Autism, Anxiety and Enabling Access to Education

A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology in the Faculty of Humanities

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List of abbreviations and acronyms

AEP Association of Educational Psychologists
AFIRM Autism Focused Intervention Resources and Modules
APA American Psychological Association
ASD Autism Spectrum Disorder
BPS British Psychological Society
CAMHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
CYP Children and Young People
DFE Department for Education
DoH Department of Health
EBP Evidence Based Practice
EBSA Emotionally Based School Avoidance
EHCP Education, Health and Care Plan
EP Educational Psychologist
EPS Educational Psychology Service
HCPC Health and Care Professions Council
IC Inclusion criteria
LA Local Authority
LGBT Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
PBE Practice Based Evidence
PRISMA Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses
RCT Randomised Controlled Trial
SEN Special Educational Needs
SENCo Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
SIDE Schools of Isolated and Distance Education
SLR Systematic Literature Review
TA Teaching Assistant
UK United Kingdom
USA United States of America
WOE Weight of Evidence
Abstract

Background: Mainstream education can be difficult for autistic children given the social communication difficulties, inflexible thinking and sensory sensitivities associated with autism. Educators can still find providing a safe, inclusive and supportive environment for autistic students challenging. Subsequently autistic children are at a risk of experiencing school related anxiety and school avoidance. This has led some parents to decide to home educate which is the focus of the first paper. However, this is not a viable option for all families and so the second paper focuses on the supportive factors that have helped autistic girls successfully return, re-engage and maintain their attendance in mainstream education.

Methods/participants: The first paper describes a systematic literature review (SLR) of papers exploring the experiences of parents who decide to home educate their autistic children. Ten papers published between 2011-2019 were identified using the PRISMA framework and evaluated for methodological quality and relevance of focus. The second paper, an empirical investigation, reports a case study design utilising semi-structured interviews with three autistic girls, their parents and key adults across three different secondary schools. The final paper focuses on dissemination.

Analysis/findings: The SLR identified a range of reasons that led parents to home educate and revealed that this educative option can have good academic and social outcomes for autistic children. The empirical investigation identified a relational approach was at the core of autistic girls re-engaging with formal education.

Conclusions/implications

Although not all parents may be able to home educate, this review indicates that parents with appropriate emotional, financial and social supports have found home educating their autistic children empowering. Factors that supported autistic girls to overcome school avoidance included positive relationships with key adults, friendship, psychoeducation and good autism practice including safe spaces and a flexible approach. Implications for schools and educational psychology practice are considered.
Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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The Author
The author holds a BA (Hons) degree in Economic and Social Studies: Social Anthropology and a MEd in Psychology of Education from the University of Manchester. The researcher has worked with children, families and schools in a variety of settings. Prior to beginning her doctoral studies she worked for The Children’s Society on a project aiming to develop whole school approaches to promoting mental health and wellbeing in high schools. She has also worked in therapeutic post adoption support for children, as a family support worker and a manager of a private tuition centre. The researcher’s interest in autism grew during her master’s degree as she researched the perceptions of friendship amongst autistic boys in a high school resource base (O’Hagan & Hebron, 2017). This interest led her to continue to explore the experiences of autistic children at high school for her doctoral thesis.
Introduction

The aim of the thesis was to explore how autistic children who experience debilitating anxiety and school related stress can access education. The aim was to address a gap in the current literature to identify cases where autistic children have successfully re-engaged and maintained their attendance in education and ascertain what the supportive factors and challenges to their success were. The thesis is organised into three papers. Paper One is a systematic literature review of the experiences of parents who home educate their autistic children. The review identified the motivations of parents who remove their children from the school system, their experiences and what they perceive the outcomes to be for their autistic children. Paper Two is an empirical study which explores three case studies of autistic girls who have successfully returned to school after a period of emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA). Paper Three provides a plan for the effective dissemination of the findings and implications from Paper One and Two. The aim of this is to support professionals at a school, educational psychologist (EP) and local authority level to implement evidence based practice when supporting autistic children to access education.

The research stemmed from The University of Manchester’s research commissioning process. The researcher had hoped to study autism and therefore selected the topic of autism and girls from the research commissions. The initial proposal was broad and so many different elements of female autism and education could be explored. The researcher wanted the findings to be relevant to EP practice and as there was a dearth in literature, the preliminary study explored EPs’ experiences of supporting autistic girls (O’Hagan & Bond, 2019). Through a qualitative in-depth survey, this research explored the experiences of EPs working with autistic girls, specifically looking at methods of assessment and intervention. A focus group was held with three EPs from one local authority who had a range of experience of working with autistic girls. The interview schedule explored how EPs assess autism in girls, how useful they find the tools used, and the impact and outcomes of interventions used. It was found that girls were often referred to the EP team due to mental health difficulties and school avoidance. The predominant mode of assessment utilised by the EPs was
observation over time. Following assessment, the EPs hypothesised in many cases that the girls’ difficulties were related to unidentified and therefore unsupported autism. However, the EPs faced challenges in supporting the girls along the diagnostic pathway. At times, they held conflicting views with other services such as the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service and the Autism Diagnostic Team on whether a child was autistic. The EPs felt that this was compounded by them not being involved in the local diagnostic pathway. The EPs also found that in some cases, girls behaved differently in the home and school as they were able to mask their difficulties at school and appear to cope. However, at home in their safe base, their anxiety came to the forefront and manifested in sensory seeking behaviours. In some cases, this led to conflict between families and schools and raised questions on the responsibility of schools to fund EP support if the girls’ difficulties were not displayed in school. Without an evidence-base to draw upon, the EPs used their existing knowledge to provide individualised support for each girl. However, the EPs reported that when suggesting that staff would need to take the time to build relationships with these girls, they were met with reluctance due to schools’ limited resources. The EPs felt an evidence base was needed to support their work with autistic girls experiencing EBSA. This thesis aimed to address this gap in literature to investigate ways to support highly anxious autistic children to access education.

Paper Two was commissioned first as this study aimed to address the gap in literature identified by the preliminary study, described above. Due to autism and EBSA being a new area of study there was not an evidence base to be reviewed. Therefore, Paper One, a systematic literature review, aimed to explore how home education can support autistic children to access education when formal schooling has not worked for them. This area of study was identified as the factors that led parents of autistic children to home educate were similar to the factors that led autistic girls to experience EBSA. The review synthesised the motivations of home educating parents, their experiences and what they identified as the outcomes for their children. The review incorporated both quantitative and qualitative studies to ensure that all relevant studies were included. This also enabled the
breadth of the phenomena to be acknowledged whilst examining causation in depth to support a better understanding of autism and home education.

Paper Two also looked at autistic children whose difficult school experience had led to school avoidance but who had successfully re-engaged in mainstream high school. This study aimed to address a gap in the literature by identifying influencing factors that support re-engagement and continued attendance for children with complex needs within complex school systems. Whilst both genders are at an increased risk of EBSA compared to typically developing children, it was decided that Paper Two would focus on autistic girls for several reasons. Firstly, it is acknowledged that there are subtle differences in the male and female autism phenotype which may influence their experiences of school. For example, autistic girls are often more able to develop techniques to mask their social communication difficulties, especially in primary school; this means they are more skilled at blending in with their peers and so their needs are more likely to go unnoticed (Jarman & Rayner, 2015). Autistic girls are also at increased risk of internalising their feelings and experiencing acute anxiety (Moyse & Porter 2015). Whereas boys display greater externalising behaviours such as hyperactivity (Mandy et al., 2012). Therefore, with limited resources available, schools tend to prioritise more disruptive boys for outside agency support (Werling & Geschwind, 2013). The differences in the male and female profile may go some way to explain why high ability girls are diagnosed at a later stage compared to boys (Begeer et al., 2013). Later identification of girls’ difficulties can mean their needs go unsupported until they reach crisis point and their behaviour becomes externalised such as school avoidance. As such, the support that girls need to re-engage in education may have subtle differences to the needs of boys and so a homogenous sample was deemed the most appropriate for identifying effective intervention.

The autistic community have highlighted that they want to be involved in the research concerning them (Nicolaidis at al., 2019). However, Paper One identified that pupil voice is incorporated into the research infrequently. It was therefore felt that to be ethical and to fully understand the lived
experiences of autistic girls they needed to participate fully in the research. However, there was a risk that interviewing the girls about their experiences of EBSA may cause psychological harm. For this reason the research project was categorised as high risk and the researcher met with the University of Manchester’s Ethical Committee to discuss how ethical risks would be managed sensitively. Following minor amendments to the research proposal, ethical approval was granted. To ensure that the risk of emotional harm to participants was mitigated schools were contacted in the first instance and briefed on the inclusion criteria. The participants were selected by a member of the school staff who worked closely with the autistic pupils based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) Must have a diagnosis of autism from a recognised medical practitioner or CAMHS; (2) Aged between 11 and 16 years and attends a mainstream high school; (3) Female; (4) Must have had a period of EBSA with a decrease in attendance followed by an increase in school attendance. School staff were then able to decide if they had a pupil who met the inclusion criteria and the school then contacted the parents and pupil directly. It was considered that school staff and parents were the most suitable people to assess the pupils’ emotional vulnerability in relation to the interview schedule. During data collection, one of the girls did not want to be interviewed as she felt uncomfortable talking to unfamiliar people. For her to still be able to participate and give her views she was given the interview schedule as a written questionnaire which she completed and sent back. No further ethical issues arose during the research.

Critical realism was the epistemological approach adopted for this study as it uses elements of both positivism and constructivism to understand ontology (i.e. the nature of reality) and epistemology (i.e. our knowledge of reality) to view reality as divided across three interacting levels: the empirical, the actual and the real (Fletcher, 2017). At the empirical level events are experienced and interpreted by people and are empirically measurable in the form of social ideas, meanings, decisions and actions. At the actual level events occur whether or not they are experienced or interpreted by humans and may indeed be different to how events are observed at the empirical level. At the real level causal mechanisms and structures exist which bring the actual and empirical
world together (O’Mahoney & Vincent, 2014). As Paper Two was the first study to explore the influences on successful re-engagement in education for autistic girls experiencing EBSA, it was an exploratory study focussing on the empirical level. Critical realism supports aspects of both qualitative and quantitative approaches which supported the synthetisation of mixed methods in Paper One (Maxwell, 2011).

The researcher took a realist ontological stance which assumes that multiple realities exist and a constructivist epistemological perspective that an individual constructs an understanding of their reality based on their own experience and perspective (Maxwell, 2011). Autistic children may experience the world differently to the majority of people; however, it is acknowledged that social norms are socially constructed and our understanding that children who have difficulty complying with these norms have a disorder is a social construction. That is to say that the realities that autistic children experience exist but our formulation of autism is a powerful social construction.

Axiology refers to the values and beliefs a researcher holds which may influence the way in which they carry out research and data analysis (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). The researcher’s strong belief that all children are entitled to an education heavily influenced the focus of this research. It steered attention away from a deficit model to exploring different ways autistic children can re-engage and access education. The researcher’s belief in equality influenced the decision for Paper Two to focus on autistic girls as the majority of autism research has utilised male participant samples (Bond & Hebron, 2019). The fundamental belief in equality also led to the decision to interview autistic girls to ensure their voice was incorporated into the research. Furthermore, all key stakeholders in the re-engagement of autistic girls experiencing EBSA were included in the study and equal weight was given to each perspective.
References


**Keywords:** Autism spectrum disorder; Asperger’s; home education; home schooling; flexi-schooling; exclusion

**Abstract**

**Background:** Mainstream education can be difficult for autistic children given the social communication difficulties, highly focused interests and sensory sensitivities associated with autism. Educators can still find providing a safe, inclusive and supportive environment for autistic students challenging. Subsequently some parents decide to remove their children from school and home educate. The purpose of this systematic review is to synthesise reported findings on home educating autistic children.

**Method:** PRISMA guidelines informed the review process. Articles included were published in the last 10 years and specific to autistic children being educated at home. Of the 22 articles meeting eligibility for full text review, 10 matched the final inclusion criteria.

**Results:** Findings related to four main themes emerging from the synthesis: the motivations and reasons that led parents to home educate their autistic children; parents’ experiences of home educating; practices and pedagogical approaches used by parents; and the impact of home education on the outcomes for autistic students. Findings revealed that home education can be a positive experience for families with good academic and social outcomes for autistic children and young people. Limitations of the evidence base are considered.

**Conclusion:** Although not all parents may be in a position to home educate their children, this review indicates that parents with appropriate educational, financial and social supports have found home educating their autistic child empowering. They report being able to provide flexible, balanced and individualised education leading to positive outcomes.
Introduction
Autism is a diverse neurodevelopmental condition which encompasses a continuum of ability ranging from mild to severe difficulties with social communication and interaction, and restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests or activities (DSM-5; American Psychological Association, 2013).\(^1\) Sensory sensitivity is included in the latter domain. In regards to prevalence, it is estimated that in the United Kingdom (UK) autism affects in one in 100 people (Ambitious about Autism, 2017).

National statistics for England report that there are 95,363 autistic children and adolescents who attend state-funded mainstream schools, which is about 72% of the total number of school aged autistic students (Department for Education [DfE], 2019a).

For many parents, mainstream education is deemed the option that will give their autistic child a chance to integrate with neuro-typical peers, develop their social communication skills and access the National Curriculum (Rotheram-Fuller, Kasari, Chamberlain, & Locke, 2010). This view is supported by current UK educational policy which encourages the special educational needs (SEN) of children to be met within mainstream schools where possible (DfE, 2014). The philosophy of inclusive education as promoting the right of SEN children to not be segregated from their typically-developing peers has become well established over the last 40 years, leading to an increasing number of autistic children experiencing an ‘inclusive education’ (Lawrence, 2017). However, whilst the philosophy of inclusion has good intentions the efficacy of inclusion is contentious. Effectively integrating autistic children within the systems of mainstream schools is still deemed a challenge to

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\(^1\) The terminology used in this paper is identity-first (i.e. autistic children) rather than person-first (i.e. children with autism). Identity-first language was found to be the preferred terminology by the majority of autistic people surveyed (Kenny et al., 2016). This is in line with research that highlights the unintentional bias perpetuated by scholars by referring to people, especially children, with the most stigmatised disabilities such as autism by person first language (Gernsbacher, 2017). Children without disabilities or less stigmatised disabilities are more frequently discussed in research through identity first language (i.e. blind children, gifted children, typically developing children etc.) (Gernsbacher, 2017).
educators and it is widely acknowledged that autistic children are struggling, especially in high school (Goodall, 2018).

The transition from a small primary school with one class teacher to the uncertainty of a secondary school with lots of teachers, hundreds of students, large buildings, change in the curriculum, different rules and behaviour policies, high academic demands and sensory overload can be traumatic for some autistic children (Neal & Frederickson, 2016; Tso & Strnadová, 2017). The evidence suggests that challenges in social understanding increases the risk of autistic children experiencing bullying, peer rejection, and feelings of isolation (Cook, Ogden & Winstone 2016; Hedges et al., 2014; Humphrey & Symes, 2011). Furthermore, parents of autistic children who attend mainstream schools report higher levels of social anxiety in their children compared to parents whose autistic children attend specialist schools (Zainal & Magiati, 2016).

Teaching staff report feeling ill equipped in regards to their knowledge and training on teaching autistic children within the mainstream classroom (Majoko, 2016). For example, autistic children can find it difficult to regulate their emotions and behaviour leading to anxiety and stress often being communicated through ‘meltdowns’ which can be challenging for school staff to manage (Ashburner, Ziviani, & Rodger, 2010; Sansosti & Sansosti, 2012). Autistic children are also at greater risk of school exclusion with over 45% experiencing it (Ambitious about Autism, 2016). The government’s records indicate that 119,909 autistic children were excluded from school in 2017-2018 (DfE, 2019b). Following school exclusion, autistic girls report receiving little support from their school which further isolated them from education and increased their anxiety (Sproston, Sedgewick & Crane 2017). The challenges faced by autistic students and the subsequent impact on their mental health has led some parents to feel that they have no other choice than to withdraw their autistic children from the school system to be home educated (Kendall & Taylor, 2016).
Home education practices and laws vary across the world. Home education is permitted in most European countries as well as in Australia, Canada and the United States of America (USA) (Arora, 2006). In the UK, parents who choose to home educate their child from the beginning of their education are not required to inform their local authority (LA) and parents who remove their child from a mainstream school are simply required to inform the head teacher (www.gov.uk/home-education). Therefore, the number of children being home educated in the UK is not documented; though estimates range between 45,250 and 150,000 with agreement that the number is rapidly rising (Kendall & Taylor, 2016). There are 2.5 million home educated children in the USA with an estimated increase of 2% to 8% per annum (Ray, 2019). Within this rise, an increasing number of parents are making the far-reaching decision to home educate their autistic children yet this remains an under researched area (Daniels, 2017). The home education literature has predominantly focussed on the academic and social outcomes for the general population of home educated children (e.g. De Carvalho & Skipper, 2019; Ray, 2013) with limited exploration of the experiences of home educating parents (Catlin, 2019). Therefore, more autism specific information on what influences this decision, the experiences and practices of parents and the outcomes for autistic children is needed. As parents look for alternative ways to educate their autistic children, it is imperative to keep information in this field current and reflective of shifts in education. This would also inform school practice and policy. Research on the topic of home education and autism has evolved in recent years with interest in the area growing (e.g. Bower, 2019; Lawrence, 2017). Whilst the body of literature remains fairly small, a systematic review to ascertain the current empirical understanding is both timely and appropriate. The review aimed to answer the following question: What are the experiences of parents who decide to provide home education for their autistic child and what do they identify as the outcomes?
Method
A thematic synthesis approach was adopted which included all relevant studies. Quantitative data which demonstrates scale were synthesised with qualitative findings which provide descriptive detail. Evaluative review frameworks for the two approaches were used (appendix 2) (Woods, Bond, Humphrey, Symes & Green, 2011). To evidence a transparent, sequential process linked to original data, themes are illustrated by participant quotes and statistical data.

Search strategy and study selection
The following databases were searched between September 2019 and January 2020: PsychInfo; Applied Social Science Index and Abstracts; Education Resources Information Centre; and Google Scholar. Key search terms included: autis* OR asperge* AND home schooling OR home education. As this field of research is in its infancy a date range was not applied. The review adhered to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses (PRISMA) (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff & Altman, 2009). Please refer to Figure 1 for an outline of the PRISMA process for this review.

Inclusion criteria
The inclusion criteria were: 1) English-language article; 2) published in a peer reviewed journal or a doctoral thesis; 3) an empirical investigation collecting either qualitative or quantitative data; 4) the primary focus being on factors related to autism and home education; 5) including a participant sample of parents of whom at least 50% must have an autistic home educated child; 6) AND/OR a participant sample of children or young people, at least 50% must have autism and be home educated. The last two inclusion criteria were to ensure that the data was primarily focussed on autism and home education. Three studies (Arora, 2006; De Carvalho & Skipper, 2019; Parsons & Lewis, 2010) were not included due to the inclusion criterion of a participant sample of parents of whom at least 50% must have an autistic home educated child. Of the papers included in this review all but one parent participant home educated an autistic child. One quantitative study was screened
and included due to its high quality and relevance. The inclusion criteria was straightforward to operationalise and studies that did not meet all of the inclusion criteria were excluded (appendix 3).

**Fig. 1.** PRISMA diagram. The figure illustrates the search process and study selection.

Quality appraisal

Ten studies met the full inclusion criteria and were assessed for methodological quality using Gough’s (2007) Weight of Evidence (WoE) A ‘methodological quality’ and WoE C ‘focus of the study’.

This review was concerned with including all relevant studies to explore the experiences of parents who home educate autistic children and as the field of autism and home education is in its infancy the studies were exploratory in nature. Therefore, it was not deemed necessary to evaluate the appropriateness of methodology used (WoE B). The robust evaluative framework used to assess the
methodological quality of quantitative and qualitative studies is described in Woods et al. (2011). Quantitative studies could score a maximum of 16. Studies were then categorised as low (scoring 0-5), medium (6-10) or high (11-16) quality research. Qualitative studies could score a maximum of 14. Studies were then categorised as low (scoring 0-5), medium (6-10) or high (11-14) quality research. The researcher coded all of the papers and the research supervisor coded 25% of the papers to ensure inter-coder reliability. The quality criteria of differing scores were debated until the inter-rater reliability percentage agreement was 100% for each of the three papers that were dual coded. The study of autism and home education is in its infancy and so quality assessment was used as a tool to identify good quality research rather than as a method of exclusion. For WoE C studies were appraised on their relevance to the current review question. Studies were awarded: 1 point for discussion of the decision to home educate; 1 point for reflection on the experience of home educating; 1 point for discussion of outcomes. For WoE C, studies were categorised as low (1 point), medium (2 points), or high (3 points).

Data extraction and synthesis
Data extraction began with general details of the papers including: citation details; phenomena investigated, participant sample, methodology and findings appendix 4. Themes identified by the author were recorded alongside participant quotes and statistics (appendix 5). Qualitative and quantitative findings were synthesised and inductively categorised on the basis of similarity in meaning.

Results
Overview of the included studies
In total, 10 studies were included in this review (see table 1). All of the studies took place between 2011 and 2019. The origin of the studies was as follows: UK (n = 5), USA (n = 3) and Australia (n = 2). Nine out of the 10 studies used qualitative methods and one study used quantitative methods; four studies were doctoral theses; all studies included parent participants; and two studies included
autistic children and young people as participants. Simmons’s (2016) doctoral thesis comprised of two studies. One study evaluated an intervention to increase on-task time for autistic students studying at home which was not relevant to this review and therefore not included. A second large-scale quantitative study provided a useful comparison of the experiences of home educated and traditionally schooled autistic children. This study highlighted the perception that home education can be beneficial for autistic children. The quantitative study provided numerical data and the qualitative studies unpacked the detail of what worked well for these families. The incorporation of quantitative and qualitative data sets in this review supports a better understanding of autism and home education as the breadth and depth of the phenomenon are explored.

Methodological quality
All studies scored highly for the execution of data collection. The studies did not generally score highly for emergent theory related to the problem which may be correlated to the exploratory nature of the studies. Nine out of 10 studies scored well using the quality assessment measure (table 1). The doctoral theses scored particularly highly which is likely due to available word count allowing for detailed explanation.

Overall the research on home education and autism is very positive with parents reporting improvement in their children’s mental health (see fig. 2. for full thematic map of the experiences of parents who home educate an autistic child). However, this could be related to sampling; the majority of parents removed their children from school at crisis point. Therefore, when the cause of the anxiety is taken away it is likely that the anxiety will lessen. Additionally, participants were mainly recruited through support groups and were self-selecting volunteers. There are two elements here which reduce the representativeness of the samples. First, participants who attend or join support groups and who volunteer for research may be different to those who do not. Second, participants who volunteered for studies may have wanted to share their success stories. As with all research, this study needs to be understood within the context of its limitations; however, it still
needs to be acknowledged that these good quality studies have similar findings and draw similar conclusions.

The research samples were predominantly parents which is necessary as it is parents who can make the decision to withdraw their children from school and home educate. Their experiences need to be shared to increase understanding of the risk factors leading to this decision and the support that they need to successfully educate their children. However, only two studies included the perspective of the autistic individuals. The voice of the child and the adult are important for the potential positive and negative factors of home education to be fully understood.
Table 1. Characteristics of included studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Research focus</th>
<th>Participant characteristics</th>
<th>Design</th>
<th>Analytical approach</th>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Quality Assessment Score: Weight of Evidence A</th>
<th>Relevance Assessment Score: Weight of Evidence C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bower, (2019)</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Motivations and experiences of families who home educate in Northern Ireland</td>
<td>2 mothers who share an autistic 8 year old son</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>Thematic analysis</td>
<td>Bullying and teachers’ lack of understanding of autism led to parents to home educate</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Low</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daniels, (2017)</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Motivations, practices and pedagogical approaches used by parents to home educate their autistic children</td>
<td>8 families: 15 parents (8 mothers: 7 fathers); 10 children (3 girls: 7 boys). Children aged 5 – 11 years -(Average age 8:4 years)</td>
<td>Background parent questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, observation of home education practice and follow up parent telephone interview</td>
<td>Thematic analysis</td>
<td>Multiple factors influenced parents’ decision to home educate including child’s dislike of school and teachers’ lack of understanding of children’s needs. Parents’ pedagogical approaches had similarities to child-</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
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<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Sample Size</td>
<td>Data Collection Methods</td>
<td>Approach</td>
<td>High</td>
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<td>Dolan, (2017)</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Exploration of success of home educated autistic students in college</td>
<td>13 participants: 7 mothers; 1 roommate; 5 autistic college students (4 men: 1 woman)</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews, reflection diaries and document review e.g. academic transcripts</td>
<td>Cross-case synthesis</td>
<td>Parental support during home educating years and during university resulted in students succeeding in university</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
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<td>Hurlbutt, (2011)</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Experiences of parents who home educate their autistic children</td>
<td>10 parents from 9 families (9 mothers: 1 father)</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews with follow up questions via phone or email</td>
<td>Open-coding procedure</td>
<td>Parents decided to home educate as schools were unable to meet the needs of their children. Parents felt they found a form of education that worked for their children</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kendall &amp; Taylor, (2016)</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Experiences of mothers who home educate their SEN children</td>
<td>7 mothers, 6 of whom had an autistic child. 1 mother had a child with dyspraxia</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>Thematic analysis</td>
<td>Lack of understanding by staff, poor school-parent communication and the impact the school environment had upon autistic children led parents to home educate</td>
<td>Medium</td>
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<tr>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Data Collection Methods</td>
<td>Methodological Frameworks</td>
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<td>Kidd &amp; Kaczmarek, (2010)</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Mothers’ perspectives of home educating their autistic child</td>
<td>10 mothers</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>Interpretative phenomenological analysis</td>
<td>Home education led to improvements in autistic children’s behaviour and psychological wellbeing</td>
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<td>Lawrence, (2017)</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Experiences of parents who flexi-school their autistic children</td>
<td>5 mothers</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>Interpretative phenomenological analysis</td>
<td>Sharing education between home and school can benefit some autistic children</td>
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<td>McDonald &amp; Lopes, (2014)</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>To understand how SIDE supports parents who home educate their autistic child</td>
<td>2 mothers</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews, participant observation, informal interviews and documentary data sources.</td>
<td>Constructivist grounded theory methods</td>
<td>The flexibility and individualised approach of SIDE created a good educational fit for autistic children</td>
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<td>Simmons, (2016)</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Experiences of parents who home educate autistic children</td>
<td>114 parents of autistic children (61 home educated; 53 traditionally schooled)</td>
<td>Quantitative online survey</td>
<td>Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics v.22</td>
<td>Homes educating parents noted a positive increase in motivation to learn, active engagement and family functioning as well as a decrease in problem behaviour of their autistic children</td>
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<td>Taylor, Kendall &amp; Forrester, (2011)</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Perspectives of parents who home educate their SEN children</td>
<td>9 home educating mothers. 8 out of the 10 home educated children had autism</td>
<td>Sample formed from self-selection on online forums. 7 semi-structured interviews and 2 questionnaires based on the interview questions</td>
<td>Thematic analysis</td>
<td>Personalised nature of home education supported children. Lack of support from education systems was frustrating for parents</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
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Fig. 2. Full thematic map of the experiences of parents who home educate an autistic child.
The motivations and reasons that led parents to home educate their autistic children

Fig. 3. Thematic map of the motivations and reasons that led parents to home educate their autistic children

Lack of flexible and inclusive practice to meet the child’s educational and social needs. In the quantitative paper, parents on average identified six out of 12 reasons for home educating. The most common (over 50%) of reasons were: (a) dissatisfaction with educational placement: 74.58%, (b) dissatisfaction with educational programme: 74.58%, (c) need to fight for services: 62.71%, (d) child’s negative feelings towards school: 62.71%, (e) concern about child’s safety: 59.32%, (f) school’s inability to manage behaviour: 57.63%, (g) negative interactions with educational professionals: 52.54% (Simmons, 2016). Across the qualitative studies, parents described how their children’s cognitive differences required the curriculum and teaching approaches to be adapted but that their children’s teachers were unable to modify and pushed for the child to do the adjusting (Kendall & Taylor, 2016).

Because he was having meltdowns all the time and because they weren’t managing his environment or modifying the curriculum to suit his needs, they were still trying to get him to write with a pencil, still trying to get him to play football games, still trying to get him to accept relief teachers without prior warning. All the things that set him off they continued to do and they had a behaviour management plan and there were consequences for his bad
behaviour but they were not willing to change and it was always like, we’ll cure him of this by giving him a string of consequences or punishing him (Parent; Kidd & Kaczmarek, 2010).

Children preferred to learn by rote and computer-based learning, however, it was felt that work was simplified rather than adapted and as a result children made limited progress (Kidd & Kaczmarek, 2010). Dissatisfaction with the educational programme was cited by the majority of parents as a motivating factor to home educate (e.g. Simmons, 2016). Schools reportedly found it difficult to provide for children who were exceptionally gifted in areas of interest such as algebra and quantum physics but who also had SEN (Hurlbutt, 2011; Lawrence, 2017). Parental frustration at the disproportionate time their children spent with support staff with limited access to a qualified teacher was reported (Kendall & Taylor, 2016; Lawrence, 2017). Parents expressed frustration at interventions and strategies not being implemented properly and abandoned quickly (Daniels, 2017). Therefore, a driving factor for parents to home educate was their ability to meet their own children’s learning needs, adapt the environment and provide sensory breaks and down-time accordingly (Lawrence, 2017; McDonald & Lopes, 2014).

Parents’ perception of school staff’s insufficient understanding of and attitude towards autism

Insufficient understanding of managing challenging behaviour resulted in parents feeling schools were containing their children rather than teaching them (Lawrence, 2017). A lack of partnership between home and school contributed to the breakdown in school placements across the studies (Kendall & Taylor, 2016). Daniels’s (2017) study identified a discrepancy between teachers’ understanding of autism and their ability to transfer this into practice.

When he moved into Year 2 he had the SENCo as his teacher... I thought this would be great in terms of knowing how to support my son but she really didn’t have a clue! She did not attempt to meet his needs. She saw him as defiant and told me, ‘He won’t break me you know, I’ll break him’ (Parent; Kendall & Taylor, 2016).
Parents reported experiencing hurtful comments that made them feel like ‘social outcasts’ (Kendall & Taylor, 2016). Negative interactions with educators was also identified in the quantitative survey (Simmons, 2016).

**Exclusionary nature of mainstream school.** Autistic children experienced social exclusion by their peers and teachers, classroom exclusion and school exclusion as a form of punishment.

> As soon as they got the support of the TA it was excuse to get him out of the classroom... she had not trained in ASD and would take him into the corridor. He was really bright but was spending most of his time informally excluded (Parent; Kendall & Taylor, 2016).

School staff not supporting the social needs of autistic children was identified as a form of exclusion (Bower, 2019). Parents also felt that teachers were sometimes too quick to send their autistic children home,

> “They’ve no qualms with phoning me the minute anything goes wrong. They’re not trying to sort it – they don’t try to think, ‘Well, we’ll give it a few minutes and see whether he calms down.’ It’s like, as soon as he picks up a pencil and looks dangerous, that’s it – the phone call” (Parent; Lawrence, 2017).

Children regularly being sent home for situations that with better management could be avoided was stressful for parents (Daniels, 2017). A cycle of fixed-term exclusions was also frustrating for parents (Hurlbutt, 2011). Parents reported that exclusion significantly impacted on their children’s mental health, with inappropriate sanctions exacerbating mental health problems (Kendall & Taylor, 2016).

**Bullying** is a well-documented risk factor for autistic children’s inclusion and was the predominate reason parents decided to home educate in Bower’s (2019) study. Six out of 10 mothers in Kidd and Kaczmarek’s (2010) study reported that their child was subjected to bullying, “Bullying started rearing its ugly head...so much so that I did actually come upon three boys; two were holding him
down while the other kicked him. It was the worst day of my life” (Parent; Kidd & Kaczmarek, 2010).

High school was reported to be a greater risk factor for bullying as social relationships become increasingly complex (McDonald & Lopes, 2014).

The child’s subsequent mental health difficulties and family stress. The challenges described above meant that for the autistic children in these studies, the mainstream environment was a significant source of anxiety (Kidd & Kaczmarek, 2010). Two of the mothers in Kidd and Kaczmarek’s (2010) study were advised by paediatricians to withdraw their children from school due to their level of anxiety. Children reaching ‘crisis point’ such as suicidal ideation and self-harm was the catalyst for parents to home educate,

And one day I was getting him (child with ASD) ready for school and he said, ‘I hate my life I wish I was dead’... So I just took his shirt off and I said, ‘Right you do not go to school anymore. We will think of something different’ (Parent; McDonald & Lopes, 2014).

Parents reported their children had ‘meltdowns’ after school which they attributed to their child ‘holding it together’ during the day (Kidd & Kaczmarek, 2010). Children communicated their wish to not attend school through head banging, crying and screaming (Kendall & Taylor, 2016). