EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF THE EDUCATION, HEALTH AND CARE PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

Following recent reform to special educational needs (SEN) guidance and legislation in England, the introduction of the education, health and care (EHC) needs assessment process has resulted in a considerable change in the statutory support system for children with significant SEN. To date, limited research has been conducted to explore perceptions of the EHC process. This research used a multiple nested case study design to explore the perceptions of key individuals – parents, school staff and educational psychologists – about the purposes and experiences of the EHC process. Participant views were collected using semi-structured interviews and analysed using thematic analysis. A range of purposes for the EHC process were identified including; creating a shared understanding of need, facilitating planning and support, protecting children with SEN and promoting progress. Participants reported varying experiences of collaboration during the assessment phase and outcomes following the issuing of the plan. Key factors related to perceptions of success for the EHC process included; values and existing practice, knowledge and access to support and resources. Possible implications for educational psychology practice are discussed through consideration of the practical wisdom, or phronesis, drawn from these findings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABBREVIATIONS

BERA	British Ethical Research Association
BPS	British Psychological Society
CAF	Common assessment framework
CQC	Care Quality Commission
DECP	Division of Educational and Child Psychologists
DES	Department of Education and Science
DfE	Department for Education
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DH	Department of Health
EHC	Education, health and care
EHCP	Education, health and care plan
EP	Educational psychologist
EPS	Educational psychology service
IEP	Individual education plan
IPSEA	Independent Parental Special Education Advice
LA	Local authority
LDA	Learning disability assessment
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
SEN	Special educational needs
SENCO	Special educational needs coordinator
SEND	Special educational needs and disability
SENDIASS	Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service
SMART	Specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound
TEP	Trainee educational psychologist

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to the thesis

This research constitutes the first of two volumes which combine to fulfil the academic and research requirements of the Applied Educational and Child Psychology Doctorate at the University of Birmingham. It was conducted over two years within a single local authority (LA) educational psychology service (EPS). It was within this EPS that I carried out my second and third year placement as a trainee educational psychologist (TEP).

As a TEP, newly arrived to the service and the profession, it soon became apparent that it was a time of great change. Cuts to local funding and reductions in the capacity of the service coincided with one of the most significant changes to special educational needs and disability (SEND) legislation since the early 1980s. It was in the face of these funding and legislative changes that the current research was conceived.

1.2 Terminology

Throughout this research I will make use of the term children with special educational needs (SEN) to refer to children and young people who require additional support at school. I have chosen to make use of this term because it is the one used within current legislation and policy. The SEND code of practice (Department for Education (DfE) and Department of Health (DH), 2015, pp.15) states "A child or young person has SEN if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her".

1.3 Legislative reform

The status of children and young people with SEN has been transformed in the past 140 years. Previously institutionalised and deemed 'ineducable', most children with SEN were not valued members of their local school's community. Decades of social and legislative change have resulted in the education of children and young people with SEN becoming a key topic within educational and political debate (appendix 1 provides a brief summary, from 1880-2001).

Following the publication of the revised SEN code of practice (Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2001), concerns emerged regarding the equity of SEN provision across England. This was followed by a series of enquiries into SEN practice, including a damning report from the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) (2010), which concluded that current provision for children with SEN was poor and inconsistent, and that inadequate teaching was leading to over-identification of SEN (Ofsted, 2010).

The report was followed by an article by Baroness Warnock, chairperson of the iconic Warnock Committee, whose report (Department of Education and Science (DES), 1978) had been fundamental in shaping the *Education Act 1981*, the introduction of Statements of SEN and the movement towards more inclusive approaches to education. Within the article, Warnock (2010a) suggests that the true intentions of the Warnock Report had been misinterpreted and manipulated to the detriment of children with SEN. She argues that the SEN system "…must be urgently overhauled" (Warnock, 2010a).

In response to calls for reform, the newly formed Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government (2010-2015) announced a pre-consultation addressing the provision of SEN

support in England (Figure 1 depicts key events in the reform process). This resulted in the Green Paper *Support and Aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs and disability - A consultation* (DfE, 2011), which outlined a series of difficulties within the existing system, and a number of proposals to address them (table 1).

Feedback from consultees indicated that the proposed changes were positively received, although respondents desired more information about what would actually happen (DfE, 2012). The DfE also announced the commencement of a Pathfinder Programme in 2011 to pilot the reforms. A total of 31 LAs participated in the Pathfinder Programme. The examples produced by these LAs were accompanied by regular reviews of the developing processes.

The development of the revised process and guidance was accompanied by new legislation, the *Children and Families Act 2014*, given royal assent in March 2014. With implementation of the reforms planned for September 2014, draft versions of a new code of practice were produced for consultation. Following the publication of the final draft in April 2014, Independent Parental Special Education Advice (IPSEA), an information and advice service for parents, issued a statement calling for implementation to be delayed (IPSEA, 2014). They cited a comprehensive list of concerns with the draft and argued that the consultation process had been inadequate and exclusionary (IPSEA, 2014). The statement came shortly after the publication of a report from the Pathfinder Programme which raised significant concerns about the ability of non-Pathfinder LAs to develop appropriate systems and documentation in time for September (Hill *et al*., 2014a).

Table 1: Key themes of *Support and Aspiration* (DfE, 2011)

Theme	Summary of points raised
Early identification and assessment	Early identification is perceived as crucial in promoting positive outcomes for children and young people with SEN. This requires comprehensive, holistic assessment.
Giving parents control	Parents know their children best, and must be actively involved in order to achieve a meaningful assessment. The current process is too bureaucratic, is not family-friendly and restricts parental choice.
Learning and achieving	Children and young people with SEN often do not reach their potential, and experience barriers to their learning. This is partly due to a lack of knowledge and training for classroom staff. Their low expectations for children with SEN is impacting upon children's outcomes. Schools have been incentivised to over-identify children with SEN, and this has fed into the culture of low expectation.
Preparing for adulthood	Older students with SEN continue to experience difficulties, particularly with their transition to adulthood. There is too little focus upon the young person's aspirations and planning is insufficient. The system is also confusing for young people and their families.
Services working together	Involvement from services has not met the expectations of families due to bureaucracy and funding. Local areas need the freedom to organise their own multiagency working that meets the needs of their locality.

2001

Publication of the revised SEN code of practice

Audit commission report – 2-3% of pupils receive 69% of SEN funding

2002

2006

Education and skills committee – the existing SEN system is not good enough

OFSTED – *A Statement is not enough*

Warnock - *The cynical betrayal of my special needs children*

Pre-consultation regarding provision for children with SEN

2010

2011

DfE – *Support and Aspiration*

Commencement of the Pathfinder Programme

DfE – *Support and Aspiration*

A summary of consultation feedback is published

2012

2014

March - Children and Families Act 2014

June - publication of the finalised SEND Code (DfE/DH, 2014)

September – implementation of the reforms

January – publication of the revised SEND Code (DfE/DH, 2015)

2015

2016

Publication of the framework for local area inspections (OFSTED/CQC, 2016)

Figure 1: A timeline of key developments within the reforms to the SEN system (2001-2016)

Nevertheless, the *Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years* (hereafter known as SEND Code; DfE/DH, 2014) was published in June 2014 and implemented on 1st September 2014. A revised SEND Code (DfE/DH, 2015) was published in January 2015, which included arrangements for children in specific circumstances, such as those in custody (DfE/DH, 2015). Key themes of the SEND Code are presented in table 2. Joint local area inspections of SEN provision by Ofsted and the care quality commission (CQC) were proposed to ensure equity of provision and accurate implementation of the reforms. Following consultation of their plans, guidance about the inspections was published and visits have recently been announced (Ofsted/CQC, 2016).

Table 2: Key themes of *Special educational needs and disability code of practice* (DfE/DH, 2015)

Theme	Description of the theme
Changes to the categories of SEN	Four categories were provided; 1. communication and interaction 2. cognition and learning 3. social, emotional and mental health 4. sensory and/or physical needs There was also a removal of the 'school action' and 'school action plus' classifications, replaced with an encompassing 'SEN support'.
Replacement of Statements of SEN with education, health and care plans.	A new statutory document outlining the education, health and social care needs and required provision of children with significant difficulties.
Emphasis upon an increasingly holistic, multiagency approach to planning and support.	Encouraging further integration of education, health and social care services, where necessary.
Promotion of person-centred approaches to planning and support.	Increased emphasis upon the views and aspirations of the child or young person and their family.
A change from targets to outcomes.	A shift in emphasis toward describing what the child's experience will be once they have achieved. Accompanied by an increased expectation of specificity in planning.

Extension of the age range to 0-25 years.	Support for children with SEN to start earlier and be maintained for longer. Planning for adulthood to be a theme throughout their education.
Introduction of personal budgets.	Providing additional choice for young people and their parents in the commissioning of services.

1.3.1 Education, health and care plans

The education, health and care plan (EHCP) replaces the Statement of SEN as the statutory document outlining the needs and required provision of children with significant SEN. Requests for education, health and care (EHC) needs assessment, which informs the decision to issue an EHCP, can be made by the parent, young people aged between 16-25 years old, or a person acting on behalf of a school or other educational provider. Whilst the particular criteria for EHCPs are left to the discretion of individual LAs, the SEND code (DfE/DH, 2015) generally advises LAs to consider whether, in spite of the education provider taking sufficient steps to identify and support additional need, the child continues to make less than expected progress. Figure 2 depicts the national EHC needs assessment process. Although the responsibility for the design of the EHCPs is placed within each LA, the SEND code (DfE/DH, 2015) specifies 12 sections that, where applicable to the individual child, must be included (appendix 2).
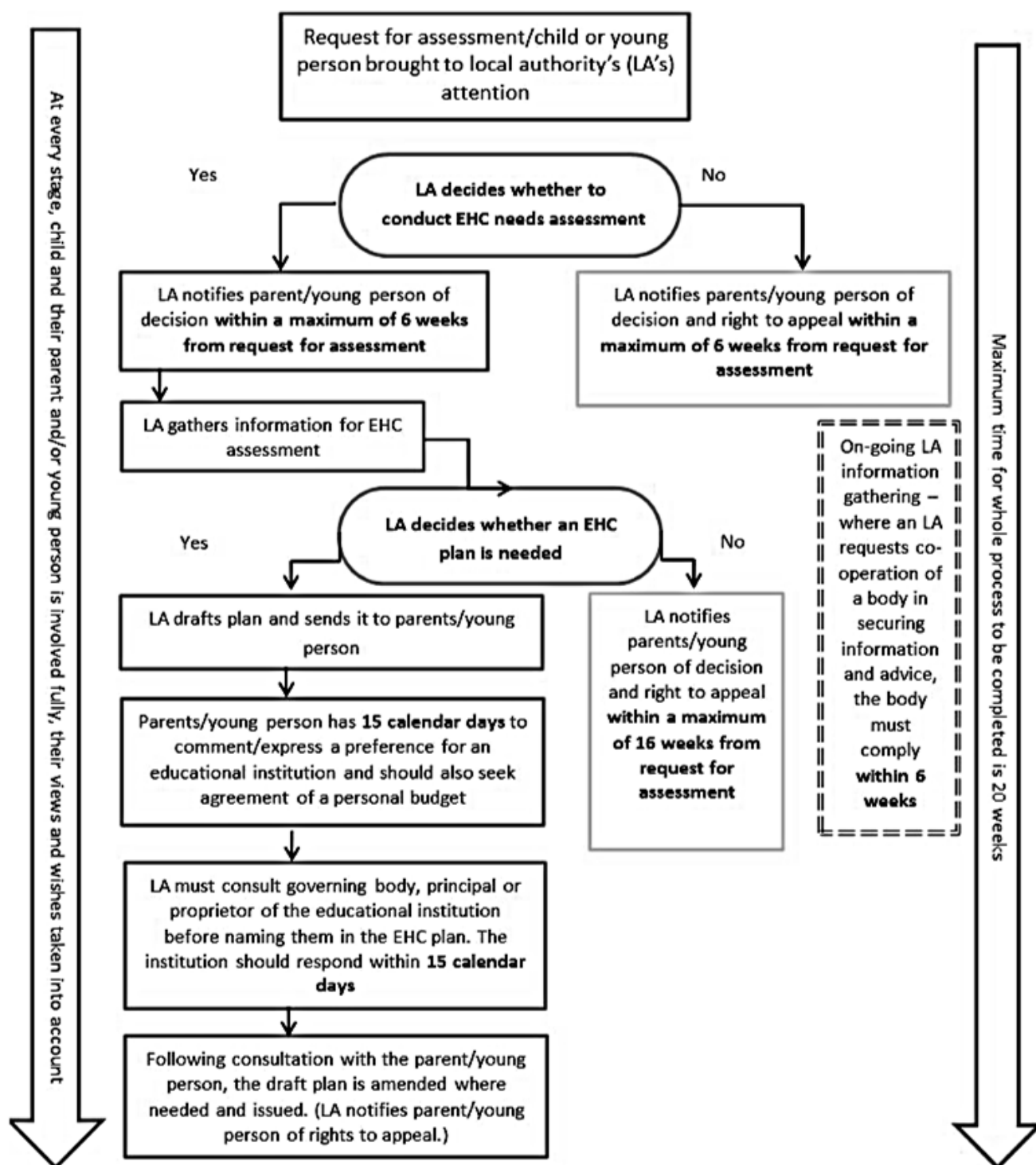
Figure 2: The EHC process, taken from DfE/DH (2015)

1.4 Local context

Chesterfield (names and identifying information have been changed throughout) is a densely populated city in the West Midlands. It has a large number of schools serving a diverse community. Like many cities, Chesterfield has a large number of children identified as having SEN. It also has a high number of requests for statutory assessment. Following repeated discussions with colleagues, schools and families about requests for assessment, I began to notice many differing purposes were ascribed to the EHCP, some of which were different from my own perceptions. This sparked an interest in understanding how different individuals conceptualised the purposes of the EHCP, which led to this research.

1.5 Structure of Volume One

This volume comprises of four chapters. Following this introductory chapter, I will go on to review the current literature available regarding the EHC process in Chapter 2. Despite the national implementation of the reforms, very little research has been published to date. In Chapter 3 I present my methodology, including the underpinning epistemological stance of the research and a description of case study approaches. I will also discuss the use of interviews and thematic analysis. This chapter includes consideration of the ethical implications of this research, and a discussion about the role of quality, rigour and phronesis in case study research. Chapter 4 details the findings of this research with accompanying discussion. Consideration is given to the limitations of this work, and implications for educational psychology practice.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will outline current research regarding the EHC process. There are several key themes within the existing literature, which include; the extension of the age range, the use of outcomes, multiagency working, person-centred planning and personal budgets. In addition, consideration is given to the impact of reforms on schools. Given that the revised SEND Code (DfE/DH, 2015) was only implemented in September 2014, limited research has been published to explore this topic.

2.1 Search Strategy

Studies for this literature review were identified from academic databases including *'British Education Index (BEI)'*, *'ProQuest Social Sciences'* and *'Web of Science'*. They were also found through *GOV.UK* and *Google Scholar*. The search included articles from the first available date until 15th June 2016, using the term *"education health and care plan"*. Due to the limited amount of peer-reviewed research available, theses and government published research was also included. Following initial selection, a snowball method was employed to identify additional research by searching through the reference lists of selected papers.

2.1.1 Description of identified publications

A total of 14 papers were identified (see table 3). Six consisted of discussions of the reforms and their application to various groups; health services, educational psychologists (EPs), children with emotional and behavioural needs and teachers. The remaining eight contained active exploration of topics related to the SEN reforms.

Six reports were commissioned by the DfE. Five of these were evaluations of the Pathfinder Programme, whilst the sixth was conducted in the first year of the reforms (2014-2015).

Whilst these documents are important to understanding the landscape of the EHC process, some care should be taken in the interpretation of their results. It is important to consider the potential impact of the commissioning of research on the reporting of findings and conclusions. The avoidance of bias within research related to educational policy is a key consideration for researchers in the field, who recognise the importance of maintaining rigour in spite of potential pressure from policy-makers (Whitty, 2006).

Table 3: Overview of research identified related to the EHC process.

Author(s) (date)	Publication type	Description of publication
Buck (2015)	Journal article	An account of the SEN reforms and their implications for EP practice.
Gough *et al.* (2015)	Journal article	An overview of the SEN reforms with particular reference to health services and children with complex medical needs.
Hill *et al.* (2014a)	DfE publication	An interim evaluation from the Pathfinder Programme which explored the readiness of Pathfinder and non-Pathfinder LAs to implement reforms.
Hill *et al.* (2014b)	DfE publication	An interim evaluation from the Pathfinder Programme which explored the engagement of schools with reforms within Pathfinder LAs.
Ko (2015)	Journal article	An overview of the SEN reforms with particular reference to health services.
Lauchlan and Greig (2015)	Journal article	A critique of the SEN reforms with particular reference to inclusion.
Norwich and Eaton (2015)	Journal article	An overview of the SEN reforms, with particular consideration of their potential impact upon children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Pearson, Mitchell and Rapti (2015)	Journal article	A survey of special educational need coordinators' (SENCOs) perceptions of the SEN reforms following the publication of the Green Paper (DfE, 2011) and prior to the initial publication of the revised SEND Code (DfE, 2014/2015).
Redwood (2015)	Thesis	A two-part exploration of perspectives on the EHC process, with particular reference to multiagency working, person-centred planning and child participation. The first half surveys the views of advice givers, whilst the second provides in depth accounts from case studies including parents, professionals and in one case, the child.
Robertson (2012)	Journal article	An overview of the changes proposed within the Green Paper (DfE, 2011) with particular reference to the role of the SENCO.
Skipp and Hopwood (2016)	DfE publication	An exploration of factors perceived to increase and decrease satisfaction amongst parents whose children are undergoing or have undergone the EHC process.
Smith, Cameron and Vanson (2014)	DfE publication	An interim evaluation of the Pathfinder Programme which explored experiences and perceptions of Pathfinder parents.
Thom and Agur (2014)	DfE publication	An interim evaluation of the Pathfinder Programme exploring the implementation of reforms for older young people aged 19-25 years.
Thom *et al*. (2015)	DfE publication	The final Pathfinder evaluation exploring the experiences and perceptions of Pathfinder parents about the EHC process.

2.2 Support from birth to 25 years

Previously, children with complex special educational needs were eligible for a Statement of SEN between the ages of two and 19 (DfES, 2001). Under the new legislation this age range has been extended to encompass children and young people from birth to 25-years-old. Despite being considered to be one to the most significant changes of the new legislation (Lauchlan and Greig, 2015), this extension has received little research interest.

2.2.1 Birth to five

Very little has been written about children under five accessing EHCPs. Within the SEND code (DfE/DH, 2015), guidance is provided as to how SEN is identified for very young children, and the responsibilities of providers are outlined. Eligibility for EHC needs assessment at this age is related to the anticipation that they will have a high level of need when they reach school, or that they require access to otherwise inaccessible provision (DfE/DH, 2015). A clear advantage for parents of two year olds with EHCPs is the ability to access the '2-year-old funding', entitling them to 570 hours of free early years provision over the year. Ordinarily, this funding is reserved for those whose parents are on benefits, or to children who are looked after.

To date, one paper has included explicit reference to the experiences and perceptions of families whose pre-school aged children have an EHCP. In their thematic report from Pathfinder families, Smith, Cameron and Vanson (2014) found that parents of young children hoped the EHCP would ease the transition to school, and would allow them to be fully involved and consulted throughout the planning process for their child. Additionally, alongside parents of children of all ages, they expected the EHC process to unite education, health and care assessments, and to lead to a greater understanding of their child by

professionals. When asked about their experiences of the outcomes of the EHCP, parents of young children reported that it was too soon to tell, or that new support could not be attributed to the plan or the assessment process (Smith, Cameron and Vanson, 2014).

In their DfE commissioned review of parental experiences of the EHC process, Skipp and Hopwood (2016) found that early identification of need was highlighted as crucial to parental satisfaction, who reported frustration that valuable opportunities to support their child had been lost. Whilst the term 'early identification' does not necessarily refer to identification in the early years, the increased focus upon younger children may promote the recognition of their needs at an earlier stage.

For children aged below two years old, the only change within the reforms has been their entitlement to statutory assessment, which may enable them to access specialist provision early (DfE, 2014). Aside from this, very little consideration has been given to the impact of reforms upon very young children with SEN.

2.2.2 Sixteen to twenty-five year olds

Greater consideration has been given to the older end of the age range; from 16 to 25 years old. Several explanations could be given as to why the age range has been increased to encompass early adulthood. In his summary for medical practitioners, Ko (2015) suggests that a primary reason for the extension is that children and young people with SEN may require more time to achieve their outcomes. Therefore, EHCPs safeguard their right to remain in education settings for longer.

An alternative explanation may be that the extension provides greater accountability and transparency for children and their families as they proceed towards adulthood. Given the statutory imperative placed on education, health and care providers, it seems likely that an

additional benefit of an EHCP for older young people is to safeguard them through the transition from child to adult services. For many families, this process is a complex and distressing one, where the focus of services often shifts from supporting the young person, to deliberating who has responsibility for their support and care (CQC, 2014).

During interim Pathfinder Programme evaluation interviews with families, many considered the possibility of long-term planning to be an important aspect of the EHCP (Smith, Cameron and Vanson, 2014). Unsurprisingly, parents of older young people seemed most focused on its possibilities for long-term planning of education and outcomes post-school (Smith, Cameron and Vanson, 2014). Regarding the outcomes of EHCPs, parents of older children generally reflected that the plan had resulted in transition in placement, or to access to additional services. A small number of accounts suggested the EHC process led to feelings of empowerment for the young person (Smith, Cameron and Vanson, 2014).

In the early stages of implementation feedback from Pathfinders suggested "the older age group… has generally not been high priority" (Thom and Agur, 2014, p.4). Services report the perception that working to support this age group involves similar skills to those used for younger children, although there is a greater importance placed on the transition towards adulthood. Also, LAs report the even greater importance of young person and family involvement, in order to make plans meaningful and useful. Several practical considerations were causing some difficulty, such as the criteria for assessment.

In addition, it was felt that some families and young people may be unclear about some aspects of post-19 provision (Thom and Agur, 2014). For example, it is not guaranteed that young people will retain their plans until 25. Rather, the plan will remain for as long as it takes to achieve their long-term outcomes. Therefore, if a student achieves these, they no

longer require the plan, and it will be discontinued. Finally, Thom and Agur (2014) noted the need to support employers, provide practical support (such as transport to work) and the need to ensure employment was sustainable.

During the closing stages of the Pathfinder Programme, feedback was sought from families for a final time (Thom *et al*., 2015). The researchers compared the experiences of families whose children had received EHCPs with those of families whose children received Statements of SEN. They found that families whose children were 11 years-old or over, and particularly for those 17 years-old and over, were more likely to report feeling that their views had been considered, that services worked closely together and that they were satisfied with the EHC process. Families were particularly satisfied where their EHCP had been transferred from a Learning Difficulty Assessment (LDA).

2.2.3 Summary

Whilst some research has begun to explore the impact of age range extensions, this area of reform is still at a formative stage. There remains a lack of information regarding processes and expectations for very young children, and further work is needed to set out support for older young people who would like to enter the workplace. Early evidence suggests EHCPs are being positively received by families with older children in particular.

2.3 Outcomes

In line with the person-centred agenda that runs throughout the new SEND Code, outcomes "refer to the benefit or difference made to an individual as a result of an intervention" (DfE/DH, 2015, p.46). Parents included within Skipp and Hopwood's (2016) research placed particular importance upon the promotion of aspirational outcomes. Some parents reported

that the low educational outcomes described within their child's EHCP were of considerable

concern, and that they disliked assessments that were primarily deficit focussed.

The SEND Code (DfE/DH, 2015) states that these outcomes should result from joint planning

initiatives that ensure the views of the child and family are fully integrated within the plan.

This collaboration, considered so integral, is dependent on the accurate elicitation of child and

family views, and genuine collaboration from these partners. However, concern has been

raised about the elicitation of children's views. Redwood (2015) found that only 21% of

respondents (professionals who provided advice for EHC needs assessments) felt that the

child's preferred method of communication had been utilised whilst gathering their views.

This is likely to have impacted upon their ability to genuinely collaborate with the process.

Aspiration and outcomes are thought to be intrinsically linked; the outcome reflects a small

step towards the future aspiration. Therefore it is important that participation from children

and young people is genuine, as these outcomes directly impact the provision set out for them.

The use of outcomes, as opposed to the objectives detailed in Statements of SEN, aims to

create greater specificity within EHCPs. Specificity within plans has previously been

associated with greater parental satisfaction (Skipp and Hopwood, 2016). However, Buck

(2015) highlights that care must be taken when considering outcomes, to ensure they do not

create a reductionist, within-child approach to supporting children with SEN. He reflects that,

over time, many EPs have moved towards more systemic approaches to supporting children.

