE PARTICIPATION OF PEOPLE OTHER THAN THE RESEARCHERS AND SUPERVISORS?

Yes ☒ No ☐

Note: 'Participation' includes both active participation (such as when participants take part in an interview) and cases where participants take part in the study without their knowledge and consent at the time (for example, in crowd behaviour research).

If you have answered NO please go to Section 18. If you have answered YES to this question

please complete all the following sections.

9. PARTICIPANTS AS THE SUBJECTS OF THE RESEARCH

Describe the number of participants and important characteristics (such as age, gender, location, affiliation, level of fitness, intellectual ability etc.). Specify any inclusion/exclusion criteria to be used.

I will recruit 4-5 participants for this study as this will allow an in-depth and rich picture to be drawn for each individual case. A purposive sampling technique will be utilised due to the selection criteria as follows;

- Parents of children who have an Education, Health and Care Plan
- Preschool cases- children who did not attend a mainstream school setting prior to the choice of specialist provision to ensure that this experience has not shaped their view.
- Parents of children who are aged 3-5 years old

To help gather a sample who meet the criteria, I will need to work with EP's in my placement to identify a sample of participants who can be contacted (approximately 4/5) for the interview process.

10. RECRUITMENT

Please state clearly how the participants will be identified, approached and recruited. Include any relationship between the investigator(s) and participant(s) (e.g. instructor-student). *Note: Attach a copy of any poster(s), advertisement(s) or letter(s) to be used for recruitment.*

Potential participants will initially be identified through discussions with the Education Psychology Service and SENAR (Special Educational Needs, Assessment & Review) team in the local authority service I am placed in. They will be aware of the selection criteria as outlined above. Potential participants will then be passed an information letter (Appendix A) and asked if they would consent to be approached by the researcher with more information regarding the project.

Once participants have been identified, further information will be shared (Appendix B) and consent will be gained. Written consent will be gained from the participants prior to the interview process (see Appendix. C).

11. CONSENT

a) Describe the process that the investigator(s) will be using to obtain valid consent. If consent is not to be obtained explain why**.** If the participants are minors or for other reasons are not competent to consent, describe the proposed alternate source of consent, including any permission / information letter to be provided to the person(s) providing the consent.

Phase 1

Information sheets (Appendix A) will be given to potential participants as identified in the ways outlined above. Participants will sign the accompanying form to give permission for the researcher to contact potential participants with more information regarding the research project. Further information will then be shared with any potential participant (Appendix B).

Phase 2

For my semi-structured interviews, it will be necessary to obtain opt-in consent from all those participating (Appendix C). Consent forms will have the appropriate information (name, contact details) on University or Birmingham headed paper and university supervisor contact information to facilitate any further questions. During the data collection sessions, the content of consent forms will be discussed with participants to ensure they understand what is being stated and asked of them.

A copy of all proposed consent forms and information sheets can be found in the appendices.

Note: Attach a copy of the Participant Information Sheet (if applicable), the Consent Form (if applicable), the content of any telephone script (if applicable) and any other material that will be used in the consent process.

b) Will the participants be deceived in any way about the purpose of the study?
Yes ☐ **No** ☒

If yes, please describe the nature and extent of the deception involved. Include how and when the deception will be revealed, and who will administer this feedback.

12. PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

Explain what feedback/ information will be provided to the participants after participation in the research. (For example, a more complete description of the purpose of the research, or access to the results of the research).

As part of my Applied Educational and Child Psychology Doctorate course, a (approximately) 25,000 word thesis will be written including an account of the project, anonymised version of my findings, and any discussion or recommendations for university submission. I will also produce a short summary for participants of key findings and potential recommendations. Furthermore, a short summary report will be given to the local authority that I am on placement, again summarising the key findings, and any potential recommendations for practice.

13. PARTICIPANT WITHDRAWAL

a) Describe how the participants will be informed of their right to withdraw from the project.

Prior to consent, the full information letter (Appendix B) will detail that participants have the right to withdraw at any point during the research project, up to two weeks post-interview. The consent form (Appendix C) will also detail participant's right to withdraw from the data collection process. This will be repeated to all participants at the start and end of their interview. There are no consequences of withdrawing from the research which will be expressed to all participants at all stages pre, during and post interview.

b) Explain any consequences for the participant of withdrawing from the study and indicate what will be done with the participant's data if they withdraw.

All participants will be given a unique individual ID code which will be used to identify their data in the event that they would like to withdraw their transcripts. Participants will be asked to contact myself or my supervisor if they would like to withdraw from the study. They will then be asked to provide their name which I will use to identify their unique individual ID code and data set. All relevant data will be destroyed. There will be no consequence of withdrawal to the participants. They will be told that they do not need to give a reason to withdraw their data. This event will be managed in a supportive, understanding and non-judgemental way. Participants will be assured they are free to make any choice regarding their data and that they are not pressured to remain in the project.

14. COMPENSATION
Will participants receive compensation for participation?

i) Financial ☐ ☐
Yes ☐ **No** ☒

ii) Non-financial ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** ☒

If **Yes** to **either** i) or ii) above, please provide details.

If participants choose to withdraw, how will you deal with compensation?

15. CONFIDENTIALITY

a) Will all participants be anonymous?
Yes ☐ No ☒

b) Will all data be treated as confidential? **Yes ☒ No ☐**

Note: Participants' identity/data will be confidential if an assigned ID code or number is used, but it will not be anonymous. Anonymous data cannot be traced back to an individual participant.

Describe the procedures to be used to ensure anonymity of participants and/or confidentiality of data both during the conduct of the research and in the release of its findings.

Confidentiality of participants will ensured by assigning each participant a unique ID code. Therefore, when information is recorded and analysed, it is not identifiable to others. Participants will be briefed prior to their involvement in this research project on this ID process. For the write up of findings, participants will be assigned a false name that is different to their own, and that is not connected to the information they previously provided. The interview process will take place in a setting that is confidential.

If participant anonymity or confidentiality is not appropriate to this research project, explain, providing details of how all participants will be advised of the fact that data will not be anonymous or confidential.

Participants will be assured that their data will be handled completely confidential, and they will be assigned ID codes to insure this. However, as participants will be required to complete face to face interviews; they will not be completely anonymous to the researcher. Participants will be told that their information will be kept confidential and they have a time frame to request the removal of their data from the project if they so wish to.

16. STORAGE, ACCESS AND DISPOSAL OF DATA

Describe what research data will be stored, where, for what period of time, the measures that will be put in place to ensure security of the data, who will have access to the data, and the method and timing of disposal of the data.

Initially data will be recorded using a Dictaphone and then transcribed. This recording process will be optional to participants. If they would not like to be recorded, written notes will be made. This data (i.e. recordings and transcriptions of interviews) will be stored securely using the university's software and only relevant parties (myself and supervisors) will have to access this data. Once transcription is complete, the recordings will be deleted from the Dictaphone. Any other data, i.e. paper based interview notes, will be secured in my own home office until it is scanned into secure university systems. Once these files have been scanned, the physical copies will be destroyed via shredder.

For each participant, the following data will be obtained/stored; initial contact details, signed consent form, participant data set and demographic information. Data will be kept securely for 10 years following completion of the project, my own records will be deleted in the previously outlined methods following completion of the project write-up and graduation from the course.

17. OTHER APPROVALS REQUIRED? e.g. Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks or NHS R&D approvals.

☐ YES ☒ NO ☐ NOT APPLICABLE

If yes, please specify.

18. SIGNIFICANCE/BENEFITS

Research regarding inclusive education has tended to focus thus far on teachers views, and educational professionals, and less so on parents/carers. There still appears to be significant gaps in capturing parent's views and constructions of educational inclusion in the UK. Moreover, very little research explores parental decision making in this area and thus also warrants further exploration. Research has shown the perceived positive effects of inclusive education, not only for children with SEN, but also for those without SEN and yet the figures of those attending specialist settings continue to rise. My research will hopefully help clarify and explore why this trends continues to rise.

Furthermore, the hope with this research will be to highlight to professionals that it is important to find a common understanding when talking about inclusive education. This is to ensure that parents are being listened to and supported appropriately when choosing school provision. This research will contribute to the further understanding of the discourse surrounding inclusive education. Moreover, it is important as both a researcher and applied psychologist to provide a voice to those we work closely with to ensure that we work ethically and in an empowering way. Finally, this research may lend itself to be used through the planning of specialist provision and to understand the variety of influences that may have formed parental views and affected their decision making concerning choosing a school to

meet the needs of their child/children. Additionally, as outlined in the CoP, as professionals, we should be promoting person centred planning. Understanding what it is that parents want and need for their CYP may help to create individualised and personal provision.

19. RISKS

a) Outline any potential risks to **INDIVIDUALS**, including research staff, research participants, other individuals not involved in the research and the measures that will be taken to minimise any risks and the procedures to be adopted in the event of mishap

One potential risk that this research may invoke is anxiety/distress to participants when discussing provision and choices of provision for their children. Participants recalling their experience or reflecting on their ideal inclusive educational environment may cause parents to become upset over the ideal choice of provision vs their reality, thus potential causing emotional distress. To support this, participants will also be provided with the contact details of (IPSEA) Independent Parental Special Education Advice and ASHTOWN Psychology Service if they feel they would like any follow-up support or information.

Parents will be reflecting on their own views and experiences retrospectively. This will be a retrospective analysis of parental choice. Therefore this should not confuse any ongoing decision making parents are engaging in regarding their provision choice for their child. This will hopefully avoid any potential sources of stress.

Throughout the interviews, participants will be carefully observed to ensure that if they do appear distressed, the interviews will be stopped immediately. The participants can withdraw at any stage, and as the researcher, I can stop the interview if I feel distress is being caused. Full debriefing, follow up and support will be offered. Participants will be given the opportunity throughout all stages of the project to ask any questions to seek support from myself, my supervisor, or the educational psychology service. All those involved will be required to complete consent forms which will outline their rights of participants in line with the BPS Code of Ethics (2018). As a researcher, I will emphasise the importance of respecting participant's views and experiences, as well as the confidential nature of the interviews. I will also need to ensure that my own views and thoughts are not influencing the participants in any way and thus will keep regular supervision with my own supervisors. All participants' views will be respected.

b) Outline any potential risks to **THE ENVIRONMENT and/or SOCIETY** and the measures that will be taken to <u>minimise</u> any risks and the procedures to be adopted in the event of mishap.

The findings of the research may indicate and highlight tensions between whether parents feel they have a choice in regards to their children's educational provision. It may also potentially highlight a lack of shared voice between parents and professionals, and thus indicate that parents are not positioned at the centre of the education, health and care plan process. Similarly, it may also highlight that parents perceive that there is a lack of person centred planning in regards to support and provision available to their children. Both the local authority and participants will be given a summary of key findings and recommendations as well as offered a consultation to talk about findings. Furthermore, solutions and recommendations will be offered to the local authority and therefore this should reduce/minimise any potential risk that this may cause.

20. ARE THERE ANY OTHER ETHICAL ISSUES RAISED BY THE RESEARCH?

Yes ☐ **No** ☒

If yes, please specify

21. EXPERT REVIEWER/OPINION

You may be asked to nominate an expert reviewer for certain types of project, including those of an interventional nature or those involving significant risks. If you anticipate that this may apply to your work and you would like to nominate an expert reviewer at this stage, please provide details below.

Name
Contact details (including email address)
Brief explanation of reasons for nominating and/or nominee's suitability

22. CHECKLIST

Please mark if the study involves any of the following:

- Vulnerable groups, such as children and young people aged under 18 years, those with learning disability, or cognitive impairments ☐
- Research that induces or results in or causes anxiety, stress, pain or physical discomfort, or poses a risk of harm to participants (which is more than is expected from everyday life) ☐
- Risk to the personal safety of the researcher ☐
- Deception or research that is conducted without full and informed consent of the participants at time study is carried out ☐
- Administration of a chemical agent or vaccines or other substances (including vitamins or food substances) to human participants. ☐
- Production and/or use of genetically modified plants or microbes ☐
- Results that may have an adverse impact on the environment or food safety ☐
- Results that may be used to develop chemical or biological weapons ☐

Please check that the following documents are attached to your application.

	ATTACHED	NOT APPLICABLE
Recruitment advertisement	☐	☒
Participant information sheet	☒	☐
Consent form	☒	☐
Questionnaire	☒	☐
Interview Schedule	☒	☐

23. DECLARATION BY APPLICANTS

I submit this application on the basis that the information it contains is confidential and will be used by the

University of Birmingham for the purposes of ethical review and monitoring of the research project described

herein, and to satisfy reporting requirements to regulatory bodies. The information will not be used for any

other purpose without my prior consent.

I declare that:

- The information in this form together with any accompanying information is complete and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief and I take full responsibility for it.
- I undertake to abide by University Code of Practice for Research (http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/legislation/docs/COP_Research.pdf) alongside any other relevant professional bodies' codes of conduct and/or ethical guidelines.
- I will report any changes affecting the ethical aspects of the project to the University of Birmingham Research Ethics Officer.
- I will report any adverse or unforeseen events which occur to the relevant Ethics Committee via the University of Birmingham Research Ethics Officer.

