Parental Choice and School Placement – Issues for Parents of Children with Statements of Special Educational Needs

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Abstract

This doctoral study set out to explore how parents of children with statements of special educational needs and disability (SEND) made their decisions with regards to school placement. It aimed to explore both how these decisions were made and parents' perceptions of how well the schools, that they had placed their children in, were meeting their needs. The perceptions and views of these parents are given voice in this research. The project is very topical as sweeping changes (Part three of The Children and Families Act 2014 (DfE), the Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations (DfE, 2014) and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0-25 (DfE, 2014)) have recently been brought in with the aim, at least in theory, to reform the SEND system and give children, young people (up to the age of 25) and their families greater control and choice. This research is also very relevant at a time when there is an exponential increase in the numbers of academies and free schools, with their own admission procedures and curriculum.

Through the use of a pragmatic approach, using surveys (n=65) and semi-structured interviews (n=20), a range of views, across three Local Authorities in the South East of England, were collected and analysed. The main findings indicate that for many parents, despite their resources, social capital and education, finding a school that they felt could meet their child's needs was a difficult task. To find a mainstream school, within their local community, that could support their child's educational and social needs was virtually impossible for all but a small minority of participants. Parents whose children were diagnosed with a statement for Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) found it particularly difficult to find suitable schooling whether in a mainstream school, a special school or a specialist unit. A range of difficulties were identified, including in the areas of communication, between parents and providers, school curricula and funding. Some of the difficulties identified may be addressed by the new legislation and guidance, giving greater control and choice, others require schools and LA to work more collaboratively and flexibly with families. Other recommendations include improving LA practices, with regards to information and guidance about schools; and more effective teacher and head teacher training. However, on a more positive note, there were some schools, in the primary sector, which did manage to successfully meet the needs of some of the children. This indicates that such an ideal is achievable.

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I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the participants who have made this study possible; the parents and carers who gave me their time and shared their experiences, without their stories nothing else would have been possible. I hope that this study will have some positive impact and that sharing the stories of the families will inspire others in the way it has inspired me. Another thank you must go to the University of Northampton, the excellent staff and resources have enabled me to carry out and report on this research. The library, especially the electronic resources, and the training and support offered by the Graduate school, especially the excellent Induction, have made the whole PhD journey that much smoother. The opportunities offered by the research placements programme were really good and taught me a great deal, without them I would not have the great job that I do now and I am very grateful for the experiences that it gave me. My fellow PhD students, both within the School of Education and across the university, have been a constant source of support, inspiration, guidance and camaraderie throughout the last four years. Knowing that I could always ask them for help and share my highs and lows with them without being judged or held to account has been invaluable. I would like to particularly thank a small handful of my fellow students who, with their competence, generosity and faith, have made my PhD journey easier than it might have been without them.

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1. Introduction

1.1   Context and foundations of the research

When seeking input for a Green Paper on Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) the (then) children's minister, Sarah Teather, suggested that parents should have more choice over special educational needs provision in England (Sharp, 2010). Both the 2006 House of Commons Education and Skills committee report (HCESC, 2006), and the 2008-2009 government-commissioned inquiry, led by Brian Lamb (DCSF, 2009), reported that parents of children with special needs faced many issues when it came to schooling, including a need for more support and accessible information and also that for many of them the system was failing to meet the needs of their children. It was these issues that suggested that research into how and why parents of children with Statements of SEN decided on the schools for their children, and how well the schools that they chose met their children's needs, would be valuable. As the research began the government published the Green Paper and, as the research was written up, the Children and Families Act, (DfE, 2014a) received Royal Assent. Part three of the Act focuses on families and SEND, highlighting the importance of the role of parents, a concept which is closely related to this research.

Both of the issues above, that parents face, are closely related to debates about inclusive education which have been part of the discussion surrounding education since the Salamanca framework in 1994 (UNESCO, 1994) although, one could argue that actually the debate goes back even further to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, where education, Article 26, was defined as a universal right (UN, 1948). In England, even before the subject of including children with SEN in mainstream schools was raised explicitly in the 1981 Education Act, the advantages and disadvantages of differentiated schooling for children had been debated (Kershaw, 1974, McMichael, 1971). In terms of parental choice for children with SEND, the Ofsted SEND review (2010:6) reported that 'Parents saw the current system as requiring them to 'fight for the rights' of their children'. However, they also:

> 'found that no one model – such as special schools, full inclusion in mainstream settings, or specialist units co-located with mainstream settings – worked better than any other.' (2010:7)

Evidently, there is no simple solution to what can be a difficult and emotive situation for many families. If Ofsted found that no one model worked better than another in meeting the needs of children with Statements then it is hardly surprising that many parents may

find it a real dilemma to find a school placement that best fits their child's needs. Often children have complex needs which may change over time and, although parents may have an excellent knowledge and understanding of their child's needs, their understanding of a school may be based on more limited evidence than Ofsted have available and it is a tough judgment for them to make. Parents may use a range of means to help them make their decisions on schooling but, if no one model works best then, it is undoubtedly a dilemma that they face. This research aimed to examine the issues and dilemmas surrounding parental choice of schools for children with a Statement of Special Educational Needs. Through researching parents' views, and the literature on inclusion and school choice, the research would explore the current situation and based on the evidence uncovered make recommendations about how the system could be adapted.[1]

As an experienced school teacher, who, prior to starting her PhD, had worked as an Assistant Head teacher in a large mainstream secondary, I was obviously aware of the guidance and pedagogy relating to teaching students with SEND and had taught many students with Statements of SEND over the years. However, what I was less aware of, as a teacher, was the concept of educational inclusion. Special education, planning lessons, Individual Education Plans and planning and working with additional adults were all familiar to me but the concept of inclusion was not. In fact it was only when I began teaching on an Initial Teacher Training course, after leaving secondary teaching, that I became fully aware, and knowledgeable, of the concept of educational inclusion. This struck me as a problem. I considered myself to be a successful teacher; I had good relationships with my students, I helped them reach their target grades and I regularly *added value* at all the Key Stages. I was especially good with the trickier students and had a reputation for both excellent behaviour management and teaching. However, I did not recall being taught about, or being aware of, inclusion but I would argue that my pedagogical practice was always inclusive. Before going further I think it is important to, briefly, explore this concept of educational inclusion. Educational inclusion can be seen as an issue of location when it is interpreted to be about where children are educated - mainstream or special schools - although of course there is also the home schooling option and the mainstream school with an attached specialist unit option. (Although some would interpret this as integration not inclusion, more on this in section 2.4.2). Educational inclusion can also be viewed as an issue of pedagogical practice, when it is interpreted to be about how effectively teachers teach and include all the children in their

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[1] (Please note that I shall not consider the possible implications of the Children and Families Act within this project. As the Act has only recently been passed it was too late to consider its impact on the issues of parental choice and school placement, although of course I accept that there appears to be an emphasis on the marketization of SEND within the Act (Gray, 2012).)

classrooms, regardless of their individual differences. There is also an interpretation that educational inclusion is about a school and how inclusive an environment a school provides for all the children (and staff) in its community. This issue of interpretations of inclusion is explored in greater depth in the literature review, however, the above three interpretations are those that I shall focus on in this thesis. To define educational inclusion, I shall borrow some of the words of one of my participants, its making education fit the child, not the child fit the education.

Initially national legislation and guidance, such as the Education Act 1981 (DfE) and Education Act 1993 (DfES), and the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001), promoted the placement of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools as the preferred option, thus suggesting that inclusion was an issue of location. Likewise interest groups, such as the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE), have lobbied for the gradual closing of all special schools and an end to the marginalisation of some children (CSIE, undated). Internationally the notion of inclusion as the 'best' solution has been promoted by UNESCO, the Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education (1994) endorsed the concept of inclusion, suggesting that regular schools with an inclusive orientation are the best means to build an inclusive society and challenge discrimination, thus seeing inclusion as pedagogy and inclusive school environments and going beyond inclusive education to inclusive societies. Despite the legislation and lobbying, current government statistics (DfE, 2013) show that the number of children attending special schools in England has remained largely consistent over the last ten years and many parents continue to choose special schools as the preferred option for their child's education. This could be because parents see special schools as a better option for their children than mainstream school environments, where both leaders and teachers are unfamiliar with, or unsupportive of, inclusion.

The issues surrounding why parents of children who held a Statement of Special Educational Needs (SSEN) decided on the schools that they did for their children was closely linked to the issue of what in-school factors parents perceived as being important for the support of their children in their chosen schools. As a teacher I had my own views on what parents and schools felt was important in a child's education although I had no particular awareness of the views of parents whose child has a Statement of SEND. With my teaching background of course I was very curious to understand what schools did differently and what parents' views were on what these schools did. In order to understand the inclusion debate, which has been called 'the biggest challenge facing school systems throughout the world' (Ainscow, 2006:1), I needed to develop my

understanding of policy developments and research parents' views in the areas of inclusion and school choice. However, the research also aimed to allow parents of children with Statements of SEN to have their voices heard and provide a means for critically examining the workings of the structures of power which operate in educational policy and practices through the lives of participants affected by these systems (Armstrong, 2003:34). Gaining insights into 'individualistic experience' (Eiser, 1994) seemed an entirely laudable aim in the context of research that would explore aspects of inclusion. With all this in mind, I list my research questions below:

1. How do parents of children who have a SEN Statement make decisions to send their children either to mainstream or special schools?
2. What are the aspirations of these parents for their children?
3. In choosing either mainstream or a special school what in-school factors do these parents of children perceive as being important for the support of their children in those schools.

1.2 Brief background to issues of inclusion and parents' choice of schools

Approximately, twenty per cent of all school age children in England have some form of SEN, ranging from emotional problems to physical disabilities (DfE, 2013). Statutory guidance from the DfES (2001:11), *Inclusive Schooling: Children with Special Educational Needs* (SEN), promotes the concept of all children being educated in mainstream unless such an education is *incompatible* with either the '*efficient education* of other children', or the wishes of the child's parent (emphasis added); this relate to the inclusion as location concept discussed earlier. This guidance is supported by the *Special Educational Needs and Disability Act* (SENDA, 2001), which requires that mainstream schools make the *reasonable steps* necessary to allow for such inclusion which relates to the idea of an inclusive school environment. However, despite this legislation, "'What is highly problematic, is establishing clearly the meaning of 'incompatible', 'efficient education' and 'reasonable steps'" (Black-Hawkins, Florian and Rouse, 2007:9). Another key government policy document *Removing Barriers to Achievement* states that:

> All teachers should expect to teach children with special educational needs (SEN) and all schools should play their part in educating children from their local community, whatever their background or ability. (DfES, 2004: 5)

This can be interpreted as the inclusion as pedagogical practice concept with perhaps a hint of schools as inclusive environments. Legislation that gives parents a 'choice' of schools, and suggests perhaps that mainstream for all children is the ideal, puts a great

deal of responsibility on parents. Parents whose children have SEN may been seen as having even greater responsibility as there may be many more needs that they need to consider when it comes to 'choosing' a school that can effectively meet their child's needs and educate them. The use of language such as 'incompatible' and 'efficient education' further complicates the issues for both schools and parents and of course there is the overriding complication caused by the whole issue of what the concept of inclusion in education actually means. If there such confusion over the meaning of inclusion then it is hardly surprising that there are problems in achieving it. It is also unsurprising that parents may have worries and concerns about what is possible in terms of 'choice' and, what is best for their child, in terms of effective schooling. The debate over inclusion has resulted in a great deal of discourse, both nationally and globally, relating to definitions of what it actually is, the best way of achieving it and the impact of inclusion on schools in terms of pedagogical practices, school communities and, of course, students - both those with and without SEN, themselves. The role of families in school choice and education is an important one, after all as Ferguson writes:

> When families get involved in their children's education, the student's achieve more, stay in school longer and engage in school more completely. (2008:116)

With regard to children with a Statement of Special Educational Need (SEN), the 1993 Education Act (DfE, 1993) gave parents the right to express a preference for a particular school, and the Special Educational Needs Disability Act (SENDA) (DfES, 2001) enabled them to challenge schools and local authorities on the basis of discrimination. (Although parental choice of school has been at the heart of policy discourse since the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) (DfE, 1988).) The present UK coalition government's Green Paper, *Support and aspiration, a new approach to special educational needs and disability*, on SEN and disability (SEND) (DfE, 2011) was hailed by the *Times Educational Supplement* as 'the biggest shake up of SEN in 30 years' (Ward and Vaughan, 2011). The Green Paper argued that reform is required to give parents a real choice unencumbered by bureaucratic red tape and needless delays. The main argument for reform of SEN provision is that:

> Every child deserves a fair start in life, with the very best opportunity to succeed. At the moment, life chances for the approximately two million children in England who are identified with SEN or who are disabled, are disproportionately poor. (DfE, 2011:14).

The solution to the poorer life chance for these children, presented by the Green Paper, is that 'There should be real choice for parents' by 'removing any bias towards inclusion'

which 'obstructs parent choice' (DfE, 2011:51). Here the Government made an explicit connection between inclusion and parental choice.

The Green Paper (DfE, 2011) and the new legislation, the *Children and Families Act* (DfE, 2014a), raise a number of questions. First of all, the legislation and its implementation refer to choice and 'stating a preference' as if they were the same. In reality, parents might have the right of stating a preference of school, but this does not ensure that they have a 'real' choice in the final analysis. Secondly, deciding which school is 'right' for a child is more complex than a simple placement-based dichotomy between special schools and 'inclusion'. Besides the obvious mistake of associating inclusion simply with placement in mainstream schools, as if special schools are unable to fulfil the principles of inclusion, choosing a school is the result of parents' consideration of a number of related factors. Thirdly, establishing whether a school is 'right' for a child can be more a jump in the dark or a leap of faith than a rational choice based on evidence, since the evidence required relies on how the child fulfils his/her potential only once he/she is placed in the school. It is within this complex context that this research project set out to find out why and how parents choose the schools that they do.

Of the 20% of students who may be identified as having special needs at some point in their schooling there are some who will have a Statement of SEN, a formal document, resulting from a statutory assessment which is made by a LA (Local Authority), and detailing a child's learning difficulties and the help that will be given. In 2012 2.8% of children had a Statement of SEN (DfE, 2012), a figure that has remained consistent over the last 5 years, although there are considerable variations across Local Authorities. Over 53% of students with statements attend mainstream schools (DfE, 2013) in line with the statutory guidance *Inclusive schooling – children with special educational needs* (DfES, 2001:11), which stated that all children should be educated in mainstream, unless such an education is incompatible with either the 'efficient education of other children', or the wishes of the child's parent. This guidance is supported by the SENDA (DfES 2001), which requires that mainstream schools make the necessary reasonable steps to allow for inclusion. However, in reality, despite these positive legislative efforts, there are considerable difficulties and uncertainty as to whether children, who are currently educated out of the mainstream system are there because of the 'wishes of their parents' or because there being in mainstream is incompatible with the efficient education of other children. The incompatibility clause is problematic for both parents and schools and one of the pivotal aspects of the dynamic of choice, after all, who is choosing, parents or schools?

There can be little doubt that the legislation, guidance and interpretations surrounding the concept of inclusion have made the decisions surrounding school placement and choices very complicated for many families. Add to this the operation of a market economy and the pressure for schools to achieve high academic standards to survive and thrive, and it quickly becomes apparent that parental choice and school placement, for parents of children with Statements of SEN, is a labyrinth.

1.3   Categories of needs - simply needs or simply people?

At the start of this project I was keen to ensure that I got the categories or needs right; I wanted to ensure that I used BESD instead of EBD, or is that the other way round? HI instead of deaf, child with Down syndrome rather than a Down syndrome child, and the list goes on. Just as I had in my teaching, I did not want to offend or wrongly label, however as I learnt more I realised that I was entirely missing the point; it is not the labels that matter it is simply the people. Participants in the research talked to me about their children, and whilst they did refer to the categories of needs/labels that their children were given on their Statements, these labels did not in any way define them. Their children were individuals with needs and hopes and wants and the parents shared some of these with me. All of the participants had children with Statements, and it was the Statement, which gave them statutory protection and was, for all of them, a 'passport' (Pinney, 2004) to benefits, support and resources, aimed to help their children. The labels on the Statement were a means to an end, and the end was the well-being of their children, so although the labels did not define their children they did help them to procure extra support for them. One avenue of support that they opened up was a wider choice of school placements; a Statement meant that their children were eligible for special as well as mainstream schools. Of course identifying children with SEN is not a straightforward process (Florian, 2007), since children rarely fit categorical descriptions and not all SEN are disabilities and not all disabilities are SEN. Florian argues that using labels to classify some children makes them distinct and different from others; the debate on the 'dilemma of difference' (Minow, 1990, Norwich, 2008), - that is that treating people differently can stigmatise them on the basis of being different whereas as disregarding differences could stigmatise them on that basis, by not supporting their differences. In England this dilemma remains and some (Williams, 2009) have even argued that the term Special Educational Needs has outlived its usefulness. However, for now, the labels still exist, with the House of Commons Education and Skills Select Committee (HCESC, 2006), declared that the Warnock framework for identifying children with SEN was struggling to remain fit for purpose. The latest *SEND Code of Practice: 0-25 years* (DfE, 2014b) refers to four

broad areas, of need and support: communication and interaction; cognition and learning; social, emotional and mental health and sensory and/or physical needs, which differ only moderately from the previous categories (DfES, 2003).

A recent event demonstrated clearly how wrong I was to worry about labels: I was introducing a colleague, who is visually impaired, and when I asked how she would like me to introduce her, she asked me to introduce her as a disabled person and not as a person with visual impairment (VI). I had, wrongly, assumed that using visually impaired was the correct way, however, I realised, again, that it is the people that matter and not the labels. People are all different and have their own personal identities, and for people who have SEND, how much this matters, or should be labelled, varies. One person with SEND might want to be introduced with no reference to their special need or disability - they might see it as irrelevant, for example, 'I am a person'; whilst another might want to be introduced as a person with a special need, for example 'I am a person with a special need'; and another, like my colleague recently, might wish to be identified by their need, for example 'I am a disabled person'. In this research I am using SEN and SEND interchangeably, I think the point about labels is actually that we need to respect the labels that people choose for themselves and not worry too much about political correctness or semantics. It is about personal identity, which is a very personal, dynamic and unique concept. Although I acknowledge that there is debate (Riddick, 2012, Forlin and Chamber, 2011) around the current system of labelling in England and it is a contentious issue within the field of inclusion.

1.4   Entering the inclusion maze

In the first chapter I have explored the rationale and aims of the research. This has highlighted a number of areas which need to be considered when exploring issues surrounding parental choice of schools for children with statements of SEND. Issues of parental choice are closely related to the debates over inclusive education; the statutory framework for inclusion (Warnock, 2010) strengthened the rights of all children with Statements to a place in a mainstream school, albeit, within the parameters of being compatible with the efficient education of other children and wishes of the parents (DfES, 2001), as mentioned earlier, and aspects of the debate, along with its origins, are explored in this review. Educational policies and research into both pedagogical issues and inclusive schooling also needed to be explored in order that the context in which participants make their school placement decisions for their children could be fully understood.

One of the limits that I imposed on this research was focusing exclusively on parents' views rather than children and young people. Many other researchers have worked with groups that have experiences of the educational system, for example Rose and Shevlin (2004) researched how the voices of young people from marginalised groups, including those with disabilities, have been excluded in the educational decision-making processes. They argued that there was much that professionals could learn by giving such marginalised groups the chance to express their opinions. The participants in this project, families of children with statements of SEN, could be seen as a marginalised group and their views seen as an expression of those of the less powerful, although some, such as Ball (2003) and Bourdieu (1984), might argue, that as many of the participants could be seen as middle class, they were actually quite powerful. I would argue that whilst some of my participants could be seen as middle class all of them had children with Statements of SEN and it was this aspect of their lives that I was focusing on. An aspect that for many families meant that they were marginalised within both our society and the education system. I made the decision early on to focus on the parents' voices rather than those of the children and, whilst I appreciate that some would see this as further marginalisation, I was interested in the parental decision-making rather than the children's own views as ultimately it is parents that have the responsibility for their children's schooling. I do appreciate, however, that many parents would include their children's views as part of their decision making on which school. This view appears to be supported by the raft of new guidance and legislation in the area of schooling and SEN, the Children and Families Act 2014 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations 2014 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice 2014, which, at least in theory, sees the views and knowledge of parents as integral when it comes to decisions affecting their children and their schooling.

Now that I have outlined the rationale and aims of this research I shall go on to, firstly, examine the literature, then explain my methodology and methods and then to explore findings before discussing my interpretations reaching some conclusions about the issues of parental choice and school placement and making some recommendations.

2. Chapter Two – Beginning to unravel the literature

I was aware that conducting a literature review was a fundamental aspect of the research process as I needed to demonstrate my understanding of the field of study. As Hart (1998) suggests a literature review contributes many things, including: establishing the context of a topic, relating ideal and theories to applications, distinguishing what has been done before and identifying relationships between ideas and practices. There was a vast amount of literature that I could potentially review and I had to ensure that I limited myself to the areas that were most relevant to my research. Initially I undertook an online electronic search, for peer reviewed articles and books, including a range of databases such as ERIC (Education Resource Information Center) and the British Education Index and the eBook collection on EBSCO host. I searched using a range of key words, for example: parent +choice+ inclusion, this combination found over 2000 or school+ choice+ special+ education+ needs which found over 500 or families+ school+ special+ needs which found over 600. As I read more and found more I realised that I would not be able to include all of the available literature in the area in this review. I decided to focus the literature review on the issues of parental choice of school for children with SEN and this meant including the literature on inclusion and choice which strongly related to this and also literature on the choices of schools, inclusive schooling and the role of mothers in relation to school choice and SEN. This decision allowed me to focus the literature around my research questions and also explore issues that emerged during the data collection. However, as well as the literature review, I was also aware, as Armstrong (2003) suggests, that the stories of the participants would bring new perspectives on their unique experiences of school placement choices and SEN.

2.1 When to enter

Another of the limits that I needed to set when reviewing the literature was deciding when to start, I needed a defined 'beginning' and, after some initial reading I decided to define this 'beginning' as 1978. This was the year that the Warnock Report (DES, 1978) was published, the year when the term SEN came into official use. I could equally have started in 1944, when the Education 'Butler' Act made it statutory for Local Authorities to provide education for children up to age 15 regardless of ability or aptitude, the first time when all children with, what we now call, SEND, were considered as part of the education system. However, I did not choose 1944, although there is no doubt that the decision to allow all children access to education, albeit in a highly segregated manner with special

schools catering for 10 categories of 'handicap', was a very significant watershed in the history of education. Another possibility for a beginning could have been 1971, when responsibility for the education of all children with intellectual disabilities passed from the health department to the education department. Or I could have chosen to start with the 1981 Education Act, as it was at this point that parents were given the right to state a preference, as to which school their child attended. However, I chose to start a few years earlier in 1978 with the report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People, (1978), chaired by Mary Warnock. This decision was made on the grounds that much of what I had read on the issues around educating children with SEND referred back to Warnock and the recommendations made by the committee in 1978. Perhaps the most significant aspect of the 1978 report was the introduction of the term 'Special Educational Needs' and the move away from the previous categories of handicap, such as educationally subnormal and delicate, which had been the basis for special educational provision. The Warnock report suggested that 20 per cent of children would, at some stage in their schooling, experience difficulties that could be seen as SEN and that there needed to common educational goals which all children, irrespective of their abilities, should aim for. Common educational goals for all children certainly sounds a lot like educational inclusion. This redefining of the education of 'Handicapped Children and Young People' represented an important watershed in educational thinking and is still the dominant discourse, over 35 years on, which is why I considered it to be a fitting beginning.

2.2   Where to enter

As well as deciding the limits of when to begin, there was also the limit in terms of where, geographically, to locate my research, as I had found that there was a huge literature on the subject of SEND, parental choice of school placement and of course inclusion across many different countries. I made the decision to try and include especially relevant studies from across the globe as, from my reading, it was apparent that although education systems can differ greatly, the issues around SEND, parental choice and inclusion had parallels across countries and cultures. Although, of course, it must be noted that the percentage of 'children formally assessed as having SEN' varies greatly across just one continent, Europe, as do the definitions of SEN, with some countries having only one or two categories and others ten or more (Meijer, Soriano and Watkins, 2003). A recent EC report (2013) puts the figures of students identified as having SEND in Sweden at 1. 5 percent whereas in Iceland it was nearly 24 percent), these figures do not reflect actual differences in the incidence of SEND in these countries and there is 'a

common trend in all countries to move towards the inclusion of these pupils into mainstream schools' (Brusling and Pepin, 2003:198), although some countries are further down this road than others. As well as a geographic location, I also needed to locate the study within a discipline, as the issue of school choice has been debated in many disciplines, including philosophy, economics and psychology, I felt that with my own background, and with the time constraints, I would locate my work within the discipline of educational research, although I have occasionally forayed into areas such as philosophy and psychology. I also decided early on to include quantitative as well as qualitative studies in my analysis, as I realised that both kinds of studies, as well as the mixed methods examples, could provide useful insights into the issues. My own data collection used mixed methods research and therefore it seemed logical to ensure that I considered previous work that used qualitative and/or quantitative methods.

2.3   Beginning with Warnock's report

As stated earlier, I decided to begin with the Warnock Review of 1978 or, to use the pre Warnock terminology, the review of the education of 'children handicapped by disabilities of body or mind'. In the early 1970s the responsibility for those children known as severely handicapped was transferred from the Department for Health to the Department for Education (Education (Handicapped Children) Act, 1970) and it was Thatcher, as Secretary of State for Education and Science, in 1973 who announced the appointment of a committee with the following remit:

> To review educational provision in England, Scotland and Wales for children and young people handicapped by disabilities of body or mind, taking account of the medical aspects of their needs, together with arrangements to prepare them for entry into employment; to consider the most effective use of resources for these purposes; and to make recommendations. (DES, 1978:1)

The subsequent report became known as one of the most influential documents since the 1944 Education Act (Barton, 1986) and formed the basis of the 1981 Education Act. The Warnock Report (19780 recommended that children should, wherever possible, be educated together and that there should be close links between special and mainstream schools. Following the 1981 Act there was a move towards integrating children with a range of 'learning difficulties' into mainstream classrooms. Although there have been many criticisms made of the report, both at the time (Lewis and Vulliamy, 1980), and since (Barton, 2005), there is no doubt that the Warnock report significantly challenged the 'otherness' of special needs education and stimulated a huge increase in the writing and research of special needs and mainstream education, (Bowe, Ball and Gold, 1992,

Kalambouka, Farrell, Dyson, Kaplan, 2005, Norwich, 2014a). Although the Warnock report (1978) was not advocating inclusion, the legislation to support the integration of the 'one in five' children, identified by the Warnock Report, into mainstream schools was, undoubtedly a significant step in the history of SEN. Education policy following the Warnock Report was based on the idea that mainstream schooling was the way to ensure equality of educational opportunity (Lloyd, 2000), at the time this was for many an innovative concept. Warnock's 1978 recommendations bought the SEND agenda into the arena of mainstream schooling and was one of the foundations of the concept of inclusive education. Over thirty years, on the Green Paper, *Suport and Aspiration* (DfE, 2011:51) referred to a 'bias towards inclusion' obstructing parental choice, this link between inclusion and parental choice was at the heart of this research. The concept of educational inclusion clearly relates to parental choice and would need to be explored as part of the literature review if I was to understand issues of parental choice and schooling for students with SEND.

2.4   Defining this concept of inclusion(s) – or inclusion/confusion

Reviewing educational inclusion led me firstly to the concept of integration; Lloyd (2000) argued that integration actually became translated, through policy documents, into inclusion over the last two decades of the twentieth century. Other authors, (Vislie, 2003), would argue that it was the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) that first brought the term inclusion into the fore, whereas Slee (1993) and Uditsky (1993), were using it prior to this. This shift in the language, from integration to inclusion, could be seen as imperceptible, especially with the continuing confusion over both terms. Within the literature there are many definitions of both terms, but especially inclusion, I would suggest that there is still none that is universally accepted. Ainscow (1995) defined integration as implying *additional* arrangements within a school system that remains as it was whereas he positions inclusive education as the *restructuring* of a school in order to meet the needs of all children.

2.4.1   Two paradigms

This difference between the two words can be seen in terms of the competition between two paradigms within the field of (special) education (Ainscow, 1994). The first paradigm is the deficit model which sees SEND as something lacking within the individual, a personal tragedy as Oliver (1996) put it, whereas the second paradigm, the social model or organisational paradigm (Dyson and Milward, 2000) sees SEN as a combination of

differences between children and a failure of the structures of schooling to adequately respond to the needs of all children. The first paradigm leads to reform by extending special education into mainstream classrooms, perhaps explaining the exponential rise in Teaching Assistants over the last 15 years (Webster and Blatchford, 2014)? Whereas the second paradigm is about reforming the practice and ethos of mainstream schools to make them more flexible and able to meet the needs of all children. Vislie (1995) argued that moving towards integration based on the first paradigm would be bound for failure as getting mainstream schools to accept responsibility for the education of all children, whilst suggesting that those with SEN are deficit in some way, is a contradiction. Whereas Hodkinson (2010) maintained that it was the problems of integration, together with the Salamanca Statement, that led to the emergence of inclusive education in England. Lipsky and Gartner (1999:21) make the point that inclusion is more than just a reform of a system which has not done very well, that is the special education system. They believe that it is also about restructuring the education system to meet the needs of a changing post-industrial society, a society that needs a more collaborative and flexible education system, 'Inclusive education is not merely a characteristic of a democratic society, it is essential to it.' Slee (2014) also supports this notion, making the contention that is a *precondition* of a democratic education. Devecchi (2013) suggests that inclusion is actually no longer the issue and Florian (2014) argues that special education must adapt in response to concerns about what it means to educate students identified as having SEND in the 21st century. As I was starting to unravel the origins of the concept, the overlap between educational inclusion and societal inclusion began to emerge.

2.4.2   Moving from integration towards inclusion

I would argue that educational integration as advocated by the Warnock Report evolved over time and became educational inclusion. In order to fully understand the vocabulary I searched the literature for a definition of inclusion. This, however, proved to be somewhat elusive. There were many definitions of what the word meant and these seemed to have changed over time and there was also an interweaving of two terms: educational inclusion and social inclusion. The definitions were explored with a view to developing an understanding of inclusion in relation to the issues of parental choice and schooling in England. Avramidis and Norwich (2002:131) outline how the term inclusion superseded integration in terms of special education, as a 'more radical term' based within the discourse of human rights. This view is supported by the UNESCO report (2005) which defined inclusion as:

A process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular education system to educate all children. (2005: 13)

The UNESCO definition refers to the diversity of all learners, not just those with SEND, and a reference to 'regular' education as opposed to special or irregular education (Slee, 2010). This definition focuses clearly on educational inclusion and diversity across learners rather than just those with SEND, thus focusing on the second of the two paradigms mentioned earlier; and it can be related to the interpretations of educational inclusion as pedagogical practice and an inclusive school environment. Alongside the international view there was also the national view of educational inclusion, which was also based on the second paradigm, and had the support of the DfEE, which funded its distribution across schools and Local Authorities across the country; this was the *Index for Inclusion* (Booth, Ainscow, Black-Hawkins, Vaughan and Shaw, 2000). The Index was designed to guide schools through a process of inclusive development. It suggested that inclusion in education involved many things, including valuing staff and students equally, increasing participation and reducing exclusion and barriers to learning.

However, despite the apparent national and international views given above, a review of the literature found many definitions of inclusion; some referred to location and possibly sounded more like integration, whereas others took a more comprehensive approach based on the second paradigm. The table below outlines some of the differing definitions of inclusion.

Table 2.1 - A range of definitions of inclusive education

Inclusion can initially be understood as a move towards extending the scope of 'ordinary' schools so that they can 'include' a greater diversity of children. It is a term which is helping to internationalise at least part of the language of special education, replacing terms such as 'integration, in: the UK and 'mainstreaming, in: the US. (Clark, Dyson and Milward, 1995: v)	Education in an ordinary class, in a neighbourhood school which a child would normally attend, with support as needed by the individual. (Mittler, 1995: 105).
By inclusion, we mean that pupils with SEN should, wherever possible receive their education in a mainstream school, but also that they should join fully with their peers in the curriculum and life of the school . . . . But separate provision may be necessary on occasions for specific purposes. (DfEE	Inclusion as an approach to education embodying particular values…..concerned with all learners and with overcoming barriers to all forms of marginalisation, exclusion and underachievement (Ainscow, Booth and Dyson, 2006: 5)

1997: 44)	
Inclusion implies a restructuring of mainstream schooling that every school can accommodate every child irrespective of disability ('accommodation' rather than 'assimilation') and ensures that all learners belong to a community. (Avramidis and Norwich 2002:131)	Inclusive schools deliver a curriculum to students through organisational arrangements that are different from those used in schools that exclude some students from their classrooms. These two approaches to education derive from different paradigms, each of which defines students and defines teacher responsibilities in different ways. … An inclusive school defines 'differentness' as an ordinary part of human experience, to be valued and organised for. (Ballard, 1995:1)

2.4.3 No clear definition

An EPPI Centre review (2002:7) considered the issue of defining inclusion and commented on three perspectives, firstly responding 'simultaneously to students who all differ from each other…some of which pose particular challenges to the school; secondly it is more than just the presence of students, it is about maximising participation; and thirdly, inclusion is a process which can be shaped by school-level action. However despite all the rhetoric, there was no one definition that I found to be universally accepted, a view echoed by the House of Commons Committee on Education and Skills (HCESC, 2006), which reported that there was 'considerable confusion' over the term inclusion and stated that the government's definition needed to be clarified. As well as the problems with the definition however the Committee also reported that 'At the very least there is considerable confusion over the Government's position on inclusion and they must take responsibility for this' (HCESC, 2006:24). The Lamb inquiry (DCSF, 2009), which reviewed parental confidence in the special educational needs system, recommended a 'radical overhaul' of the system however, with New Labour's defeat at the 2010 election, it was left to the Coalition Government to implement the Lamb recommendations. They published the Green Paper, (2011), which advocated a series of changes to the SEN system, it clearly stated that:

> Every child deserves a fair start in life, with the very best opportunity to succeed. Currently, life chances for the approximately two million children and young people in England who are identified as having a Special Educational Need (SEN), or who are disabled, are disproportionately poor. (DfE, 2011:14).

Indeed the Green paper referred to a 'bias towards inclusion' (2011:5), a claim that remains both unsubstantiated and challenged (Runswick-Cole, 2011), especially when the definitions of inclusion continue to be either absent or confused. The literature outlining the confusion in the arena of SEND continued to emerge. The number of different

definitions are not helpful but no doubt they reflect the range of views that are held about inclusion. Reviewing the literature I felt that it would be more accurate, albeit not necessarily helpful, to talk about the concept of inclusion**s** rather than inclusion as suggested by Dyson (1999) and thus I moved on from my search for a 'pristine definition' (Slee, 2013:896). I hoped that exploring the literature on legislation, in relation to educational inclusion and parental choice of schools, which in England began with the marketization of the education market under the Conservatives in the 1980s, would help me to clear up some of the confusion around the definition of inclusion and allow me to explore the issues that parents faced in the area of school choice.

2.5   Legislating for school choice and the rhetoric of educational inclusion

An increase in school choice for families became widespread in the 1980s. Many countries which had free compulsory schooling, from Australia and New Zealand to the Netherlands and Denmark (Hirsch, 1994) and the UK and the USA, introduced legislation that allowed parents to 'pick' a school of their choice. Hirsch (1997) argued that there were several reasons behind this change to the education systems; firstly a desire to preserve pluralism and religious freedom; secondly, to allow for greater competition and therefore sensitivity to the needs of the consumer; and lastly, on a less philosophical note, parents had become fussier as more of them became educated. In terms of my research project the second and third points Hirsch made could both be considered relevant. Olssen described the formation of the consumer in the neo-liberal school choice market as '*an individual who is an enterprising and competitive entrepreneur'* (1996:340). Vincent, Braun and Ball (2010) described such consumers (parents) as strategic, informed, rational and active choosers of childcare and schools. This idea of parents as consumers 'choosing schools' became developed in England over the 1980s and 1990s, with New Labour's education policy simply following on from the Conservative's education policy, as a local manifestation of a global policy paradigm (Ball, 1999). Several papers (for example: ESCR ref: R000023407; Bowe, Ball and Gewirtz*,* 1993, 1994, Barton, 1997, Gorard, Taylor and Fitz, 2003, Bernal, 2005, Phadraig, 2010) emerged that considered the impact of a choice system on 'consumers', that is, the parents or families involved in the choice making and on the 'service providers', that is, schools. Some studies, looked specifically at the 'education market' in relation to SEN, whilst others, have focused more broadly on the issues of parental choice and market forces. This is the literature that I will review in the coming sections.

In England it was the 1981 Education Act which granted the majority of parents the right to express a preference as to which school they would like their child to attend, however

parents of children with Statements were excluded from the provision. The 1981 Education Act shifted the boundaries for children with special needs and their education The Act specified that children with SEN were to be educated in mainstream schools, subject to the following certain conditions: 1) the children received the provision required; 2) the education of other students was not disrupted; 3) the parents supported it; and 4) efficient use was made of resources. This Act was the first time that special needs legislation included a broad concept of civil rights and recognition of the rights of parents (Russell, 1986). Assessing the impact of the Warnock reforms, Goacher, Evans, Welton and Wedell (1988) suggested that the balance of power remained with professionals rather than with parents, however, this balance was set to be disrupted as the marketization of education continued.

Evans and Vincent (1997) argued that it was the 1998 Education Reform Act (ERA) and the 1993 Education Act that set up an education system in which parents saw schooling as a commodity. Riddell, Duffield and Brown (1994) suggested that Warnock's (1978) emphasis on a partnership with parents, was replaced by this later legislation with the concept of parents as '*critical consumers*'. The 1988 Act introduced the National Curriculum, 10 subjects, each with a programme of study and tests at set intervals throughout the years of schooling.The Act was intended to establish a new set of educational and social values, and Baker, the Secretary of State for Education at the time said the Act was 'about enhancing the life chances of young people. ….It is about competition, choice and freedom…' (Riddell, Duffield, Brown, 1994:14). This juxtaposition of freedom and equality on the one hand and choice and market forces on the other has led to understandable tensions in the system (Rouse and Florian, 1997). Tensions that mean students with SEND are especially vulnerable as schools compete with each other in the market-place. For parents whose children had SEN statements it was the 1993 Education Act that eventually gave them the right that other parents already had, to express a preference. Goacher *et al.* (1998) suggest that this might be because these parents, whose children differ from the 'norm', were seen as less effective consumers. Although, equally, it could be because children with SEN were seen by some schools as lowering outputs in the new educational market. Following on from ERA there was a growing emphasis on market forces in education, with schools competing against one another, weakened local authority power, in terms of school admissions, and increased parental choice. It is possible to suggest that the shift towards allowing parents more choice has continued with the passing of the 2011 Education Act, which allows parents to set up their own 'free' schools.

Alongside carrying on with the marketization, consumerism and managerialism within education, the new 'New' Labour government also passed a plethora of legislation and guidance supporting their commitment to the international movement towards inclusive education. They began, in 1997, with the publication of the Green Paper, *Excellence for all children: meeting special educational needs* (DfEE, 1997). While the Green Paper was seen as radical by some, others, such as Clough and Corbett (2000:9), felt that it did not go far enough as it only really dealt with the issue of educational inclusion as location. The Green Paper was followed by the *Programme for action* (DfEE, 1998) and then the revised curriculum, *Curriculum 2000* (DfEE, 1999), which was based on three inclusionary principles: setting suitable learning challenges; responding to pupils' diverse learning needs and overcoming potential barriers to learning and assessment for individuals and groups of pupils. Then in 2001, there was the passing of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA, DfES, 2001a), which strengthened the rights of children with SEN to access mainstream schooling; educational institutions were, for the first time, unable to refuse children access to mainstream placements. SENDA (DfE, 2001a) also specified that teachers had to make 'reasonable adjustments' to lessons to enable children with SEND to learn and be included in mainstream classrooms. In the same year the Code of Practice was published (DfES, 2001b), which required all teachers, despite the fact that many of them felt that they were not trained to do so, to identify and meet the needs of all SEND children in mainstream schools. This was followed by the *Removing barriers to achievement strategy* (DfES, 2004) which set out the New Labour government's vision for the education of children with SEND by affirming their commitment to inclusion and, of course, the *Every child matters* initiative (DfES, 2003). New Labour passed a plethora of legislation and guidance relating to educational inclusion, in relation to both location and pedagogical practice, Hodkinson (2012:5) describes the government, elected in 1997, as coming in on 'a tidal wave of rhetoric and commitment to reform the manner in which children labelled as SEND were educated.' Others see it differently, Barton (2003) suggests that the twin-track system, that is maintaining special schools whilst at the same time claiming a commitment to educational inclusion (DfEE, 1997) is contradictory and a dual policy.

This question of whether an inclusive education system should mean, effective and appropriate, *mainstream* schooling for all remains contentious. I believe that *high quality* and *appropriate* schooling for each child, whether in a mainstream or special school or in a specialist unit, should be the key principle rather than the issue of location. Some researchers, such as Ravet (2011), have argued that the UK does not have a coherent

inclusion discourse but rather that there are two, contradictory, perspectives that have dominated writing about inclusion. She calls the first of these a 'rights-based' perspective – other names have also been used to describe this position, for example Fuchs and Fuchs (1992) called this the abolitionist stance - which demands an end to segregation in our schools and mainstream schooling for all, as the route to inclusion. The second is the 'needs based' approach - Fuchs and Fuchs called this the conservationist stance - which suggests that a range of schools and educational provision is the best way to meet the needs of learners with SEND. Some research (e.g. Lindsay, 2007, Cole, 2005) has highlighted the exclusion that can arise from mainstream schooling. Cole (2005: 342) writes about the 'risks' involved in an educational system, for example the risks, for students attending mainstream schools, of bullying and isolation or the risks, for schools, of being 'inclusive' when they are judged on performance indicators that may be jeopardised. She suggests that society ought to be willing to take more positive risks, such as committing themselves 'to the challenge of inclusion; to commit ourselves to 'good faith and effort' in the cause of equity and social justice'. This dichotomy of views on the issue of location, and the links made to equity and social justice, can, in many ways, be seen as adding to the confusion over educational inclusion and as another of the dilemmas perpetuated by legislation that families and schools have to negotiate. Dyson (2001) argued that there was a fundamental contradiction in the education system in England between an intention to treat all learners as essentially the same and, an equal and opposite intention to treat them all as different. New Labour's policies at the turn of the century could also be seen as fundamentally contradictory as they continued with the raising of educational standards agenda of the previous administrations and yet also inundated schools with guidance and legislation, apparently designed to bring about an inclusive education system. However the difficulties and dilemmas of school choice for families and children with special needs continued.

There were some examples of good practice in inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream and collaboration between special and mainstream as Ainscow Farrell, Tweddle, and Malki, (1999) reported but this went alongside confusion over the some of the practicalities. Writing eight years later Ainscow (2007) suggested that although there had been more interest in inclusive education, there was still confusion about what that actually meant; these are comments that have been echoed by others, including Florian, (2007) and Black-Hawkins *et al.* (2007) who agreed that the legislation and guidance from the government had done little to clear up the confusion and ambiguity surrounding the inclusion issue. They highlighted the language used in the *Inclusive Schooling:*

Children with Special Educational Needs (DfES, 2001) guidance, a document that promotes the idea that all children should receive mainstream schooling, unless such education is incompatible with the 'efficient education of other children' or the wishes of their parents. No indication was given of what the term 'efficient education' actually meant or what it might look like and there were no ethical qualms about making the rights of the minority of possibly vulnerable children secondary to the needs of the majority. This highlights another of the, many, tensions inbuilt into the inclusive education system in England and can be seen as a contributory factor to the lack of successful wholesale implementation of educational inclusion in England. Besides the issues of location and educational inclusion there are also fundamental tensions brought about by the increased marketization of English schools; one of which is around schools and teachers trying to meet the demands of the standards agenda and educational inclusion and the other is for families searching for schools that fit the needs of their children - what one might call searching for inclusion. Ainscow (2007:137) suggested that the current system of education 'forces parents to choose between ensuring that their child's needs are met (which often implies special school placement) and ensuring that they have the same rights and opportunities as other children (which…implies mainstream).' Although the inclusion debate is not necessarily an area that many parents engage with, the consequences of introducing aspects of inclusion into the English education system has meant that many parents are left with difficult decisions about which schools might work best for their children in the contentious area of the education market. The changes in legislation in favour of a market system and the promotion, at least in theory, of an inclusive education system, have brought about the current situation where parents of children with statements of SEN, at least in theory, can 'choose' a school and expect to find schools to be welcoming and inclusive; however, in reality there are many discrepancies and inequities within the system.

Despite having the right to choose and the apparent 'bias' towards inclusion (DfE, 2011), many parents of children with special needs opt to send them to special schools and government figures (DfE, 2013) show that the number of special school places has remained fairly consistent over the last 10 years, although some figures suggest a small but steady rise in special school places (Norwich, 2014b). As mentioned previously the percentage of 'children formally assessed as having SEN' varies across European countries along with the definitions of SEND (Meijer, Soriano and Watkins, 2003). However, there is a common trend towards pupils with SEND being educated in mainstream schools (Brusling and Pepin, 2003) with some countries, such as Norway and Italy, having a one track system with almost no special schools. In England, despite national laws, such as

the Equality Act, 2010, and both European Union and international declarations encouraging inclusion, (UNESCO Salamanca Statement - 1994 and Key Principles for Promoting Quality in Inclusive Education - 2009), children with SEND are often still educated away from their local communities, which is not always an easily defined concept. In 2013, 53 percent of children with statements of SEND were in mainstream education, a slight decline from the previous year's figure of 53.7 percent (DfE, 2013). Possible explanations for this could be that, there is no 'bias towards inclusion' (DfE, 2011), and some parents find it a real struggle to get their children into schools in their local communities, whereas others perhaps do not feel that schools in their local communities can meet their child's needs. A study of parents of children with SEN in Ireland found that they spent a great deal of energy and resources trying to get their children into their local mainstream school (Kenny, Shevlin, Noonan-Walsh and McNeela, 2005). This next part of the review will focus on how parents choose schools within the 'education market', what they want from schools, the restrictions and opportunities surrounding their 'choices', including the role of schools; and I shall also reflect on the particular role that mothers play within the school choice system.

2.6   Different types of schooling

2.6.1   Special schools

As well as an understanding of the literature relating to the key SEND covered in the research, I also felt that it was important to consider literature on the different types of schooling that parents in the study referred to as, again, it might help with the answers to the research questions. As mentioned earlier, figures (DfE, 2013) show that the percentage of students with Statements in special schools has remained fairly consistent over the last 5 years: 2009 – 36.3 per cent, 2010- 37.2 per cent, 2011- 37.6 per cent, 2012- 37.2 per cent and 2013- 35.9 per cent. (The most recent dip could perhaps be explained by the rising percentage of students in academies/free schools, which has gone up from 1.1 per cent in 2009 to 12.5 per cent in 2013). The distribution of school types attended by students with Statements was markedly different from those without Statements. Of all the students with Statements of Special Educational Needs in 2013, 39.6 per cent attended maintained special schools (including general hospital schools and special academies), 26.9 per cent attended state-funded secondary schools, 26.0 per cent attended state-funded primary schools, 4.9 per cent attended independent schools and 1.8 per cent attended non-maintained special schools. The remaining pupils (around 0.8 per cent) attended pupil referral units or maintained nursery schools. The percentage of children with EBD Statements in special schools stands at 13.5 per cent, (12,740

students), slightly lower than the figure in 2009, which was 14.7 per cent, (12,920 students).

It is apparent from these figures that special schools remain very much part of the education system and that parents, in the education market place, are making decisions, or at least expressing a preference, to send their children to them. The Select Committee Report (2006) highlighted that ASD and EBD were two of the growing areas of SEN and both the *Excellence for all children* guidance and the *Code of Practice* ((DfEE, 1997 and DfES, 2001) contained sections on the education of children with EBD suggesting that there will always be a need for some special school provision for some children with EBD. Parents are understandably divided on this issue and although many of them are in favour of inclusion, they would not wish to see their child's special school closed, unless they could be convinced that he or she could be fully supported in a mainstream setting (Farrell, 1997). Evans and Lunt (2002) found in their research that mainstream schools were reluctant to admit children with EBD. These findings were supported by Avramidis and Norwich (2002), who reviewed the international research on teachers' attitudes towards integration/inclusion, they found that attitudes were most strongly influenced by the type of SEN and also the availability of support. They found that generally teachers were more positive towards the integration of children with physical and sensory difficulties than those with learning or emotional behavioural difficulties. Farrell and Tskalidou (1999) found that the ratio of children with EBD admitted to special schools, was 6 boys to every 1 girl.

Following on from the Select Committee findings (2006), which highlighted a sense of frustration for parents of children with SEND, especially those whose children had ASD, Parsons *et al.* (2009) researched parents' views on the education of their children with SEND, or 'learning difficulties and disabilities' (LDD) as they called it. Their national survey results, which were then analysed separately for parents of children with LDD, of which over half had Statements, suggests that many had had positive experiences, perhaps somewhat surprisingly in light of the aforementioned Select Committee findings. They did find that there was room for improvement, and that the parents that were the least satisfied were those whose children had 'psychosocial issues' – which they interpreted to mean, EBD, ASD and mental health issues. They also reported that the most satisfied parents were those whose children attended special schools. These parents were satisfied with school support and felt that legislation had had a positive impact. Farrell and Polat (2003) examined the long term impact of residential special school provision for a group of students with EBD and found that they were generally

positive. The students felt that the schools had helped them overcome learning and behavioural difficulties although some of them did feel that they could have been helped more after leaving the school.