This means that wider factors, for example their learning environment, teacher expectations

and family dynamics are integrated into hypotheses about their barriers to learning. In turn,

many EPs are taking a systemic response to intervention, highlighting changes within the

environment which may remove such barriers. Given that outcomes are expected to describe

the child's observable performance, Buck questions whether systemic approaches will be less

favoured by LAs, given the challenges inherent in demonstrating the direct impact of systemic intervention.

In addition, the emphasis on creating SMART outcomes – specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound – has created some challenge for those writing the plans. The concept of SMART in education is not new, and many teachers and SENCOs previously utilised SMART targets within their individual education plans (IEPs). Prior to the reforms, researchers and teachers working with children with the most profound needs were highlighting the difficulties of using SMART targets with children who may struggle to demonstrate their knowledge, or meet an outcome within a tightly stated time period (Lacey, 2010). In addition, there are anecdotal reports that professionals have experienced difficulty in writing SMART outcomes for social, emotional and mental health needs, as the impact of provision in this area may not lead to an easily observable outcome.

2.3.1 Aspiration

As previously stated, aspiration and outcomes are intrinsically linked within the SEND Code; outcomes represent the short-term progress made towards an eventual aspiration. The SEND Code (DfE/DH, 2015) highlights the importance of understanding the long-term aspirations of children and young people for their education/employment, independence and community membership. Redwood (2015) interviewed several families whose children had received an EHCP and the professionals who had contributed. She found a clear consensus that these participants felt the aspirations of the child had been included within their final EHCP. However, she urges caution in generalising this finding, highlighting the importance of gathering the views of children directly, rather than making assumptions based on the views of adults. Redwood was only able to interview a single child within her case studies, due to

the ages and needs of the other children, or because they did not want to participate. Charlie, a year 6 child, reported that he felt his aspirations had been included within his EHCP, although he did not identify this as a key part of the EHC process.

2.3.2 Summary

Outcomes aim to support an aspirational approach to identifying necessary provision for children and young people with complex needs. Guidance indicates outcomes should follow from the long-term aspirations of children, which should be gathered from the children themselves. This raises implications for the methods professionals utilise to gather the views of such children, who often experience challenges with language and communication. Additionally, care should be taken to ensure EHCPs do not become reductionist documents that identify the causes of SEN as solely within the child.

2.4 Multiagency working

A key hope for the SEN reforms was that families would experience a more streamlined process, with less bureaucracy and duplication (Thom *et al*., 2015). To this end, great emphasis was placed on multiagency working, in the hopes that sharing of information and joint planning would reduce the burden placed on families to repeat information to professionals. The significance of multiagency working is further reinforced within the title of the EHCP; signifying the collaboration, where appropriate, of services across each aspect of this triad. The importance of multiagency working has been raised repeatedly through government initiatives, such as Every Child Matters (HM Treasury, 2003), or in response to serious case reviews (Home Office, 2014). Despite this longstanding emphasis, there appears to be a lack of clarity as to how multiagency planning will work under the new reforms, due to a lack of specificity within the SEND Code (Redwood, 2015). This may reflect the

decentralisation agenda being pursued by previous (Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition, 2010-2015) and current (Conservative, 2015-present) Governments (i.e. Clark, 2012), offering LAs the opportunity to develop processes that reflect local contexts.

Reports from parents indicate the development of a multiagency assessment and planning process is a highly valued aspect of the reforms (Skipp and Hopwood, 2016). Early feedback from families within the Pathfinder Programme indicated that many had experienced increased levels of multiagency working. This was particularly the case within meetings, where multiple professionals were able to share and jointly plan (Smith, Cameron and Vanson, 2014). Within the final feedback from Pathfinder families, 70% agreed that services worked closely together, as compared to 61% of non-Pathfinder families, whose children received Statements of SEN (Thom *et al*., 2015). In addition, 45% of Pathfinder families agreed that the plan had been jointly created with all services, as opposed to 33% of non-Pathfinder families. The researchers noted that, whilst these results indicated significant differences in the frequency of multiagency working between the two groups, there was more that could be done. In particular, they noted that much of this multiagency working had fallen away by the review, and often this was left to families and schools to complete, perhaps reflecting the cessation of the statutory imperative for external services. More recently, parents noted frustration with health and social care services, whose involvement, if any, could be fleeting and did not provide meaningful contributions (Skipp and Hopwood, 2016).

In anticipation of the increased, and statutory, emphasis on multiagency involvement prior to the commencement of this new way of working, there was speculation as to who would oversee these services on a case-by-case basis. SENCOs who completed Pearson, Mitchell and Rapti's (2015) questionnaires predicted the role of 'key worker' would fall to them. They suggested this may be akin to the lead practitioner role within the common assessment

framework (CAF). Within feedback from Pathfinder families, the importance of a key worker, who possessed adequate knowledge and skills, was repeatedly recognised (Smith, Cameron and Vanson, 2014; Thom *et al*., 2015). However, the majority of key workers within the Pathfinder were employed within the LA, and a key factor in their effectiveness was the ability to respond quickly to parental queries (Smith, Cameron and Vanson, 2014). It seems doubtful that SENCOs, many of whom hold additional duties, would be able to react so flexibly within the key worker role (National Union of Teachers, 2012).

As previously noted, emphasis has been repeatedly placed upon multiagency working through various government agendas. Despite this, barriers to the effective collaboration of different professionals are regularly identified (Sloper, 2004). Common barriers to effective multiagency working include; lack of clarity regarding roles, poor leadership, poor information sharing systems, lack of training and lack of time. The inclusion of multiagency working as a statutory duty within the EHC needs assessment may present LAs with the impetus to address these barriers. In an initial survey of 31 professionals who had submitted advice during EHC needs assessments, 61% reported being happy with their experiences of multiagency working (Redwood, 2015). In addition, 83% felt that the relationships between professionals had been positive. In particular, respondents noted the importance of good interpersonal skills, strong leadership from the key worker, a lack of professional hierarchy and time to co-construct the EHC process.

Despite these positive reflections, follow-up case studies did highlight feelings of frustration from families and professionals when other services were unable to attend meetings (Redwood, 2015). Participants also emphasised the challenges of multiagency working with services whose professionals are generally less accessible, such as those in the health services. It was felt that these professionals might have had less training regarding the EHC process,

and that expectations about roles and purposes may widely differ. Finally, in regard to expectations of various professionals, concerns have been raised as to how differing disciplines might be able to collaborate to create a holistic view of individual children. Norwich and Eaton (2015) highlight the discrepancy between users of the social and medical models of disability, who are likely to construct the needs of children in very different ways. They propose that the "easy-going pragmatism" (pp.127) of the new SEND Code does not address how professionals from differing disciplines will work together to formulate a cohesive EHCP.

2.4.1 Summary

Effective multiagency working is a key factor in the creation of a comprehensive, holistic EHCP. Early reports indicate levels of multiagency working have increased in response to the renewed focus afforded by reforms. Several facilitators to multiagency working have already been identified, including having time to work collaboratively, and the presence of a knowledgeable key worker to coordinate the process. Barriers to multiagency working included poor attendance by some services at meetings and differing expectations about roles and process. Finally, many families found that multiagency support significantly reduced following the issuing of the EHCP, and few experienced multiagency review meetings.

2.5 Person-centred planning

It has long been recognised that children and young people have a right to participate in their communities and to have their voices heard (Unicef, 1989; UNESCO, 1994). Recognising and integrating the views of children and young people is an integral part of the EHC process. The SEND Code states:

LAs must have regard to the views, wishes and feelings of the child, child's parent or young person, their aspirations, the outcomes they wish to seek and the support they need to achieve them

(DfE/DH, 2015, pp.147).

The SEND Code also suggests that LAs should take a 'person-centred' approach to creating plans. 'Person-centred support' is an umbrella term referring to a range of approaches and initiatives that aim to give service users an active role in the organisation and commissioning of their services (Glynn *et al*., 2008).

Similarly, 'person-centred planning' places the views of the service user at the heart of the planning and coordination of support. Redwood (2015, p.42) identified several key factors apparent across different models of person-centred planning;

1) *The 'focus' person at the centre.*

2) *Ensuring that family and friends (non-professionals) are partners in planning – a shared responsibility.*

3) *Opportunities to have choice and control over decisions which are made about them.*

4) *The plan should reflect what is important to the 'focus' person. Their interests, hopes and aspirations.*

5) *The importance of a facilitator to guide the meetings and ensure the 'focus' person's voice is heard.*

6) *The development of positive rapport/relationships between professionals and non-professionals.*

7) *The 'focus' person should feel listened to and respected.*

8) *The plan should reflect an ongoing journey, with a recognition that aspects may evolve or change over time.*

9) *Meetings should be set up in a way that facilitates the 'focus' person's contribution i.e. environment, language, information and support/advocacy need to be considered.*

Parents of children undertaking the EHC process have agreed that the philosophy of child-centred assessment and planning is important to their families. However, the extent to which current research demonstrates the use of person-centred planning within the EHC process is questionable. The final Pathfinder Programme evaluation found that only 32% of parents felt their child had been actively involved within the process (Thom *et al*., 2015). Concerns about opportunities for participation were particularly highlighted by parents of older children (17+). The authors posited that this low level of participation was related to the age and level of need experienced by the child, which impacted on their ability to understand and contribute to the process.

This barrier to participation was also noted within Redwood's (2015) survey feedback from advice givers, of whom only 21% felt that they had used the child's preferred method of communication in EHC assessment meetings. Furthermore, only 48% of respondents felt that the child's views were equally weighted against those of professionals or parents, and none felt children's views were given greater priority. Finally, only 4% of respondents reported the focus child having choice over the length and location of their meetings. Given the likely power imbalances between a child and a room of adults, the lack of control offered to children and young people is unlikely to promote their confident collaboration in the EHC process.

Significantly greater success has been observed in the involvement of parents as the child's advocate. Thom *et al.* (2015) found that 84% of Pathfinder parents felt their views had been included in the process. Similarly, parents within Redwood's (2015) study felt they had been involved in the co-production of their child's EHCP. However, Redwood goes on to caution the assumption of parents as advocates. She notes that parents may be unaware of the wishes of their children, and may not be able to remain objective if they hold conflicting views (Redwood, 2015). These factors indicate child participation in the EHC process must be carefully considered and planned, or else may become tokenistic.

2.5.1 Summary

Person-centred approaches are espoused to be at the centre of the SEN reforms. However, feedback from families and professionals indicates that this is not always being translated into meaningful participation in practice. Whilst this may reflect the needs of the child, there also appears to be insufficient delegation of control to the child. If person-centred planning is to remain a central philosophy of the EHC process, careful consideration must be given to the scope and means by which this is achieved.

2.6 Personal budgets

Personal budgets were initially introduced within the 2011 Green Paper *Support and Aspiration* as a pathway towards greater choice for children with complex SEN and their families (DfE, 2011). Initially described as a way for parents to create a "personalised package of support for their child and family" (DfE, 2011, pp.47), the personal budget is an allocation of funding that young people and parents can request to provide greater choice in the commissioning of services. However, the SEND Code lacks detail as to how this budget is agreed, and the range of services that may be commissioned through it. As with multiagency

working, this may reflect the decentralisation agenda, allowing LAs to construct procedures which meet their local needs. It is likely that this sparsity of guidance had led to little being written on the subject of personal budgets with relation to EHCPs.

Some consideration has been given to the commissioning arrangements, with particular reference to health services (Gough *et al.*, 2014; Ko, 2015). Gough *et al.* (2014) highlight the need to consider how personal budgets will impact block contracts, which are traditionally used to reduce the costs of commissioned services. In a similar vein, SENCOs anticipating the introduction of the SEN reforms seemed to approach personal budgets with negative perceptions, predicting implications for staffing (Pearson, Mitchell and Rapti, 2015). The authors note that personal budgets are "seen as a withdrawal, rather than a redirection, of funds" (pp. 15), and that SENCOs seemed concerned about how to support families in making choices about budgets.

Despite these concerns, there is some indication that personal budgets have achieved positive outcomes for some children and their families. Qualitative feedback from Pathfinder families who had received personal budgets was positive, particularly where these had been used to secure additional services (Thom *et al.*, 2015). It was felt that this improved the young person's sense of independence and control, particularly for older students. Further examples of successful personal budgets were also highlighted through case studies, including the use of budgets to support travel and encourage independence (Mott Macdonald, 2015).

2.6.1 Summary

Personal budgets were introduced as a way of providing greater choice and flexibility to children and their families. Perhaps due to the localised way in which they are being implemented, very little research has explored the use of personal budgets. Very early reports

indicate they have had positive outcomes for some families, and particularly for older young people.

2.7 Implications for schools

Whilst the reforms will have an impact for health and social care services, they are likely to have the largest impact on schools and other education settings. In particular, they have a large impact on those with responsibility for supporting children with SEN and their families; the SENCOs. Prior to the release of the SEND Code, Robertson (2012) conjectured that SENCOs would likely be expected to champion change within their schools. He proposed that this relied on the assumption that SENCOs have the authority and ability to make changes. However, not all SENCOs are members of their school's senior leadership team.

SENCOs anticipating the release of the SEND Code reported thinking that reforms were likely to result in a reduction in the numbers of children identified with SEN (Pearson, Mitchell and Rapti, 2015). This was echoed by Norwich and Eaton (2015) who highlight the simultaneous shift towards this view by Ofsted, and raise the apparent reduction in emphasis upon social inclusion within the rhetoric. Similarly, SENCOs suggested that the way children with SEN were identified would likely change, and felt that it would become their responsibility to champion and facilitate the inclusion of all children within their schools (Pearson, Mitchell and Rapti, 2015). However, the inability of successive governments to decide upon a clear definition of inclusion (Norwich and Eaton, 2010) means that this pledge to continue inclusive practice may result in very different realities dependent on the values of SENCOs, schools and LAs. Furthermore, continuing pressure to demonstrate progress for all students may lead schools to reduce the priority they give to inclusion (Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden, 2000).

SENCOs reported being generally positive about the renewed importance of the family, and anticipated an increased need for strong relationships between schools and parents (Pearson, Mitchell and Rapti, 2015). Interestingly, Skipp and Hopwood (2015) found that, although parents valued and relied upon professionals for knowledge and support, they frequently desired the input of an independent service such as the SEND Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS). They reported that this was to ensure they were not missing important information, and to have someone to talk through their concerns with.

SENCOs felt optimistic about opportunities for multiagency working, but shared some reservations about how it would be coordinated, and whether access to services would reduce in light of cuts to budgets (Pearson, Mitchell and Rapti, 2015). Overall, a third of SENCO participants felt that their role would intensify in light of the reforms. Given the response rate (11.7%), care must be taken when generalising these results to SENCOs as a population. Despite this, the views of these SENCOs indicated they anticipated a number of opportunities and barriers within the new reforms.

Finally, feedback was gained from schools during the Pathfinder Programme evaluations (Hill *et al.*, 2014b). Many schools and authorities were still in the early stages of the program, and systems were still being identified and prepared. A primary theme drawn through consultation with schools in five authorities was the need for training and workforce development. This was focused in four areas; understanding the reforms and legislative changes, supporting person-centred planning, explaining personal budgets and identifying outcomes. They felt that the level of training required would differ dependent on the staff member's role, i.e. SENCOs and headteachers would likely require a greater level of training than classroom teachers or teaching assistants. Amongst the challenges they anticipated an increase in the frequency of requests, which may reflect the increase in requests for statutory assessment observed prior to

the implementation of reforms (Marsh, 2015). They also predicted a reduction in access to external agencies and wider pressures, such as the standards agenda. Finally, they identified enabling factors, such as having access to sufficient information, being able to see examples and the sharing of information and experiences between school and LA representatives.

2.7.1 Summary

Reforms to SEN legislation and guidance within education can have significant implications for the support of children and families within schools. In light of this, it is perhaps unsurprising that schools, and particularly SENCOs, experienced apprehension about what might need to change prior to the introduction of the SEND Code. Despite this trepidation, many schools expressed hope regarding the opportunities presented by reform and SENCOs were preparing themselves to receive more training and take on more responsibility in the coordination and facilitation of the process.

2.8 Overall summary and justification for research

Whilst there has been interest in the implementation of the new SEND Code (DfE/DH, 2015) and the resultant shift from Statements of SEN to EHCPs, there has been little research conducted about this topic. The bulk of the existing research was conducted during the Pathfinder Programme, which included a small number of self-selecting LAs who were given time and funding to pilot the reforms, prior to the SEND Code's finalisation and as such were working to different guidelines. Aside from these Pathfinder evaluations, current research has explored experiences of multiagency and child-centred working (Redwood, 2015) and the factors which influenced parental satisfaction (Skipp and Hopwood, 2016). To date, no research has explored experiences of the EHC process (i.e. support and meetings prior to the request, the needs assessment, the issuing of the plan and the implementation of support) from

a range of perspectives and using a data driven, rather than theory driven approach. Therefore, this research aimed to take this broad exploratory approach to explore how key individuals conceptualised and experienced the EHC process.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter will consider the methodological choices made throughout this research. It begins by exploring the epistemological assumptions upon which the research is based. Next consideration is given to the design frame and data collection methods. Information regarding the recruitment of participants is given, and the ethical considerations are shared. Data analysis methods are outlined, and attention is given to the rigour and quality of the research.

3.1 Epistemology

Underpinning philosophical beliefs related to the existence of and knowledge of reality (ontology and epistemology respectively) have important implications for all research. Beliefs about ontology and epistemology influence the questions asked, the methods used and the conclusions drawn (Gray, 2004; Thomas, 2015). For example, a positivist philosophy of research would follow the belief that there is an objective truth that can be known. As such, research within the positivist tradition, typically those in the natural sciences, would focus upon learning that truth, perhaps making use of large sample sizes and questionnaires, whilst seeking to widely generalise their findings. Applied to social research, positivist philosophies have been critiqued as inappropriate and too reductionist when attempting to understand complex social phenomena (Thomas, 2013).

Alternatively, interpretivist philosophies hold that 'knowledge' is mediated by a number of factors including cultural and historical context (Gray, 2004). Due to this, research based upon these methods, such as social research, is more likely to focus on the constructions of individuals or small numbers of people, using qualitative methods that encourage the production of in-depth accounts. Whilst some interpretivist researchers may strive for generalisation, others argue that this contradicts the beliefs about truth that underlie such

research (Thomas, 2015). Instead, they suggest that 'practical wisdom' should be drawn from research and applied to other contexts. For these researchers it is the celebration of the real-world, subjective nature of social research that enables it to be as valuable is its natural science counterparts (Schram, 2012; for more information, please refer to section 3.8.3).

This research follows an interpretivist approach, meaning that ideas of 'reality' and 'truth' are constructed at the individual level, and are influenced by personal experiences, social conventions and are historically based (Robson, 2011). With this perspective in mind, a methodology was constructed to complement the underlying principles of this research.

3.2 Case study

Case study is one in a series of design frames; approaches to research which outline the general principles to consider (Thomas, 2013). Disparaged by some as "an easy escape route for anyone pressed to specify a design" (Gorard, 2013, pp.199) the case study is nonetheless widely utilised and valued across a range of research fields (Robson, 2011). One reason for distrust of the case study may be the inconsistencies between researchers in defining the design. Gerring (2007) demonstrates the difficulty in creating a single, universally accepted definition by outlining eight varying criteria that have been used to describe case study design. In addition, its use across a wide range of disciplines, between whom the philosophical and epistemological variation is vast, leads to further barriers in creating a precise definition (Robson, 2011).

Thomas (2015, pp.23) defines case study design as;

> *…analyses of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions or other systems which are studied holistically by one or more methods. The case that is the subject of the inquiry will illuminate and explicate some analytical theme, or object.*

He suggests that case study is a broad design frame that complements a wide range of philosophical perspectives, data collection techniques and approaches to data analysis.

A case study design frame was chosen for this research for a number of reasons. Firstly, the research aims are exploratory in nature, and seek to explore how participants perceive the EHC process. The flexibility of approach allowed by case study design is well suited to this type of exploratory work, and enables an in-depth investigation of participants' views (Gray, 2004).

Secondly, the EHC process, and the surrounding legislation, are relatively new and as such limited research has been conducted to explore their implementation. Due to the fledgling nature of the topic, an in-depth investigation seems an appropriate way to extend the current research base. Simons (2009, pp.21) notes that "case study is an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexities and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme or system in a 'real life' context". The decentralisation agenda, by which LAs have been given greater autonomy over the implementation of the SEN reforms, also relates to this factor, as it increases the specificity of the phenomenon. The implementation of the new SEND Code (DfE/DH, 2015) will be subject to local variation, dependent on the existing philosophies, resources and practices. As such, the experiences of families and practitioners in Chesterfield is likely to be different to those elsewhere.

Thirdly, the case study design frame is also consistent with the interpretivist epistemological perspective employed. Unlike more positivist designs, case study design does not necessarily carry an assumption that an inherent truth is being sought. Indeed, Thomas (2015, pp.3) argues "you can't generalise from one thing, so there is no point in trying to do so". Case

study research is well suited to producing "intimate knowledge of localized understandings of subjective human relationships" (Schram, 2012, pp.17)

3.2.1 Case study design process

Following the selection of a case study design, a series of choices must be made, as outlined by Thomas (2015, figure 3). As each decision is made, the next must be considered to ensure a robust research design is created. Firstly, the subject of the case study must be chosen. This may represent an unusual case (outlier), an important case (key) and/or a case that the researcher is already involved with (local). The subject for the current research project was a local case, as participants were gathered from the LA that I am currently on placement within. This enabled me to have an in-depth understanding of local contextual factors which may have influenced the EHC process.
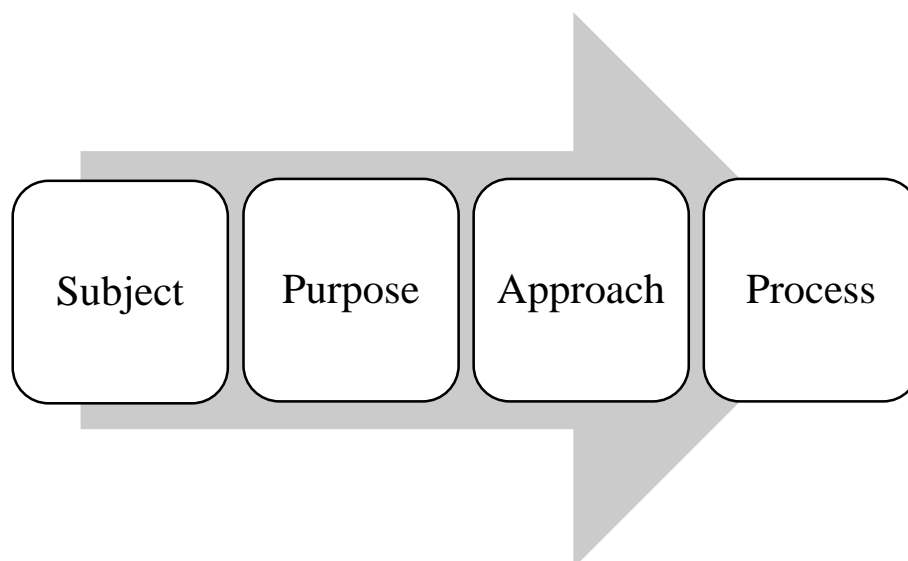
Figure 3: Key considerations within case study design, adapted from Thomas (2015)

Next, the purpose of the case study must be considered. Thomas (2015) suggests five potential reasons to use the design;

- to explore an interest (intrinsic),

- to serve a purpose (instrumental),

- to look at how something is working (evaluative),

- to explore why something is happening (explanatory), and/or

- to create a rich picture of a situation (exploratory).

As previously reported, this research topic originated from discussion with colleagues about the implementation of the new SEND Code whilst on placement (intrinsic). In addition, it attempts to explore and unpick the experiences and expectations of those who have participated in this new process (exploratory and explanatory).

The third consideration is that of which *approach* to take. Again, Thomas (2015) identifies five possible approaches to adopt; testing a theory, building a theory, drawing a picture, experimental and/or interpretative. A key aim of this project is to explore how key individuals construct the purposes of EHCPs. The data analysis method (as recounted in section 3.6) aimed to be as inductive as possible, and therefore a theory building approach was taken. Given the underlying research epistemology it is also logical that an interpretative approach was taken and as such, this case study is contextually dependent.

The final decision to be made is what process will be followed when recruiting participants and gathering information. Thomas (2015) initially separates these into two options; using a single case or multiple cases to explore the topic of interest. In exploring the case study itself, Thomas (2015) identifies two aspects for consideration; the subject and the object. The subject refers to the thing being studied – the individual, policy, event etc. whilst the object is the reason why it is of interest. He suggests that, whilst within a single case study the focus is

given to the subject, within a multiple case study, this focus shifts towards the phenomenon being investigated. In the current context, a single case study may explore a single family's perceptions of the EHC process in great detail, focusing on their particular experiences. In contrast, a multiple case study could gather information from a variety of families who have experienced the process, to contrast their experiences, giving a wider description of the process in that LA. This would lead to less focus being placed on the individual participants, and greater focus given to how the EHC process is being constructed. Because the focus for this research is on the process, rather than the individuals, a multiple case study design was selected.

Once a multiple case study design has been selected, Thomas recommends two further considerations are made about the process. Firstly, thought should be given to how comparison will be drawn. He draws distinction between a more "straightforward" multiple case study and the alternative nested case study (Thomas, 2011, pp.517, figure 4). Within the multiple case study, very distinct cases are compared and contrasted against one another, to highlight and consider differences between cases. Within a nested case study, however, multiple cases, or as Thomas refers to them *subunits*, are compared to draw inferences about the whole case. Thomas (2011, pp.517) uses the example of investigating wards within a hospital, asserting;

> *If the one hospital had no significance other than its physical housing of these three*
> *wards then the cases would not be seen as nested. The elements are nested only in*
> *the sense that they form an integral part of a broader picture.*
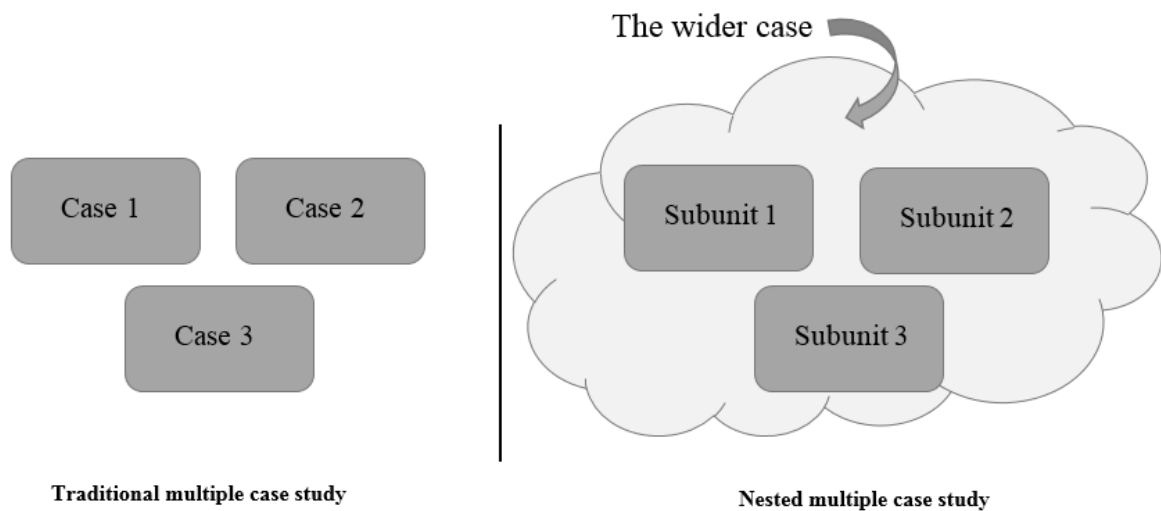
Figure 4: A comparison of traditional and nested multiple case study, adapted from Thomas (2011)

This is in contrast to Yin (2014) who suggests that nested, or as he refers to them 'embedded', case studies are a form of single case study, because there is only a single case being explored. Thomas' interpretation of nested case study as a multiple case study design was adopted for this research as the aims and methods of the research were consistent with his conceptualisation of the subject and the object. Given that this research is very much centred upon the local context, a nested case study was chosen to allow comparisons which may elicit information about the EHC process within that LA.

The second consideration to be made regarding the use of multiple case study is how data will be gathered between cases/subunits; in parallel or sequentially (Thomas, 2015). A parallel case study would gather information at the same time, whilst the sequential would gather information from different cases/subunits at different times. This approach is appropriate when change is occurring, to examine its impact over time. In this case, a parallel case study was used, because the research did not aim to explore changes over time.

As depicted below (see figure 5), following this protocol when developing a rationale for the use of case study enables a rigorous exploration of the factors that may influence the research design.

Subject	→	Purpose	→	Approach	→	Process
Outlier		Intrinsic		Testing a theory		Single
Key		Instrumental		Building a theory		Retrospective
Local		Evaluative		Drawing a picture		Snapshot
		Explanatory		Experimental		Diachronic
		Exploratory		Interpretative		Multiple
						Nested
						Parallel
						Sequential
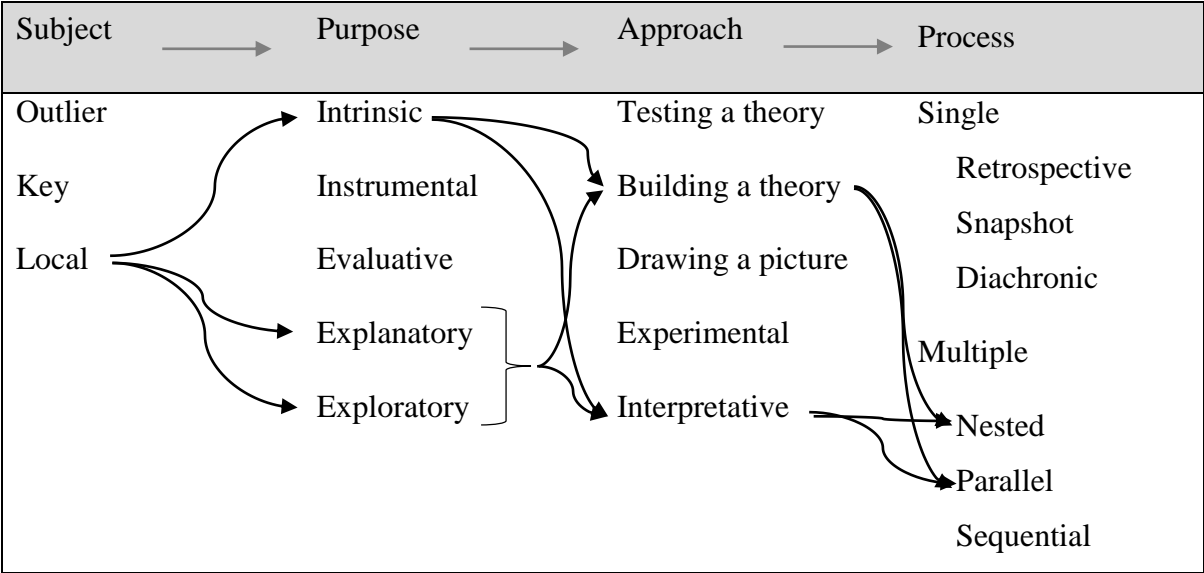
Figure 5: Methodological choices made in the case study design, adapted from Thomas (2011)

It is important to be mindful of the potential weaknesses of research designs, in order to avoid such limitations. Aucott (2014) synthesised key literature regarding case study design and identified five key concerns. Table 4 details these concerns and the implications they may have within my research.

Table 4: Potential limitations of case study design and implications for the current research, adapted from Aucott (2014)

Potential limitations of case study design	Steps taken to mitigate limitations
Case studies can be time consuming and generate excessive amounts of data which are difficult to analyse.	Given the small sample size and snapshot nature of this research, the data collection process was not overly time consuming. In addition, the interviews were limited to an hours maximum length, which was more than any single interview eventually took. Data analysis was assisted by using a structured approach, outlined in section 3.6.
Case studies can be vulnerable to researcher bias in terms of the selection and analysis of data.	Given the epistemological underpinnings of this research, it is expected that all research is subject to the influence of the researcher, regardless of the design used (Gray, 2004). Instead, it is important for the researcher to be reflexive and acknowledge their role in shaping the outcomes of the research (Thomas, 2015). In addition, steps were taken during the interviews to clarify participants' views and check that my own understanding was accurate.
Case studies have been criticised for producing findings that cannot be generalised beyond the immediate case study.	As will be detailed in section 3.8.3, the aim of this research is not to generate generalisable findings, due to its local nature. Instead, this research seeks to identify the practical wisdom that may have relevance to the practice of educational psychologists and others (Schram, 2012).
Case studies have been criticised for being descriptive and having no purpose.	It is hoped that this research will prove useful to educational psychologists and other key individuals, by identifying the practical wisdom that they might consider and apply to their own practice, as discussed in section 3.8.3.
Case studies have been criticised for lacking rigour.	This research achieves rigour due to the use of multiple case study, which enables the triangulation of information, and the explicit acknowledgement of my own positionality (Thomas, 2015)

3.3 Data collection

This study employed interviews as the sole data collection method. Interviews have been described as a key method within case study, suitable to gather a rich range and depth of information (Yin, 2014). Robson (2002) suggests that, dependent on the level of structure built into the interview design, "face to face interviews offer the possibility of modifying one's line of enquiry, following up interesting responses and investigating underlying motives" (pp.272-273). This is in keeping with the interpretivist underpinnings of this research, as it enables the co-construction of understanding between participants and researcher.

Semi-structured interviews make use of a schedule of pre-determined questions or areas of interest, which are used to guide the interview. They are proposed to offer opportunities for flexibility, alongside certainty that key topics of interest are addressed during the interview (Robson, 2002). This is in contrast with unstructured interviews, within which the participants are free to talk about any subject they choose. Beyond the questions included within the semi-structured interview schedule, the researcher is able to react to the information shared by the interviewee, such as asking for additional clarity. In addition, the researcher is able to adjust the interview schedule to meet the perceived needs of the interviewee, by removing inappropriate questions or changing the wording of questions, or by providing examples (Robson, 2002). Such approaches are felt to improve the quality of the data gathered through interview, and enable a more genuine interaction between research and participants (Gray, 2004). This contrasts to structured interviews, in which the researcher is bound by a strict set of questions. A semi-structured interview schedule was developed for the purposes of this research project (appendix 5).

A combination of individual and paired interviews were included within this study. Where participants chose to be interviewed in pairs, both parties had participated in the EHC process. Whilst this variation in participation may be discouraged in other designs that prioritise the comparability and replicability of information, the flexibility of case study design enabled participants to choose what context would make them most comfortable. This in turn promoted a more genuine interaction between participants and researcher. Awareness of power imbalances between EPs and service users is a key consideration in practice (Division of Educational and Child Psychology (DECP), 2002) that extends to research. By providing participants with choice over context, I hoped to reduce power imbalance and increase participant confidence. The parents in subunit 1 and subunit 2 had both been involved within the family conversations and subsequent planning for their respective children. The SENCO within subunit 2 requested that the school's headteacher participated alongside her in the interview because they had worked together to complete the initial request paperwork, and both had attended all subsequent meetings.

3.3.1 Interview procedure

Each of the interviews followed a similar structure;

- Phase 1: Initial rapport building time, including opportunities to ask questions,
- Phase 2: The interview, loosely following the interview schedule, and
- Phase 3: A card ranking activity, using functions identified throughout the interview.

Rapport building is a key aspect of interview-based research (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). In this research, it was achieved through initial discussion of neutral topics, and a thorough recap of the aims and processes of the research. This included reviewing the information leaflet (appendix 3), and sharing the consent form (appendix 4) and interview

schedule (appendix 5). Following the signing of consent forms, the interview was carried out in the order presented in appendix 5.

Throughout the interview, I noted potential purposes of the EHC process, and checked them with the participants. This provided an opportunity to check my understanding, ensuring that I had not misinterpreted the meaning of their statement (Gray, 2004). At the end of the interview I asked the participants to arrange their cards in order of most important to least important, providing them with an opportunity to reflect. Once they had completed this task, a photograph was taken of their ranking (appendix 6). The purpose of this card ranking task was to prompt further discussion of the topics raised throughout the interviews and as such was not subject to further analysis.

3.4 Participants

This research endeavoured to explore a range of perspectives regarding the EHC process. To achieve this breadth of perspective, whilst maintaining the depth of insight that is prioritised within case study research, participants were selected from predetermined categories. Each subunit centred upon a child with a completed EHCP. Whilst it was initially hoped that the child themselves might be able to participate within the research, upon reflection it was decided that their needs were likely to be incompatible with the data collection methods that were chosen. Amongst current research in this area, only one child was able to participate, Charlie who was in year 6 (Redwood, 2015). Otherwise, children were described as too young, having incompatible needs, or simply not wanting to participate (Redwood, 2015). The children discussed within this research were quite young at the time (aged between 6 and 8 years old), and each had difficulties with communication and interaction. Therefore, I did not believe that I would have been able to achieve fully informed consent, or that they would

be able to express themselves sufficiently within interviews. I was also concerned about the possible distress that the children may have experienced if they did not understand, could not share their views or were just cautious of a new adult. Given that an important tenet of research is the avoidance of harm, I made a choice not to include the children (British Psychological Society (BPS), 2010). Instead, the subunits consisted of parents who had completed the family conversation and subsequent meetings, school staff who had completed the initial request for statutory assessment paperwork and the subsequent statutory advice for the school, and the EP who completed the psychological advice for the EHC needs assessment.

Given the level of need required to receive an EHCP, the length of time the EHC needs assessment takes and the short period of time between the introduction of the new process (September 2014) and the commencement of recruitment (September 2015; Appendix 7 for timeline), a limited number of children and families had received a finalised EHCP by the time of the research. At the time of recruitment, 30 children had received a finalised EHCP in Chesterfield. In addition, several criteria were chosen to support the inclusion and exclusion of particular cases (please see table 5). In adherence with guidance from the University of Birmingham ethical review committee, I identified appropriate cases through the records held by the EPS with supervision from the principal educational psychologist. In total, 12 cases met the criteria. Letters and information leaflets (appendix 3) were sent to the parents in each case to introduce the research. Following this, a phone call was made to offer an opportunity to ask questions and to gauge interest in the project. Three parents indicated that they would like to participate in this project. Following their verbal consent, I made contact with the SENCO and EP associated with the subunit, to offer information about the project and to extend the offer to participate (BPS, 2010). In each subunit, both the SENCO and EP

consented to participate in the research project. Once consent was gained from each of the

participants within the subunit, interviews were organised at their conveniences.

Table 5: Criteria for participant selection

Criteria	Justification
The EHCP should have been finalised	As a placement student within the LA, others may perceive that I have an influence on the outcomes of the EHC needs assessment. It would be more appropriate to wait until the EHCP has been finalised, so that participants will definitely understand that their interviews are not part of the EHC process.
The child should have been school-aged when the request for statutory assessment was submitted.	In the LA, requests for statutory assessment of preschool children with additional SEN are made by specialist preschool workers, who work within the council, rather than schools.
Participants should be able to comfortably and freely communicate in English.	Due to the use of interviews as the data collection method, participants must be able understand and answer questions. For participants with language difficulties, or those with English as an additional language, this would be a barrier to their genuine participation. Use of interpreters would be inappropriate, as they are unlikely to be able to recount the participant's views word-for-word, which would add a further layer of interpretation to the interview.
The EP who completed the psychological advice should be employed by the LA.	Whilst most psychological advices for statutory assessment are completed by LA EPs, a small number are written by other EPs who may not as aware of the LA context and processes. Inclusion of these practitioners would not be beneficial when exploring practice within the LA.
The case should not have been taken to tribunal.	These cases are likely to have been an atypical experience, and therefore would not be appropriate in a nested case study.
The request for statutory assessment should not have been made by the parents.	These cases are likely to have been an atypical experience, and therefore would not be appropriate in a nested case study.
The EHCP should not have been transferred from a statement.	Within the LA, EHC transfer cases do not undergo the same process as a 'new' statutory assessment would. These cases are likely to have been an atypical experience, and therefore would not be appropriate in a nested case study.

3.4.1 Subunit 1: Sarah
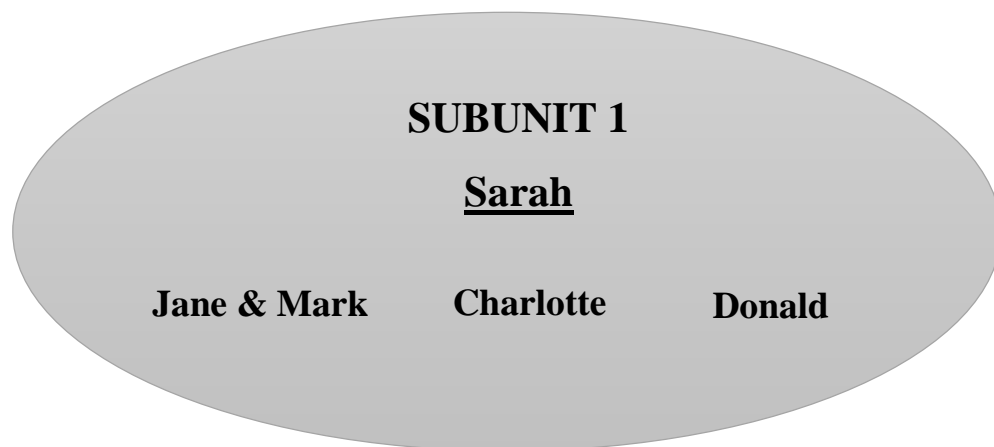
Figure 6: Participants in subunit 1: Sarah

Figure 6 depicts the key members of this subunit. At the time of the research, Sarah was eight years old and lived in Chesterfield with her parents, Jane and Mark, and three siblings. Sarah is identified with specific language impairment, and this is the primary need stated in her EHCP. Sarah's school has a base for children with language difficulties that can only be accessed with an EHCP, which Sarah now attends. The base is within the mainstream school, and students spend 50% of their time in the base, and 50% in their mainstream classes.

Charlotte is the SENCO at Sarah's school. She is an experienced member of staff, who has worked at the school for 20 years. She has been the SENCO for 10 years. Prior to working at the school, Charlotte worked within the speech and language service.

Donald is the EP who completed the psychological advice for Sarah. Sarah's school does not 'buy in' the LA EPS, and so this was the first time an LA EP had worked with Sarah. Donald is an experienced practitioner with over 20 years of experience. At the time of the research, Donald was working as a locum EP for the LA, meaning that he was employed on a consultancy basis, rather than having a fixed contract.

3.4.2 Subunit 2: Daniel
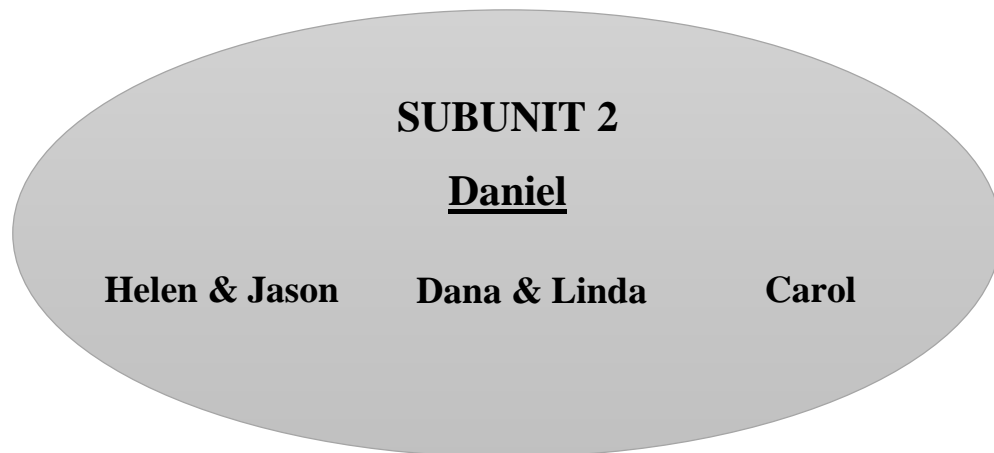
Figure 7: Participants in subunit 2: Daniel

Figure 7 depicts the key members of this subunit. Daniel was a six year old who lived with his parents, Helen and Jason, and older sister. Daniel has an identification of autism spectrum disorder, and this is listed as his primary need in his EHCP. Daniel's needs were recognised at the early years level, and the request for EHC needs assessment was made during his reception year. He is now in year 1, and continues to attend his local mainstream school.

Dana is one of two SENCOs at Daniel's school, who works specifically with children in foundation and key stage 1. Dana is an experienced teacher who became SENCO three years ago. Because the request for Daniel's EHC needs assessment was the first Dana had completed, she received support from her headteacher, Linda.

Carol is the EP who completed the psychological advice for Daniel. Previously, Daniel was supported by another colleague at the early years level. Carol took over from this colleague when Daniel joined the school in reception. Carol is a recently qualified EP, who was in her first year of qualified practice at the time she wrote the psychological advice. She had also been on placement in the EPS for the previous 2 years.

3.4.3 Subunit 3: Penny
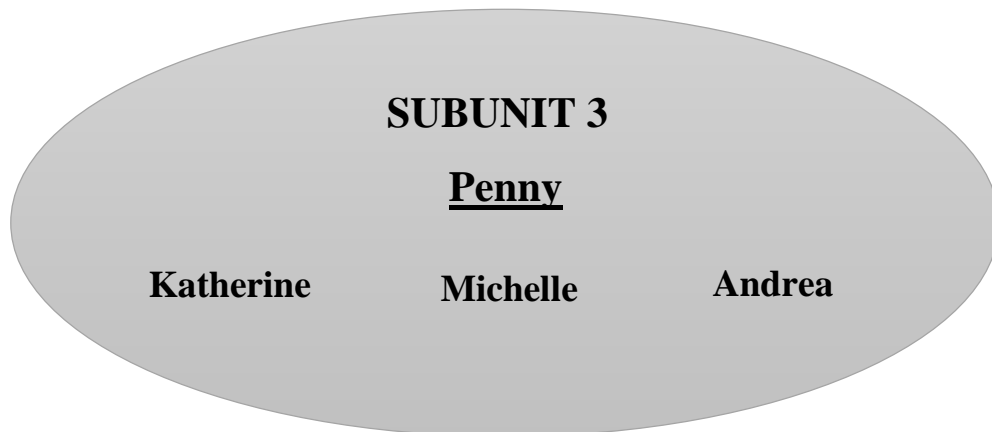
Figure 8: Participants in subunit 3: Penny

Figure 8 depicts the key members of this subunit. At the time of the research, Penny was a six year old child living with her mother, Katherine. Penny has an identification of autism spectrum disorder and experiences learning difficulties, and these needs are listed as her priority needs within her EHCP. Penny received her EHCP during her reception year, and is now in year one at her local mainstream school.

Michelle is the SENCO who completed the paperwork for the request for EHC needs assessment. At the time of the request, Michelle was in her first year as a SENCO. At the time of the research, Michelle had recently moved to a new job in another school, but was happy to participate in the research.

Andrea is the EP who completed the psychological advice for Penny's EHC needs assessment. At the time of the research, Andrea had been qualified for just over two years, and had worked in the LA EPS for all of that time.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for this research was sought from and granted by the University of Birmingham's Ethical Review Committee. The application for ethical review includes detailing the ethical considerations of the project, and a consideration of how these factors may be accounted for. The ethical considerations of this project are largely covered by those in guidelines set out by the BPS (2009) and the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011), which include the participants' right to give fully informed consent, to withdraw without penalty and to have their data kept confidentially. In addition, particularly given the interpersonal nature of the methods used, consideration must be given to any power dynamics between participants and the researcher. Table 6 outlines the ethical considerations of this research, and the steps taken to manage them

Table 6: Steps taken to manage the ethical considerations of this research

Ethical consideration	Steps taken
Participants have the right to be fully informed prior to giving their consent to join any study. They also have a right to withdraw from research without penalty (BERA, 2011; BPS, 2009)	Parent participants were sent a letter and information leaflet to introduce them to the project (appendix 3). They also received a follow-up phone call to offer them the opportunity to ask further questions. Following their consent, I approached the relevant school staff via telephone and EPs in person. These participants also received information leaflets, and were given opportunities to ask questions. Prior to the commencement of the interviews, a final summary of the research aims and processes was read to participants (Appendix 4). This included the participant's right to withdraw from the research without penalty up to a week after the interview. This allowance of a week was agreed by the ethical review committee to allow participants to reflect on their interviews, prior to the commencement of transcription and analysis.

Participants have a right to confidentiality (BERA, 2011; BPS, 2009)	All participants were notified that their interviews would be stored securely using an encrypted storage device for 10 years, and that only I would have access to the original interview recordings. They were also informed that identifying information such as names or places would be anonymised during transcription. The only exception to the confidentiality of the interviews was in the event of a child protection concern. Participants were informed that, in the event of any child protection concerns, the school's designated child protection officer would be notified and a note would be made in the child's file, in line with the EPS's child protection policy.
Where anonymity cannot be guaranteed, participants should be explicitly informed and given the opportunity to withdraw (BERA, 2011)	Due to the nature of the research, in which members of subunits would know one another, anonymity could not be guaranteed in this research. Participants were advised that, although they would not be named within the project, others within their subunit may be able to identify them, and their right to withdraw was reiterated. They were also informed that quotes from their interviews would be included within the final write-up.
Participants should not be at risk of harm (BERA, 2011; BPS, 2009)	It was not anticipated that participants would come to harm throughout the process of the research. Care was taken to ensure participants knew they could end the interview at any time, or to not respond to questions that they were uncomfortable in answering.
Researchers must be mindful of potential power imbalances that may place undue pressure upon participants (BPS, 2009)	Care was taken to explain my role as both a placement student within the LA and a research student at the University of Birmingham. I emphasised that whilst I was on placement within the LA, I was not employed by them, and the interviews aimed to serve a research purpose, rather than impacting on their child's EHCP in the same way as, perhaps, an annual review. Participants were given control over time, location and format (i.e. individual or pairs) of interviews. In addition, they were reminded of their right to withdraw at any point up until a week after the interview, including during the interview itself.

3.6 Data analysis

Thematic analysis is a broad analytical method that can be used across a wide range of information to transform data into patterns (Boyatzis, 1998). It is a highly flexible approach that can tolerate a wide range of underlying epistemological perspectives, design frames and data collection techniques. The flexibility of thematic analysis has been championed as a key strength of the method by Braun and Clarke (2006) who provided one of a small number of comprehensive frameworks guiding the use of thematic analysis. This framework includes several initial considerations to be made prior to approaching data analysis, and then 6 practical steps to be taken to analyse the information.

Firstly, researchers must consider what constitutes a theme. This could range from a more quantitative approach, where the most commonly used codes are identified as themes, to a more interpretative method, where those codes most interesting to the researcher are pursued. Within this research, I utilised a combination of these methods. Codes may have become themes because they were frequently assigned, but also if they raised important or interesting perspectives. This reflects the co-constructed nature of such research, where the perspectives of participants and researchers combine into findings.

Secondly, the researcher must decide whether the findings will reflect the entirety of the data, or focus on a single, salient aspect of the data. Given the exploratory nature of this research, I chose that the analysis would reflect all of the data, rather than one aspect. Braun and Clarke (2006, pp. 11) agree that this approach is "…a particularly useful method when you are investigating an under-researched area…".

Related to this is the third consideration; to code using predetermined criteria (theoretically) or to code from the data (inductively). The former might include the use of a theory or prior

research to guide the search, forming an in-depth account of particular aspects of interest. The latter is thought to produce findings clearly linked within the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) note that this type of coding may result in findings that bear little relation to the initial research questions, and suggest that research questions are likely to evolve over the course of analysis. It was this approach to coding that was selected in this case; to enable a more exploratory investigation of an under-researched area, reflecting the perspectives of the participants with as much accuracy as possible. It is recognised that the researcher can never enter into such analysis as a blank slate, and as such I recognise that my own constructs and beliefs will have influenced the codes that were identified throughout the analysis.

The fourth consideration reflects the level of meaning that the analysis seeks to address. Braun and Clarke (2006) refer to these levels of theme as semantic or latent. They define a semantic theme as concerned with identifying patterns in the semantic information shared by participants, and include the expectation that some interpretation will translate this theme from purely descriptive to a more robust explanation of why this theme is of interest. Alternatively, a latent theme involves exploration of the underlying assumptions derived from the codes. This approach has similarities with approaches such as discourse analysis, which is underpinned by the belief that the language we use reveals information about the culturally and historically influenced beliefs we hold. In this research, as I am not attempting to explore underpinning views or language in this way, I have chosen to take a semantic approach to developing themes.

The final consideration relates to the epistemological underpinnings of the research, which have already been described as interpretivist. This has implications for the way in which themes can be discussed, and to what extent conclusions can be drawn. As will be detailed in section 3.8.3, the nature of this research means that I do not aim to develop widely

generalisable findings, but instead seek to consider what *practical wisdom* might be sought

from it. Once these decisions were made, Braun and Clarke's six stage process (please refer to

figure 9) was adopted in the analysis of the data.

Gaining familiarity with the data
- Analysis begins during transcription and subsequent reading, where the researcher gains familiarity with the data set.
- The researcher begins to identify patterns as they become more familiar with the data.

Generating initial codes
- Codes are labels used to describe what is important or interesting about a segment of test. (demonstrated in appendix 8)
- The researcher codes systematically, taking each interview individually.
- Segments of text may be labelled with multiple codes, to ensure all aspects are included within the analysis.

Searching for themes
- Once all interviews have been coded, the codes are collated and the researcher looks for patterns amongst codes. (demonstrated in appendix 9)
- Similar codes are organised into themes and subthemes.

Reviewing themes
- Themes are refined to ensure they represent sufficiently important or interesting patterns within the data. (demonstrated in appendix 9)
- They are checked to ensure the consistency of individual codes within the code (internal homogeneity) and that themes are sufficiently distinct from one another (external heterogeneity).

Defining and naming themes
- Identifying the *essence* of the theme, to allow others to understand what the theme may be about. (demonstrated in appendix 9)

Producing the report
- The story of the data is clearly, coherently and convincingly shared with others. (demonstrated in appendix 10)

Figure 9: The thematic analysis process taken in this research, adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006)

3.7 Research questions

Initially, my primary interest in this project was to explore what people felt was the purpose of EHCPs, and this general topic was used to develop an initial research question; *how do key individuals conceptualise the purposes of EHCPs?* However, many of the methodological choices that I have made allow research questions to develop over the course of the research. Firstly, the interpretivist stance taken in this research recognises that individuals will construct their own meanings. Due to the multiplicity of perspectives that may emerge over the course of a research project, the initial research questions may not be answered by the actual data gathered (Robson, 2002).

Secondly, Thomas (2015) acknowledges that research questions can be changed and refined over the process of the case study. He notes that early research questions have value in that they allow researchers to "be unafraid, on the understanding that it will change. It will get better…" (pp. 30). Finally, the approach taken during the thematic analysis can have implications for the research questions. A more deductive, theory driven approach to analysis might mean that the research questions are perfectly answered, because the researcher is searching the data for information related to each question (Braun and Clarke, 2006). However, the inductive, data driven approach taken in this research means that the findings of the research may bear little resemblence to the initial research questions, and are more grounded in the perspectives and beliefs of the participants. In this case, it is essential to make adjustments to the research questions, to ensure the research can cohesively achieve its purpose; to explore the views of key individuals.

With these considerations in mind, the research questions were developed through an iterative process. The final research questions for this research are;

1. How do key individuals conceptualise the purposes of the EHC process?

2. What was the EHC process like for key individuals?

3. Which factors influenced the perceived success of the EHC process?

3.8 Rigour, quality and phronesis

Each aspect of this research reflects a qualitative tradition that is difficult to assess by traditional concepts like reliability and validity. From a small sample size, to the flexibility of the interview schedule, to the interpretative analysis approach, it would be difficult to argue that the findings of this research could be held up as universally true, or replicable. However, for this type of research, generalisability, validity and replicability are not the primary aim (Thomas, 2015). Instead, the researcher seeks rigour and quality through different methods.

3.8.1 Triangulation

Thomas (2015) suggests the first way in which to produce rigorous work is through *triangulation*. This refers to the collection of data from multiple sources. This is something that is easily achieved through the multiple case study approach, because there is an inherent focus on exploring many perspectives. Triangulation is also achieved by the researcher pausing to consider whether the data could be perceived another way during analysis. This process is intrinsically present within thematic analysis, where the researcher is prompted to repeatedly return to the data in search of different codes or themes that could be applied to the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This was the approach taken within the current research, which resulted in individual segments of data being coded multiple times with differing labels (appendix 8).

3.8.2 Positionality

Thomas' (2015) second criteria for rigour is *positionality*; the researcher's reflexive consideration of their own views and perspectives. As has been recognised throughout this research, the way in which individuals perceive the world impacts the way we interpret and experience events. Whilst I must be mindful of any biases which lead to the identification of information that did not exist in the raw data, the same holds true for me as a researcher; I cannot isolate my own preconceptions when conducting and analysing the research.

With this in mind, I feel it is important to explicitly consider my own perspectives on key topics within this research. As a TEP working within the LA, I have a working knowledge of the EHC process in Chesterfield, and as such have developed my own perceptions of purposes, strengths and limitations of the system. For example, I perceive that a purpose of the EHCP is to provide additional funding to schools, to facilitate them in supporting children with complex SEN. I also hold values that I feel are related to the EHC process, such as the importance of inclusion and participation for children with SEN and their families. These values, developed throughout my Doctoral training through university-based work and placement experiences, are important features of my practice. As a reflexive researcher, I accept that my pre-existing knowledge and values are likely to have some influence over the choices and interpretations within this research. Schram (2012, p.17) suggests;

> *...social scientists are inevitably people who offer interpretations of other people's interpretations. And the people being studied always have the potential to include the social scientists' interpretations in theirs, creating an ever-changing subject matter and requiring a dialogic relationship ...*

The use of semi-structured interviews within this research provided an opportunity to mediate the impact of my subjective interpretation, in that I was able to reflect participants' views back to them and check I had accurately understood their meaning. Using the cards to summarise their views of the purposes of the EHC process also enabled me to check my understanding. Given the local nature of this project, my own constructs formed an important part of the research process. However, within the interpretivist tradition, objectivity is not expected, and thus my subjectivity as a researcher, as long as it is recognised, does not present a flaw (Thomas, 2015).

3.8.3 Phronesis

As has already been stated, this research does not seek to achieve generalisability, in the traditional sense. The local, subjective nature of the research means that it would be very difficult to justify drawing wide ranging conclusions to apply to others experiencing the EHC process. In addition, any such attempt would be at odds with the underlying epistemological perspective adopted in this research. Instead, the concept of *phronesis* may be usefully applied. Originating with Aristotle, the term phronesis refers to the practical knowledge that can be gained from research (Thomas, 2011). Schram (2012, p.17) states;

...the social sciences are better equipped to produce a different kind of knowledge – phronesis, practical wisdom – that grows out of intimate familiarity with practice in contextualized settings. Local knowledges, even tacit knowledges, cannot be taught a priori and are grown from the bottom up. They emerge out of practice, forgoing the hubris of seeking claims to a decontextualized universal rationality stated in abstract terms of false precision.

Thomas discusses the use of exemplary knowledge; examples presented within their own context that are interpreted and applied within a new situation. The aim of phronesis is for individuals to examine research conducted in one setting, reflect upon the findings, and develop tentative hypotheses about their use within their own setting. Consideration of the practical wisdom drawn from this research can be found in section 4.7.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings of the thematic analysis previously described. It considers inductively identified themes in relation to their respective research questions. I also reflect upon the existing literature and draw comparisons with these findings. Finally, I consider the limitations of this research, and implications for educational psychology practice. For ease of reference, the research questions addressed in this chapter are;

1. How do key individuals conceptualise the purposes of the EHC process?

2. What was the EHC process like for key individuals?

3. Which factors influenced the perceived success of the EHC process?

4.1 Presentation of findings

The final phase of the approach to thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) is the presentation and communication of findings. They hold that results should be documented in such a way as to provide "a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account of the story the data tell" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, pp.23). Due to the potential complexity of the findings, this chapter will include the use of diagrams and quotes from the interviews throughout to provide as coherent and transparent an account of the findings as possible.

4.2 Research question 1: Purposes of the EHC process

Themes in this section related to the research question; how do key individuals conceptualise the purposes of the EHC process? Participants generated a wide range of purposes for the EHC process, related to both the process itself and the hoped outcomes of the EHCP. They concerned expectations for not only the child's educational outcomes, but also for changes in

the perceptions and practice of adults within the child's microsystem and exosystem. Figure

10 depicts the themes and subthemes related to research question 1.
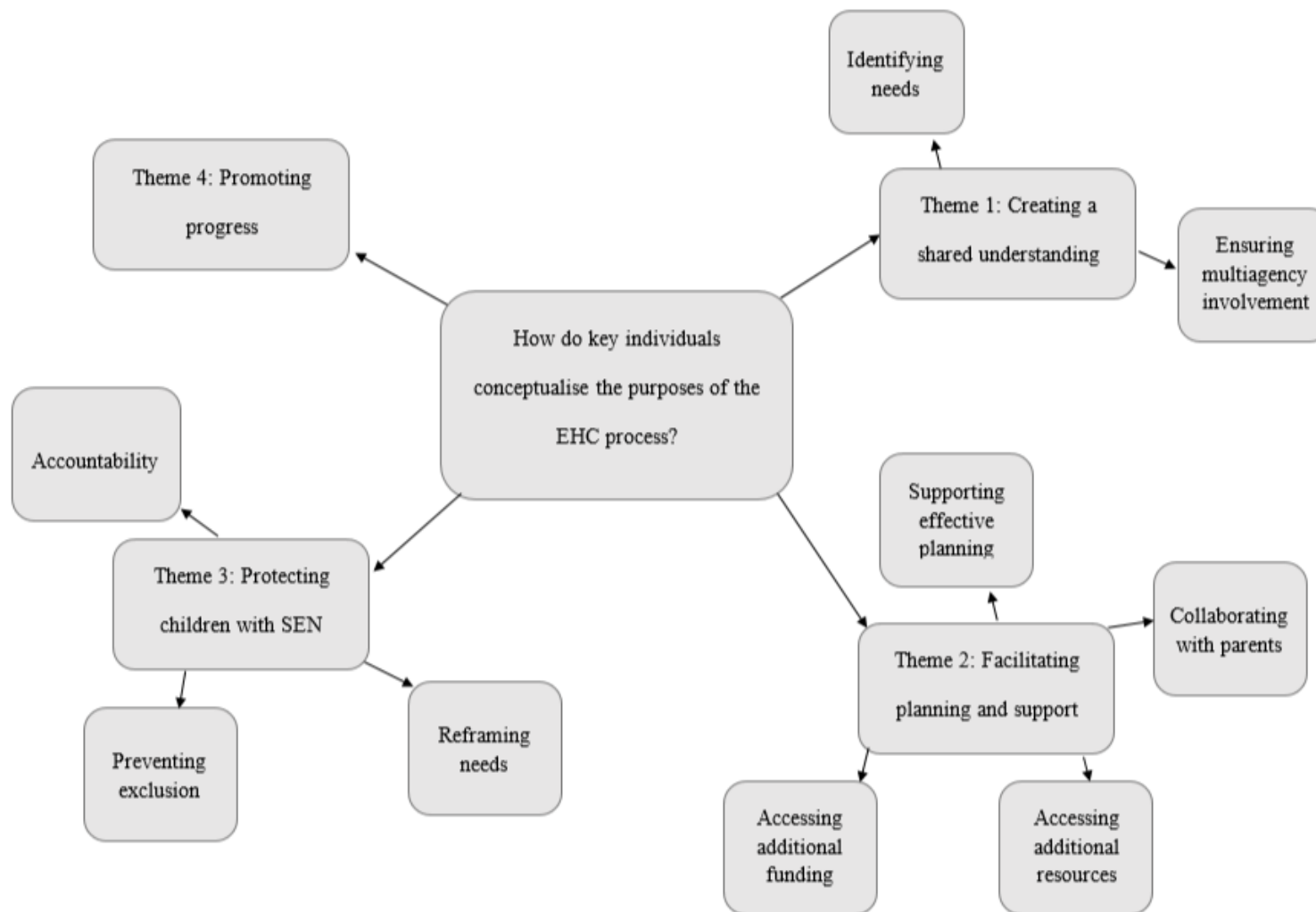
Figure 10: Themes and subthemes related to research question 1

4.2.1 Theme 1: Creating a shared understanding

The creation of a shared understanding of the child and their needs was identified as a key purpose of the EHC process. Participants highlighted the importance of accurate identification of needs and in ensuring multiagency involvement.

- **Subtheme – Identifying needs**

Children and young people who receive EHCPs are likely to experience a high level of need (DfE/DH, 2015). Due to this, their presentation can be complex and difficult to understand. This was felt to be the case between participants within this study, who felt that each child had a significant level of need.

> Helen (parent, subunit 2): *Daniel has got unbelievably high level of need. He... is a very, very, very different child.*
>
> Jason (parent, subunit 2): *very complex.*

This complexity is reflected within the SEND Code (DfE/DH, 2015), which states that LAs use assessment information to create EHCPs that "provide a full description of the child or young person's special educational needs and any health and social care needs" (pp.142).

Akin to parents in other LAs (Skipp and Hopwood, 2016; Thom *et al*., 2015; Smith, Cameron and Vanson, 2014), participants placed a high expectation upon the process to unpick these complex needs. There was a perception that the EHCP would provide a definitive description of the child and their needs. In turn, this was expected to facilitate their support within school.

...the purpose was getting a clear picture of her needs together, one that can be shared across the members of staff that teach Penny, that can be updated and dynamic and flexible.

– Andrea (EP, subunit 3)

- **Subtheme – Ensuring multiagency involvement**

Participants recognised that there could be various ways of identifying needs. They placed emphasis on collaborative working, which allowed multiple perspectives to be considered whilst developing the plan.

...it's defining those [needs], *it's articulating those then and then it's having the right people - in inverted commas - around a table regularly, to have discussions about how those needs can be best met.*

– Linda (headteacher, subunit 2)

Ensuring the involvement of a range of agencies was highlighted as a key purpose by various participants during the interviews. Multiagency involvement was also cited as a priority purpose for families participating in the Pathfinder Programme, who similarly felt that it was key to developing a true understanding of the child's needs (Thom *et al*., 2015; Smith, Cameron and Vanson, 2014). The EHC process places a statutory duty on services within education, health and social care to provide advice, where necessary, about the needs of the child. The opportunity statutory assessment creates for multiagency involvement was explained by Linda (headteacher, subunit 2);

If you didn't have an EHCP, as I said earlier, you wouldn't get the right people

around the table. ... If you didn't have that, those conversations wouldn't happen in

the same way.

<div align="right">Linda (headteacher, subunit 2)</div>

The perceived gap between the support needs of children with SEN and the capacity of services to provide this support, particularly following sweeping cuts within LAs, has been previously documented (The Key, 2016; Redwood, 2015). The result within Chesterfield has been a steady decline in access to services, and increasing 'trading', meaning that schools must purchase support from external services. Therefore the statutory imperative for involvement from services was a key purpose in these subunits.

4.2.1.1 Summary and discussion of theme 1

Developing a shared understanding of the child or young person's needs was perceived as a key purpose of the EHC process. Particular emphasis was placed on expectations of the process to be highly collaborative, and participation from external agencies was perceived to be central to this purpose. Participant expectations of the EHC process as collaborative are consistent with those purposes outlined within the SEND Code (DfE/DH, 2015), which places emphasis on the statutory duty of services to conduct assessments of children with SEN.

Participants were primarily concerned with identifying the needs of the child, rather than their strengths and skills. This deficit focus may reflects the aims and constraints of the statutory process, which requires some criteria by which funding is delegated. However, this approach to identifying children who would benefit from additional support may unintentionally place limits on their outcomes (Shifrer, 2013).

4.2.2 Theme 2: Facilitating planning and support

The next theme identified was the role of the EHC process in the planning and delivery of additional support. Participants raised facilitation of planning, parental empowerment and access to funding and resources as key purposes of the EHC process.

- **Subtheme – Supporting effective planning**

Participants felt that facilitating planning for children and young people with complex SEN was a key purpose of the EHC process. This included the need for multiagency input, which accords with the views of other parents (Skipp and Hopwood, 2016; Redwood, 2015; Thom *et al.*, 2015; Smith, Cameron and Vanson, 2014). Parents and school staff participants often framed external professionals as experts, who had the greatest understanding of how the child should be supported;

> *…the big part is having the professionals around, it's not just talking to us, it's having them around him really, getting him, helping him trying to unlock because we ain't got all the answers.*

> – Jason (parent, subunit 2)

The positioning of external agencies as 'experts' was reflected by both parents and school staff. Positioning theory proposes that the way individuals are positioned through language has implications for the way in which individuals can act (Harré, 2012). By positioning external services as 'experts', schools and parents place high value on the involvement of such services, and may devalue their own potential contributions. This may be one reason why multiagency involvement was prioritised by these participants.

The EHC process seemed to provide schools with the security that they were doing 'the right thing' in supporting these students. As Michelle (SENCO, subunit 3) noted;

...it was about supporting Penny, supporting the family, supporting the class teacher in making sure that we were meeting Penny's needs in the right way, so she could progress and she could make gains in her learning.

This may relate to perceptions that mainstream schools would be supporting increasingly more complex students, and thus may be facing new experiences (Pearson, Mitchell and Rapti, 2015). Thus establishing a consensus amongst members of the assessment group may provide an additional sense of reassurance.

Minimal consideration was given to planning for the future by families, likely due to the ages of their children. This echoes the views of Pathfinder families with young children, who felt that it was too early to consider long-term impact (Thom *et al*., 2015; Smith, Cameron and Vanson, 2014).

The only other thing which I've seen out of it, which is it stays until 25? It's the support when he's older, but we weren't, we can't say what that would feel like yet, because he's only 6.

– Jason (parent, subunit 2)

For professionals, however, planning for adulthood was a key function of the EHC process. This likely reflects their experience working with children across the age range. There was a recognition that the outcomes and targets identified at this early stage of their schooling would have implications for their future opportunities and skills.

I do feel like there's something about it going up to 25 ... it's about preparing for life in work, it's preparing for independence and it's preparing for... it's, yeah, it's preparing for all of those things that, where we contribute to the community that we're in.

– Andrea (EP, subunit 3)

It is interesting that participation of the young person in planning their own support was not considered, despite this being of great importance to the parents of older young people in other contexts (Skipp and Hopwood, 2016; Thom *et al*., 2015; Smith, Cameron and Vanson, 2014).

- **Subtheme – Collaborating with parents**

In addition to the inclusion of 'expert' external agencies, the EHC process was also considered to be an opportunity to collaborate with, and empower, parents. This was primarily raised by the school staff and EPs within the subunits, as opposed to parents themselves.

I link it to empowering parents cos it, parents are already not. The EHC process is education professionals, so parents, it empowers them up to therefore engage in joint decision making.

– Carol (EP, subunit 2)

Many of the Pathfinder reports have also emphasised the centrality of parental involvement (Thom *et al*., 2015; Hill *et al*., 2014b; Smith, Cameron and Vanson, 2014). This seems to reflect the renewed importance placed on parental participation within the SEND Code (DfE/DH, 2015). Although their own participation was not highlighted by parents in this sample, other parents have previously cited this as a key outcome (Skipp

and Hopwood, 2016; Redwood, 2015; Thom *et al*., 2015; Smith, Cameron and Vanson, 2014).

- **Subtheme – Accessing additional resources**

The EHC process, and specifically the EHCP, was expected to enable access to additional support. Whilst access to additional resources is clearly a central aspect of the EHC process (DfE/DH, 2015), it has received little attention in the current literature. This may be due to the diversity of support potentially required by children with SEN, and the local nature of the allocation of support. For example, within this research, some participants felt that this additional support should consist of more frequent withdrawal from the classroom to work on identified areas of need, whilst others suggested the support should come in the form of a 1:1 key worker to support full time within the classroom.

There was some contradiction as to the role of the EHC process in accessing specialist provision. Whilst some felt that the primary function for other people was access to specialist provision, others were quick to deny this as a purpose. For example, Carol (EP, subunit 2) felt strongly that Daniel's school were expecting him to access a placement within specialist provision.

> *Ultimately, as far as I'm concerned, school did want him in specialist provision.*
> *School, yeah, school wanted him in specialist provision, so an EHC would provide a*
> *route to do that.*

> – Carol (EP, subunit 2)

Meanwhile, Charlotte (SENCO, subunit 1) whilst reflecting that this was indeed a purpose of the request for Sarah's EHC needs assessment, was quick to qualify that this was due to the specifics of Sarah's case.

> Charlotte: *Like I said, it isn't always about placement, because, for some children, they don't need an EHC. And it isn't, it shouldn't always be about placement, but in Sarah's case it was.*
>
> Hannah (researcher): *It was a very specific circumstance.*
>
> Charlotte: *and she is a truly* [specific language impairment] *child.*

The emphasis on inclusivity for mainstream schools is likely to be a large factor influencing the way in which school staff reflect upon their reasons for requesting an EHC needs assessment. Following the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), schools have greater responsibility for the inclusion of a wide range of children, with and without SEN. Therefore, it may be socially undesirable to suggest placement in special school to be a priority purpose for school staff.

- **Subtheme – Accessing additional funding**

As may be expected in the current climate of cuts, funding was considered a key purpose of the EHC process. It highlighted an interesting dilemma within SEN provision; the point at which support is implemented. Some participants felt that schools were entirely unable to offer additional support prior to the finalisation of the plan;

> *I think a lot of it is down to school saying they don't have the funding to support this child extra, and the only way to do that is to get the education, health and care plan.*
>
> – Katherine (parent, subunit 3)

Meanwhile, others felt that the plan simply verified the support that had already been allocated.

> *... if as a school, if we weren't going to action the needs of that child before that piece of paper came through ... where would that child be if we hadn't put those things in place already?*

<div align="right">

− Dana (SENCO, subunit 2)

</div>

This highlights a key pressure for schools delivering inclusive education in the face of budget cuts. This difficulty was raised in a recent investigation into the impact of SEN funding reforms, which highlighted that the most inclusive schools were being disadvantaged by the current funding systems in which schools are expected to provide the first £6,000 of support (Parish and Bryant, 2015). Children with SEN are more likely to attend more inclusive schools, and as such, these schools had greater financial pressure placed upon them in supporting their needs without additional high-needs block funding (Parish and Bryant, 2015).

Interestingly, the importance of funding was overwhelmingly raised by parents. This may reflect a perception that schools are unable to support children with SEN without such funding. There was some evidence amongst parents that this was the case.

> *...it was the only way to get him the extra help, wasn't it? To get the funding, because in a mainstream school, there's nothing really, apart from their own funding that they get.*

<div align="right">

− Helen (parent, subunit 2)

</div>

4.2.2.1 Summary and discussion of theme 2

The planning and allocation of additional support was perceived to be a key purpose of the EHC process. This included careful consideration of what support would be most appropriate. The EHCP was perceived as the only way to access adequate support to maintain the child's placement within their school. This theme suggests the EHC process has a key role in the educational experiences of children with complex SEN. Participants indicated that much of the support and planning was dependent upon the process, rather than being available within the school. Whilst this may be true for some provision and the additional funding, it is questionable whether the access to effective planning and all additional provision is truly dependent on the EHC process.

Topics raised within this theme have highlighted a key debate within education; the definition of inclusion. The Warnock Report (DES, 1978) defined inclusion as the physical, social and functional integration of children with SEN into mainstream schools. However, over time, concerns have been raised that children with SEN are only being physically included within some schools. These concerns were notably raised by Warnock (2010b). She suggests that the push towards more inclusive schooling has resulted in poorer outcomes for learners with SEN.

As a practitioner with strong beliefs about the rights of children and young people to inclusive education, I perceive that Chesterfield LA does not promote inclusive practice, due to their large number of special schools, and lack of investment in the training of mainstream school staff. Due to this, I feel that schools within this LA are less predisposed towards inclusive practice. Previous research indicates that teachers with inadequate training in SEN may be less likely to think positively about inclusion (Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden, 2000). Thus,

perhaps the schools within this authority have not been given the tools to create an efficient approach to supporting children with SEN, and instead rely upon the statutory assessment system. Indeed, Carol (EP, subunit 2) questioned the necessity of an EHCP received by another of her cases;

> *Does he need an EHC? Are there other systems that could change rather than him have an EHC?*

Whilst the importance of a holistic approach to planning has been raised within previous research (Skipp and Hopwood, 2016; Redwood, 2015; Thom *et al*., 2015; Smith, Cameron and Vanson, 2014), funding and additional resources have received less attention. This may reflect a local variation in practice whereby additional resources are intrinsically linked to the EHC process.

4.2.3 Theme 3: Protecting children with SEN

> Hannah (researcher): *What was the purpose of the plan?*

> Katherine (parent, subunit 3): *Security for Penny. Security*

All but one participant raised the protective function of the EHCP. There were several aspects of a child's educational experience that were perceived as making children with SEN more vulnerable, and thus requiring protection.

- **Subtheme – Reframing needs**

One way in which the EHC process was thought to protect children and young people with SEN was to provide an opportunity to reframe their needs. This supports those around the child to reconceptualise the reasons for the child's presentation, which may help them to think differently about how to support the child.

I'm thinking of a child we've got in this school... socially she's really, really struggling, really struggling, but actually, I've had people come and say to me "she's just rude"... and I think that, you know, for some children it gives them that, level of, a deeper understanding of their difficulty and their... their need

– Charlotte (SENCO, subunit 1)

This reframing occurred for families, as well as schools, as Michelle (SENCO, subunit 3) reflects;

I like to think that mum started to realise that actually Penny had significant difficulties.

This opportunity to stop and reflect was also appreciated by Pathfinder families (Thom *et al*., 2015; Smith, Cameron and Vanson, 2014). Having time to consider their child's needs has also been proposed as a key characteristic of resilient families (Knestrict and Kuchey, 2009).

- **Subtheme – Preventing exclusion**

So that was a new one to me, but some people saw the purpose of an EHC being to protect somebody from being permanently excluded.

– Carol (EP, subunit 2)

In one subunit, a purpose of the EHC process was to protect the child from permanent exclusion, which has not been raised within previous research. It was felt that the EHCP made it harder for schools to exclude children with externalising behaviour. In addition, it was felt to encourage schools to consider why the behaviour had occurred, and how they would prevent it next time. There was a perception that, for some types of behaviour, exclusion was

perhaps unavoidable for children without an EHCP, but that the plan gave schools additional powers to avoid that course of action;

> *...they don't want that expulsion, they want to say that well, there's a reason why he's doing it. Therefore I need a plan to do that, protect him. Again it's the protection for him...*

> – Jason (parent, subunit 2)

This perception that the EHCP could protect a child from exclusion relates to the finding that children with SEN are significantly more vulnerable than their peers in this area, being seven times more likely to be excluded from school (Mackenzie, Watts and Howe, 2012). However, the view that having a statutory assessment of their needs would prevent exclusion is not upheld by statistics. A recent analysis found that children who had received a Statement of SEN were most likely to receive a fixed term exclusion (6.42%), followed by their peers with SEN but without a Statement of SEN (5.17%) (DfE, 2016). When contrasted to their peers without SEN, 1.08% of whom received a fixed term exclusion, it is notable that children with statutory assessments were not totally protected from being excluded by having a statement. Given that the statutory imperative of the EHCP and Statement of SEN are the same, it seems unlikely that this position has dramatically altered.

- **Subtheme – Accountability**

Ensuring schools were accountable to the support they provided for children with SEN was primarily highlighted by the SENCOs within the study. They perceived that the additional monitoring that accompanies the EHCP provided additional emphasis on the provision

available to students. In addition, the EHCP was thought to protect children with SEN by placing greater responsibility upon teachers to differentiate the demands of the curriculum.

...we've had children who had obviously their cognitive needs and children who really just, just needed that extra, I mean, the extra support and the extra recognition and making sure that they were, their needs were met really

− Michelle (SENCO, subunit 3)

Some parents also promoted the EHCP as a way of ensuring provision was implemented. Jane (parent, subunit 1) noted that a key reason for Sarah's EHCP was to prevent her "*getting lost in regular class*". This may reflect the tension between the inclusion and standards agendas, in which schools are expected to ensure quality education for all learners, whilst as the same time ensuring their students achieve a high level of academic success (Ainscow, Booth and Dyson, 2006). For children with SEN, their needs may be perceived as incompatible with the prescriptive nature of the national curriculum. As such, the EHCP may be perceived as protecting them from these pressures and expectations by positioning them as requiring something different.

Finally, the EHC process was also perceived to hold the LA accountable to its duties and responsibilities to children. The idea that some children with complex needs could access an extremely high level of support, and therefore funding, was considered a point of social justice.

What the code of practice talks about in terms of, in terms of kind of providing support to young people and their families and kind of, issues around social justice in a way, about those with the greatest need receiving the support and resources that they need.

− Andrea (EP, subunit 3)

4.2.3.1 Summary and discussion of theme 3

Almost all participants felt that protecting children with complex SEN was a key purpose of the EHC process. Some felt that it supported others to think differently about the child, or that it might stop them from being excluded. Others felt that the EHC process ensured children received appropriate support, above and beyond what may typically be expected.

Whilst this is a new finding in relation to the EHC process, the perception of statutory assessment as protecting children with SEN has been previously raised. In the formative days of Statements of SEN, their primary purpose was to safeguard the newly legislated right of all children to be educated (Florian, 2002). The perception of the EHC process as protective appears to be an extension of this, meant to ensure children can receive adequate support, make progress and thus remain within mainstream schools. Given the ever increasing pressure placed upon schools to raise standards, and the reduction in emphasis on inclusion (Norwich and Eaton, 2015), mainstream schools may be struggling to maintain their inclusive practices. Additional recognition of children as requiring something 'different' was perceived as crucial to their access to mainstream schools in this research. This may be particularly important in response to the reduction of funding allocated to schools (The Key, 2016).

The way in which children with SEN were discussed in relation to this theme perhaps revealed interesting insights into how participants are constructing their situations, and the wider education system at large. They seem to position the child as vulnerable, at risk of maltreatment by the system if not for the EHCP. This may have important implications for how individuals approach aspects of the EHC process, such as the emphasis they place on the outcomes and provision aspects of the EHCP, as they feel that it will not be implemented if it is not explicitly stated. In addition, it may lead to the child being positioned as a victim of the

system, which could have implications for their empowerment and their perceptions of group membership amongst peers (Dunne, 2009).

4.2.4 Theme 4: Promoting progress

The final theme identified was the idea that the EHC process should promote progress for children with SEN. There was some discussion as to what form this would take, which seemed to reflect the individual needs of the child in question. For example, for Sarah, consideration of her progress was primarily centred upon her speech and language skills.

> *…it's about accelerating her rate of progress in the key skill areas, so that, particularly language, language processing and to a degree articulation.*

> – Donald (EP, subunit 1)

In contrast, one of Penny's primary areas of need was cognition, and subsequent impact on her access to the curriculum. Therefore, this area was most important for her mother.

> *…the gap with Penny's education had got bigger and bigger and the additional support just wasn't there…*

> – Katherine (parent, subunit 3)

Participants raised the importance of specificity when considering what progress meant. Andrea (EP, subunit 3) pondered;

> *What do we mean by progress?… Because that can be, that's, could really be task specific, making progress, so making progress in Mandarin, no, ridiculous. Making progress in identifying colours, that, you know what I mean? So that is important, but, but it needs a lot of specificity.*

This reveals a difficult balance that must be achieved between ensuring outcomes are both realistic and aspirational (DfE, 2011).

4.2.4.1 Summary and discussion of theme 4

Promoting progress was considered to be a key purpose of the EHC process by many of the participants in this research. They recognised that the areas in which progress was prioritised would be dependent on the presentation of each child. In addition, there was some consideration of the many ways in which 'progress' could be conceptualised. As highlighted by Andrea (EP, subunit 3), there are many ways in which progress can be considered. Children who undergo an EHC needs assessment are a heterogeneous group, and what may represent important progress for one child may not for another (Parsons and Platt, 2013).

4.2.5 Summary of research question 1

Participants raised a range of potential purposes of the EHC process. These purposes not only concerned direct effects on the child, but also support for those around the child such as teachers and parents. Indeed, many of the purposes concerned not the outcomes of the plan, but rather the process of assessment and planning, which arguably could be achieved without resulting in an EHCP. However, it appears that the statutory nature of this process is key, particularly given the impact of cuts to funding and restructuring of schools and external services.

Taking a holistic approach to planning and support for children with SEN has been consistently cited as a strength of the SEN reforms (Skipp and Hopwood, 2016; Redwood, 2015; Thom *et al*., 2014). However, it can present a challenge for mainstream schools. Given the drive for standards and recent shifts in Ofsted criteria, the emphasis

appears to be placed on academic success (Norwich and Eaton, 2015). This places

pressure on schools to prioritise academic progress over the individual needs of the child.

This creates a barrier to more inclusive practices, particularly given the de-emphasis of

inclusion within Ofsted frameworks (Norwich and Eaton, 2015).

Unlike the SEND Code (DfE/DH, 2015), involvement of the child in this process was only

considered a key purpose by Andrea (EP, subunit 3) who stated; *"capturing the child's voice

in more, in a more kind of, fundamental way. I think that's key, and that's key in the code of

practice."* Instead, primary emphasis was placed on how the process could support adults.

Previous research found that only 48% of advice givers felt that the child's views had been

given equal importance compared to parents and professionals, and none gave them greater

priority (Redwood, 2015). In contrast with the emphasis upon person-centred planning within

statutory guidelines (DfE/DH, 2015), little reference was made by participants to the

empowerment of the focus child as a key purpose of the EHC process.

4.3 Research question 2: Experiences of the EHC process

Themes within this section relate to the second research question; what was the EHC process

like for key individuals? Participants reported experiencing variable levels of satisfaction in

the process, and their considerations were categorised into two themes; the degree of

collaboration experienced, and the outcomes of the EHC process. Figure 11 depicts the

themes related to research question 2.
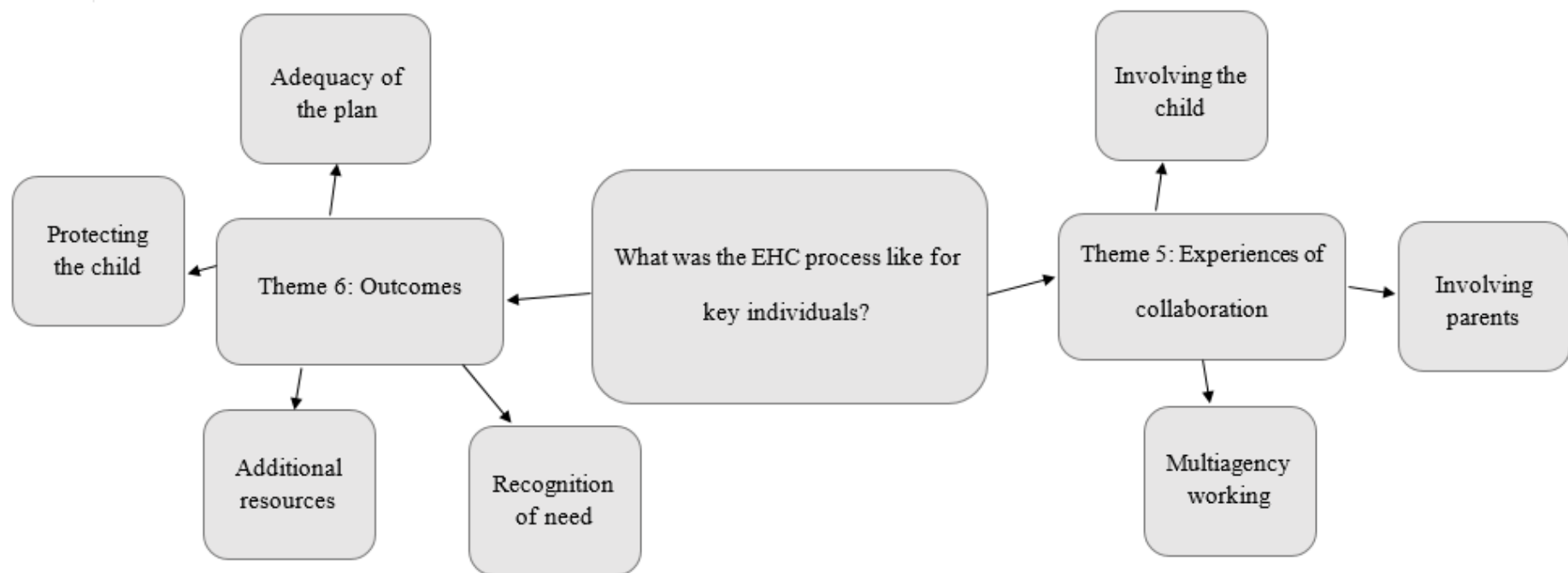
Figure 11: Themes and subthemes related to research question 2

4.3.1 Theme 5: Experiences of collaboration

Different forms of collaboration were identified in participants' accounts of their experiences of the EHC process. These included collaboration with the child, their parents and with external agencies.

- **Subtheme – Involving the child**

Child involvement has featured heavily within the existing literature as an important, but challenging aspect of the EHC process (Redwood, 2015; Thom *et al*., 2015). Whilst generally not perceived as a key purpose of the EHC process in the current sample, involvement of the child was raised as a beneficial outcome of the process within two subunits. In these cases, the child's views paperwork was highlighted as important, and care was taken in ensuring the child's views had been accurately captured.

> *I type word for word what they say, and then we read it back, so I do it like that, so*
> *that the children would have a chance also to make sure that what they said reflects*
> *what they feel.*

> – Charlotte (SENCO, subunit 1)

Participants noted that including the voice of the child could result in unexpected information, or insights that they had not expected the child to be able to give.

> *When we had the child's conversation she acknowledged that she found it hard, but*
> *actually, there were so many positive things that she saw in herself, to have that*
> *documented was quite powerful for everybody involved, and especially for her, as*
> *well.*

> – Michelle (SENCO, subunit 3)

In relation to another child he had worked with, Donald (EP, subunit 1) highlighted the importance of gaining the views of older children. He spoke of a student displaying significant challenging behaviour, who was at risk of exclusion;

> *I said, I'd like to know what you can see yourself doing when you're 25 and she said, I'm going to be a semi-professional footballer and a car mechanic and the head tutor at that point … she said that's really interesting, cos all the subjects that tie in with those two ambitions she's cooperating with, and the ones that don't, she's not. And it was just like a, it was just like a eureka moment.*

This highlights the importance of including the child in the writing of their plan; they often have invaluable insight and can provide explanations for otherwise confusing situations. Redwood (2015) argues that authentically capturing the child's voice is key to the EHC process. She suggests that, although well intentioned, parental and staff perceptions of children's views may not be accurate, and should not be relied upon. In addition, she highlights that the SEN Code (DfE/DH, 2015) explicitly states that "LAs **must not** use the views of parents as a proxy for young people's views." (pp. 22, emphasis theirs).

In one subunit, the voice of the child was not raised throughout the interviews. This may have been due to the communication needs of Daniel (subunit 2), which may have prevented him from accurately sharing his views and was therefore not a key outcome of his EHC process. However, it is interesting that Sarah (subunit 1) and Penny's (subunit 3) participation in their EHC needs assessments was raised, given that they are of a similar age and also have communication difficulties.

The degree to which any of the children were truly included within the development of their EHCP can be called into question. Beyond completion of the child's views document, none of

the children were described as participating in the process. This may have been an appropriate response to the needs of the child; they may have found multiagency meetings intimidating or overwhelming. However, it brings into question the extent to which the process in this LA can be thought of as 'person-centred', if the plan owner is not in attendance at meetings about their support and provision. If we consider the common factors of person-centred planning collated by Redwood (2015, as described in section 2.5) few aspects appear to have been achieved, such as the child having choice or control over decisions. It seems that the child empowerment ideologies of the SEND Code (DfE/DH, 2015) have proven difficult to realise in practice, as reviews of implementation consistently find that inclusion of the child's views is not achieved in all cases. For example, only 37% of Pathfinder families felt that their child's views had been included within their EHCP (Thom *et al.*, 2015).

- **Subtheme – Involving parents**

Involvement of the family was raised by school staff in every subunit as something that had gone really well within the EHC process. The family conversation documentation was identified as a helpful way to hold a comprehensive discussion with parents, if time consuming. In particular, when considering what parents hoped for their child's future, the process could elicit some interesting and helpful responses.

> *That is something that really stuck with me with this family, massively. Because actually, they weren't wanting their child to rule the world, or anything like that, they wanted him to be, it was something like in a happy, safe place where there are people around that understood him… So they weren't looking for a magic cure, they were looking for what could support him on the journey to that safe place.*

> – Linda (headteacher, subunit 2)

This insight allowed professionals to understand the perspectives of families when planning, and helped their consideration of what outcomes might be of use. A desire for the EHCP to accurately reflect the needs and wishes of the family has previously been recognised as a key aspect of the EHC process for parents (Skipp and Hopwood, 2016; Thom *et al.*, 2015). The careful consideration of their wishes was associated with parents feeling more satisfied with the outcomes of the EHC process (Skipp and Hopwood, 2016).

Parents within two of the subunits agreed that they had been able to collaborate with the other professionals over the process of the EHC needs assessment.

I think we jointly sort of agreed it with the professionals really.

– Jane (parent, subunit 1)

Despite this perception of involvement, there was a sense that parents were directed through the process, rather than being active members of the group.

It was really set out by the teachers, wasn't it? And the psychologist at the school.

– Jane (parent, subunit 1)

We've sort of said, well, we'll sort of always follow the professional's advice.

– Jason (parent, subunit 2)

...the teacher who was also a SENCO worker, was the one who said she needs to be statemented, because back then it was the statement, so, we just sort of followed the process of what she said.

– Katherine (parent, subunit 3)

If information is given in an impartial manner that does not pressurise parents to make particular choices, then its purpose could be to ensure their fully informed decision making (Skipp and Hopwood, 2016). However, if parents are being directed towards particular decisions then this would not be an ethical approach to the EHC process. This reason may be why parents continue to desire support from impartial advice services, despite receiving advice from school staff and other professionals (Skipp and Hopwood, 2016).

Not all parents agreed that their views had been considered within their child's EHC process. Like 9% of Pathfinder parents (Thom *et al*., 2015), Katherine (parent, subunit 3) felt that her views had not been taking into consideration, and as a result she felt very dissatisfied.

> *What school are saying to me; it promotes the family being involved and we'll all*
> *work together and, but no you don't, because you still just make decisions. I didn't*
> *do any of this plan, the school did it, not me….*

- **Subtheme – Multiagency working**

As identified in theme 1, facilitating multiagency working was perceived to be a key purpose of the EHC process. There was agreement from all participants that a range of professionals had been involved, primarily from education services.

> *We've had ed. psychologists,* [the autism support service]*, SENCO, senior SENCO*
> *and then you had school… So we've had quite a number of people involved in it.*
>
> – Helen (parent, subunit 2)

However, there was less consensus about the collaborative nature of such involvement, and there were differing experiences of participation from health and social care services. Perhaps due to their role as 'co-ordinator' of services (Pearson, Mitchell and Rapti, 2015), it was the

SENCOs who were most likely to express dissatisfaction with the collaborative involvement, or lack thereof.

> *I think the other thing about an EHC that it's supposed to achieve is it's supposed to bring services together… In reality, it doesn't. In reality it's made no difference, it's still schools doing the majority of the work.*

– Charlotte (SENCO, subunit 1)

In particular, the school staff noted difficulty in the attendance of health services at meetings. Michelle (SENCO, subunit 3) hypothesised this may be due to the systems within which they work.

> *I think it's the realities of their role … she did have that support, but getting everyone around the table, that was more of a challenge.*

Similar difficulties in the involvement of health and care services have been documented within previous reviews of the EHC process in other authorities (Skipp and Hopwood, 2016; Thom *et al*., 2015). There was also discontent regarding the involvement of agencies after the plan is finalised. Daniel's parents felt let down by external agencies following the EHC process.

> *There's a review yearly, but in between that, it's between you and school isn't it? I think the professionals aren't really involved, which you need them to be, because you need them to see the progress as well, don't they?*

– Jason (parent, subunit 2)

Similar experiences were documented by Pathfinder families, many of whom found that multiagency working had fallen away by the review (Thom *et al*., 2015). It seems likely

that, in a climate of cuts and traded services, the level of external service involvement

outside of statutory duties will reduce.

4.3.1.1 Summary and discussion of theme 5

Participants had differing experiences of collaboration. Overall, the level of participation

from parents was greater than their children. Whilst this appears to be the typical

experience (Redwood, 2015; Thom *et al*., 2015), it raises questions about the notionally

person-centred nature of the EHC process. The participation of support services was

inconsistent. Whilst education services were generally available, support from health and

social care was more challenging. In addition, the extent to which the involvement of

external agencies within the EHC process could be considered collaborative is

questionable. Redwood (2015) makes the distinction between multidisciplinary,

interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary working (see table 7). Participants within this

sample gave accounts of multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary or a total lack of

involvement. This echoes the findings of Redwood's (2015) initial survey that the

minority of participants had experienced transdisciplinary working, despite this being the

favoured model of practice.

Table 7: Categories of multiagency working as described by Redwood (2015)

Category of multiagency working	Description
Multidisciplinary	Working alongside other services, with no joint planning.
Interdisciplinary	Planning with other services, working separately.
Transdisciplinary	Planning, working and roles are shared.

4.3.2 Theme 6: Outcomes

As for theme 5, participants reported differing experiences of the extent to which they felt the EHC process had produced positive outcomes.

- **Subtheme – Recognition of needs**

The extent to which the EHC process was perceived to identify and document needs seemed to depend on the individual subunit. For example, for Penny, there seemed to be consensus that the plan had led to an accurate understanding of her needs.

> *... there is an absolute recognition and acknowledgement of her needs, and that they are considerable, and that's been achieved.*

> – Andrea (EP, subunit 3)

Conversely, Helen and Jason felt that the plan was insufficient to give an accurate description of Daniel, but they felt that this might reflect the complexity of his needs, rather than the plan.

> *I don't think it gives a full description of Daniel, there's just broad lines, and he's such a complex little boy.*

> – Jason (parent, subunit 2)

This seems to reflect a lack of dynamism within the planning process. Given that this is supposed to be a very personal document, which clearly identifies the needs and support requirements of complex children, it seems a large limitation for the plan itself to be insufficiently detailed. The extent to which EHCPs are perceived to truly identify the child's needs has not been explicitly explored within the current literature. Given that this was identified as a key purpose of the EHC process by both these participants and others (Skipp

and Hopwood, 2016; Smith, Cameron and Vanson, 2014), this appears to be an important area of development.

- **Subtheme – Additional resources**

He received the appropriate support throughout his reception year, he made

progress, his challenging incidents did decrease.

– Carol (EP, subunit 2)

Some participants felt that the EHC process, and primarily the EHCP, had definitely resulted in additional resources being allocated to the child. The type of resource varied, as expected, dependent on the needs of the child. For example, Sarah received access to the speech and language base at her school. This enabled her to target her particular area of difficulty, and make significant progress.

She's made leaps of progress, she's come from sort of playing around with 1 plus 1,

and messing around her speech and pronunciations to getting through whole books

holding conversations with people and can actually understand her.

– Mark (parent, subunit 1)

However, not all participants were content with the support that had been allocated. Daniel's parents felt very disappointed by the lack of flexibility available in planning support for him. This was particularly the case because they were currently considering a move to specialist provision, despite their wish that he attended a mainstream school.

Jason (parent, subunit 2): *But I sort of said, you know, you've got to just think about*

different options, what about him going half the time to special school and half in

mainstream

Helen (parent, subunit 2): *yeah it's just not, it's there or there and that's it.*

Others had experienced poor implementation of the plan, with some schools reportedly not providing the support.

… it doesn't really stand because Penny has had the education health and care plan since February, she came back in September and it only went back into place last week.

– Katherine (parent, subunit 3)

Unfortunately, poor implementation of the EHCP has been raised in several reviews of the EHC process. In the final review of the Pathfinder, 39% of families reported that insufficient provision had been implemented (Thom *et al*., 2015). More recently, Skipp and Hopwood (2016) found similar experiences within their sample, and highlighted the impact of this upon parental satisfaction. They also highlighted that few parents were aware of what action they could take if support was not being implemented, increasing feelings of frustration.

- **Subtheme – Protecting the child**

There were varying experiences of the extent to which the plan was felt to protect the child. Penny's mother, who felt disappointed with the process made it very clear that she felt the plan had not achieved this purpose.

…it actually upsets me to think I let my daughter into the lion's den. I just get so frustrated with it.

Meanwhile, Daniel's parents agreed that the EHCP was an additional barrier to prevent him from being excluded, which was of particular concern for them.

...if he has a moment or an incident they are like, they will back him all the way

because, you know ... it's quite a formal document, it protects him in that respect.

– Jason (parent, subunit 2)

- **Subtheme – Adequacy of the plan**

Several participants recognised that the EHC process was relatively new within the LA, and felt this had had implications for the quality of report written. This is in keeping with other reviews of the process, which recognised the formative state of various procedures and policies (Skipp and Hopwood, 2016).

There were different perceptions of the way in which the plan should be considered. For example, Jason (parent, subunit 2) felt that the plan alone could only provide an overview of support, and that an iterative action planning process was needed to supplement it.

It's like principles, you've got principles, you all need that sort of scope and

principles about what are you going to do for him, broadly, but then within that, if

you've got no plan underneath it, it doesn't really do anything, does it?

Part of the reason he felt this way was because he felt the plan lacked specificity without a more dynamic approach. However, given the advice within the SEN Code (DfE/DH, 2015), it seems that the plan should in fact include enough specificity to be sufficient.

This perhaps serves to highlight the importance of those providing advice having a clear understanding of the child, their current progress and their aspirations. In order to produce advice that would inform a meaningful, practicable and individualised EHCP, professionals need to take time to gather relevant information (Thom *et al.*, 2015). This in turn makes it easier to write appropriate and specific outcomes. Parents from other authorities have also

highlighted the importance of SMART outcomes and high degrees of specificity in their children's plans, and felt that identifying who should deliver particular actions was key to ensuring the plan was implemented and progress was made (Skipp and Hopwood, 2016; Redwood, 2015; Thom *et al*., 2015).

4.3.2.1 Summary and discussion of theme 6

Participants again reported varying perceptions of the outcomes of the EHC process. Whilst not everyone agreed, most felt that the process had resulted in the child's needs being identified, and that this had resulted in some degree of support. Their experiences following the issuing of the plan had a significant role in perceptions of the adequacy of the plan and its ability to protect the child.

Generally, school staff and EPs reported satisfaction with process and its outcomes. In contrast, parental views differed greatly depending on their context. Although Skipp and Hopwood (2016) identified factors which influenced parental satisfaction, there is yet to be an in depth comparison of parents who report satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the process that may demonstrate the importance of context. For example, in the case of Sarah, who was making good progress in her learning, her parents were generally satisfied with each aspect of the process. For Penny, who continues to make slow progress at school, her mother raised significant concerns, and was less content with the process. Daniel's parents initially reported feeling happy with the outcomes of the process, but over time indicated that they were dissatisfied with aspects of it. Given the uncertainty over Daniel's placement, this may reflect the confusion they are currently experiencing.

4.3.3 Summary of research question 2

Participants talked about several important factors in the EHC process. These were categorised into two themes; experiences of collaboration and outcomes. Each individual subunit, and indeed, each individual participant, had differing views about the success of these aspects, which inevitably impacted upon their overall perception of the EHC process. The varied experiences of the process are broadly in keeping with the current literature, which finds that satisfaction varies between cases (Skipp and Hopwood, 2016; Thom *et al.*, 2015).

It is worthwhile considering that the focus children had only received their EHCPs within the previous 12 months, and as such participants were reflecting upon a relatively short amount of time. Thom *et al.* (2015) found that levels of satisfaction decreased over time, as Pathfinder families began to experience the realities of the support offered within the plan. As such, the current views can only be considered a snapshot within a single context. Given that the pending local area inspections are specifically focussed upon examining outcomes for children and young people with SEN (Ofsted/CQC, 2016), exploring the factors which influence satisfaction, with particular reference to dissatisfied families, seems a priority area of investigation within LAs.

4.4 Research Question 3: Factors which influenced the perceived success of the EHC process

Themes within this section were identified as answering the final research question; which factors influenced the perceived success of the EHC process? Again, the responses vary between participants, and demonstrate the value of exploring the context when evaluating processes. Figure 12 depicts the themes related to research question 3.
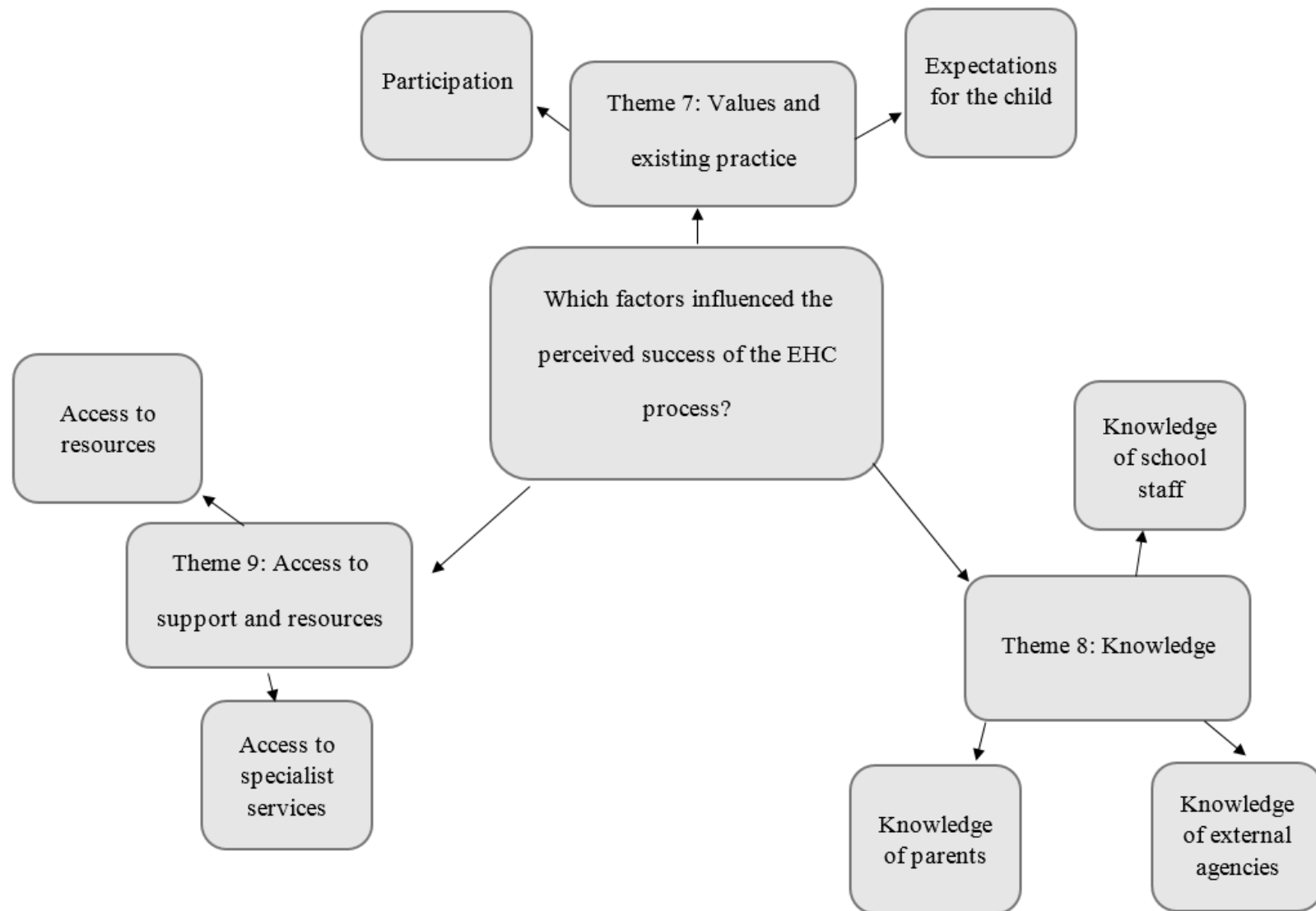
Figure 12: Themes and subthemes related to research question 3

4.4.1 Theme 7: Values and existing practice

Participants identified several underpinning values which influenced the expectations they had for the EHC process, and impacted upon their perceptions of its success.

- **Subtheme – Expectations for the child**

Expectations of what a child with SEN could achieve played a key role in experiences of the process. For example, akin to parents who have experienced the EHC process (Skipp and Hopwood, 2016), participants spoke about the importance of aspiration and holding high enough expectations for children with SEN.

> *...sometimes we have conversations where they're like, oh, they won't achieve that, in reference to outcomes, and you think, well, there we are, of course they won't, because you've just said it, you've just written it off.*

> – Andrea (EP, subunit 3)

Parents in particular noted that the expectations held for their children influenced their outcomes. For example, Penny's mother felt that her daughter's school held low expectations for her.

> *I think they don't want to, they don't want to, I had that impression because the head teacher told me, as long as she had the basic skills to read and write, she'll be fine. No, she won't be, so that's me knowing that actually, you don't care.*

> – Katherine (parent, subunit 3)

Given the importance of expectations in driving the reforms to SEN policy and legislation (DfE, 2011), perceptions of the child are key to the EHC process. Although the research surrounding the impact of expectation on academic outcomes is contentious,

many agree that continuous low expectation can have a significant impact upon the educational outcomes of children and young people with SEN (Ofsted, 2010; McGrew and Evans, 2004).

Each of the parents reflected upon a sense of stigmatisation experienced throughout the process, although their perceptions of its effects differed.

They see it that, as soon as a child gets put in base, they're immediately disabled, or something like that, so there is that associated with it.

– Jane (parent, subunit 1)

...there's other people that don't want it because of that, they don't want them to be labelled, and you sit there and go, it's not really a label is it? It's just a document, you know.

– Jason (parent, subunit 2)

It's something I do want to avoid, because once you got that name and that label, she'll probably resort back to it.

– Katherine (parent, subunit 3)

There was discussion from some participants as to whether the use of labels had an impact upon expectations. The impact of labelling upon educational outcomes has been investigated previously. In considering many of the key arguments and counterarguments for the use of labels, Lauchlan and Boyle (2007) conclude that, overall, they result in more negative outcomes for the child. Some have suggested that the reforms to SEN policy represent a missed opportunity to reconsider the ways in which need and support are conceptualised (Norwich and Eaton, 2015). The concept of an interactionist model of

SEN, in which consideration of disability is broadened from within the individual to exploring the interaction between the individual and their environmental/societal context, has been widely proposed (Reindal, 2016; Norwich and Eaton, 2015; Terzi, 2014; Terzi, 2005). Through such an interactionist approach, the utility of labels would be reduced, as it recognises the impact of context upon level of difficulty. However, the continuation of categories of SEN means that the use of labels is likely to continue whilst they result in additional resources.

- **Subtheme – Participation**

Having an ethos that encouraged participation was perceived to be an important facilitator across subunits. Consideration of participation was overwhelmingly related to parents, who it was agreed required additional information to fully participate in the EHC process.

> *My parents know everything about an EHC because … we talked about it in depth, because they know as much as I know. Because if you're asking parents to make a decision about their child, then they deserve to know everything that I know and more, so that their, the decision they can make is an informed decision.*

> – Charlotte (SENCO, subunit 1)

In contrast, when a parent did not feel included within the process, this was highlighted as a key cause of dissatisfaction.

> *So I was just, it was just, I just think it's pointless. And considering I've gone and done all of that and spent a lot of time on this, to be ignored.*

> – Katherine (parent, subunit 3)

Parental participation has been an expectation of the SEN assessment process for over 30 years. It has also been a key aspect addressed within the existing literature (Skipp and Hopwood, 2016; Redwood, 2015; Thom *et al*., 2015; Smith, Cameron and Vanson, 2014). Crucial to the genuine participation of parents is ensuring they have sufficient information to make informed contributions to the assessment process (Skipp and Hopwood, 2016; Smith, Cameron and Vanson, 2014).

Key to facilitating parental involvement was the SENCO. Each SENCO in this research highlighted the importance of positive relationships with families in facilitating their involvement. Their experiences were similar to the expectations of other SENCOs, predicting the need to fight alongside parents to achieve positive outcomes for their students (Pearson, Mitchell and Rapti, 2015).

> *If you ask any of my parents, you know, I've always been with them and fighting with them for access to services.*

> – Charlotte (SENCO, subunit 1)

Given their role in facilitating parental involvement, it is important to consider barriers to effective SENCO practice. Each of the SENCOs in this research highlighted the bureaucratic burden placed upon them by the new process. They reported that the new paperwork had taken a considerable amount of time to complete in a way that accurately reflected the views of parents and the child. Given the already overstretched nature of the SENCO role (Pearson, 2008), this likely placed a considerable burden upon them in the completion of their duties. Indeed, Robertson (2012) predicted that, in order to achieve the best from these reforms, the role of SENCO within schools would likely require changes. In particular he noted that

SENCOs must be allowed sufficient time to carry out their duties, and their role should be located within the senior leadership teams.

4.4.1.1 Summary and discussion of theme 7

The expectations held about the child and the participation of parents were identified as key factors within the EHC process. Whilst they may not always recognise them, the values that individuals hold about factors such as educational expectation and participation have significant implications for the EHC process. For example, parental participation was perceived as a key value by many participants across differing roles, and this likely resulted in a greater inclusion of parents within the EHC process. These views concur with previous explorations of the EHC process, which found that parental participation and holding high expectations were important to parents (Skipp and Hopwood, 2016)

In contrast, participation of the child was generally not raised as a key value within this context. It seems that this relates to the expectations held for the child, given that the child's needs are commonly cited as the reason for low involvement (Redwood, 2015; Thom *et al.*, 2015). Despite the reported importance of child involvement in other samples (Smith, Cameron and Vanson, 2014) there is a consistent lack of child participation in both the EHC process, and the related body of research. Given that only around a third of EHC needs assessments are reported to include the views of the child, it seems that achieving the person-centred ethos of the SEN reforms has proven challenging (Redwood, 2015; Thom *et al.*, 2015). In reference to the common justification that the children are unable to participate due to needs and age, Redwood (2015) suggests that time must be invested in considering how to involve the child, rather than just accepting non-participation as the only choice.

4.4.2 Theme 8: Knowledge

Knowledge was perceived to play a significant role in the success of the EHC process. Participants experienced varying levels of knowledge across different groups, which at times led to feelings of frustration and disappointment.

- **Subtheme – Knowledge of school staff**

Participants agreed with previous assertions that the knowledge of school staff differed depending on their roles and responsibilities within the school (Hill *et al*., 2014b). SENCOs were identified as the person expected to have the most knowledge. They were perceived to be key to the process, given their links with both parents and external professionals. Thus their level of knowledge about the process was thought to be critical.

> *I have to admit, the SENCO worker at the time we done it, she was absolutely*
>
> *amazing, she was brilliant, and I, for her, we wouldn't've got where we've been.*

> – Katherine (parent, subunit 3)

Due to this, it is concerning that some SENCOs felt unprepared, unsupported and uninformed when they began the EHC process.

> *We wouldn't know about an EHCP unless we'd had to do one with a child. We'd've*
>
> *read up on it, you'd've made sure you had a copy of the paperwork for if you've got*
>
> *to do one, but until you actually go through the process … people around weren't*
>
> *sure which piece of paper we've gotta have where, or when.*

> – Dana (SENCO, subunit 2)

Indeed, prior to the implementation of the SEN reforms, SENCOs anticipated that they would have a key role to play in the support of parents through the EHC process, particularly given

the renewed emphasis on parental choice (Pearson, Mitchell and Rapti, 2015; Hill et al., 2014b). Although many SENCOs welcomed this change, they expressed a need for clear guidance (Pearson, Mitchell and Rapti, 2015). Whilst it was expected that sufficient training would be provided to key staff, including SENCOs (DfE, 2014), it is unclear if this occurred within Chesterfield. Given the rapidity with which the reforms were implemented, there may have been little time to deliver comprehensive training to front-line workers.

Regarding other staff in schools, such as class teachers, it was common within this research for SENCOs to have delivered training prior to the implementation of the changes. However, it was generally agreed that they were unlikely to have retained all of the information, and would require additional input if a child in their class was expected to undergo assessment. This reflects findings from the Pathfinder Programme that staff without additional responsibilities for SEN were unlikely to be well informed (Hill *et al*., 2014b). Although this may reflect the newness of the reforms, given the key role of teachers in identifying children with possible SEN, more work is needed to improve their knowledge.

- **Subtheme – Knowledge of external agencies**

The knowledge of professionals from external agencies, and how they made use of that knowledge, was another factor in the success of the EHC process. Some professionals were felt to have a large amount of knowledge, and could be relied upon to provide support throughout the process.

> *…Andrea and it was* [a worker from the autism support service]*, would sit with me a lot and they supported me massively with how to do the process and supported mum in her understanding.*

> – Michelle (SENCO, subunit 3)

However, other professionals did not seem to have the same level of understanding about the process. This had ramifications for their involvement with the EHC process, because their expectations were different.

Social workers I don't think know as much about it as you'd hope, given that it's an education, health and care plan. Case in point, I've got two cases in one family ... The older boy doesn't need the level of support, doesn't have such a level of need, but the question raised was, if we're going forward for the younger one, should we not just do it for this older boy, and I had to argue, well no because he doesn't have the same needs, he doesn't need the same support.

– Carol (EP, subunit 2)

Others felt that, despite being perceived as having a good enough knowledge of the process to support others, their knowledge was insufficient when compared to what they should know. This has implications for the quality of support they are able to offer.

I think there is this, because there's this great big whopping code of practice and... and actually, what people know, you could write on a post-it note and I think that the information that EPs convey you could probably write on a post-it note as well which is sad isn't it?

– Andrea (EP, subunit 3)

This variation in knowledge can lead to challenges in ensuring multiagency collaboration. There has been some recognition of the importance of shared understandings within the EHC process (Redwood, 2015). However, little has been done to examine the knowledge and understanding of various services. This is worrying given the expert position allocated to many professionals. If they have misunderstood the purposes and processes

of the EHC needs assessment, then their input may lead to confusion and distress, for example, where an EHCP is not issued.

- **Subtheme – Knowledge of parents**

The lack of knowledge and confidence of parents in regards to the EHC process has been well documented (Skipp and Hopwood, 2016; Redwood, 2015; Thom *et al.*, 2015). Within this sample, parents were generally constructed as having very little knowledge about the EHC process, and requiring a high level of support.

> *…it's very new to them, so you know, they're struggling with their child with complex needs, and then they've got on top of that a whole sort of paper trail and documentation and important people I suppose in a room, you know, it's a lot to take on.*

> – Dana (SENCO, subunit 2)

Parents themselves agreed that, even after the process, they were not as knowledgeable as they would like to be, particularly in relation to the resources available to them.

> *…there is something about personal budget, but I don't know anything. I don't know anything about it, I didn't know … I'm still oblivious to it all.*

> – Katherine (parent, subunit 3)

This lack of knowledge from parents is likely to have a significant impact on their ability to truly collaborate within the EHC process. This was of concern to Charlotte (SENCO, subunit 1), who found that parents could be hesitant in asking for clarification, instead trying to find information through other sources.

I always say that to my parents. Come talk to me, if I don't know what you're asking

me then I will go and find out from somebody who does, but don't Google it.

Charlotte (SENCO, subunit 1)

Professionals have a key role in supporting the knowledge of parents. Generally, it is perceived that, whilst parents may be experts when it comes to knowing their child, they are likely to have little prior experience or knowledge of SEN (Skipp and Hopwood, 2016; Russell, 2005). This may impact upon their expectations for their children's outcomes. Therefore, it has been argued that professionals must ensure they give parents sufficient information and opportunities to visit different provision to develop an informed opinion (Russell, 2005). The source of this information must also be considered. Parents within Skipp and Hopwood's (2016) study reported a desire for information and guidance from an independent source, such as SENDIASS or parent groups. This was, in some cases, despite feeling they had received good advice from their key worker. In addition, it was found that parental expectations shifted as children entered school and beyond (Russell, 2005). Thus it is key that parental views continue to be gathered and integrated into the EHCP throughout their child's education, as these priorities and aspirations are likely to shift over time.

Very few participants mentioned the personal budget, and those that did seemed to face it with a sense of confusion about what it would mean.

Katherine (parent, subunit 3): *SENDIASS were on about budget?*

Hannah (researcher): *yeah, there's something called a personal budget*

Katherine: *I don't know anything about it*

This confusion may be attributed to the way in which the LA delegates funding; an additional £3,500 for the first tier of additional funding, and £7,000 to the highest tier. Rather than delegating funding based on the provision outlined in the plan, which would allow for personal budgets to be given in addition to other support, the use of a personal budget in Chesterfield would result in funding being removed from the school, as anticipated by SENCOs prior to the reforms (Pearson, Mitchell and Rapti, 2015). As highlighted by Daniel's father, this is often counterproductive to what parents want for their child's education;

> *...we were always adamant that ... whatever money comes from it, it just goes straight into school, because that's where he needs the support most because we can deal with him at home, well we have to, but they're the ones that need help.*

> − Jason (parent, subunit 2)

It appears that greater clarification is needed as to the role of personal budgets in Chesterfield. This is an area that has receive little interest within the research, despite being a key proposal of the original Green Paper (DfE, 2011).

4.4.2.1 Summary and discussion of theme 8

Knowledge was central to experiences of the EHC process in these cases. Where participants felt that they were sufficiently informed about the process, they were more likely to report feeling confident about their experience. However, there continues to be a concerning lack of knowledge across all groups; school staff, external professionals and parents. Given this dearth of information it seems unsurprising that important philosophies of the SEND Code (DfE/DH, 2015), such as person centred planning and personal budgets, are not being implemented.

This represents a key area of development for Chesterfield, to increase knowledge of the EHC process across the LA. At the core of the confusion appears to be the local nature of the process. The lack of national guidance forces people to rely upon locally sourced information, which should be held within the local offer. However, previous research indicates that few parents are aware of the local offer, impacting upon their ability to use this resource (Thom *et al.*, 2015).

4.4.3 Theme 9: Access to support and resources

Alongside the values and knowledge of participants, there were practical realities which impacted on the success of the EHC process. Related to aspects of the previous subthemes, access to resources and availability of external agencies played a central role in the EHC process.

- **Subtheme – Access to specialist services**

Access to specialist services was perceived to be an important aspect of the EHC process, and integral to producing a comprehensive, holistic plan. This echoes the views of other families who have experienced the EHC process, who cite multiagency involvement as key to feelings of satisfaction (Skipp and Hopwood, 2016)

> *The parents, the child, us as people working within, other professionals that have*
>
> *then got their own expertise around well if you didn't have that, those conversations*
>
> *wouldn't happen in the same way.*

– Linda (headteacher, subunit 2)

Participants from across all subunits and roles expressed frustration about the inaccessibility of certain services, at both the assessment and support stages. This concern is a consistent

feature across the existing literature (Skipp and Hopwood, 2016; Redwood, 2015; Smith, Cameron and Vanson, 2014). There was a perception that individual agencies had specialist roles to play for children with complex needs that were being fulfilled by non-experts due to issues of capacity.

> …it's nobody's fault, because services are stretched, but we are expected to be speech therapists, we are expected to be physiotherapists, we are expected to be occupational therapists. We're now expected to be social workers, and I feel now that we're expected to be education officers.

> − Charlotte (SENCO, subunit 1)

A recent survey of over 1,100 school leaders found that 89% felt that cuts to LA services had led to poorer outcomes for children and young people with SEN within their schools (The Key, 2016).

In addition, receiving input from health services was perceived to be particularly difficult, and this was a key source of frustration for many participants.

> ...my experience was getting health involved was, was a bit more of a challenge. Not that they didn't in the end, but it was, it was, that was my harder challenge.

> − Michelle (SENCO, subunit 3)

Even when external services were able to participate in meetings, their expectations of the process could have unhelpful outcomes. For example, some raised concerns about the degree to which professionals should direct and guide parents.

> … other professionals were giving views that maybe he should be in special. I said, we know what support he needs, he's doing really well at the moment, if you wanna

argue over what school he's going to go to then you do that, but I'm not gonna get involved in that argument because it's not my, my professional remit to do so.

<div align="right">– Carol (EP, subunit 2)</div>

This represents an ethical dilemma for professionals, who must negotiate a balance between maintaining good working relationships with others and adhering to the principles of the SEND Code (DfE/DH, 2015). Discrepancies in role perceptions were also noted by professionals in another LA (Redwood, 2015). They cited the importance of time to jointly construct roles and expectations within the EHC process, and to engage in joint training between services.

- **Subtheme – Access to resources**

Finally, access to additional resources was highlighted as an important factor within the outcomes of the EHC process. For example, some parents had accessed specialist services through the plan, and reported satisfaction with this.

Jane (parent, subunit 1): *I think it was mainly about speech and language, wasn't it?*

Hannah (researcher): *Lovely, and do you feel like the assessment achieved those purposes?*

Jane: *Yeah, it really did.*

Meanwhile, other parents were less satisfied with the support offered to their child.

Because the classroom is just too big, the teacher hasn't got time to support my child, there's no TA in there, you know.

<div align="right">– Katherine (parent, subunit 3)</div>

This area was related to a much larger critique of educational provision of children with SEN, that too few resources were being delegated to support them.

> *I just don't think there's enough resources as a whole for children with special needs ... and I find that unfair, because every child should be given the right opportunity, but it's all about money at the end of the day.*

– Helen (parent, subunit 2)

The Key's (2016) survey of school leaders found that 82% felt that they did not have the funding to meet the needs of children with SEN within their schools. This indicates that there is a significant gap between the expectations being placed upon schools and the resources they are being provided by LAs and the central government to meet those expectations. Similarly, 62% of Redwood's (2015) small sample felt that there was a gap between funding for community services and the provision required to achieve the principles of equal opportunities for children and young people with SEN.

4.4.3.1 Summary and discussion of theme 9

Given the climate of cuts to funding and services, it is perhaps unsurprising that access to resources was of key importance to the experiences of the participants in this research. Lack of access to specialist services and resources was a source of great frustration for some, and their access to resources in particular had significant implications for feelings of satisfaction for parent participants. This finding is not overly surprising, given the importance placed upon access to resources as a key function of the EHC process.

Dissatisfaction with access to resources or services has been a prominent feature within the existing literature (Skipp and Hopwood, 2016; Redwood, 2015; Thom *et al*., 2015). It has been identified that the lack of access to support and resources may be a key factor in

the decision to apply for an EHC needs assessment (Hill *et al*., 2014b). Therefore, if such support were more widely available, the demand for EHC needs assessment might reduce.

4.4.4 Discussion of research question 3

Key factors influencing perceptions of the EHC process' success were; expectations and values, knowledge and access to support and resources. Whilst distinct, these three factors are inevitably related. For example, higher levels of training for teachers is associated with more positive expectations for children with SEN (Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden, 2000). As a result, work to develop any of these areas should consider the interplay between factors to achieve the best outcomes.

4.5 Conclusion

The aim of this research was to explore how key individuals conceptualised and experienced the EHC process within Chesterfield. A number of themes were identified in relation to this. In considering the purposes of the EHC process, participants highlighted the opportunity to develop shared understanding, facilitate planning and support, to protect children with SEN and to promote their progress. When reflecting upon their experiences of the process, they reported differing levels of collaboration, and varying satisfaction with outcomes. In identifying the key factors that influenced perceptions of the process, participants spoke about the impact of values and existing practice, the needs for knowledge and frustrations regarding access to support and resources.

4.6 Limitations of the research

Like much of the existing research, a key limitation of this work was the failure to include the children themselves. It was my original intention to include the children

within the interviews. However, it quickly became apparent that the children who had received EHCPs at that time had needs that would impair their ability to understand the questions, provide answers, or feel comfortable talking with a stranger. I felt that to place children in that context would be unethical (BPS, 2010). Despite this, it would have been preferable to seek the assent of Sarah, Daniel and Penny, to establish they were aware and comfortable with the research. To achieve this, leaflets or scripts could have been developed and shared with each child by familiar adults who could help them to understand the process and answer any questions.

In addition, reflecting upon the findings of this research, I wonder whether any of the target children would know that they had an EHCP, or know anything about the process, given their limited involvement. An area of future development work in this respect might be to work with children with SEN to design a more child-centred approach to the EHC process, including consideration of the factors they think are important to child participation. This could take the form of a diachronic single case study, focussing on the development of a pre-emptive, child-centred EHC process for one child over time. This would allow the researcher to co-develop the process and create a data collection method based upon the communicative preferences of the child, rather than trying to adapt an existing, less compatible data collection method, such as the interviews used in this research. In this context, the relationship between the child and researcher would be an important factor to consider, to ensure the child feels comfortable enough to share their views (Shaw, Brady and Davey, 2011).

A second potential limitation of this research is the small sample size. This will have significant implications for the types of conclusions that can be drawn. Due to the aims and epistemological approach taken within this research, however, this is not a major

limitation. The aim of the research is to explore perceptions and experiences within unique contexts, and to reflect upon how the findings may relate to practice, rather than identify which findings can be generalised (Thomas, 2015). Due to this, the local, in depth approach taken with this research is a strength, as it was able to describe one context in detail (Thomas, 2015).

A third limitation of this research relates to the interview questions, which were not piloted. Fortunately, due to the semi-structured nature of the interview, I was able to rephrase and adjust questions where participants were struggling to understand (Robson, 2002). In addition, none of the participants seemed to have difficulty with the questions in the interviews, and all gave answers that indicated they had understood the meaning of the question. The questions developed for the interviews were very broad, which may have resulted in data not related to the initial research questions. Initial piloting may have led to refinement of the schedule. As the research questions discussed within this research evolved over time, driven by the data, this would likely have resulted in greater emphasis being placed upon the functions ascribed by the participants; the original focus of this research. Due to this, the resultant data may have included less information regarding the experiences of the participants, the significance of which was only identified during the data analysis process.

Finally, the level of subjectivity within this research may be considered a limitation. Methods such as semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis are open to the influence of researcher bias. However, the interpretivist perspective held throughout this research would theorise that personal interpretation occurs within all research (Gray, 2004). Therefore, explicit recognition of my own perceptions as a researcher, and my role in shaping the findings, becomes a strength of this work (Thomas, 2015).

4.7 Implications for educational psychology practice

Whilst this research does not strive to create generalisable conclusions, it has resulted in a number of reflections, also known as phronesis (Thomas, 2015), which practitioners may wish to consider in respect to their own practice. Firstly, this research demonstrated that there can be a wide range of expectations placed upon the purposes of the EHC process. Practitioners may wish to consider the purposes they ascribe to the process, or find out about the expectations of others they work with (i.e. families, school staff or other professionals). This may serve to illuminate explanations as to why individuals are seeking statutory assessment. As a TEP, I have begun to integrate this into my practice. It has resulted in developing a deeper understanding of perceptions in some cases, and identified misunderstanding and misconceptions in others.

Secondly, the findings of this research, and others (i.e. Skipp and Hopwood, 2016), indicate that levels of knowledge amongst those involved with the EHC process should not be taken for granted. Whilst some parents, school staff and wider professionals may be very knowledgeable, others are less so, and this can have implications for the EHC process. EPs may be well placed to support in the development of local knowledge, particularly where they are closely linked with their SEN departments. Practitioners may also wish to reflect upon their own levels of knowledge, given the common perception that they are experts.

Finally, practitioners could reflect on the degree to which their practice could be considered family-centred and most crucially, child-centred. Insufficient consideration about the inclusion and empowerment of the child in the EHC process was a striking feature of this research, and one which is at odds with the statutory guidance (DfE/DH, 2015). EPs have the potential to play a key role in eliciting the voice of the child, using a

range of developmentally and individually appropriate methods, and in demonstrating its importance in the planning and delivery of support for children with SEN (Harding and Atkinson, 2009).

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: A BRIEF HISTORY OF SEN POLICY AND LEGISLATION IN ENGLAND

Educational consideration of children with SEN is a relatively recent occurrence. Indeed, the compulsory education of children without any additional needs was only legislated from 1880 in the *Elementary Education Act 1880* (43 & 44 Vict c 23). Figure A1 briefly documents key events in the development of SEN support in England. Individuals with visual or hearing impairments were the first children with SEN to be considered within educational legislation, with the enacting of the *Elementary Education (Blind and Deaf Children) Act 1893* (56 & 57 Vict c 42), which called for local authorities to provide better provision for these children. Following this, children considered 'physically defective' or epileptic were also highlighted by the *Elementary Education (Defective and Epileptic) Act 1914* (4 & 5 Geo. 5 c. 45) and *Education Act 1918* (8 & 9 Geo. 5 c. 39). Thus the educational needs of some children with SEN began to be considered, with a general perception that they were best educated in specialist settings.

The publication of the *Education Act 1944* (7 & 8 Geo. 6 c. 31) was heralded as an opportunity to create greater equality within educational access. It included a new classificatory system for children and young people with SEN that identified 11 possible categories of 'handicap'. Such children would be assessed by medical professionals who would allocate them to the appropriate category. This would then dictate the location and type of education they would receive. A small number of children were considered to have needs so severe that they were deemed 'ineducable', and as such the Act did not apply to their education (Runswick-Cole and Hodge, 2009). Instead, they were under the responsibility of

the health services until 1970, when the *Education (Handicapped Children) Act 1970* placed responsibility for this group with the local authorities.

The 1970s was heralded as a time of great change in the perception of children with SEN. In response to significant pressure from campaigns and the general public, a committee was created to review and provide advice about the state of educational provision for children with SEN. As a result of this work, the Warnock Report (DES, 1978) was published, summarising their conclusions. It was at this time that the term 'handicapped' began to be replaced by the phrase 'special educational needs'. As opposed to the smaller group of children with more complex needs that the former term referred to, the Warnock Committee felt that the term SEN could describe a wide range of children experiencing difficulty with their learning. They estimated that this term could be applied to around 20% of the school population. Alongside this broadening of the concept of educational needs, the committee maintained that the vast majority of children should be educated within their local mainstream settings, heralding the dawn of the inclusion agenda.

Education Act 1944

11 categories of 'handicap', defined in 1945;

Blind	Educationally subnormal
Partially sighted	Epileptic
Deaf	Maladjusted
Partially deaf	Physically handicapped
Delicate	Speech defect
Diabetic	

Small numbers of children educated within mainstream schools, most placed in special schools. Children deemed 'ineducable' were placed under the responsibility of health care professionals.

Education Act 1993

8 categories of SEN:

Learning difficulties

Specific learning difficulties

Speech and language difficulties

Emotional and behavioural difficulties

Sensory impairments (hearing)

Sensory impairments (visual)

Medical conditions

Introduced the SEN code of practice.

Children with SEN expected to be educated within mainstream schools.

2001 – Revised SEN CoP

4 categories of SEN;

Cognitive and learning

Communication and interaction

Behavioural, emotional and social development

Sensory and/or physical

Pre-1944

Compulsory education of children without SEN (1880)

Introduction of compulsory education for children who are blind, deaf (1893), 'physically defective' or epileptic (1914 & 1918).

1978 – The Warnock Report

Introduced the term 'special educational needs' (SEN).

Estimated this would apply to around 20% of children.

Made recommendations for the inclusion of children with SEN within mainstream schools.

Education (Handicapped Children) Act 1970

Responsibility to educate children with SEN placed upon local authorities.

1994 – The Salamanca Statement

International agreement to educate children with SEN in mainstream settings.

Education Act 1981

Introduced the parental right to participate in assessment.

Adopted the term SEN.

Introduced the use of Statements of Special Educational Needs
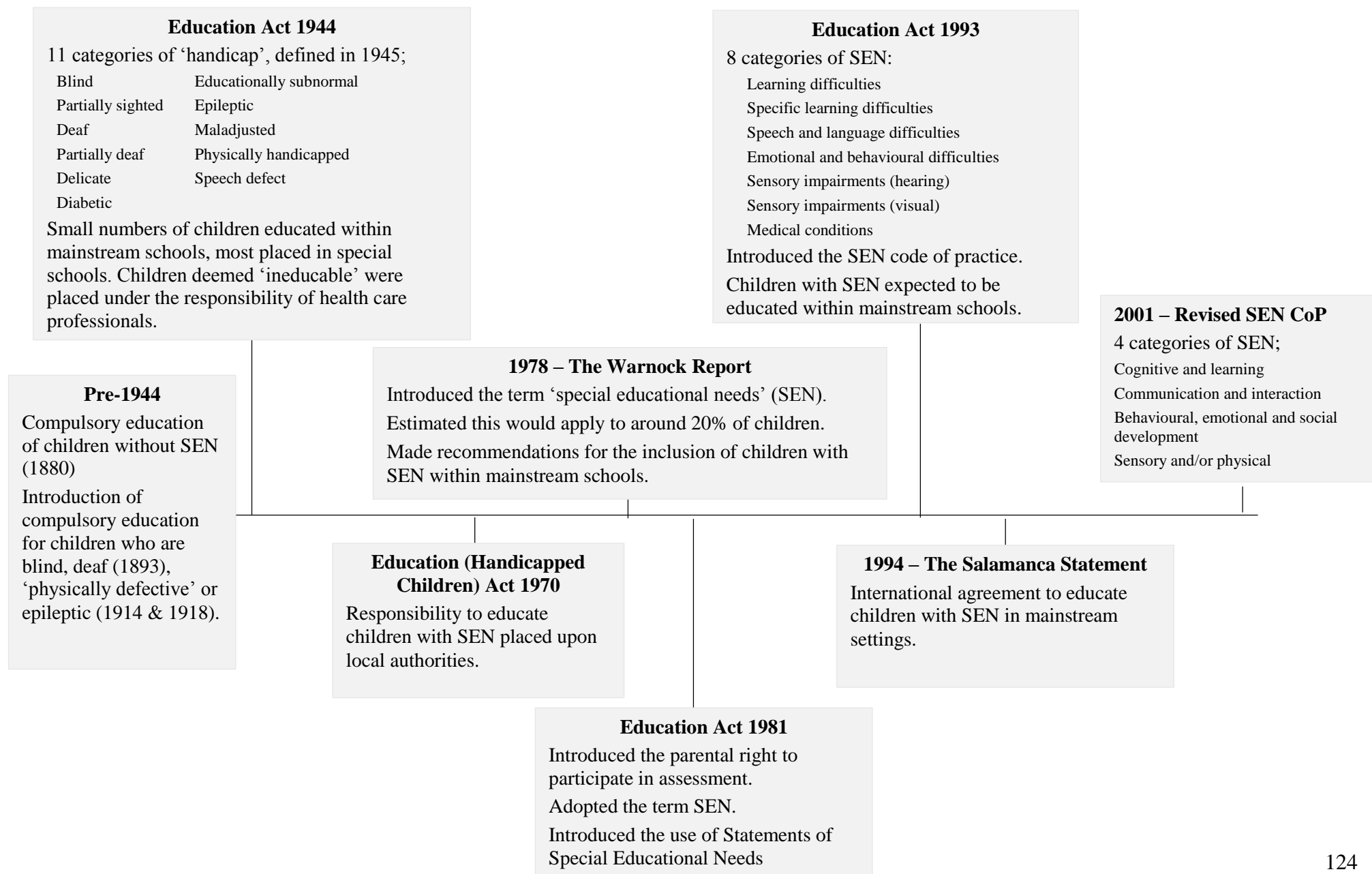
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Figure A1: A brief history of SEN support in England 1880-2001

The *Education Act 1981* saw the adoption of SEN as official terminology, entitled parents to participate in educational assessment and introduced the Statement of SEN. These statutory documents were designed to outline the educational needs of children with significant difficulties, who would require additional provision to ensure their education. They also served to underline the right of the child to education (Florian, 2002). Whilst the Act does make some reference to children with Statements of SEN being educated in mainstream settings, few changes were observed until the 1990s. The *Education Act 1993*, which identified eight new classifications of SEN, and the signing of the Salamanca Statement in 1994 escalated the then Government's commitment to inclusive practice. The Act was followed by the development of the first SEN Code of Practice (DfE, 1994), which provided statutory guidance to schools and professionals as to the provision of SEN support. A revised version of the SEN Code of Practice was published in 2001, with the primary alteration being to subsume the existing classifications of SEN into four categories (DfES, 2001). Following this, the practice of supporting children with SEN remained relatively static, until the announcement by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government (2010-2015) of significant reform to the system.

APPENDIX 2: SECTIONS OF THE EHC PLAN

Section	Purpose
Section A	To describe the views, interests and goals of the child and his/her parents, or the young person.
Section B	To give a description of the child or young person's special educational needs.
Section C	To give a description of the child or young person's health needs related to their SEN.
Section D	To give a description of the child or young person's social care needs related to their SEN.
Section E	To describe the outcomes sought for the child or young person.
Section F	To describe special educational help required to address the child or young person's needs.
Section G	To describe the special health services required to address the child or young person's needs.
Section H1	To describe the special social care services that must be provided as a result of section 2 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970.
Section H2	To describe the special social care services required to address the child or young person's needs.
Section I	To give the name and type of school that the child should go to
Section J	To describe how a personal budget (if any) will be used
Section K	Supplementary information gathered during the needs assessment.

Parent Leaflet

Is taking part confidential?

Yes. All of your information will be securely stored for 10 years after the research. Only I will be able to access the data. I will remove any personal details, so that you cannot be recognised from it.

Please be aware that others from your case study (the SENCO and the EP) may be able to identify you. However they will not have access to your interview.

In addition, where child protection concerns arise in any of the interviews, these will be shared with the child protection officer at your child's school and recorded in line with Chesterfield Educational Psychology Service policy.

What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?

There are no anticipated risks of taking part in this study. However, if you have any concerns at any time, please contact me.

Who has reviewed this study?

This study has been reviewed by the University of Birmingham's Ethical Review Committee.

Who is running the study?

This study is being run by Hannah Cochrane.
Hannah is a trainee educational psychologist on placement in Chesterfield Educational Psychology Service. Hannah is in her second year of training at the University of Birmingham.
Hannah's research supervisor is Dr XXX (School of Education, University of Birmingham). Hannah is also supervised by XXXX (Chesterfield Educational Psychology Service).
For more information about the study, please contact Hannah by phone, email or post:

Phone:

Email:

Post:

UNIVERSITYOF
BIRMINGHAM

You are invited to participate in a research study:

Exploring Perceptions of the Purposes of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)

Parent Information Leaflet

What is the aim of this research project?

In 2014, new education legislation and a new Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice were introduced. A key aspect of these changes was the introduction of the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). I am interested in exploring views about the purposes of EHCPs.

This project will use a case study design, which aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the views of participants.

For each case, centred around a completed EHCP, will include interviews with parents, the special education needs coordinator (SENCO) and the educational psychologist (EP).

What are the benefits of the project?

The project will give you an opportunity to give feedback about the EHCP application and assessment process.

It will also help to inform future conversations with other families about the EHCP. The aim of this project is to understand how different people view the purposes of EHCPs. By sharing your views, you will provide another perspective in this understanding.

Why have I been invited to take part in this study?

You have been invited to take part in this study because your child has recently received an EHCP.

As EHCPs are relatively new, many parents are unfamiliar with them. Your experience of the application and assessment process will mean that you will have had an opportunity to develop an understanding of EHCPs.

I am particularly interested in including the views of families in my research as one of the aims of the new legislation and code of practice has been to emphasise the key role of families in informing decisions and practice.

Do I have to take part?

No, your participation is entirely voluntary.

If you do agree to take part, you can withdraw up to a week after the interviews.

If you withdraw in the week between the interviews and the withdrawal deadline, your interview recording and any notes will be disposed of.

What will happen if I agree to take part?

Once you have given your permission, I will then contact the SENCO and EP that were involved with your child's EHCP. If they also agree to participate, then the interviews can be arranged. If your child is able to take part, I will also ask them if they would like to participate in the research.

The time and location of the interviews will be arranged with you, to ensure they are convenient. It is expected that the interviews will take up to an hour.

The interviews will be recorded, to allow for analysis at a later time. The recordings will only be accessible by myself, and all transcriptions will be anonymised.

What will happen after the interviews?

Once the research has been completed, I will send each participant a report outlining the findings.

The research will also be written up to form a part of my thesis.

EP leaflet

Is taking part confidential?

Yes. All of your information will be securely stored for 10 years after the research. Only I will be able to access the data. I will remove any personal details, so that you cannot be recognised from it.

Please be aware that others from your case study (the parent and the SENCO) may be able to identify you. However they will not have access to your individual interview.

In addition, where child protection concerns arise in any of the interviews, these will be shared with the school's child protection officer and recorded in line with Chesterfield Educational Psychology Service policy.

What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?

There are no anticipated risks of taking part in this study. However, if you have any concerns at any time, please contact me.

Who has reviewed this study?

This study has been reviewed by the University of Birmingham's Ethical Review Committee.

Who is running the study?

This study is being run by Hannah Cochrane.
Hannah is a trainee educational psychologist on placement in Chesterfield Educational Psychology Service. Hannah is in her second year of training at the University of Birmingham.
Hannah's research supervisor is Dr XXX (School of Education, University of Birmingham). Hannah is also supervised by XXX (Chesterfield Educational Psychology Service).
For more information about the study, please contact Hannah by phone, email or post:

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UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

You are invited to participate in a research study:

Exploring Perceptions of the Purposes of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)

Educational Psychologist Information Leaflet

What is the aim of this research project?

In 2014, new education legislation and a new Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice were introduced. A key aspect of these changes was the introduction of the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). I am interested in exploring views about the purposes of EHCPs.

This project will use a case study design, which aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the views of participants.

For each case, centred around a completed EHCP, will include interviews with parents the special education needs coordinator (SENCO) and the educational psychologist (EP).

What are the benefits of the project?

The project will give you an opportunity to give feedback about the EHCP application and assessment process.

It will also help to inform future conversations about the EHCP process. The aim of this project is to understand how different people view the purposes of EHCPs. By sharing your views, you will provide another perspective in this understanding.

Why have I been invited to take part in this study?

You have been invited to take part in this study because a student you work with has recently received an EHCP. The parent of that student has been contacted about this study, and expressed an interest in taking part.

As EHCPs are relatively new, relatively few have been completed. Your experience of the application and assessment process will mean that you will have had an opportunity to develop an understanding of EHCPs.

Do I have to take part?

No, your participation is entirely voluntary.

If you do agree to take part, you can withdraw up to a week after the interviews.

If you withdraw in the week between the interviews and the withdrawal deadline, your interview recording and any notes will be disposed of.

What will happen if I agree to take part?

In order for you to be included, each part of the case study (the parent, the SENCO and the EP) need to give their consent. When each participant has given their consent, interviews can be arranged.

The time and location of the interviews will be arranged with you, to ensure they are convenient. It is expected that the interviews will take up to an hour.

The interviews will be recorded, to allow for analysis at a later time. The recordings will only be accessible by myself, and all transcriptions will be anonymised.

What will happen after the interviews?

Once the research has been completed, I will send each participant a report outlining the findings.

The research will also be written up to form a part of my thesis.

School staff leaflet

Is taking part confidential?

Yes. All of your information will be securely stored for 10 years after the research. Only I will be able to access the data. I will remove any personal details, so that you cannot be recognised from it.

Please be aware that others from your case study (the parent and the EP) may be able to identify you. However they will not have access to your individual interview.

In addition, where child protection concerns arise in any of the interviews, these will be shared with the school's designated child protection officer and recorded in line with Chesterfield Educational Psychology Service policy.

What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?

There are no anticipated risks of taking part in this study. However, if you have any concerns at any time, please contact me.

Who has reviewed this study?

This study has been reviewed by the University of Birmingham's Ethical Review Committee.

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UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

You are invited to participate in a research study:

Exploring Perceptions of the Purposes of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)

School Information Leaflet

What is the aim of this research project?

In 2014, new education legislation and a new Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice were introduced. A key aspect of these changes was the introduction of the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). I am interested in exploring views about the purposes of EHCPs.

This project will use a case study design, which aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the views of participants.

For each case, centred around a completed EHCP, will include interviews with parents, the special education needs coordinator (SENCO) and the educational psychologist (EP).

What are the benefits of the project?

The project will give you an opportunity to give feedback about the EHCP application and assessment process.

It will also help to inform future conversations about the EHCP process. The aim of this project is to understand how different people view the purposes of EHCPs. By sharing your views, you will provide another perspective in this understanding.

Why have I been invited to take part in this study?

You have been invited to take part in this study because a student in your school has recently received an EHCP. The parent of that student has been contacted about this study, and expressed an interest in taking part.

As EHCPs are relatively new, SENCOs have completed the associated paperwork. Your experience of the application and assessment process will mean that you will have had an opportunity to develop an understanding of EHCPs.

I am interested in gaining the views of SENCOs because they play a key role in the identification of children and young people who may benefit from an EHCP. Also, due to their role, SENCOs are most likely to be aware of the recent changes to education legislation.

Do I have to take part?

No, your participation is entirely voluntary.

If you do agree to take part, you can withdraw up to a week after the interviews.

If you withdraw in the week between the interviews and the withdrawal deadline, your interview recording and any notes will be disposed of.

What will happen if I agree to take part?

In order for you to be included, each part of the case study (the parent, the SENCO and the EP) need to give their consent. When each participant has given their consent, interviews can be arranged.

The time and location of the interviews will be arranged with you, to ensure they are convenient. It is expected that the interviews will take up to an hour.

The interviews will be recorded, to allow for analysis at a later time. The recordings will only be accessible by myself, and all transcriptions will be anonymised.

What will happen after the interviews?

Once the research has been completed, I will send each participant a report outlining the findings.

The research will also be written up to form a part of my thesis.

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APPENDIX 4: CONSENT FORMS

Parent consent form

Research Consent Form for Parents

Research title: **Exploring perceptions of the functions of Education, Health and Care Plans.**

Researcher name: **Hannah Cochrane**

This study will make use of interviews with key stakeholders to explore the perceived functions of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). During the interview, you will be asked questions about your views of EHCPs and about the EHCP that has been written for your child. The interview is expected to take up to an hour. The interview will be recorded to allow for transcription and analysis at a later time. The recordings and transcriptions will be securely stored for up to 10 years after the study. After this time they will be destroyed.

Please Tick Box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw up to a week after the interview, without giving any reason. ☐

3. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

4. I agree to the interview being audio recorded. ☐

5. I understand that the information I have submitted will be included within a thesis write-up, and that I will receive a summary report after the research has been completed. ☐

_____   _____   _____
Name of Participant   Date   Signature

Research Consent Form for Educational Psychologists

Research title: **Exploring perceptions of the functions of Education, Health and Care Plans.**

Researcher name: **Hannah Cochrane**

This study will make use of interviews with key stakeholders to explore the perceived functions of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). During the interview, you will be asked questions about your views of EHCPs and about the EHCP you have recently been involved with. The interview is expected to take up to an hour. The interview will be recorded to allow for transcription and analysis at a later time. The recordings and transcriptions will be securely stored for up to 10 years after the study. After this time they will be destroyed.

Please Tick Box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw up to a week after the interview, without giving any reason.

3. I agree to take part in the above study.

4. I agree to the interview being audio recorded.

5. I understand that the information I have submitted will be included within a thesis write-up, and that I will receive a summary report after the research has been completed.

_____   _____   _____
Name of Participant   Date   Signature

Research Consent Form for School Staff

Research title: **Exploring perceptions of the functions of Education, Health and Care Plans.**

Researcher name: **Hannah Cochrane**

This study will make use of interviews with key stakeholders to explore the perceived functions of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). During the interview, you will be asked questions about your views of EHCPs and about the EHCP you have recently been involved with. The interview is expected to take up to an hour. The interview will be recorded to allow for transcription and analysis at a later time. The recordings and transcriptions will be securely stored for up to 10 years after the study. After this time they will be destroyed.

Please Tick Box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw up to a week after the interview, without giving reason. ☐

3. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

4. I agree to the interview being audio recorded. ☐

5. I understand that the information I have submitted will be included within a thesis write-up, and that I will receive a summary report after the research has been completed. ☐

_____   _____   _____
Name of Participant   Date   Signature

APPENDIX 5: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1) Why did you originally decide to apply for an education, health and care plan for [child's name]?
2) In this particular case, what were the purposes of the education, health and care plan?
3) Do you think it achieve those purposes?
4) Thinking more generally, about children and young people who undergo the education, health and care needs assessment process, can you think of any other purposes for education, health and care plans?
5) What do you think is the main reason people apply for education, health and care plans?
6) How much do you think people know about education, health and care plans?
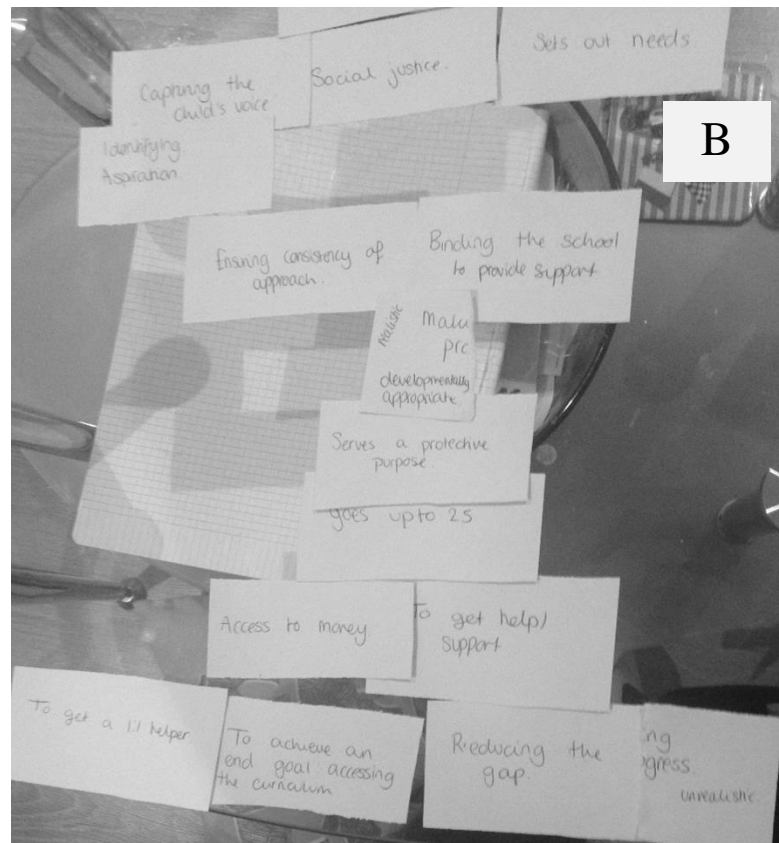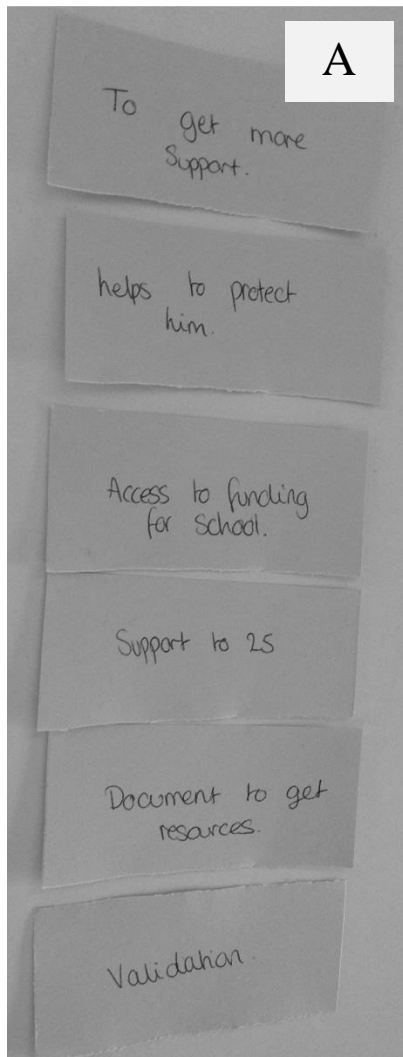
A; Helen and Jason, subunit 2

B; Andrea, subunit 3

C; Michelle, subunit 3

APPENDIX 7: RESEARCH TIMELINE

Activity	Date(s)
Submission of application for ethical approval	28th April 2015
Ethical approval received	17th July 2015
Letters sent to parent participants	14th September 2015
Recruitment of teacher and EP participants (following parental consent)	September 2015 – November 2015
Interviews	October 2015 – January 2016
Transcription	December 2015 – March 2016
Thematic analysis	March 2016 – May 2016

APPENDIX 8: TRANSCRIPTION EXTRACT, WITH INITIAL AND REFINED CODING

Hannah (researcher): OK, so the first question is about why, why did you originally decide to apply for the education, health and care plan for Sarah, what was the context of the case? Charlotte (SENCO, subunit 1): Ok, so ==Sarah came to us in reception and we already had her older sister here and knew the difficulties that she had faced and had picked up on Sarah's difficulties and could see that they were really similar to her older sister's.== But we went through the process of, you know, first school action, because that's what it was at the time, putting targets in place, but ==we could see that actually her need was very much speech and language as her primary need, so we went through the process of speech therapists, and then EP advice.== And ==we could see that actually what... we could provide in mainstream... wasn't tailored, because of time, because of the pace of the curriculum, because of the language that she needed differentiated.== And we knew, because... ==I worked as, I worked for the speech and language service==	• Initial code: • Early recognition of needs • Previous experience • Following process • Multiagency • Individualised support • Identifying provision • Supporting specific difficulties • Previous experience	• Refined code: • Early recognition of needs • Previous experience • Multiagency working • Meeting individual needs • Previous experience • Access to specialist provision

for 19 years, I knew that actually, that's where we could put her that would best meet her needs, and actually support her the best in terms of the difficulties that she's experiencing. So, it takes time, and obviously I know that our speech and language base is Key Stage provision, so, I wouldn't put a child into it until at least year 2, because actually, the children who've got language difficulties, what they need is a real language rich, play-based curriculum, to develop their language at, all aspects of language. And that's what we provide here. So I knew that whilst she was in reception and year one, that actually she would be able to have the, her needs met within our classroom. But when we were charting her progress and things, and I think I knew probably when she was in reception, that actually, she would need specialist provision. And access to a curriculum were language was the primary focus. ... H: OK, and, how was the process of introducing the idea of the assessment, the plan to parents?	• Appropriate provision • Individualised support • Appropriate provision • Schools providing support without EHC • Individualised support • Appropriate provision • Planning provision • Securing provision placement • Language difficulties	• Meeting needs without EHCP • Access to specialist provision • Meeting individual needs • Poor progress

C: I'm always very open with parents, I'm very candid, and I don't dress difficult messages up in wooliness. And I very often will say to parents, and have said to parents, you know, I'm going to be honest with you, because I would rather be honest with you and then say these are the difficulties this is what we're experiencing, this is what we're facing, We're going to get through it together, I'm going to be here, I'm going to support you. So, I'm always very honest with parents, and because we've been through it with her older sister, I had a very good relationship anyway. Which was hugely, hugely important with any child, not just Sarah. As a SENCO, you have to have such good relationships with families. It's key, it's massive. Because the families are a huge part of that child's journey and we've always believe, and I've always believed that actually the children and family should always be at the heart of what we do. So I don't do anything without families knowing about it, anything. So I've always had parents in, including Sarah's parents, so it, it was easy for me to broach it with	• Relationships with parents • Difficult messages • Openness • Power dynamics • Supporting parents • Previous experience • Relationships with parents • Centrality of family • Relationships with parents • Collaboration with young person • Centrality of young person • Empowerment • Relationships with parents • Trust • Openness • Power dynamics • Trust	• Relationships between school and parents • Centrality of family • Supporting parents • Power dynamics • Openness • Collaboration • Relationships between school and parents • Centrality of family • Centrality of child • Relationship between school and parents • Collaboration • Existing practice • Centrality of family • Power dynamics – trust

		• Openness
them, because they have my, they knew that they could trust me, and I think that that's big. If parents know that what you're doing is because you care about their child, and you want the best for their child, then they go with you, don't they? And if they could see everything that you've done, because it's a staged approach, they were involved every step of the way, then they could see how it was... building. And also, it's how you talk about it, isn't it? It's not, you know, you don't sit in front of parents and say [long sigh] hmmmm, you don't, do you, you say, this is how we can support her more. This will be the process that benefits her, and then you always ask their opinion. It's not just you telling them how it's going to be, it's seeking their views, you know, how do you feel what do you think, what's your view? H: It's including parents in as an equal part of the dialogue. C: Absolutely, well, they are equal partners H: that's their child	• Collaboration • Centrality of family	• Collaboration • Centrality of family
	• Openness • Power dynamics • Collaboration	• Relationship between school and parents • Collaboration • Centrality of family

C: they actually, probably have more percent weight than I do, you know? Because that's the way it should be. They're her parents. And Sarah as well, I've always spoken to children as well like that... The children have always known everything that's happening to them. If they have a visitor in, or if someone comes to work with them, the children always know about it. Unless, unless it would panic them to know	• Relationships with parents • Centrality of family • Collaboration with young person • Openness	• Centrality of family • Centrality of the child • Openness
H: yeah, make them feel uncomfortable		
C: and worry about it. So you know, broaching it and speaking to parents is no problem.		
H: OK, do you think the process, perhaps reflecting back on statements, do you feel like the process is more family friendly, less family friendly?		
C: Personally, it hasn't changed a lot of our practice. And actually, the SEND reforms that came in, and the new code of practice, it hasn't changed our practice in this school. Because it's what I believe in	• Variability between schools	• No change in practice

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anyway. And I've always had the practice where parents were always included in everything, always. And that's always been the practice at this school. So, I guess it's formalised it... but in terms of speaking to parents, in terms of giving information parents information, it hasn't changed my practice at all.	• Openness • Centrality of family • Importance of SENCO • Guiding beliefs • No change in practice • No change in practice • Guiding beliefs • Centrality of family • Openness	• No change in practice • Values • Openness • No change in practice
H: OK, so it's formalise it, given you that official structure to what you're already doing?		
C: Yeah, yeah, and I do believe that, and if you ask any of my parents, you know, I've always been with them and fighting with them for access to services. I can remember, and I'm going off the point of EHCs, that a woman here, a lady here, who's got a daughter in year, just coming into year 9, and she came to see me the other day, she's got a little boy in reception as well, and she said, she said you'll never guess what, she said they've just decided to get an EP involved, and get CAMHS back involved, and I just sort of laughed, and she said, she said to me, 2 years, she said, me and you, sat in your office fighting, to	• Fighting for families • Having to fight	• Centrality of family • Having to fight

get this, although she had the EP involvement in our school, she said 2 years, for me and you, sat in your office, fighting, and I think that sums it up. That, you know, how long ago was that when she was here? And yet, that was my practice then, so that was way before EHCs came along. I think what, I think what helps though, is because I taught nursery for 10 years here, people know me as Charlotte, and that relationship that you have with the children is very different isn't it? And that relationship I have with parents can be very different, to traditional SENCO I guess, if you just come in as a SENCO	• No change in practice • Power dynamics • Relationships with parents • Importance of SENCO • Pre-existing relationships	• No change in practice • Relationships between school and parents • Power dynamics • Importance of SENCO
H: coming in cold, rather than having built that relationship over time.		
C: Yeah, so I guess that's different.		
H: And how did you find the assessment process as a school.		
C: In terms of people coming in,		
H: yeah, and your paperwork, and things like that.		
C: well the paperwork for it is hideous, absolutely hideous, it's like I said, it's quad, probably quadrupled my work, easily. I think because	• Bureaucracy	• Bureaucracy

you have, the family conversation is really important. And it's really important that it reflects what the family feel. So what I do is I meet the parents before I do the family conversation, and I talk to them about what it involves and I talk to them about the sorts of things we're going to talk about, and I give them a copy of it, a blank copy. And I say, when we meet next week, or in 2 weeks, or whenever we've set the date for the family conversation, have a think about these things. If you want to jot a note on this. So that they are... they can have time to think about what they want to say..., and then when I have the conversation, I, my shortest conversation have probably been an hour and 10 minutes my longest was 2 and a half hours... you know, and because, what I do is, I say to the parent, I'm going to have a blank copy, they've got their blank copy that I've given them, I'm going to scribble pencil notes and then I rub them out and change it, jot notes for what they're saying, and then I take it all, then I give it to the family, and say if you want to talk it through, if you want to come and meet me, I will go through it with	• Openness • Power dynamics • Centrality of family • Collaboration • Relationships with parents • Following process • Importance of SENCO • Holistic assessment	• Centrality of family • Collaboration • Openness

|		
you, if you don't agree with anything and you just want to scribble it out, write the changes that you want,... then do that. I will retype it and send it back out to you, so we do it like that, and I don't give them the signature page until they are truly happy and they know that, that that conversation is reflective of what they say.		
H: you're not pushing them towards an answer, or trying to get it done quickly, it's getting it done right		
C: yeah, and also I give the same to the children, You know, for their my views, and under the bit it's the third bit that says what does the child want for themselves in the future, the two previous parts that the child, the child, it was happy with life, that bit, I, I take from their my views, but the bit about the future actually isn't in their my views, so there's actually a mismatch between the paperwork actually in that bit. because you don't really have to ask the children in their my views what they want for their future, but it's in the family conversation, so,	• Openness • Power dynamics • Collaboration with young person • Child empowerment • Child's voice	• Centrality of the child • Collaboration • Child empowerment
so I always have a separate conversation with the children and say to	• Openness	

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them, again, we talk about the sorts of things that go in, we talk about and I give them some times to think about it. And then they come back and I type word for word what they say, and then we read it back, so I do it like that, so that the children would have a chance also to make sure that what they said reflects what they feel. Oh, and then I put the child's thing on before the parents, and when I send it home to the parents it's got the child's bit on as well so they can see what the child said. H: Hold that family view C: yeah, so I don't sort of hide anything from them it's all a very visible process.	• Power dynamics • Collaboration with young person • Child empowerment • Child's voice • Openness • Power dynamics • Collaboration with young person • Child empowerment • Child's voice	• Centrality of the child • Collaboration • Child empowerment • Collaboration • Openness

APPENDIX 9: THEME DEVELOPMENT

After identifying codes using NVivo 11 software, I adopted a manual approach to identifying themes. Codes were transferred onto post-it notes, and I used these to map out common patterns between them.
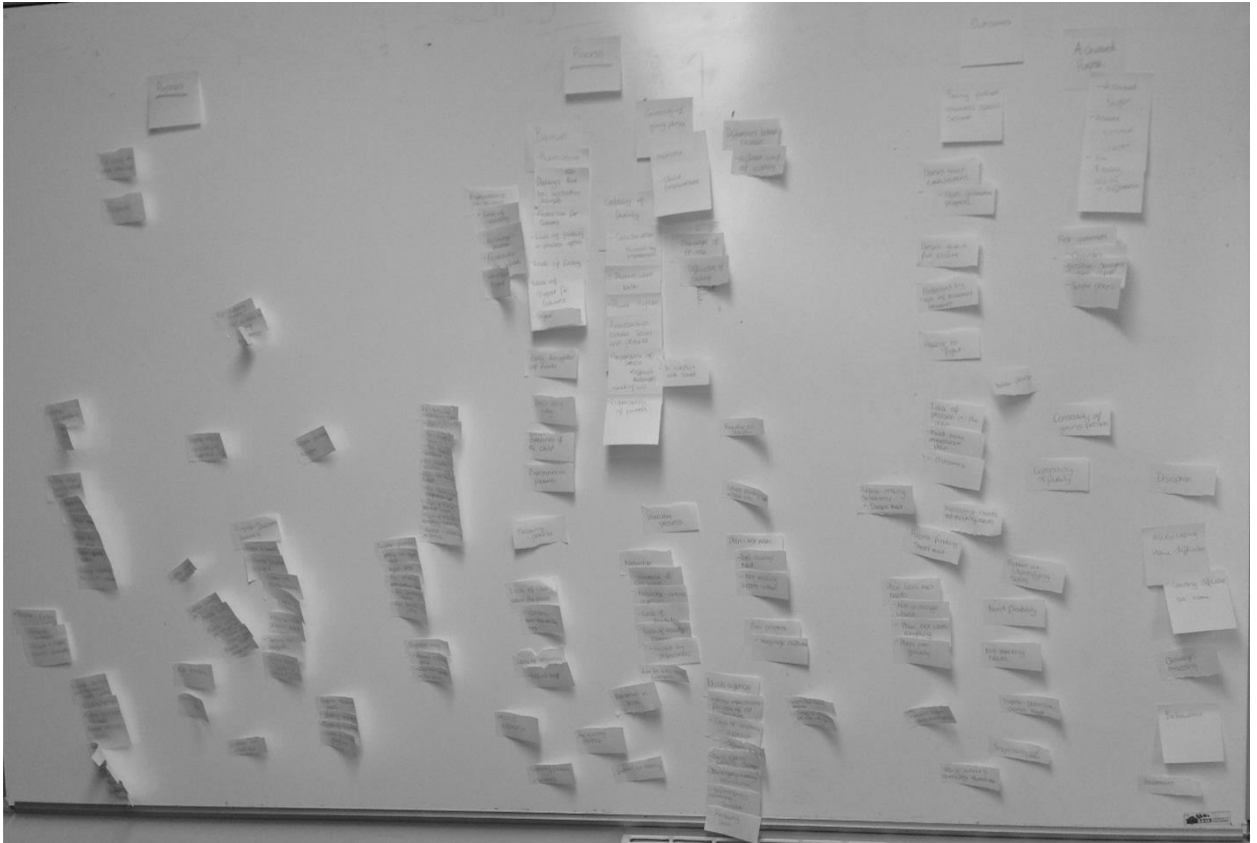
Identification of themes
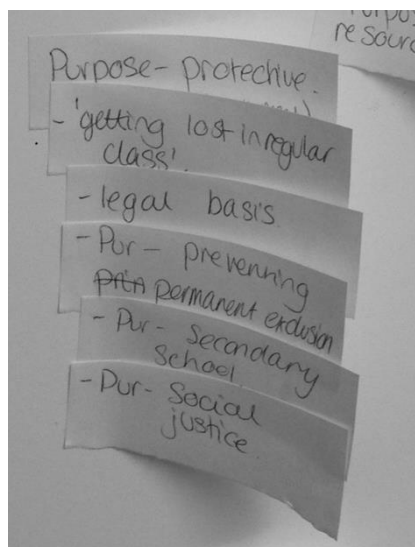
Development of Theme 3: protecting children with SEN

Development of Theme 5: experiences of collaboration, subtheme: involving parents

Chesterfield educational
psychology service address

Telephone number

Email address

Dear [participant(s) name],

As you may remember, you recently participated in a research project exploring experiences of the education, health and care process. Firstly, I would like to start by thanking you for your participation.

The purpose of this letter is provide you with feedback about the results of the research. In total, three cases were included, each consisting of parents, school staff and an educational psychologist. The findings of this research are based on the information shared by participants across these cases. The findings answer three key questions;

1) How do people understand the purposes of the education, health and care process?

2) What is the education, health and care process like?

3) What factors influenced the success of the education, health and care process?

1) How do people understand the purposes of the education, health and care process?

Four key purposes were spoken about during the interviews:

- Creating a shared understanding of the child's needs,
- Facilitating planning and support,
- Protecting children with special educational needs, and
- Promoting progress.

2) What is the education, health and care process like?

Each participant's individual experience of the process varied. Some felt the education, health and care process had been very successful, and achieved all of their aims. Others felt that there were still difficulties to be addressed. Two parts of the education, health and care process that were identified as important were:

- Collaboration; the extent to which the child, their parents and external agencies had been genuinely involved with the process.
- Outcomes; the extent to which the aims (such as receiving additional support, or offering additional protection) had been achieved.

3) What factors influenced the success of the education, health and care process?

There were several factors that seemed to influence the success of the education, health and care process. These included:

- Values and existing practice; it was important for everyone involved to have high expectations for the child and to value parental participation in the education, health and care process.
- Knowledge; it was important for everyone involved (parents, school staff and external agencies) to have a good enough level of knowledge about the education, health and care process.
- Access to support and resources; it was important for children to be able to access additional resources and specialist services.

If you would like any further information about this research, or have any questions, please feel free to contact me at any time.

Yours sincerely,

Hannah Cochrane

Trainee educational psychologist

Chesterfield educational psychology service