Name of principal investigator/project supervisor:	Dr Huw Williams
Date:	March 2019

Please now save your completed form, print a copy for your records, and then email a copy to the Research Ethics Officer, at aer-ethics@contacts.bham.ac.uk. As noted above, please do not submit a paper copy.

APPENDIX FIVE: INITIAL INFORMATION SHEET FOR EP TO SHARE WITH POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

Invitation to Participate in Research Project: Information Sheet

Project Title: An Exploration of Parental Views Regarding Educational Placement for their Preschool Children and Inclusive Educational Practice: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Background Information

I am a student at the University of Birmingham who is currently training to be an Educational Psychologist. I am on placement as a trainee educational psychologist with ASHTOWN Educational Psychology Service. As part of my training I am required to complete a research project.

I am interested in exploring the different types of educational provision available to children and young people. I am also interested in the views and perceptions of parents and how they come to make choices for their children. Having worked closely with parents previously, I understand that it is important for their voices to be heard by professionals around them to make sure that the best opportunities and support is given to children.

I understand that you have previously been involved in the Education, Health and Care needs assessment process, and your child now attends/will attend a specialist school setting. I am very interested in your experiences and views during this process as part of my research study. None of the information which you give me will be shared with the Special Educational Needs support service as part of the Education, Health and Care needs assessment process. Your name will not be used in any stage of this project and complete confidentiality will be assured.

Aim of Project

The aim of this project is to explore the views and experiences of parent/carers who have decided that a specialist school placement is the best setting for their child to attend and how you might have come to this decision. I also want to explore what the term educational inclusion means to parents/carers and how this view has been shaped.

What will the project involve?

The project will involve you meeting with me for an interview that will last roughly 1 hour-1 hour and a half. In this interview I will be asking you about your views on inclusion and specialist provision. There are no right or wrong answers and it is simply just an exploration of your own views and experiences that I am really interested in. No names will be used when writing the findings but parents will be offered a summary document detailing all of the anonymised findings. Your information will be kept confidential. You can withdraw your information after the interview for up to two weeks. You will not have to provide a reason for withdrawing your data.

Contact details for further information

Please sign below if you are happy for your contact details to be passed to myself in order for me to discuss further details about the research with. I have included the details of my university supervisors for your information. Your decision to not wish to take part or be contacted will have no implications for the Education, Health and Care plan process, or the provision for your child whatsoever.

- Rachel Hunt (Trainee Educational Psychologist)
    1. [redacted]
    2. [redacted]
- Dr Huw Williams (Lead Supervisor): [redacted]
- Dr Colette Soan (Supervisor): [redacted]

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this information leaflet and for considering your participation in the study.

I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing for Rachel Hunt, acting as a researcher, to contact me. This will involve the release of my contact details to her but not to any other parties.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Contact Details: _____

APPENDIX SIX: FULL INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS SHARED WITH PARTICIPANTS PRE-INTERVIEW

Full Information Sheet

Research Project: An Exploration of Parental Views Regarding Educational Placement for their Preschool Children and Inclusive Educational Practice: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

Background Information

- I am seeking your consent to be involved in this research project. I would like you to be involved as, in the last year, you have been part of the Education, Health and Care assessment process and have decided that specialist school setting is the most appropriate provision for your child.
- I am a trainee educational psychologist on placement in **ASHTOWN** Educational Psychology Service and currently undertaking a doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology at the University of Birmingham. As part of my doctoral training I am required to undertake research.
- I am interested in the views of parents, particularly their views in regards to education and educational provision. I am also interested in listening to your views regarding the process of you deciding which type of school best matched the needs of your child.
- Before you decide if you would like to be involved, please read this information sheet so you understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve.

Aim of the Project

- The aim of this project is to explore the views and experiences of parent/carers who have decided that a specialist school placement is the best setting for their child. I also want to explore what the term inclusive education means to parents/carers and how this view has been shaped.

- Inclusive education has been defined differently by many different people but at the root of it, it means the learning and participation of everyone in the school curriculum and provision.

- By collecting these views I hope to understand what different parents/carers think of educational inclusion and provision for their child. I am looking to improve understanding of individual experiences within the assessment process and with regards to views on educational inclusion, whilst allowing parent/carers voices to be heard within research.

What will the project involve?

- The project would involve you meeting with me for an interview that would last roughly 1 hour to 1 hour and a half. In this interview I will be asking you about your views on educational inclusion and specialist provision. There are no right or wrong answers in this view, it is simply just an exploration of your own views and experiences about how you thought about choosing a particular type of school for your child.

- These would include relevant background information, the stages you went through to in the assessment process and decision for specialist provision, communication with support services, your expectations, your views and thoughts on educational inclusion now and previously, and any factors which were helpful or not helpful.

- Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are under no obligation to take part. You have the right to withdraw or stop the interview process at any time, and do not have to give any reason to the researcher. After interview, you will have two weeks to withdraw.

- Your participation in this research project will in no way impact on your decision to send your son/daughter to the school of your choice.

What will happen to the information collected?

- All information that is talked about will be kept confidential. You will not be identified through your data. Under no circumstances will your name be used in any documents. It is important to protect the data and keep it confidential.

- All data collected will be kept confidential and used for research purposes only. If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to ask now or at any time. I can also be contacted before, during and after your participation through the contact details provided.

- My University of Birmingham supervisors are also available to answer any questions that you may have.

- The interviews will be recorded on an audio recording device and written up. If you would not like the interview audio recorded, this is okay. I will make hand written notes instead. Only I and my supervisor will have access to these recordings and notes during this time. The audio recording will be destroyed once the audio has been written up. The written up data will be stored securely on the University's data storage programme for 10 years.

- I will then take the data and read it to identify themes. This data and the themes will be written up as part of my doctoral thesis. I would be very pleased to be able to send you summary of my research when it is completed.

- You are allowed to withdrawn from this project before, during or after the interview process, at any stage.

What if I want to remove my data after the interviews?

- After the interview, you are allowed to withdraw your data. If you decide you would not like me to use your data, this is absolutely fine. There are no consequences for wanting to remove your data. You will be able to do this for up to two weeks following the interview. Please contact myself or my supervisor and provide your name. This will be used to identify your unique IQ code and allow me to remove you data. Your data will be completely destroyed and not used.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this information leaflet and for considering your participation in the study.

APPENDIX SEVEN: CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

Consent Form

Title of Project: An Exploration of Parental Views Regarding Educational Placement for their Preschool Children and Inclusive Educational Practice: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

Researcher(s): Rachel Hunt (Trainee Educational Psychologist)

- [redacted]
- [redacted]

University Supervisor(s):

- Dr Huw Williams: [redacted]
- Dr Colette Soan: [redacted]

Participant Name (BLOCK): _____

- I have read and understood the information sheet

  YES/ NO

- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

  YES/ NO

- Have all your questions been answered to your satisfaction?

  YES/ NO

- I understand that I am free to withdraw from this project (up to two weeks post interview and without giving a reason)?

  YES/ NO

- I give permission for the data from this project to be recorded using an audio recording device.

  YES/ NO

- I give permission for my data from this project to be shared with other researchers provided that my anonymity is completely protected.

  YES/ NO

- Do you agree to take part in the project?

  YES/ NO

Signature _____

Date _____

Thank you for taking the time to complete the consent form. Please get in touch if you have any questions or queries.

APPENDIX EIGHT: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Semi-structured Interview Schedule

Introduction

- Thank participant for taking part
- Discuss confidentiality
- Discuss audio recording of interview (turn on audio recording device)
- Discuss purpose of interview
- Discuss my role and background
- Interested in you and your experience; no right or wrong answers
- Like one-sided conversation; I may say very little
- Some questions may seem self-evident but that's because I am trying to understand your views as much as possible.

Area	Question	Probe	Prompt
Provision	I would like to start by discussing your child's current school provision. Can you tell me about that? What were the stages you went through to get to this point? What was your understand about the different types of school settings that were available for your child? How was this understanding shaped? Who spoke to you about this?	How do you feel this is going? What did you expect to happen? What was the source of those expectations? Were you given the appropriate support at this time? By whom?	Can you tell me a bit more about that? What led you to think that?
Decision Making	How did the process of deciding about provision begin? How did you come to make that choice? What led you to that decision? What was discussed/was advice given?	How did this make you feel? How would you describe your feelings at this time? What happened next?	What do you mean by that comment?

	What do you think other people's views were? What have been the biggest changes? What support or inhibited this decision-making? Can you tell me about your communication and relationships with anyone who you felt was involved in this process/decision making?		
Inclusion	Can you tell me what the term inclusion means to you? What does it mean to you within school? Was this term discussed with you before? What do you put these views down to? In your view what else could be done to support inclusion?	Can you tell me more about how you have developed this view? How does this view make you feel? Are there any barriers? How did/will you overcome these?	Why do you think that?
Evaluation/Rounding up	Can you imagine how this process could have been better for you/your child? Is there anything else you would like to share with me?	Why do you think that?	

Additional Information

Name: _____

Date: _____

Age of child: _____

How long attending provision: _____

Child's SEN: _____

Any Additional Information (e.g. non-verbal behaviours)

Points to return to:

APPENDIX NINE: EXTRACTS FROM REFLEXIVE JOURNAL

Post-Interview Extracts

- I really empathised with Amy's experience. It made me feel quite angry hearing about what happened to her and her child. I wonder if this will cloud how I interpret her data.
- I wonder how Nicole saw me, whether she saw me as with the LA or not. She seemed interested in who I was and my role before we began the interview. I wonder if I was not a part of the EPS would she have described a different experience with the EP she worked with. Maybe I should have done more to show that I was a student firstly. I need to be mindful of my role as a researcher and not as a TEP. I am adopting a different identity as a researcher. Is this a reflection of my development in my training or is it just hard to separate from 'placement' and 'researcher'?
- Kelly was very open and honest with me during her interview. I really empathised with her emotional experience, and her perception of a lack of support. I wonder if there was more I should have done in the moment to support her emotional containment.
- On reflection I wonder if my interview with Harshil was more focused on practical considerations such as curriculum rather than emotional experience. Harshil was the first interview I completed (after the pilot) and may be my skills developed as a researcher as I grew more confident in my role. Nicole's interview was last, and was also the longest, I wonder if this was due to my skills as a researcher at the different time points.

Data Analysis Phase

- My focus on literature/psychological theory in relation to experience with professionals seems to be guided by my own values and personal development. My interest and desire to develop my own practice has shaped the direction of this research project. I need to make sure that I try and 'bracket' my professional perspective in order to analyse the data. I also need

to set aside the literature to make sure that does not guide the themes that I find.

- This analysis process is taking a long time and I'm concerned that by group themes I'm losing valuable and individual experiences. I need to be okay with 'cutting' some of the findings in order to answer the research question. I need to just keep going back to the research question and remind myself the purpose.
- I am finding it hard to detangle experience and factors. They seem to influence one another a lot of the time. Perhaps its due to the way I asked the questions or maybe it's just easier for participants to discuss practical aspects instead of the experience. I think I need to step away from the data and come back with fresh eyes to re-orientate towards experience.
- It is difficult not to be guided by the previous participants themes when moving on to the next data set. Some of the experiences are similar but I don't want to lose the individuality of each participants experience.
- I need to make sure I am not overinterpreting the views of participants. Although IPA involves interpretation on part of the researcher, I need to keep going back to the data to make sure that it is grounded and I am not just finding what I may want to find.
- I find it interesting how some participants valued being told exactly what type of school placement would be suitable for their children. To me this feels like the professionals are influencing the choice, is this right? That's my interpretation but is that what the parents felt?
- I wonder if I am purposefully trying to find data that 'fits' the empowerment lens or whether the data is saying this. I think this is a point to bring to peer supervision.
- Now that I am writing, I have had to 'cut' even more than I had wanted to in order to fit the remit of the thesis. I feel like I have lost some of the individuality of the experiences for participants and the nuance of their views. I need to revisit the experience to make sure the themes are grounded in the data.

Post-Research

- This research has been both personally rewarding and challenging. There were times where I felt like I would not be able to complete it as it felt overwhelming.
- I want to bring the experiences of these parents into my own professional practice. I need to make sure that I make time for parents and that I support both them and the professionals around them. What support and guidance do I offer now? Can I help develop network groups in the schools that I work with? What is my role when parents are trying to obtain a school placement?

APPENDIX TEN: EXAMPLE PARTICIPANT TRANSCRIPT

This example shows the transcript for Nicole including the initial exploratory comments and emergent themes.