2.6.2 Elective home education

One of the choices that some parents of children with a Statement of SEN make is elective home education (EHE). EHE of children with or without SEN is an area that is under researched; parents have a right to educate their children at home, under the Education Act 1996, should they choose to do so. Estimates of the number of children that are EHE range from 20 000 to 80 000 (Badman, 2009) and yet their views have been given little attention despite the fact that they could be seen as an indicator of a system of inclusive education that is failing families and children with SEN. Arora (2006) looked at the elective home education of children in one Local Education Authority, and she found that often parents had taken their children out of school because of bullying or the child's unhappiness. Nearly half of the children in her sample had SEN and parents had withdrawn them from school because they felt that their SEN were not being well catered for. In their research on parents' views on home educating their children with SEND, Parsons and Lewis (2010) found that the majority of the children had been in mainstream education when the decision to home educate was taken and also that 48 per cent of them were described as having ASD. The only way that parents in their study felt able to help their children achieve their potential was by removing them from school, 'often after serious concerns about their children's health and happiness'. Hurlbutt, (2011:247), researching home schooling of children with ASD in the USA, found that parents were turning to home schooling as the best option for their families. The parents were not negative about the school system but felt that it was just 'not the best fit for their child'; some parents felt that in schools their children either fell behind as they were educated with students with more severe needs or equally were left in general classrooms where teachers did not have the knowledge they needed about their needs. One of the themes that she explored in her research was that parents who taught their children at home were very knowledgeable about ASD and they demonstrated advanced knowledge about many aspects of their child's difficulties. Another theme that emerged related to the way in which the parents who home schooled felt that that they had found effective 'treatment plans' for their children and that schools had been either unwilling or unable to do so.

2.6.3 Mainstream schools

Government statistics (DfE, 2013) show that the majority of children with Statements of SEN attend mainstream schools. Does this suggest that inclusion is working in practice? In their survey Croll and Moses (2000) found that teachers in mainstream schools felt strongly that special schools were essential for a minority of children, though their main concerns were about pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Casey, Davies, Kalambouka, Nelson, and Boyle (2006) found that on average there was a positive effect of mainstream schooling on the aspirations of students with MLD or EBD, with benefits more likely where parents had higher status jobs. If students attended a mainstream school they had higher aspirations if their parents were educated, which was no different really to SEN students without a Statement in mainstream. Ellins and Porter (2005) found a difference in the attitudes towards SEN learners between teachers across different departments. Science departments were more negative in their attitudes than other departments and the teachers of core subjects were more negative than other subjects. Perhaps teachers of core subjects feel more pressure to achieve higher standards and this affects their views on inclusion as they may regard children with SEND as having a negative impact of their results? They felt that more training in awareness of SEN, trained Teaching Assistants, and a higher profile for SEN, led by senior leaders, would all help. In terms of parents views on mainstream, Whitaker (2007) highlighted that respondents to his survey, on parents of children with ASD, were concerned about how well mainstream schools dealt with promoting social development and relationships, and some were concerned about the schools' lack of flexibility. Batten *et al.* (2006) found that although the number of children with ASD in schools had risen, facilitating their learning and participation was not something that was understood by many schools. According to the National Autistic Society (NAS) figures, 27 per cent of children with autism have been excluded from school, compared with 4 per cent of children without autism (Bancroft, Batten, Lambert and Madders, 2012). Norwich's study, (2008) about a placement dilemma relating to students with severe disabilities across three countries raised some interesting points. The participants (educational professionals and administrators) felt that those with moderate SEN/disabilities could be educated in regular classes but that it would be harder for children with severe disabilities. Some of the issues raised by participants across different countries were about poor teacher attitudes to inclusion or noisy classrooms; the one issue that was raised across all participants related to severe behaviour difficulties being harmful in ordinary classrooms. This question of where to place students with severe disabilities, in mainstream or special schools, is one of the most challenging and the issue of location is one way of framing the inclusion debate.

Ainscow (2007) argued that one way forward in terms of inclusion was for increased collaboration between special and mainstream schools, as this would allow the skills and values of special schools to be shared with the mainstream, thus increasing the capacity of mainstream schools and developing a more inclusive education system. Although I had considered the definitions and concepts of inclusions I also felt that an understanding of the literature on what an inclusive school would look like, along with the data from parents', would enable me to make more informed recommendations about future practice with regards to educational inclusion so this next section explores the issues around inclusive schools.

2.7   How do parents make school placement choices?
2.7.1   Choices, decisions

Before moving any further I needed to consider what was meant by the concept of parental choice. Giddens (1995) asserted that, choice is a medium of both power and stratification, and in some ways this is supported by Schneider, Marschall, Teske, Roch (1998) who found that parents from different racial and different social economic backgrounds regarded different school attributes as important. Their study suggested that parents of lower socio-economic status, and those identified as ethnic minorities, wanted something different in a school from what their white or well educated counterparts wanted. However they all made choices, if choice is defined as a model with three stages (David, Davies, Edwards, Reay, Standing, 1997): Stage 1) possibilities are identified and separated out; Stage 2) information about each is acquired and evaluated against previously held criteria; and Stage 3) this rational appraisal leads to the selection of one option as the 'choice'. Although of course everyone is making their choice in different contexts, David *et al.* highlight how a single parent, living on benefits on a council house, reliant on public transport will have significantly different 'possibilities', in terms of school choices, than a two-parent, dual-income family, with their own car, living next door. Some thinkers, such as Bourdieu, have been very critical of a model of human behaviour which suggests that people are intrinsically rational and calculating (Jenkins, 1992). In many ways I agree that people can be both rational and calculating in their choice making given the right circumstances. For instance as a means to an end, as a route to getting the school place they feel is right for their child and yet, at the same time, operate within a given *habitus* as Bourdieu would have us believe.

However, this concept of making choices within particular contexts is undoubtedly key in terms of defining choice as Bowe *et al.* (1994) argued; research needs to ensure that it maintains the context in which families make choices. Different contexts can affect choice, as some contexts may mean that some choices are unavailable to some because of their situation. For example a single parent in full time employment would have different choices to a two-parent family in which one parent stayed at home. Gewirtz *et al.* (1995) asserted that in different class and cultural contexts, choice had different meanings and they felt that families in their study were disadvantaged or privileged according to the values which informed their decisions about school choices. In their work on children and choice, Reay and Lucey (2000) highlighted that some of the key literature on parental choice (Whitty, Edwards and Gewirtz, 1993, Gewirtz *et al.* 1995, Ball *et al.* 1996, Vincent, 1996b) emphasised the impact of factors such as class, race and gender when it came to parents making choices about schools. Bagley and Woods (1998) and Bagley, Woods and Woods (2001) in their work in the area of school choice for parents of children with SEN, found that there were a number of influences on these parents, which included their child's SEN, nearness/convenience for travel, child's own preference. If choice can be influenced by many factors and is always made in a particular context, then for parents of children with statements of SEN, their child's SEN can be seen as one more variable in the mix of race, class gender. Or, alternatively should the SEND be seen as an overriding variable that impacts on all others and distorts the choice making process. Albeit it is a variable made up of many factors, depending on the age of the child, their particular needs and the severity and impact of those needs. Butler and van Zanten (2007), in their review of school choice in Europe, argued that decision-making would be a more relevant concept than parental choice, as not everyone has the possibility to choose but decisions can be made by all. I agree with the idea that the term 'choice' can imply a level of freedom that simply is not felt by many parents of children with Statements when it comes to school placement (and no doubt many other aspects of their lives). I shall continue to use both terms however, as they both appear in the literature, albeit with the proviso that the choice many of these parents have is a very limited one.

This concept of 'choice' has been integral to many research studies and of course is paramount in the recent legislative changes to SEND. In her study of parents' attitudes towards inclusion Runswick-Cole (2008:177) suggested that there was a typology of parental school choices. She summarised these into three categories: 1) parents who accepted nothing but mainstream schooling; 2) parents who are committed to mainstream schooling but then later change their minds; and 3) parents who do not consider mainstream and want special schooling. She used a social model analysis and

theorised that parents who wanted mainstream schooling tended towards a social model of disability, compared to those who wanted special schooling who tended towards a medical model. However, Runswick-Cole (2008) does acknowledge that this is a very simple analysis and that for parents of children with SEN, choosing a school is very complex process. Runswick-Cole's work may be another indication that, in the search for a definition of choice in terms of school placement, there is no such thing; parents/families are all individual, living in different contexts, with different beliefs- some rational others perhaps not, different experiences, living in different locations, different social networks - in fact there are too many differences to form any kind of concept of 'choice' that could apply to them all.

This concept of choice has many facets. Parsons and Lewis (2010:82) outlined some of these in their work with home educators whose children had SEN or disabilities. They suggested that 'one difficulty with a consumer driven ethos in educational provision is the inequity it can create by some parents being able to exercise their right to choose through engaging with the process and others not willing or able to do so. A second difficulty lies in the assumption that deciding where and how to educate children, especially those with SEN or disabilities is a real choice for parents.' These ideas of 'real choice' and inequity, with some parents being able to engage with and others not, are at the heart of the debate in terms of parental choice of schools. While some studies (Barton, 1997; Parsons and Lewis, 2010) suggest that the idea of 'choice' is a myth for many parents who lack the social capital to exercise such a 'choice', others (Gorard *et al.*, 2003) suggest that any 'choices', exercised or otherwise, do not actually matter when it comes to any impact on social stratification or fairness. In some ways what Gorard *et al.* claim is reassuring and yet at the same it there is little doubt that the issue of choice in the education market is a contentious and confusing one for many parents. Vincent *et al.* in their work on local care and school settings claimed that choice was an inadequate concept has it is a phenomenon that has multiple meanings. Perhaps they summarised the whole issue most succinctly however, when they wrote that:

> Choice could be better understood as a signifier for a composite of fears, aspirations, contingencies and constraints, norms, social relations, and routines and 'obviousnesses' that are involved in the relations between families and ..schools. (2010:295)

2.7.2   What are the choices based on?

When looking at how parents make school placement choices several studies were reviewed. Some specifically looked at parents of children with SEN, and no studies were found that just looked specifically at the choices for parents who have children with

statements of SEND. Many of the studies reviewed also focused on specific SEN, for example Whitaker's 2007 study on children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or Palmer, Fuller, Arora and Nelson, (2001) writing about the inclusion of students with severe disabilities. This contrasted with my research in which participants had children with a range of SEN Statements. One of the differences, in terms of school placement decisions for families where children have a Statement is the dilemma of mainstream versus special schooling, or Barton's (2003) 'twin track', this can be seen as one part of the composite outlined by Gorard *et al.* (2003) and as one part, location, of the inclusion debate. Elkins, van Kraayenoord and Jobling (2003) make the point that many parents are concerned about the capacity of mainstream schools to provide a relevant and effective education for children with SEN. To parents of children with SEN the issue of inclusion is much more personal and subjective than ideological. De Boer, Pijl and Minnaert (2010) reviewed the literature on parents' attitudes towards inclusive education. They found that, contrary to previous claims that parents of children with special needs were a key factor in the push for inclusion, their results indicated that whilst parents in general held neutral to positive views on inclusion, parents of children with special needs were less likely to be positive about inclusion and expressed concerns about their children's emotional well-being. They theorised that the reason that parents of children with special needs were more likely to be critical of inclusive education was because they were the 'consumers' of it. It was their children that experienced mainstream education and they were hesitant and had concerns about the availability of services, individual instruction and their child's emotional well-being. Elkins *et al.* (2003) found that parents were accepting of inclusion when they felt that their child's needs were well supported; they had to have confidence in the school's capacity to understand their child's needs and educate them effectively. Although, of course, one family's views on well supported may be very different to another family's, contexts vary and variables such as the type of SEN will all play a role in determining the variety in the views of different family's. As Palmer *et al.* suggested:

> Parents who are making important decisions regarding what is best for their child are unlikely to be influenced by what may be perceived as social or educational experimentation with their child's well-being at stake. Rather, these decisions are likely to be based on a contemplative and subjective evaluation of a specific child's attributes, circumstances, and needs. (2001:472)

This idea of parents making decisions specifically based on their own child's attributes and needs rather than any ideological concepts of, for example, justice or inclusion, suggests that each family's decision is very individual. Bagley and Woods (1998), found that parents of children with SEN looked for 'caring schools'. Many of the parents in their case study areas involved their children in the decision–making as they felt that attending a

school of their choice would relate to making the children happy and this was key. Academic reasons were not given by the parents in the case study area as a reason for choosing a school; they felt that their children would achieve their potential in 'a happy and caring environment'. As part of their analysis of the wider study, Bagley and Woods identified two value perspectives - the instrumental-academic and the intrinsic-personal/social - held by parents that underpinned their school choices. Using ideas from the work of Bernstein (1977) they argue that parents of children with SEN held the intrinsic-personal/social perspective, i.e. they value the child as a person, encompassing their likes and dislikes and sensitivities. They wanted their children to go to schools where they would feel safe and secure and develop fully in a stimulating environment; school was not seen in a purely instrumental light, as a means to an end, with the acquisition of specific skills or exam results. This desire for safety and security is supported by Ainscow *et al.* (1999) who suggest that well-resourced special schools can appear to encourage parents to see them as the 'safest' option for their child, thus perhaps creating a barrier to inclusion, if inclusion as seen as a one-track system. A well-resourced safe school sounds like an option that many parents would be interested in for their children, however, it is possible that for families already dealing with the challenges of SEND a 'safe' option may seem like the 'best option'. In line with Palmer *et al.* (2001) and Ainscow *et al.* (1999) Connor (1997) maintained that the choice between mainstream and special was not actually about a child's needs, but rather several factors ranging from a parental lack of self-belief, to anger about a child's diagnosis of SEN. Parents bring their own experiences, negative and positive, to bear on any decisions regarding their children, and it is possible perhaps, that parents whose children have a statement of SEND may have had more negative experiences, particularly in the area of education and, specifically with some SEND; for example behavioural difficulties, and these negative experiences may perhaps make these parents more cautious in their school choices which could lead to more of them choosing 'safe' special schools. It could also mean that as children experience more education, families may experience more negativity which could mean more 'safe' schools being chosen at secondary level. Bagley *et al.* (2001) found that when it came to secondary school parents were concerned about ensuring that the chosen secondary school did not perpetuate what was seen by some parents as a poor response to their child's needs by their primary school. However, this contrasts with Jenkinson's (1998) findings that for many parents early primary education worked well and it was only in the later years and in secondary that parents felt less happy with the provision, they felt that the social and academic gaps widened with age, especially in the case of children with severe and moderate needs. At this point parents often moved their children to a

special school, partly due to their concerns about their children acquiring independent living skills. This evidence suggests that parents' choice of schools is based on a range of, very personal, variables and that the desire for educational inclusion for their children plays little part in their decision making, although when it comes to inclusion as location, special schools and/or caring schools seem to be a preference for some families.

2.7.3   Where does the information for the choices come from?

How parents actually acquire the information about the schools that they choose was another area of the review. In Ball and Vincent's work (1998) on how different families choose schools, they came up with a concept of grapevine knowledge that is 'hot knowledge' about which school was the best choice. They suggested that this 'grapevine' or hot knowledge is distributed unevenly and used differently across different social groups. Where you live, who you know and what communities you are part of all determine which grapevine is open to you and they argue that some parents see the grapevine as a highly reliable source of information. Perhaps these are the parents who are less confident that they can 'decode the school's presentations' and they are a different group from the professional middle class parents who seek out extensive 'cold' knowledge (for example, league tables, Ofsted or HMI reports) to replace or supplement their grapevine knowledge. Bagley and Woods (1998), found that parents of children with SEN looked for 'caring schools' and, as schools often downplay their SEN provision, parents used 'word of mouth', or the aforementioned 'hot knowledge', to find out about which schools may be best for their children. Just as Ball and Vincent (1998) reported, they also found that middle class parents used government guides, the media and support groups, such as the Dyslexia Association as part of their research on which school to choose. In contrast to working class parents who were often confused, middle class parents spent a great deal of time planning and preparing their facts, with many of them serving time as primary school SEN governors. Bagley and Woods were clear that competencies as consumers among parents of children with SEN can to a certain extent be differentiated by class, cultural, social and financial resources. Flewitt and Nind (2007) found that the parents in their study, also spent time consulting others, perhaps as part of their grapevine, before making their decision. Jenkinson (1998)) surveyed parents in a support group about the decision they made regarding school placements for their children. Parents identified special programmes, student-teacher ratios and self-esteem as key factors in their decision about which school they chose for their children. Evidently grapevines were a key part of the decision making process and various factors, such as social class, played a part in the quality of each family's grapevine.

Some of the literature on school choice (Evans and Vincent, 1997; Gewirtz *et al.*, 1995, Bowe *et al.*, 1994) suggests that the 1988 ERA and the 1993 Education Act set up an education system in which parents saw schooling as a commodity. Other researchers, such as Bagley and Woods (1998), were clear that competencies as consumers among parents of children with SEN can, to a certain extent, be differentiated by class, cultural, social and financial resources. (Reay and Ball, 1994; Bagley and Woods, 1998; Ball 2003; West and Hind, 2007). Evans and Vincent (1997:113) suggested that social class differentials affect how parents are positioned within the market as 'competent/incompetent consumers' which then translates into 'desirable/undesirable customers', and that this can then affect the way in which their children are seen as ready and willing to learn or not. In their work in the early 1990's Bowe *et al.* (1993, 1994) looked at the issue of school choice in relation to consumerism and consumption and postmodernism and the concept of a market with parents as 'ideal consumers'. In the open and free market, if parents are seen as consumers, then their children become commodities with varying market value. The increase in parental choice of school has been criticised by many (Brown, 1990, Ball, 1995, Bowe, 1994, and Riddell *et al.* 1994), as allowing parents with more social capital and wealth to potentially manipulate the system at the cost of others. Brown (1990:65) called the situation a 'parentocracy', 'where a child's education is increasingly dependent upon the wealth and wishes of parents'. As the education market was opened up to the idea of individual choice the chances for children where families made 'good choices' improved, in direct contrast to those children whose families lacked the skills and resources to make such choices. For families of children with SEND, the 'good choices' may be more limited but the system undoubtedly still benefits those families with the skills and resources (Ball, 2003). More recently Clarke (2010) agreed with Ball (2003) when he argued that parental choice of school was an example of how the middle classes might exploit the choice system to reproduce or increase their social advantage. This concurred with Brown's (1995) assertions that the opening up of the school choice market would be exploited by the middle classes to exert their power and reproduce relative advantage and social mobility and Gorard *et al.* (2003), who suggested that the marketization of school choice would allow those families with the means, whether that was social capital or merely the ability to transport their children, to place their children in the better, over-subscribed schools. The initial idea behind introducing a market system into education was that it would encourage schools to perform better and be more responsive to their 'consumers', which would in turn lead to educational practice that would meet the needs and preferences of families and their children more effectively (DfE, 1993). Harris and Ranson (2005), in their criticism of New

Labour's Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners, asserted that the expansion of the marketization of education was very unlikely to reduce inequality and increase social mobility for young people from disadvantaged communities.

Ball and Reay (1998) explored this issue of different parents wanting different schools when considering the decision making process within families. They used Bernstein's (1977) ideas on positional and person-orientated family types when they found differences in how families made their school choice decisions. In their sample the working class families seemed to use where their child wanted to go and locality as key factors in their decision-making, whereas in the middle class families' preferences were based on factors such as whether or not the school taught high status subjects or 'setted'. As well as considering the issue of class and the choice market, Reay and Ball also suggested that gender was a factor in the decision making, when they found that school visits and gathering information about schools was mainly 'women's work'. Working class families saw their child as the expert whereas middle class families saw the parent, mainly the mother, as the expert. Phadraig's (2010), examination of the issue of parents' rights in Ireland, argued that merely having the legislation to increase parental power and choice is no guarantee that such a partnership approach will be successful and he suggested that in the UK increasing parental power has simply reproduced inequalities amongst parents, giving the more powerful parents even more power and disadvantaging the already disadvantaged. The idea of some parents being in a better position to choose also seemed to be replicated in the Spanish school system. Bernal (2005), as part of an ethnographic study into parental choice, social class and market forces identified the existence of three micro-markets. The research concluded that middle class families had more chances to choose a school as they had more resources and cultural status and that actually the design of the 'market system' meant that only the upper and middle classes benefit. As they went lower down the class system they found that families 'chose' more local public schools, although of course there are other factors that need to be considered such as middle class families having the resources to transport their children to their chosen schools or that working class parents not feeling that certain schools are 'for people like us', (West and Hind, 2007:520). Oría, Cardini, Ball, Stamou, Kolokitha, Verigan, and Flores- Moreo (2007) researched the issues surrounding choice for middle class families in a London borough. They used Nagel's (1991) idea of the 'divided self' to analyse their findings and concluded that school choice decision-making produced conflict for their participants. The families tried to balance their personal views, the interests of the family and were very aware of the juxtaposition of exclusivity on one side and social

mix on the other. For families where there is the added dimension of an SEN to consider, the process can be even more complex. Bagley and Woods (1998) found that well as a caring school parents also looked closely at the nature of the provision and the facilities and school environment. However the literature revealed that school placement choices were not just about parents choosing, schools choose too.

2.7.4   Schools choose too – the impact of the standards agenda

As mentioned earlier, alongside the development of policies 'supporting' inclusion, there has also been a movement by governments, of different hues, to try and improved educational standards through the use of parental choice and competition. This 'quasi market' (Barton, 1998) has produced a somewhat hostile environment for the development of inclusion policies. Some academics (Barton, 1998 and Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe, 1995) have argued that this 'standards agenda' has highlighted, or even created, tensions between families of children with SEND (amongst other groups) and schools. Ainscow, Booth and Dyson (2006) state that, in principle, higher standards and inclusive schooling can be seen as compatible, however, in reality, with schools being held accountable for the attainment of their students, students with SEND may be seen as a less attractive option and this contradiction could help explain some of the tensions between schools and parental choice. Bowe *et al.* (1992) suggested that schools are very aware of the fact that their market image depends on factors such as sixth form staying on rates and national test performances; parents whose children have SEN, certainly for the majority of schools, are not their ideal consumers. Gorard *et al.* (2003) suggested that schools could show preference to those students more likely to improve their performance in the league tables. In Spain Bernal (2005) also found that private schools discriminated against students who did not correspond to particular social and cultural groups or those that required learning conditions that may be more expensive for the school, i.e. those with Special Educational Needs. It seems that schools are trying to attract a certain kind of consumer whilst parents are trying to get school places at certain kinds of schools., Bagley and Woods (1998), considered how schools competing within the educational market respond to the needs of parents of SEN children; they found that school managers took their decisions based on the instrumental-academic perspective (Bernstein, 1977) and their views of what constituted a successful school were framed in terms of examination results. With parental choice leading to increasing competition, schools were focusing on the academic results rather than the pastoral or social developments that parents' value. They argue that this '*privileging of the academic*' could have dire consequences for parents of children with SEN, who may 'find themselves marginalised

and devalued in a competitive environment driven by instrumentalist values antithetical to their needs, concerns and priorities' (2001:781). Many parents came away from school open evenings with the impression that schools were only interested in the more academically able. Bagley *et al.* (2001:305), went on to argue that there was a '*system-consumer value tension*' between the needs of some parents and the pressure and impact of competition on schools and that it remained to be seen how this would resolve itself.

Little resolution was apparent ten years later as Runswick-Cole (2011:116) found that the situation had not really changed for schools, when she referred to the conflict of the 'standards agenda' and inclusion 'as schools are simultaneously required to 'drive up' their academic results and 'include' children whose achievement' or indeed behaviour falls far short of the standards they are required to strive for. West and Hind (2007) presented their findings on a quantitative project that examined how school composition varies between different types of secondary school in London in terms a range of variables, including SEN. They found that the percentage of students with SEN statements was higher in community/voluntary–controlled school than in voluntary-aided /foundation schools, however they found no differences between schools with or without selective admissions criteria. It was not the use of selective admissions criteria that was the difference, but school autonomy, which was the key factor associated with a lower proportion of children with SEN. If schools are choosing parents/students, and parents are choosing schools, then the results will be complicated and it will difficult to unravel and understand exactly what influences are the most dominant. Families whose children are different ages, have different needs, who live in different locations and hold different values and social capital will all make their own decisions about schooling for their children and some schools may encourage or discourage them according to their own ethos, as well as the legislation. The statistics on students with statements of SEND and school populations give us an indication of some potential differences in the choices of schools and parents.

The Statistical First Release on SEN in England, January 2013, (DfE, 2013), shows that the number of children with statements of SEN across all types of schools in England, has remained at 2.8% over the last five years. In primary school the percentage of boys with statements was 2.0% and 0.8% for girls, at secondary school, the number of boys with statements was 2.8% and girls was 1.0%. 53% of students with Statements attended mainstream schools; this is a slight decrease compared to 2012. The majority of mainstream state primary school had fewer than 2% of students with SEN Statements.

The percentage of students with Statements increased with age - 0.8% at age 4 to 2.2% at age 10; between the ages of 11 and 15 the number of Statements remained quite stable between 1.9 and 2.1%. In 2012/13 the most common need at primary age was ASD, which made up 21.9% of all students with Statements. Some of these statistics can perhaps be explained by what the literature tells us about how factors such as a child's age affect what kind of school parents choose, but how far these choices are affected by pressure from schools or class differences is harder to assess. I felt that reviewing the literature about what parents want from schools, whilst not directly answering the third research question, would help me to understand the factors that they considered important when it came to evaluating, or even making, their school choices.

2.8   Schools – what parents really want

Bronfenbrenner (1974) outlined how parental involvement in schools meant increased academic achievement, and parents of children with statements of SEN are often very involved with their children's schooling. As changes have been made to the education system to make it more inclusive, at least in theory if not in practice, many parents of children with Statements have worked hard with schools, both mainstream and special, to try and ensure their children are educated and included. Research (Garrick-Dunhaney and Salend, 2000) has shown that parents of children with SEN had mixed but generally positive perceptions towards inclusive educational placements; they believe that inclusion helps their children to become accepted socially, emotionally and academically. Dobbins and Abbott (2010) looked at the parent/teacher relationship in Northern Ireland, and they found that the relationship between them was very important, with the parents clearly wanting to work closely with their child's school. Their study also found evidence of a reshaping of the traditional deferential relationship between teachers and parents, with parents replacing deference with a desire to know more about how the school could meet their child's needs and how skills could be shared to improve the life of their child. This changing relationship and sharing of skills in a two-way relationship between home and school and vice versa can only be beneficial for children and their families and must be encouraged across all schools. In their work looking at conflict between parents and special schools, Lake and Billingsley (2000) found that parents questioned their ability to advocate for their children without proper knowledge and they found it difficult to judge if services offered were appropriate without the proper knowledge. Knowledge sharing is essential if parents are to support their children and feel empowered to make decisions and choices in regard to their children's schooling.

Whitaker (2007) highlighted that respondents to his survey were concerned about how well mainstream schools dealt with promoting social development and relationships, and

some were concerned about the schools' lack of flexibility. Batten *et al.* (2006) found that the number of children with ASD in schools had risen, however facilitating their learning and participation was not something that was understood by many schools. 27% of children with autism have been excluded from school, compared with 4% of children without autism (NAS, 2012). Research suggests that some children with some kinds of SEN might be at a more of a disadvantage than others. For example, children with a Statement whose behaviour is not consistent with the required standards may well have a label of Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or Behavioural Emotional Social Development (BESD), two areas of SEN identified by the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee (2006) as being the fastest growing areas of SEN. Whitaker's survey of parents of children with ASD attending special and mainstream schools across one Local Authority found that there was a higher level of dissatisfaction expressed by those parents whose children attended mainstream schools compared to those attending special schools. Although it is difficult to judge how representative the responses to his survey were or whether they might just be peculiar to a particular Local Authority, the findings do support the Select Committee Report of 2006 with regards to parents of children with ASD. Humphrey and Lewis (2008) found that, when it came to secondary schooling, parents' confidence in the effectiveness of inclusion for their children with ASD diminished. Visser, Cole, Daniels (2002) suggested that pupils with BESD difficulties constitute a greater challenge for inclusion than all other areas of SEN. Visser and Stokes (2003) argued that there was insufficient legal provision to assist in the inclusion of pupils with Emotional Behavioural Difficulties (EBD) within mainstream schools. Is it the case that with more inclusion, and the inclusion of children with ASD and EBD that many mainstream schools are struggling to cope with the behaviours that they are presented with?

Jordan (2008) writing about the challenges of ASD for inclusion suggested that getting education right for children with ASD would be a way of getting an inclusive education right for every child. Like Ainscow (1994) she felt that teachers need to develop their capacity and that specialist schools have a role to play in an inclusive system, as support, as centres for research and training, not as an alternative to mainstream. Historically schools have adopted a deficit perspective, however a child's disability is just a small part of who a child is; educators need to provide opportunities for parents to describe their children and their dreams and include their perspectives in their educational planning. Ainscow (2007:137) suggested that the current system of education 'forces parents to choose between ensuring that their child's needs are met (which often implies special

school placement) and ensuring that they have the same rights and opportunities as other children (which…implies mainstream).' This concept of equitable education and social justice is one that Florian (2014) suggests will only be achieved by a shift away from special education and its problems. One way of making this shift is through the capability approach, as developed by SEN, provides a framework for reconceptualising disability and SEN, it sees disability as relational, as a vertical inequality when compared to non-disability – a difference that limits functions and has to be addressed as a matter of justice (Terzi, 2005), some academics would argue that it is an important perspective for re-examining the dilemma of difference in significant ways. The participants in the research however, whilst occasionally referring to 'rights,' were more concerned with the day-to-day realities of schooling for their children and their families.

2.9   Inclusive schools – what they look like and pertinent issues, including teacher training

Ainscow (2005) maintained that schools knew more than they used to and that school staff must enlarge their capacity and challenge their thinking on how things are done. How far is it true that if teachers were more attuned to attaining diversity then more children with different minds will be able to manage in mainstream settings without needing special or segregated support? Some researchers, (Dyson, 1997; Skrtic, 1991) have asked how far children's difference should be seen as within and how far they are the product of the traditional schooling environment. Farrell *et al.* (2007) in their study looking at the relationship between achievement and inclusion in mainstream schools, in a bid to understand how some schools can be both high achieving and inclusive, found no 'convincing evidence' that inclusion had a negative impact on achievement. The schools in their case studies used a range of strategies to 'drive up achievement' which were unaffected by having children with SEN in the classroom. Booth and Ainscow (2002) and Skrtic (1991) have theorised that schools with higher proportions of children with SEN may actually achieve higher academic levels as the staff and ethos of the school would be one of responding to individual differences, thereby promoting better standards of teaching and learning. Kalambouka *et al.* (2005), in their literature review for the Institute of Educations' Evidence for Policy and Practice Imitative Centre (EPPI), found that including children with SEN had no adverse effects on pupils without SEN, however many of the studies involved in this review were from the USA rather than England. These findings along with the work of Farrell *et al.* (2007) and Black-Hawkins *et al.* (2007) support the argument that some schools do work successfully and creatively within the confusion of the inclusion legislation and guidance to achieve excellent academic results

and be inclusive. The research found that the staff in these successfully inclusive schools did not believe that having children with SEN in their classroom would have a negative impact on learning and did not see them as a threat.

Teachers are obviously an integral factor in successful inclusive schooling and the beliefs that teachers, along with other school staff, hold about the aims and value of education are of great significance (Pajares, 1992). Cooper (2011) found evidence of how the personal qualities of teachers can help or hinder behavioural difficulties in the classroom and how qualities like empathy and positivity can induce a classroom environment that encourages student engagement. Jordan, Glenn and McGhie-Richmond (2010) recognised how effective teachers maximised instructional time through preparation and clearly communicated expectations for all students. There seems to be significant evidence that good teachers can make inclusive teaching successful, however, a systematic literature review in 2009 (Rix, Hall, Nind, Sheehy and Wearmouth), found a lack of robust evidence of the effectiveness of either mainstream or special school teaching for children with SEN. This finding is supported by a review undertaken in 2002, in the USA by the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education, which found no advantages to either specialist or inclusive settings. Clearly the quality and scope of research in this area varies and it can be difficult to reach any convincing arguments either for or against the idea of inclusive schooling for all. However, what is very evident is the role of good teaching in successful outcomes for all students regardless of ability or location of schooling and the importance of teachers' beliefs and values about education and ability. Hart (1998) has argued that much pedagogical practice, for example ability groupings, differentiating by ability, reaffirms the idea of fixed ability and that children with SEN are particularly vulnerable to such 'determinist beliefs' (Hart, Drummond, McIntyre, 2007). In their book, *Learning without limits*, Hart, Dixon, Drummond and McIntyre (2004) suggest a radical pedagogical approach that they suggest can transform learning capacity.

So can good teaching be taught in ITT and can effective ITT impact on a teacher's values and beliefs? Kerschner (2007) suggests that expertise in teaching is dependent on having a 'deep approach to learning', which can be seen as a transformational approach that allows teachers to see things in different ways and change as people. She maintains that this can be as present in novices as experienced teachers and is connected to a teacher's perception of their professional identity. Hodkinson (2009) argued that teacher training has not kept up with the changes in inclusive education policy and is insufficient. Goodman and Burton (2010) make the point that there is no compulsory training in either Initial Teacher Training (ITT) courses or as part of the professional development of

qualified teachers on working with students with emotional, behavioural difficulties, despite the demands that working with such a group might place on teachers and the fact that, due to government guidance and legislation (for example, SENDA, HMSO 2001, SEN Code of Practice, DfES 2001), they are very likely to have students with such difficulties in their classrooms. They are very clear that such poor preparation for teaching in an inclusive education system will have a negative impact on the success of students both in schools and in society as a whole. As Slee (2001:113) wrote, 'should not the preparation of 'inclusive' teachers be woven right across the teacher training curriculum?'

Ofsted in their report (2006) - *Inclusion-does it matter where students are taught?* - highlighted three key features of schools where students with SEN made outstanding progress. The three areas were: 1) ethos – including teachers who challenged themselves and scrutinised data to drive improvement; 2) specialist staff – including teachers with thorough subject knowledge and skill in assessing and planning for students with more complex needs; and 3) focused professional development for all staff – including training from specialist teachers and other agencies. Hodkinson (2007) suggested that the last barrier to inclusion lay within individual schools themselves, more effective teacher training and adequate funding coupled with a partnership between schools, Local Authorities, local communities, students and their families, where they can work in harmony and not be held to ransom over examination results. Clough and Garner (2003:87) also explained the delay in successful inclusion, suggesting that educational institutions are not fit to include all children because of a 'lack of knowledge, lack of will, lack of vision, lack of resources and lack of morality.' Whatever the reason (s) behind the problem, the literature suggests that schools are currently not meeting the demands of an inclusive education system. In a similar vein to Hart *et al.,* 2004, Florian (2007) suggests that rather than more training to teach children with SEN we need to rethink our concepts of normalcy and the beliefs that our teachers hold about ability, teaching and learning and specialist knowledge. In their report, on the Inclusive Practice Project, Rouse and Florian (2012), suggest that a different approach to ITT, where trainees are taught to view inclusive education not as 'additional to' but as a range of opportunities for all learners, a way of teaching that focuses on everyone in a classroom that is seen as a learning community can be very effective in preparing new teachers to teach all students successfully.

2.10 Mothers and school choice

This final section of the literature reviews came about as a direct result of the interview data collection. As I conducted the interviews it quickly became apparent that there was a strong theme running through them that I had not anticipated. Each of the women I spoke to was an expert in the field of her child's special needs and their schooling. The women I spoke to knew a great deal about their child's particular needs, from academic to social and physical; this was not surprising as I had read about this Read (2000). I felt that it was important that I reviewed the literature in the area of mothers of children with SEND to try and reach a better understanding of the phenomena.

A national survey in 1995 (Beresford) found that parents of disabled children reported that they had to fight for everything their disabled children needed. The survey reported that their findings were similar to those of a survey twenty years earlier. Depressingly, I found that this 1995 report was also similar to a report seventeen years later: the Care Quality Commission report into health care for disabled children (2012: 25) which reported on parents saying that they have to fight for the care that their children require,; one parent is quoted as saying '*you fight to get an assessment- once you've got that- you fight to get a diagnosis. Once you've got that you fight to get support…*' These reports are also supported by the findings of the Lamb inquiry (DCSF, 2009), as mentioned previously, which looked specifically at SEND information and found that the system seemed to create 'warrior parents' with little faith in the schools and professionals that were meant to support their children; parents that felt that they had to 'fight for what should be their children's right'.

The involvement of parents in their children's education is seen as a right and this right includes parents of children with SEND. The latest policy, the *SEND code of practice: 0-25 year* (DfE, 2014b), based on principles set out in **Section 19 of the** *Children and Families Act 2014* (DfE), makes it clear that parents hold important information about their children and can therefore contribute to views on how best to support them. However, the previous Code of Practice (DfE, 2001), which also stressed the role of parents' views, seemed to matter very little when it came to the decision making and choices of many parents of children with SEND. As mentioned earlier, David *et al.* (1997) argued that mothers' experiences of educating their children are not necessarily in line with the discourse of free choice and marketization and that mothers make their 'choices' within a series of moral and structural constraints. Making the choices that they have to, within the constraints that they have, can lead to mothers feeling frustrated and guilty. For mothers of children with SEND I would suggest that there are perhaps even more

constraints and limited 'choices' and that this can cause even more frustration and perhaps guilt. Riddell (2000) suggested that, when it comes to disability rights literature, there are two types of parents: 1) radical parents who want an 'inclusive' single system of schooling and are seen as legitimate; and 2) those parents, like many of my participants, who are happy to support separate and special schools, who would be seen as misguided. This is similar to what Runswick-Cole (2008) research found. Poikolainen (2012), in a study of parents' school choices in Finland, found that the higher the level of education, especially the mothers' education, the more passionate the search for resources to support their child's schooling and to try and enhance the schooling to meet the child's individual skills and competences. This supports, Reay (2000) who suggested that working class women often lacked the conditions that would allow them to provide the cultural or emotional capital for their children. The definition of emotional capital, according to Nowotny, (1981:148wr), constitutes 'knowledge, contacts and relations as well as access to emotionally valued skills and assets, which hold within any social network characterised at least by partly affective ties.'

2.11 Labels

Rogers (2007) found that her participants, parents of children with 'impairments', had spent a great deal of time and money pursuing a label for their child. To these parents, like the ones in my study, there was no stigma of a label, no negative connotations; instead a label meant being able to research their child's difficulties, once they had a name, and thus gain some control of their situation as well as being able to procure support from external agencies. Read (2000) suggested that mothers of children with SEND often believe that, through their close involvement with their child, they have knowledge and insights about their children which they can use to convince others what life is like for their child. Coward (1997:118) describes the demands that motherhood can impose on lives, 'unleashing feelings that can quite easily drive you crazy. Women can sometimes find themselves up against emotions of anger and gnawing guilt, instead of living up to the idealised version of goodness', it is possible to see in the interview data, how, for some of the participants, anger, and perhaps guilt, drove them to continue their fight for their children's education. Ryan and Runswick-Cole (2008) reviewed the ways in which mothers of disabled children were portrayed in academic literature, a subject in which they had a personal interest as non-disabled academics with disabled children. They found that within disability studies mothers had a marginal position, in that they were not disabled but may experience discrimination based on their child's needs. Mother's may work to bring about positive changes for their children and for people with

SEND in general, however their work is undervalued. They go on (2009) to suggest that as these mothers changed their maternal role from 'advocate to activist', there was a blurring of the maternal position and the skills and experiences that 'activism' gave them added to their capital value amongst their peers and transformed their status. The study also suggested that most of the mothers acted as advocates for their children however this role, for mothers of children with ASD, was more complex; they were not necessarily activists but more 'internal activists', advocating for their children, not necessarily other people's. Ryan and Runswick-Cole suggested that perhaps the lack of visible signs of impairment, coupled with the difficulties in finding the right education for their children, makes these mothers' experiences of activism and advocacy more complex. McKeever and Miller (2004: 1183) reported that some of their participants, mothers of children with SEND, engaged in provocative and even 'conflictual relations with professionals' as they strived to achieve everything possible to benefit their children. It seems that, for some mothers, along with their child's label, they achieve their own new label as 'advocates', 'good mothers' and for some even 'activist mothers'.

2.12 Motherhood, but not as we know it?

Rogers (2007:4) presents the idea that 'mothering' a child with a SEND '*dramatically changes the expected horizon of what becoming a mother involves, her public performance and her private internal* and *external dialogues*.' She suggests that expectations of certain norms, such as celebrating birthdays, returning to work or schooling are shattered and changed forever and that, as the course of this 'normal' life shifts, there is a merging of the public and the private spheres. Research on mothers of children with SEND describes the contradictions, which can be related back to the prejudices prevalent in a society where 'disability diminishes personhood' (Landsman, 2003:148). Landsman outlines what she calls the mother's great paradox of simultaneously thinking both 'I love you as you are' and 'I would do anything to change you'. Oliver (1990) argued that the labelling of a child as having SEND was seen as a 'personal tragedy' for the family. Bridgens (2009) feels that her research, into the experiences of people who had polio, demonstrates that there is a pressure for disabled people to be 'normal' and that the pressure to prove this means that many of the choices that they make cannot be seen as free choices. For mothers of children with SEND there is a similar pressure to be normal and be seen as a 'good' rather than a 'bad' parent, (Ryan, 2008). McKeever and Miller (2004: 1181) suggested that mothers of children with SEND are under pressure 'to conform to traditional ideologies of care' and dedicate their lives to their welfare of their children. I would argue that yes, there may be a pressure to

conform however this could sit alongside a maternal desire to protect and nurture one's child. Although I accept that there are external pressures to conform and would agree with Avery's (1999:117) idea of 'the gaze, that not only judges the differently embodied Other, but endows entire families with the stigma of disability'. Bauman (1995) argued for a society that was 'for' others, rather than 'with' others, nearly twenty years on, the families in this study were still Others and many felt treated as such by society and an education system which so often fails to meet their children's needs.

It is apparent from this focused review of the literature that there are no easy answers to any of the many questions concerning schooling and SEN. Dyson (2001:25) neatly summed up the dilemmas of inclusion, when he wrote that 'The more educational responses emphasise what learners have in common, the more they tend to overlook what separates them; the more they emphasise what separates them and distinguishes each learner, the more they tend to overlook what learners have in common.' Although there have been many changes in the English education system since Warnock's 1978 report, I do not feel that it could be said, despite the academic rhetoric and legislative changes, that we have an inclusive education system, which of course is not what the Warnock report recommended. What we appear to have is an education system that allows for a degree of parental choice of school with more mainstream education for more children with SEN than there was thirty years ago. However, as the literature shows, many issues around location, pedagogical practices and inclusive school environments remain unresolved. These unresolved issues, theorists, such as Bronfenbrenner, Bernstein and Bourdieu, and the debates on inclusion provided the foundations for my research, however, it was the parents' voices and their stories that was the focus of this research. The literature provided me with an academic awareness of the field of study and allowed me to distinguish what had gone before me and also to understand the theories surrounding the relevant issues, it was fundamental to my understanding.

3. Chapter three - Methodology

3.1 Research questions

The area for research was one that appeared to be a gap in the literature, whilst studies on other aspects of SEN and schools and parents had been undertaken (Parson and Lewis, Whittaker) there was little research that looked specifically into how and why parents of children with a range SEN chose schools for their children. Plano Clark and Badiee (2010:207) state that 'research questions set boundaries to a research project, clarify its specific directions, and stop a study from becoming too large'. Certainly with a background in teaching, and as a parent myself, it would have been all too easy to allow the project to quickly extend beyond manageable parameters without specific questions to focus on. As a teacher I have many views on how and what children should be taught and as a parent I spent considerable time and research deciding where my children should be educated. (I have little doubt that my experiences and views as a teacher and a parent have influenced this project in many ways.) I was curious to know whether the experience of choosing schools, and then the schooling itself, would be similar or different for parents whose children had statements of SEND. Would having a statement make the choosing more complicated or the aspirations and expectations different? With these questions and my consideration of the previous literature I devised the research questions mentioned earlier and again below:

4. How do parents of children who have a SEN Statement make decisions to send their children either to mainstream or special schools?
5. What are the aspirations of these parents for their children?
6. In choosing either mainstream or a special school what in-school factors do these parents of children perceive as being important for the support of their children in those schools.

3.2 Worldview

The research aimed to explore the issues surrounding parental decision making around school placement for children with SSEN, with a view to both improving practice and giving parents an opportunity to voice their opinions. In the area I was researching some children and their parents were experiencing difficulties (DCSF, 2009) and I wanted to ensure that if I was asking for parents to participate then, that by doing so, they might actually improve the situation for others as well as get an opportunity to share their own

experiences, both positive and negative. When it comes to laying out a set of beliefs that have guided my research design and actions (Guba, 1990) or the 'worldview' (Plano Clark and Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2009) that has informed my actions, I would argue that my worldview is essentially pragmatic with some elements of participatory, both from my own feminist research background (Bajwa, 1998) and by virtue of the issue being researched. Pragmatism as a worldview, has been used by others such as Dewey, it accepts that there are multiple realities, rather than a single truth that can be explored by research through the use of a range of methods, which the researcher is free to choose as they think is appropriate. 'An advocacy/participatory worldview holds that research inquiry needs to be intertwined with politics and a political agenda' (Creswell, 2009:9). As my research was about families with children who have SEN it was undoubtedly connected with the political agenda; in fact just as I began my research the government Green paper *Support and Aspiration* (DfE, 2011) was put out for consultation. I was keen that the research should allow parents the space to express their views and be heard, at best, by LAs and teaching practitioners, at least, by academics.

Although I was keen to involve participants, and did not simply see them as subjects in my research, and impact on practice within LAs or schools, I was also aware that my work would not be fully collaborative as I was not going to use participants to help design the questions or collect and analyse data. I did hope that participants might benefit from being given an opportunity to voice their views and be heard, albeit in a largely academic environment. I needed a research design to be cautious and err on the side of the pragmatic as I did not wish to alienate 'gatekeepers', schools and LAs. I wanted to undertake research that would 'make the world better', which Sikes and Goodson (2003:37) suggest is typical for educational researchers, and, to this end, I was open to use the methods that would be the most appropriate. As a feminist and an educator I believe in empowering people and working alongside others to develop skills and build knowledge however when it came to my research I felt that such an approach would be 'all too difficult' (Hardimann, 1993). Whilst I wanted to give my participants a voice, as a relatively inexperienced researcher, working to a deadline, I felt anxious about engaging in what Reason (1988:61) calls 'co-operative inquiry', a way of research that can be exciting but equally can be an upsetting process for those involved. I did not feel ready for utilising such an approach. I wanted data that might convince a LA or a school to change their practices and I also wanted to give families an opportunity to be heard, however all of this was within the confines of what I could practically achieve. So pragmatism was the key worldview (Maxcy, 2003), because it allowed me the freedom to choose the methods which I felt best answered the research questions while it allowed

me to gather the data that suited my experience and my aims. Goodson and Sikes (2001) maintain that the key reason for using any research method has to be that it is the most appropriate one. My aims were to allow families to have their say, to provide the best understanding (Creswell, 2009) of the situation facing families of children with SEN and to provide LAs with information on what parents were saying about school choice.
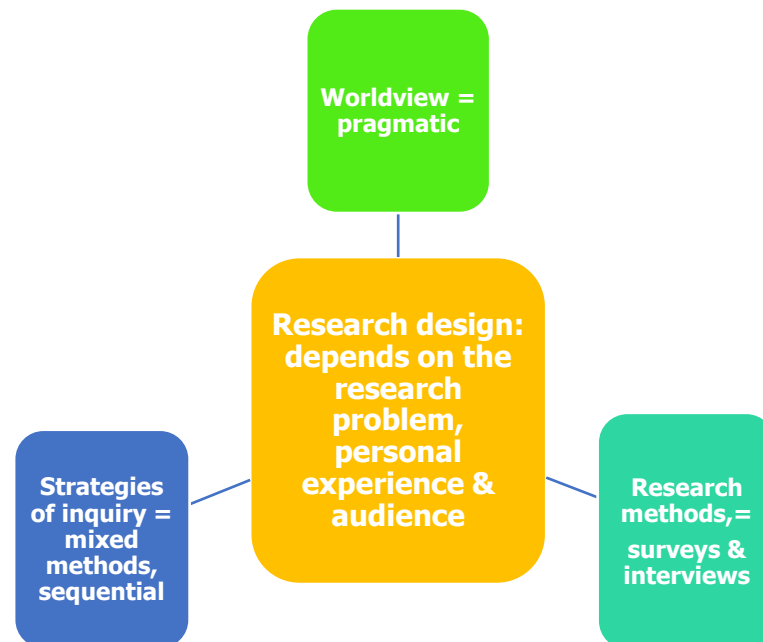
Figure 3-1 - a diagram showing influences on my research design

This pragmatic view of research fitted my values and experiences, as a practical person who likes to solve problems. As a teacher I understood that success in the classroom involved solving problems, whether those problems were how to ensure a student behaved appropriately or how get coursework completed successfully, I was able to use the best method for each student or task. So whilst I do strongly believe that the voices of the participants are important and undoubtedly add richness to the data collected, equally, if a LA would be more convinced by numbers, then I was happy to use numbers, to carry out a survey. To me, the end, usually, justifies the means, albeit within all the ethical guidelines, to do no harm, of course. For a researcher with a pragmatic worldview the object (social reality) under study is the determining factor for choosing research methods not the other way round (Flick, 2002).

3.3 Mixing methods

With the aims of improving practice and giving parents an opportunity to have their stories heard, I wanted to use methods that would allow for openness. Based on these aims I needed to decide how best to get the relevant data to most effectively answer the research questions. The research questions centred on how parents made the decisions

they did and also involved evaluating how these decisions were working out for them and their children and their futures. These were personal and potentially sensitive issues, they involved causes and consequences of human actions and complicated and complex institutions such as schools. With this at the forefront of my mind I realised early on that using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods would be the most appropriate approach for the issues I was researching. A range of methods would ensure that I had the breadth that might be useful in trying to influence practice across schools and LAs as well as the depth that would allow for greater validity when examining the issues that the parents/carers might raise. Thus my research design emerged as a mixed methods approach or, as some (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, Turner, 2007) would call it, mixed research. The key tenet of such research is 'that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone.' (Creswell and Clark, 2007:5). Complex issues, such as how and why parents decide the schools that they will send their children to, are not easily explained, and therefore a research design that allowed the flexibility in the use of quantitative and qualitative data and the most appropriate research method for the task was key. Audiences, whether they were parents, schools/LAs or academics, would be better informed by a range of suitable evidence that helped explain complicated situations. A more complete picture could emerge, one that showed trends and patterns as well as the detail of the context of individual participants' experiences. As Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010:274) state, 'The multidimensional nature of many, if not most, social and behavioural phenomena is the reason why mixed methods are often required in research addressing those phenomena'. Although of course many important studies have been completed without the use of mixed methods.

After reviewing the range of methods that I might use: surveys, accounts, focus groups, interviews, personal constructs, I decided that a survey and interview were the best fit for both the research questions and my worldview. Using just a survey would not have allowed participants to express their views and experiences in depth and just using interviews might mean that a LA would be less likely to be interested in my findings, as the sample would be smaller and the findings perhaps too time consuming to consider. The use of the survey followed by the interviews, a sequential design, (Creswell, 2009) also gave me an opening with participants and allowed me access to an initial sample that I could build from. It also enabled me to access a much larger sample which gave the research more breadth, thus perhaps enhancing its validity for some audiences. Shephard, Orsi, Mahon and Carroll (2002:337) suggest that researchers are not always clear about the benefits or purpose of using mixed methods in their research, 'researchers

have treated the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods as "inherently good" without identifying on the fundamental components of the research process – the purpose of the study and the purpose for using mixed methods'. In their examination of four mixed methods studies looking at *vulnerable families* they found that the purpose and design of each study was closely linked to the outcomes and that the strategies used by each of the studies allowed for a more rigorous understanding of the complex issues that might be related to vulnerable families. To be sure that I was not just utilising mixed methods because I felt they were 'inherently good' I assessed the possible outcomes using Greene and Caracelli's (1989) five purposes derived from an analysis of over 50 empirically mixed methods studies. The first purpose they found was triangulation; their second purpose was complementarity; the third purpose was initiation to reveal fresh perspectives or 'paradox and contradiction'; their fourth aspect was to use sequential methods where the primary results inform the second method and their final aspect was expansion, to extend the breadth and scope of the inquiry. In my planning I felt that more than one of these purposes could be applied to my research project since the issues around school choice for parents of children with statements may well involve some 'complex realities'. Although, one could argue that, in many ways, these five purposes are simply features of good research.

3.4 Triangulation

Triangulation was an aspect of my research design as both the surveys, in phase one, and the semi-structured interviews, in phase two, obviously have their own strengths and weaknesses. Using two methods would allow the weaknesses of a single method to be supported by a different contrasting method and thus allow for more confidence in the findings if they correspond. The use of two methods would also mean enhanced validity, in terms of both primary and secondary validity (Whittemore, Chase and Mandle, 2001). The second purpose also applied to my research design as, by using two very different methods to examine the same issues, I hoped to get elaboration and detail from one to support and enhance the data from the other. Equally the third purpose, which Green Caracelli outline, could apply to my research, as the stories of the participants and the surveys may have revealed contradictions. The fourth purpose would play a role as I would use the results of phase 1 to help design the interview schedule for phase 2. As would the fifth purpose, which was applicable was I hoped that the two phases would reveal more detail and insight than would be possible with just one method. In some ways the research design was similar to one used by Way, Stauber, Nakkula and London

(1994) when they studied substance misuse in two disparate groups of high school students, they initially used a questionnaire and then selected students to be interviewed based on their questionnaire responses. In my design, some of the participants in phase 2 would emerge from the initial survey but in contrast to Way *et al.* these would be anonymous and self-selecting rather than specifically picked for their responses to the survey, in this way my sample would be random and I would not be speaking to parents who met specific criteria.

The purpose of the research study was to examine the issue of how parents of children with statements of SEN (SSEN) chose the schools they did for their children. As I approached the area to be researched I conducted an initial literature review and familiarised myself with the language and legislation in the area, (please see the literature review chapter for more details). In my work as a teacher and senior leader in a mainstream secondary school, I was obviously familiar with aspects of the legislation as they applied to a school and classroom environment however, I was unfamiliar with the literature on families and children with SEN. The research was conducted in two phases, in the quantitative phase of the study (phase 1), survey data was collected through the use of a postal survey distributed across one LA in the South-east of England to a sample (parents whose children were in Reception or Year 7) of parents of children with SSEN. In phase 2, semi-structured interviews with parents were used to explore the issues raised by the survey results in more depth and also to uncover any other relevant issues not previously raised by the data collected in phase 1. Interviews with parents would, ideally, cover a sample of parents from more than one LA and include children with a range of SSEN. Phase 2 of the research would allow parents to raise issues of concern or good practice and add detail to the results of the quantitative phase.

When it came to the questions of how to carry out the research I felt that a two phase approach would be best to allow for breadth and depth. I felt that having a spread of families across one area would provide a broad overview of the situation and give some indications as to what families felt the key issues were and these could then be explored in more depth across more areas to find out the stories behind the figures and allow the families to express their views and explain their issues without the constraints of a survey. Sandelowski (1993) writes about how research is a creative and yet also a destructive process, she suggests that we make things up out of our data and can sometimes destroy that which we hoped to understand in the first place. As well as this destruction of understanding we can also destroy 'the spirit of qualitative work', which she suggests is imaginative and similar to more artistic ambitions. I felt that in the area I was researching

it was of paramount importance to not destroy the thing I was hoping to understand better. I wanted to be able to voice the stories the families shared with me.

In phase two of the research I was keen to understand the issues that were relevant to the participants I had some idea of what these might be from the phase one data and my review of the literature; however I was keen to ensure that I allowed the participants to share their own perspectives. The interviews were designed with a purpose, they weren't everyday conversations (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009) but I did conduct them with a view to gaining descriptions of the participant's lived world and their interpretations of the reality of making decisions about schools for their children. Kvale and Brinkman are clear that qualitative interviews have a unique potential to gain access to, and descriptions about, the everyday worlds of the people we conduct the interviews with. The participants in the research had complex and multiple understandings of their situations, I aimed to find out about their views on school choice and the interviews allowed me to listen carefully to what participants were telling me about their realities. Research needs to make sense of and interpret (Creswell, 2009) the meanings that others have of their world. I did not have a theory into which I hoped to fit the interview data; instead I hoped to understand more about a complex issue by my interpretations of the data collected.

3.5   Reflections and reflexivity

I think it will be helpful to firstly define how I have interpreted the two terms being used: reflexivity – I have taken this to mean a continuous self- awareness of my own positionality as a researcher in relation to what I am researching and an overt recognition of the possible impact of this on my research (Berger, 2013); reflection: I have used this in the same way as I did when I was teaching, looking back on my practice, albeit this time as a researcher, and seeing what I could have improved on or done differently. As far as interpretations go as a researcher I recognised that of course I brought my own historical and cultural background to the research and that my own interpretations would be made through my own unique lens. Equally readers of the research, including participants, would bring their own interpretations. I was reflexive about what I was bringing to the research, as a mother and a teacher I undoubtedly had many views, for example about education and motherhood and children, that could impact on the interviews and my interpretations and even transform the research (Finlay, 2003:4). Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) stress the importance of such reflexivity, researchers are part of the world that they research and their behaviour and attitudes will undoubtedly influence the research that they carry out and the interpretations that they

make. As feminism has very clearly shown (Oakley, 1981, Harding, 2004) there are many different ways in which women experience the world, these differences can be linked back to race, socio-economic position, age, beliefs, experiences, political views, sexuality and emotional responses to participants (Hamzeh and Oliver, 2010), to name but a few variables. The interview participants were all women and mothers, the fact that we shared some characteristics could be seen to make the interview data more valid and the power differentials smaller, however our similarities, superficial though they may be, were more than likely outweighed by our many differences.

Although reflexivity and critical reflection- which Daley (2010) calls reflection on action - were part of my research practices, as I believe both are an important aspect of good research (Denscombe, 2002). Like many others (Harding, 2004, Plummer, 1983) I do not believe that it is possible to do 'objective research' as we are unable to step outside of the social world we are part of. However, I do believe that researchers can be rigorous and ensure that research is valid and reliable if not objective, Sandelowski (1993) suggests that rigor can be used creatively in our research to ensure that we maintain the flexibility and spirit of qualitative research and this is what I aimed for with my research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2006), amongst others, suggest certain steps that can be taken by researchers to ensure validity. Many of these, and others (Tuckett, 2005), were used in my research, these included triangulation, rich and thick description, checking for researcher effects, respondent feedback, leaving an audit trail and reflections from the field. I included all the interview data in my analysis, albeit some of the findings do not support one another and some are surprising and others are contradictory. By explaining the research process, my research and sampling methods and by acknowledging my own background and situation I am making my research practices visible and accountable (Davies and Dodds, 2002), thus enhancing the rigour of my research, making it more trustworthy and allowing the reader to evaluate the extent of my impact on the research and findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, Horsburgh, 2003). I have reflected further on issues of reflexivity in relation to the research findings later on in the discussion section.

4. Chapter four - Methods

4.1 Why surveys?

The data collection methods utilised in the first phase was a survey, a survey is often used to gather a large amount of data, which can be efficiently analysed, in a relatively short period of time. The initial plan was to use a survey across three Local Authorities (LAs) to find out about the views of parents/carers on issues of school choice, current schooling and to elicit some broad trends in the behaviour and background of the parents of children with SEN statements. This was with a view to exploring the trends in more depth through the use of semi-structured interviews across 3 LA s and comparing the data obtained to earlier studies, for example Whittaker (2007) who, also used postal surveys, when he looked at aspects of parental views on school choice for children with ASD.

Knight (2002:93) suggests that good questionnaires ʻare the product of ... thought, theory, technical skills and pilotingʻ. With this in mind, I thought about why a questionnaire was the most appropriate instrument for this stage of the research, I wanted to find out about why parents of children with SSEN, across the three areas chosen, made the school choices they did. Parents of children with a SSEN are a fairly large population and as a doctoral student I had limits on both my time and resources. A questionnaire would allow me to gather a range of useful data relatively quickly and economically. I felt that I could use it as an exploratory research instrument to gather some broad descriptive data on relevant issues about schooling in my chosen population and that these issues could then be explored in depth in the second phase. I understood that there were limitations in using a survey, for example respondents might interpret questions differently to how they were intended or a lack of flexibility in terms of response options, however, I felt that the benefits of gathering a breadth of views, relatively quickly, outweighed the negatives.

On the *theory* front in order to know what questions would actually be relevant on a questionnaire relating to parental choice and school placement I needed to have some idea of what ought to be explored. I wanted to know about the factors that other researchers in the area had considered significant in order that I might then ask relevant questions. I therefore undertook an exploratory review of the literature surrounding the issues of parental choice and school placement and children with statements of SEN. I also looked at previous questionnaires that had been conducted into similar areas, for e.g. Bagley *et al.*, (2001) and Whittaker (2007), in case it was possible that a questionnaire

already existed which I might use. However as there is no research on the exact same area, although Bagley *et al.* comes close, no suitable instrument came to light. From the reading several factors emerged and these were supplemented by information gathered in some informal meetings with staff from Parent Partnerships, a support group for parents. The data collected from the meetings and an initial review of the literature were used to compile a series of questions relating to background information on the parent, child's SEN and location and school choice and school experience.

On the *technical skills* I needed to decide what kind of questions to use, should they be open or closed, clearly there are advantages to both. Did I want to ensure that respondents had the freedom to express themselves and use their own language through the use of open ended questions or did I want to ensure that questionnaires were quick and easy to complete and thus maybe get a better response rate? Which questions would provide me with more valid data? Was a higher response rate better or less bias? Was it possible to have both? In the end after considering all the options I decided to use a series of largely closed questions, I felt that these would be more accessible to a wider range of the population and thus ensure a better response rate and validity than using broad open questions. I felt the second phase of the project, the semi-structured interviews would allow a sample of the population to give their own opinions in more depth and more autonomously and, taken together with the questionnaire data, would give me the breadth and depth needed to answer the research questions. As well as considering the validity of the data and the response rate I also needed to be pragmatic about handling the data, not only can open questions take longer to answer but they can be very time consuming and difficult to analyse. It seemed logical with the project design being a mixed methods one to design a simple questionnaire with closed questions to get a broad overview of the relevant issues and then follow these up and explore new ideas/perspectives through the use of the interviews in the second phase of the research.

4.2   Piloting the questionnaire

Of course with all this in mind, I drafted a questionnaire which initially had 5 pages and over 25 questions (Appendix 1)! There was so much to potentially ask it was difficult to know what to leave out. I took the questionnaire to a research meeting of department PhD students and asked them for their feedback. It was really helpful to get the views of a range of students from different backgrounds and at different stages of their PhDs, I learnt a great deal and amended the questionnaire in numerous ways. Once I had another draft, a much shorter draft, I gave it to some parents of children with SSEN/SEN,

as a pilot. Their feedback, by email or in person, was again invaluable and I drafted another version of the questionnaire before going through it with my supervisor.

I then took the amended draft to another colleague, who had considerable experience and expertise in the field of surveys from working in the NHS, along with a copy of the letter to the parents that would accompany the questionnaire. This version of the questionnaire was approved by the 'expert' and went on to become the final version (appendix 2) that was sent out, once approved by the LA. The advice I was given on the letter mainly involved cutting down on the explanations I had included about how the information on parental addresses was provided by the LA and that I had had no access to this confidential data. I wanted to reassure parents that their confidential data had not been made available to me in any way however I took the advice of a 'survey expert' who suggested that parents 'would not care' and removed this information. As well as the survey and the letter of introduction (appendix 3) I also compiled a brief flyer (appendix 4) that gave details of the project that was to be included in the envelope. All of this information then needed to be sent to the contacts/gatekeepers at the LAs to check through and agree.

4.3   Gatekeeping- the saga begins

I planned to send questionnaires out to the population of parents across the 3 Local Authorities (LAs) I had chosen to study and I communicated with the relevant 'gatekeepers' to this end. As Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011: 168) suggest, 'Gatekeepers play a significant role in research...they control access´, well they certainly did this and I found that I could not gain access to the population of parents in two out of three of the LAs that I had approached. Despite numerous emails and telephone calls I was refused access, with one LA using cuts to the workforce as their reason for refusing and another simply saying they could not send out 'unsolicited mail' to parents. I was confused and disappointed, two of the LAs that I had approached had worked with me previously in my role as a senior leader in a school and as a teacher trainer, and I had felt sure that they would be keen to support me. I gradually realised that in my new role my relationship with the LAs had changed, suddenly I was an *outsider* (Sixsmith, Boneham and Goldring, 2003) I no longer had the professional relationship that I had once had with the LAs and therefore I was no longer someone they would necessarily have to work with.

I had to rethink my research quickly, as the final LA, which had agreed to work with me, were waiting to see a draft questionnaire before agreeing to go ahead. The window of opportunity for getting the questionnaires approved, copied and the envelopes prepared and posted out to parents was getting smaller as the summer term passed. I quickly

reflected on my planned research, was it worth carrying out a survey in just one LA? What would I learn from such a survey? Was the effort going to be worth the reward? In consultation with my supervisors I decided to go ahead with one LA, it was felt that having breadth in the results, albeit for one LA, would still increase the validity of the findings. Also I was very reluctant to turn down a LA that had actually agreed to support the research. After my initial disappointment I quickly realised that just working with one LA was actually a lot more manageable for me as a lone researcher. The population across 3 LAs would have been 1000s of parents and this could have meant an overwhelming amount of data, obviously depending on the response rate.

As the LA were the only ones with access to the database of parents' names and addresses I prepared envelopes which included the letter, questionnaire and flyer and a stamped addressed return envelopes, sealed them and handed them over to the LA who posted them out to the relevant parents on their database. Sending them to the whole population of parents of children who had SSEN in the LA was not practical in terms of the time the LA could devote to the project and also in terms of the amount of potential data I could cope with as a doctoral student. In consultation with the LA it was decided to send the questionnaires out to the parents of children in Reception and Year 7 as they were the ones who had most recently made decisions regarding school choice, i.e. when their children started school in Reception or when their child underwent school transition from primary to secondary. I felt that getting the views of the parents who had most recently made decisions about school placement would in some ways provide the most up to date data; the two groups of parents who had most recently made school placement decisions could be called an intensity sample (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009), that is a sample that provides a high incidence of the issue in question. The sample for the survey, which can be considered both a convenience and a purposive sample, therefore came about through practicalities rather than design and does not necessarily represent the views of all parents/carers of children with statements of SEN across the LA. It was hoped that when it came to the interviews, phase two of the research, parents whose children were in other year groups would also form part of the interview sample.

4.4   Responses and analysis

Surveys (n=380) were initially sent to parents with children in Reception or Year7, with SEN statements across one LA. Surveys were sent out via the SEN team of the LA as they were the gatekeepers of the information about which children had SEN statements. Included with the survey was an invitation to parents to take part in phase two of the research. The response to the parent surveys was disappointing with a 17% response

rate, a total of 65 surveys were returned. As the LA were labelling and posting the surveys it was impractical to send out a reminder to participants, although of course this would be accepted good practice with self-administered postal questionnaires. Over thirty parents/carers from this phase, also volunteered to be interviewed for phase two.

The response rate raised some interesting questions, Bagley *et al.* (2001) in their ESRC funded longitudinal study in the late 1990s had a high response rate, (between 75-78%), to a postal questionnaire which was sent to all parents across three case study areas. However they did find that the response rate from parents whose children had SEN was relatively low, (between 5.2-7%), compared to a national average of children with SEN being 20%. Is there some kind of relationship about a postal survey and parents of children with SEN that needs to be explored further? Are these parents perhaps busier than other parents and therefore have even less time to complete surveys or are these parents perhaps more likely to have needs of their own which makes them less likely to complete a survey? Or is it just a coincidence? As the response rate was relatively low can the findings from the questionnaire be considered valid? In some ways the survey left me with more questions than answers.

When I came to collating the data from the surveys for analysis I firstly entered all of the details from each survey onto an Excel spreadsheet, using participant identifier numbers so that I could identify each one easily. I checked through the data that I had entered for errors and problems, and then, once it was 'cleaned', I used a series of Pivot tables and simple graphs to manipulate the data for analysis. I also exported the Excel spreadsheet into SPSS (a statistical software programme) to allow me to manipulate the data further, I used the software to generate some descriptive statistics. As well as the numbers, the survey also contained information from open questions, I recorded all of this information and used it as part of my analysis.

4.5   Ethics

Another aspect of rigorous research must be the application of a strong ethical framework, my research was based on the British Educational Research Association Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2004) and the University of Northampton's Research Ethics Committee (REC) Guidance. Before any research was conducted in the field ethical approval was obtained from the REC and during my research I followed the research design and discussed any issues or concerns with my supervisors to ensure that ethical guidelines were always followed. However, even before the ethical approval was obtained many ethical issues needed to be considered, one of the elements of participatory research is the belief that the research will empower rather

than marginalise the participants of the research. One of the aims of the research was to give participants an opportunity to have their stories and concerns heard through the research process, during the pilot stages of both the survey and the interview phases I engaged in discussions with those taking part in the piloting to try and ensure that questions were sensitive to their needs and the relevant issues. We discussed possible areas of concern, including the most appropriate language to use and questions that might be deemed to be sensitive. I also met with parents and support groups to discuss the research before starting it to try and ensure that I was as aware as possible of pertinent issues. I learnt a great deal from these early conversations with friends and professionals, about the lives and issues that parents and their children and their SEN contend with, and it helped me design and carry out a research project that was sensitive to the needs of others. I became more aware of the importance of both asking questions and providing information and I tried to use the information that I had gleaned to anticipate the ethical considerations of working with families and researching some potentially sensitive areas.

I had decided early on in the research that I was only going to interview parents/carers rather than children themselves as I felt that it would be the adults that made decisions regarding school choice rather than the children. However this was an assumption that I made and I was very aware that I would be conducting research that had children at the heart of it without actually giving them a voice. I also considered the issue of voice for participants and how would they gain access to any work that I published. To try and increase access for participants a website address for the university repository, where any publications or papers I might produce would be located, was included on the flyer, which was posted to all parents in phase one and given to all participants in phase two. The likelihood of parents accessing these was debateable but I felt that including them at least gave them the opportunity should they wish to. I also considered the using a blog or Twitter to share my research findings, as I felt that perhaps they were more accessible ways of communicating, as yet however, I have resisted the use of both. My blogging so far has been restricted to my research journey, rather than my research findings.

My research proposal and the accompanying ethical considerations (appendix 5) were approved by the University's REC before I began any research. However, a discussion with colleagues about ethics and my project led me to revisit the BERA guidelines (2004) following my REC approval. The conversation with my colleague made me realise that that I didn't know if any of the adults that I was planning to interview could be defined as 'vulnerable adults'. According to the BERA guidelines (BERA, 2004:7) a 'vulnerable adult'

should be treated in many ways as one would treat a child, in accordance with Articles 3 and 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Furthermore there were guidelines that recommended desisting immediately from any actions that cause emotional harm, I recognised that there were questions that I might ask that could upset participants and thereby cause emotional harm. Even if participants were not 'vulnerable adults', I realised that my interviewing could potentially make them vulnerable and I would need to be very sensitive to the situation and stop interviews if I felt that 'emotional harm' was being caused. Another area which must be considered carefully when it comes to ethical matters is informed consent, how the purpose of the study was conveyed to participants was clearly important and I spent considerable time thinking about the information I wanted to get across to participants. The informed consent form (appendix 6), which informed participants about the research was sent out and any queries raised were answered but questions remained in my mind as to how informed participants actually were from reading my brief explanation of the research. To try and address my concerns, during the interviews the first question was about why participants were taking part in the research and the conversations that took place around this question did reassure me somewhat about participants' understanding of the research. However, I still query the concept of informed consent, a researcher's perceptions of what they mean could differ from a participant's perceptions and even if the form is read aloud and discussed there are still questions about why participants may give consent. For example, participant may be too embarrassed to say that they do not understand the research or feel too disempowered to say that they do not wish to participate once they have read the consent form and I think that researchers need to be sensitive to these issues when conducting research.

Kvale and Brinkman (2009) write about the moral enterprise of interviews, how the interview process affects participants and impacts on our understanding of social reality. They remind us that ethical concerns permeate through the whole research process rather than a simple 'it got through the ethics committee' approach. They suggest that when researchers meet ethical difficulties they should consult with their research community. I agree with this idea and I believe that the research community plays an important role, particularly for doctoral researchers, it was in meetings with supervisors and casual chats with colleagues that I found solutions to the ethical dilemmas that came up in the various stages of this project, although, of course many ethical questions remained. Creswell (2009) suggests that research should benefit both the researcher and the researched, I agree that this is an ideal to aspire to, however, I remain sceptical about the benefits of this research for participants, although I suspect that most, if not

all, of the participants were happy enough to talk to me as a 'sympathetic listener' (Vincent and Warren, 2001). As well as data collection, ethical considerations are also of relevance to the analysis and dissemination of research. Confidentiality and anonymity need to be respected during transcription and coding and data needs to be stored securely to maintain such confidentiality, all the names, for example of participants, young people/children, schools, were coded so that nobody or place could be identified. During the interpretation phase of the research, it is imperative that data is reported accurately, I asked interview participants to check through transcripts and agree them before proceeding with the analysis, this was partly to check that participants were happy with the accuracy of the transcript and partly to allow them the opportunity to change their mind if they wished to, in some ways perhaps a second opportunity to give informed consent. Again, however, the scepticism remains, how empowered the participants felt to change their minds, is questionable. I believe that in future research, of a sensitive nature, I would endeavour to conduct at least a second, repeat interview as I feel that this might help develop a more equitable and less exploitative experience (Vincent and Warren, 2001) for participants.

4.6   Why interviews?

Semi structured interviews formed part two of the data collection process. I decided to use semi-structured interviews to allow for a more in-depth exploration of a sensitive and dynamic subject area. Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggest that the goal of interviewing is a solid, deep understanding of what is being studied, a conversation in which the researcher carefully listens to what is being said in order to hear the meaning, this is what I felt was needed as a follow up to the surveys. Whilst the surveys had provided interesting data, for example, that 78% of parents felt their child was receiving the best schooling for their needs, however why parents thought this and what exactly this meant for their child could not be understood from the survey data. An interview would allow me to understand the views and opinions of the families I interviewed in greater depth, to learn about what they aspired to for their children and hoped for their families (Kvale and Brinkman 2009). I also chose interviews as it was a research method that I had some experience of and I felt that this experience would allow me to be more successful in gathering data than if I used a method in which I was a novice. Kvale and Brinkman are very clear about the importance of skills and experience in the craft of interviewing, when he writes, 'The quality of the data produced in a qualitative interview depends on the quality of the interviewer's skills and subject matter knowledge' (2009:82). Owens (2006:1161) in her work on marital breakdown felt that a researcher's skills helped to create and expand the conversational space that would allow a participant to feel safe

recounting their 'emotionally laden experiences'. Although as well as recounting experiences, interviews can be seen as a dialogue, 'a form of discourse between two or more speakers…in which the meanings of questions and responses are contextually grounded and jointly constructed by interviewer and respondent' (Schwandt, 1997:79), if this is the case then the relationship between myself, as the researcher, and the researched would form the basis of the interview data. Feminist researchers, along with others, accept that there are power differentials within the interview process, Oakley suggests that finding out about people through the use of interviews is best achieved when the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee is non-hierarchical (2008:222), I was aware of this at all stages of the research and tried hard to establish such a relationship, however I feel that it is a very difficult thing to achieve completely. As a feminist researcher I aimed to be as open and reciprocal in my relationships with participants as I could be, I don't believe that there is any such thing as 'bad science' (Phoenix, in Maynard and Purvis, (eds.) 1994). I answered questions and allowed interviews to go off in directions that they felt were important and wanted to share with me, this kind of interaction is at the heart of feminist research.

4.7   Interview schedule and pilot

The interview schedule was drawn up following the analysis of the quantitative surveys conducted in phase one and with themes that emerged from the literature review. The findings from the survey showed what seemed to be both positive and negative aspects of the issues involved with parental choice and school placement. For example survey results showed that 60% of respondents had said that their child's SEN had entirely affected their choice of school and the majority of respondents had 'chosen' special school's that were not local to them. I was keen to explore the reasons behind these decisions in more detail, what was prompting parent's to send their children to special schools rather than mainstream and send them out of their local communities to be schooled? The survey respondents had children with a range of special needs and issues around how these needs had affected their decisions needed to be explored further. Survey results gave indications of what parents considered to be the negative and positive aspects of their child's schooling and this was another area that the interviews questions covered to try and understand the school based factors in more detail. The purpose of the interviews was therefore as an explanatory device to explore relationships and variables that emerged from phase one but also I wanted to test various hypotheses that had emerged from the literature.

Just as I had with the survey questions, I asked the PhD research team to look through the draft interview schedule and again I received useful feedback which I used to make amendments, although there were fewer amendments to be made with the phase 2 instrument. Perhaps a reflection of my growing competence or a reflection of my qualitative background? I piloted the interview schedule, although, as a pilot interview in comparison to piloting questionnaires, I did only undertake one pilot interview. Again I was able to take on board feedback and make the necessary amendments. I ended up with an interview schedule made up of 6 sections, ranging from 'Background of the parent/carer' to 'Hopes and aspirations' and each section contained a number of prompts relating back to the heading. I was keen to conduct semi-structured interviews that allowed the parent/carer to cover the issues that they felt were important within the remit of the research area, I wanted a flexible approach where issues that arose could be explored (Berg, 2009). I explained at the start of each interview that although I had prompts and some research questions to answer I was not the expert, they were, and, so if they felt an area I asked about was irrelevant or there was a really relevant area that I did not ask after then they should mention these, I was keen to be able to explore paths that emerged that I had not previously considered. I also had a specific question at the end that asked if there was anything else they wished to add on the area that we had not already covered. In many cases parents took this on board and the conversation flowed freely and naturally along the lines of the research questions but with additional commentary, for example on the schooling experiences siblings, with or without SEN.

The first section of the interview (appendix 7) asked questions around the background of the parent or carer, it then moved on to the child's lifestyle and SEN, section three focused on issues surrounding choosing a school, section 4 focused in on the school itself, section 5 explored the hopes and aspirations of the parent's for their children and the final section explored a range of areas and gave parent's a specific opportunity to raise additional issues that they felt were relevant and had not previously been covered. I ensured that the language I used was comprehensible and relevant to the participants (Bryman and Cassell, 2006) rather than 'academic'. The order of the questions was carefully considered to ensure not only a logical progression through the topic area with ideas and evidence emerging that would allow for the research questions to be answered, but also to allow a gentle and steady start that would allow the interviewees to build on their relationship with the interviewer and establish trust and rapport. Kvale (1996:125) explains how a delicate balance must be achieved during an interview, 'The interviewer must establish an atmosphere in which the subject feels safe enough to talk freely about his or her experiences and feelings....personal expressions and emotions are encouraged,

the interviewer must avoid allowing the interview to turn into a therapeutic situation. I was very aware of the need to build rapport quickly, asking women to speak to a relative stranger about their children's SEN and schooling was potentially a sensitive and difficult situation, especially as many of the women had fought long, hard battles to ensure the best for their children, indeed many were still fighting. The interview schedule was adjusted after the first interview as it became apparent that the initial question *(To start off with, can you please tell me a little about yourself and your home/ family/ work situation please? Job, education, marital status, children, SEN, location, age etc.)* was not the most appropriate starter, a new first question (*To start off with can you please tell me a little about why you agreed to become involved in this research/be interviewed*?) was implemented for the second interview and worked more effectively. As the interviews progressed no other questions were changed, although, as is the flexible, conversational nature of semi -structured interviews (Patton, 2002), not every interviewee was necessarily asked all the same questions and often the order of questions was altered as interviewees covered them elsewhere. Kvale (2009) writes about the fact that interviewing is a skill a something *to be* learned through practice in contrast to the positivist view of research as the following of a set of rules and specific methods. I found each interview had its own feel or rhythm and the questions had to be adapted whether in their wording or in their order for each one to allow participants' stories to be heard and acknowledged. Some participants spent a great deal of time sharing the details of their child's SEN, they told me about their personalities and their abilities they told me about their other children or their relationships with other family members or friends, each interview was unique despite the many similarities across them and after each one I felt very privileged to have been allowed to briefly share in the lives of my participants.

4.8   Sampling issues or gatekeeping, the saga continues

As the sample for the survey was restricted in some ways by logistics I was keen that the interview sample should be as representative as possible, however, I recognised that this would be very difficult to achieve as my access to parents of children with a statement was restricted by my role as an outsider to the group and also because, in many ways, it could be seen as a 'hard to reach' (Earthman, Richmond, Peterson, Marczak and Betts, 1999) population. As Kennan, Fives and Canavan (2011) and Faugier and Sargeant (1997) argue, the more sensitive and the greater the needs of the groups, the more difficult it can be to gain access to them. There are many examples of such groups, for example, the homeless (Shpungin and Lyubansky, 2006) or those who have given up their child for

adoption (Mander, 1992) or those receiving palliative care (Ewing, Rogers, Barclay, McCabe, Martin, and Todd, 2004) and I would suggest that parents of children with statements of special needs could also be seen as one. Crozier and Davies (2007) suggest that potential participants may be reluctant to participate if they feel they have been misunderstood and misrepresented in the past, this could explain some of the recruitment difficulties I had, along with gatekeepers.

The sample for the interviews was initially a self-selecting group or what could be called an opportunistic sample, these were the parents who had completed the parental choice survey carried out a cross one LA and volunteered to take part in further research. 35 survey respondents had expressed a willingness to be contacted to take part in the interview stage of the research. I contacted all of the volunteers by email and arranged interviews with those who responded; in the end 10 of the interview sample were from the original group of survey respondents group. In phase one the majority of respondents had been graduates, living in villages and aged 40+, to try and increase the range of participants in phase 2. I used a wide range of methods, (including leaflet drops in schools, clinics, doctor's surgeries, advertising in community magazines, networking at LA parent support events, approaching schools, snowball sampling, advertising on online parent support websites, emails to schools, networking and presenting at head teacher events), and a great deal of time and effort an attempt to recruit families from a more diverse spread of educational, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. Snowball sampling can be an effective way of reaching 'hard to reach' populations, however, it does rely a great deal on relationships and is respondent driven (Heckathorn, 1997), I have no doubt that the participants who passed on my contact details to friends who also had children with a statement of SEN were selective in who they chose (Browne, 2005), perhaps picking friends who had similar views to their own.

I was keen not to use family support groups as a base for recruitment as many previous studies had used this method and I felt that it was important to try and hear from other groups in addition to those usually used by researchers. As Batten and her colleagues propound, parents who are part of a support group have found access to support and information and therefore represent a certain kind of parent (Batten *et al.*, 2006). I was not planning to exclude parents who were part of a support group from the study, I just hoped to use a group that was not made up solely of such parents. However, despite the resources devoted to recruitment, the parents interviewed were not from as diverse a background as they might have been. Gatekeeping, i.e. gaining access to the people or place under study, took on a more significant role than the research design had

considered. As Kawulich (2010:57), who conducted several ethnographic studies into a group of Native American women, wrote 'Gatekeeping is an integral but sometimes difficult part of the research process.´ McNab, Visser and Daniels (2007) allude to the manner in which gatekeepers can withhold co-operation if they feel threatened by a study, which perhaps some head teachers may have felt. I would say that gathering participants was rather like trying to get backstage at a concert without a 'meet and greet pass', virtually impossible.

In the end data was compiled on 20 children with statements of SEN, ranging in age from 4-15, across 3 LAs (table showing characteristics of interviewees on page 98). There is little doubt that parent participation is a significant challenge, whether for your average doctoral student or for a LA trying to recruit for a Pathfinder project. In theory it would have been good to have had representatives from various categories, e.g. different ethnic groups, ages, locations, genders, as part of the interview sample. In reality, however, gaining access to a group of parents of children with statements of SEN proved to be a remarkably difficult task, they are not an easily identifiable group and accessing the interviewees was a significant challenge that took up a great deal of time and energy. I found myself agreeing with Owens (2006:1164), who when trying to find participants for her doctoral research into marital break ups, wrote in her field journal 'recruiting is hell´. I stopped my recruiting efforts for the interviews at the point. Although of course it is also important to acknowledge that even when success is limited, in order to ensure that research of these hard to reach groups continues, researchers must be open about such difficulties and share their experiences to improve practice. Or as Lewis puts it,

'Marginalized groups are, by definition, often excluded from mainstream studies. The greater the difficulties in reflecting the views of those marginalized groups, the greater the concomitant danger (particularly in a policy context which is increasingly recognizing children's right to be heard (Lewis, 2004) that the loudest voices obliterate those of the unheard. This places a responsibility on researchers to develop methodologies and methods which recurrently open the research process.´ (Lewis, 2005: 396)

4.9 Sharing experiences and difficulties to improve practice

Looking back at my recruiting efforts and choice of methods I wondered whether different methods may have led to more successful recruitment. Being an outsider to the group I was studying, what Adler and Adler (1987) might call a peripheral member, on reflection I feel that perhaps I was unaware of many aspects of the situation that the families that I was studying were in and this lack of insider knowledge played a part in my recruitment difficulties. Using methods such as ethnography or the internet might have led to more access to groups that I struggled to engage with, for example Parsons *et al.* (2010) used an online survey to access the views of families who were home educating their children

with SEN, a group that were on the increase (Hopwood *et al.,* 2007) and yet remained little researched. In my efforts to try and include as diverse a sample as possible I believe that I failed in my responsibilities to develop methods and methodologies which might have helped me engage with many more groups of parents. At the time of the research my drive for diversity, coupled with the restrictions of logistics, time pressures and my own skills and experiences, actually restricted the diversity of my phase two sample. Whilst I believe that the findings of my research tell an important story, it is not the story I necessarily set out to tell, the story was shaped by the people that spoke to me and by my own tunnel vision when it came to research methods and design. In future research I would like to hope that I can use these doctoral experiences and my increased knowledge and skills to more fully explore possibilities for more inclusive research. Although of course I also need to accept that some people may have good reasons for not wishing to be involved in research and that, regardless of the methods employed, the rights and wishes of these people need to be respected, if not always fully understood. From my own background I am very aware that a researcher knocking on the door of my childhood home would have been treated very respectfully as a guest but ultimately refused entry to a private, working class home inhabited by a first generation immigrant family with their language restrictions and invasion of privacy concerns. Berger (2013:13) argues that 'researchers must continually ask themselves where they are at any given moment in relation to what they study and what are the potential ramifications of this position on their research.' I feel that at times in this doctoral research I was less aware of the ramifications of my own position on the research than I should have been.

4.10 Interview process

Most of the interviews were carried out in the homes of participants during school hours, although other locations (e.g. room in a school) were also used on occasion. Due to time constraints on the part of the interviewees, e.g. working hours, or me, working around school pick -ups, some interviews were carried out over the telephone during the evening. The participants were women, mothers of the children and in most cases, although not all, it was just the interviewee and the interviewer present. Occasionally a husband might be present but they did not take part in the interviews, although on one occasion a wife did check a few dates with her partner who was present. Perhaps this tells us something about which parent makes decisions regarding school placements or which parent perceives taking part in research as valuable. Or is it merely a reflection of the fact that it is usually women who stay at home and deal with school communication and are

therefore more informed and available? One of the things that did strike me as the interviews progressed was that all of the interviews were with two parent families, a fact I found surprising as a ¼ of families with dependent children are made up of lone parents[2]. Following on from the volunteers from the survey other interview participants were also sought across two other LAs, the rationale for interviewing parents across more than one LA was to reflect the different practices across LAs in terms of their processes and available school choices. However the recruitment of parents again proved problematic, a whole range of methods were utilised, from contacting head teachers, to leaflet drops, to advertising in community magazines, to contacting SENCOs, to social network sites, to word of mouth, to snowballing and attending LA parent events. Eventually several parents from the second LA were interviewed and two parents from the third LA were also interviewed, therefore the spread across the three LAs was uneven and the search for participants used up a great deal of time and energy. On reflection perhaps it would have been better to have used snowball sampling following on from the initial volunteers, this would have been a more efficient use of time and resources. The search for a wide range of participants across several LAs shows a naivety on my part in not realising how difficult accessing such an 'ideal sample' would be. I wanted to ensure that my research results were convincing, that they reflected the reality of the people I interviewed and included a variety of perspectives, when designing the research this meant to me that more than one LA should be involved. Flick (2007) refers to the idea in the background when it comes to sampling, the way in which having a range of demographic factors, which in my case might have included age, ethnicity, location, range of SEN, socio-economic, allows for variety in our sample. Gheradi and Turner (2002) look at the relationship between qualitative and quantitative research, one of the points they make is about how research projects do not always follow the plans intended for them, I reached this point when I found that no matter how I tried to recruit parents from across the different LAs, I was not going to manage to do so to my satisfaction. Although, on reflection, this aim of the 'ideal' sample was very unrealistic and, perhaps, unimportant, it could possibly be explained by my desire to transform practice or 'fix' things, like any good teacher or perhaps by the vast body of literature on research that fails to mention any sampling issues and reports findings as 'the absolute truth' for e.g. Batten, 2006 Bagley and Woods, 1998. The sample I did get data from may not have been representative of the population but they were nonetheless parents who had experiences of the SEND system,

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[2] According to the Office for National Statistics lone parents with dependent children represented 26 per cent of all families with dependent children in 2011, an increase of two percentage points since 2001. http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/family-demography/families-and-households/2011/sum-lone-parents.html

both positive and negative, and the education market and were prepared to share them with me.

As well as the arrangement and wording of the questions in the interview schedule, (please see appendix 7) a great deal of attention was also lavished on actually preparing for the interviews themselves. After establishing initial contact I was very careful to ensure that I did all that I could do develop trust and rapport with potential participants. (Although of course the ethics of this could be considered questionable, how ethical is it to do all I can as a researcher to make the interviewees trust me so I can get as much information from them as possible.) Prior to the interview a consent form (appendix 6) was sent out to all participants with an email asking them to read the form and ask any questions either via email or telephone. I explained that I would go through the consent form with them at the start of the interview to ensure that they were clear on all aspects of the study, their rights and any other ethical issues. Most interviewees had read through the form before we met up and I went through the form with them before beginning the interview and asked them to sign to show their consent. I always ensured they had a copy of the consent form. There were a few questions asked across the interviews but no major concerns and, thankfully, all the interviewees consented to the interview being recorded. The fact that there were few questions asked about the consent form could mean a number of different things, it could mean that the form was very comprehensive and the women all understood and felt content with the nature of the research project and interview. Alternatively, it could mean that very few of the women understood the form however were unable to ask about it as they were embarrassed to do so or felt unable to do so because of the power differential in the interview situation. Or perhaps many of the women did not read the form but did not wish to admit so and were therefore happy to agree to the questions I asked about their understanding and cooperation. There could be many more reasons why there were few questions asked about the consent form but as a researcher I was prepared to accept that the women signing their names on the consent form were giving their informed consent.

As well as ensuring consent forms were sent out I was also very careful with the arrangements for the interview itself, I planned routes carefully and ensured I was always on time and had plenty of time to carry out interviews. I dressed carefully, not too smart and not too casual, in an attempt to seem professional but not too intimidating, and I always wore my student identity card on a university lanyard to reassure interviewees that I was a legitimate student. I made sure I checked on arrangements beforehand and gave interviewees emergency contact details in case of last minute changes. I checked

my recording equipment before each interview and had spare batteries and a spare recorder, just in case. These types of logistical pre-arrangements ensured a professional interview situation, with no last minute panics or technical glitches, which hopefully made the interviewees, feel relaxed and valued. This is a very interesting section which is truly you. I can hear your voice in every word. I just wonder whether you can be more to the point and avoid some repetitions

4.11 Rapport building - a conscious process

I ensured that I spent a few minutes reviewing the interview schedule just before beginning each interview as I found this helped relax and focus my mind before beginning an interview. Before each interview I had just a few minutes to try and build on the trust and rapport I had already established with the participants through our emails or telephone contact before meeting. I found this easier to do with some participants than others and also easier to do face-to-face than on the telephone. However the fact that I was also a woman and a mother of school age children, a fact I made clear when arranging interviews to work around school hours or after my children's bed time, generally meant that I had at least some empathy and something in common with the women I was interviewing which I believe made it easier to quickly establish a common bond before the interview actually began. I often made some comment about being on time for the interview and dropping children or getting them to bed on time, a comment that showed that I shared something in common with the women I was interviewing, even if it was something as trivial as a manic morning chivvying children along or a crazy school run or a hectic rush at bedtime. I wanted to establish rapport with the interviewees but equally I wanted to share something of myself with them, many of them had invited me to their homes, all of them were giving me some of their valuable time, and I felt that it was important that I was open and personal with them. Like Oakley (2003) I believe that if one hopes to achieve the goal of finding out about people by interviewing them, then it is best achieved by establishing a non-hierarchical between interviewer and interviewee and by the interviewer investing some of their personal identity in the relationship. Or, as Wicks and Whiteford (2006) explain, sharing personal insights during the research can help build rapport and disclosure. The idea of 'conscious partiality', which stresses partial identification with participants and the treatment of them as subjects with real emotions and feelings (Mies, in Bowles and Duelli Klein, 1983) was one that appealed to me both as a woman and from a research standpoint,

'interviewing with conscious partiality demands that the researcher assume the role of empathic listener and neither exploit or manipulate the researched.… (this) method places great value on personal interaction and identification with the subject's experiences as another woman to produce more insightful research in a more ethical manner.' (Bergen, 1993:202) However, despite trying hard to ensure that I shared some of my own experiences with the women I interviewed and despite the fact that I sent all the transcriptions to the participants for their comments and approval I was still a little uneasy about the process. Whilst I understand the idea of a 'conversational partnership' (Rubin and Rubin, 1995) and I was aware of the temporal and personal limits (Flick, 2007) of the interview, I felt that the experiences the women shared were very personal and the role of an interviewer felt somewhat distant and impersonal. Perhaps my experiences as a teacher, someone who works with students over a long period, affected my feelings, dipping in and out of the lives of interviewees was not something that felt very natural to me. Following interviews I used the drive home and my research journal to help me work out these feelings, however despite this, I continued to feel this way throughout the interviewing process, a process that lasted over 11 months. I understood that the interviewees had all volunteered to take part in the research and that for many of them there might be benefits, Hutchinson *et al.* (1994:?) list these possible benefits of interviews as *a) serve as a catharsis, b) provide self-acknowledgement and validation, c) contribute to a sense of purpose, d) increase self-awareness, e) grant a sense of empowerment, f) promote healing and g) give voice to the voiceless and disenfranchised.* I was also aware however that topics of research that delve into participant's personal lives and experiences have a higher probability of causing distress (Lee and Renzetti, 1993). For me, as the researcher, I found the interview process to be emotionally and physically wearing. Corbin and Morse (2003) point out the fact that qualitative interviews can be very demanding of researchers as they can become very involved in a participant's story and feel very emphatic. This was not something that I had anticipated when planning my research and I found the long drive home and my research journal invaluable in helping me process my feelings and maintain my emotional well-being.

Bahn and Weatherill (2013:31) in their work looking at researchers working with people who were dying found that: *Feelings of guilt and personal responsibility for the plight of the interviewees arose with the researcher a few days after the interview,* this made complete sense to me, the *plight* of the people I interviewed touched me in ways that I had not planned for and had to find ways to deal with. Wicks and Whiteford (2006) also comment on the emotional impact of listening to stories, whilst there were many aspects

of the participants' lives that I did not necessarily have in common with them, there were equally many aspects, as a mother or as a woman or, that I did share with them.

4.12 Logistics

After the first interview I quickly realised that I would not have time to drink any drinks offered as despite the recording equipment I did still find myself making notes throughout the interview and even when I was not writing the level of concentration required to listen effectively and respond did not allow time to have a drink. The recording equipment had to be managed effectively to ensure that whilst the interview was recorded accurately it did not impact on the interview any more than necessary. I spent some time talking to the participants before explaining about the recording and checking consent, once the recorder was switched on I tried to put it somewhere where it could record but would be out of direct view if at all possible, in many cases this meant balancing it on a sofa edge. Where it had to be in direct sight, for example when interviews took place sat around a dining table, I put the recorder on and then ignored it, in the hope that the participant would too. Managing the recorder was a practical issue that had to be dealt with I had planned to check that the recorder was working and that the sound quality was good by stopping and checking, however the reality of sitting in a stranger's house and asking them questions about their children and their needs meant that this was not practical as it was not conducive to the atmosphere that I was trying to create. This isn't as easy as it sounds because once you create an almost intimate atmosphere, chatting about personal sensitive issues with a virtual stranger then it can be hard to let the logistics of tape recordings and microphones interfere. The logistics have to be managed effectively, and as Hermanns (1995) suggests it is the interviewer's responsibility to manage the situation and any feelings of recorder-discomfort that may arise during the interview process.

4.13 Telephone interviews

Five of the interviews were conducted over the telephone as the participants and I were unable to find a suitable time to meet, just as in the face-to-face interviews, these were recorded, once informed consent had been obtained and verified, and transcribed before being coded and analysed. Ideally a research design should include just one kind of interview, i.e. face-to-face, telephone or internet, for increased validity and reduced bias, however the realities of research are often different to the ideal. I considered the different impact that telephone interviews might have, Silvester *et al.* (2002) looked at differences in recruitment interviews which were conducted on the telephone for some candidates and face to face for others, they found that candidates interviewed by telephone received

lower ratings. Some books (Rubin and Rubin, 1995 and Gilham, 2005) suggested that telephone interviews and in depth interviews were not a good fit, they advised that there might be a lack of rapport (Shuy, 2003) which could hinder the search for thick descriptions. Irvine *et al.* (2012), in their small scale study of telephone versus face-to-face interviews, found that telephone interviews were shorter and they attributed this to the fact that participants provided less detail or elaboration, perhaps because of reduced rapport. I did not however find the telephone interviews that I conducted to be any shorter than those done face-to-face and I certainly did not feel that there was a lack of thick description when I read the transcripts, one of the longest interviews was in fact a telephone one. My experience of the telephone interviews supports the work of Trier-Bieniek (2012), she suggests that perhaps telephone interviews can lead to more honest interviews as the relative anonymity of participants can lead to more empowerment. The telephone interviews also allowed ease of access for some participants and this surely is a positive. Contrary to what Shuy (2003) and Gilham (2005) suggest I did not feel that I lost the naturalness or humanity that are found in face-to-face encounters, I spent a time talking with participants before starting the interviews and after stopping the recordings, and, in some ways I felt that I concentrated more fully in the telephone interviews, without the distractions of a new environment or a long drive to contend with. The telephone interviews were recorded with me sitting in a small dark hallway, the only place I could guarantee peace and quiet, and whilst I do not doubt that in some ways, particularly for participants, they were different to the face-to-face interviews I do not feel that these differences were necessarily detrimental to the data collection. If qualitative research is an 'intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008:14) then the telephone interviews, although a different experience, did result in 'thick description' and felt as 'intimate' as those done face-to-face.

4.14 Qualitative data analysis - Coding

As I conducted my interviews I knew that I would be coding them and using these codes to analyse what I was hearing, Rossman and Rallis (2012:168) describe coding as: '*the process of organizing the material into chunks or segments of text before bringing meaning to information'.* DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall and McCulloch (2011) suggest that coding is a series of steps that help the researcher make sense of interviews. Once I had the transcript for an interview I read it through and checked and corrected any spelling errors, I then sent the interview to the participant, normally via email, to check through and agree the transcript as an accurate record of our interview. McNiff (1988) suggests

that returning transcripts to participants is sound research practice and increases validity as it allows participants to confirm and review what they have said. Sending transcripts back to the participants fitted in well with my worldview although I did of course also have concerns about participants possibly withdrawing after reading through their transcripts or asking for parts of the transcript to be removed. Fortunately there were no cases of this and all the transcripts were returned, some with comments or typos highlighted, and I was able to continue. This process did make me wonder, again, about the power differentials between researcher and participant, would the women feel in a position to withdraw or ask for transcripts to be revised or was it merely a case of them responding with an affirmative answer as I was perceived to be in a dominant position? This kind of reflection is important, albeit uncomfortable, for a researcher and increases the validity of the project.

After I received approval from the participants I began my analysis, using Tesch's (1990) eight step process as a guide, firstly I read through each transcript and added a sticky note or two, these tended to be about things I remembered from the interview itself, on some as I read them. I then picked the most recent one and read it again putting more notes in the margin of issues that related to my research questions or the literature or just seemed interesting or were a big focus of the interview. After I had been through several interviews in this way I started to see similar topics emerging, I had jotted down words in the column next to the words and then began to put these words into shorter codes. This kind of coding is known as data-driven coding, it is where the codes derive from the raw data; another way of developing codes can be theory-driven, this is where the codes derive from previous literature (Ryan and Bernard, 2003) codes can also be structurally-driven, where they are guided by the research questions. Each method of coding requires revisiting data or literature and the process of coding can be seen as an iterative one. The codes for this research were largely data and structurally-driven to allow for participants voices to be heard and for research questions to be answered. After all the interviews were coded, there were over 80 codes, these were gradually reduced down (Appendix 8 shows some examples of steps in the coding process). As well as considering the power differentials during the interview process I also had to ensure that I was self-reflexive and reflective during the analysis stage and that I was accountable. By reflecting on my own 'subjectivity' (Stanley and Wise, 1993) and making it explicit in my write up, I felt that I was true to the principles of feminist research and therefore to my participants.

Figure 4-1 - Diagram of codes and themes

Table 4.1 - Showing themes that emerged from coding interviews

Parents' reactions to diagnosis and statement	Experiences of early schooling (primary school)	Experiences of secondary schooling	Mother's instincts, leg-work and 'on the case-ness' (Tiger mothers and problem solving)
What influenced parents' in their school 'choice' decisions, the information available and views on 'choice'	Parents' evaluation of their child's current schooling	Aspirations	Views on inclusion

In an effort to check my coding and understanding of the interview data for the purposes of trustworthiness, I asked a colleague to code one of my transcripts and then we met to discuss their coding and mine. We found that there was general agreement across many of the codes, but not all of them; this process showed me that my interpretation of codes was not always very clear to someone else and if I were to work with someone else's codes or ask them to work on mine in the future, then a degree of training beforehand would be beneficial. However, following on from this process, I felt that my codes were reliable. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggests working out reliability as the number of

disagreements divided by the number of agreements plus disagreements, although I didn't count these during the activity with my colleague, I feel sure that the figure would be in the high 90 percent mark. I began to link codes together and then, finally, I categorised codes into themes. I ended up with 8 themes, some of which related to my research questions (structurally-driven), others to the literature (theory-driven) I had already read and others to areas which I had not anticipated the start of the study (data-driven). This system of coding is what Kvale (2007:233) might call *bricolage*, an 'eclectic form of generating meaning- through a multiplicity of ad hoc methods'.

Once I had the themes defined I re-read all of the transcripts and coded each of them by theme using colours on the electronic version (Appendix 9 – an excerpt from a coded transcript). Once I had all of them colour coded by themes I then condensed the data from each interview into a table of the eight themes so that I had a table for each participant to work from rather than hundreds of pages of transcript. I also then used a system of tables to gather data under each of the eight theme headings, with each piece of data referenced back to individual participants to allow me to be able to search back easily within a transcript if I needed clarification or more detail at any stage of the analysis and interpretation. This was the data that was then interpreted and analysed as my findings. As I began the analysis, despite having the tables of themes and a table for each participant I found myself returning to individual transcripts as I worked through the themes, I found that often the context and the details from the conversations was needed to fully understand and interpret the data, however, the tables did give me an initial starting point and certainly helped me manage the huge amount of raw data which made up the transcripts.

5. Chapter five - Findings

Phase one of the research was a survey carried out across one LA with parents/carers of children with statements of SEND, the sample comprised of parents/carers whose children were in either their first year of schooling, Reception year or Year 7, which is the first year of secondary education in England. Sixty-five respondents returned a completed survey.

5.1 Range of SEN across the two phases of the research

In phase one of the research 49 different SEN were identified by respondents in the survey. The SEN ranged from speech and language difficulties to Asperger's and emotional behavioural difficulties to Down syndrome, further details are shown in the table (5.1) below. (For details of what the literature says about the SEND of the young people involved in the research please see appendix 10).

Table 5.1 - The primary type of need of the children surveyed compared to the needs of the children in the LA

Type of need	Survey %	LA stats % (LA figures include children with SSEN and a lower category of SEN)
Specific /Moderate/Severe Learning Difficulty	28	16/26/>1
PMLD	0	>1
BESD	11	15
SLCN	18	24
HI	5	2.5
VI	5	1.2
Multi-sensory impairment	0	>1
Physical disability	7	5
ASD	23	6
Other difficulty/disability	3	3
Please note: Percentages add to more 100, as some children had more than one need		

The comparison between the children in the survey and the children in the LA was difficult to make as the LA figures include children with SEN who may or may not have a statement. However there are some points of interest, most notable perhaps is that the number of survey respondents whose children had ASD compared to the number with ASD in the LA was much higher. One explanation could be that the parents of children

with ASD have more difficulties with regards to school placements in this LA and therefore more of them responded to the survey? Of the children who had ASD/Asperger's as part of their SSEN, all but one of the respondents was secondary based and just over half attended either a mainstreams school or a mainstream school with a special ASD unit.

In phase two of the research the sample and the range of needs was smaller and no comparison could be made with LA data as the families were from three different LAs, research (Mooney *et al.*, 2010) shows there is widespread variation in the prevalence of and provision for children with SEN, the table (5.2) below, shows the needs of the children in phase two.

Table 5.2 - A table showing the SEND of the children in phase two of the research

Type of need	Number of children
Learning Difficulty	6
HI	1
VI	1
Physical disability	1
ASD inc. Asperger's	10
Downs	1
22q11.2 deletion	1
ADHD	1
Please note: total adds up to more than 20 as some children were identified as having more than one need	

Table (page 96) shows that most, 13 out of 20, of the sample were from the same LA where the phase one survey was conducted, and the other participants came from two neighbouring LAs. It also shows that the majority of participants were from urban settings and that six of the participants lived in more rural settings and that there were five parents of primary aged children and the rest were secondary aged. There were 11 boys in the sample, 3 of primary school age, and 9 girls, 2 of primary school age. All the primary aged children, except one who attended a specialist unit attached to a mainstream primary, attended mainstream schools. Of the secondary aged children, one attended a mainstream school, six attended specialist units attached to mainstream schools and the remaining seven attended special schools.

In some ways the national statistics mirror the sample of young people in phase two, the high numbers of ASD statements reflects the growing increase in this area and the numbers who attended special schools was 30%, only slightly lower than the national figure of 39.6%. In other ways they do not, in this project there were *slightly* more boys

than girls as compared to the national figures, where boys *greatly* outnumber girls. Also, for example, the numbers of ethnic minority children or looked after children, in the sample does not reflect the national picture and this is an important caveat when considering the implications of the findings.

5.2   Findings phase one - introduction

The data for phase one was collected via a postal questionnaire (appendix 2) distributed by a LA. The questionnaire was made up of three sections, 1) personal details, 2) school choice and 3) school placement. There was also an invitation to interview section in an attempt to recruit parents for phase two and an introductory letter to explain the nature of the research and also why and how they had been selected for the sample, I was keen to emphasise that the survey was confidential and that no personal details had been shared as the LA had added all the postal labels. I felt that parents would be more likely to respond if they understood these aspects of the research. The data below is collated from the returned surveys, it is divided up in the same order as the questionnaire was laid out.

5.3   Characteristics of families who took part in the survey

 The majority of respondents, 78% (51), were mothers and 15% (10) were fathers, while 2% (1) of questionnaires were completed by both parents and 5% (3) by foster carers. The majority of respondents (45) were aged between 41-50 years, the remainder of respondents were split equally between those that were older and those that were younger. 26 respondents were educated to at least graduate level and just over half of respondents lived in villages across the LA. Respondents identified forty nine separate SEN across the sample, for the purposes of the analysis primary needs were used and allocated to the categories of SEN used in the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice 2001 (DfES, 2001b). In terms of labels, an important point to note is that many of the children in the research may have had more than one SEND. Also, as the authors of the DfES report *Admissions and exclusions of pupils with SEN* explain, identifying need is not 'an exact science' (2005:11). The category of Communication and Interaction Needs (CIN) includes ASD and Asperger's.

60
50
40
30
20
10
0

Foundation   Year 7   Year 3   Year 4   Year 6
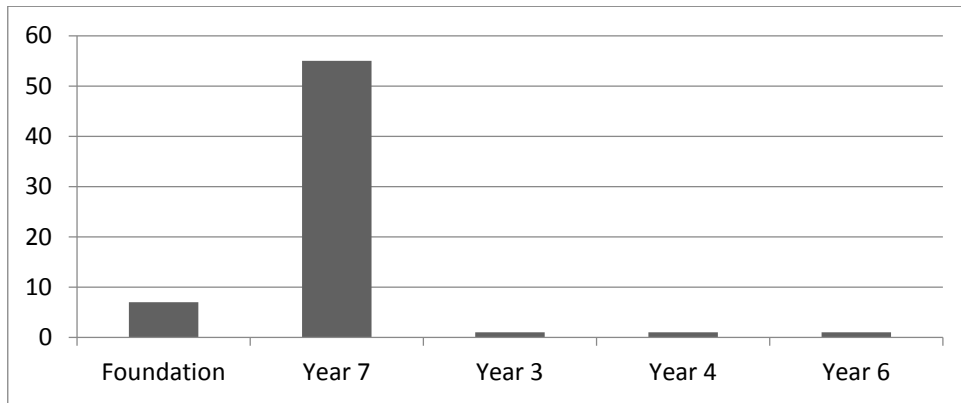
Figure 5-1 - Ages of children

The majority of the children in the sample were aged between 12-13 years, the figure (5.1) above shows the spread of ages across the sample.

5.4   Where did the children go to school?

One of the questions in the survey related to where children went to school, whether they attended a school in their local area or not and also the type of school each of them attended. The results were analysed in relation to each child's primary SEN.

Table 5.3 -The schools the children went to, according to their primary SEN

Category of SEN	Local	Not local	Not	Total
Cognition and Learning Difficulty (CLD)	7	11		18
Behavioural Emotional and Social Development (BESD)	1	5		6
Communication and Interaction (CIN)	10	10	1	21
Sensory and/or Physical Needs (SPN)	4	11		15
Medical conditions (Medical)		1		1
Not specified	1	3		4
Total	23	41	1	65

Table 5.4 - The type of schools the children went to, according to their primary SEN

Category of SEN	Mainstream	Special	Main + ARP	Grammar	Total
Cognitive Learning Difficulty	5	12	1		18
Behavioural Emotional and Social Development		5	1		6
Communication and Interaction	9	8	4		21
Sensory and/or Physical Needs	6	7	1	1	15
Medical conditions			1		1
Not specified	1	1	2		4
Total	21	33	10	1	65

Most of the children in the survey, thirty-three, attended a special school which was not based in their local community, this was in contrast to the majority of children in England who attend a mainstream school in their local community. They travelled various distances to school ranging from 0.25 miles to 90 miles, although this was a child that boarded during the week. Over 75 percent of the children travelled more than 3 miles to school. 64 percent of parents had 'chosen' schools' that they did not consider to be their 'local school'. For many not attending their local school also meant not attending a mainstream school. Twenty-one children attended a mainstream school and ten children attended a mainstream school with an attached specialist facility (ARP). It seems that the category of SEN affected the type of school attended, for example, the data shows that all the children with BESD attended special schools or, in one case, an ARP and the majority of children with CLD also attended specialist provision.

5.5   Parental choice

With regards to whether parents felt they had been given an actual choice the results varied depending on the type of SEN. The situation for parents of children with SPN and Medical needs was quite positive, parents felt that they had been given a choice, one commented, *'all schools were open to me'*; although some parents had faced difficulties, for example, *'I had to fight for my choice as only one special school locally'*. The majority of parents/carers whose children had CLD felt that they had been given a choice, however, fulfilling the choice was problematic. One parent said they had had a choice but *'had to fight to get LA to pay'*, another agreed but *'only after a long fight with LA who*

wanted our daughter to attend another school. Of those who felt they had not had a choice, one commented, '*were told her mainstream school was unable to cater for her needs any longer'*.

The respondents whose children had BESD were less positive, since only half of them felt that they had had a choice. One parent who felt they had not had a choice, commented that '*there are no suitable schools in county so it came down to a choice of one'*. The biggest group that felt as if they had not been given a choice were parents whose children had CIN. Even one of those who did felt they had had a choice, wrote '*but only because I pushed and paid for extra reports/assessments to support my choice'*. The majority, felt that there was no choice for them, one parent explained, '*county made it very clear they would only send to two schools on list'* and another felt that '*no other school specifically met her* [the child's] *needs'*.

5.6 Factors affecting school placement decisions

Parents/carers were influenced by a range of factors when making their decisions about which school to send their child to, see below.
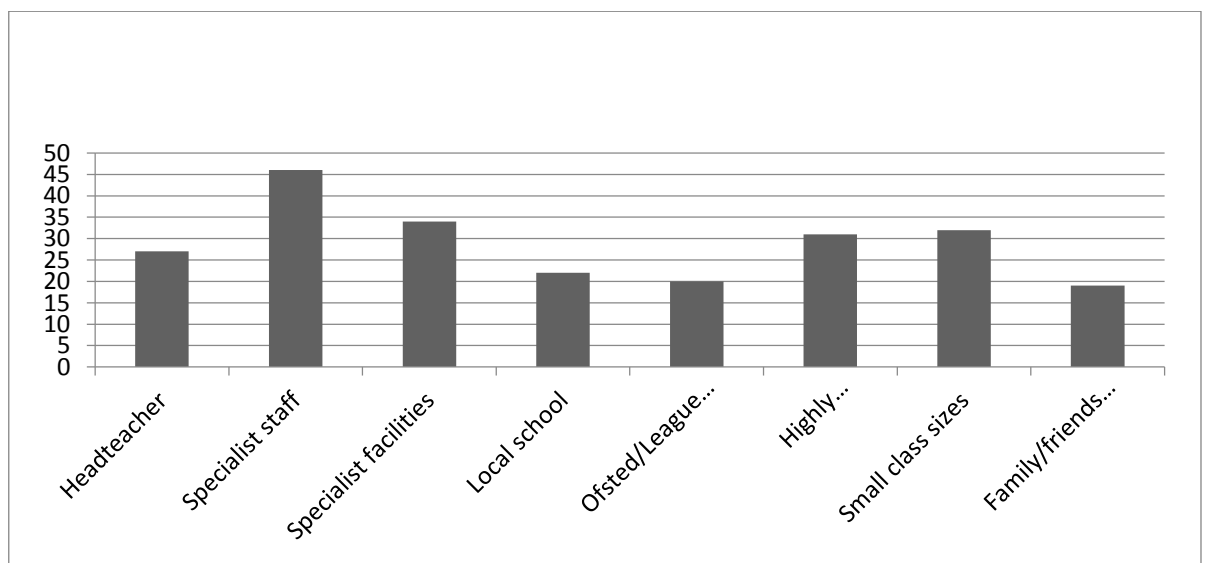

Figure 5-2 - **Key factors that influenced school choice decisions**

Specialist staff and facilities were clearly key factors in helping parents choose one school over another, thirty-eight respondents reported that their child's SEN had completely influenced their decision about school choice. These factors were mentioned significantly more by the parents whose children attended special schools, a finding that is similar to Jenkinson's (1998) results from a survey of parents from a support group in Australia, where parents identified special programmes, student-teacher ratios and self-esteem as key factors. There were other pull factors and, in a

minority of cases, there were also push factors, for example '*to avoid residential*' or '*given little choice*'.

In terms of guidance on which school was best for their child, most of the parents surveyed got their advice from the LA SEN team or the child's previous place of education (table 5.5).

Table 5.5- Where parents got their advice from

Category of SEN	Portage	Local Authority	Own Research	Friends	Parent Partnership	School/ nursery	LA	ED Psych	Paediatrician
CLD	1	6	2	2		6	4	2	4
BESD		2	1		1	3	1		
CIN		10			1	9	5	5	5
S/PN	2	8	2	2	1	5	3	4	2
Med	1	1			1	1		1	
Unspec -ified				1			1		
Total	4	27	5	5	4	24	14	12	11

The role of the LA proved to be a key factor in the choice process; respondents' comments varied from feeling pressured by the LA who '*wanted our daughter to attend another school*' to others who felt that they were '*not given any guidance which may have been best school for my daughter*'. Although thirty six respondents felt that they had received all the information they needed to help them choose a school, the remainder felt that they had not and some felt that the LA had actually been '*obstructive*' and '*unwilling to listen*' and that little or no information on special schools had been provided. Schooling or school?

5.7   Parents' aspirations and views of current schooling

As figure 5.3 below shows, social and life skills and confidence were what most parents expected their child to gain from their schooling.
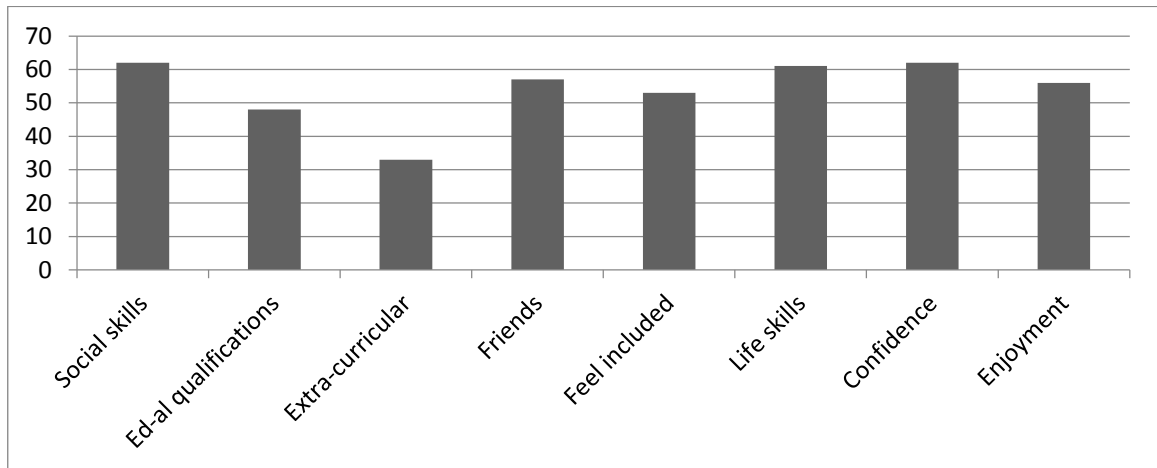

Figure 5-3- What parents wanted their child to gain from schooling

Parents and carers also commented on the positive and negative aspects of the school their child was attending (see Figs.5.4 and 5.5).
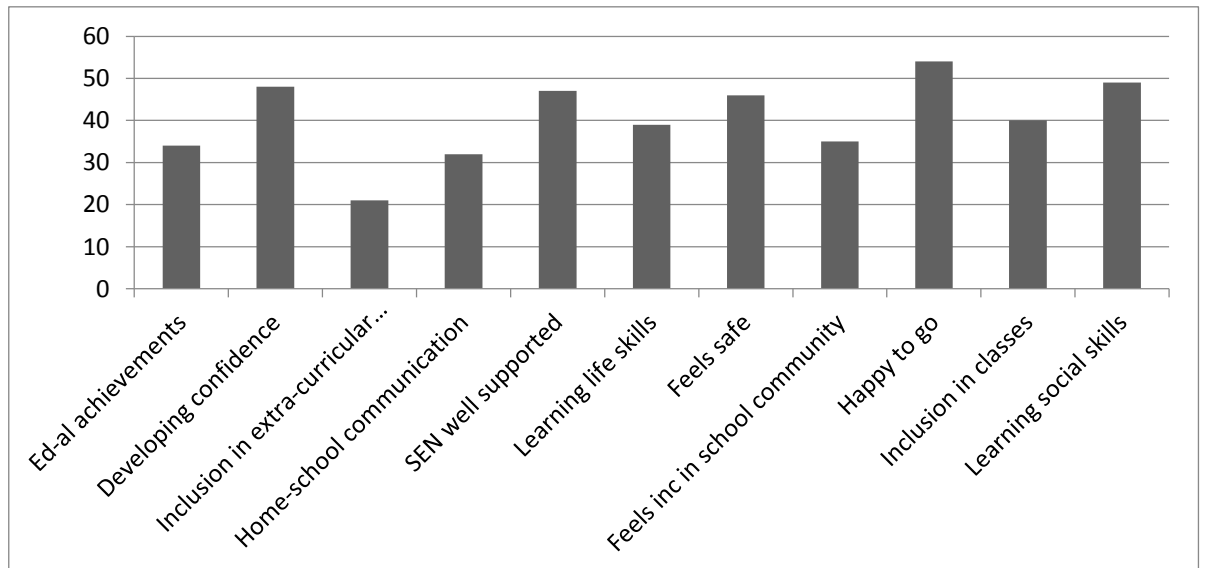
Figure 5-4- Positive aspects of current schooling

There were many positive aspects reported and half of all respondents felt that their child was included in the school community and nearly one third felt their child was included in extra-curricular life at the school.   Far fewer negative aspects of schooling, such as

distance travelled and not reaching academic potential, were reported (Fig. 5.4).There was no correlation between parents who felt they had had a choice or hadn't had a choice and the number of positives reported, even those respondents who felt that they hadn't had a choice and would not choose the same school again reported on some positives. There was also no correlation between the reporting of positive and negative aspects of schooling and the type of school the child attended.
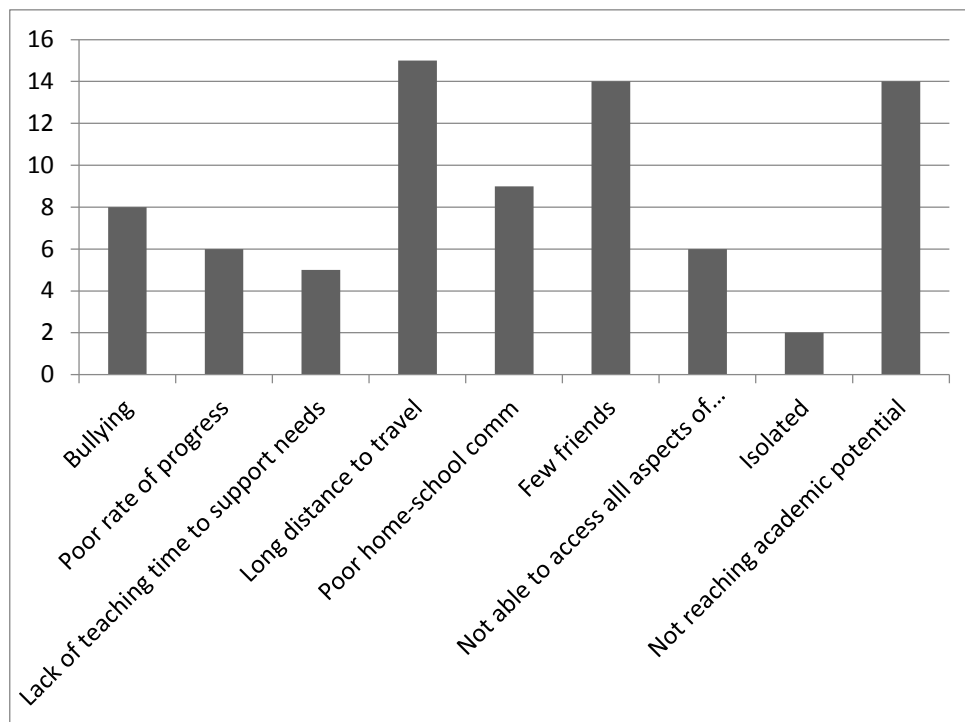
Figure 5-5- Negative aspects of current schooling

Parents/carers were also asked if they would make the same choice again, almost all the respondents whose child has CLD were clear that they would choose the same school again as, one parent commented, '*my child is happy, school have exceeded expectations*'. When it came to children with CIN, SPN and medical needs, almost all respondents said that they would make the same choice again, with a variety of positive comments being made, '*very pleased with specialist teaching*', '*doing well, school positive and encouraging, gained confidence*', '*our experiences have been mainly positive so would choose again*'. There were a small minority of respondents who would not have chosen the same school again, parents whose children had BESD seemed to be the least content.

When the results were analysed by the type of school attended, there was a clear contrast between how happy parents were with the provision in mainstream and mainstream with ARP. There were only two negative comments across these two types of provision whereas there were many more negative comments about special school

provision. Perhaps parents who choose a special school for their child have different or higher expectations of the schools or perhaps special schools are failing in some fundamental way to meet the needs of these children?

The majority of parents felt that their children were receiving the kind of schooling that best supports them, with lots of positive comments. Others indicated a degree of reserve *'although more resources, both hours and equipment would be helpful, the department do their best'* or *'enjoys school just wish it was a bit closer'* and *'sometimes teachers need more knowledge specifically about how to handle kids with ASD'.* The respondents who felt their child was not currently receiving the kind of schooling that best supported their needs fell into three broad views; 1) those who felt that *academic needs* were not being met, *'he is not learning at a high enough level, school is too easy for him'*; 2) those that felt that their *child's SEN* were not really being met *'been there nearly a year and still no speech therapy'*; and then 3) those whose children just 'do not fit' the system *'there doesn't seem to be any school that can meet all his needs'* or *'her abilities are somewhere between mainstream and special school and there is nowhere that fits that description.'*

5.8   Discussion of phase one findings

Parents with children who have a SEN Statement are legally entitled to 'express a preference' on school choice applications. Survey findings (table 2) show that just over half the respondents had 'preferred' special schools for their children, in contrast to both the statutory guidance and government statistics (DfE, 2013) which show that 53 percent of students with a statement are in mainstream education. Ofsted (2006) reported that it was the quality of the education rather the location, mainstream or not, that really matters. The phase 1 data supports these findings as there were many parents who were positive about the schools their children attended, whether these were mainstream, special or ARPs. There were parents who were positive regardless of whether they felt as if the school their child attended was necessarily their choice or not.

Results also show (table 1) that 41 out of 65 families had children attending schools outside of their local communities. In every single category of SEN children were less likely to attend local schools; in the case of children with a statement for BESD all but one of them was educated away from their local community. Is this because, despite the legal provisions in place, the changes in attitude that that will make school more accepting of children with BESD have yet to follow and therefore parents have little choice, especially when it comes to behavioural issues? Children with statements for BESD can sometimes disrupt learning environments in ways that perhaps children with other SEN statements might not and this can clearly cause concern for any school. Schools

might be reluctant to admit students with BESD or perhaps these students are more likely to be excluded or made unwelcome in mainstream schools and so parents make the 'decision' that

Parents of children who had statements for CIN made up the biggest group of respondents (table 5.2), that were the least likely to feel as if they had had a choice. It could well have been this feeling of a lack of choice or perhaps other difficulties with regards to school placement that prompted them to complete the survey, as Whittaker (2007) suggests 'a higher response rate might intuitively be expected from 'dissatisfied' parents' . These were the parents identified by the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee (2006) report on Special Educational Needs as being the group whose frustration and upset with the failure of the (SEN) system needed the most urgent resolution.

When it came to factors that influenced school choice decisions specialist facilities and staff were highest on the list, so perhaps inevitable that more respondents 'preferred' special schools which in many ways can be seen as having more of both than the average mainstream school. Ainscow (1999) suggests that for some parents a well-resourced special school may seem to be the 'safest' option for their child. This view could be supported by the survey results, as 59% of parents indicated that their child's SEN had completely influenced their decision on school choice. Previous research (Bagley and Woods, 1998) supports the survey findings and the idea of parents of children with SEN looking for caring schools. The implications for schools that may not wish to accommodate children with SEN statements are clear, West and Hind (2007:516) suggested that 'schools that had responsibilities for their own admissions had lower proportions of students with special educational needs'.

Another dilemma surrounded the information and guidance they may or may not have received from various sources including the LA, previous schools, medical staff, parent support groups, friends or their personal research. The LA SEN team and previous places of education were most frequently mentioned (table 5.5) as places where parents got their guidance. Although the role of the LA seemed to be less positively viewed by respondents with many negative comments regarding school placement advice/guidance for children with a range of needs, perhaps the inevitable result of the LA being the body that awards statements and manages the finances of many schools and services? (Hodkinson, 2010). In terms of the guidance received from the LA, just under half of respondents had not been provided with much guidance on school placement and their choices, especially when it came to special school provision, this kind of variance is

difficult to understand, unacceptable and easily rectified. It was also interesting to note that the Parent Partnership, a support group set up for families of children with SEN, funded by the LA but working at arm's length from them, was used by so few of the respondents, 4 out of 65 families.

When asked what they aspired to for their children, respondents favoured social skills and confidence over educational achievements. In keeping with Bernstein's (1977) ideas on the intrinsic-personal/social perspective, perhaps respondents were more interested in their children as people with likes and dislikes than perhaps parents whose children did not have SSEN. In their evaluations of their children's current schooling respondents, bearing in mind that most of them indicated that they had felt as if they had, had a choice, were largely positive.

When it came to choosing the same school again, respondents with children in special schools seemed to have some reservations and again the survey data was limited in being able to indicate whether this was due to their expectations of a special school would be like or other reasons such as their experience of previous schooling. Perhaps the most significant dilemma was which of their child's needs would be met by the school they 'chose' for them? Whilst many parents indicated that their children were making good progress others felt that some needs were just not being met. For some parents it seemed the dilemma was simply that the school that they thought would fit their child's needs best simply did not exist.

5.9   Limitations

Although 65 families responded to the survey and a response rate of 17% for a postal survey is not without precedent, the demographics of the respondents must be taken into account when considering the findings. The fact that ¾ of respondents were between the ages of 41-50 and that 40% of participants were graduates does suggest that the findings may not be typical of parents of children with statements of SEN.

5.10 What did we learn from phase 1?

A review of the literature (Hodkinson, 2010, Visser and Stokes, 2003) suggested that there is a basic conflict for LAs and schools between implementing inclusion, managing budgets and the continual government drive to push up standards in our schools. Parents who participated in the study were more likely to have chosen a special school for their child's education than parents nationally, the reasons behind their choices however remain far from clear cut, and there was some seemingly contradictory findings with some parents feeling that they had had little choice of school placement and then expressing satisfaction with the educational provision. The complexity of the data and the

possible tensions in the way the parents talk about their satisfaction and choice shed light on the fact that it is not easy to read parents' views and feelings. It is evident however that the dichotomy between special versus mainstream is a false dichotomy as it is not the type of school, but the quality of the provision that makes a difference. . It is apparent from the data that, despite the discourse the implementation and practice of reforms, that give parents the right to choose a school for their child, are neither assured nor simple. Participants in the study indicated that they had little choice of suitable provision and were having to compromise either the academic or the social aspects of their child's schooling. As Bajwa-Patel and Devecchi (2014) argued, for many parents whose children have a statement of SEN, the choice of a school is often a dilemma as nowhere actually seems to fit.

As the analysis of the phase 1 data was completed the data collection for phase 2 was already underway, the interviews were intended to add depth, thick description, to the survey findings and breadth, due to the fact that they were undertaken across 3 different LAs. In the next chapter the interview findings from phase two of the research are explored.

6. Chapter six - Findings phase two

6.1 Characteristics of children whose parents were interviewed

Age of child		Gender	SEN	Preschool/Primary school	Secondary school (where relevant)	LA	Location
P1. Year 8		Male	Learning diffs, not otherwise specified	Mainstream	Mainstream	LAK	Town
P2. Year 8		Male	ASD	EHE	Special-p/t	LAB	Rural
P3. Year 1		Male (twin)	Learning difficulties	Mainstream		LAB	Town
P4. Year 8		Female	GDD and ASD	Mainstream (Inde)	Special	LAB	Rural
P5. Year 8		Female	Albinism and VI	Mainstream	Mainstream with VI unit	LAB	Town
P6. Year 8		Male	HI	Mainstream	Special (residential)	LAB	Sm town
P7. Year 8		Female	22q11.2 deletion syndrome	Mainstream x2	Special (girls)	LAB	Town
P8. Year 1		Male	ASD	Mainstream Mainstream with ASD ARP		LAB	Town
P9. Year 8		Male	ASD	Mainstream/special	Special	LAB	Sm town
P10.	Year 8	Female	Downs	Mainstream	Special	LAB	Town
P11.	Year 8	Female (twin)	Learning difficulties	Mainstream	Special	LAB	Rural
P12.	Year 8	Female (adopted)	Learning difficulties	Mainstream	Special	LAB	Sm town
P13.	Year 8	Male	ASD	Mainstream +ARP	Mainstream +ARP	LAB	Town
P14.	Year 4	Female	Learning difficulties	Mainstream		LAK	Town
P15.	Year 5	Female	Physical disabilities	Mainstream		LAB	Town
P16.	Year 2	Male	ASD	Mainstream		LAN	Town
P17.	Year 8	Male	ASD	Mainstream	Mainstream +ARP	LAN	Rural
P17.	Year 10	Male	Asperger's	Mainstream/mainstream	Mainstream +ARP	LAN	Rural
P18.	Year 8	Male	ASD	Mainstream/special	Mainstream +ARP	LAN	Sm town
P19.	Year 8	Female	ASD + ADHD	Mainstream/mainstream	Mainstream + ARP	LAN	Rural

Please note there were only 19 interviewees however they discussed 20 children, one participant spoke about the SEN of both her boys.

6.2 Introduction

The vast majority of families that participated in this research had become highly competent at 'choosing' schools for their children, one mother (P9) told me '*I visited twice first as his mum and then as his project manager',* however they didn't see schooling as a commodity, they had other aspirations for their children, the same mother said simply '*I want him to be able to function in society and be happy'.*

For their primary education almost all of the participants chose to send their child to their local school however for many this is where things first started to go wrong, as the schools, both urban and rural, failed to deal adequately with the needs of their children. Whether it was not adapting the curriculum, one mother (P8) of a young child with ASD said '*he wasn't really getting anything out of it'* or not understanding the SEN, a mother (P13) whose son has ASD said '*I didn't feel they could meet his needs- just because of how they were talking to me. I don't think they had any understanding of autistic children'* or failing to cope with behavioural issues, another mother (P18) talking about her son's Reception year, he was subsequently diagnosed as having ASD, told me that '*his teacher would ring up at 9 o'clock every day about his behaviour, when I was on my way to work'* the schools failed their children*.*

Some parents then chose alternative mainstream schools for their children and this worked better for them, one mother (P19) whose daughter was diagnosed with ASD and left her first mainstream school in the second term of Reception, found that the second mainstream school '*were fantastic, brilliant. Yes, totally got her, totally understood it'.* Whereas for others improvements were less apparent one mother (P7) commenting on the second mainstream school felt that '*it was alright, still not perfect'* and there wa*s 'too much love and not enough teaching.'* Of those parents that chose special school or mainstream with a special unit options for their second attempt found the schooling worked better '*because the Head said, we'll listen. I thought, it's not going to be perfect but'* (P10) however for others (P4) it was still not quite the right fit, *I still don't think she's in the right place, to be honest. But what I want doesn't seem to be there.* These findings suggest that for many children with SEN statements the schooling they receive fails them and their families.

6.3 Getting a statement and the reactions to the 'diagnosis'

Acquiring a statement and the reaction to a child's diagnosis emerged as one of the themes from the interviews. The age at which young people were diagnosed varied, with some families knowing before the child was born that there would be issues, for e.g. one little girl who was born with spina bifida, whilst others were not diagnosed until later,

middle school spotted it (P1) and they got their statements later still, one parent (P14) said, *she was 10*. Some parents were advised, by school staff or friends & relatives 'in the know' to get a statement for their child, one mother (P5) whose child was visually impaired said, *I hadn't really a clue. Luckily I've got a good mum* (her mum was a teacher). Another parent was advised by nursery staff to get a statement and did so, despite her own reluctance, she felt glad that she had as it made them feel ahead of the game and gave them access to lots of things. As for the reactions to their child's diagnosis this varied from those parents who didn't really understand the implications at the time or were not too concerned, one mother (P3) said it, *Doesn't really bother me, I know he's a happy child.* Others (P1) were relieved to finally have a 'label' as it meant, *he was finally going to get some help.'* Some found the diagnosis harder, one parent (P2) said

> *initially it was on my mind from the minute I woke up; it was like a cloud- I suppose it was like a kind of grief. I didn't know much about autism but I knew that it was bad.*

Another parent (P13) of a young man with autism said

> *I was relieved. I knew that he was autistic. I would still say that there is a grieving process and I still think you go through that; even now at certain time*

Another family in particular were relieved when they got the diagnosis of autism, the mother (P16) said, *I was working away and a bit of a detached mum,* and before the diagnosis the parents were blaming each other for the child's lack of communication. Previous research, most recently by Broomhead (2013), has explored this notion of parents blaming themselves, especially in cases of young people with BESD, however this was not something that was brought up by many of the parents I interviewed. The concept of grief and the importance of labels were mentioned more frequently. In terms of getting a statement it was evident that, just as Pinney found in her 2004 report for the DfE, for many parents acquiring a statement for their child was a way to ensure access to additional services and, where necessary, priority admission to schools - a passport. For some families (P18), whilst there is a sense of relief, as they realised it was ASD, the emotions were more complicated

> *It's such a double edged sword, relieved because there's a name to what's wrong and it's not a parenting issue and it's also you don't realise you're grieving but we did. And it was quite a lengthy grieving process as well.*

Whilst for other families the diagnosis process is harder to achieve, one parent (P11) who said she *knew they weren't progressing,* was told it was because they were summer born, premature twins. Eventually they were diagnosed, but *it's hard, you have to fight.*

6.4   Primary schooling

The participants' experiences of the reaction of primary schools varied, some parents had found that their local primary welcomed their child and worked hard to ensure their needs were met. One parent, whose daughter has spina bifida which led to some physical difficulties including wearing nappies when she started school, was welcomed by her local pre-school and school. The mother (P15) stated that

> *They were very welcoming. They set up a number of meetings with us, with her local physio. And we've never had, sort of, an issue with the school….They've always been very willing to provide things. They've often come up with suggestions to help us before we have.*

Another parent (P5) with a positive experience of primary school has a daughter with albinism and VI she sent her daughter to her local nursery and then the local village school, they found the Head was very welcoming and '*They had a really good attitude to (daughter) coming and they really kind of accepted it and didn't resent it or anything'.* The school provided consistent support and excellent communication throughout the child's time at the school and the Head teacher also advised the mother on the child's transition to secondary school.

One parent (P14) whose child's difficulties were first identified by her primary middle school was also very complimentary of the school, *I feel the school are doing brilliantly because,...if an issue comes up, they will find out how to deal with that.* A parent (P12) whose daughter was adopted and who later went on to a special secondary school sent her daughter to the same independent nursery as her older children and then to the local primary school. Her daughter received support with learning difficulties and the mother felt the SENCo was very helpful. Two parents whose children were in the very early stages of primary education at the time of the interviews were both pleased with the schools their children attended, one child (P3) went to his local village school whereas the other (P16), also attended a village school, although this was not his local school. Primary schools that successfully managed children with SEN statements made the changes that were necessary, e.g. ensuring that there were nappy changing facilities, to accommodate the needs of the children and provided in class and playground support to assist them physically or with academic needs.

The remaining 14 children all had difficulties with their pre-school or primary schooling and then some got places in schools that understood their needs, which included mainstream, special and mainstream with units, whereas others struggled through until secondary before finding somewhere more suitable and others were still struggling in secondary at the time of the interviews. 10 of these children had ASD as part of their

SEN, 2 had learning difficulties, another had Downs and the other suffered with a genetic condition which caused her some developmental issues. Of these 14 children only one attended a mainstream secondary school, the remainder attended either special schools or units attached to mainstream schools. So what kind of difficulties did these families face with early years and primary provision?

One parent (P1) whose child was diagnosed with Learning Difficulties, although as she commented

> *I don't have a clear diagnosis. I think it* (the statement) *said um learning difficulties not otherwise specified, whatever that means? Like every year you go they've got a new classification. One year he's autistic and then the next year they don't think he is and it, just, they don't seem to know what they're doing all these professionals. But we decided that it didn't really matter as long as his problems were described and he was getting help for that. So they seem to be around focus and coordination. Maybe a little bit dyslexic, um maybe a bit autistic, he wasn't...he has trouble interacting with other kids. Gets left on his own a bit. He's got some friends but ... picked on a bit. Yeah.*

Although this child did not have his statement in first school, he was on the School Action plus list, however his mother was clear that the school '*didn't seem to know what they were doing and he learnt nothing'.* The next primary school, a middle school, realised that he needed more help and arranged for him to get a statement and even before this was in place they arranged more support for him '*they'd given him somebody to work with him a lot of the time. And you know they were trying, trying things'.* The second school seemed to have a much more sympathetic approach, his mother said that he

> *had a teacher who seemed to like him which really helped. ....She understood him yeah, so she could make, you know, she made allowances or helped him to deal with things yeah so he became a lot happier and didn't allow the bullying. Bullying was not tolerated at (name of school). Whereas at the school before I don't know what was going on...*

Another of the parents (P4) of a child with GDD and ASD sent their daughter to the same independent nursery as her older sibling, they did try registering her for a place at their local Ofsted 'outstanding' village school however this did not go smoothly; their daughter was still in nappies at the time and rather than accommodating this need the school asked that the mother be on hand to change nappies as required during the day. At the independent nursery her daughter had 1:1 support (paid for by her statement) and was in a small class, high adult to child ratio, and the family felt that *the school was very supportive and she was fine*. However as the child moved up the school the mother started to feel more pressure,

> *Nobody said anything to me, but I was beginning to think things like- to this day I don't know if people were thinking this, but- they're paying all this money for a*

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private education and they've got a child in the class who could potentially be disruptive and I began to think, would I like it if it was my child? I don't think there was any of that, but there were things I was beginning to think about. There were phone calls every night – (child's name) has done this, (child's name) has done that today. …The other children were flying off and she could barely write. So I began to question was she in the right place or not? .. . I think the teacher wasn't a particularly good teacher and I think that the pace picks up at that age. Because she'd gone into the prep school where they start gearing them up for the Common Entrance exam at 12. So it stepped up, they were moving them on quickly and she was just falling – not falling behind but being left behind.

Another case where parents (P6) felt that their child, who had developed HI as a result of childhood meningitis, was perhaps being left behind in the later stages of primary education started off really positively. As the child developed his HI just before he began at primary he and the family assumed that he would attend the same school as his older sibling

And the school were so adamant that this was a child that they could, and should, be supporting that there wasn't any logic in sending him anywhere else. And everything at that stage – (child's name) was still going up a learning curve. ….Yes, and to be honest I don't think we ever thought about doing anything really differently; because we're a hearing family, and he never stopped talking, so we didn't know anything to go and try and do

The school worked hard to support the child and he spent most of his time there as the only HI child in the whole school however as he got moved up through the school his SEN seemed to cause more issues.

It became less successful towards the later years at school, not because (child's name) was receiving less support, but just… you couldn't expect 29 other children to slow down and talk only one at a time just for him…he'd had a teacher who taught him in Year 3 and taught him again in Year 5, and they got on really well and she had learnt a lot about (child's name) and his needs. But I can even remember her saying at one point that we're not experts … that we're always relying on the teacher for the deaf and I think at that time he'd got a fairly new teacher for the deaf who had only recently qualified so we kind of lost the depth of outside experience. And he got quite frustrated and often things were fine in the classroom, you know, in a controlled environment. But then things would kick off in the playground – again because that's a noisy environment. And the rules in the playground game would shift and (child's name) wouldn't get what was happening …and then the kids would get fed up with him because he wasn't doing whatever he was supposed to be doing…so he went through quite a difficult patch where he was the naughty boy who was being marched down to the Head's office.

Whilst for other parents primary school worked relatively well in some respects once they had a statement for their child, one family (P11) felt that getting the statement was an accomplishment and that once they had it,

more help is put in place and she was given … because what we were finding was that, you know, within – I mean it was a big group of them by this stage - it was Key Stage 2 – there was one teacher and one TA.

However despite the statement some aspects of primary school did not work so well, for example their daughter suffered from social problems,

> *She was just so used to being teased or, you know, got at; she needed someone with them because she knew that if they (teaching assistant) weren't there then she'd be teased or bullied or punched or kicked, or whatever… Socially she was … well, I suppose for want of a better word, kind of outcast…So no, they didn't get invited to tea, they didn't get invited to parties, they didn't get invited to anything. It was alright initially but when it got to sort of going to secondary schools, people are very … you know, wanted their children to mix with people like-minded, so they were kind of … particularly (child's name) was, you know … I don't know, never won anything, never got a line in a play because it would be too much, never got to say anything apart from maybe two words.*

Another parent (P7) that found their child struggling with social issues, as well as academic in their local mainstream provision, moved their daughter from her local mainstream primary in Year 2, to a smaller mainstream village primary.

> *Year 2 when we decided to move her because it's a very big school. The school was cheating; they were having two Statemented children in the same class but they employed one LSA (Learning Support Assistant), which we didn't realise till we spoke to the other parent. … Then (she) went to the local school, in the next village up and I would say it was alright. Still not perfect… She ……had a full-time Statement and had someone working with her. She was being mothered quite a lot, which used to annoy her quite a lot.*

The parents felt that

> *Some years, you know, she would be taught nothing in the sense that she was spending all her time being taught on her own – that's not inclusion, in my opinion you know; particularly when she got into Years 5 and 6, she was lost, didn't know what was going on you know, didn't understand the curriculum – so that was stressful for her, I think.*

One parent (P13) of a child with ASD realised very early on that mainstream provision would be unsuitable; her child was non-verbal and she felt that.

> *That caused him a lot of angst in terms of his behaviour and the behaviour started probably just around the time he started nursery, if I'm honest. Behaviour really deteriorated but it was more that … it was lack of language.*

The mother supported her son in his nursery school, acting as a classroom assistant to see if it helped improve his social interaction, it didn't and a diagnosis of ASD was made. Following a recommendation from the Educational Psychologist the child was then accepted at a mainstream primary with a specialist ASD unit.

> *And that's where he went and that was a very, very difficult decision for us. I did look at mainstream school as well as. I'm quite realistic about how he was – still is, really – in terms of how he would cope, how the school would cope with him, how he would cope with his environment – things like that. The local school….would definitely have not suited his needs. All of the other mainstream schools I did look at, that were identified as taking SEN, made it quite clear that*

they wouldn't be able to meet his needs either without using me again – (as a voluntary teaching assistant) *My local one didn't say that* (they wouldn't take her son); *I made that decision, because it was open-plan and he was a runner,… when he was small and he needed to be able to be contained. The next local school didn't really want to entertain him – well just how they were speaking. And the others that I went to see, I didn't feel they could meet his needs – just because of how they were talking to me. I don't think they had any understanding of autistic children.*

In another case of a young boy with ASD a parent (P18) described her son's negative experiences at a mainstream pre-school

..He started struggling at pre-school… And the pre-school teachers used to ask us questions about our parenting at the time. He was doing loads of silly things, like he would bite children - a lot. And he would do that trick of eating their lunch....He'd poke their hand with his fork. You know, not losing his temper and doing it but just he'd do it. We had questions from a lot of parents, did we sit at the table with him and what did we let him watch on telly? We went and took him out of there just before he was due to start Reception.

And then his few short months in a mainstream Reception class

He was full time from October half-term and they started having problems. They couldn't cope with his behaviour. So they ended up excluding him from lunches. I'd come home, I'd have to come and have lunch at home every day. Then they excluded him from afternoons in school and lunches too. Then they finally excluded him permanently – in the February.

The school had felt that they could deal with him as they had some experience with children with ASD, however this proved to be incorrect.

They had an autistic child in school who was … you know, he was quite classically autistic. A very quiet child. They presumed that because they knew his autism, they knew about autism. 'Don't worry we know autism, we can cope with him', but they couldn't. I don't really know what they did when they were at school to be quite honest, I don't think they did anything. Because if you look at a child with Asperger's and what they need, they need their own space and actually Reception class was so small they put him a little tent in there but it was so small, there were 13 children in that class. And it was a really, really small room, they had no outdoor area that was significant, it was a very small playground. You know he was the kind of child that everybody knew his name, every child knew his name there. He was the little, you know, naughty one.

The parents then moved their son to a school with a designated ASD unit, *basically we've got him into this autistic unit, it's a 25 mile trip to school, a 30 mile round trip*, where his mother says

He's actually really good at school.....I still don't think it's the right for for him. Um, he holds it all in at school now, he really holds it in, he doesn't get to go out at break time, because he can't cope with it. He was bullied by a Year 6 child while he was out in the playground. The Head....saw his bad behaviour, and wouldn't have his autism used as an excuse for his bad behaviour

This theme of a school not coping and deciding a child with ASD was 'naughty' was an experience repeated by parents of a young girl diagnosed with ASD and ADHD. The family (P19) sent their daughter to their local village primary school, with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) as she was still being assessed, and they explained her difficulties and were assured by the school that

> ..we'll look after her! A small village school which we thought would be nice and cosy for her. Big mistake! Big, big mistake! She wasn't looked after at all. They didn't understand her needs at all. They thought everything she did was a choice; she was choosing to behave like that. They didn't have any understanding of special needs… So she was continuously in trouble, really, and it was a battle to get her to school. And in the May I removed her. I got told...that she'd been dragged out of the sandpit by one of the teachers…you know with Autistic children you have to manage how you get them from one activity… But no understanding that her speech and understanding was poor. You know it was, there's the instruction you didn't follow it so I'm going to punish you.

Another parent (P8) of a young boy with ASD, realised very early on that her son had SEN and would need a school that could cope with his needs, at the pre-school that he had attended his behaviour had been a challenge however the setting had worked hard to try and meet his needs. His mother explained what the pre-school leader had said to her

> She said we don't know what to do with him but because we love him, and want to help him, and in the end – out of their own budget – they employed somebody for 1:1 with him because he was a liability! He kept escaping; he was a Health and Safety risk to himself, to the other children, to the staff. You know, but he just has this – he's like marmite, (child's name). If you get him, you can't help but fall in love with him but if you don't get him people just, like some of the staff, didn't want to go near him because they were frightened of him. So, you know, he was actually a liability. If he'd broken his leg or something, he was that type of child that, you know, in your care, you don't want to deal with that, do you? Most people who do pre-school do it because their children are grown up and they want something to fill their day. They don't want to deal with a child who's got those type of problems.

Even though the pre-school tried hard to meet her son's needs she still felt that he had not got a lot from the experience. She commented that as she searched for a primary school for her son, who was soon to be diagnosed with ASD, she was told by the head teacher at a local primary that

> you don't want somebody going, oh yes we can cope. You don't want people to cope with him, you want people to help him and do best by him.

It was at this point that she stopped looking at mainstream schools and concentrated her efforts on special schools.

In one family with two boys with ASD the mother (P17) had a difficult time with her local primary school with one of the boys, who was diagnosed after his younger sibling, she

sent him the to the local nursery, which was *an absolute nightmare and then he moved on to the local* village school where he did okay in the first two years as the teacher managed his needs effectively, his mother felt that

> *he'd got a very good teacher at that time in Reception and Year 1 and she used to give him little Science projects to do; sort of wiring and little bits and bobs like that. So he was fine Reception and Year 1, but ran into difficulties in Year 2.*

Despite the difficulties her son was having in school for example

> *He was building towers with rubbers and every so often he would just shout out 'I don't know what's going on'. Well of course nobody tells you that … I suppose they just think it's a cheeky child, you know. But he was just basically saying that I don't know what's going on, you know!*

The school did not feel that any support was necessary as the child was performing at an average or above average academic level in most areas, they were resistant to help and the mother gave her opinion

> *I don't think small village schools are … I don't think they've got the interest, the expertise, the time … I don't know what it is.*

In another example, a young boy with ASD (P9) went to his local playgroup and then received a statement and attended his local primary which just happened to have a specialist communication unit, although with hindsight his mother feels this was a mistake

> *… If I knew the things I know now; if I'd have known them then, he wouldn't have gone there. He would have gone to a special school immediately because … But, because it was a department, he was autistic, it was up the road, it was local.*

She felt that even though the school had a specialist unit that should have coped with her son's needs they failed him and furthermore used underhand tactics to get him to leave.

> *He moved halfway through the year because they couldn't accommodate his needs, but they didn't outrightly say to that to me, if you know what I mean? Schools can be very odd about how they get rid of a child from a school and I've experienced it twice; and they do lots of underhand, sly things which are awful. You know, it's much easier if they just said, we can't meet (child's name) needs; this is what he needs, we can't supply that, we think he should move schools. What's wrong with saying that, you know? So, and they don't do that. Or, some schools do.... But at that time she was doing things like inviting me in so that I could see what he wasn't able to achieve, and how he wasn't fitting in and all this sort of thing. So, you know, a bit of bullying really going on.*

The mother clearly felt very strongly about how the school had handled the situation with her son and she felt that it was the school's inclusion policy that was to blame, she told me

> *I think that what it was, was that their inclusion criteria – they wanted to change their inclusion criteria. So they wanted children to be more inclusive in the school and (child's name) wasn't able to do that; not at the level of the age he was at.*

Another parent (P2) whose son has ASD and was diagnosed aged 3 felt that there was not a primary school that could meet his needs, the mother told me, *we'd looked at school but couldn't find any that we thought would be right for him.* So the family decided to educate him at home and ran an education programme for him with volunteers and then paid teachers until he was of secondary age.

It is apparent that the educational experiences of the families I interviewed at the early years and primary level were very mixed. It is interesting that all of the families, bar the one that chose EHE, sent their children to their local early years or primary providers. Previous research (Broomhead, 2013) suggests that students with challenging behaviour are 'unwanted' in mainstream schools and Bagley and Woods in their 1998 study suggested that schools are likely to 'privilege' the academic. Were the students who found primary mainstreams unwelcoming presenting 'challenging behaviour' or were they perhaps not academic enough? Rix, Sheehy, Fletcher-Campbell, Crisp and Harper (2013), in an international review of education provision for children with SEN, reported that countries found it harder to meet the needs of the child, through collaborative and co-operative methods, as they moved up the school. There seemed to be a definite division in the minds of practitioners, policy makers and parents between the primary and secondary phases. Although these studies might go some way towards explaining the reactions of some primary schools to some children with SEN, the picture appears to be more complicated.

6.5   Secondary schools

The situation with secondary schools was very different, far fewer parents sent their children to their local mainstream secondary. Of the 14 children in the sample of secondary school age, 13 attended a special school or mainstream school with an attached specialist unit.

The only parent (P1) who sent her son to his local mainstream secondary visited 3 local secondary mainstream schools, she based her visits on location and advice from the Parent Partnership and the Inclusion Manager at her son's primary went on the visits with her. She visited to see how her son might 'fit in' and felt that the Inclusion Manager might be helpful as *she knew him an educational setting and so she could talk to you know the schools and try and get some feeling about they would deal with that*, despite her own education and the fact that she worked in a university the parent felt unsure about dealing with schools, she said *It's still kind of hard going into school and, this is their issues how are you going to deal with them.* As well as the visits she also looked at

Ofsted reports and spoke to people she knew whose children attended the school, so she used a combination of what Ball and Vincent (1998) might call 'hot' and 'cold' knowledge.

The school that she felt perhaps would be best for her son, although he was not keen on going there, she explained,

> *they seemed to know what they were talking about, but it was not actually where he went as he wouldn't have been with local friends. So and I don't know how I would have got him there and back every day.*

The mother was influenced in her choice by the SENCo that she met when she visited the school that her son attends now, she told me,

> *I met (SENCo) who seems very pleasant and positive and helpful and you know, wants to solve problems…she definitely knew what she was talking about. And seemed positive about (my son) going there.*

Clearly having staff that were positive about having a child with SEN and knowledgeable about their SEN was an important factor in helping a parent decide whether or not a school was suitable for their child. The mother was pragmatic in her evaluation of the school she commented that, *it just seemed the best, it wasn't like yeah this is the perfect place it was just like yeah this is the best of the available choices you know, weighing up the pros and cons.* She kept a close eye on what went on at school and communicated regularly with school staff to ensure her son's needs were met, she felt that the school were good at listening to her and trying to accommodate her son's needs, although she also felt that *the overall feeling of the organisation is not one of trying to involve the parents; it's trying to keep them away*.

Despite the problems her son had had with his SEN in primary school, where his difficulties were not identified and supported for a number of years, this parent still felt that a mainstream school in her local community was the best option for her son. However she was very clear about the necessity of having a statement, she said

> *If you don't have a statement I think secondary's not good, that's what I am hearing talking to other parents. Their kids have this problem or that problem but it's not enough to get someone to help them and they're struggling along.*

And she was also adamant that the thing that was missing in the school choice system was an advocate,

> *So yeah I felt like (my son) could do with an advocate, there wasn't an advocate for (my son) in all this. And I think that's what's missing for these children with statements. Because there's the school, but the school wants to, you know it's got its own needs hasn't it, I mean it wants them to progress but and make them look good for their results but that's not about (my son), that's about the school ……there is nobody who really cares about the kids except for the parents and even me with my education wasn't that well prepared for being his advocate. And*

> *it needs to be somebody who understands the school system and can speak on a level with the teachers and the heads and whatever I think.*

She had also found that when she was visiting schools, it was difficult to find out about the school's SEN policy

> *Um none of the schools had anything written where they would say this is what we do. This is our policy, this is our process, I had to sort of go in and ask. .....You'd have thought they ought to really say this is the steps, if this doesn't work we do this and if that doesn't work then your child has to leave and you know I didn't really know .....*

The one child from the group attending a mainstream secondary, had had a difficult time in primary, but seemed to be coping in secondary and his mother had academic aspirations for him and felt that he was getting more out of school, *although he won't admit it.*

Of the other children at secondary school several attended mainstream schools with attached units, known alternatively, depending on the LA as Designated Specialist Provision (DSPs), VI provision or Additional Resourced Provision (ARPs).

One of the parents (P5) of a child who attended a mainstream school with VI provision spoke to me about choosing a secondary school for her daughter who had experienced excellent provision in her local primary school with really good and personal communication throughout her time there. The mother hadn't realised how lucky she had been with the primary school experience until she began to speak to other parents.

> *To be honest I had my head in the sand a bit. I didn't realise how bad it could be for other parents and then by the time she was in Year 5 and Year 6 I started meeting parents of Visually Impaired children and thinking, my God she was so lucky that this has been her experience. It had been just like every other child's one really, which is exactly what I had wanted for her.*

It is difficult to say how much of a role this positive experience and the desire that her daughter experience what every other child would played in the parent's choice and decisions about secondary provision for her daughter. Looking for a secondary school proved to be more challenging following on from such a positive primary experience:

> *The problem was when we started looking round the schools, the ones that she was in catchment for and then a couple of other ones around... I was quite scared at one point. One of the schools was just so…they didn't have a clue.....Primarily ignorance, but there was a bit of a like, do we have to take her, sort of attitude as well. And this was the school that she was in catchment for.*

After realising that her catchment local secondary was not going to be suitable, the parents visited other schools, including one with a specialist unit, for behaviour. The mother explained

So we kind of thought, right we'd better look at some other schools and we looked at some of the other ones that had been recommended. One of them was really good, we liked, but it had a separate admissions procedure - it was a church school. Although we go to church, we didn't go regularly, and we were out of catchment and we applied but didn't really think she'd get in. The other catchment school had a behavioural unit and everything seemed to revolve around it, well she won't really get in the behavioural unit. And it was like, No there's nothing wrong with her behaviour! She didn't need to go there. I want to know how you're going to support her in class. Well, we can't support her unless she's in the unit. Again, they just didn't seem interested in her at all. Again, this was a more personal feeling when I walked round, it just didn't feel right. Some of it felt like a prison, to be honest. It just didn't...it felt very narrow and crowded, and small windows and I said to (my daughter) I don't think I really want you going there.

The school that the parents wanted their daughter to attend was the church school, which they did not think they would get in to. The factors that convinced them when they visited the school were the staff, they met the Deputy Head teacher, the SENCo and a support assistant and their attitude, they told me that the staff

had looked at her Statement, talked about previous experience they'd had with children – not necessarily who were visually impaired – but who had had disabilities. I think one had a hearing impairment and somebody else had been in a wheelchair……So that was one of the reasons it was really good – they seemed interested and geared up and knew their stuff..

However a week before the deadline for applications the mother heard informally that there was a school in another LA that had a specialist VI unit that her daughter could apply for, whilst the mother had previously heard of the school she was unaware that it had a VI unit that her daughter might be eligible for

*I mean, I had known about the school beforehand, but I thought you could only get into the VI base if you were in (name of neighbouring town). So again, a bit of ignorance on my part, but I thought – it's a (name of neighbouring town) school, she won't get in. (Own LA) probably won't pay to send her in, all that sort of thing. We went round, and it was just like – yes, give me the form now, I'll sign it right now! ….The VI base, they do **lots** of visual awareness training with the children; the teachers have to do 2 days VI training. They have … the whole school is marked out, the steps have lines on that are regularly checked. It's just really made for them, really. And it was just the general attitude. Everyone seemed quite friendly and welcoming. And, it's a Catholic school, so it wasn't my first choice, but they have a very strong pastoral emphasis and there's lots of kind of communication with parents and all the sorts of things I'd really valued in KH's old school…. It felt right, yes.*

Despite both parents, and a grandparent, working in the school system they had been unaware of the fact that they could apply out of catchment for a school place for their daughter. This lack of knowledge and clarity within the school choice system was a frustration shared by many of the parents I interviewed. Their daughter gained a place in

the out of town school and the parents, and their daughter, are happy with the choice, when I asked them what had influenced their choice, they told me

> *The knowledge of the staff and also the kind of ethos of the school, and it was very caring and welcoming. So it was kind of a bit of both really, but primarily it was the knowledge and the experience actually because that was what the two catchment schools didn't have – the experience. They could be trained, but until you have got the experience of working with visually impaired children you don't really know.*

These were parents whose daughter had been the first VI student at her primary school and who felt that she had had a fantastic experience in her previous schooling and yet at secondary level they wanted somewhere that was experienced and knowledgeable about students with VI. When I asked why this was the case the mother said that perhaps it was *because I was a bit more aware of mistakes and how badly it can go wrong if you don't get the things in place*.

Another family (P13) whose son attended a mainstream school with a specialist ASD unit at primary and then wanted him to move on to a similar school at secondary faced huge difficulties with the LA. Initially the parents considered the grammar school options in their area, however they quickly realised that these would not be suitable for their son.

> *He is a very, very bright boy and, for me, I did look at some grammar schools placements for him. One in particular, because I knew they took Asperger's. But I didn't feel in any way, shape or form really that he would cope in a mainstream secondary school because it's just a totally and utterly different environment in terms of movement around school, interaction with peers, level of homework. Stuff like that.*

They then decided that he should stay in the mainstream and special unit environment that he had experienced at primary level and they looked at the options available to them in their LA

> *There were two- there's only two in the county for autism- and we looked at both of those and we felt the one that was further away would best suit his needs; purely, really…the key reasons for us was because of the environment.. The one that was closer to our home was based within the school itself… the other set-up was a separate unit, that was purpose built, so it would be quitter; there would be less movement and stuff like that. We felt that would be better for him – that was one of the key reasons why we felt…because he's got sensory issues, noise issues, and he does need to be able to go away to somewhere where there is quiet. And the one closer to home didn't have that.*

The parents were clear that the specialist facilities at their chosen school would suit their son's needs best. Their son has settled well at the school and the parents feel that they made the right decision

it's been -I'm touching wood here - the best choice. It was the right choice for him and they are really pro-active; they're not re-active, as they've had situations - and it's because they obviously do have situations quite often with these children. I couldn't fault how he's settled in the school and feel that they're dealing with things in a pro-active way. The experience has been brilliant really because, you know, it could have gone horribly wrong for him. It didn't.

The LA had wanted them to send their son to a more local school that had an ASD unit and whilst they agreed to the parent's choice of school, they initially refused to pay for transport to the school they had chosen, the mother explained

*They were backing us into the corner to try and get us to take the school which was closer; not meet our son's needs....they were saying, well they're both the same; they categorically were **not** the same. And they hadn't even bothered to go and visit these placements.... what I was really upset about is they were making recommendations about the schools, about my child, when they'd never ever met my child; never even been to the provisions they were talking about, so how could they stipulate?*

The parents took legal advice and threatened to go to tribunal and the LA eventually backed down and agreed to pay the transport costs. The whole experience took a huge toll on the family,

the transfer to secondary can be really tough, and they were trying to, you know, back us into a corner. It was so, so stressful for us as a family. It was the worst time of my life, actually. Horrendous.

This family's experiences highlight some of the difficulties that can arise in this situation. The LA authority's Transport officer called the family after the transport was finally agreed, he suggested that the family had caused the issues by deciding to send their son to the school that was further away, the mother explained

*I was **so** upset because we effectively, we haven't got hardly had any choice. You know, I'd choose for my son to go to the local school, if I could choose, but they can't meet his needs and he wouldn't be happy there and, you know, he'd probably end up being excluded. So it's not a choice where, you know, … we're trying to do the best for our kids, not being … it was as though we were being particularly obstructive,*

This notion of having no choice was a recurring one for many of the families I interviewed another parent (P19), whose daughter had had problems in her first mainstream primary and then a fantastic inclusive experience in her second, also felt that there was no choice, when talking about the transition to secondary she said

I was really worried about how she would adapt, but in terms of choice you know there isn't a choice! There isn't really a choice….. I think that's the thing, choices aren't … there aren't really choices; you're not given any choice because you're not given any information - at any level really. I mean, yes, we knew a bit at … from leaving the juniors but actually the reality is there isn't a choice and I think

> *that's … you know, we could have had choices at infant and junior school level, but when you get to secondary school there isn't a choice.*

Despite this lack of choice the mother felt positive about her daughter's move, she felt that the school handled the transition effectively, she told me

> *I think because she was with people she knew and there were children already there that she knew and because she'd been taken in this sort of nurturing little group with staff she knew, it was like a nice handover really. I think that was done well.*

The fact that she had some informal knowledge of the school and some good experiences early on with some of the staff helped to make the move easier,

> *her class teacher who was fantastic. I emailed her a number of times before (name of daughter) started and she'd always email back immediately … she's fantastic.*

Her daughter's experience at the school began well and changes were made to the curriculum to help meet her needs, albeit after several meetings with the mother, she explained

> *The first four months she was really … the school were really pleased with her, you know. She was coping. But at home she was really fraught so I knew something … she was stressed; really, really stressed. And I thought the key to helping her …was …getting back to the curriculum that she needs. So I had a meeting with school and they were, oh we're doing all we can – which I didn't believe! And from that, because she'd got such a good class teacher – the SENCo was sort of saying, well we're doing everything – but we then had another meeting in the January and I was about to launch into my, she needs this is because of this and she needs this is because of that, and she said I think I've got some good news for you. And she'd arranged for (daughter's name) to have 6 hours in the DSP unit…. she was accessing all the things she loves like computers and music and, you know, all the sort of lovely things; making things. They took out one of the Science lessons … she was having two sets of Science lessons….. and I said….. I don't care if she's getting her Science entitlement! That is totally irrelevant. She's not actually learning anything, so give her those hours. So they gave her those 6 hours and that was the key to it. Once she'd got that it was total transformation…..it made so much difference, yes.*

Despite the perceived lack of choice and even if it meant lots of parental involvement the unit did appear to be adapting and working to try and meet the needs of the child.

Lots of parental involvement was a feature of many interviews and it seemed to matter little what type of secondary provision the child attended, parents took a very active interest in their education and communicated a great deal with school. One family (P2), who had elected home education for their son at primary as they felt they did not visit any schools that would meet his needs, sent their son part time to a special school at secondary age, they made this decision for social rather than academic reasons, the mother told me that,

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> *I wanted to give it a try because, although academically he's doing relatively well at home, obviously his home programme is tailored completely to him. He wasn't getting much in the way of social opportunities; he goes to special needs Saturday club and he's got his brother, but he wasn't really used to learning in an environment with peers. So I thought that I would give school a try and see if he liked it*

However it quickly became apparent that after home educating her son for many years the mother found the reality of schooling very different to what she had hoped for, she said

> *It's quite difficult to get information about his education. Because I've been in charge of his education for so long I obviously want to know what he's doing at school so he's not going over stuff that he already knows. And it is quite hard to get information about that. ….they're not very open to sharing information, and I had a vision of being joint-educators; and that I would tell them what works at home and if they had anything that they had issues with there might be something we were doing at home that would help, and vice versa. But they're not open to my input.*

At the time of the interview her son was attending school on a part time basis but the school and LA were pushing for him to go full time, they explained that they didn't do *part time education* and whilst the mother accepted that school had had a positive impact on her son in some ways, just as she had hoped, for example, she commented that

> *I know that if we take him out somewhere, he is more comfortable now. Whereas before he went to school, wherever he went he'd like to be in the car, but didn't particularly want to get out and he'd want to come back home again. So he is able to tolerate going to places better now, and I think its school that's done that.*

Despite the positives however the mother was convinced that the schooling her son was receiving was not meeting his needs, particularly with the school's insistence that they could only meet his needs if he attended full time, she expressed her frustration

> *I'm really disappointed. I've been put under pressure to put (son's name) in school – well, since forever! And now that I've done it, all I've been told is that he'd be better off with a school education and, now that he's having it, it doesn't seem that he is better off really. He has more chance of learning at home and he's learning at home things that are more appropriate to him, more challenging to him academically and hopefully more useful to him. So I'm disappointed. I thought that part-time would work, and I still feel that would work really well. He could then get the best of both worlds. He'd get the life skills education at school and the academic skills at home and I think that he does … yes life skills are important but, you know, if he is capable of say, I don't know, reading at GCSE level, and he's reading Postman Pat, then that's important too. So I don't know!*

It seems that the school felt that they could only meet the requirements of her son's statement by having him attend full time, there was little willingness to consider the part time option or give any serious consideration to the mother's request to work with her and she commented that

> *I would have liked the school to treat me as a co-educator.....I think that if the school looked at me as a co-educator rather than as a Mum and took my thoughts and views seriously, that it could be very different and I think he'd make a lot more progress that way.*

This rigidity in the school system became apparent to another family (P17 and 18) with two autistic boys, one of whom had his needs met perfectly by a school with a specialist ASD unit and the other, at the same school but with high functioning ASD, whose needs were eventually catered for more appropriately but only after persistent efforts by his mother. She explained why she felt this was the case, she said

> *I was discussing this this morning with the Parents in Partnership advisor, and she says well (son's name) very complex; and he is very complex, you know. So I suppose it's something … I suppose it is the fault of the system that these kids are not … I don't blame the school, you know. I blame the system that, you know, is sort of … the system is very rigid and, you know, when their needs are more complex, I think it's very difficult to meet their needs.*

Her younger son was having a very positive time at the school and had made good progress, the mother explained that

> *he went straight into the ASD unit; it's for the lower functioning kids with learning disabilities. And I worried at first that because he'd had a lot of contact with the mainstream kids that he would find it very limiting and very isolated. But he's absolutely loved it. You know, so he, I feel, is very well served. You know, its spot on, the right place for him.*

However her older son had a very different experience, as he was high functioning, he was considered *too able* to be in the ASD unit and was in the mainstream school for his lessons, supported by Learning Support Assistants (LSA), his mother told me what happened

> *You know, they didn't understand his needs at all. Because he was in mainstream and all the teachers were mainstream teachers that had probably never come across kids like him … He was always really well behaved. He's never had behavioural issues at school. He's always very quiet but he goes into himself and, of course, when he came home then, you know, all his worries and anxieties and, you know, anger used to come out. And he would be here sobbing and we'd have to drag him to the taxi and it was an absolute nightmare. We'd have endless meetings…….he had LSAs, but they didn't have any training; they were just LSAs – they weren't Autism trained LSAs…..But it was the mainstream part of the school and I think this was what we hadn't, sort of, bargained for and I don't think the school had bargained for – a child like him. You know, so I think it was a learning process for both sides.*

Eventually the mother negotiated a compromise through her son's tutor, who phoned her, she told me about how it happened,

> *She (the tutor) rang me up on an unrelated issue – him losing his card - and I thought it was the Finance Office. She said, do you know who I am?   I said Finance, I assume. So she said no, she said (son's name)'s been doing some work*

> *with me, she says. I've taken over part of the ASD unit, she says, and he comes to me quite a lot. Well, I hadn't even been told. So I met with her and, I have to say, again since he's been with her – again Autism, you know, savvy – she understands these kids – things are a lot easier and I'm able to liaise with her. And if there's any issues, you know, we try and sort them out. But again, it's been a hard journey...... With **her**; with the school in general ... I mean the SENCo, I never get a response from, which I find really irritating.*

So a chance phone conversation and a well-trained teacher has meant her son's school experience has improved which is fortunate because the family do not consider there to be any better alternatives, as the mother explained,

> *I think it was the only choice we could have made. I don't think there would have been another choice, you know. After, I mean, there was a point when we were really struggling that I thought again about the other schools and I realised that there was nowhere else. We had to make it work at (school name) because there was nothing else.*

This feeling of having no choice was not peculiar to this one family, it was a recurring theme in many interviews, parents who felt that there were no alternatives to the school their child attended had looked long and hard at the alternatives and realised that, despite the legislation, there were few if any choices open to them. One parent (P4) whose child completed most of her primary education in an independent preparatory school visited some state mainstream schools when she was looking for alternative places for her daughter, she said

> *When I went to the mainstream schools ... it was such a shock to the system to see these big classrooms with so much going on. She's since been diagnosed with autism as well so I couldn't ... she would just ... I couldn't see how she would have functioned in that sort of environment.*

She continued her search in special schools and was frustrated with the lack of information and expertise to help her, she wanted *a specialist who could advise you.* The parent support group Parent Partnership set up to support parents with schooling were of little help, the mother felt that she was more of an expert than them, *they were telling me stuff I already knew.* The lack of a suitable place for her daughter was a constant worry, she commented that

> *what I want, in my ideal world, I want a nice little, private, special needs school but they don't seem to exist – or they do exist but they're all boarding. There are perhaps about 4 or 5 in the country and because they're so few they go away and board there. And of course they're really, really expensive but I wouldn't mind – I'd be happy to pay it – to get her to a standard ... to get the most out of her. I don't think they're getting the most out of her at (current school)......I feel I missed the boat, I missed a trick somewhere. I mean we're quite articulate, we're fairly well educated, we know the system. I know how it works, I feel we missed a trick somewhere. Out there, there must be something that's right for (child's*

name) and I haven't managed to find it yet. It's a shame really. We'd do anything, really, for her.

Another family (P9) that had difficulties with their child's primary schooling were still struggling to find the right place for him at secondary level, the mother eventually chose an independent school in the next county which she felt would best meet his needs, she said

> *I feel that the most suitable placement for senior school is (name of school)... he's spent the day there and I think his needs include appropriate peer group, similar cognitive ability as well as environment of signing and visual reinforcement prompts ... sensory issues' and stuff like that. So I based my letter on stuff from the Statement that needed to be reinforced, that from the Statement needs to be met and (school name) could meet those Statement requirements. But the other schools couldn't. And we didn't have any problem; we got the school*

A great deal of work went into choosing the best secondary placement, an independent school for children with ASD, the family wanted to ensure their son was in the best environment for his needs and they had learned a lot from the previous negative situation in his primary school, *mostly it's just experience because I think, in the first instance, you really don't know what you're doing*, they visited 6 schools, twice but unfortunately despite all their efforts, things quickly deteriorated within the first term, the mother explained

> *He started there in the September last year and he went from being responsible, taking the register into the office, being ... you know, the class teacher who had him was going to miss him because he was responsible and he would really take, you know, stuff to heart. And he went from being grown-up to devil incarnate within half term of being at the new school. And his class teacher was full of, we're all in it together, we can support you holistically, we're going to support the family as well, and all this – blah, blah, blah. And the first parent evening she'd listed all these bad behaviours that he'd got……..He was a mess. And they moved him out of the class that he was in. I had this meeting and we ... that was it, he moved there in the September and I'd had a parent evening and she was ... you know, she just came out with all this stuff and I said, you're going to tell me to move him, aren't you? And she went, no, no, no we can cope; there's nothing here that we can't deal with. Then November, we went in for a meeting. I think (my husband) and I were called in to a meeting to discuss how we could resolve the behaviours; bearing in mind we were getting nothing at home. We were just getting him being as he was. The first thing they said to us at the meeting was, we can no longer support (son's name)'s needs – we want you to move him immediately.*

The mother's views on what went wrong were simple, she told me

> *I think that what fell down at (school name) was that they want autism, they don't want autism, if you know what I mean. They want autistic children that fit a particular pattern and they weren't able to bend to fit (son's name)'s needs. And they were expecting him to bend and he's autistic and he's never going to do that….I think there's a lot that's hidden that you just don't know about. And I*

> *mean they get a lot of good Ofsted's. They get Outstanding in Ofsted – I don't know why. I think it's all about they want compliant children and my son's not compliant; he's got his own mind.*

At the time of the interview the child was just starting out at his second secondary school, another local special school suggested to the family by the LA, not a school they had previously considered, the mother explained why

> *I hadn't looked at it previously because it's an SLD school and I was told that MG was too academically able. So I looked ... I went to the school on my own. I had just a chat with the Head; I was there for 2 hours and their approach is, we'll look at the behaviour too see what (son's name) is trying to say. Music to my ears!*

For some families (P6, 8, 10, 11) however secondary school was more positive for their children and they felt that they had found somewhere that fitted. One mother (P6) whose son had a HI and had attended his local mainstream primary told me that the reason they chose a residential special school for his secondary schooling was simple, she explained about a visit the family made to the school,

> *We were hoping he would say, oh he wanted to go to school because he wanted to use a laser cutter and he wanted chicken for lunch; he said I'd like to go to (name of school) because they were very kind and I think they know about deaf children. And that was our concluding argument as to why he should go...*

The family felt that although their son had coped largely successfully at primary school, that at secondary they wanted something more, the mother explained how they felt about their son attending a mainstream setting,

> *I felt... that (son's name) had every chance of being the only deaf child in his year at school …. In comparison with going to a school where he would just be like everybody else. I mean, no deaf child is quite the same as the next deaf child, depending on why they were deafened, their background, their family background – you know, and there are different degrees of deafness. But he spent 7 years in primary school very successfully, but always the child that had the support assistant, there was always somebody on his case, he was always slightly different. And I don't think you want that; that's what we felt quite strongly that you don't want that as a teenager. You don't want somebody on your case all the time; you don't want to be – if you like – marked out.*

At the time of the interview the school was working out well for their son and the family felt that he was definitely in the right place and not just because he was with peers who had similar needs, the mother commented that

> *It's more than that; I mean all the teachers are qualified teachers of the deaf; all the school, all the classrooms are acoustically treated. They actually have, when ... I mean he's only in a class of 8 children and they're all sat – when they need to be – when it's appropriate to the class – they're all sat in a horseshoe formation. He wears a headset which has been programmed for his hearing loss with a basic microphone, so that everything is done ... I mean the whole ethos of the school is to give the children... that they can cope in the real world and to give them the*

> *very best ... using their residual hearing or their lip-reading skills or whatever. But it's interesting that he's now interested in signing because he's meeting deaf children who come from, you know, families where sign language is their first language. And it's a bit like a secret code! They can do it under the desk and the teacher can't see ... things like that. It's not just about peer group but I think peer group is a large part of it. It is actually putting him in an environment... if he can learn ... that's one of the frustrations at primary school, at the end of school. He wasn't learning ... well he was, but not as much as he could be because he couldn't cope with the environment.*

Three of the families I interviewed had girls attending a local single sex special school and all of them were happy with the way the school was educating their girls, their children had all attended mainstream primaries with varying degrees of success however all of the families wanted them to attend a special school at secondary level, they explained their reasons to me. One mother (P10) whose daughter had attended two primaries in an effort to find one that could meet her needs, was going to send her daughter to a local mainstream secondary and then move her if it didn't work out and then she thought,

> *Why bother going through another change when she could go to (name of special school) and settle in and it should just all carry on through. That she would have a peer group of people that would be much more like her. So she could develop her own friendships, really on her own, and have to be independent….. And she has now made her first **real** friend – it's a girl who started this year in Year 8.*

For another family (P7) there were similar reasons for choosing a special school for their daughter, a feeling of wanting their child to fit in and feel part of a community, the mother explained that after their experiences at two very different mainstream primary schools, they knew their daughter needed to go to a special school, she told me

> *So we looked around at various ones and we found (name of school) in (name of town) – fantastic. Absolutely – a little Enid Blyton school, 120 girls there, and they're all trained appropriately; they're not treated as if they don't understand anything, they're part of the community. She's making friends now, she's getting phone calls now, she gets texts now which she just didn't get before; she wasn't invited to anything, you know.*

The third family had twin girls and the decision to send them to different schools added to the difficulties, the parents tried to get the girls used to the idea that they might not attend the same school,

> *we wanted to feed it into their brains, very early, that they could be separated by senior school. Because that was my main concern – not the main concern, but one of the concerns. You're not … you're looking for different schools for two individual children, but they're also very close and twins. And they are each other's back up and they never had been anywhere separate.*

As the parents visited secondary schools, they met with SENCos to discuss their daughter's needs and were told by two mainstream schools that they didn't feel they could meet them, *actually they were telling me they couldn't meet their needs. And they*

were actually quite honest about it. So the parents looked at special schools and found one reasonably locally that they thought would work,

> *(name of school) just shined out, I don't know why. The main thing is it's an all-girls school...I hadn't even thought of sending her to an all-girls school at that point and we started looking around and did feel that that might be a bit better for her. And I know she … she got on better with the boys than she did with the girls in mainstream school but I know that, you know, there were … she would actually say that, you know, people would tell her to do things and she'd find it difficult to say no and stuff like that. So we thought to protect her, it would be a better place to go. And it's kind of, as it got on nearer and nearer to the time, that became more evident that that might be a little bit of a problem, so it might be better if she was, you know, in an all single sex senior school for a little while.*

They managed to get their daughter a place at the school and feel that they made the right choice, the mother explained how she was getting on,

> *they enjoy it. And they both have … the one thing they both said is that they've got friends and that they both are – I don't know – involved a bit more….she's very popular, apparently! Which she loves because, I mean, although people … the one thing that did shine out, because of her character some people did like her at school; they felt that they couldn't be friends with her because they would be teased for being friends with her and that did come out as we kind of got on through the school.*

6.6   Discussion

The reasons for choosing a particular secondary school vary for every parent as do the worries and anxieties that go along with it for many. However from the interviews I carried out there can be little doubt that for parents whose children have a statement of SEN there is even more to consider and often more schools to decide between. Why did the research reveal so many examples of families unhappy with their child's schooling? Was it the nature of the sample, the parents that wished to speak to a researcher are more likely to be those that have had issues with schooling? Or is this the reality of schooling for many families whose children have statements of SEN? The Lamb inquiry (DCSF, 2009) supports the findings with their conclusion that for many parents the SEN system 'can and does work well, but for too many parents it represents an unwarranted and unnecessary struggle.' (p.6). There is also evidence from the Ofsted SEND review (2010) which reported that 'Parents saw the current system as requiring them to 'fight for the rights' of their children' the research findings would certainly support this view.

Why did so many schools fail to meet the needs of some of the more vulnerable children entrusted to their care? The statutory guidance from the DfES (2001), *Inclusive Schooling: Children with Special Educational Needs* (SEN), promotes the concept of all children being educated in mainstream unless such an education is incompatible with either the 'efficient education of other children', or the wishes of the child's parent This

guidance is supported by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA 2001), which requires that mainstream schools make the *reasonable steps* necessary to allow for such inclusion. This idea of inclusion is also supported by another key government policy document *Removing Barriers to Achievement* (DfES, 2004:5) that states that 'All teachers should expect to teach children with special educational needs (SEN) and all schools should play their part in educating children from their local community, whatever their background or ability.' With all this guidance and legislation, much of which has been around for over a decade, how can so many schools still fail to provide a suitable educational and social experience for some children and young people? The ways in which schools failed ranged from schools telling parents that they could not support their children to failing to keep them safe or failing to support them making academic or social progress. Or perhaps the focus needs to be on those schools, mainstream, special or units that are managing to meet the needs of the children and young people in their care? How do they do things differently and how can their good practices become more widely disseminated and perhaps one day be the norm for all schools?

7. Chapter seven - Findings phase two, part two

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter I shall outline some of the factors that influenced parents in their decisions about which schools their children might attend and also consider the information that they were given, or acquired, about school choice options and, in some cases, what they felt about the issue of school choice. I shall also consider the role of mothers in the whole school choice process, as the interviews progressed it became apparent that the work mothers put in to choosing schools and communicating with schools was incredible, many of them became experts in the process of statement reviews and schools and many of them referred to the 'fighting' that they did to try and ensure the best for their child. The Lamb inquiry report (DCSF, 2009) referred to meeting some of the angriest parents in the country, as well as some of the happiest, I would say I met some of the hardest working and resourceful mothers in the country.

7.2 School choice information and the factors affecting school choice

Phase 1 data suggested that the factors which most influenced families in their school choice decisions were specialist staff and facilities in the interviews this was a question that was asked of participants in an effort to extend the breadth and depth (Green and Caracelli, 1989) of the findings in phase 1 and to gain more elaboration and detail. As far as influencing factors went, the LA SEN team and their child' previous school were the most common sources of information.

The phase 2 participants were located across different LAs and it might be expected that the experiences of the parents would vary accordingly. One parent (P1) was clear that there was not enough information on school choices, despite the fact that she had utilised the Parent Partnership (PP) and the Inclusion manager at her son's primary school to help her find a suitable school by visiting the local mainstream secondary options. She spoke to SEN staff to see if they 'know what they are talking about', in the end the decision was made on the basis of location and her son's willingness to go, as well as a sense of the school being 'okay'. Despite the effort put into the decision the parent was not entirely sure it was the best place for her son, she told me, *Whether it's gonna be the best for his education I don't know, he probably could do with a smaller place.*

Another parent (P14), within the same LA, whose daughter was diagnosed with SEN at her local primary school, was planning on sending her to the local mainstream secondary

as she felt, from experience with her other children, that it would meet her daughter's needs. This parent was unusual in the sample, she appeared to accept that all the school was doing for her daughter was suitable and she was happy for her to move on to her local secondary without visiting any alternatives. One other family (P3) in the sample, whose son was in Foundation at the time of the interview, had looked at some alternatives and then chosen their local village school which they felt could meet his needs, these included various learning difficulties associated with a cerebral bleed at birth. This family was unusual in that their problems with school choice were connected to their other son, the children were twins and whilst the son with the SSEN received a place at the school of their choice, their other son, who did not have a statement, did not. This interview raised some interesting points about how LA's treat twins, the parent felt that there needed to be LA guidelines on school placements for twins where one has a SEN, the mother told me that *I think there needs to be something in the local authority handbook that says that multiple birth children go to the same school automatically.* The family had been preparing to go to appeal to get their other son a place at the school, fortunately a place became available at the school and the appeal was unnecessary however the situation had caused a great deal of distress to them.

Another family (P15) that chose a local mainstream school looked around their area and then picked a school where they felt that the physical environment suited their daughter's needs best. In terms of their secondary school options, no mention was made of information from the LA, instead they received advice from the SENCo at their daughter's current school and also more informally through their own contacts, one school that they were considering was mentioned by a girl that went to the same disabled riding club as their daughter, another example of 'heard it on the grapevine' at work. In another LA, one family (P16) received no information from their LA, the mother said, *I just went looking under my own steam. We were recommended (name of school)*, social capital and their own research were how they got the information they needed to choose a primary school place for their son, who has a statement for ASD.

A parent (P5) in another LA, whose daughter had albinism and VI, chose both the schools for her daughter using social capital (Bourdieu, 1984). The child's grandmother was a teacher and knew the head teacher of the primary her daughter attended and then secondary school was chosen following several visits to mainstream secondary's, none of which felt suitable until a chance comment from another parent alerted the family to the school that they eventually chose. The information from the LA did not even mention the school that they eventually chose as it was not in their catchment area and but for the

chance comment they would not have known that they were able to apply for a place there. Another parent (P12), whose daughter attended a mainstream primary, visited several schools before finding a special school that she felt was suitable for her daughter, explained how difficult it was to find the information about schools, she told me

> it was really word of mouth. Obviously the mainstream schools were ones that I, you know, local … they were all really people that had mentioned things. And even one of the … I mean one of the special schools I had never even heard of, despite having been on websites and Googling and (name of county) County Council. It was very hard to find that information.

She eventually found a school that she felt would suit her daughter's needs best, it had small class sizes and didn't feel as 'frightening' as some of the schools that she had visited, the mother felt that her daughter would not cope emotionally or keep up with the work with many of the other schools she visited. Another parent (P7) whose child completed her primary education in mainstream schools, chose a special school for her daughter, the factors that influenced the families choice included the fact that they felt that the staff were all appropriately trained and that the curriculum, which included aspects such as life skills, would suit their child's needs. The information about the school was again 'hot knowledge', the mother said, *(name of school) was actually through word of mouth.* Two other families (P10 and 11) within the sample, one based in a town and the other in a village location, also chose this same special school for their daughters, one of the families found the information about the school themselves, the mother (P11) explained, *You trawl through them. You trawl through the list, you read Ofsted reports; you do what you have to*; the other family heard about the school at swimming club. Neither family received their information about school choices from the LA, although one mother (P10) did recall having been given a standard letter about school transfer as she walked into the Year 5 Transition Review. The families had different reasons for choosing the school, but both were pleased with the school and their daughters' were happy there. One family (P11) explained how they made the decision,

> It is basically gut and the fact that, you know, you can just tell by talking to people whether they are going to work, you know, for your child. Looking to how the teachers can kind of bring them on.

Another parent (P9) in the same LA told me that she had received no information from the LA about schools but had been given a list from the PP. Her son was diagnosed with ASD before he began his schooling and she too had found word of mouth very helpful early on, she explained,

> I think it's getting the right support. So it's knowing who to speak to. I mean I've been lucky because I've had people that have said, oh you know, so and so can

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> *help you, or this is good, or ... but mostly it's just experience because I think, in the first instance, you really don't know what you're doing. You don't know who to speak to, where to go – I think it's probably better now, but we had hardly anybody*

She had chosen several different schools for her son over the years, at secondary level she decided that a special school would be best and she visited several, and asked lots of questions and took lots of notes, to see if she felt that they could cope with her son and his needs. She explained to me why so many schools had proved to be unsuitable for her son,

> *For children like (son's name) who are not quite SLD but they're not Asperger's that can't manage in mainstream, there's not a school in the middle that can support children like (son's name).*

Another family (P17), who had two children with ASD, also found a suitable mainstream primary school for them through word of mouth, she explained what happened,

> *I was at my wit's end and I got in touch with the Health Visitor again and she said, get in touch with … and she gave me the name of a mother. I got in touch with her and she said get in touch with (name of school) – I knew nothing about (name of school) at that time. I rang them up and told them the difficulties I was having and the Head…..she said come down for a chat. We went down for a chat … because she understood it all, being experts in that area. And they took him in the next week and from there, suddenly, sanity seemed to come back into our lives.*

At secondary level the family were struggling, as, although they had found what they wanted - *a school that understands autism*, in a local secondary school with a specialist ASD unit, one of their boys, who has high functioning ASD, was struggling and the school had been failing to meet his needs adequately. Their older son, who has high functioning ASD, was pushed out into the mainstream school where there appeared to be little understanding of autism, even the Learning Support Assistants assigned to him had no autism training. At the time of the interview she explained that her son was *quite well looked after,* as he was being allowed to spend more time in the autism unit but was not making much progress socially, she said, *I don't think he has a lot in the way of socialisation at school at all, you know. I think he just gets through the day and he has no friends.* When I asked the mother about the issue of school choice, she explained that,

> *I think it was the only choice we could have made. I don't think there would have been another choice, you know. After, I mean, there was a point when we were really struggling that I thought again about the other schools and I realised that there was nowhere else.*

The family of child with HI (P6), who had attended a mainstream primary visited several secondary's to try and find one that might be suitable, they found their information

through their own research, they visited 5, local schools, one had a specialist HI unit and another was a grammar school, and one, not local, special school. After several visits over a period of years, they eventually decided on the special school, which meant their son would have to live away from home during the week, their decision was based on the visits and the facilities at the school and the fact that they wanted him to be amongst his peers and to not always be the one that was different. His mother explained, *I feel that actually he needs friends, he needs a peer group that actually understand what it's like to be deaf. And we … as a family we can't give him that…*

Another participant (P2) who had chosen to home educate her son at primary level, as she felt that there were no suitable schools, decided to send him to secondary school, after visiting three special schools the family chose the one they felt was most suitable, the mother explained her choice,

> *I looked to see if I could see my son there, so I looked at the other children, I looked at the classroom size, I looked at the lessons, I looked at the style of teaching, I looked at what they were actually learning and (name of school) seemed the closest match to what he was doing at home.*

One parent (P8) who was making a decision about her son's first school place was given advice by staff at his pre-school and decided that a mainstream school would not suit his needs, she described the information that she was sent by the LA about school placements to me, *this great big, like War and peace, manual of every school you could possibly think of....what the hell am I supposed to do with this?*. Eventually the parent spoke to other mothers at her local autistic club and *got the gist of them.* She then visited schools and chose the one she thought could 'cope' with her son, she described her visit,

> *when I went round, when they showed me the ARP – the first thing I looked for the door handles. That was the first thing; that was my priority…….and the first thing I noticed was high door handles, that was the first thing; and bolts on the window, because he's like Houdini………you just get a gut instinct. And (name of school) was the first school that I actually looked at and the first thing that I liked was that it was so small*

The physical environment had to be suitable to meet her son's needs, above all else she had to know that he was safe and that the school understood him and could deal with his needs.

Another example of where the LA played little role in actually helping families find suitable schooling for their children was the case of a family (P19) whose daughter had gone to her local village school, where they made no effort to support her needs, the mother felt that their attitude was simply *We don't want that kind of child*, they removed their

daughter midway through her Foundation year and found that nobody ever contacted them regarding this,

> I never heard from the school, I never heard from County … How could she just be allowed to go missing? There was no support, it was just literally sort of – bye.

The family then looked online and read Ofsted reports in their hunt for an appropriate school, the mother, a trained teacher, felt her own knowledge of the system helped but she still found it a difficult process, she explained that,

> to find a school was literally just me trawling my brain and thinking where could I send her? And looking on the internet and my Mum reading Ofsted reports and … I used to be a teacher as well and I remembered in my training, one of the ladies I worked with was training at (name of school) and I remembered her saying what a lovely school it was and it was a school for children with hearing difficulties. And I thought, I wonder if they deal with other things? And just because of that memory I contacted them and when I went … oh my god… I could tell the Head was lovely - approachable, understanding … but you just know. But that's my own knowledge … if you haven't got that… I'm not saying I'm brilliant, but you know what I mean? But some people aren't able to have that. You know, at the end of the day, I had trained as a teacher, hadn't I? So I'd trained as a teacher and we still went through that. So and that's how I supposedly know the system. So what happens to people who don't?

When it came to choosing a secondary place for their daughter it was in some ways a simpler process as their daughter's statement said she needed a school with a specialist ASD unit and there was only one in their area, when asked about the issue of choice, the mother simply told me, *in terms of choice you know there isn't a choice, there really isn't a choice. There aren't really choices.*

This idea of no choice was one that kept recurring throughout the interviews with many parents, particularly those whose children had ASD finding that there was little suitable provision available to them. One mother (P18), whose son had struggled in his mainstream primary school and been pressured to leave after 4 months, was struggling to find somewhere suitable for him at secondary level, she had already visited 8-9 schools. At primary, after being asked to leave his local mainstream school her son had attended a unit, a DSP which had spaces, 25 miles away, when asked about the issue of choice, the mother told me what the family had thought,

> if a mainstream school couldn't cope with him then who else is going to cope with him? So we thought, okay you know, we didn't have, we didn't feel we had a choice. That was what was offered therefore this is what we would take.

Her son was diagnosed with Asperger's and at the DSP he was put into the mainstream school because of his academic ability however this was hard for him to cope with and

although he held it together at school he came home very upset and angry, his mother explained,

> the Head was pushing and pushing him into the main school because he was one of the more academic children and she wouldn't see his Asperger's, she didn't see that he would come home and absolutely charge into the house and punch me and kick me and his sister because he was so struggling to hold it all together all day at school. And she said it was just a home issue, a parenting issue

The mother was worried about where he would go to secondary school, she was too scared to send him to mainstream school after the experiences at his primary, and the options he had come up with, a boarding school and a local independent school were both rejected by the LA, she told me,

> I don't really know what he needs, I know what he needs but there isn't anything like it anywhere…. you don't want the perfect place because there isn't such a thing and actually you can't find the perfect place because every child is different. But the best fit and there isn't anything in this county for high functioning autism or for Asperger's….And all the LEA say is, we only have to provide adequate education for your child.

The family (P4) of a young girl with GDD, who was recently also diagnosed with ASD, similarly felt that there wasn't anything actually suitable to meet her needs, the mother commented on her current schooling in a special school, she said *I still don't think she's in the right place, to be honest. But what I want doesn't seem to be there!* The family felt that their daughter was making no academic progress at the school and that the school's expectations were very low, the mother explained, *if we didn't bother to read with her, I don't think anyone would hear her read. Any sort of learning, there's no … And when I bring this up with them they say that's not the way we teach anymore.* The family had received little help from the LA about the options available to them, just a list of schools that they then visited and researched, the mother believed that the system really needed some kind of advisor, the mother described what she felt was needed,

> a specialist who could advise you but people seem to tell you about their little bit but they won't … it would be fantastic if there was somebody who was prepared to come and see (child's name), look through all her paperwork and say, right, I know the UK system – perhaps these schools would be suitable for (child's name)

When asked about the school choice system the mother felt that the special school system was very different to what she was used to with her other children in their mainstream school, she explained to me that,

> The mainstream sector, it's all very regimented. There's a strict format – on this date you've got to fill this form in and give it in. There's a set procedure that you follow. But on special needs it just seems to be random really, you just have to pick your own way through it…… I feel I missed the boat, I missed a trick somewhere. I mean we're quite articulate, we're fairly well educated, we know

> the system. I know how it works, I feel we missed a trick somewhere. Out there, there must be something that's right for (name of child) and I haven't managed to find it yet. It's a shame really. We'd do anything, really, for her.

Another family (P13), whose son attended a school with a special ASD unit for his primary schooling received no information from their LA about secondary school options and had to research this themselves. There were two possible choices in the LA and they eventually chose the one further away as they felt the environment, which was a quieter separate unit, would suit their son better. However this decision resulted in conflict with the LA who agreed to the school but refused to pay for transport costs arguing that there was a suitable option closer, this understandably caused the family a great deal of stress, the mother told me

> it was an absolute hell of a time for us. If it was down to the county council … they were effectively saying, well we've given you your preference, but they hadn't really. They were backing us into the corner to try and get us to take the school which was closer; not meet our son's needs

Eventually the LA backed down before the issue reached tribunal and agreed to pay the transport costs. When asked about the issue of school choice the mother recalled an incident that happened just after the LA agreed to pay the transport costs, she explained that,

> I had a phone call from the Head of Transport Department shortly after and … I don't think he'd started … and he said, **you** decided to send your child there and I was **so** upset because we effectively, we haven't got hardly had any choice. You know, I'd choose for my son to go to the local school, if I could choose, but they can't meet his needs and he wouldn't be happy there and, you know, he'd probably end up being excluded. So it's not a choice where, you know, … we're trying to do the best for our kids…

Trying to do the best for their kids, surely what any parent would do? The idea of doing their best and having to fight for what they thought was best became a distinctive element of the research.

7.3   Mother's instinct - tiger mothers:battling for survival in the SEND jungle

As the interviews progressed one of the recurring themes that emerged was that of the mothers, their understanding and intuition about their children and their battles for them. This was not something I had read a great deal about in preparation and it was not an area I specifically asked about, however it was certainly an area that many of the participants mentioned in the context of either getting a school place or transport to their child's school and many described the fights they undertook as part of the statementing

process. The stories that emerged had many similarities and it became apparent that this emerging theme was one that needed to be followed through.

One of the mothers (P16) explained how she realised that perhaps her son had some difficulties rather than just being a slow developer, she said

> *you get everyone telling you, children develop at their own time, you know, don't worry about it. But I don't know what it was – maybe a sixth sense or, you know a mummy thing – I just knew it was something slightly more*

Another mother (P12), whose daughter, her fourth child, was adopted, felt that something wasn't right but was 'fobbed' off by a teacher telling her if was fine for a year before she finally insisted, she told me, *I knew it wasn't fine.* A mother (P17) who has two boys with ASD, told me how she realised early on with her second son that things were not as they should be , she explained*, I was beginning to realise when he was 9 months old that there was something seriously different.* Whereas another mother (P8) told me about her first born, *I knew from birth that there was something…I've been quite intuitive about my son.*

As well as this intuition, and for some alongside it, there was a common reaction to the news that their child had special needs, and this was regardless of what kind of need their child had, and it was a two-fold reaction, what Dale (1996:113) might call 'active information-seeking' and 'constructive problem-solving'. The majority of women in the interviews were experts on their children's SEN and worked tirelessly to ensure that they kept up to date with legislation/guidelines and local support. One mother (P7), whose daughter suffers from a genetic condition, retrained in SEN once her daughter was diagnosed, she explained why,

> *I used to work with interior design but started feeling that I needed to know more about special needs; so started retraining because I assume it's that sort of thing you want first-hand knowledge, don't you, so I wanted to do more for special needs in general; so started to do training..*

Another mother (P16) who gave up a high paid job and retrained as a Teaching Assistant (TA) explained what motivated her, she said,

> *I'm a Special Needs TA…. I work at (name of school)….and I got involved with that a couple of years ago. Not because I necessarily wanted to be a TA but I did the course … because I thought that it would enable me to support (name of son) better at school.*

This desire for more knowledge was a common thread across several interviews, one mother (P9) whose son has ASD, went on a range of training programmes with her husband as their son was being diagnosed as a way of understanding, or perhaps in an

attempt to regain some control, the situation. She talked me through the various schemes,

> so we got on the Hanen programme as a result of her, which (husband's name) and I went on, and that was called 'It Takes Two'. So that's a course learning – it was about a 3-month course – and then you learn about how to engage them ... how to stimulate conversation with your child who's got a learning difficulty…..the Hanen programme we'd been on was for children with a speech delay, not with autism. So then we did 'More than Words' which is the autistic programme. We were a bit programmed out for about a year and a half

Another parent (P2) whose son again was diagnosed with ASD attended a range of training, again with her husband, as they tried to find ways to communicate with and educate their son, the mother outlined some of the training they had undertaken which allowed them to run a home schooling programme for him for many years, she said

> We've had input from experts in America – we take him over there once a year…(Sonrise) we did that for about 5 years….and we changed, in the end, to a more directive programme called ABA, which is better known. Sonrise, because it is run by parents, so you basically get your training and they used to do a course over here once a year, which is where we were trained, and then you can go for extra things in Massachusetts.

As well as doing training a desire for knowledge and an understanding of their children's condition led parents to undertake research and become active in local groups, one mother (p10), whose daughter had Downs Syndrome, had spent a lot of time researching the condition and became involved in local support groups. Another mother (P8), whose son had ASD, also took time to find out about his condition told me,

> I kept researching myself and trying to get involved with things. I did a piece in the (local) press about autism and special education, so I try and be as pro-active as I can.

Alongside this search for information and becoming 'expert' many families found themselves involved in 'problem solving' (Dale, 1996), with the problem being finding somewhere that fits, a school to support their children's needs, and in many cases this resulted in battles with schools and LAs as they tried to ensure what they felt was the best for their children. For some the fighting was fruitful but for others it was an endless, and seemingly pointless, battle, one weary mother (P18) told me,

> And we've been told by the LEA that they will not support us, so we'd have to fight them every inch of the way…. you end up fighting everybody and turning into this really aggressive person. Because you're so used to fighting to get what you want but actually it's frustrating because you can't get what you want because you're just chasing your tail all the time... And how do you fight the head teacher of his school, when she's got her and the head from the autistic unit and the teacher and they make you feel like you are asking for too much? And that you are wrong…

Another mother (P13), whose son also has ASD, explained what trying to get a school to understand his needs had felt like,

> a bit of a battle. Not so much in the infants' school, but everything has always been a bit of a battle – negative; they're trying to change him, rather than adapt their practice.

This feeling of fighting to get a child what they need from a school was a common one across several parents, with some parents feeling that trying to work alongside a school, to ensure their child's needs were met, was a difficult and time consuming task, one mother told me, *you've got to fight to get it how it needs to be.* Another parent (P17), whose son had Asperger's, echoed this view when she explained her negotiations with the school,

> it's been a fight. Not something that – oh this will be best for him. It's been an on-going sort of, you know … And I'm still arguing, you know, still, you know … we're still trying to make it fit, you know… It still doesn't fit.

One mother (P12) whose daughter attends a special school explained that she was given a place at the school, *but we then had a huge fight to get the transport.* Another mother (P8), whose son was diagnosed with ASD at a very early age, told me that she felt that the parents who got what they wanted for their child were those who were the most vocal, she explained,

> It is about who shouts the loudest; it is about who fights the hardest and, at the end of the day, you know, that's about as clean cut as it is. You don't have a choice.

This was a view shared by another family (P16), who had also got the school they wanted for their young son, the mother shared her views on the situation, she said,

> I mean the thing is that we were parents that were willing to fight, and we were willing to fight hard for (name of child). (name of child) is an only child and obviously we had the energy and the will and probably the education, I mean we looked into it. If you know okay they said 'no' what is our next process, can we appeal, can we go to tribunal? We looked into that and we had the foresight to do that I mean obviously we didn't know how it worked because we hadn't been in this position before but we both had the education to think right we're not giving up here, we must be able to go somewhere else, we must be able do something else. But there are a lot of parents out there who can't, who don't have that.

This worry about how other parents might be coping and what would happen to their children was shared by a number of participants, one family who successfully got their son a place a residential school for the deaf, were also concerned about how some other families might cope, the mother told me (P6),

> we have fought the corner for our child and I think we've been lucky, you know. We've been prepared to have to fight longer and harder if we had to. And I'm

grateful, you know, that we haven't had to fight longer and harder, but it doesn't mean we haven't been prepared to do it if we had to. And I find it quite tragic – yes tragic is the right word – when I come across instances where people, for whatever reason, don't feel it's up to them; don't have the skill set, don't know, you know, where to go and ask for help…

The participants I interviewed all had different stories to share with me about their children, their needs and their schooling, each family was different, no two houses I visited were the same and each family had their own unique experiences of the school placement decision making process. However, as different as each interview was, there were also many similarities across many of them. Families had engaged with LA staff, school staff, medical professionals and their own communities to try and ensure their children were getting what was best to support their needs and education. Some felt that they had been successful, so far, in their efforts, others had struggled across several years and schools and were still searching, wearily, for something that fits (Bajwa-Patel and Devecchi, 2014). Nearly every parent I interviewed was proactively involved in their child's education on a daily basis to try and make sure that schools and LAs did what they considered was best for their children.

7.4   Parents' evaluation of their child's current schooling

When it came to evaluating their child's current school parents across both phases of the research had mixed views, some were very complimentary and others felt less positive about the schooling or felt that it required a lot of effort on their part to ensure that the school met their child's needs. Phase one parents were generally positive about their child's current schooling, many more positives than negatives were reported. Positive aspects included the fact that their child was happy to attend school, developments in confidence and learning social skills. Negatives included having to travel a long distance, lack of friends and not reaching academic potential. In terms of the types of school and parents' views in phases one and two, there was no clear pattern, some of the parents were happy with special schools others less so, it was very individual, which is unsurprising as the parent's expectations, the schools and the needs of the children were all very different. One parent (P5) with a child in their first year of schooling in a specialist ASD unit, was very positive about the unit, she said,

> *Took him with welcoming arms because they do like the trickier kids. I just loved the school. They just get (child's name) and they understand (child's name) and even when he's been really quite difficult….she (teacher) handles it. They just accepted him. He's the trickiest by far… but the most responsive. At parent's evening they told me what was what and then what they were going to do to fix it…and it's good, I thought good.*

She explained how the school was very aware of the need to develop her son's social skills and how they utilised social stories to explain things. Another parent, with a child in an ASD unit attached to a mainstream secondary school also mentioned the use of social stories, the school had provided a social story booklet to help with transition, which had gone smoothly, and, ever since the school had been very proactive. The communication between the school and the family was very good, the parent felt that they were very good at pre-empting things, her son was doing well academically, although she still had some concerns about his isolation from his peers and she (P16) told me, '*I can't fault them*'.

Another parent whose daughter attended a specialist ASD unit attached to a secondary school was complimentary about the communication with the school which began before the child even started school and led to an excellent transition. However, at the same time she felt that there were some issues in terms of the curriculum, she explained her views on it, she said (P19),

> *The curriculum really. Yes, how are you going to actually properly meet what she needs? Because a lot of … and I still think a lot of what they do is totally irrelevant to what their lives are going to be. I don't like a lot of what they do, which is not the school's fault…..But then my opinion is always that her Statement says 'national curriculum as appropriate', so actually if they've got confidence to say… But then lots of schools don't have that confidence to actually say …. I know my child, I know this child and I know that if I allow her to do that I'm meeting her needs and meeting her … but they won't; they're trying to just tick a box and say, yes we're doing the science entitlement but nobody seems to have that … the guts to stand up and say, **I** understand what I'm doing here. And I think if you can always justify what you're doing, that's the thing.*

Why do so many schools feel the pressure to teach children the national curriculum even when it does not suit the needs of the child? Is this inclusion at work? Or something less complicated like a complete lack of awareness of the needs of the child? Or is it head teachers' lacking the confidence to disapply the curriculum wherever necessary?

Although not every child in an ASD unit was doing quite so positively, one family, with two boys in the same unit, had very different stories, one son is very well served by the school, his mother told me (P17), '*It's spot on the right place for him…he has programmes to develop him*', whilst, at the same time in another year group, her older son is not being well served. The mother felt that the teachers simply do not understand his needs and that there was only one ASD trained teacher that understood the situation and that the rest of the staff, including the SENCo were inadequate, her son had no support for his social needs and no friends. The difference between two children, both with the same label in the same school, was shocking to hear and reflects the need for

schools to train their staff so much more effectively and also how essential it is that schools and units are more flexible in order to meet the very differing needs of children under the vast ASD umbrella. Another child in an ASD unit was suffering similar complications and at the time of the interview, the family were struggling to cope with the situation and the mother (P18) was desperately searching for a more suitable solution, she explained the situation,

> It doesn't fit, you don't want the perfect place because there isn't such a thing and actually you can't find the perfect place because every child is different. But the best fit and there isn't anything in this county for high functioning autism or for Asperger's. It's an autistic unit so my son is in a unit with the boy who's bashing his head against the wall and can't communicate. In the same class as him and that's not acceptable for him, so they stick him in main school. Where he doesn't cope there, he doesn't fit in because he's different and he gets bullied so what do you do with that? And that's why I look because I never had that opportunity to look when he was you know excluded from school, maybe I needed to just do that but I still came up with just nothing. And all the LEA say is we only have to provide adequate education for your child.

The mother of the one secondary aged child in mainstream school felt that the school served his needs well enough, he had some friends and social issues that had arisen were adequately dealt with. She communicated regularly with the school and explained how that felt, she said (P1),

> You kind of feel you're not really wanted as a parent. Except for (name of SENCo), the few people I do talk to are very happy to talk, but the overall feeling of the organisation is not one of trying to involve the parents it's trying to keep them away, I have been in and I email and talk to people and all the people I talk to have been really good and helpful.

Despite feeling that the staff she spoke to were helpful, this parent still got the impression that she was not necessarily welcome at the school. This kind of contradictory message could be the result of a parents' own insecurities or it could be a more complicated picture whereby schools, have to listen to parents and communicate with them, in our instant access 21st century world and yet underneath the veneer of listening schools, especially secondary schools, would rather just be left to get on with what they see as their jobs, educating children. A job that they know best and should be trusted to do. The parent in this case was a highly educated, articulate woman and spent considerable time and energy ensuring that the school met her son's needs, if she felt that the school was trying to keep parents away, perhaps for another parent, such a feeling might be enough to actually keep them from communicating with the school. Although another parent in the sample, who had her own special needs and not much education, felt that she was able

to communicate with her daughter's mainstream primary school and was welcome, she felt that the school communicated with her really well and dealt with her daughter's needs as and when issues arose, whether these were academic or social. How welcome parents feel clearly depends on the ethos and values of the school.

When it came to special schools the evaluations were mixed, the parents of one child at a local special school felt that the school was failing to meet their child's needs, the mother explained that there were few academic expectations of her daughter, no reading or homework or spellings or maths, she felt that the school was catering for the least able students and that her daughter's academic needs were not catered for. She also felt that the school failed to understand her daughter's behaviour, however despite her misgivings, her daughter enjoyed school and was settled, the mother (P4) said, *'She's happy there, which again, is a big thing, isn't it, if she's happy? If she can learn life skills that might offset some of the lack of academic.'* A difficult situation for a parent, clearly she was unhappy with her daughter's schooling whilst at the same time her daughter was enjoying it, which is more important in terms of satisfaction with schooling, the views of the child or the parent? Another special school also seemed to be failing to meet parental expectations, the mother felt under pressure, from the school and the LA, to send her son in full-time, instead of the part time placement that was in place at the time of the interview. Whilst she felt that her son had made some progress at the school and was more sociable as a result of attending, she was at the same time disappointed with the communication with the school and felt that improvements could be made, she told me (P2),

> *I think that if the school looked on me as a co-educator, rather than as a mum and took my thoughts and views seriously, that it could be very different and I think he's make a lot more progress that way.*

Another case of a school not meeting parental expectations and not making parents feel welcome, evidently this feeling of not being welcome in schools is not just a mainstream issue. One parent whose son went from a special primary school to a special secondary, an independent school, also felt disappointed with the provision for ASD, she eventually moved her son from the school as following a rapid deterioration in his behaviour she became concerned for his mental health. She (P9) explained why she thought it hadn't worked out for her son,

> *I think that what fell down at (*name of school) *was that they want autism, they don't want autism, if you know what I mean. They want autistic children that fit a*

*particular pattern and they weren't able to bend to fit (*name of chid*)'s needs. And they were expecting him to bend and he's autistic and he's never going to do that.*

However, some of the parents whose children attended special schools, mainly following on from negative experiences at primary schools, were very pleased with how their children were progressing. One mother, who had moved her daughter from her first primary school as she felt unhappy with the provision and continued to be dissatisfied with the provision at the second primary, she (P7) told me about her daughter's experiences in her special secondary school,

> *I can't believe the difference in her. She's been there just over a year now, she's in Year 8. Can't believe it, it's just ... she said to me one day, when she'd been there a couple of months I think, we were walking the dogs, she was like - I understand what they're teaching me now. I said did you not understand before? She said, no she said I didn't understand what they were teaching me before.*

Clearly one family where choosing a special school, following on from negative experiences with two mainstream schools, was proving to be successful and was meeting both the child's needs and parental expectations. However the family of another child, at the same school, had somewhat different experiences, although the parent was largely happy with the school, she still had some concerns and communicated with the school regularly. The mother felt that the school had less understanding of Down syndrome than the two mainstream schools her daughter had attended, she put this down to a lack of support from the Down syndrome support services, who she felt didn't support special schools. So whilst the mother was happy with the curriculum offered at the school, which included life skills, she had concerns about the quality of speech therapy and the level of communication about behaviour and the amount of homework set, she explained her views on the poor communication, she (P10) commented,

> *They don't have parents who have high expectations. They all seem to be grateful for what's being done. I suggested to a parent the other day that maybe we could ask about better communication – and she's a governor – and she didn't want to rock the boat…*

She felt that some of the parents at the school had children with very complex needs and that they had felt very 'lost' until their child got a place at the school and that they were then just grateful to the school and perhaps had lower expectations. Ainscow *et al.* (1999: 137) suggested that perhaps some parents saw special schools as 'the safest option for their child', if this is the case then perhaps an attitude of being grateful and not wanting to rock the boat is to be expected from some parents. Clearly different parents, whose children have different needs, chose different schools for different reasons and undoubtedly these parents will then have a range of expectations, academic and social, which may or may not be met by those schools. As well as a range of expectations there

were also a range of aspirations that the participants shared with me during the interviews and I shall go on now to look at these.

7.5   Aspirations

In phase two a few participants hoped that their children would achieve academically others felt that some achieving some aspects of independent living or acquiring friends and communication skills would be what they aspired to for them. It is important to realise that this research was very much about parents and their views, I have no doubt that had the same question been asked of the young people themselves that the answers may have been very different. In terms of academic aspirations, some parents wanted their children to go to university, these included children who attended mainstream, special schools and units. One mother (P6), whose son at the time of the interview attended a residential school for the deaf, told me, *'there's absolutely no reason why he shouldn't go off to university and things like that'.* Although she also mentioned what her son himself hoped for, she said, *At the moment he wants to join the Army and I haven't the heart to tell him that actually, you know, I think that's highly unlikely.* The sadness and worries of the parents was something that wasn't always captured by the words in the transcripts but it was a palpable feeling in several interviews. Another parent aspired to university for her son, but was concerned about his ability to cope, she said (P17),

> *we're hoping that he'll apply for university. Whether he'll have the confidence to go … because his anxieties mean he doesn't leave the house without either myself or my husband. You know, won't even go down to the front gate, you know. He's very isolated and he's got very anxious and, you know, he's got no independence whatsoever, so how he'll access university …..*

Besides university parents also wanted their children to get some qualifications so they could get a job. One parent (P4) shared her hopes for her daughter's future, she wanted her to have practical skills like being able to understand run bank account, she said she dreamt that, *she will be able to live independently, get a little job or something & have a happy fulfilled life.* This view of some basic independence was similar to another parent (P12) who wanted her daughter to be able to understand money and time and maybe *read a recipe.* Or another parent (P11) who aspired to her daughter holding down a job and being happy. Concerns for the future and worries about safety were also voiced by parents, in some cases their children's needs left them more vulnerable, one mother explained her fears,

> *With (name of son), when we see things in the paper, sort of, these vulnerable people – the awful things that happen to them – that's (name of son) you know. He's very vulnerable. The Speech Therapist at school, she went in to speak to him and then she asked to see me. She said, you do realise how vulnerable he is? I*

> *think, I mean I knew it anyway … I think her saying that really hit home, and I just don't know…*

On the social side, parents had what one might consider to be fairly basic aspirations like wanting their child to be able to socialise, or to have 'a friend', or be happy or safe and have fun, one mother explained her son's aspiration, she (P2) said,

> *his ambition would be to get better, whatever that means. To be like other boys, I suppose. Of course, I would love that too but I just want him to be the best of whatever he can – whatever his capabilities are – to be the best of them, which doesn't really mean anything either. I want him to be happy, of course, and I would love for him to be able to communicate effectively.*

Aspirations that might be seen by some as basic human rights, rights that so many of us take for granted. When it came to life skills again these might seem basic to some people, parents wanted their children to be able to live independently or hold down a job, be able to understand concepts like money and time or perhaps be able to 'read okay'. Parents in the study, like most parents, just wanted their children to be happy, and fulfil their potential, however, for these parents, they felt that the potential of their children was, in many cases, more limited and therefore, for many of them, their aspirations were more limited. In phase one of the research social skills, confidence and life skills emerged as the most popular aspirations, this very much supports what the interview participants shared with me in phase two, however, with phase two allowing for more flexibility in responses, there was more detail and description of parental aspirations.

At the end of most interviews I asked parents about their views on inclusion, I was interested to understand what inclusion meant to parents, what it looked like at the grass roots level.

7.6   Parents' views on the inclusion debate – views from the coalface

As mentioned previously, at the start of the interview phase of my research the government Green paper (DfE, 2011) was out for consultation, aspects of the paper outlined changes to the SEN, health and care systems and proposed to put parents more in control. The consultation for the Green paper referred to 'a bias towards inclusion', this was taken by many groups working in the area of SEN and inclusion as a backward step, advocating segregation for children with SEN. As the issue of inclusion was once again in the news and significant changes were proposed, a question on inclusion was added to the interview schedule. I did not always get the opportunity to ask the question, sometimes this was due to time constraints, at other times participants became upset and interviews ended earlier than intended, however when it was asked it usually led to some interesting conversations.

The parents that participated in my interviews generally had very similar views on inclusion, as one parent put it, *inclusion is well intentioned.* This parent (P6) felt that efforts should always be made to include children but she felt that as a parent there were limitations, she and her husband chose to send their son to a specialist school for children with HI, she explained,

> *I have no hang-ups about him being at a specialist school. I think that's where he fits in and if you interpret inclusion you know, as meaning any child can get into any school, in my son's particular place I don't thinks that's, you know … We didn't discount it; we talked to people about it, but actually sometimes you have to say, you know, the needs are specific and can best be looked after in a specific environment.*

So their idea was that inclusion is more about attitude than location, they had visited many schools and in the end they felt a specialist school was the place where their son was best included. At primary school as a child with HI in a mainstream primary the family felt that there son had been included on all but two occasions, the mother told me that at his primary, *He was never not expected or not allowed or, you know, to do anything but what the other kids were doing.* This was the case except on two occasions, swimming lessons, where he obviously was without his hearing aids and so couldn't hear and cycling training, where again if he rode off he might not hear, on both occasions school expressed concern about allowing him to take part. However, despite their generally positive experience with inclusion in primary education and their belief in the concept, the family were very committed to sending their son to a specialist secondary school because they felt that, that was the best environment for meeting his needs.

The mother explained, why they chose a special school,

> *I don't think you should ever not make an effort to include children. But I would say, as a parent, there are limitations. And I don't know, you know … while none of the schools if you like, in choosing secondary schools turned round and said they wouldn't or couldn't take my son, I think as a parent, part of what you're doing is looking at where your child will best fit in. And I can only talk from (son's name) specific set of need but, you know, I feel that actually he needs friends, he needs a peer group that actually understand what it's like to be deaf..*

She also felt that perhaps for her son, with the needs that he had, inclusion had been less complicated, she told me what she meant by this, she said,

> *I don't get any pleasure out of saying this, but one thing I can say about (son's name) and deafness is that it's measurable …it's not a spectrum ….We've not had any arguments about whether on a good day he can hear and on a bad day he can't hear. What we've got, is what we've got to deal with. And that has made, perhaps, some of arguing his case, you know, hard to beat. Because it's a fact of*

life and we've got to get on with it. As I say, it doesn't give me any great joy in pointing that out, but there are other children who have different needs and that, you know, are not necessarily so clear cut.

The history of SEN in England shows that children with VI and HI have traditionally been treated differently to those with other, perhaps less obvious or measurable, SEN. Schools for the blind and deaf, as they would have been called, were available, often through the church, significantly before they became available for those children with other learning difficulties, who were seen as 'ineducable' until the 1944 Education Act. Could it be that children with VI and HI are still treated more sympathetically within today's education system and perhaps have a more straightforward and successful experience of SEN and inclusion?

Another mother (P9), whose son has ASD felt that in one instance a school's inclusion policy, which encouraged everyone to integrate in the main school had meant her son was excluded because he couldn't cope with life in the main school and needed to be in the specialist unit which was discouraged. She explained her views on inclusion,

> *I think that schools need to be firm on their inclusion and stick to it and not fanny about. And not play with people's emotions. I think that, in terms of a child like (son's name), who quite clearly can't cope in a mainstream school ... I mean there is provision and there should be ... I think County should be more aware of the fact that not every child can go into mainstream... So I think inclusion is ... I think it's an emotive thing because I think everyone... not everyone is clear on what inclusion is. And that needs defining, I think, better. I think it means that everybody should be included in everything, but all the time. And sometimes that just doesn't work... Because inclusion's great but I think there are just some things that children just can't do.*

This confusion over what inclusion actually means for a school and, how best to implement it to ensure inclusion for all is evidently a fundamental issue for many schools.

A mother (P17) in another LA with two boys in an ASD unit attached to a mainstream secondary had very strong views on the issue of inclusion, she felt that for her family inclusion had not been a reality in terms of schooling or their lives outside of school. Asking her views on inclusion provoked a really passionate response in her, she explained,

> *this idea of inclusion doesn't include kids with Autism! I think inclusion doesn't work. And inclusion in school, as well ... you know, this is what he was supposed to be having, and it didn't work. It didn't meet his needs, he couldn't cope with it. And what they were doing, because he was in classes that supported inclusion, he was sitting outside the class because he couldn't cope with what was going on inside the class. So it's actually* **exclusion** *part of the time. He had to be excluded – he was the good guy – but because all the other kids were sort of, you know, doing what they do (son's name) couldn't cope with it. So he sat outside the class. … I think it's rubbish, inclusion, to be honest. And I think it's a lovely idea; in a perfect world it would work, but in reality it doesn't work. It, you know*

> *… I feel our kids, and as a family, we are totally excluded. There's no inclusion in our family and I think for my daughter … this is where I get upset … Because she doesn't have these issues, it's very difficult for her as well because she has to be in a family that, you know, is not part of the village, not part of, sort of, mainstream society. So that makes her life difficult, so she can't have a sleepover the same as her friends because the boys can't cope with it, you know. If she has friends in, you know, the friends have to realise that her brothers are odd and they're going to be, you know, acting in an odd way towards them. So, you know, I feel that we're not included at all; I think we're excluded, because our children have this condition. We can't do mainstream things; we can't even, you know … if we get an invitation to a wedding, I know we can't go, you know. My kids can't cope with it. You know, we're totally excluded. We can't do mainstream things; we can't even, you know … if we get an invitation to a wedding, I know we can't go, you know. My kids can't cope with it.*

For some family's issues of inclusion were an issue beyond school with difficulties in communities, family life and with making friends, several participants referred to their children's issues with friendships and isolation within their communities. One mother (P18), whose son attends an ASD unit several miles away from home, mentioned her concerns, *he goes to school so far away, he doesn't get invited to parties and see anybody outside of school. And the holiday's, we're very isolated in the holidays. He does try to fit in, he tries but he always gets it wrong.* In another LA, a family (P7), whose daughter has learning difficulties related to a genetic condition attended a special secondary school at the time of the interview, after having been to two mainstream primaries, had similar views about inclusion both in school and in their community, the mother told me,

> *I don't actually think that inclusion works in practice because, you know, there's all these policies and things. They go, oh yes we include children, but actually they don't really because they don't adapt the curriculum for those children; and they do end up being mothered because they have an LSA, which is typically a Mum, part-trained. And, no disrespect to them, but the school doesn't put the money in to train the LSAs, the school she did go to in the end, on top of it don't advertise the jobs, they employ from the school mums…. Some years, you know, she would be taught nothing in the sense that she was spending all her time being taught on her own – that's not inclusion, in my opinion you know; particularly when she got into Years 5 and 6, she was lost, didn't know what was going on you know, didn't understand the curriculum …*

So in the primary school, despite their best intentions, she felt that her daughter was not included, school's that accept children with SEN and then hire untrained, and often inexperienced, LSA's perhaps feel that they are being inclusive but lack the resources or willpower and imagination to really be inclusive. This was another example of a lack of inclusion in a school alongside a lack of support and inclusion within a local community, she told me about her daughter's experiences in her secondary school, a special school, compared to her mainstream primary,

(daughter's name) she's making friends now, she's getting phone calls now, she gets texts now which she just didn't get before; she wasn't invited to anything, you know. …And we kept inviting people here; we had people nearly every weekend, you know, trying to encourage it. We used to hold princess parties, we used to hold big hall parties and people just didn't give it back, you know. And we would do photo albums for people to look at afterwards – someone nicked the photo album. There was just like no inclusion really. That was worse than the school I think; for her anyway. I've not kept in touch with anyone at all… I strongly believe in inclusion but it doesn't work; it doesn't work in most places. The kids are bullied, the kids are excluded, the kids are made more to feel different than the other children by being in a unit or being with an LSA.

Another family (P11), whose daughter had also moved to a special secondary school after some difficult experiences in her mainstream primary, had similar views in terms of inclusion and their realities of mainstream schooling, she explained,

*the inclusion bit is that … **my** way of seeing it is that every child should be included in the group and able to access that point. (daughter's name) sometimes couldn't access it because she couldn't work out; so if they were working in a group within … when she was in mainstream school, and they were working in a group, she would become excluded because she couldn't understand what they were talking about. And although they were trying to include her, it was at a level that she just wouldn't be able to follow. So she just used to sit and stare, and it's easy. Because she was, she would just sit and stare or go quietly off into a world of her own and … I mean I'm not putting them down, because they worked really hard with her, and they did everything that Occupational Therapist and everything said. But if you've got 38 children in the class, you can't keep all of them going at the same time. It's just impossible. So that's where she probably fits into special needs more; the fact is she is more included…*

The experiences of these two families seems to support the views expressed by Baroness Warnock in 2005 (Warnock, 2010) when she suggested that children in special school were less vulnerable to bullying than those in mainstream schools. Both families found that their daughters were only really included and felt part of the community and developed friendships once they left mainstream schooling for special.

This idea of children needing to fit in and be included was a key determinant when it came to decisions about where their children could be schooled, for some parents inclusion came in the shape of a mainstream school, albeit normally their second attempt at a mainstream school, for others it was a special school or a specialist unit. One participant (P.2) interpreted inclusion as meaning mainstream schooling and for her this meant that her son could not be included, I asked her what she understood by the term inclusion, she said,

I don't think it's particularly helpful. I mean there is no way that (son's name) would … if (son's name) only option was to go to a mainstream school, then he would never have gone because there's no way that he could cope in a class of typically developing children; there's no way the teacher could cope; and what

they're learning is light years away from his learning requirements, his learning needs.

What are the implications of these differing interpretations of the word inclusion? One mother (P13), whose son attends an ASD unit attached to a mainstream secondary, was training to be a teacher and had some strong opinions on inclusion, she explained them to me,

> *I think it's over-rated, it's taken too literally. I think Baroness Warnock has done us a disservice because everyone took it in the wrong way. I think inclusion should not be throwing all these children into mainstream schools to then try and find resources to make the best of a bad job, if I'm totally honest. And my concern is this new Ofsted framework is that is what the implication is going to be. I think inclusion has been taken too far. I think inclusion is a term that … inclusion is a word which is very difficult to describe because what some people would view as inclusion is every child in the class, educated in the class; and I think inclusion should be focused around the child and, if it's in a special school or in a unit or in a mainstream school, you know, it's how inclusion is perceived and dealt with in schools. I just think that inclusion is not about throwing every child into mainstream schools and letting them get on with it because some children, particularly those with autism, cannot do that. They need time out, they need to be taken out for intervention, they need quiet time, they need understanding and, you know, what I'm hearing out there – particularly with Ofsted and things – they don't feel that Special Needs children should be taken out for intervention because that's not inclusion. Well, why? You know, it scares me, actually; as a parent especially as I know that the majority of schools are doing their damndest to include these children as best as they can, but they don't have sufficient expertise, and everything comes with a price, so you have to buy into all these services and we are doing a disservice to these children.*

Several of the recommendations from the Lamb inquiry (DCSF, 2009) referred to the need for specialist materials and training and guidance for LSAs, trainee teachers and teachers to ensure that they understood the requirements of children with SEND and were deployed effectively. However despite the recommendations many teacher training courses, for example a leading London university which does not even mention SEN in the list of course aims for its ITT programme, still fail to cover the area of SEN in adequate depth and many teachers and LSAs work in schools with children with SEN needs that are not trained to understand or support.

For some families (P16) though there had been some positive experiences of inclusion, one such family had a young son with ASD attending a small village primary, his mother explained her views on the school and inclusion, she said, *I am familiar with it* (inclusion), *and (name of school) do a very good job to include (name of son), I have no problems with their inclusion policy, I think they've adapted very well to cater for his needs. And um, we are all really happy there.* One mother (P10) whose daughter has Down syndrome

was also supportive of the principle of inclusion but felt that it needed to deal with children as individuals, she said,

> I think it's (inclusion) *a really good idea, but in practice you've got to look at the people that you're doing it to. And if the child with special needs is unhappy, then something has to change.*

Another participant (P8), whose son was in his Foundation year at a local ASD unit, was in favour of inclusion, she felt that the unit her son was in was very inclusive and that this was a good thing, she told me her views,

> *I think the inclusion thing is definitely … I mean they have that at his school anyway, and it's such a big thing. All the children in the (unit), you know, they get the same … you know, they do the chocolate raffles and Christmas dinner and, you know, all the other things that are coming up at the moment, and they are just as much involved in that as all the other children. They have to go to assembly…so they are expected to do everything. Obviously they're not … I mean they … (son's name) only mainstreamed in his lessons half-an-hour a week at the moment, but that's because that's all he can cope with, so that's different. But it's the view is to get him mainstreamed as quick as he will allow, you know, and … so he is included, otherwise if he lives his whole life in the (unit) there's not going to be a progression, is there?*

Another mother (P19) who had removed her daughter from her local village primary in her first year there was very clear about what she thought inclusion was. Her daughter's disastrous experience at her first school was followed by a fantastic experience at another local mainstream primary, which also catered well for her younger daughter, an able child with no SEN, all these experiences had clearly shaped her view, she told me that,

> *To me, inclusion should mean providing the child that's got the disability, whatever it might be, with the ability to access – not necessarily everything that everybody else would do … Because that might not be appropriate. But to be included and be part of society, part o=f education at a level that's appropriate for them. So they're not … there's nothing that they can't do because it shouldn't be a problem to allow them to do it. I think it's (*inclusion) *got the possibility to be … because down here there's no inclusion. At (name of child's second mainstream school) it was just taken as read; they were included … but that doesn't mean they were included in mainstream if that's inappropriate. It's about making them have the best access to whatever they need, rather than … it doesn't necessarily have to be the same things as everybody else …Because (child's name) would do some mainstream things but then she'd come out and she'd go off to the ball-pond or she'd go to the development room. At the junior school. It's about making education fit them, I think, rather than make them fit education. That's how I see it.*

Making education fit children, rather than making children fit education, seems like such a simple ideal. Although many of the schools, across the key stages and types of school, referred to by participants in this study, seemed to be struggling to meet this simple ideal.

8. Chapter eight - Discussion

When I started this project the Coalition government were preparing their consultation on changes to SEN statements and funding, as I come to the end of the project, the Coalition has less than a year remaining before the next election. The Children and Families Act 2014, which recently gained Royal Assent, brings in sweeping changes to the SEND system replacing the old system of SEN statements with a new birth- to-25 education, health and care plan (EHCP) and offering families personal budgets as well as changes designed to improve the cooperation between all the services that support children and their families, particularly requiring local authorities and health authorities to work together. How much impact these changes will actually have on families remains to be seen over the coming years, although the new legislation does little to address the inequalities in the schooling and school choice systems it does appear to introduce more flexibility into how and where families can access support. The SEND Pathfinder pilots, carried out across 31 LAs, do not produce their final evaluations until early in 2015, however, interim evaluations suggest that parents have been involved as part of the assessment and planning process and findings are 'broadly positive' (Craston, Thom, Spivack, 2013:9). The fact that the Children and Families Act has become legislation before the Pathfinder pilots have even been completed strongly suggests that, perhaps, the timing of this important Act has more to do with election campaigning than actually making positive changes for families and children.

This final section will bring together earlier discussions from the interview and survey analysis and, along with the analysis of the literature, will attempt to draw together all aspects of the project to answer the research questions, explore other aspects of the analysis and reach conclusions and suggest avenues for further research. However, it is important to recognise that another researcher with the same data may well have reached different conclusions, this interpretation is influenced by my values, beliefs and priorities (Vincent and Warren, 2001), and this research is my 'story' of the data (Limerick, Burgess-Limerick and Grace, 1996). I believe that research needs to have some impact and, in terms of this project, there are a number of groups, schools, local authorities and parents that might consider some of the findings useful and so a list of recommendations is also included. The most significant impact has perhaps been on me personally in terms of my journey as a researcher and student and I shall also reflect on some aspects of my personal journey.

8.1 How do parents of children who have a statement of SEN make decisions to send their children either to mainstream or special schools?

I realised fairly early on in the project that the distinction that I had made in this research question, between special and mainstream schools was one based on very limited knowledge and understanding of inclusion and SEN. The parents that participated in the research were not necessarily interested in the distinction between mainstream and special schools, although one or two did consider it, most of the parents simply wanted a school that would 'fit'. There were 65 phase one participants, the majority (51%) of their children attended a special school or a specialist unit attached to a mainstream school (15%), the remaining 34% attended a mainstream school (section 8.8, table 2). Just over half of the children in phase one were secondary school aged. In phase two there were twenty children, five of primary school age, of who four attended a mainstream school and one a mainstream with an attached specialist unit. However, of the fifteen secondary school aged children only one attended a mainstream school, six attended a mainstream school with an attached specialist unit and eight attended a special school.
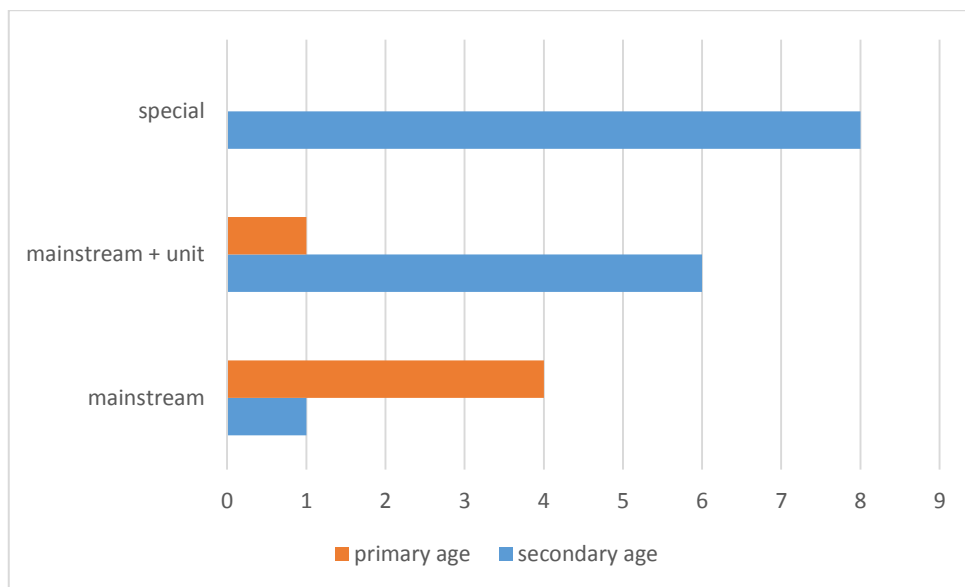
Figure 8-1- the types of school attended by the children in phase two

There was a striking difference between the types of school attended at secondary and primary ages across both phases of the project. Of the fifteen secondary aged children all, except three of them, attended mainstream primaries, although several of them did change from one school to another. It seems that the children, no matter what their SEN, 'fitted' in better at primary school, of the five children that moved schools during the primary phase, four had a diagnosis of ASD. Of the two that did not attend mainstream primaries, one was home educated and, at the time of the interview, was attending a special school part-time, whilst the other two, both with statements for ASD, attended mainstream primaries with attached specialist units. Parents in phase two explained these

differences between primary and secondary in a number of ways, it seemed that for most families their local mainstream primary was their first choice, one parent was unaware of her child's needs until the school identified them, however the other parents were aware of difficulties and differences, although not all necessarily had a label for them at the time of starting primary school. The local primary for some was where their older children had gone or where they automatically had thought their child would go, not for ideological reasons but practicalities and expectations, one might explain it as *habitus,* social and cultural messages. It seems parents expect that their child will go to their local school, even where there is a choice of school in the local area, they expect to send their child to go to one of them. One of the patterns that did emerge in the findings was that almost every phase two participant initially chose to send their children to mainstream schools. Was this because it is the 'natural' choice for parents to make based on their prior expectations of having a child? Prior expectations and social norms that are so ingrained that they do not change even when faced with the reality of a child with SEND? Or is it because they are ignorant of alternative options? How much information and support do parents get with regards to their children's schooling? Some might suggest that the reason that most parents chose mainstream schools for their children was because they were motivated by something more than social norms or ignorance, they were motivated by a desire for their child to receive an education in their local school because of a belief in their 'equal and inalienable rights' (UNICEF, 1989) or their right to be accommodated in a 'regular school' (UNESCO, 1994) with a child centred pedagogy capable of meeting their needs? Although I support such sentiments, I believe that the reality of them, the achievements that they hoped for, have yet to be seen, even in the more developed countries where it might be expected that such aspirations perhaps should be easier to achieve, on any large scale at the grass roots level? The participants in this research didn't talk to me about such concepts as inalienable rights, they talked to me about their children as individuals and their needs.

Parents in phase two had often visited a few local primaries or knew of them, 'hot knowledge', or it was just the 'village school'. In terms of how they chose, at the initial primary level, it was relatively simple, most of them knew their child had needs and they expected these to be met within their local primaries. An expectation that coincides with the 2001 Special Educational Needs and Disability Act – the Act that strengthened the rights of parents of children with SEN to mainstream education and sits well within the boundaries of the 1994 Salamanca Statement and the Framework for Action that stipulates that a child with SEN should attend the same 'neighbourhood school' that they

would attend if they did not have a SEN. In phase one, 64% of parents reported that their child did not attend their local school and over three quarters of the children travelled over three miles to school. Of the five primary school aged children in phase two, four attended local mainstream primaries, three of these were carefully chosen by their parents following visits and meetings with staff to ensure that SEN could be met. In these three cases, one of which was a child with autism, one child had physical disabilities and another physical difficulties and some learning difficulties, parents were made to feel welcome and schools assured them that needs could be met and, at the time of the interviews, families were happy with their choice of school. Knowledgeable staff and an accommodating and welcoming ethos do exist in some primary schools and they mean that children with SEN can be educated successfully alongside their peers, in their local communities. It could be the case that some SEN, perhaps the more visible ones, are accepted more willingly by schools than others? Although this argument is undermined by the fact that the child with autism was also accepted and welcomed and ASD is a SEN that is often invisible. Warnock (2010), like Runswick-Cole, argued that many of the children with SEND that are disadvantaged by the education system are those with less visible disabilities, for example children with ASD or other communication and behavioural difficulties. The findings in this research would support this view, as it was the children with the more obvious physical disabilities like Down syndrome or albinism and VI, whether they were in mainstream or special schools that seemed to be receiving an education that their parents felt suited their needs. As the number of children with ASD and EBD continue to increase (DfE, 2013), more and more families, whose children have invisible needs, will be searching for schools that can educate them and support their needs.

In phase one, when asked which factors influenced their school choice decisions, specialist staff and facilities emerged as clear favourites, hardly surprising when 66% of the children in the sample attended either a special school or a mainstream school with a specialist unit. The parents in phase one got their advice from a range of sources, but overall LA staff and educational professionals were the main ones. Some parents felt that the LA had been a hindrance in their choice making either through a lack of information being provided for them or because of a lack of support for parental choices. The range of negative experiences varied across schools and type of SEN and possibly families, different families may have different expectations of their child's schooling. The difficulties that children had in their primary schools ranged from being treated as 'naughty', to being ignored or social problems outside of the classroom and isolation. Many commentators,

(Gewirtz *et al,* 1995, Barton, 1998, Cole, 2005, Runswick-Cole, 2011) have written about these 'risks' involved in our present educational system which can occur when students attend mainstream schools, schools that are very much judged on their 'standards', standards that presently do not sit comfortably with the demands of some children's needs. Until schools are judged differently there can be no doubt that the tensions created between inclusion and 'standards', the 'system-consumer value tension' (Bagley *et al.* 2001) will remain and continue to impact negatively on both parental choices and children's experiences.

There were also, however, some positive experiences, primary schools that employed extra staff to support a child before any SEN funding was available or schools that meet with parents regularly to discuss how to meet needs or structure things differently to help accommodate a child's needs. There were a small number of schools that did successfully include children and meet their needs and parents reported how nothing seemed like too much trouble and communication and support were excellent. How is it that some schools can include children with statements of SEN and yet so many do not do so successfully? The Lamb report (DCSF, 2009:2) also highlighted this point, 'the crucial issue is that both experiences happen within the same system' and it is undoubtedly a source of great frustration to families and children that there seem to be no easy or logical choices. Many parents in both phases of the research felt that their choices had been limited or that there had been little choice for them at all. How does this sit within the concept of inclusion (as location) as promoted by the legislation and the marketization, surely freedom of choice is the basis for a free market for all parents, or perhaps such choice is only open to competent parents (Goacher *et al.*)?

However, even the schools that did successfully include, these rare exceptions, did not necessarily lead to parents choosing mainstream secondary school, clearly they perceived a difference between primary and secondary schools. This perceived difference between the two phases of schooling raise some interesting pedagogical issues, are there fundamental differences between our primary and secondary schools? If so, why and should there be? Rix *et al.* (2013) have shown such differences appear across countries, does this mean that is it inevitable? One parent felt that her son, who has Asperger's, considered sending him to a grammar school until she visited and realised that he wouldn't cope with the environment, she talked about the moving around between lessons, communicating with other children and homework as the issues that made her reconsider. Are these aspects of secondary education that cannot be adapted or that

secondary schools do not want to adapt; or is it more about the parents and their fears rather than the schools themselves? Perhaps there is something about the structure and organisation of secondary schools that makes them so intractable? These are questions that are difficult to answer, suggesting that some parents may choose special schools as a 'safe option' (Ainscow, 1999) or, that schools are unwilling (Ellins and Porter (2005) or unable to adapt, are obvious answers however they may hide more complex realities.

When it came to decisions at secondary level, most of the parents' researched visited a number of schools, both mainstream, with and without specialist units, and special before reaching a decision about which one to choose. For some, at the time of the interview, this choice seemed to be working for their child, whilst for others it was not working and some they were still looking for a suitable 'fit'. In phase one, as well as specialist facilities and staff, the majority (59%) of parents reported that their choice of school was influenced by their child's SEN. In phase two parents, who were based across three different LAs, were also influenced by facilities and many of them talked about a process of visits and seeing if their child would 'fit' in the schools they saw as well as the use of Ball and Vincent's (1998) 'hot' – neighbours, other parents, word of mouth- and 'cold' - Ofsted reports, prospectuses- knowledge, and of course issues of location and convenience which cut across many others. The idea of specialist facilities seemed to be paramount in the decisions of many parents, as they felt that their children's needs required them, although of course the facilities varied in accordance with the needs of the child, in one case a mother needed an environment with high door handles, to help keep her son, *he's like Houdini*, safe, whilst in another case peers with HI were what the parents felt the child required. Some parents may not have the resources, the time, the money or perhaps the confidence, to visit a number of schools, they may make choices about schools for their children based on more limited information however, apart from one parent, this research did not engage with such parents. Generally the families that spoke to me, used their skills and resources (Ball, 2003, Grey, 2010) to make the best choices that they could for their children, although this did not necessarily lead to success at secondary school level.

However, when it came to secondary school it was the experiences of the child, and the family, at the primary school that appeared to have the most impact on how parents chose and, as the majority of children across both phases attended a special school at secondary level, it is evident that, for many families primary school experiences were

negative. Jenkinson (1998) suggested that the social and academic gaps widened for some children with SEND at secondary level, perhaps this, combined with negative primary school experiences can explain the prevalence of special schools across the participants. Once parents had made their decisions regarding placement, some consideration was given to their aspirations for their children. The high prevalence of special schools/units at secondary school level could suggest that inclusion as location is failing for the participants of this study. However, equally, it could suggest that inclusion as pedagogical practices or inclusive environments is failing too, as special schools/units were often the choice made when parents felt that a mainstream school didn't 'fit' or when a mainstream school made them feel unwelcome, for example in the case of P4 and P5.

8.2 What aspirations do these parents have for their children?

The parents in phase one were asked about what they hoped their child would gain from their schooling, the responses (figure 5.3) showed that social skills and confidence were what most parents wanted their children to gain. These were followed by life skills, enjoyment and friends – it seemed as if participants in the project were keen that their children had some of the interpersonal skills and basic life skills that would allow them to get on and have some independence and happiness in life. Academic skills and qualifications were not necessarily what these parents felt was relevant for their children and their lives, perhaps this is similar to other parents, or perhaps, their children's SEN made these parents more aware of the basics than the majority of parents? In phase two many participants had similar views, they wanted their children to be happy, socialise or be able to live independently. Some parents wanted, what could be considered, the very basic rights and skills for their children, for example, they wanted them to be safe or to be able to communicate or to learn how to read, things that many families take for granted. However, in phase two some parents also mentioned university, which was not even given as an option in phase one, perhaps reflecting my own views on what parents of children with SEN statements might aspire to and highlighting one of many pitfalls of utilising quantitative methods to explore people's views.

No clear distinction could be made between the views of parents across different types of schools or across type of SEN. In phase two some parents whose children had physical or sensory difficulties aspired to university places for them, whilst others whose children had ASD equally hoped that their sons might attend university. Although when it came to children with ASD, this was perhaps unsurprising given the spectrum of needs – after all

as Beadle (2014) said 'when you have met one person with autism, you have met one person with autism'- parents had a wide range of aspirations from university at the Asperger's end to wanting their child to be able to communicate at the other end. With such a range of aspirations and needs to consider is it only logical that the children in the phase two sample attended a range of schools and that these schools varied in how well they met expectations? Or should there be more consistency across schools in terms of their provision and ability to cater for a range of both needs and aspirations?

In terms of aspirations, this study focused on what the parents thought rather than the children and it found that parents in both phases had mixed views and a range of aspirations, there was no clear distinction in terms of aspirations between types of school or SEN. It was apparent, however, that parents of secondary aged children with ASD did share concerns about their futures in terms of their independence, safety and mental health, although of course, as Perepa (2013) maintains, the impact of ASD on each family can be different and thus their concerns and aspirations will also differ. Unlike Meyer (2001) findings, however, the parents in my study, whose children attended mainstream schools or units, did not form friendships easily or have many friends, it was the children in special schools that seemed to fit in more and not suffer from *social isolation* (Gottfredson, 1986). Why might the parents of children in special schools feel that their children were more included and less isolated than those in mainstream? Is it the environment and ethos of special schools or simply the fact that in many mainstream schools children with statements of SEN are treated, and therefore seen as, different? What are these barriers to inclusion? Bauman (1995) argued for a society that was 'for' others, rather than 'with' others, nearly twenty years on, the evidence from this research suggests that we are still living in a divided society. Booth (2002:2) agrees with this idea of for rather than with, he outlines how participation is more than just access, it also involves 'being recognised for oneself and being accepted for oneself. I participate with you when you recognise me as a person like yourself, and accept me for who I am'. Could it be that this kind of participation is more common in special schools where all the children have additional needs and therefore are all different yet equal? In terms of inclusive education the data suggests that mainstream schools are not engaging with inclusion beyond location, and some of them, with their unwelcoming attitude, not even with that aspect. If inclusive pedagogical practices and inclusive school environments were established in more mainstream schools then perhaps fewer parents would choose to send their children to special schools/units. Until schools are united in their support for,

and expertise in, all aspects of inclusive education, parents of children with statements of SEN will continue to struggle to find a school that fits.

8.3 In choosing either a mainstream or a specialist school, what in-school factors for these parents perceive as being important for the support of their children in those schools?

When looking at the in-school factors that were supporting their children in schools, phase two parents again had a mix of experiences across types of school and SEN, although there was some consistency when it came to parents of children with Asperger's or high functioning autism. In terms of good practice, some parents mentioned communication as a strength, starting with transition, which was very well managed by some schools, and moving on to issues like email communication, which again some parents felt was effective in helping them communicate with key staff in schools. Social stories were also seen as a useful tool by parents of children with ASD as they helped their children deal with new experiences or understand how others might respond in a situation. However, despite being able to communicate with schools more effectively through the use of email, parents still did not necessarily feel that they were welcome in their children's school or were seen as partners in their education. Why might parents feel this way? Is it an oversight on the part of these schools, who just do not see parents as having any part to play in their children's' education? Or a more deliberate effort to keep parents on the outskirts of their children's education and maintain the dominance of educational professionals? McGhee-Hassrick and Schneider, (2009) suggest that parental involvement in school acts as form of surveillance of teachers, as once parents have *chosen* the school they are keen to ensure that standards are maintained. Does this explain why schools try and keep parents at arm's length? Or is it that the increased involvement of parents has led to tensions with teachers feeling as if their professionalism is being challenged by interfering parents (Crozier, 2000). Have parents become too 'critical consumers'?

Another area that received mixed reviews related to the curriculum, Daniels and Porter (2009) reported on a lack of evidence on the need for a specialised pedagogy for students with SEND. This project found that some parents of children in special schools were pleased with the inclusion of subjects such as life skills, which enabled their children to learn basics like how to use the bus or money, they felt that these were essential skills for their children to learn, in the hope that they might live their lives as autonomous adults. Parents of some children in special schools were also relieved that after years of not

making progress their children finally understood the subjects that they were being taught. However, for others the lack of academic expectations or appropriate teaching or an appropriate curriculum, meant that they felt that their children were missing out and not meeting their potential. This mismatch of curriculum provision and the needs of the child was evident in both special and mainstream schools. Adapting a curriculum to suit the needs of a child does not require a specialist pedagogy, merely an understanding of a child's needs and a willingness to be flexible in order that such needs might be met. For two academically able students in specialist ASD units, attached to mainstream schools, the juxtaposition of their academic abilities and their needs led to considerable difficulties for them and their families. The boys were taught in mainstream classes to try and meet their academic needs, and/or perhaps to help the school achieve the best results, and yet the environment of the mainstream classrooms was very difficult for them to cope with in terms of their SEN. This discomfort and the stress and anxiety it caused this was ignored by the schools and seen as a 'home or parenting issue'. The immersion in mainstream and lack of support for, or even acknowledgement of, their needs led to both boys struggling to cope mentally outside of school. The invisibility of SEN such as ASD can cause families many problems, Ryan (2010) and Perepa (2013) identify how parents of children with ASD can feel shame and distress at their children's behaviour in public places, as the lack of outward signs can make them look like incompetent parents rather than parents of children with social and communication difficulties. Parsons *et al.* (2011) found no evidence in favour of special or mainstream schools when they reviewed best practice for students with ASD, however, parents in this study did favour special schools when it came to best practice for their children's secondary schooling.

Why is it so difficult for some schools to deal effectively with children with ASD, is it a question of pedagogical practice or inclusive environments or both? Do some schools lack the flexibility or the expertise or the confidence to teach each child the curriculum that they need? Or is it unrealistic to expect each child to have their academic needs met when the mix of children within both mainstream and special schools has become more diverse with the introduction of more guidance and policies on inclusive schooling? Although of course if one takes the Lewis and Norwich model (2005) and applies the unique differences model, it is entirely possible to teach a range of needs within one class. After all if teaching practices that are effective for children with SEND are effective for all then surely mainstream teachers can teach children with SEND without the need for any extra or special training. How is it possible for one mainstream primary to provide effective support whilst another, in the same vicinity, is unable to do the same? Is it a

question of training for staff? Cardona (2009) advocates concentrating on teacher education as a means to ensuring the successful implementation of inclusive practices. If so, how can we introduce effective CPD and amend or ITT courses to ensure more parity across schools and provision? Hart (1996:131) is very clear that if improving learning and achievement is the aim then the approach to professional development, must respect the complex nature of what teachers do and 'recognise, nurture and strengthen the expertise within', has previous training failed to do this? Rouse and Florian (2012) suggest that teaching trainee teachers to view inclusive teaching not as additional to but as a range of opportunities can help them feel more supported and prepared to teach a diverse range of students. They do make the point, however, that ITT needs to make some fundamental reforms if it is to teach trainee teachers how to teach inclusively. Just as Peters and Reid (2009) argue that moving away from our current pedagogical discourses to achieve the principles of inclusive education will take time as it requires changes, not just to legislation, but also enmeshed school procedures and classroom practices. Pedagogical practice in England still seems to lag far behind the inclusion ideal, despite the decade old legislation (DfES, 2004) advocating that teachers should expect to teach all children within their classrooms, many of them still fail to do so adequately.

Or is changing schools to become more inclusive about ethos? If this is the case, then where does ethos come from? Does ethos come from teacher identity, which Hoffman-Kip (2008) believe is the intersection of three types of participation: personal, pedagogical and political within the larger socio-political context? Although the definition of identity is complicated, Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop (2004) suggest that teacher identity plays a key role in the pedagogical decisions that teachers make. A study of ITT by Wideen, Mayer-Smith and Moon, (1998) highlights the importance of such programmes on the formation of teacher identity. It seems evident that ITT programmes have a significant role to play when it comes to the ethos of a school. However, teachers might argue that, as the leader of the school, it is the head teacher that ultimately is responsible for the ethos of a school, so is it head teachers that need to be trained more effectively? The current National Qualification for Headship Qualification, which is no longer compulsory, has an *optional* module on Leading Inclusion: Achievement for All. Surely if our schools are to become inclusive institutions that can effectively teach all children then we need more training for head teachers, rather than an *optional* module in an *optional* qualification? How can we ensure that all head teachers have a broad understanding of and commitment to inclusive education and practices? Is such a thing possible to measure, can such values be taught? Perhaps mainstream teachers need to spend time in special

schools, as well as receiving improved training, in order to challenge their understanding of what educating all children means and develop their skills. It seems evident that making schools more inclusive will involve both the teachers and the heads of schools. Whilst the parents who took part in the research did not explicitly mention ITT, some of them did talk to me about the characteristics of the schools that they chose, the schools that welcomed their children and included them. Like Rouse and Florian (2012) I believe that effective training can teach school staff both the importance of inclusion and the pedagogy of inclusive teaching.

Opinions amongst families were divided on the issue of teaching in special schools and their approaches to the curriculum, some families felt that the teaching was satisfactory and allowed their children to make progress and achieve, for some, it was wonderful that their children, for the first time, were able to achieve and not be bottom of the class. Some parents were very happy that their children were learning life skills that might enable them to live independently one day and care for themselves. However for other parents the special schools failed to challenge their children academically and they were disappointed with their progress. As there was no pattern to parental evaluations of the special schools it is difficult to suggest wholesale improvements that could be made by schools. Perhaps the mixed reactions of parents whose children had a range of needs and attended a range of schools can help explain why it might be difficult for schools to get it right and meet the needs of each individual student, as it seems that, not only are the needs of each student different but alongside this the expectations of each family, and in some cases, each parent within that family, are different. Perhaps as Ravet (2011) suggests there is no 'recipe' for inclusion, although of course she is commenting just on students with ASD.

Although each family and child in the research was different, one similarity across participants emerged in the area of the mothers in phase two. The idea of mothers as strong, resourceful and unrelenting is supported by the data that was collected in the interviews although there was not always a direct link between the amount of time and resources spent by the family and the appropriateness of the schooling received by the child. Nor did I find a link between levels of education and passion to support and enhance their child's schooling as Poikolainen (2012) suggested. The mothers that I spoke to all had children with a label, a statement of SEN, although for some the exact label or diagnosis was a little unclear, the statement or label gave them 'capital' which enabled them to access services and resources in both the medical and educational arenas. Most of the mothers in the study were pragmatic, they realised that the label

could give their children more access, Pinney's (2004) passport, some had spent a great deal of time and effort pursuing a label, just as Rogers (2007) participants, parents of children with impairments had. Once they had the label, they went about using the statement in the most effective ways that they could. The mothers that I spoke to in the interviews, bar one exception, were all closely involved in their children's lives, they saw themselves as the 'experts' on them (Read, 2000) and worked hard to communicate effectively with the various professionals involved in their lives. Some succeeded more than others in this communication however, all of them devoted a great deal of time and energy to this, as they saw it as crucial for the well-being of their child and perhaps therefore, for some, a reflection of their parenting. Some of the mothers in phase two, like those reported by Lake and Billingsley (2000), questioned their ability to advocate for their children without proper expertise although they still dedicated their lives to the welfare of their children (McKeever and Miller, 2004). Perhaps this questioning of their ability can be partly explained by the legislation, which some, (Armstrong, 1995 and Vincent, 1996) would argue, gave parents a more powerful role in the education system but still allowed professionals, for example, teachers and psychologists, to maintain a more dominant position.

8.4   Further thoughts

I have no doubt that many of the parents that I spoke to do believe in ideals like social justice and equality in terms of their children and their schooling, however, I do not feel that this is something that was of paramount importance to them when it came to issues of school choice and school effectiveness. It was not fairness that they talked about, although this may well have been at the root of their comments, it was their child and their needs. The details that they shared with me were more personal, the gritty realities of their children and their family life. Perhaps this is a reflection of the questions that were asked of them, questions that were based on my own interpretations of both previous research and the phase one findings. Questions that were not based on ideological or international agreements about the rights of all children to equal education. Plummer, (1983), highlights the triumvirate relationship between the participant, the researcher and the interaction between them, the interview itself. Denzin (2001:25) agrees with this when he writes that 'the interview is an active text, a site where meaning is created and performed.' As a feminist researcher I did aim to make each interview an interactive experience, answering any questions that were asked and sharing experiences

(Oakley, 1981). If I had focused more on theoretical concepts like social justice or disability issues, then perhaps the interview questions and the interviews themselves may have produced very different data. My own experiences and subjectivity, my interest in classrooms and students rather than statistics and concepts undoubtedly influenced, not just my choice of methods, but my use of those methods and the analysis of the data. Equally my role as an 'outsider' would no doubt have played a part in my research design and interpretations. As a researcher I agree with Berger (2013: 13) that reflexivity should be a continual process and that researchers must understand the potential ramifications of their positions on their research. I would like to believe that the narratives that participants shared were the ones that they wanted to share for the purposes of the research. However what participants' perceptions of the research were, along with their perceptions of me, as the researcher, undoubtedly changed from one interview to the next. Perhaps my own perceptions of the research changed as I completed more interviews and some tentative patterns began to emerge. There is no doubt that the lens that I used to filter the interview and the survey data was affected by my experiences during and after the research process as well as all my experiences and biases beforehand and that therefore the findings and conclusions that I report on here could be very different if they were reported on by someone else. Merely because a colleague agreed with me on my interpretations of codes for an interview or because my supervisors have monitored my work and discussed my findings with me or because I have reflected on my work and acknowledged and recognised by biases does not make this research credible or valid, however, I would argue that does make it more credible and valid than if I hadn't. Many researchers need to be more reflexive and open about the challenges that they face in their research, although there are some that do, for example Preece and Jordan (2010) in their work with children with ASD. However, much of what we read in journals and hear during key notes seems to skip this crucial aspect of reflexivity and report on research as if it were some sterile, objective process, as Clough said (2002:17) researchers 'never come innocent to a research task'. Issues of validity and reliability are not always adequate (Booth, 1996) as people's lives are messy. Like Clough (2002) I have aimed throughout this research to simply tell the truth as I have seen it.

One of the questions that I felt was very significant in this research was the question about who actually took part in the research and why, why did those who took part, take part? This was one of the questions that I asked the participants, I originally planned to ask the questions as an ice breaker type question, that the participants could answer easily (Noonan, 2013) not too personal and an easy way to open the interview. The

answers fell into two broad camps: 1) participants who wanted to help others if they could somehow through the research and 2) participants who wanted to share experiences of good or bad practice, again with a view to helping others. Although of course there could well be differences between the realities of why participants took part and the answers that participants gave me. The idea that my research could make a difference was certainly one that I had started off with, however, as time had passed I had become somewhat more pessimistic or, some might say, realistic about how much of a difference the research could make. There seemed to be no clear answers or patterns that could be altered through recommendations that I might make no simple fixes, the problem was simply too big. It was structural and ideological, the marketization of the education system; it was economic and ingrained, pedagogy, school budgets, ethos and it was sprawling, it covered mainstream schooling, special schools, specialist units, a huge range of SEND, the whole spread of school age children and beyond, it was impossible for one small piece of research to make any difference. Or was it? What messages did I need to get out there that could make a difference, that did matter? What had the participants told me that I could share to try and make their lives better? I realised that although I was right in thinking that the problem was huge and my research was small there were still things that needed to be said that I had the evidence to say. One of the most significant things that this research tells us is that we need to be much more aware of the children whose parents do not, or cannot, do all the things that the participants in this research do to ensure that their children get the schooling that meets their needs.

The participants in this research spent a great deal of time, effort and resources to develop their skills and access the information that they felt could best support their children. They dedicated their lives to ensuring that they found the best schools for their children and that those schools did everything that they could to support their children's needs. However there were many parents that did not speak to me and, although many of the parents that did not speak to me may equally devote a great deal of time and energy to their children's schooling, many of the parents who did not speak to me may not. For whatever reason, time, social capital, confidence, education or their own SEND, the reality is that some parents do not fight their child's corner and it is these children that we need to ensure are supported alongside the children whose parents can, and do, fight their corner. If we only listen to those parents that take part in research, or only conduct research in which some parents take part, then we will not develop policies or bring about changes that reflect the views of the society that we live in. Despite the desire of researchers and policy makers to hear and include the views of all strata of

society there is an acknowledged, though not often written or talked about, awareness of the problems of reaching some groups within society. As Kennan, Fives and Canavan write

> 'It might understandably be thought that those with the greatest needs or exposed to the greatest risk are the most important group to involve in research, which is to inform policy and service development. However, these groups can often be the most difficult to access.' (2011:276)

9. Chapter nine - Conclusions

The parents in this study chose schools in what might be considered the usual ways, they used 'hot' and 'cold' knowledge and tried their best. The difference isn't in the way parents chose schools but in the schools that they chose. Some special schools meet the needs of some children. Some mainstream schools meet the needs of some children. Some attached units meet the needs of some children. Some commentators would advocate getting rid of all special schools and suggest that mainstream schools and staff can effectively teach all children. Other commentators would advocate that we need special schools as part of a continuum of schools that can meet the needs of children with a range of SEN. Some parents in the study felt that that there was a choice of schools but some felt there was no choice. However, they all felt that no matter what type of school you choose it may, or may not work out the best for your child. There are no guarantees, no formulae to follow, no type of school + type of SEN = success. Some types of school + types of SEN= great. Some types of school + types of SEN = some effective provision, for example social aspects and some less effective, for example academic aspects. Some types of school + type of SEN = ineffective provision in all aspects. Stobbs (2012) suggests that what parents want in a school is really very simple, parents have confidence in teacher skills, and they will get a statement or choose a school to try and get the teachers that they feel have the skills to meet their child's needs. The issue of mainstream or special is not the issue at all nor is the notion of parental choice, these are just ideological concepts that perhaps interest academics rather than parents?

In terms of aspirations, the participants in the study had a range, some academic, from university at one end of the spectrum, to being able to read at the other end; aspirations varied from family to family. Other aspirations also ranged between families but what did appear to be common was the desire of families for their children to be safe, have some friends and be included. Perhaps aspirations that most parents have, however, for the participants in this study aspirations that were made much harder to achieve by their child's SEND and, in many cases, the lack of appropriate and effective schooling for them. Effective educational inclusion would allow the aspirations of these families a much greater chance of being met, however, as the majority of parental evaluations of their child's current schooling were negative, this seems unlikely. In phase two, of the minority of families whose evaluation of their child's current schooling was positive, two had children in the very early stages of their schooling and as this data, the literature and the statistics (Jenkinson, 1998, Humphrey and Lewis 2008 and DfE, 2013) show problems with schooling increase as time passes. Another child in the first year of schooling was in a specialist unit, after difficulties in his early years placement. Two of the other positive

assessments were from families whose children had physical disabilities and the evidence suggests that schools have traditionally coped with such needs more effectively and willingly. The final positive assessment was from the parent of a child with learning difficulties, this interview was unusual in that the participant hadn't recognised that her child had any SEN until the school contacted her and so perhaps her expectations of schooling were different to the other participants in phase two or perhaps the school was an example of effective inclusion. Participants who had concerns about current schooling were in the majority and their concerns ranged from the suitability of the curriculum to social isolation and school's demonstrating a lack of both understanding and effective communication. Many of the negative evaluations of schooling ranged across more than one school and across types of schools, no common patterns emerged, which suggests perhaps that any solutions would need to be multi-dimensional across the range of schools.

A combination of legislation and policy has led to a choice of schools for parents of children with statements of SEN (although the exponential growth in academies and the development of more free schools may impact on this). However, having a choice of school does not equate to effective, successful schooling for children with a statement of SEN. The question then is what then does equate to effective, successful schooling? Is it keeping the elements of choice within the system and combining them with the Ofsted (2006) three key features of successfully inclusive schools: ethos, specialist staff and focused professional development for all staff. Let us imagine for a moment that this is the solution and would lead to effective, successful schooling for all children, in a range of schools and with a diverse range of needs, questions however still remain. For example, how could we ensure that all schools incorporated the three features effectively? Would this need a change in the way in which schools are measured, different success criteria? A move away from the standards agenda that currently dictates what is considered success in terms of our schools? Changes in ITT and professional development for all teachers and school staff to help them feel that they have the specialist knowledge and skills to meet the needs of a diverse classroom could be a starting point but it would require a vast amount of training, initially for teacher educators and then across schools, training that would cost an awful lot of money. Such a change would require a commitment to, and acceptance of, inclusive education as something different to special education, it would require something different to the debates on which provision is best and something different to what many teachers and schools currently consider to be inclusion. Until schools and teachers and politicians believe that effective teaching needs to be effective teaching for all students (Ainscow, Dyson, Weiner, 2012) we will not be

effectively meeting the needs of all students, regardless of the diversity of learners' needs.

Parents in the study wanted a school that 'fit' their child, including their child's needs. One could argue that in many ways successful inclusive education would give them precisely that, a school that fits. Based on my findings I would suggest that, put simply, an inclusive education is where the education fits the child's needs rather than one where the child has to fit the education. Whether those needs are academic, social or emotional. A school that fits does not struggle to cope with behaviour or fail to address learning difficulties or social isolation. A school that fits welcomes all children and young people and values their talents, makes the most of their strengths and supports their weaknesses, whatever they may be. And a school that fits, values staff and parents and communicates effectively to ensure the needs of their learning community are heard and respected. I would build on Stobbs' (2012) suggestion and go a step further and say that parents want to have confidence not just in the skills of a teacher but in the skills of an entire school and, without a doubt, it is the head teacher who shapes the school. If children with SEND statements are to get the schooling that they, along with everybody else deserve, then head teachers need to embrace inclusion and find the means and confidence to support it throughout their school. Whether they realise it or not, parents who want a school that fits, want an inclusive school. Educational inclusion, whether it is defined as location, pedagogy, an inclusive environment or any combination of these is at the heart of parental choice of schools. Parent of children with statements of SEN do not necessarily want the 'right' to choose, they are not necessarily staunch advocates of inclusion, what the participants in this study wanted was not choice or inclusion as a right, what they wanted was simply schooling that fit. Whether they felt that they chose the school or not was irrelevant, what was relevant, was whether the school fit their child (was inclusive) or not.

9.1 Limitations

This study has a number of limitations which could detract from its findings, these are, firstly, the lack of diversity in the samples for both phase one and two; secondly the limited number of LAs covered by the sample and lastly, the impact of a relatively inexperienced researcher. The sample for phase one was made up largely of over participants aged over 40 living in villages in one LA, their children had a large range of SEND. In phase two, whilst the participants did come from three different LAs there was less of a range in terms of the SEND of the children, all the participants were 'white', all

spoke English as a first language, apart from one participant who grew up in another European country, and all, bar one, of the participants were part of a two-parent relationship, although one of these was with a partner who was not the biological father, many of the participants were evidently from a higher than average socio-economic background. The three LAs were adjacent to one another, and although phase two participants came from all three areas, the majority of them were from the same LA as the phase one participants, indeed many of them were recruited to do the interview as a follow on from the phase one survey. Although a range of needs was covered across the two phases, the lack of participants whose children had EBD must be acknowledged as a limitation, along with ASD, EBD is a growing area of need (HCESC, 2006) and yet parents of children with EBD did not form part of the sample. Perhaps parents of children with EBD were too busy to engage with the research or perhaps their experiences of the school choice process was too negative and they were reluctant to be involved? The final limitation which I must acknowledge must be myself as the researcher. Whilst I have learnt a great deal during this research project and I have been careful to reflect on my practices and be reflexive throughout, I am aware of the impact of both my inexperience and my experiences on this work. As a former teacher I believe I initially approached the recruitment of the participants in a naïve manner, I, wrongly as it turned out, felt that as an insider in the school system I would be able to get LAs to work alongside me to help me recruit parents for the research. Eventually one LA did agree to work with me but I only realised gradually that I was an outsider and even more gradually did I begin to appreciate what this would mean for my research. I suspect that had I not been a teacher my method of recruiting participants and perhaps my research tools may have been different. Parsons and Lewis (2010:84) used an online survey to try and explore parents' views on home educating their children with SEND, they felt that this might be an effective way to elicit response from this hard to reach group, perhaps an approach like this would have led to a more diverse sample for my research? Also perhaps if I had been an 'insider', a parent with a child with a statement of SEND or a SEND teacher or TA I would also have approached the research very differently. Berger (2013) makes the point that there are advantages and disadvantages whatever the researcher's position, as insider, outsider or otherwise and suggests measures to counter these, however, despite taking on board some of these I would suggest that all research is limited by the experiences and inexperience of the researcher(s).

9.2 Recommendations

However, despite the shortcomings, there are still some key messages that can and should be extracted from this work, besides the overall value of the research in allowing parents a chance to share their private and personal narratives, their intimate stories (Plummer, 1995).

The role of the LA and the information and guidance that they provide must be separated from their role in 'statementing' children, perhaps this will happen with the new EHCP, as the new legislation stresses, the importance of LAs working with families and young people. LAs also need to ensure that they provide up-to-date, useful and accessible information about school choices to all parents and make clear what the 'local offer' is. It will be paramount to see how effectively the new legislation works over the coming months and years.

LAs also need to ensure that transport costs do not prevent children from being able to attend their 'preferred' school.

LAs must be more flexible about school placements where parents wish to co-educate and send their child to school on a part-time basis. Funding for those who choose to EHE their children could also be considered, although, again this may be partly addressed by the new payments system.

LAs must ensure that they takes into consideration the unique relationship between twins, where one might have a statement of SEN and thereby get a school place, a place must also be made available for their twin.

Teacher expectations, in terms of what they think their role is as a teacher, need to change, for example, many teachers, according to the literature (Norwich, 2008, Ellins and Porter, 2005 and Croll and Moses, 2000) still believe that they should only teach 'normal' children or their 'subject' rather than believing that they should be teaching all children. However, as well as this commitment to inclusive teaching there also needs to be expertise in pedagogical practice if a diverse range of learners are to be taught effectively (Rose, Shevlin, Winter, O'Raw, 2011, Hart, 1996, Rouse and Florian, 2012). To achieve these changes in attitude and pedagogy, teacher training, within ITT and schools, needs to adapt to ensure that teachers and trainees acquire the skills necessary to meet the demands of teaching effectively in inclusive classrooms and meeting the needs of all learners.

Expectation of head teachers, in terms of running schools, need to be made explicit. Head teachers need to be effectively trained to ensure that their understanding of what it

means to run a school is more comprehensive and incorporates issues of inclusion in terms of location, pedagogy and environment.

Governments need to recognise that to build a democratic and just society for all their citizens, schools need to be judged on more than just the standards agenda, they need to be judged on how effectively they meet the needs of all children.

Educational researchers need to ensure that they are, wherever possible, striving to carry our more inclusive/democratic/innovative research, in order to ensure that more voices are heard and views and experiences included in the evidence that they collect.

9.3   Final thoughts

This doctoral journey has taught me a great deal about SEN, schools, inclusion, families, research methods, writing and myself. I started the journey, a journey that I never imagined ever undertaking until I took the first step, a very different researcher; I am now much more realistic and objective about research and I can step back more easily and reflect effectively on my research. Undoubtedly I am a better researcher as a result of this doctoral journey and I have no doubt that I will retain my ethical, reflexive and reflective habits throughout my research career. I am also in some ways a different person as a result of my doctoral experiences, I have developed my understanding of inclusive education and embedded my views on the importance of high quality training for teachers and head teachers; and this journey has also taught me a great deal about my own ability to persevere, developed my self-discipline and allowed me to reflect on my own parenting priorities. However, alongside all this personal development, I have also come to realise that, despite my years of teaching experiences and personal life experiences, I began this research rather 'wet behind the ears', Troyna, (1994) wrote that researchers' claims that their research could be empowering or emancipatory were, at best naïve, and at worst grandiose, at the start of this PhD journey I know that I was guilty of both.

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11. Appendices

11.1 Appendix 1 – Initial survey

THE UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHAMPTON
School of Education

May 2011

<u>**Parental choice and school placement issues for parents of children with statements of Special Educational Needs**</u>

Please answer the questions below

Section A	Background information
	(Please tick in the relevant boxes below)
A1	**What is your gender?**
	Female [ ] ¦ Male [ ]
A2	**Which age group best represents you?**
	18-28 [ ] ¦ 29-39 [ ] ¦ 40-50 [ ] ¦ 50+ [ ]
A3	**How would you describe your ethnic origin?**
	White [ ] ¦ Afro-Caribbean [ ] ¦ Asian [ ]
	Other *(please specify)*
A4	**Which religious affiliation best describes you?**
	Christian [ ] ¦ Muslim [ ] ¦ No religion [ ]

	Other *(please specify)*		
A5	**Which is your highest educational qualification?**		
	0-4 GCSEs/O levels [ ]	5 GCSEs/O levels [ ]	2 A levels/BTEC/NVQ L3/4 [ ]
	Diploma [ ]	Degree [ ]	Higher Vocational qualification [ ]
	Masters [ ]	Other *(please specify)*	
A6	**Which figure below best fits your annual household income?**		
	Below 16k [ ]	16k-25k [ ]	26k-40k [ ]
	41k-50k [ ]	51k- 69k [ ]	Over 70k [ ]
A7	**How would you describe the area where you live?**		
	Big town [ ]	Small town [ ]	Village [ ]
	Other *(please specify)*		
Section B	**Information about your school choice decisions**		
B3	**When you were making decisions about school placement for your child, where did you get guidance?** *Please tick as many as are relevant*		
	Portage	[ ]	

	Special Needs Team – Local Education Authority	[ ]	
	Sure Start Centre/Children's Centre	[ ]	
	Local Parent Partnership	[ ]	
	Nursery/pre-school	[ ]	

	Primary school staff [ ] Please specify: Class teacher [ ] SenCo [ ] Headteacher [ ] Teaching Assistant [ ]

	Educational Psychologist	[ ]	

	Other special needs support group (please specify)
	Others, e.g. family, friends (*please specify*)

B4	**Of the guidance, you received, in terms of its impact on the decision you made regarding school choice, which had <u>*most*</u> impact?** *Please write your answer in the box below*
	Most impact:
B4	**Of the guidance, you received, in terms of its impact on the decision you made regarding school choice, which had <u>*least*</u> impact?** *Please write your answer in the box below*
	Least impact:

B5	**What were the key factors that influenced your decision regarding school choice for your child?** *Please write your answer in the box below*
B6	**What was the role of the Local education Authority in helping you make your decision about your child's school placement?** (*Please tick all that apply*)

Very helpful [ ]	Informative [ ]
Not helpful [ ]	No role played [ ]

Other *(Please specify)*	
B7	**What else could your Local education Authority have done to help you with your decisions about school placement?** *(Please write your answer in the box below)*
B8	**Do you believe your child is currently receiving the kind of schooling that best supports their needs?** *(Please write your answer in the box below)*

B9	**To what extent do you feel you have had a choice about the school your child attends?** *(Please write your answer in the box below)*
B8	_**This question is only for parents of children in secondary school**_ **How would you rate the transition process, i.e. the move from primary school to secondary school?** *(Please tick below)*

I had all the information I needed about the options available [ ]	I had too much information and felt confused about the options available [ ]	I did not have enough information about the options available [ ]
Other *(please give details)*		

Section C	**Information about your child**
C1	**Does your child have a statement of Special Educational Needs?** *(Please tick in the relevant box)*

Yes [ ]	No [ ]

C2	**What special educational need(s) does your child have?**

	(Please make brief notes below)
C3	**What do you hope your child will achieve from attending their school?** *(Please tick as many as are relevant)*
	Social skills [ ] / Confidence [ ] / Educational attainment [ ]
	Friendship [ ] / Enjoyment [ ] / Feel included [ ]
	Other, (*please specify, e.g. life skills*)
C4	**What are your hopes and aspirations for your child's schooling?** *(Please write your answer in the box below)*
C5	**Do you think your child is happy at school?** *(Please tick in the relevant box)*
	Yes [ ] / No [ ]

	Most of the time [ ]	Sometimes [ ]
	(Please add any further comments on this below)	
	Has your child ever been excluded from school or at risk of exclusion?	
	Yes [ ]	No [ ]
	(Further details)	

Section D	**Information about your child's school**	
D1	**What type of school does your child attend?** *Please tick in the relevant box*	
	Mainstream [ ]	Mainstream with a Designated Specialist Provision or Department (DSP) [ ]
	Special School [ ]	Other, e.g. independent school, home schooled, pupil referral unit
D2	**What year of schooling is your child in?** *Please tick in the relevant box*	
	Reception/Foundation [ ]	Year 7 [ ]
	Year 1 [ ]	Year 8 [ ]
	Other *(please specify):*	

D3	**What were the key characteristics that initially attracted you to your child's school?**		
	(Please tick as many as are relevant)		
	Friendly staff [ ]	Head teacher's presentation [ ]	Building [ ]
	Specialist staff [ ]	Specialist facilities [ ]	Local school [ ]
	Siblings attend [ ]	Friends attend [ ]	Highly recommended [ ]
	No choice [ ]	SENCo [ ]	Size/ small classes [ ]
	Others, (*please specify*)		
D4	**How much did your child's SEN statement affect your decision about school placement?**		
	(Please tick in the relevant box)		
	Entirely		[ ]
	In many ways		[ ]
	Not at all		[ ]
	Other (*please specify*)		
D5	**What are the <u>positive</u> aspects of your child's current schooling**		

	experience? *(Please tick as many as are relevant)*		
	Educational achievements [ ]	Inclusion in classes [ ]	Inclusion in extra-curricular activities [ ]
	Making friends [ ]	Happy to go [ ]	Home-school communication [ ]
	Special needs are well supported [ ]	Feels safe [ ]	Learning life skills [ ]
	Developing confidence [ ]	Learning social skills [ ]	Feels included in the school community [ ]
	Other aspects (*please specify*)		
D6	**What are the <u>negative</u> aspects of your child's current schooling experience?** *(Please tick as many as are relevant)*		
	Too much time spent out of classroom [ ]	Not able to access all aspects of school life [ ]	Bullying [ ]
	Few friends [ ]	Not included fully in classroom [ ]	Not reaching academic potential [ ]
	Teachers do not understand needs [ ]	Long distance to travel to school [ ]	Poor communication between school and home [ ]
	Poor rate of progress [ ]	Lack of teaching time to support their needs [ ]	Isolated [ ]

	Other (*please specify*)		
D7	**Approximately, how far does your child travel to school?**		
D8	**If you had to make the decision about your child's school placement again, would you make the same decision?** *(Please tick in the relevant box)*		
	Yes [ ]	No [ ]	Maybe [ ]
	Further details on your answer (*Please use this box to explain your answer above in more detail*)		

Section E	Further questions		
E1	**What words best describe your relationship with your child's school?** *(Please tick all that apply)*		
	Supportive [ ]	[ ]	Hostile [ ]
	Friendly [ ]	Unhelpful [ ]	Honest [ ]
E2	**Have you ever been to a Special Needs Tribunal because you felt your child's needs were not being met?**		
	Yes [ ]	No [ ]	
	Further details (*Please use this box to explain your answer above in more detail*)		

E3	

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

<u>Please return the form to me, at the address below, by 17th June in the pre-paid envelope</u>

Meanu Bajwa-Patel

Research Student

C/O PAM CORMACK

School of Education – Administration

S107

The University of Northampton

Park Campus

Boughton Green Road

Northampton

NN2 7AL

If you have any questions about this research, please contact either myself, meanu.bajwa-patel@northampton.ac.uk or my supervisor Professor Richard Rose on, richard.rose@northampton.ac.uk

Further optional involvement – availability for interview

As part of this research, I would like to interview some parents about how they have made decisions regarding school choice for their child with a SEN statement and how their choice of school has worked out.

If you would be willing to take part in the interview process, then please put your name and contact details below.

Thanks again.

Optional information about you to enable us to contact you regarding an interview for this research

Name:...

Address:..

....

E-mail:..

Telephone:..

Please return this form with your questionnaire to the address below, in the pre-paid envelope provided, by 17th June

Meanu Bajwa-Patel

Research Student

C/O PAM CORMACK

School of Education – Administration

S107

The University of Northampton

Park Campus

Boughton Green Road

Northampton

NN2 7AL

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHAMPTON
School of Education

Parental choice and school placement - issues for parents of children with statements of Special Educational Needs (SEN)
Please complete all the questions below. All answers will be treated confidentially. If you

would rather complete this form as an online survey, please go to

http://tinyurl.com/http-tinyurl-parental-choice

If you have more than one child with a statement of SEN, please complete this survey for the youngest child of school age.

Section A - Personal Details				

Section A analyses the key indicators that influence and determine the research results

A1-What is your relationship to the child?		☐ Mother	☐ Father	☐ Other, please specify	

A2-What is your age?			

A3-At what stage did you finish your education?		☐ Compulsory schooling, age 16	☐ Sixth form/college, age 18
		☐ University	☐ Other

A4 –What type of school does your child attend?		☐ Mainstream	☐ Special
		☐ Mainstream with a specialist department or ARP	☐ Other, e.g. PRU, please specify,

A5-Which year of school is your child in?		☐ Year 1	☐ Year 7
		☐ Year 8	☐ Other, please specify

A6-Approximately how far does your child travel to school?			

A7-How would you describe the area where you live?		☐ Big town/city	☐ Small town	☐ Village	☐ Other

A8-What special educational needs does your child have?		

Section B – School Choice

Section B analyses the influences that determined your decisions about your child's school placement.

B1-When you were deciding which school was best for your child, where did you get guidance from? *(please tick all that apply)*		☐ Portage services	☐ Special Needs team	☐ School or nursery/pre-school	☐ Paediatrician
		☐ Parent Partnership	☐ Educational Psychologist	☐ Other, e.g. friends, please specify	

B2-What were the key factors that influenced your decision about school placement?		

B3-To what extent did your child's SEN affect your decision about school placement?		☐ Entirely	☐ To some extent	☐ Not at all

B4-Did you receive all the information you needed to help you choose the best school for your child?		☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Other, please specify

B5-If you had to make your decision about school placement again, would you choose the same school?		☐ Yes	☐ No

B6-Do you feel		☐	☐

you had a real choice when it came to choosing the best school for your child?		Yes		No	

Section C- School Placement

Section C will help us to understand how your child's school is meeting their needs.

C1-What were the key characteristics that initially attracted you to your child's current school? *(please tick all that apply)*	☐ Head teacher	☐ Specialist staff	☐ Specialist facilities	☐ Local school
	☐ Family already attend	☐ Highly recommended	☐ Small class sizes	☐ Friends already attend
	☐ Other, please specify			

C2-What do you hope your child will gain from their schooling? *(please tick all that apply)*	☐ Social skills	☐ Educational qualifications	☐ Extra-curricular	☐ Friends
	☐ Feel included	☐ Life skills	☐ Confidence	☐ Enjoyment
	☐ Other, please specify			

C3-What are the positive aspects, if any, of your child's current schooling? *(please tick all that apply)*	☐ Educational achievements	☐ Developing confidence	☐ Inclusion in extra-curricular life	☐ Making friends
	☐ Home-school communication	☐ SEN well supported	☐ Learning life skills	☐ Feels safe
	☐ Feels included in school community	☐ Happy to go	☐ Inclusion in classes	☐ Learning social skills
	☐ Other, please specify			

C4-What are the negative aspects, if any, of your child's current	☐ Too much time spent out of class	☐ Bullying	☐ Not included fully in classroom	☐ Poor rate of progress
	☐ Lack of	☐ Long distance	☐ Poor home-	☐ Teachers do

schooling? *(please tick all that apply)*		teaching time to support their needs	to travel	school communication	not understand needs
		☐ Few friends	☐ Not able to access all aspects of school life	☐ Isolated	☐ Not reaching academic potential
		☐ Other, please specify			
C5-Do you believe your child is currently receiving the kind of schooling that best supports their needs?		☐ Yes		☐ No	

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire

<u>Please return the form to me by 24th June in the pre-paid envelope provided, to the address below</u>

Meanu Bajwa-Patel, c/o Pam Cormack, School of Education, S107, The University of Northampton, Park Campus, Boughton Green Road, Northampton, NN2 7AL.

If you have any questions about this research, please contact either myself, meanu.bajwa-patel@northampton.ac.uk or my supervisor Professor Richard Rose on, richard.rose@northampton.ac.uk

Further optional involvement –

Invitation to interview
As part of this research, I would like to interview parents about how they have made decisions regarding school choice for their child with a SEN statement and how their choice of school has worked out.

If you would be willing to take part in the interview process, then please put your name and contact details below and a researcher will contact you.

Thank you.

Optional contact information if you would like to be involved in the interviews

Name:...

Address:...

....

E-mail:...

Telephone:...

If completed, please return this invitation to interview form <u>along with</u> your questionnaire in the pre-paid envelope provided, by 24th June, to the address below

Meanu Bajwa-Patel, c/o Pam Cormack, School of Education, S107, The University of Northampton, Park Campus, Boughton Green Road, Northampton, NN2 7AL.

The University of Northampton

School of Education

Sulgrave Room (S)107

Park Campus

Boughton Green Road

Northampton

NN2 7AL

Tel 01604 892897

Fax 01604 716375

Dean Professor Ann Shelton Mayes

June 2011

Dear Parent/Carer

Research project: Parental choice and school placement for pupils with SEN statements

As a PhD student at the School of Education, University of Northampton I am looking into the school placement choices made by parents of children with Special Educational Needs Statements.

How parents choose schools for their children and how schools and Local Authorities deal with this process are the issues I am researching with a view to giving parents and organisations a voice and making recommendations for improvements. This can only be done effectively with the help of relevant parents who agree to answer questions regarding this issue, so if you can spare the time to take part we would be very grateful.

You have been selected as a parent/carer of a child with a SEN statement to take part in this survey. Address labels were added to the envelopes containing this letter and the questionnaire and leaflet by your Local Authority to allow access to relevant parents for this survey.

Your answers to this questionnaire will be completely confidential and participation is entirely voluntary. Please be honest with your answers to ensure the research can fully explore this complex issue.

Please complete all sections of the questionnaire and return the completed form by **24 June 2011** using the stamped addressed envelope provided.
For each questionnaire completed and returned on time we will be making a small donation to the UK's leading learning disability charity, Mencap.

You are not required to put your name or other identification on the questionnaire. All responses will remain confidential and anonymous.

However if you wish to take part in the second stage of the research, which will involve interviewing the people involved in the school choice process you should complete the additional **Invitation to Interview** form at the end of the questionnaire. These contact details will be separated from your questionnaire responses and you will be contacted by a researcher to arrange an interview.

The results of the survey will be made available online, once the research has been completed, on the University of Northampton website, at http://nectar.northampton.ac.uk/

If you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact me by email or telephone. Alternatively if you would like to you may also contact my supervisor Professor Richard Rose (Richard.rose@northampton.ac.uk) for further details of the project.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and I look forward to you taking part in this valuable research.

Yours faithfully

Meanu Bajwa-Patel

meanu.bajwa-patel@northampton.ac.uk

Telephone 01604 893703

Parental choice and school placement -issues for parents of children with statements of special educational needs

This project aims to carry out an in-depth study of the issues surrounding pa...
of school for children with statements of special educational needs (SEN). Pa...
of schools has long been on the political agenda and together, with the hig...
issue of inclusion, features again in the latest government SEN Green Paper–...
Aspiration.

In order to build a picture of the many issues involved in this complex area, ...
will use a range of perspectives and will be informed by a survey of parents ...
interviews with Local Authority officers, parents, support groups and scho...
research will be carried out across three local authorities over several terms.

The researchers aim to explore the issues that matter to parents when m...
about schools for their children. The questions that the research will be answe...

- How do parents of children who have a diagnosed SEN statement make deci...
  their children either to mainstream or special school?

- What aspirations do these parents have for their children?

- In choosing either a mainstream or a special school, what in-school fact...
  parents perceive as being important for the support of their child...
  schools?

Research data & findings will be made available on

http://nectar.northampton.ac.uk/

Email:

meanu.bajwa-patel
@northampton.ac.uk

The involvement of parents of children across a number of Local Aut...
a wide range of special needs will ensure the research is able to give ...
and comprehensive picture of the current issues with regards ...
placements.

If you would like to be involved further in this research please do not...
return the **Invitation to Interview** form at the end of the questionna...

alternatively email.

All the information gathered in the research will be confidential.

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHAMPT
School of Education

11.5 Appendix 5 – Ethical considerations

This code is based on the British Educational Research Association Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2004) and the University of Northampton's Research Ethics Committee (REC) Guidance

Any researcher involved in this project will adhere to these guidelines and will inform her supervisors and, where advised to, the School of Education Research Ethics Committee of any ethical issues that arise.

No data will be collected until the Research Ethics Committee has approved the ethical code.

The researcher recognises the rights of all colleagues, parents, children, schools, Local Authority staff and any others who may participate in the research to have their confidentiality protected.

Respondents who complete and return a questionnaire will be considered to have given their consent to take part in the research.

Voluntary informed consent, i.e. consent where participants are under no duress and understand and agree to participate, will be sought before any interviews are carried out. Participants will understand the aims and nature of the research and the process they are engaged in, including why their participation is necessary, how the information will be used and to whom and how it will be disseminated.

Participants will be able to withdraw from the research at any time and will be made aware of their right to do so.

The researcher will provide contact details to ensure participants are able to contact her (and her supervisors) to discuss findings, conduct or procedures at any time during the research.

Interviews will be tape-recorded with the participant's permission and recordings will be destroyed after they have been used for the research.

Transcripts of interviews will be made available to participants to ensure they are an accurate record of their interview.

Whilst participants are not expected to be distressed during the interview process the researcher will be sensitive to any distress caused and proceed accordingly or discontinue as appropriate.

All research data will be respected and kept confidential. Questionnaires and transcripts of interviews will be anonymised. Data will be available only to the researcher and her supervisors. In some cases it may be possible to identify research participants from characteristics or position in an organisation, participants should be made aware of this possibility.

All data will be stored and used in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1988.

All data will be stored securely and confidentiality and anonymity as agreed will be respected even when research is published.

The researcher will liaise with her supervisors about any intention to publish findings from the research and will ensure the content of such publications will conform to the ethical code agreed.

All participants will be debriefed on the outcomes of the research and conclusions and findings will be made available to them.

The researcher is obliged to report findings truthfully and not sensationalise or distort findings by not using some data.

The researcher will communicate her findings with members of the research community through research seminars, conferences and publications; such communications will take into account all the issues of confidentiality and anonymity raised above.

Draft questionnaires, interview questions, consent forms and information sheets for participants will be given to the supervisors (and where considered appropriate the Research Ethics Committee) before use to ensure they conform to the standards expected and ethical guidelines.

Further notes on data collection procedures and ethical considerations

Data Collection	Ethical points to consider
Access & consent	All participants will take part on a voluntary basis. Participants will be given ample opportunity to decide to take part initially and the opportunity to withdraw at any stage. All information given will be written. If participants would like a friend to support them during the interview this will be accommodated. Issues of confidentiality and anonymity will be made clear in writing. Permission and consent will be obtained from parents and other interview participants, such as School staff, by signed consent form.
Tape recordings	Consent forms, which will be obtained from parents and other interview participants, such as School staff, will include a section on permission to tape record interviews.
Storage	Data will be kept under lock and key in the researcher's office and will be destroyed when the researcher completes her studies unless there is justification for keeping the data in which case appropriate consent from the participant must be obtained. The Data Protection Act (1998) will be observed.
Data Analysis and Reporting	All participants' details will be held confidentially and securely and anonymised in reporting by the researcher including the name of the institutions / organisations unless permission is obtained to reveal names. The Data Protection Act (1998) will be observed.
Questionnaires	Participants who complete questionnaires will be anonymous. In some cases questionnaire participants may agree to be interviewed in which case they will no longer be anonymous, however the data from their questionnaire will still be kept anonymous.
Interviews	Semi-structured interviews will be carried out in appropriate venues with the necessary permissions and risk assessments. All questions asked at interview will have a value and the researcher will respond sensitively and ensure the well-being of the participant is paramount.

Parental choice and school placement: Interview consent form
Meanu Bajwa-Patel (email - meanu.bajwa-patel@northampton.ac.uk)
Exploring the issue of parental choice and school placement for pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Needs (SSEN) across the primary and secondary phases
My name is Meanu, I am a research student at the University of Northampton. As part of my studies I am carrying out some interviews with parents who have children with a Statement of Special Educational Needs (SSEN) to try and find out about how they choose the schools they do for their children. Currently not very much is known about how and why the parents of children with SSEN send their children to the schools they do.
These are the questions I am trying to answer:

1. How do parents of children who have a Statement of SEN make decisions to send their children either to mainstream or special schools?

2. What aspirations do these parents have for their children?

3. In choosing either mainstream or a special school what in-school factors do these parents perceive as being important for the support of their children in those schools?

This interview is not any kind of a 'test'. There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers to the questions I will ask you.
This interview forms part of my PhD research degree, at the University of Northampton. The findings of this research will be submitted as part of my PhD research degree thesis and may also be shared with some Local Authorities and schools. All the information collected will be broken down and analysed, it will not be linked back to any one person or school. It may also be used in a future academic journal article, as part of a conference or it may be published online.
As I want to find out your detailed opinions and views and represent them accurately I will be recording the interview. If at any time you feel uncomfortable about the interview, please tell me and we can turn off the recorder, take a pause or end the interview as you wish. Any interview data used in the research will be fully transcribed. If your interview is transcribed I can send you a copy of the transcript to ensure it is accurate. The only people with access to the interview transcripts and recordings, which will be securely stored, will be my supervisors (Professor Rose and Doctor Devecchi) and I.
In taking part in this research it is important for you to realise that any answers you give are done so in the strictest confidence and that any quotes used will be anonymous and will not identify you. Nothing you say to me in this interview will be viewed by anyone apart from me and, possibly my supervisors. You are entitled to withdraw from the research project at any time.
This interview will be structured around a number of questions covering the themes that I believe may be relevant to this area. I shall also give you a chance to add anything else that you feel is relevant that I do not ask.
To confirm that you understand the information above and would like to proceed with this interview please print and sign your name below.

Name: …………………………………………........Signature: ……………………………........Date........................

Participant...Interviewer..MB-P......Date................

Themes/Questions	
1. Background of parent/carer 1a) To start off with can you please tell me a little about why you agreed to become involved in this research/be interviewed? 1b) Can you please tell me a little about yourself and your home/ family/ work situation please? Job, education, marital status, children, SEN, location, age etc. 1c) What was your own schooling like/what kind of memories do you have of your own schooling?	
2. Child's SEN and lifestyle 2a) Can you tell me a little bit about your child and their SSEN? If you have more than one child with a SSEN then I am happy to hear about whichever one(s) you wish to discuss in relation to the research issue. (Age, gender, SEN, talents, limitations, quality of life, character, siblings etc.) 2b) When and how did you find out about your child's SEN? 2c) How did you react to this information?	

3. Choosing a school 3a) Why did you choose the school your child currently attends? 3b) What information did you get on school choices? Where from? Can you describe the information? 3c) Do you feel you got the information/help you needed? 3d) How did you make a decision? 3e) What were the key factor(s) in your decision about what school your child would attend? Transport/location; open eves, school visits; attitude of staff 3f) What was it about the school that most influenced your choice? 3g) Was the timing of their review helpful in terms of school choice? 3h) Did you involve your child in the decision?	

4. Child's schooling	
4a) What kind(s) of school(s) has your child attended in the past?	
4b) What are/were your thoughts on the transition from nursery/preschool to primary and/or secondary school?	
4c) What kind of school does your child currently attend? (Mainstream, special, independent, church, grammar, mixed)	
4d) Is it your local/community school? Was this an issue for you?	
4e) (Residential schools – why, distance, how is it working out for your family/child. Is there a better alternative in an ideal world?)	
4f) Are you aware of any friendship/social issues that your child has at school?	
4g) What are your views on your child's current schooling?	
4h) Are you happy with the decisions you have made regarding this issue?	
5. Hopes and aspirations	
5a) What do you hope your child will gain from their schooling?	

5b) What ambitions do you (and your child) have for their future?	
6. Other 6a) Are you familiar with the term 'inclusion'? Do you have any views on it? 6b) What more would have helped in terms of your child's schooling? 6c) What is the best thing about school for your child? 6d) If you could change 3 things about the current school choice system, what would they be? 6e) Is there anything else that you feel is relevant that you would like to add to this interview?	

11.8 Appendix 8 – Code book- working documents

Coding Interviews- draft 2

1.		
2.	Want to help/make things better	Why interview
3.	Share positive	
4.	Share negative	
5.	Interested in research	
6.		
7.	Married/partner	Background
8.	Other children	
9.	Twins	
10.	Adopted	
11.	Paid employment	
12.	Location	
13.		
14.		
15.	Loved school	Own schooling
16.	Bullied	
17.	Unhappy	
18.	Hated school	
19.		
20.		
21.	1	SSEN
22.	2	
23.	3	
24.	4	
25.	5	
26.		
27.	Before birth	When diagnosed

28.	At birth	
29.	Before schooling	
30.	At school/nursery	
31.		
32.		
33.		How diagnosed
34.		
35.		
36.		
37.		
38.	Relief	Reaction to diagnosis
39.	Despair	
40.		
41.		
42.	Pre-school/nursery-	Current school
43.	Primary- special	
44.	Primary – mainstream	
45.	Primary- ARP/DSP	
46.	Secondary- special	
47.	Secondary- mainstream	
48.	Secondary- ARP/DSP	
49.	List from LA	Information on school choices
50.	Info from previous school	
51.	Parents/informal network	
52.	Own research	
53.		
54.		
55.	Visits – SENCO/SEN dept	Factors affecting decision on school choice
56.	Visits- gut feeling	
57.	Visits- facilities	
58.	Visits- headteacher	

59.	Visits- felt child would fit	
60.	Visits- school welcoming/accommodatin	
61.	Visits- other	
62.	Academic reports/Ofsted	
63.	Other parents	
64.	School staff recommended	
65.	LA staff recommended	
66.	Medical staff recommended	
67.		
68.		
69.	Yes	Child involved in school visits
70.	No	
71.		
72.	No previous	Previous school
73.	Nursery	
74.	Mainstream primary	
75.	Special primary/junior	
76.		
77.		Transition
78.		
79.		
80.		
81.	Yes	Local school
82.	No	
83.		
84.	Yes	Residential

Coding interviews draft 6 - Emergent themes from interviews

Code	Description	Examples	Theme
Whyint	Reasons parents gave for agreeing to do an interview	*I just want to try and make things better*	Parental background
Bkgd	Background of the interviewee	*I am working; my husband and I*	
Twin	The child with the statement is a twin		
Adopt	The child with the statement is adopted		
Habitat	Where does the interviewee live	*Town, village*	
Pososch	Interviewee is positive about their own schooling	*It was a privilege, I was very lucky; school was okay*	
Negosch	Interviewee was unhappy in own schooling	*I couldn't wait to leave*	
CLD	Child has statement for Cognitive Learning Diffs	*She's got general learning difficulties*	Diagnosis & reactions
BESD	Child has statement for Behavioural, Emotional, Social Diffs	*My daughter has been diagnosed with EBD*	
CIN	Child has statement for Comm, interaction needs	*My son has autism*	
S+P	Child has statement for Sensory/physical diffs	*She was diagnosed with cerebral palsy*	
Med	Child has statement for Medical needs	*He is VI*	
Whendiag	When was the child given their diagnosis	*We knew before she was born; school were the ones that noticed*	
PosD	Getting the diagnosis was largely positive	*There was no problem getting her diagnosed; it was a relief to finally have a label*	
NegD	Getting the diagnosis was largely negative	*We had to fight for it; we're still grieving in some ways*	
Helprec	We received all the help we needed		
Nohelp	We did not receive the help we needed		
Pvschpos	Previous experience of school largely positive	*We had no problems at primary; everything was okay at pre-school*	Previous experiences of schooling
Pvschneg	Previous experience of school largely negative	*I knew he wouldn't cope at the village nursery*	
Noprevsch	No previous experience of school		
SchSp	Currently at a special school	*She is at special school for girls*	Current schooling
SChMa	Currently at a mainstream school	*He's at the local village primary*	

SchUnit	Currently at a mainstream school with a special unit (DSP/ARP)	*She is based in the HI unit*	
SystemInf	We got our information about school choices through the system	*The previous head recommended it; the LA sent me a list*	Information on school choices
InformInf	We got our information about school choices through other means/social capital	*One of the parents at the social club mentioned it; we looked them up ourselves*	
£sch	Funding affected school choice decision	*We knew we wouldn't get the funding for another school*	Factors that influenced parental choice of school placement
Visitfac	When we visited the school facilities affected our choice	*It was the only place that would be able to contain him; it was such a calm atmoshphere*	
Visitstaff	When we visited the school, the staff affected our choice	*The staff were so knowledgeable; the head was welcoming*	
Visitfit	When we visited the school, knew child would fit in and this affected our choice	*I could just see her there; it felt right*	
Visitoth	When we visited the school facilities, various other factors affected our choice	*The location was the key; small class size was important*	
Coldknow	Cold knowledge recommended the school	*The Ofsted report was very good; the results are excellent*	
Hotknow	Hot local knowledge recommended the school	*All the parents said it was great*	
Sysknow	Somebody in the system recommended the school	*The LA said it was where she should go, the Ed Psych told me to take a look; the SENCo at her school said it was a good place*	
Visitx	Parent visited lots of schools	*I must have gone to all the schools in the county*	
Transi	Transition was/is an issue/a worry	*He's okay now but it will soon be time for juniors*	
Appeal	Had to go to/threaten appeal	*They only gave in because we threatened to take them to tribunal*	
No Choice	Little or no choice of school	*There was nowhere else; it's wrong to say we had a choice*	
Schneg	Most aspects of current schooling are negative	*He doesn't have any friends; the communication with school is appalling; they can't manage her behaviour*	Evaluation of current schooling
Schpos	Most aspects of current schooling are positive	*Communication is excellent, she loves it*	
SchP+N	There are positives & negatives of current schooling	*School's great with social aspects but I know he's not learning anything*	
Bestsch	Best aspect of current schooling	*She loves the subjects; it's such a nurturing environment; her friends*	

AspireAc	Academic aspirations for child	*We've started to mention university; as long as she can read and write and count*	Parents' aspirations
AspireLif	Life skills aspirations for child	*I want him to be able to be independent*	
AspireCon	Contentment aspirations for child	*I just want her to enjoy school; fulfil his potential; to have some friends*	
MumInstinc	Mother's instinct	*They wouldn't listen; they should listen to the mother's because we know*	Mother's struggles
MumPersis	Mother spends a lot of time/energy on child schooling	*We had compiled all the evidence for the meeting; I am constantly monitoring what they do*	
Fight	Have had to struggle/fight	*We had to fight for the transport; if we hadn't put up a fight we wouldn't have got his place*	
INCNT	Inclusion, nice idea, doesn't work		Views on changes & inclusion
INC	Inclusion, great idea		
INCP	Inclusion =pressure for mainstream		
MINF	More information needs to be given about school choices		
LS/F	Needs to be less struggle/fighting for school choice		
MGUID	More guidance/direction needed from professionals		

11.9 Appendix 9 – Excerpt from a coded transcript

No.	Recording time	Speaker/Utterance	Theme
1.	00:00	M: I kind of know the answer to this a little bit because of what we said already SS, but if you don't mind, for the tape. Can you tell me a little bit please about why you agreed to be involved in the research?	
		P: Because I think research can inform the way things are done in the future. And if you don't have enough subjects then you don't have a valid study.	Whyint
		M: OK, and you think that stuff in the future needs to be different?	
		P: They need to look at what they've been doing.	
		M: Right, OK – thank you.	
		P: I don't have any axe to grind, it just … it doesn't hurt to look back and see and think about how you could make it better.	
		M: Right, OK. Can you tell me a little bit about your situation? You tell me you're an LSA and you've got two girls?	
		P: Yes.	
		M: 17 and 13?	
		P: Yes.	
		M: OK, and you've been based here for a while, because LS went to school locally?	
		P: We've lived here since my oldest one was 2 ½, so a long time. And before that we lived about a mile away.	
		M: Right, so in the area for a long while. And LS is 13?	
		P: Yes.	
		M: Right. Do you remember your own schooling?	
		P: Oh yes!	
		M: Good memories, bad memories?	
		P: Not bad. Bits I'd wished had been different there, but …	Pososch(?)
		M: So happy memories of school?	
		P: Mm.	
		M: OK, and were you schooled locally?	
		P: No, I was born in DG which is on the edge of SH.	
		M: OK.	
		P: I lived there till I was 8 and then we lived outside WC.	
		M: Right.	
		P: And I went to the village school there. And then I went to the girls' grammar school in WC.	
		M: So you've been through the grammar school system yourself?	
		P: Yes.	
		M: So you're familiar with that. OK.	
		P: And my husband went to AV middle school and then NB school.	
		M: OK, and tell me about LS then. You say she's got Down's and hearing – impairment, would you call it?	
		P: Yes, it's a conductive hearing loss, but she's had it since the day she was born. Something the HI teacher was saying at school last week, which I didn't know before, children with HI have problems thinking because it will take longer to process what is coming in. And nobody's ever said that to me before! So that could account for some of her things,	S+P

		because she's not daft, but she can completely forget what she's doing next or …. but I don't know how much of that is Down's Syndrome and how much of that is the HI. But I think it contributes more than we've ever given it credit for before. M: Right, so in terms of her needs, she's obviously got the hearing? What other impacts? P: The biggest problem is that her expressive language is way below her comprehension. So she can't … she understands far more than she can say. But I think that can lead to people thinking that she doesn't know as much as she does because she can't tell them. She can't have a long conversation about something and say coherent sentences because she hasn't got the working memory to do that; she hasn't got all the language, but she knows what she wants to say, so she can get frustrated. M: Right, and so how does she deal with that frustration? Has that got worse as she's …? P: Mm, it's probably got a bit worse, yes. But she does shout and scream, but then teenagers do! I don't know how much of that is normal and how much is extra. M: And visually – she wears glasses? P: Yes, but that's fairly normal for children with Down's Syndrome. They have difficulty accommodating so there's been a lot of research done at Cardiff and also the children have bifocals, so they can accommodate better. M: So it's part and parcel of her Downs. P: Yes, and she will pick up her glasses in the morning and put them on. But she will probably choose not to bother with her hearing aids. M: Right, and how long has she had hearing aids? P: Since she was 2 ½ but she's only really worn them since she was about 4. M: Right, OK. And in terms of … P: Oh, and I think she's got – nobody' ever labelled it – but I think she's got some sensory issues. Sometimes if she's having a bit of a strop, what she actually needs is a big hug. A big, tight squeezy – and then she calms down and she can … M: Right, but in terms of her Statement, it's Downs and the hearing? P: It's Downs and hearing loss and the glasses. M: OK, and has the sensory stuff come out recently, or is it newish? P: It's stuff that I've	Details of child's difficulties Further details of day to day impact of difficulties
2.	00:05	noticed, but nobody's ever … she's not been seen by an OT so nobody's ever labelled it. But I think I'm going to make a bit of a fuss about it because I think it actually impacts on her learning, because if she can't … if she's all – she can't cope with things, then she won't sit still and she won't learn. So unless we do something … unless we get it assessed … but it's going to be hard to assess because it will be a dual diagnosis. M: Right, and also in terms of, you know, getting things added on her Statement. P: I don't know that it would make a huge difference to any provision, but it would maybe mean that some of the teaching strategies they use could be different. M: OK. So did you find out about LS's diagnosis at birth?	Motherinstinc Fight (fuss)

		P: Oh yes, first day – well 3 hours.	Whendiag
		M: Right. And how did that feel?	
		P: I was saying to someone the other day – difficult, because she was born about 3.00 in the morning and at 9.00 o'clock one of the people I knew in the hospital came in and said, oh my daughter has - my god daughter - has Down's Syndrome and she started mainstream secondary school 2 weeks ago. So straight away, within 6 hours of her being born, my horizons went from sort of down near my ankles – well they weren't quite sure where they were – to coming right up thinking, oh – OK then! More is possible than I'd ever thought of.	
		M: Right, so when you first got the information you had your own sort of ideas about Downs and what it would mean in terms of your child?	
		P: Not really, and I didn't really have time to process things through or to think. My Mum worked with children with special needs in WC, so I'd seen lots of kids … I'd always thought when I was pregnant, the worst thing would be cerebral palsy or autism. Cerebral palsy because they're not, until they're born, they're not … there's nothing wrong. And autism, just because I find it – the whole not-looking, the whole social - not doing social communication – pretty hard. LS doesn't suffer from that!	
		M: No, and LS's father – how did he react to the news?	Parent's reaction to diagnosis
		P: Oh, he was very cross on that day but since then he's been fine. He adores them both.	
		M: So cross?	
		P: He kicked the radiator – in the hospital!	
		M: OK, thank you. The school that LS currently attends – why did you choose the school she currently attends?	
		P: Because I didn't … I changed my mind about the school she was going to go to.	
		M: Right, OK.	
		P: Going back 4 steps … so she went to infants school here, just up the street, which had just combined with the junior school. And after 2 years we moved on to the junior school side and it got harder and harder. Nobody was … parents weren't allowed in the school, the SenCo was rude – she told me I sent her to school too often with a runny nose!	
		M: What's that got to do …!	Child's school difficulties increase as progresses through primary school
		P: I wasn't allowed in school to put her hearing aids in when the LSA wasn't in school that day! It was inappropriate for me to go in the classroom. But if I hadn't done it, they'd have sat in Reception in an envelope the whole day. She was in Year 3 and I'd been CRBd to go in the school and help! I just thought, I can't do this anymore. So then she went to another school which were brilliant, and the Head said to me, don't worry, we'll listen to you. And I thought, that's fine.	Pvschneg
		M: So in Year 3?	Parent felt couldn't continue with local school, too many problems. Moved child to another local mainstream school
		P: End of Year 3 she moved.	
		M: So to another local mainstream?	
		P: 3 miles away, yes.	
		M: And how did you pick that school?	
		P: Her God-mummy, HL, said why don't you think about GK? So I thought … because nothing else … before that it would have been difficult to get one that fitted with where FS was at school. But I didn't want her … we didn't want her	

		to go the primary school FS went to because I'd helped out and I knew the SenCo, and their expectations were about round your ankles. You know, would she go through school with her peer group? It depends on whether she keeps up, said the Head. And I thought, no that's not the answer I want so we won't even … we didn't even go there. So … M: So her sibling at one school and you moved her to GK which is a village school? So you thought maybe..? P: Yes, but by then FS had gone to WH, so it was easier to go to the school where	
3.	00:10	they came out at the same time as FS's old school because I didn't have to worry about parking half a mile up the lane, getting LS up the lane into the car and then going to collect FS. That didn't have to happen. And I knew that would be better because the Head said, we'll listen. I thought, it's not going to be perfect but … and a much more high-achieving cohort – the whole school was far more high-achieving and LS loved that. And her best friends – well not her best one, but the people she got on best with – all went to the grammar schools and they left. And she'd have liked to go to the high school – she wanted to wear the same jumper that FS wore, the same uniform. M: So you were happy with GK, and you talk about high achievement? Is that something that you were … the high expectations for LS, is that something that you felt ..? P: No, years ago I went to a conference run by the people from Portsmouth, from Down's Education Trust, and they said it doesn't matter what level the school is at, it's whether the Head will want the child in school. And the Head of the school up here didn't. The Head of KS1 - well she was Head of Foundation - she wanted LS in school, and that was fun, that was fab. And it was after that, and we got a different SenCo – she wasn't interested. M: So very much the staff and the Head really set the ethos for the place. P: … set the tone. Whereas over in GK, the opposite extreme to not going in the classroom to put the hearing aids in, they almost had to … you'd be coming out of school at half-past nine and they were coming back from assembly and I'd still be there chatting to a mummy in the cloakroom or chatting to LSA or something, so very much more laid back. Almost a bit too much. But it was fine, so it was very easy to fit in there. And then <mark>I was all set on her going to WR, which is – it's not our nearest, but it is our catchment upper school – because they'd had other children with Down's Syndrome there and it would seem to be fine. But I went round and had another look and the SenCo was saying, oh it will be fine and I was like, OK. And I went back at break to see they room they have for the special needs kids who don't want to go out and mix</mark> with everyone else, and I just thought LS wouldn't cope in there<mark>. Because it was … they've got a unit for physically disabled as well; but there were lots of people sitting round chatting and LS doesn't do a lot of chatting; she needs to run round and have her own space and what have you. And I just thought, she'll get swallowed up</mark>; she'll go outside and be with the big boys and go off down the field and, you know, there'd be … you'd not get her back for the next lesson! Because at the first school up here, they used to find her sitting at the corner of	Child changes school to somewhere parents more welcome and easier to fit in Visited local school and realised facilities would not fit child's needs

		the field, digging the field up with her bare hands at lunchtime. And actually, at GK a few times, because nobody played with her … because at lunchtime they all do their own thing, however much they include her in class; it was that sort of time. And then at swimming club I was talking to somebody who was out of county who'd just got her daughter into AF; and I'd always thought I'd keep AF as a backstop so that if …	
		M: AF is a special school in BF – girls school?	Even 2nd school not sounding very inclusive for child
		P: So if WR didn't work out we could go to the single-sex special school, 5 miles away. And I suddenly thought, why am I doing this? Why bother going through another change when she could go to AF and settle in and it should just all carry on through. That she would have a peer group of people that would be much more like her. So she could develop her own friendships, really on her own, and have to be independent. I think – I've never been to other special schools – I think, they're pretty much … the kids sit in the room and the different teachers come in. But AF works more like any other upper school.	Hotknow SchSp
		M: They move around.	
		P: They go to Science, they go to DT, they go to English, they go to Maths. They've got … it's based in two Victorian houses so they actually walk from one to another. And they don't have an LSA taking them, they go on their own – from Year 7.	Parent felt special school would fit her needs better. Perhaps change at primary meant she was more careful and not wanting change at secondary?
		M: So you went to WR?	
		P: Yes.	
		M: Which is your local comprehensive?	
		P: No, upper school …	
		M: Upper school.	
		P: … because we don't have comprehensives. If we had comprehensives it might … it would have been better for LS because her	
4.	00:15	clever friends from primary school … If everybody went to the same local school, the brighter ones there would have accommodated LS better than the not quite so bright ones that you get in the upper schools.	Grammar school system perhaps made this case harder as child may have coped in comprehensive environment
		M: But because they've been creamed off by the grammar …	
		P: Because the top 30% have gone away…	
		M: You've then got everyone else and they're all struggling to find their own places in the world.	
		M: But that was your local school and you thought, oh I'll just try the local secondary?	Parent had thought local upper school, which had other kids with Downs would work, based on views of other parents
		P: But also because it's had several children with Down's Syndrome.	
		M: And how did you know that?	
		P: Oh gosh, I've just know it for years! Through the local Down's Syndrome groups, through the Down's support service.	Informinf (nothing from LA)
		M: Right, so sort of other parents, local groups had given you that information – that kind of know-how, really, about what school is what?	
		P: Yes.	
		M: And that's how you know about AF, or was it ..?	
		P: Yes.	
		M: MS's department sending stuff out to you with information to you, or …	

		P: Oh no, nothing – I don't think I got anything from them! M: So this is Year 5/6 we're talking, is it? P: Yes. So I went to see them in Year 5. Well in fact, when I was looking for FS we were both … my husband and I went separately to different schools and we were both thinking about where LS would go as well, when we were going round the upper schools. We really liked HG and would have sent her there, but we went to see the SenCo there and LS was probably Year 5, and had a lovely chat with the lady there but we felt, and she felt it, that would be really hard for LS to fit in there because there would be such a gulf between her ability and the rest of the school. But it's slightly smaller than WR but probably more difficult to get around because it's on different levels. Whereas WR is designed for physically disabled so there are ramps – it's all on one level. So we thought we'd go with WR and the staff were going, oh it will be fine; and then we were thinking, socially, I don't think it would work. I had a friend who was working at WR and she was telling me what actually happened with the differentiation or not; she was in a class where there was a child with Down's Syndrome and he was just sitting there doing nothing. So it's when you know … but if you live somewhere, and you know people, you can find out what it's really like. And I know 3 people who work at WR, that's in the support side… M: So you get a very good idea … P: You do find out, yes. M: So it wasn't the Open Evening, it wasn't … it was just your insider knowledge really? Stuff that's hard to … P: Yes, because when you go on Open Evening, you know they can say anything they want. I never bothered going to a Head's talk because I felt, well they're paid to do a PR job and I'm going to be taken in. But FS's M: So much happier and easier? P: Yes, and it's close- I mean it's not far. If I got in the car now, I'd be there in 10 minutes. M: And did you involve LS in any of this decision making? P: LS's the sort of person, if you told her that she could have chocolate cake there she would go. So, you have to be careful. M: Smart girl in my opinion! There's a lot worse decisions you could make!	Visitx Hotknow- found out lots about local school from insider info
5.	00:20	P: Yes, She'd been to WR because we have a big holiday club the first week of the summer holidays and it's at WR, so she'd been up there since she was 4. So she knew that's where it was and I'd said we were going to go there and we'd go on a visit and she was, oh we did go on a visit, we went after school one day. And one of FS's friends who went there, in fact she came round last night, R took us round so that LS could actually see it. Because we couldn't go into the real school buildings in the summer holiday. So she got to see around it and she liked it. But then anything that's bright and shiny and looks like a big Science Lab and DT room – is exciting when you've been in primary school. M: Yes, it's all singing and dancing, isn't it? P: Yes. And then I said we were going to AF and we went. And she just loved it. We went round together with the Head and then the Head took her off to the Year 7 and she came back going, well you know lots of people don't you.	 Visitfit

		Two people have already said hello to LS and LS's gone, oh hello! So she just got on with it.	
		M: So she went from GK, Year 6 up to there in Year 7?	
		P: Yes.	
		M: And there were no problems with that – you were happy with it?	
		P: Yes.	
		M: And she's there now – she's Year 8 now?	
		P: Yes – but I have got a few issues. I don't think they really understand the Down's Syndrome. Because I was saying about the expressive language not being as good as the comprehension, and they've got her in the bottom group for everything and I think she's a bit bored. I think she's actually capable of a lot more. So I'm going to see them on Thursday to talk about that. And there's things about their profile – there are some things, some bits of Maths concepts, they will never get, so it's no good keeping on trying to get them to do everything to get a Level 1 in your SATs because it isn't going to happen. But they might still be working on a bit of Level 1, but they might be able to get a bit of Level 3. So you've got to do that and you can't just keep banging on to try and get your Level 1s.	Parent unhappy with aspects of current schooling

MumPersis |
		M: So, academically, maybe not as …?	
		P: Well they think she's not achieving a great deal and I think she's capable of a bit more.	
		M: Right, so maybe not a very good understanding of her as an individual?	
		P: The Down's Syndrome, I think. When they're in mainstream they get Down's support service and when they go into special schools it's deemed that the special schools have the expertise. But actually, this time last week, a friend and I were seeing MS about this (because her son's at PB in AY) and we were saying, they don't get the nature of Down's Syndrome.	Parent feels special schools have less understanding of Downs as don't have the expert help that mainstream schools do
		M: And are there are Down's Syndrome children there, that you are aware of?	
		P: Yes, there's two little girls who started in Year – not little - in Year 7, and there's … That was one of the other reasons I changed my mind; there's a girl in Year 9 and she started in mainstream at the MB which is down in GM, and I think Easter or May of Year 7 she moved to AF. And it was a mutual friend told me, not her Mum, but that she didn't have any friends. She was doing alright in the academic bit, but she didn't have any friends and that's what made me think Ooh! If she can't cope, and her language is better. She doesn't have a hearing impairment, so the few times I've seen her she's more able socially; and she hasn't got friends, it's going to be that much harder for LS.	
		M: Yes, absolutely.	
		P: But also, I wanted independence and when you go to AF they don't have an LSA, so they have to go from here to there. You go to mainstream, you have your LSA and they're not supposed to be velcroed to you, but still you go to a lesson and, I mean her LSA has said it before, they'd say, go on - write the date - and she'd wait. The teacher would do the introduction to the lesson and she'd fiddle and then she'd turn round and say, so what are we doing? Because she didn't have to concentrate.	Parent hoping child has more independence
		M: So in terms of her development, in terms of what's	

		important for LS in school, social skills, friendships and this independence? Are they the things that you'd put up there in terms of …? P: Yes. M: Right, and things like life skills and stuff? Do AF do …? P: Oh they do loads, so this morning she's got triple cooking. Well, it's life skills. She's learned to polish her shoes,	
6.	00:25	she's learned to iron her t-shirt last year. They do loads of things that you wouldn't do. WR say, oh we could do it, we would have to train somebody to do it and we'd buy a program and do it. And I'm thinking yes, she'd be the only one doing it. Whereas at AF, they all do it. M: So she's happy at AF? P: Yes. M: And she's happy to go to school in the morning? P: Yes, oh yes. Well she has her moments! And it gets worse because you think , the taxi's coming …! Because at least when you're taking them you can choose to be late, whereas if she was to have a complete meltdown then the taxi would have to go on without her. And actually I suppose I just have to get to the point where I just think, OK that's fine we're just going to do that. And then I bet you that the moment the taxi's gone she would be fine. Because then she would have won, you see, and then she would get to go to school on her own. So that makes it a little more stressful. But she hasn't had a "I don't want to go to school" probably since about September. M: Right, that's good. P: Yes. Whereas I think if we'd been at upper school we'd probably have had a lot more. M: So you're happy with the decision? P: Yes. M: And you feel you had the choice to make that decision and the support from the local authority to ..? P: No! The SenCo at the GK said something like this is a Transition Review and I'm thinking, is it? M: Was this Year 5 or 6? P: Yes, Year 5 – is it a Transition Review? Nobody's told me anything about it. And as we went into the meeting she gave me a photocopy of a letter from county that wasn't even addressed to us. It was just addressed "Dear Parent" … a Transition Review does, this, this and this. M: As you went into …? P: As we went into the Review! I can't remember if it was that one or the year afterwards, the Local Authority Officer was invited and he never came. But one of them, I was rung up while I was in Geography at the grammar school and I knew what it was going to be; the SenCo said, he can't come to this one so we'll re-arrange the meeting and I thought, what is the point? Nearly blew my top. I can remember exactly where I was standing, just over there looking at my main road, and agreed OK we would change the date, rang my husband, got him to change his day off. I mean he doesn't have a day off … but he'd booked his time, so we re-arranged it all and he wasn't there. So I had **no** input from him at all. I think I might have had a phone call with him; or that might have been after I'd decided that I wanted her to go to AF – but certainly nothing along the way. And I didn't	Life skills is a positive aspects of current schooling Schpos

			Parent received no info on school choice/transition apart from a standard letter
		M: Oh, you missed out there SS! P: No, I don't think I did, but then there's a list in the big booklet that you get for applying for secondary schools – there was that one. But that was the same booklet that we'd had for FS. So, you know, there was nothing new in it. Because she's the second one through, it's kind of difficult to pick out when you found out the different bits of information. M: So as far as the review went, the Transition Review…? P: At that point school - the primary school – was saying they thought she should go to AF. And I was thinking, you're not telling me what I'm doing! And all the research would say that children with Down's Syndrome do better in mainstream secondary than special school. But that's based on research in Hampshire and that's on schools that don't have the top 30% creamed off. So when you stop and think about it, you start thinking well this thing that I've believed for the last 6 years, maybe it ain't quite so great. And actually if we could have a unit for girls with Down's Syndrome in WH, it would be fantastic because those girls would be great. My theory is that when there's a bigger gap in attainment, the bright ones are much better at accommodating the dimmers. They're not threatened by somebody being different or not achieving stuff and they can see what the child isn't getting and what they might need to do, even when it's somebody just the same age as them. Whereas the ones that aren't so bright can't do that adjustment. So that's why I'd go for LS going to WH! M: Yes, with an IC unit added on, when they've got a spare few million lying around up at county - eventually! P: Yes – I can't see it happening in a month of Sundays!	MINF Parent adamant about making decision regarding school placement
7.	00:30	Especially as they're all academies and so on. But it is, it's just that … Grammar schools don't get many kids with special needs and they're actually quite good at looking at their needs, I think. Whereas I think the upper schools get a whole raft of … not Statemented but lots of dyslexia, dyspraxia stuff, ASD. M: I wonder what WH would say about having a unit for Down's Syndrome? P: I don't know, there are some lovely teachers … I think probably welcome it with open arms, actually, because the teachers would see it as a challenge; it's a different way of teaching. But you'd have to look at how you dealt with your statistics because if the achievements of the girls with … M: Statistics … P: Yes, if you were to lump it in, then the achievements of the whole school would plummet. The Heads and the Governors wouldn't like that … M: Therein lies the crux of the matter, I suspect, as much as the money! The impact it has in terms of their statistics, but … P: And their sense of their self-esteem because they're …	Parent believes losing top 30% to grammar schools mean secondary schools in the LA are less suitable for children with Downs than other mainstream secondaries

| | | M: It's interesting, isn't it, because if we're … if it's about the children ?
P: It should be where they're best, yes. And you see I think if you want an inclusive society then you should have your children of different abilities all in together.
M: We do want an inclusive society; we've got an inclusive bias, don't you know!
P: Exactly! However, the reality is those children have got to be happy and if … if there aren't enough of other children of their sort of ability around, for them to have real peers, real true friendships, then they're going to be lonely. And we don't want that either. So we do inclusion by going to ordinary gym club and ordinary dancing and ordinary lots of things.
M: Mm, in terms LS and her schooling and your ambitions for her future, you talked about independence and you talked about friends…
P: Well she's moving out.
M: She's moving out!
P: Yes.
M: How long has that decision been made?
P: No, no – she's decided!
M: Oh right, I thought at 13 …
 I think even when she was a primary school. And about a year ago she got the steel rule out and the Argos catalogue on Saturday afternoon and she was going around the kitchen – I'm having one of these and one of those when I move out! So I had to do a quick think. This time last year I'd said … it was like, in 7 year's time when you're 19 because she was going on that she was moving out next week. So then we went to Orthotics for her feet, because she's got very flat feet, and MS – no, yes another MS – said, so how old are you LS? And she said I'm 13 next week. When I'm 19 I move out!   I'd only mentioned it – talk about being bright! I'd mentioned it once, when I was driving, that when she was 19 she could move out. And she turned round and told the guy she saw once every 6 months that when she was 19
M: They'll think you're turfing her out!
P: I was like, where did this come from? It's obviously gone in and been processed.
M: The things they want to hear…
P: Yes. So she wants to because I think probably at primary school they were talking about … you know when they do transition for the whole of Year 6, about moving on and them being 19 and going to college. That's what you do, so why shouldn't she? I mean, I would like her to do it, but how and where and what budget cuts will do, I don't know. I'm not thinking about that in too much detail at the moment.
M: A long time to go.
P: But, it will happen because she wants it to.
M: That's good, and learning how to cook and polish her shoes will stand her in very good stead.
P: Yes, and making friends. And she has now made her first **real** friend – it's a girl who started this year in Year 8. She'd been at another upper school and she's got ASD. And at AF they split them into a top group and a bottom group and when you ask who her friends are; they were all in the other | Parental ideas on inclusion

Aspirations of child include moving out of home, age 19!

Parent refers to child's first 'real' friend |

		group, not in the bottom group where she is. So E's in that group, and they go and have their snack together at break time, in the shelter out in the playground. And then they play *Bang Bang* and … I can't remember what else she was telling me they play. Sort of spying, you know it's a piece of camera action and that things with people … all that James Bond, that kind of … Dr Who, things like that. She's not a sit around girly chat-chat, which is where an upper school wouldn't work for her because the girls that go to upper schools are generally more into clothes and boys and talking about boy	
8.	00:35	bands and things like that. And she can't actually talk about. M: OK, sounds like she's having fun – even if there's no chocolate cake! I'm nearly done in terms of direction. The term "inclusion" – I take it you're familiar with it? What are your views on it? P: Well as I say, I think it's a really good idea, but in practice you've got to look at the people that you're doing it to. And if the child with special needs is unhappy, then something has to change. And whether that's putting them with a bigger peer group, and that means going to special school … I mean maybe that's the price you have to pay. But it's a difficult thing; maybe we should have more units in our upper schools, but then would they be big enough? Or perhaps better links between special schools and upper schools and grammar schools? I mean there are more links than – or there have been before we became academies and goodness knows happens next. M: OK. In terms of LS's schooling, what more would have helped? P: If the speech therapy that she had in mainstream could have carried on to special …but again that's sorted out by the school and they haven't really got that sorted. M: No, that's interesting. P: She's got speech therapy but because it's organised through the school, it's not a therapist. There's not somebody trained and experienced in Down's Syndrome so she had some rubbish targets for her. I only met the speech therapist in November of Year 8; I had no contact with her at all in Year 7. But there was quite a lot of … I just thought, oh well just leave it. Because school is actually going well and she's talking a lot more; she's more confident about having something to say and … so that's good, her actual saying things. But her articulation is rubbish. Milk is *nilk*, this is *nis* – when I saw the speech therapist at school I said, she can't say things and I said a few things to her. She said, oh; then I said something else she said oh, I think I'll re-assess her and I thought – Yes please do ! M: Is that 1:1 speech therapy? P: No, it's in a group with 2 other dim ones in her group. But she told me about 2 weeks ago that the other 2 had gone to speech and she stayed in the classroom. And then last week she told me that they'd gone to speech and she hadn't … she hadn't had speech therapy – it wasn't fair! And could she have the therapist that she had when she was at the other school? She's not daft. M: No. What's the best thing about school for LS? What would she say, what would you say?	INCNT- nice idea but practically difficult SchP+N – Child speaking more but speech therapy at special school not very good

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		P: Friends. M: And you'd both say the same? P: Yes. M: Right. OK, and in terms of the current school choices …? P: I mean, I think she does lots of things but I don't know what she does during the day because we don't have a Home-School book. That's nothing unusual about … M: So communication at AF doesn't sound very good? P: No! She's cooking today – I've got no idea what she's cooking. M: So there's no Home-School diary? P: No, she has a homework book but they don't put anything in it other than what she has to do. M: Right. P: She didn't have any Maths homework from 11th November until this last weekend and she's got stuff …. something which is on the level that she would have done when she was in Year 3. But then her Dad said, well you know maybe she's actually not doing it on her own? But then that might be an element of them not actually engaging her enough for her to be bothered to do it; because it's boring. She had to count pineapples and melons this week! She could do … she could go round the class in her primary school and do a tally chart, asking them about certain things! I mean, with support, but she can do that, why are we back to counting up to 6? So that's another thing I need to talk to them about. But no book so they get red cards and green cards … M: For behaviour? P: Yes, but I don't know when she's had a green card unless she happens to bring it home because I **think** the teacher gives it to them and then they have to give it to their Form Tutor, who puts it on the wall. So if they get it in the afternoon, it would come home and then she takes it back in. So she came home with a handful in the end of July – I didn't know she'd got them. M: Red or green or both? P: Green ones; she didn't bring the red ones home. They don't tell you that they've got a red card unless they've got 3 in a week or something, so you don't know. But she gets cross when she gets a red card; she got one last	Parent not happy with level of communication with school or amount of homework set in some subjects Parent not feel well informed by school about behavioural issues
9.	00:40		

11.10 Appendix 10 - What does the literature have to say about the range of SEN covered in the research?

I wanted to briefly examine the literature related to the needs of the children covered by the research as I felt it might help to answer the research questions.

11.10.1 Autistic spectrum disorder (ASD)

Daniels and Porter (2009), reviewed the evidence for educational provision and support for children with SEND. They concluded that there was a lack of evidence regarding both the existence of, and the need for, a specialised pedagogy for students with SEND. However, one type of SEN is generally seen as requiring specialist pedagogy - ASD. ASD is a developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with, and relates to, other people and the world around them and Asperger's syndrome is a form of ASD. There is a growing awareness of the condition amongst teaching and medical professionals and an increasing prevalence of the condition over the last 25 years. Children on the autism spectrum are the fastest growing group of children with a statement of SEN in mainstream schools in England (Frederickson, Jones, and Lang, 2010) and Wales. ASD was the most likely Statement for boys with a Statement - just over a fifth of them (DCSF, 2010). School placements for children with ASD are often unsuccessful, resulting in exclusions (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee on SEN, 2006) and increased home education (Parsons and Lewis, 2010).

Biomedical models of ASD maintain that it is a neurodevelopmental disorder and that early diagnosis and treatment are essential whilst others argue that it is in part socially constructed and calls for an increased social acceptance of 'neurodiversity'. Baron-Cohen, Scott, Allison, Williams, Bolton, Matthews and Brayne (2009) have called for the term disorders to be replaced with 'conditions', thus ASD becomes ASC as one route to lessening the stigma attached to the label. Jordan (2007) also discusses the issue of labels and the needs to respect and balance the needs of those who wish to be seen as different not disordered and yet the need for a labelled disability to gain access to resources that may be needed. Many of the parents who participated in this research had children with a Statement for ASD. The large numbers of participants whose children had ASD can be explained by the increasing prevalence of the condition and also perhaps by the potential stigma of the label and the difficulties it can cause in schools meaning that more parents of children with ASD were looking for a voice. Ryan and Runswick Cole (2009) argued that

whilst all parents may advocate for their children, many parents of children with ASD advocated more vociferously and often blurred the lines between advocacy and activism.

As mentioned earlier, ASD is seen by some as an SEN requiring specialist teaching, often defined as, 'forms of instruction 'informed by needs that are specific or distinctive to a group that shares common characteristics' (Lewis and Norwich 2005:3). Lewis and Norwich refer to this as the 'general differences position'. Some academics (Slee, 2001) feel that such specialist teaching reinforces differences and puts children with ASD statements into the position of 'other'. Florian (2007) agrees with this argument of reinforcing difference, arguing that specialist teaching can perhaps imply that mainstream teachers cannot be held responsible for teaching children with ASD. Lewis and Norwich have referred to this position as the 'unique differences position', Jordan (2005) argued that researchers and professionals did not need to conform to one or other position if they were active in challenging them. In their review of articles on best practice for ASD, Parsons *et al.* (2011) found no evidence in favour of mainstream or special school teaching or vice versa although they acknowledge that more research is needed to establish which types of provision work best or how to evaluate best outcomes. Although, of course, decisions about best practice are based on a range of factors, besides research, factors such as family and logistical considerations and, for some, issues of social justice. Ravet (2011: 678) advocates a more integrative approach to the teaching of children with ASD, and an avoidance of 'the binary thinking associated with labelling and special pedagogies'. She suggests prioritising teacher training in ASD for all mainstream practitioners in order that these learning environments would then be adapted to allow the successful participation of learners with ASD and allow other learners to benefit from improved practices too. Other researchers (Batten Corbett, Rosenblatt, Withers, and Yuille, 2006 and Humphrey and Lewis, 2008) also support this idea. Ravet also argues that it is not just teachers that can bring about inclusion but that parents, children and support agencies working together and communicating are required alongside, she writes, 'Collaborative negotiation, flexibility and creativity, informed by an understanding of autism, will be vital, as there is no theoretical formula for 'doing' inclusion. There is no 'recipe' for the inclusion of children on the autism spectrum' (2011:680).

11.10.2 Visual impairment (VI) and hearing impairment (HI)

In 2012 there were approximately 23,540 children in England with a VI, half of these may have additional SEND, for example PMLD or SLD (Emerson and Robertson, 2011), too, and most are born with the condition. The majority of children with VI, 64%, are educated in mainstream schools. The proportion of children with VI in special schools for VI have

reduced dramatically in recent years; for primary aged children, the percentage has dropped from 7% in 1995 to just over 1% in 2012; and for secondary aged children the percentage has dropped from 13% to just over 3%. Local Authorities provide support for VI students via peripatetic advisory teachers, who usually hold a specialist qualification, although there has been a slight decline in specialist VI staffing over that last few years. The Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) provide guidance on their website for families choosing schools, and much of the advice would be equally valid for children without VI, for example the RNIB leaflet on *What to look for in an early years setting* (2014) suggests that: adults are involved in the child's learning; and that resources match the needs and interests of the children and are organised to encourage the children's independence. The RNIB website has a wealth of guidance for teaching children with VI as they get older and, although considerable changes may have to be made to resources and learning environments, there is an understanding that, once these changes have been made, children with VI can, and should, progress and be included in mainstream school settings. The data in the statistical release for 2013 (DfE, 2013) shows that children with VI were most likely to achieve the expected level in both English and Maths at Key Stage 2. However, despite such data, some problems are identified by research, such as a lack of understanding by mainstream teachers and an inability of schools to meet specialist needs (Miller, Keil and Whitehead, 2008). Douglas, McLinden, Pavey, Ware, Farrell (2009), in their review of the literature, made several recommendations about the teaching of children with VI, including suggestions relating to changes to assessments and teaching methods. The Consortium for Research into Deaf Education (CRIDE) found that in 2012 there were approximately 37, 414 deaf children in England, 21% of deaf children may have an additional SEND, MLD is the most common additional need. The majority of deaf children, 82%, are educated in mainstream schools, with less than a quarter of deaf children having a Statement of SEND. The proportion of deaf children in special schools for deaf children has fallen from 6% in 2010/11 to 3% in 2012. There has been a slight increase in specialist staff working with deaf children in England since 2010. Guidance from the National Sensory Impairment Partnership (2012), *Raising the achievement of pupils with a hearing impairment* suggests that by working together Teaching Assistants (TAs), teachers and teachers of the deaf (ToD) can make a significant contribution to supporting deaf pupils overcome some of the barriers that can affect their development. Pupils with hearing impairment, along with those with VI, were the most likely, of those with SEND, to achieve the expected progression between Key Stage 2 and 4 (DfE, 2013).

11.10.3 MLD in Global developmental delay 22q11 deletion

Most children with MLD, and I am including 22q deletion under this heading, have their needs met in mainstream schooling. MLD is the largest category of children with SEN, with 24.2% of children being labelled as MLD'. Williams (1993) suggests that students with the MLD label are considered one of the 'easiest' groups to integrate. This could well be because teachers recognise their difficulties, for example slow recognition of responses, and perceive that they can accommodate their needs using their general teaching skills (Fletcher- Campbell 2004, in Lewis and Norwich, 2004). There is no suggestion of alternative pedagogies for this group of students although both Fletcher- Campbell and others, (e.g. Skrtic, 1999), recommend that any interventions made are with respect to individual differences and unique needs. More recently Norwich, Ylonen and Gwernan-Jones (2012) have suggested that MLD is a neglected area for research and development in England and that its definition and general use are poorly understood and perhaps an alternative more sophisticated approach (for example, International Classification of Functioning, ICF: WHO, 2002) might be utilised more effectively.

11.10.4 Down Syndrome

Increasingly, children with Down Syndrome are taught in mainstream schools (Cuckle, 1999), the impetus for this has been from parents of these children and as a result of the general move towards inclusive schooling. The DfES guidance *Inclusive schooling: children with special educational needs* (2001) gives some guidance on including children with Down Syndrome in mainstream schools. The Down's Syndrome website (Downs-Syndrome, 2014) is clear that schools with a 'positive attitude towards meeting the needs of all children' and teachers, with 'a little training', can successfully engage with children with Down Syndrome. Research (Buckley, Bird, Sacks and Archer, 2006, Petty, 1996) suggests that, with training for teachers and support, children with Down Syndrome can be successfully included in mainstream settings. The Down Syndrome website has several examples of successful case studies of children with Down Syndrome in, what they call, 'real school settings', Petty's work (1996) also suggests, that, with help from specialist support teachers and in service training, children with Down Syndrome can be educated successfully in mainstream settings.