Transcript Five: Nicole (Child: Carl)		
Key**: Descriptive comments** *Linguistic Comments* Conceptual Comments **R:** Researcher **P:** Participant		
Emergent Themes (Step 3)	**Transcript**	**Exploratory Comments (Step 2)**
Family treated child same Positive nursery staff experience Positive mainstream experience Thrived in mainstream	**R**: Can you start my telling me about your child and your family? **P**: So uh my husband and I have two sons, Richard who is typical, just went into Year 3. Carl who is four and was post-natal diagnosis of Down' syndrome, when he was a couple of hours old. We uh got the news that he probably had Down's syndrome. Um so yeah so he uh has just now gone to school. **He has a fairly…you know same sort of upbringing my older son has had**. I went back to work; I work four days a week when he was 10 or 11 months old. **He was in a mainstream nursery** for three days a week, my mother in law looked after him one day a week and I had him on the Wednesday. And **he thrives there, got on well, the girls love him.** A few months before he was due to leave to go to school, the nursery closed suddenly. We had to go to a new nursery for three months just before he started school. At first we were all really sad about, you know at first the nursery had brought up both of my boys. **But actually it gave him a bit of independence and knew different people, renewing him, different skills that he learned; the nursery was very different to his first nursery**. **So actually it didn't turn out to be a bad thing at all. It was a lot of free play; he loves outdoor/messy play. In the second nursery the door is open to the outside area. Um**. Very...almost like a Montessori atmosphere which at first, **I was worried about as there was so much structure at his first nursery but I think he had enough structure in his early years to understand routine and structure**. But actually a bit of freedom was not a bad thing and to understand independence and they helped him pour his milk on his cereal and you know	**Treated/seen as the same.** **Mainstream nursery: doing well, accepted/cared for** **Change of nursery: positive experience despite being different helped him progress.** **Anxiety over new environment: less structured/routine. Change anxiety inducing.** **Developing independency skills.**

Started process early Parental organisation Considered various options Location consideration Previous experience of educational system Externalised behaviour got support Supportive nursery Preparing for fight (x2) Advice sought from mainstream Knowledge of SEN system	put away his bowl. Actually that sort of thing was quite nice. Um and yeah, **we started the EHCP process quite early on because I think my husband and I, well we are quite organised so we thought well what are our options**. So we moved here when I was pregnant with Richard because the schools here, this side of (place name), were the kind of schools we wanted Richard to go. **Yes so Richard goes to (mainstream school) just around the corner, (mainstream school) is next to (special school name A).** And when we were looking for schools for older son, Carl was already born. **Did that persuade our thinking? Perhaps, but we started looking for schools for our son early on.** When he was quite young, around 2 **he went through a phase of biting carers and nursery…. everyone was fine with that but nursery started thinking 'oh how will we manage that when he goes in to the 2 to 3 rooms'** and that's ya know fewer staff, **so they were very *supportive* of us starting the EHC process early.** *I was expecting a fight which we ended up not having to have*. I kind of **built in contingency time for a battle.** So we started looking for schools for Carl very early on. **We had a meeting with Richard's school to see how they felt about children with additional needs**. I made another couple of phone calls to other schools, and we also saw special school quite early on. **R**: What age was Carl then? **P**: He was probably only 2 ½. Because he was august birthday we thought he would be starting very soon after his august birthday. **So my thoughts and understanding of the EHC process was that it is potentially very long, building in potential tribunal time if we didn't get what we wanted**. Um so we were quite organised with it all. I would say he is fairly…happy child…at the moment…he is going through…probably tired and grotty in the evening but	**Process started early: due to parent's organisation** Experience/awareness of special school/education system due to older son. Influence: familiarly with special school. **Started looking for education early on.** Behaviours linked with EHC: concern from nursery over managing in mainstream setting. *Nursery staff supportive.* *Preparing self for battle/worst case scenario.* **Asking mainstream school how they felt about children with SEN.** **Knowledge/awareness of SEN system: planning to overcome potential barriers.** **Description of Carl.**

Impact on whole family School location consideration Aware due to experience School separate identities EP questioning	generally happy. He likes to play football with his older brother, he likes to play, he likes Mr Tumble, he is a fairly content child most of the time. **R**: He sounds lovely. **P**: He is…he's like a magnet, he draws people to him. Because he's got…children with Down syndrome, I don't want to stereotype but he's very cute looking, he's got his glasses, and sociable. **He likes people, always copies.** I say to my older son he has got to be careful because if 'you climb on to the windowsill Carl will climb on to the windowsill'. **R**: So you feel he has to be a role model? **P**: Yeah and it **can be a lot of pressure too**, 'me and my shadow'. **R**: Sounds like they have a good relationship **P**: They do, Richard has his moments where if he is trying to do something and Carl comes to annoy him he will yell for me. But I think that's fairly typical of normal siblings. **R**: Can you tell me about his current school provision? **P**: Yeah so, he's just started at special school this week, and that for us is great. **We are in a very fortunate position that Richard and Carl are on the same site.** So (special school name A) used to be a couple of miles away, primary school has been there for years. and I think, maybe ten years ago, council sold off special school grounds, and the two heads of the schools got together and decided to build specials school…I'm not going to call it an integrated school…its one building on one land where the two schools can coexist. They've kept their own identities; they have their own names. They're separate schools within the	**Description of Carl: positives (PEN portrait).** <u>Carl learns from others</u>**.** <u>Pressure: impact of SEN on brother/family</u> **Experience of special school from mainstream/older child.** **Schools co-exist but don't tell to integrate/separate identities.** <u>Mainstream/SEN not seen as the same</u>**.**

Practical consideration Mainstream after school club Acceptance Uncertain over choice during process Parent knew what was right Process of parental acceptance Social exclusion concern Previous experience shaped view	same building but with different coloured jumpers. So in some ways you could say where the integration is. I **remember EP saying to me if they were going to be fully integrated why they didn't give all the kids the same coloured jumper**. You know what you've is you've made the children from (mainstream school name) different to (special school name A) because they wear different colour uniform. But for us it's great **because it's one drop off**. It's literally you walk into reception- you turn right to walk in to (mainstream school), and left to go to (special school name A). the other thing is **it's got before and after school. Because I work…most special schools don't have that.** They take (primary) children from special school with ***open arms*, they were like 'of course we will take Carl'.** So **Carl gets a bit of mainstream integration some days before and after school** for being at the after-school club, **which is great and that's working out**. When we looked round (special school name) **we knew that it was probably the right place for him**. I think at one point, probably **when I had the second meeting with the EP, I kind of flip flopped a little bit, should we go for mainstream**. **R**: How did that feel? **P**: We made some investigations. Like I said we met with the head at (mainstream school) um but I **think deep down we always expected (special school) would be the right place for him**. Um because he is so young in the year, he's non-verbal really. He's very **good at Makaton, we've done that since he was a baby um so he's got the tools to communicate but he only really says 'mum, dad, nan' you know he doesn't really say, he's starting to say more words but essentially, I would consider him nonverbal.** So **I thought well how could a non-verbal child possibly go to mainstream**. **EP said to me that plenty of non-verbal children go to mainstream but I didn't really want that for Carl.** I thought about how Richard had been when he started school, **you know he**	**Professional: EP discussing integration/inclusion concept** **Being seen as different in school:** has this experience shaped the way parent sees child as children as being different/needing different schooling? **Positive due to practical reasons despite no integration. Integration within after school club: practical support for parents.** *Open arms: accepted/welcomed.* Is this a reflection that schooling needs to be specialised by socialising can be integrated with children without SEN? **Parents decision: 'knew' it was right. Although sense of uncertainty: was this due to the professional?** Process of accepting special school themselves Anxiety over communication: did this aspect influence choice to go for special school? **Need of child influenced choice: communication.** **Professional giving advice/options?** **Older child experience shaped view.** Fear Carl would not make friends/become isolated if he could not communicate in mainstream.

Teacher lack SEND experience Parent needed more practical support Others negative experience Good personal experience of process Uncertainty over provision	**made friends with the other boys who like superheroes and football.** You know if Carl can't say I like football how can he mix. **I was never really sold on that integration point of view. How do children with additional needs genuinely integrate and be happy at a mainstream school**. Um and I know that in some instances it does work but around here they don't seem to be open to it. **They don't seem to have the experience of children with additional needs, certainly not Down's syndrome**. The primary school have never had child with Down's syndrome. **In (other primary school) which has a speech and language unit, which is meant to be more open to children with additional needs, they've never had a child with Down's**. **So no one has any experience**. So at one point **me and my husband felt that, we were just winging it, no one gave us a manual on Down's syndrome when he was born**. At some point **he will need some specialised help to be able to thrive and** progress so that's really why we picked (special school name). **I have a friend who children with Down's have just started in mainstream and it's not working out. You know the EHC hasn't brought any money, the teachers are saying they can't cope, they're saying the children can't do after school club, just you know it's having a massive impact on their lives.** For us, **it's been quite a smooth process going to school**. I think maybe because he knows the building because we would take Richard. he knows this is a school, its familiar. When I first dropped him off for his integration in the summer, the couple of hours that you do, he ran straight in and gave me a wave and that was it. He's been happy to go in ever since he started. **When he first started at his new nursery it took him a couple of weeks, you know he was crying when I first left him which he had never done before.** **R**: Okay. Can you tell me what his school is like?	Integration: Not a priority for parents? Not sure it is authentically possible for children with SEN. **Mainstream schools not equipped for supporting children with SEN.** Lack of experience, even within primary with SALT: negative towards mainstream. School need experience/expertise to care for children with SEN. View that specialist support is needed: parents will need experts to come in to help Carl progress. Special school experts in doing so. **Friends experience: mainstream not suitable: learning through others experience.** Sense of negative impact/stress of families lives when sending children with SEN to mainstream school. Contrast with 'smooth process' of going to special school. **Transition day support choice.** Change in nursery: unsettled; took time to integrate but not the case for special school. Despite specialised view of school: not sure what the curriculum/provision is. Unaware: reassuring self that this is normal/part of special school process.

Specialist provision appropriate Mainstream expectations too high Comparison to older sibling experience Carls wellbeing Big decision Emotional process Process of acceptance Big decision Childs wellbeing	**P**: **We are kind of getting to grips with what he's actually doing in the school**. You know the communication is… I get a box that's ticked that he's done some PSE or communication, been to the school library, done a speech and language activity but I don't know what that actually means. I think until we have parents evening **we are still slightly in the dark. But I think that's quite common**. I think they're assessing him to see how they teach him best, do they teach him in small groups, does he need one to one with… **R**: Will you be able to get more information about the curriculum? **P**: I think so, we have a rough idea of the timetable. They come in and have a hello song, register then free play, then an activity either forest school, speech and language numeracy, something like that, then they have lunchtime, then play, then they have one more activity, then its tuck then one more activity then it's time to go home. That seems to be the structure. Every other Friday they seem to go to the donkey sanctuary. He gets all excited because he can say bu- kind of sounds like bus. He does the mimicking of brushing on my leg so that's how I know what they're doing with the donkey. **R**: How does it feel having him there? **P**: **So it feels *appropriate* for Carl,** all the activities, the yoga, the forest school- **it's appropriate for him**. **Rather than him being constantly behind or given homework that is totally not appropriate for somebody who can't even speak**. So, so far, I feel like it's going smooth. **I mean he's only four, I'm not expecting him to read and write any time soon so you know you take away that pressure. There no curriculum you know, Richard could read by the time of Christmas came and he was in reception, there is no pressure on to do that.** Obviously, **I want him to progress and that's what I'll be speaking to the**	Aware of school time-table *Appropriate*: right for him. Parent feel the curriculum is suited to Carl's needs/isn't the sense that he is behind his peers/pressurised. Mainstream school puts pressure on children to progress. Individualised to his needs instead of needing to follow the crowd. Childs own emotional wellbeing considered within school context. Emotional impact on parents. Grieving for mainstream? Process of accepting special school/understanding.

Explored mainstream option Mainstream could not meet need Fear of child isolated Anecdotal stories from others Parental concerns exclusion Mainstream kind Sense of belonging Concern carl will be headache Resources Not easy choice Considered various options	**teachers about, how he will progress. But at the moment the fact that he's happy…he's relaxed** **R**: That's your priority **P**: Exactly, that's all that matters. **R**: How were you feeling when you were deciding about school? **P**: Um it was **quite a big decision to actually go into the special school**. **I've had my moments, I've probably cried in front on the EP, you know I have my moments where I get upset, and I did when I was going in there…it's *different*.** Especially when you have an older child whose followed the pattern of nursery, going into school at a breeze. Um it was quite…it was a *big decision* to make. **I don't have any negative views special school, I think if you take that away. I'm not ashamed of it, I just wanted Carl to be happy**. Having **met with primary school head teacher and SENCo it became quickly apparent** really that whilst they **were nice and happy to** have a conversation with us, and pleased we were being open with them, and I shared some SALT reports and I shared some EP reports so that they could try and get to know Carl a bit better on paper. **That they…probably couldn't meet his needs. They say it in such a delicate way**. The **terminology you know 'we don't think he will be able to meet his potential or thrive'**. They **told me of a couple of incidents where they had previously, they had a child who was deaf, he had come with money through his EHCP so they employed a teacher of the deaf so they were able to sign with him, the BSL, but the children didn't sign, the rest of the staff didn't sign and after a bit of time he became isolated and unhappy**. His parents made the decision to move him and send him more specialised for children who are deaf. **And that kind of story makes me, everything that I was worried about- like how do children actually play and integrate, how can he access a curriculum in**	Different: process of unlearning from older child/having to accept a different path for Carl. **Big decision: repeated: not an easy, large impact.** View of special schools: IS the parent implying some people may have negative views? Some parents feel sense of shame with special? Their own views were for Carl to be happy above all else. **Parent was given the sense that mainstream would not be able to meet Carl's needs. Mainstream told them they could not meet need/not the best place for Carl.** Mainstream school use story to show how it could go wrong for parent? How child could feel isolated within mainstream? Using fear as way to dissuade parent? Played on parent fear of Carl becoming isolated from peers. Want Carl to have a sense of acceptance/belonging with community. Sense of stress/anxiety/worry: mainstream schools would see Carl as difficult. **Knowledge of SEN system/structure.** **School funding cuts linked to lack of inclusion.** **Specialist: smaller classes, resources, staffing-** Carl to be accepted?

Whole family stress Some mainstream schools better than others Experience form network of others Not inclusive area Other areas more inclusive Lack of school options Minority group no adaptation Want carl to be wanted	**a room full of 30 people** with one class teacher and one TA, sit down and concentrate on phonics for half an hour when it would be straight over his head. **So the conversation with the head and SENCo, they were very kind but it's kind of reinforced that**. **And I always thought that I don't want Carl to go to a school where he is not wanted**. I am **pretty sure that if he went to a mainstream school he would be the headache. They would have to worry about him**, on top of…schools are pressured aren't they, the funding, they're all struggling to survive, making cuts you know. A SEND school budget is not ring-fenced for SEN you know they can't really, I was concerned they wouldn't be able to meet his needs. **Going to (special school name A) you know and seeing the children play, with all the emphasis on Makaton, visual timetables, small classes, one teacher and two TAs in a class, maximum of 11 children.** **R**: How did it feel walking around? **P**: **It's very different. We did *wrestle* with the…you know could we try mainstream for a year, could he learn-because he likes to copy and does like other children**, would he benefit from being in reception for a year. And that's why at one point I **was considering mainstream, but then I thought well actually are there going to be schools trips he can't do. You know (primary school) all go to the pantomime at Christmas, would they be able to take Carl to that, would they call me and say you need to take a day off work to take him to the pantomime if you want him to go. That kid of…it adds stress to life when life is already stressful**. I just thought…*I don't know…there's too many risks*. I think for some **schools who do have the budget, mainstream for children with additional needs can be perfect**. When Carl was born there was four of us who all had children with downs born within three months. **We all got together, and the three girls have all gone to mainstream. Two of them it**	**Wrestle: not an easy choice/back and forth trying to decide.** **Pros of being around mainstream peers.** <u>Pros of mainstream does not outweigh potential costs i.e. stress of not being accepted/stress of not included Carl-impact that may have on family.</u> *Risks: danger/things could go wrong. Safer option specialist setting.* **Schools require more money to be able to include children with SEN.** **Experience of others: some it may work out for others it doesn't. Those that it does work for smaller schools.**

Special school loving Parent worry Concern over friendship in special Parental emotional sad Local community friends Older child experience integration to support friendship Part of wider community	**working out fine, one of them it's not. And the one who is particularly thriving, they happen to be at a school where there's only 12 in the class.** **R**: that's in a mainstream? **P**: Yeah, it's a village school and the school **have a child with Down's further up the school and they straight away, before Lily even started had employed a TA just for her. They do a big emphasis on Makaton, Makaton assemblies**, they're included her. It's exactly how you would hope **mainstream might work but I don't think that's the reality, certainly not in this area**. It seems to be…SEN budgets are based on children with free school meals but in our area…**it's a more affluent area so there's no SEN budget really**. I work (place name), that whole area is one of the most deprived areas in (City name). **R**: How does it feel to compare your experience with your friends? **P**: **I understand, I think they have 50% of children with additional needs in their schools, so therefore they have to manage it because they have no choice**. Whereas here you're in the *minority*, and ***I didn't want Carl to be in the minority.*** **I didn't want him to be the one where everyone goes 'oh I hope he's not in my class'** I didn't want there to be any bad feeling like. **I wanted him to go somewhere where he was wanted**. And the staff at (special school name A) are absolutely amazing. **They love those children so much. You know when the kids come in in the morning and they're greeting them off the bus, they just love those kids.** Um. It's just got a nice feel to it, so I just…**this is where Carl will probably do his best. You know I've had my concerns. I was worried, because Carl does copy, I was worried if there was bad behaviour he might copy people in his class who have autism,** or different needs that mean their behaviour might not be so good. Because actually Carl's behaviour is pretty compliant, not always with me but with teachers, that's what kids do act out	**Mainstream works if school is proactive/has funding/additional support/knowledge of SEN. Concentrate on ability to communicate.** **Can work in some areas but not city.** **Affluent areas lacking SEN budget to support.** **Schools made to adapt then they can include children with SEN.** *Lack of choice for schools- made to do it.* *Minority: outnumber by others, be marginalised/isolated?* Parent discussing that want Carl to be with others like him, find a community, not be seen as different or in a minority. Sense of fear of rejection/prejudice from others. **Wants Carl to be accepted/wanted in school.** **Special school staff: caring/loving towards children with SEN.** **Carl do his best: where he will thrive.** **Anxiety of parent** **Negative of special: copy behaviours of others.**

with mainstream and special Disappointed at integration Lack of integration Previous integration experience Lack of staffing barrier Curriciulm differs Personalised special curriculum	with parents. But he will sit at school and do the activity, if you've got children who aren't is he going to copy their behaviour. So far, I don't think so. **R**: Was there anything else you were thinking about when deciding about school placement? **P**: Um another thing, a lot of children in (special school name A) travel in on the bus, they come from all over (city name). **Therefore you know… where is his friendship based, will he get invited to parties**. That **sort of stuff makes me sad**, but what we have also discovered, the parent liaison lady at (special school name A) came out a couple of weeks ago and **said this year they've had a particular intake in the early years of people who are local.** Actually one of Richard's friends, his brother also started at (special school name A) this year, that's quite nice, the children play together. **You know Richard has a lot of friends whose siblings started in mainstream reception this year, but he's also got a friend whose sibling started in special school like he has so that's quite nice**. Another little boy who lives by the park, two parents who live close by. So that to me is nice, **you want some integration and you want Carl to have some friends in his local area. Not somebody who lives (other side of city) who we are not going to go and visit at the weekend.** **R**: Did anyone speak to you about this? **P**: I think it was our **SALT, or special school, who said we are in a fairly unique position because we are a part of mainstream community and Carl fits in to that as the youngest sibling.** There is a family that lives beside the school who has a Halloween party every year, and Carl gets invited as the younger sibling so that's how we are included. They need to work on integration, even though the	**Difficulty with decision: where will Carl' community/friendships be.** <u>Parent emotion: wanting Carl to form friendships- be part of a community where he belongs</u>**.** **Community in local area important.** **Older child able to share experience with friends.** **Carl able to have friends in local area.** **Part of mainstream community due to older son but not due to school.** **Wanting more integration at a school level.**

Professionals advice provision Professional advice around SEND Professional shared experience Professional guide choice EP as supportive Parent wanting professional help to decide	schools are on the same site. **There isn't as much integration as you might hope.** **R**: How would you like that integration to work? **P**: Yeah you would think, **(primary name school) always say they hope their children come out nicer at the end of year 6 because they've got the special children on the same site therefore their more understanding** of children with additional needs. **I don't know if that's the case because they don't have that much access to them**. You know the children on that playground have the blue jumper's they're with a different school. I **think in reception a couple of people in Richard's class went over to (special school name A) to join in with music lessons but really if you're properly integrating, you should be sending Carl to mainstream**. Not sending a few well-behaved children in to (special school name A). But **I understand why…you know…staffing wise why that may not be** the case. **Some children with additional needs may have unpredictable behaviour; they may not be able to cope in a classroom of 30 peopl**e. I actually think Carl probably could because he may enjoy it being with some of the younger children who are siblings, and he loves music you know so…there isn't as much integration as I would like. They have this amazing space, an outdoor classroom. But because of the pressure of the curriculum on mainstream, **Richard did forest school once a week for one term in reception, Carl does it every Wednesday. That's the different emphasis. In reception in mainstream you've got to learn your ABC, you've got to learn to read and write.** You've got a phonics test in year 1, your SATs at the end of year 2, that's basically what you're working toward. The minute you hit reception. **For Carl its different, they go at their own pace.** When he first did forest school, they were like he just loved it- he loved the mud school. Carl just loves mud and mess.	**Mainstream school believe exposure to children with SEN will have positive impact on mainstream children. Parent unsure as they do not get integrated often.** <u>Seeing integration as children with SEN in to mainstream not the other way around.</u> <u>Reasons for lack of integration: staffing/children with SEN behavioural needs (Within child focus)</u> **Desire for Carl to be integrated further in to mainstream school.** **Specialist curriculum allowing Carl to access areas of curriculum he enjoys more often.** <u>Special school: see Carl as individual as opposed to needing to conform/follow mainstream test pattern?</u>

Experience from others SEND community experience Nursery advice experience Others experience rejection Lack of guidance from council Parent proactive with learning Learnt independently (from online and others)	**R**: Did he come home covered in mud? **P**: (Laughs) He did, they have those all in one suits but he was still covered. **R**: Showing you he enjoyed it **P**: Exactly he enjoyed it. **R**: Were you given any other advice or guidance at this time? **P**: Uh, I **think really the conversations I've had with the specialists**. Particularly the conversations I had with the NHS SALT. She happened to be employed by (special school name A) at the time it was one day a week, now it's one day every two weeks. So she had quite a good insight into Carl but also in the schools in the area. **If I'm honest it was probably her who led me down the more special school path because she talked a lot about experiences she had had of children with downs in mainstream school**. **How schools in the local area didn't have experience of SEN.** How he would *thrive* at special school. She always said to me that if we were going to go down the **special school route that he would need mainstream integration somewhere, if you go to mainstream you need specialist intervention. So whatever way you need a bit of both.** **R**: Okay, was there any other advice? **P**: Um I think she…I think the rest of it we did ourselves. **By the point I met EP, we were pretty sure we wanted special school. Because I remember saying to the EP; do you help me decided.** And **she said no, I'm here to support your decision so if you want to go down the mainstream route I'm here to help that, make sure it works, give you the options**. So we didn't actually look at any other special schools. For me, why would you, it's on our doorstep. **And we**	<u>NHS SALT influence parent towards special school due to SALT experience of children with SEN in mainstream school. SALT described as specialist in this area- therefore they should know more compared to parent? Parent reliant on specialists to advice therefore puts weigh on what they tell them?</u> <u>School lack experience: fear that they don't know what to do/are not equipped.</u> *Thrive: do better at special school.* <u>SALT acknowledged that mainstream integration would be needed; is this why parent hoped for more integration from mainstream school on specialist site?</u> <u>SALT influence and parent knowledge/choice.</u> <u>EP involvement: decision had been made.</u> <u>SALT positioned as professional that helped in decision? EP positioned as advocate for parental choice?</u> **Special school suits Carl's SEN.**

Preparation needed for SEND system Confusing system Self-taught	**knew full well it's, it's a school for cognitive delay which Carl, he's not severely physically disabled**. I knew…when Carl was a baby we used to do hydrotherapy with a little girl who has quite a severe brain injury, and she goes to (special school name B). so I knew (special school name B) was for quite complex needs, and that was it really. I didn't feel the need to look any further. Whereas one of, a friend, whose son was born deaf she did look at (special school name B) and she did look at schools for children who were… and I know the (special School name C) is a specialist for autism. So I'm aware of these school. **I'm aware from conversations with nursery**. So when we were doing the EHC process this was only their second EHC. The first was for a young boy who went to a mainstream school. So I knew about the experiences she had, I know she went to see the catholic school down the road who actually does have a child with downs. **But they told her they don't really want children with additional needs so you know the kind of options were based on schools that we knew, having spoken to parents.**	**Awareness of system/different types of specialist setting due to friends/experience.** **Nursery gave advice/guidance.** Nursery lacking experience? Nursery telling parent that mainstream does not want children with SEN? Did this anecdotal experience of other parent influence this parent due to fears of Carl being rejected by setting?
Nursery support Contrasting experience from others Reliant on professionals to begin process	**R**: What were the stages you went through to get a place at (special school name A)? **P**: **Nobody from the council ever said to me, you know these are the options**… we just had the normal letter in the post, which said you apply for schools because your child is going to school in September 2019. **Of course that process I had to check with SENAR, doesn't apply for you if you're going to special school**. So yeah**, it's really just from what I know from having spoken to parents in the area.** Yeah rather than anybody helping me I would say. I don't know who would be the person who would give you the options**. We only had an EP because we were going through the EHC process. I only knew about the EHC process because I'm active on forums with children with Down's syndrome. So I had read up quite a lot about the EHC process. My husband**	**No guidance from council about what to do/information about settings.** **Parent had to seek out information/guidance from SEN team.** **Guidance from other parents in area/similar situation.** **No help from others. Using own knowledge/exploring options.** **EP access only due to EHC process**

Prepared for rejection Smooth process Own experience not the norm Surprised no rejection EHCP process easy EHCP passport to special school	**and I had also, and I can't remember how we came across it, but we came across a free training session in (City name) that was given by contact a family charity, alongside a legal firm. I can't remember how we found it, I think it was through a local Down's syndrome forum, somebody had posted it.** So we went to that one Wednesday morning so that was really useful. **So I felt we were quite prepared**. **We had done a lot of reading, we got everything there was off the council website about the local offers. We felt that eventually we could navigate…the system**. Because eventually you're going around and around in circles on the council website trying to find what you need. I remember one day I found a booklet with everything you need and I send it to my husband and he said 'wow how did you find that' and I don't really know, I'm not sure I could find it again. Maybe it was a resource on this page. I don't know, I was probably a bit self-taught. **R**: Were you given any other support? **P**: **Nursery… they were also… because they had gone through this process with this other child, they had quite a good regional SENCo**. They had gone to the regional SENCo because they needed some extra support with Carl because he was biting. So they um, 'we think the parents should apply, you know he's clearly very developmentally delayed'. **So one of our friends who has Down's, her older brother was at the same nursery as Carl but he has further progressed, her (Beth) speech is better than Carl's. So nursery, all the time, when I was starting the EHC process were saying to (other mum) Beth will be fine, she will be fine. What then happened when she finally turned 3-oh she's a bit delayed now- okay let's start the EHCP process, then of course we both had to leave nursery, go to this new nursery.** And it's been a much harder job for her (Beth). We had an EHCP last Christmas when he was still at nursery.	**Training course given by charity to support parents understanding of EHC system**. Reassuring/prepared: giving parents knowledge. Capitol: reading/process of learning. Navigating system-find their way. Confusing for parents trying to understand system **Nursery offered advice/support. Nursery thought parents should get EHC due to externalising behaviours.** Other child did not go through process as seen as progressing/speaking- lacking the external behaviours that would get her noticed. Sense that reliant on nursery professionals to pick up on need/start process.

Proactive parent Nursery supportive helped Parents lack guidance Parents need to be proactive Positive professional relationship helped Wider family system Parent agreed decisions Others supportive	**R**: When he was in his first nursery? **P**: Yep, so they said to us. **The first step is you have to apply for an EP that can get rejected or not rejected. But they said to us we think we can build enough of a case because Carl is biting a bit** and with the support of the regional SENCo. So we put in the request for an EP maybe the January/February. I got a call from EP in the May, so we met in the May. By Christmas the EHC was done. **R**: How did that feel? **P**: It was *staggering*. And even NHS SALT said, 'I've never seen such a quick smooth process for getting into a special school'. **I think we were just lucky**; I think we had someone good at **SENAR who went to special school through the backdoor because their time was running out**. She was getting to the end of the 20-week period and I think she called up (special school name A) and said, 'I've got this family who live in this locality, they've got a son at school next door'. Approaching the 20-week deadline, will you look at that?' Then I got a phone call saying he had his place, which I think was quite unusual. **When I spoke to SENAR they said, 'look special is a popular school, there are 17 other people like me who all want their caseload to go to (special school name A), it's in my interest as well as yours to get Carl a place'. So it's kind of worked, we didn't get rejected at any point**. So when we put in the request for an EP that was granted. EP came out and said Carl was borderline for getting **an EHCP which I found staggering but (redacted) but she still said I will support you in your application.** The application, we put in the request for an assessment that was granted, yes, we will give you your EHCP. What school do you want- X, yes, they have a place, and yes, they can meet his needs. All done and dusted by December before he started in September 2019.	<u>Process of EHC seen as facing hurdles of rejection? EP difficult to get involved- need to make a case.</u> <u>Smooth process: seen as not the norm. Sense that only reason it was smooth was because it went through 'backdoor' i.e. did not follow guidelines.</u> *Staggering: surprised at ease of process.* **Sense of surprise there was no rejection.** **Support from professionals helped make process easier/smoother.**

Lack of understanding from wider family	Having said that, when the EHC came back it was pretty vague and wishy-washy. I spoke to EP about it, and she said at this point the EHCP is really only used for two reasons; one is a passport to get you where you want to go i.e. into special, or two to use against the setting to go to tribunal. Well obviously we weren't in that situation, we were in the first situation. **We just wanted to get him in**. What we do now with the EHCP will be different. **R**: What was it that you wanted to change? **P**: Yeah get a bit more meat on it, but just to get him into (special school name A) that's what we needed. **R**: Sure. How did you feel about getting the school place?	**Professional view of EHC as passport to special school.** **Aim of EHC process to get Carl in to special school.**
SEND network supportive Shift in own knowledge Wider network happy	**P**: **I wouldn't say it's down to us, but it almost was really because we started the process so early.** Luckily with nursery's support. Those people, special school said to me, they've just filled the last space in Carl's class. And I was like why is that so late, we are in October how come. 'Oh well the EHC only got finalised in July' and I was like why is that**. But maybe other parents aren't so aware of it, or of the pitfalls, how long it can take. So that's wrong really, who is it that tells you an EHCP needs to be done, have you got to do all the work yourself. I think you have you know and because we were on it we got what we wanted. Its luck. I think we got a good SALT NHS who has the relationship with special school. I think we were lucky with, I wasn't unhappy with how SEN admin team acted, I liked the EP very much so I think we were just lucky with how it all worked.**	**Process better when started earlier with support from nursery.** **Other parents may not be aware of system which would prevent them from accessing support/school.** **Positive experience with range of professionals involved.** <u>Sense that this is not the norm/down to luck? External factors may have influenced ease of process.</u>
Set on decision	**R**: What did you think other people's views were at the choice of special school? **P**: Yeah um, **well my mother in law I think was, she talks a lot about integration you know 'oh I know someone in (city name B) whose school is**	<u>Acceptance from family members: non-immediate process of accepting wanting child to go to mainstream.</u>

Professional influence Friends supportive Early on in process Desire for integration Fear special school segregate Desire for social relationships for child Fear mainstream socially isolate	**really good at integrating children with additional needs' well great but we don't live in (City name B). I think she was more hesitant** 'oh it's a shame Carl can't go to school like Richard', **well it's a shame but that's the situation we are in**. My mum was very supportive. **My husband and I pretty much agreed. I think if I decided to push for mainstream, he would have been warier**. I think he was keen just to make life as **un-stressful for us as possible**. You know could we have gone to mainstream to mainstream up the road, you know traffic to get to one. **From a selfish point of view we decided that wasn't right for the family**. Um I think generally people have been fairly supportive. I think because it's on the same site, I think when Carl was born generally everyone was very supportive. In fact I've never really had any negative or stupid comments. **You know people, I think the worst came from my own grandmother when he was born** 'oh I knew one of them once, he died' well that's nice terminology, thanks for that Nan. **But you know she was in her 90s, you know you kind of expect that. Back when she was younger children with Down's were put into an institution and probably did die**. So I've never really had any stupid or insensitive comments, all my friends have been very supportive. I'm very close to my NCT friends **from when my oldest son was born, one of them has a son who is 8 with autism. When you have a child with additional needs you suddenly meet other parents…** **R**: How do you mean? **P**: **Yeah before I was probably completely unaware, never came across children with Down's**. Now it's opened my eyes a bit to the range of needs out there. So yeah people have been completely supportive. You know he's quite a popular little chap, they still see him on the school run. Um yeah everyone was supportive. I think, **everyone is pleased how it's working out**.	<u>Sense that parent accepts situation but outer family is yet to.</u> **Parents in agreement for special school: life easier/less stressful for everyone. Seeing this as decision that will affect all members of the family not just Carl.** **Experience from others has been positive/supportive.** **View of SEN of older generation different to views now.** **Have support network that can share experience with: positive.** **Shift in own perspective/awareness after having child with SEN.** **Everyone happy Carl is in special school.**

Understanding from SEND network Independence skills prioritize over academic Mainstream responsible for inclusion	**R**: Do you think anything supported or hindered this decision? **P**: No I don't think so, **we were fairly set on what we decided**. Dad and I have been given this situation and we know what we think is right. **You know apart from the experience of our NHS SALT that definitely had an influence on me**. But in terms of what other people thought, my friend whose child has autism he's at special schools but she said to me, **well the benefits of Carl being in a mainstream reception for a year are worth considering**. But I think that's all the advice she gave**. I think my friends haven't tended to give much advice because they don't really know**. **They've been supportive when I've moaned, but they don't really know, don't understand** – you don't because you can't unless you have a child with additional needs. So **I haven't really felt like I've had that much opinion about it, it's just I suppose also very fairly early on** we knew what we were doing. We were going down this road on the EHC process. **R**: Has anything else challenged this decision? **P**: I suppose a **slight hesitation for what you want for your child. You want your child to be integrated into society**. My general thoughts about special school, **once they're in special schools they're not going to go to mainstream**. A few people have said to me 'oh once he's in special school maybe he will go to mainstream' **I don't think that happens.** He will have to go to secondary elsewhere. **We just take one day at a time**. I don't think the options for secondary are very good in the area. I **think that was my slight hesitation the integration, and building friendships. But then really, are people, mainstream, do they have friendships with people who have additional needs**. I don't know the answer to that. Like I said, the **bad behaviour I was a bit worried about**. Um I want **positive role models for Carl and that will probably mainly land on Richard**. We have him signed up for beavers as well, the same colony that Richard is in but that won't be until he's 6. But you know they, **I've spoke to the**	<u>Despite influence of others: consider decision their own. Agency over choice.</u> **Professional influence but not that of friends. Friends not given opinion as they have not been through experience.** **Seen friends as supportive of process.** **Hesitation: integrating in to society. Not moving away from special school in to mainstream school/wider society.** <u>Fear that special school will segregate Carl- isolate him from others when he is in society.</u> **Parent trying not to focus too much in to the future: is this anxiety provoking?** **People in mainstream not accepting of those with additional needs: not make friends with them.** **Hesitation: Carl will learn behaviours from others.** **Impact on brother.**

Inclusion needs to be meaningful Political awareness of influence on education provision Lack resources	**leaders already and they said 'absolutely we will take him**' so that's good that kind of, that's what you want. And for before and after school club, for them to say 'of course we will take him', he actually said to me 'we take those kids from who have 4 TVs in their house and 5 X-boxes, of course we will take Carl, he's easy'. **But he also has got a daughter with autism so he also um is more open to it**. Him and his mum who run the before and after school club have said to me, they'll basically give anybody a go. **And that to me is what you want. I think that's it really, just where his social scene comes from.** And **is he learning enough to help him integrate into society**. But alongside that is the reality, Carl is not going to be prime minister. **He will probably always need a level of support, he's not probably going to live independent. Therefore at special school they are probably giving him more skills than mainstream that are probably going to help.** **R**: Can you tell me what the term inclusion means to you? **P**: **Inclusion is something I don't think there is enough of. I wish there was more. It's about integrating you know children with additional needs with mainstream typical children. It's for children not to be looked at in funny ways on the playground.** Not for children to go 'Carl is weird, why is he still in a nappy still'**. It's for you know, children to understand that there are other children out there with additional needs- they might do things a bit slower than other children**. I don't know if that answers your question. **R**: Can you tell me about how you've developed this view? **P**: **I support inclusion because Carl is in a special school, you know inclusion is for mainstream to include children with additional needs in the school**	**Acceptance within community groups:** <u>parent seems to feel that only those who have experience with children with SEN are able to understand/be more open and accepting of children with additional needs.</u> **Priority for Carl is to establish relationships with others and be able to live in society when he is older. Priority over academic side of school life.** <u>Special school equipping Carl with knowledge/skills he needs to live in world: mainstream not suited to what Carl needs.</u> **Inclusion not enough of: wanting to integrate children in to mainstream school.** **Parent wants more inclusion: does this stem from Carl's needs?** **Inclusion: not being seen in negative way by others. For children to understand Carl and his needs.** <u>Inclusion viewed as aspect that mainstream have to do. Mainstream role to incorporate children with additional needs. Social model of disability?</u>

Lack training for inclusion Positive attitude not enough Need for specialist training Social network influence Need for open minded leadership Location difference in provision- lack of choice Ep discussed inclusion	**environment**. So **doe's inclusion also mean that typical children go spend time with him, it works both ways.** **R**: Can you tell me a bit more about your feelings with the school choice? **P**: Actually when we went to visit (special school name A) **for the first time, the lady showing us around, when I asked about inclusion and integration, she said to me, she said something interesting 'really integration is great but there has got to be a reason for it, you know it's got to help. So is it helpful**. We have had some children from special school who were high functioning who went into primary school and had maths integration, I think that's great. I don't think that's happened for a while. **And who has that helped, well it's obviously helped the child from special school because they're in a mainstream environment. They've been pushed a bit educationally.** Has it helped the children at mainstream? Hopefully, **if you believe in this kind of lofty um the children at (mainstream school name A) are nicer because they mix with children with additional needs but…are they really**? Are they really being exposed to them when they're on a different playground wearing different jumpers? **That's probably why there isn't more integration, integration and inclusion is hard work**. But **you know, this is the whole policy from years ago, when the conservatives said 'right we are going to do away with special schools and everyone is going to be in mainstream and included'. Well that's all very well saying that but you've got to have the resources and the skills and I think that's probably what's missing to be able to include children to their full potential**. **You know teachers don't have the skills, not through their own fault, they're just not trained**. **R**: How did you develop that view?	Inclusion needs to be beneficial/meaningful rather than tokenistic to be genuine. Inclusion helps children with additional needs but uncertainty over it helps those in mainstream develop their awareness/understanding of others. Integration/inclusion difficult to achieve. **Awareness of government policy for inclusion: but lacked practical ways to help this process i.e. through funding/skill-** need expertise/specialised knowledge to help inclusion. Specialised view of teacher's ability for inclusion: sense that teachers need to be given training/skill development to ensure this happens/understand SEN but what would this actually look like in practice? Positive attitude not enough for parent to feel that Carl would be supported within mainstream/receive the appropriate curriculum: belief that there is a skill deficit.

Anxiety over social inclusion Concern over social acceptance Emotional reaction to social inclusion Parental anxiety over social inclusion Parental worry over others Learning from experience	**P: Actually, the other person I spoke to when I was thinking about mainstream was Richard's reception teacher.** Richard was in Rear 1 at the time but I really liked his Reception teacher and I went back round to her one day and I said I just wanted a quick chat about Richard's brother. If you were teaching reception again, what would you feel, how would you feel having a child in your class with additional needs, and sh**e said 'well I'd say bring it on', and I went 'that's great- have you had any training recently on SEN?' 'No not really, there's not much time for that.** Actually, **one person who did...influence me…my best friend university…her mum is a head teacher**. I had gone to visit her and her mum was there. And I said while you're here what do you think about mainstream vs special and she said to **me 'children's with Down's Is recommended that they're educated in mainstream isn't it?' and I said yeah that's what the Down's syndrome associate recommend that children with downs are educated in mainstream. And I said what do you think is the reality of it, and she was quite positive about it**. She was probably the only person who made me think twice because she was a head teacher and **had experience of children with special needs and she was of an open inclusive mindedness**. But again she doesn't teach around her. she retired. And then that made me think it is often down to personalities and who you get in the room. **So Richard's head teacher may have been very welcoming of Carl but he might leave in three years' time. That was the other impact that made me think it's not as straight forward as…** it was **my SALT who said to me that the Down's association are based down south, they don't have many special schools in the area so don't feel you've got to follow what they say just because he has downs**. **R**: Was inclusion spoken to you at all during this process?	**Influence of education professional (friendship)** <u>Positive open mind of head teacher put down to individual/exception not the rule: not the norm.</u> **SALT advice around going to special school.** <u>Due to environment that they are in and not due to need: environment parent in not as inclusive?</u>

Parental anxiety common Avoidance anxiety situations Accepting difference Not seen as advocate Stress for whole family Concern over prejudice	**P**: Probably learnt from my own experience. **The EP probably talked about it but probably more about if I wanted mainstream.** I think it's often been driven by me. I've **had all the questions like 'if Carl goes to special how do we get inclusion?'. By anybody in authority? Probably not no besides from EP saying if you want mainstream I'll help you**. No I don't think so. You might talk about it on the forums (internet) someone might say I'm delighted 'someone invited my child to a party'. Actually that sort of thing is really exciting. **The first party invitation Carl had at nursery *I was happy and I cried, it was terrifying***. It was a small party at a farm. My first reaction was- I **said to the nursery girls- does that mum know Carl has Down's- and they said, 'yeah they don't care'.** A few days later…I sat their thinking about it…he acts different…he would have been two and a half. He was walking and it was a little boy who was turning three. Going around the farm he's going to run off, he doesn't really eat much. He's a bit annoying like that. He's going to act differently 'oh god'. I sat on the invitation for about a week. The girl at nursery said to me 'oh Tim's mum was asking if you had the invitation' and I burst into tears. And she said, **'you know we treat Carl like all the other children, don't you?' and I was so touched by that**. In my response to this poor mum- I wrote an essay…oh I'm a bit worried Carl might walk off or do this. He's not very good at eating and he might act up. And she just wrote back 'great, see you on Saturday'. She was so utterly unbothered by it. What I hadn't realised was that Carl and Tim played nicely together. What I didn't realise was that she had an older daughter who would play with Carl for a few minutes when she picked her child from nursery. Which I never saw because he was already picked up by the time I got there. She said it was only a very small party, only a few people from nursery and some family and when we arrived. I had to wake Carl up because the timing wasn't right he was sleep. She came over to the care and he recognised them and he was all happy and they were happy.	**Not directly talked to about inclusion: EP promoted as option.** **Learning about inclusion by self/internet forums** Anxiety/fear over integrating with others: mixed emotions. Parent anxiety over acceptance of Carl; what he would do/what he would be like. Disbelief over acceptance by other? Concern over being judged by others? **Emotional impact of Carl being treated the same as every else.** **Parent anxiety over situation overshadowing Carls actual SEN** **Parents own anxiety- cause Carl to miss out on opportunities.**

Societal ignorance Process of learning Money needed for inclusion Social inclusion Training in specialised strategies needed Resources needed	**R**: How did that feel? **P**:**It was me who had made a bigger deal out of it than they did**. And **actually when it came to the food he was eating stuff I didn't even know he ate**. He was eating cucumber sticks and he sat their good as gold eating his cheese sandwiches. **And I sat there and thought 'that was MY bad' that I sat there and thought, not doubted him, I made it into a bigger deal than it might have been**. Then there was another party at nursery, a soft **play party, and yes you know all the parents are sitting around having a coffee and I'm crawling around after Carl because he's not physically as able. But the kids and the parents were just lovely about him. It definitely made me think I'm the one who's trying to…separate…not separate…. but almost separate from other people…I was worried about how people would react to him and so** sometimes it's ***easier just to not go anywhere then have to deal with other people's looks and that kind of thing.*** **So probably I didn't include him as much as I should have done. I wouldn't do it now; I'd take him to any party.** **Lily, the girl who has gone in to mainstream, her mum messaged me the other day saying has anyone one been to the snow doom for a party because Lily has been invited. And she was thinking that same,** is this ice-skating Lily can't ice skate- out kids are very unstable on their feet. Then we were all thinking is it appropriate for her to go. And I said I think it is because it's not ice skating because they play in the snow. What you need to do is keep her warm because she will be freezing, its cold in there, that's the biggest thing. But she was thinking- **is this part accessible, and therefore is it easier to say no instead of take her there and find out you can't do it.** ***Which is more upsetting. We know that we are different.*** I'm not one of these…**I don't go around going 'yay Down's syndrome we are all the same' because I can absolutely see that's not the truth.** He does not act the same as his four-year-old peers. **So there is an**	**Learnt from experience something new about Carl i.e. food he likes.** **Worried about what others think of Carl.** <u>Inadvertently separating Carl from opportunities'/segregating due to concern around how he would be seen/how he would be treated/what others would do.</u> **Learning from experience.** **Fear shared with other parents with children with SEN: common experience/ concern.** **Easier: less stressful to avoid situations (anxiety avoidance)** **Acceptance that they are different: not treating all children the same.** <u>Sense that parent would like Carl to be integrated/included with mainstream peers but does not want to do so if it is stress inducing for family.</u> <u>Concerned over prejudice/discrimination from others: not wanting others to reinforce difference.</u>

Awareness needed Wider community influence Inclusive attitude needed Resources needed Understanding needed Money Others experience of inclusion	**understanding that your child is different but you still want them to be integrated as much as physically and mentally possible without everyone getting upset in the process**. **Because that's not good integration and inclusion if you are doing something that makes you upset. I think sometimes it can cause more upset**. **We know that our children are looked at differently in the world. Do we want that to be reinforced at a party at the weekend- no not really no thanks. By other parents who we don't blame for not being aware because probably we weren't aware.** One of the other girls she said, she gets a lot of stupid comments from parents. **Weird little stories that aren't that helpful**. And Sarah had said, I don't really mind those comments because if I hadn't had a child with Down's I think I might not have been aware… so I never, **I don't correct people's terminology**. You know if someone says Carl is Down's it makes me go (action). But I don't correct them. I don't make a point of correcting them. I might say oh yeah, he has Down's syndrome but I wouldn't say 'hang on a minute you mustn't say' because actually **that's the kind of thing that I probably would have said before we had Carl**. As my mum says to me- we are all learning new terminology. We are all learning to be politically correct and not offend people, its new for all of us. **R**: What else could be done to support inclusion? **P**: I think a lot of it **essentially comes down to money. I think if you have more money you can train teachers and then that's the thing**…. **communication can be a big way that kids can be excluded**. What I have had to learn is that communication is not just about talking. Carl communicates brilliantly but he says very few words. I can generally understand what point he is trying to get across. I know that's familiarly as well and context. **But if there was more money to put behind schools for things like Makaton training, SEND training. More resources in the classroom that you can have a TA. That can spend the**	<u>Sense that those who have not experience children with SEN are more likely to be ignorant about terms/what they say/how they treat others.</u> <u>Parent reframing technique to others: shift their thinking without being forcing/arguing.</u> <u>Own perspective has changed since having Carl.</u> <u>Inclusion: needs money to fund training. Expert view of inclusion.</u> <u>Communication: concern for parent/Carl lack of speech: shaped how parent views inclusion what needs to be prioritised.</u> **Schools need more funding to be inclusive** **Schools need SEND training and MAKATON training.** **Resources in the classroom** **More staff to support inclusion** <u>Mainstream schools don't have visuals: where has this assumption come from? Older child's experience?</u>

Parents self taught More info needed Guidance needed to navigate system Felt supported which helped Others negative mainstream experience Start process early Power of professionals not support	**time one day creating a visual timetable that you can stick on the wall. A lot of mainstream schools don't have the kind of visual cues that Carl needs to help him**. You may think his understanding is good but **we pay privately for SALT**. My private lady was saying last **night 'he probably does understand that question you've asked him' that makes you sit back and think 'well he doesn't' so you simplify things and do it visually.** A lot of mainstream classes are **under resourced, underfunded. I think that's fairly obvious. Everyone needs more money**, the whole country. That's not going to be solved anytime soon. **I think its awareness as well**. I don't do much for awareness for Down's. **My friend does, and she has been contacted by someone in her area that has a high risk of Down's in her pregnancy. How she feels so much better seeing the positive coming through** (my friends) Facebook posts. Awareness helps. **Inclusion is a lot about people just being nice**. And unfortunately, **some people in the world are just not nice.** And I think no matter how much money you throw at them or how much awareness there still not going to be nice, and there not going to be nice to your child. So you have to discount people like that. Awareness is important. Hmm what else…. can you ask me the question again (*laughs*). **R**: (*laughs*) We were talking about what could be done to support inclusion? **P**: Hmm…yeah…I would like…I think **maybe it's down to resources,** if there were more clubs and stuff out there that can be more inclusive. Can football clubs be more inclusive. **Can they again have more resources and understanding. Holiday clubs…there's always a lot of topics on holiday clubs on the forums** because someone's told, 'y**our child can't come to dance club anymore because she needs 1:1 and we can't provide that'**. So that inclusion of being in a ballet class she now can't do. **Or the parents have to come with her and manage her behaviour. So training but again that comes down to**	**Economic capital to support child with specialist support.** <u>Sense that mainstream school lack understanding/specialised input to understand children with SEN.</u> **Awareness needed.** <u>Community amongst others help those understand SEN: positive emotional impact on others.</u> <u>Inclusion in part due to people's attitudes: not everyone will have the right attitude/want to accept those with SEN.</u> **Resources are needed to support inclusion.** **Further understanding needed.** **Community inclusion: after school clubs.** **Children missing out on opportunities due to lack of inclusion.** **Impact on parents.** **Communication fundamental to inclusion**

Nursery need support Distrust of professionals Different sides Specialist teaching Continued fight for support Parental private support	**money.** Where my friend is, they don't have much money for EHCs. She was told you won't get an EHC so don't bother trying. But the **schools are much more geared towards inclusion**. Makaton is fundamental in her school. **Communication is big…a lot of children in this area do tiny talks which is based in BSL but at least it's something**. Carl is doing sign, so people might recognise. It always comes down to money, funding training. **R**: Is there anything that could have help you or Carl through this process? **P**: I think, unusually, we had a **fairly smooth process but I think that's probably because we were self-taught**. Could the **local council run some more sessions for parents on the EHC process** because we did find that session that we went to valuable. Honestly, I don't there was (any area we didn't feel supported) and I think **that's quite unusual.** Generally, I **think children with additional needs, if your child is…sits in the corner quietly not bothering anybody…nobody will really shout…the teachers will say 'well they're not causing us any problems' so this particular colleague of mine**. She has a daughter who is GCSE age, she's got twins, one of them has ADHD. The way she deals with life. In class she acts perfectly well does everything she is told to and then comes home and will smash her room up. So, what her parents…**so therefore her support at school has been withdrawn because she acts fine, the other children in the class who have ADHD or autism who act up get support**. And this is what's happened with Carl and Beth. Because Carl went through this phase where he was biting everyone got worried. 'ah, we need extra support, we need the EHC quick let's do something about it'. Lily is sat there is the corner nicely playing with dolls ignored and everyone said she was fine. That's um, I think that's… **we had the support of the nursery to start this process early because Carl had this brief period of biting and then it went on from there**. The EP was supportive luckily. EPs are all so different so we may have had an EP who went 'no your child can	<u>Friends have had negative experiences of being included in clubs: has this influenced this parent view of how Carl will be treated/accepted by others?</u> <u>Inclusion does not just extend to schooling but to clubs/opportunities/holidays too.</u> <u>Less money for EHCs: schools needing to accommodate/be more inclusive.</u> **Smooth process: not the norm: partly down to parents teaching themselves.** **More guidance/information needed for parents about navigating the EHC process/SEN system.** **Felt supported through process.** <u>Support only given for externalising behaviours: lack of understanding from schools on how needs can manifest which will impact on support that children can receive.</u> **Smooth process in part due to Carl's externalising behaviours** <u>Support only because Carl seemed like he had a high level of need?</u>

Continuing to fight for provision Social exclusion fear Peers may exclude Parents need to be inclusive Provision is minefield	will be fine in mainstream'. **That would have skewed the process if they're saying mainstream and we want special**. But EP was supportive of our decision um NHS SALT was supportive of our decision. SENAR went to the panel and absolutely recognised that Carl would do better in special school. You know if that had been a different panel of different SENAR it might not have been so smooth. So, stars aligning I think. **R**: Anything else you would like to share with me? **P**: Our nursery we were only the second EHCP so that's not a lot of experience really but you only gain experience by going through the process. **Nurseries could probably do with more experience.** Again, you have to have a good SENCo who's aware…*you've got to play the game.* And actually, that's one of the things I wanted to find out when I meet the **EP 'are you friend or foe?'.** I didn't ask her that directly, but **I wanted to know 'whose side are you on?'. Are you on the side of the council**…and I've had this conversation with NHS SALT, I tried to get out of her…one area that I'm not very happy with now. She only ever saw Carl 5 or 6 months anyway. Her specialist is pre-school Down's and mainstream primary. Now that Carl doesn't fit in to that so she said at our last session 'I'm not having to transfer you to specialist team' and I went 'oh'. And she said 'hmm the thing is **now you're now going to go special; communication is built into the whole day. I've trained those teachers that you don't really need individual speech therapy from me'**. So, the next thing I had this letter telling me that their waiting list was so long…and I was like 'hang on a minute'. And the one thing I tried to query in the EHC that I couldn't do anything about. The one thing that everyone always says to me is that everything has to be specific. NHS SALT has offered up to 6 sessions in a year, one of which has to be training. **Up to 6 could mean one and I wrote back to SENAR trying to change the wording to at least 6 but they wouldn't let me because that had come**	**EP could have skewed process: power of EP/professional in SEN system.** **Nursery require more support about EHC process.** *you've got to play the game: system is game that you need to know how to navigate.* **Distrustful of professionals/SEN system: will there be a fight/battle if they do not agree with parents wishes.** **Parent positioned as against council.** <u>Sense that specialist support has been removed since Carl now has place at specialist setting. Does this reinforce the idea that special schools are equipped with specialised training/expert model of care?</u> **EHC issue: lack of specificity due to funding needs.** **Funding influencing care that child receives.**

	from SALT. So, what's happened is I'm probably not going to get SALT. The specialist, whenever they can fit me in, and I haven't…I left a message saying I wasn't very happy about it…I don't care if you have a waiting list his EHC says 6 sessions but they haven't called me back. But now, when they eventually come out they're probably going to say 'well great you're in a specialist setting the teachers know exactly what they're doing' so they'll sign us off. **So, we will be without SALT apparent from the fact that I'm paying for it myself**. So that's an area…where I feel isn't effective. That's what I was trying to say to SALT. You work for NHS or the council, you've got budgets. Are you telling me that Carl only needs 6 sessions a year or is that just all you can offer. And she said it's all I can offer. That to me is a discrepancy in care. Maybe it's because there is not enough money but you should be offering what the child needs. **R**: How do you feel about that? **P**: That's really **why I'm continuing pay for SALT because at some point I may decide to fight provision**. To me the most important thing to Carl at the moment is to get him speaking, that fundamental. He can walk, we will toilet train at some point. But I want him to be able to able to speak because that's what he will need… because the other thing. **That's what with mainstream and integration and inclusion I was worried, very quickly, children would not play with Carl** anymore because he can't talk. And yes, some games don't involve words fine you're running around. But actually, **children can be a bit mean**, they're only 4/5 they don't know it. This is what my friend had from another parent the other day 'oh how's Kelly settling in' um 'oh yeah my son said that Kelly comes up to them and laughs so he doesn't play with her'. Why have you just told her story to her mum- she seems to get these idiotic comments. **You can't make children aware; you need to make parents aware of integration and inclusion**. So, their **thoughts will filter down to their kids**. But yeah that's	**Waiting list issue for receiving care** **Parent having to pay for support/SALT for Carl.** **Possibility of having to fight in the future: process not finished with Carl in school, still need for further support.** Anxiety/fear: **Carl isolated from peers due to communication needs.** **Inclusion/awareness needs to come from all ages.** **Starting with parents to make children more inclusive: learn through parent's views.**

	why we are going for private SALT. And then you get to a point where it's only the parents who can afford it but that's life in general. But yeah. **The whole thing is a *minefield*.** **R**: Thank you for taking the time to talk to me today.	*Minefield: hazards/difficulties/complex situation that could be difficult/hazards.*

APPENDIX ELEVEN: EXAMPLE OF PARTICIPANT EMERGENT THEMES, SUBORDINATE THEMES AND SUPERORDINATE THEMES

This example shows an individual analysis including potential emergent themes, which were then grouped into subordinate theme. These subordinate themes were then grouped to create superordinate themes.

Initial Grouping of Emergent Themes	Potential Subordinate Themes	Potential Superordinate Themes
Positive nursery staff experience. Supportive nursery. Nursery support. Nursery supportive helped. EP as supportive. Felt supported which helped.	Professionals as supportive	Construction of professional role
EP questioning. EP discussed inclusion. Professionals advice provision. Professional advice around SEND. Professional guide choice. Positive professional relationship helped. Parent wanting professional help to decide.	Professional help guide process	
Reliant on professionals to begin process. Professional influence.	Professionals facilitate process	
Power of professionals not support. Distrust of professionals. Different sides.	Power of professionals	

Positive mainstream experience. Thrived in mainstream. Mainstream kind. Explored mainstream option. Previous integration experience. Disappointed at integration. Lack of integration. Others negative mainstream experience. Mainstream unable to meet needs.	Positive Mainstream view Negative integration experience	Contrasting Views
Started process early. Parental organisation. Preparing for fight (x2). Parent proactive with learning. Learnt independently (from online and others). Proactive parent. Not seen as advocate. Parents self-taught. Shift in own knowledge. Learning from experience. Process of learning. Self-taught (x2). Continued fight for support.	Parent Proactive Parent gaining knowledge Parent fight for provision	Parent Self concept

Continuing to fight for provision.		
Considered various options. Location consideration. School location consideration. Practical consideration.	Multifaceted considerations	Factors Influencing Choice
Good personal experience of process. Smooth process. Own experience not the norm. Prepared for rejection. Surprised no rejection. EHCP process easy.	Positive personal experience Expected rejection within process	Expectation vs reality of process
Impact on whole family. Whole family stress. Stress for whole family Lack of understanding from wider family. Wider family system. Parent agreed decisions. Others supportive. Wider network happy. SEND network supportive. Friends supportive. Social network influence. Understanding from SEND network.	Whole family stress Family and friend support and understanding	System of influence and support
Knowledge of SEN system.		

Lack of guidance from council. Preparation needed for SEND system. Parents lack guidance. More info needed. Guidance needed to navigate system. Parent needed more practical support. Provision is minefield. Confusing system.	Lack of guidance for SEND process Confusing SEND system	Navigating SEND
Previous experience of educational system. Aware due to experience. Previous experience shaped view. Older child experience. Comparison to older sibling experience. Professional shared experience. Nursery advice experience. Others negative experience. Anecdotal stories from others. Experience from others. Experience from network of others. SEND community experience	Personal Experience Professional Experience Social Network Experience	Experience Shaped Process

Others experience rejection. Contrasting experience from others. Others experience of inclusion.		
Process of parental acceptance. Process of acceptance. Parent worry. Parental emotional sad. Parental anxiety common. Avoidance anxiety situations.	Parental Acceptance Parental emotional challenges	Parental Change
Uncertain over choice during process. Considered various options. Uncertainty over provision. Not easy choice. Set on decision. Parent knew what was right. Big decision. Emotional process. Big decision Some mainstream schools better than others. Not inclusive area. Other areas more inclusive.	Process as feeling of uncertainty Set on choice Emotional decision Lack of school options	Emotional Process

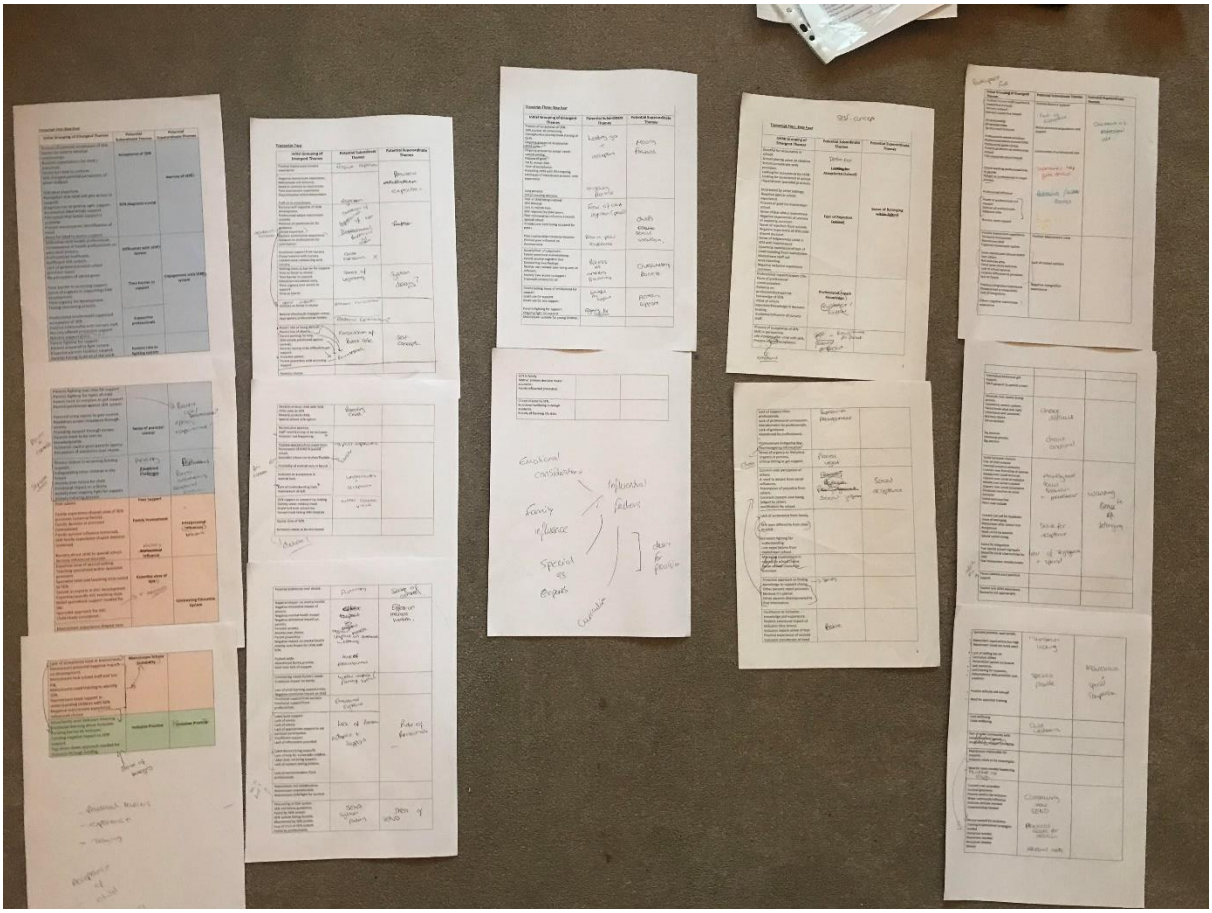
Lack of school options' Location difference in provision Lack of choice.		
Social exclusion concern. Fear of child isolated. Parental concerns exclusion. Concern over friendship in special. Anxiety over social inclusion. Emotional reaction to social inclusion. Social exclusion fear. Peers may exclude. Concern carl will be headache. Sense of belonging. Mainstream after school club. Acceptance. Want carl to be wanted. Special school loving. Desire for integration. Fear special school segregate. Desire for social relationships for child. Fear mainstream socially isolate.	Anxiety over social exclusion in mainstream Desire for acceptance Segregation as consideration	Wanting to belong

Teacher lack SEND experience. Mainstream expectations too high. Mainstream could not meet need.	Mainstream unable to meet needs	Mainstream and Special School Comparison
Resources not appropriate. Lack of staffing barrier. Need for specialist training Lack resources. Lack training for inclusion.	Mainstream lacking resources	
Specialist provision appropriate. Curriculum differs. Personalised special curriculum. Independence skills prioritize over academic.	Specialist flexible	
Carls wellbeing. Childs wellbeing.	Child wellbeing as consideration	Wellbeing
Money needed for inclusion. Training in specialised strategies needed. Resources needed. Awareness needed. Resources needed. Money.	Practical needs for inclusion	Need for Change
Need for open minded leadership. Concern over prejudice. Societal ignorance.	Attitudinal shift needed	

Parents need to be inclusive. Wider community influence Inclusive attitude needed. Understanding needed. Positive attitude not enough. Mainstream responsible for inclusion. Inclusion needs to be meaningful.	Inclusion needs to be developed	

APPENDIX TWELVE: PATTERNS ACROSS/BETWEEN PARTICIPANTS

The photograph shows the emergent themes with initial subordinate and superordinate grouping/themes for each participant. The individual subordinate themes became the emergent themes to form the basis of the 'across participant' analysis.



APPENDIX THIRTEEN: EMERGENT THEMES FROM EACH PARTICIPANT

Emergent Themes Participant One (P1)	Emergent Themes Participant Two (P2)	Emergent Themes Participant Three (P3)	Emergent Themes Participant Four (P4)	Emergent Themes Participant Five (P5)
Acceptance of SEND. SEND Diagnosis crucial.	Positive Educational Experience. Sense of mainstream rejection.	Letting Go and Accepting. Ongoing Process.	Concern for child being rejected. Wanting child to be accepted.	Professionals as supportive. Professional help guide process. Professionals facilitate process. Power of professionals.
Difficulties with SEND system. Time barrier to support.	Professionals as experts. Collaborative professional partnership. Lack of advice and support.	Fear of child being rejected. Positive Peer Experience.	Proactive Approaches. Professional Value. Nursery staff relationship.	Positive Mainstream view. Negative integration experience. Mainstream unable to meet needs.
Supportive Professionals.	Impact on parental wellbeing. Sense of abandonment.	Process anxiety provoking.	Parent Isolation. Process difficult. Affective Response to process.	Parent Proactive. Parent gaining knowledge. Parent fight for provision.
Parent role as fighter.	Protecting Child.	Grateful for support. Fighting for support.	SEND Systems failings. Sense of urgency.	Multifaceted considerations.

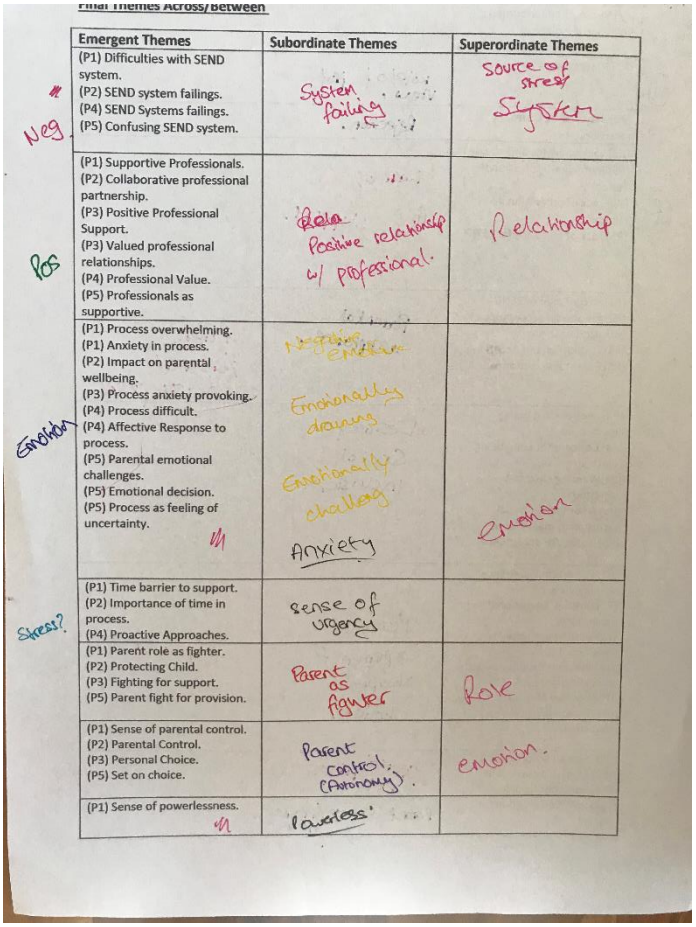
Sense of parental control.	Sense of powerlessness. Parental Control. Finding knowledge.		Lack of professional support	
Process overwhelming. Anxiety in process.	Importance of time in process. Practical considerations for provision. Emotional acceptance of provision.	Special School Expert. Specialist curriculum.	Role Construction for Parent. Readjustment for parents. Ready to fight.	Positive personal experience. Expected rejection within process.
Positive peer support. Family Involvement. Nursery Influence.	Wider societal views.	Lack of autonomy within process. Personal Choice.	Lack of family understanding. Concern for prejudice.	Whole family stress. Family and friend support and understanding.
Expertise view of SEND.	SEND system failings.	Influential factors.	Previous experiment with education system. Inclusion facilitate acceptance. Lack of school options. Mainstream not meeting needs.	Lack of guidance for SEND process. Confusing SEND system.
Mainstream School suitability.		Positive Professional Support.		Personal Experience. Professional Experience.

Education Experience shaping view. Comparison of school provision.		Inefficient Professional Support. Valued professional relationships.		Social Network Experience.
Funding barrier to inclusion.		Positive Inclusion Experience.		Parental Acceptance. Parental emotional challenges.
		Acceptance and understanding from others.		Process as feeling of uncertainty. Set on choice. Emotional decision. Lack of school options.
		Desire for provision.		Anxiety over social exclusion in mainstream. Desire for acceptance. Segregation as consideration.
				Mainstream lacking experience. Mainstream lacking resources. Specialist flexible.

				Child wellbeing as consideration.
				Practical needs for inclusion. Attitudinal shift needed.

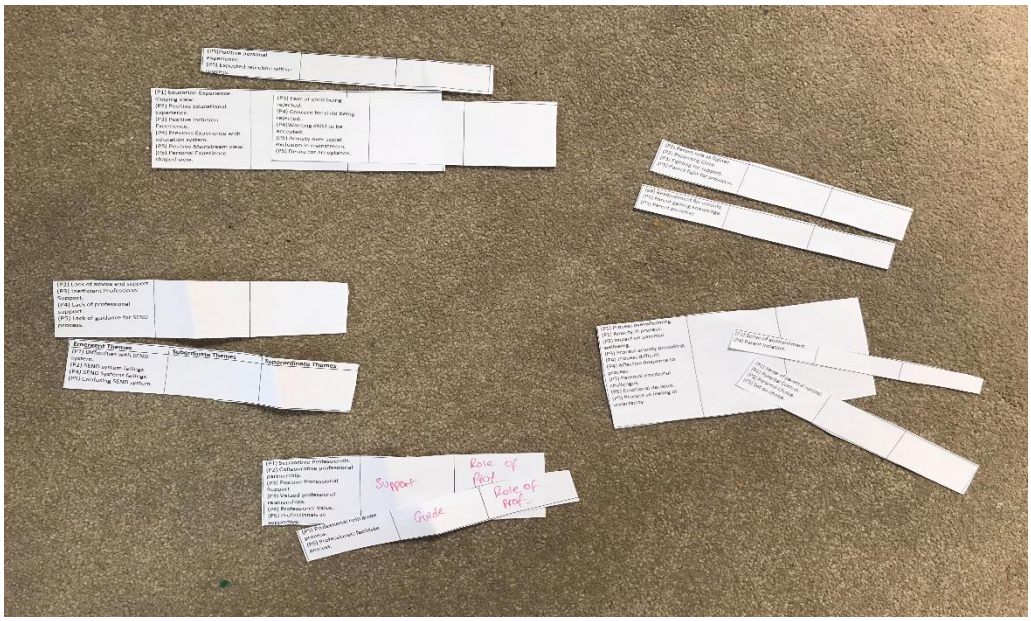
APPENDIX FOURTEEN: DEVELOPING ACROSS/BETWEEN PARTICIPANTS THEMES

These photographs depict the analysis process whereby emergent themes were grouped together to form new subordinate and superordinate themes. As part of this process, I engaged in re-reading the transcripts to ensure the themes were presentative of experience. This process also involved 'cutting' of themes.



Final Themes Across/Between

Emergent Themes	Subordinate Themes	Superordinate Themes
(P1) Difficulties with SEND system. (P2) SEND system failings. (P4) SEND Systems failings. (P5) Confusing SEND system.	System failing	Source of stress System
(P1) Supportive Professionals. (P2) Collaborative professional partnership. (P3) Positive Professional Support. (P3) Valued professional relationships. (P4) Professional Value. (P5) Professionals as supportive.	Positive relationship w/ professional.	Relationship
(P1) Process overwhelming. (P1) Anxiety in process. (P2) Impact on parental wellbeing. (P3) Process anxiety provoking. (P4) Process difficult. (P4) Affective Response to process. (P5) Parental emotional challenges. (P5) Emotional decision. (P5) Process as feeling of uncertainty.	Emotionally draining Emotionally challenging Anxiety	Emotion
(P1) Time barrier to support. (P2) Importance of time in process. (P4) Proactive Approaches.	Sense of urgency	
(P1) Parent role as fighter. (P2) Protecting Child. (P3) Fighting for support. (P5) Parent fight for provision.	Parent as fighter	Role
(P1) Sense of parental control. (P2) Parental Control. (P3) Personal Choice. (P5) Set on choice.	Parent control (Autonomy)	Emotion
(P1) Sense of powerlessness.	Powerless	



APPENDIX FIFTEEN: FINAL EMERGENT, SUBORDINATE AND SUPERORDINATE THEMES

Emergent Themes	Subordinate Themes	Superordinate Themes
(P1) Supportive Professionals. (P2) Collaborative professional partnership. (P3) Positive Professional Support. (P3) Valued professional relationships. (P4) Professional Value. (P5) Professionals as supportive. (P5) Professional help guide process. (P5) Professionals facilitate process.	Supportive Relationships	**Experience with Professionals**
(P1) Sense of powerlessness. (P2) Lack of advice and support. (P3) Inefficient Professional Support. (P4) Lack of professional support. (P5) Lack of guidance for SEND process.	Unsupportive Relationships	
(P2) Professionals as experts. (P1) Nursery Influence. (P3) Influential factors.		

(P5) Professional influence (P5) Professional Power. (P3) Special School Expert. (P4) Nursery staff relationship	Professional Power and Influence	
(P1) Process overwhelming. (P1) Anxiety in process. (P2) Impact on parental wellbeing. (P3) Process anxiety provoking. (P4) Process difficult. (P4) Affective Response to process. (P5) Parental emotional challenges. (P5) Emotional decision. (P5) Process as feeling of uncertainty. (P2) Sense of abandonment. (P4) Parent Isolation. (P1) Acceptance of SEND. (P2) Emotional acceptance of provision. (P3) Letting Go and Accepting. (P5) Parental Acceptance.	Stressful Experience Parental Acceptance	**Emotional Journey**
(P1) Parent role as fighter.		

(P2) Protecting Child. (P4) Ready to fight (P3) Fighting for support. (P5) Parent fight for provision. (P4) Role Construction for Parent (P4) Readjustment for parents (P5) Parent gaining knowledge. (P5) Parent proactive. (P1) Education Experience shaping view. (P2) Finding knowledge (P4) Previous Experience with education system. (P5) Personal Experience shaped view.	Parent as 'Fighter' Developing own knowledge	**Parental Role**
(P3) Fear of child being rejected. (P4) Concern for child being rejected. (P4)Wanting child to be accepted. (P5) Anxiety over social exclusion in mainstream. (P3) Positive peer experience (P5) Desire for acceptance. (P5) Child wellbeing as consideration. (P2) Wider societal views.	Apprehension of Peers	**Balancing Act**

(P2) Positive Educational Experience. (P3) Positive Inclusion Experience. (P4) Concern for prejudice (P4) Inclusion facilitate acceptance. (P5) Attitudinal shift needed.	Searching for Belonging	
(P1) Family Involvement. (P4) Lack of family understanding. (P5) Whole family stress. (P5) Family and Friend support and understanding (P1) Positive peer support. (P3) Acceptance and understanding from others.	Support and Guidance from Others	**Learning from Others**
(P5) Mainstream lacking experience. (P5) Lack of school options. (P1) Mainstream School suitability. (P1) Funding barrier to inclusion. (P5) Mainstream lacking resources. (P1) Comparison of school provision (P4) Lack of school options.	Lack of Options	**Limited Choice**

(P4) Mainstream not meeting needs (P5) Negative integration experience. (P2) Sense of mainstream rejection (P5) Mainstream unable to meet needs.	Sense of Mainstream Rejection	

APPENDIX SIXTEEN: A TABLE SHOWING THE PREVALENCE OF EACH SUPERORDINATE AND SUBORDINATE THEMES ACROSS PARTICIPANTS

This table depicts the final six superordinate themes and related subthemes. It also shows which themes can be found within participants accounts.

Superordinate Theme	**Harshil**	**Amy**	**Hannah**	**Kelly**	**Nicole**
Emotional Journey	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Stressful Experience	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Parental Acceptance	✓	✓	✓		✓
A Balancing Act	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Apprehension of Peers			✓	✓	✓
Searching for Belonging		✓	✓	✓	✓
Parental Role	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Becoming a "Fighter"	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Developing own Knowledge	✓	✓		✓	✓
Learning and Support	✓		✓	✓	✓
Support and Guidance from others	✓		✓	✓	✓
Perception of Professionals	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Supportive Relationships	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Unsupportive Relationships	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Power and Influence of Professionals	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Limited Choice	✓	✓		✓	✓
Lack of Placement Options	✓			✓	✓
Sense of Rejection from Mainstream School		✓		✓	✓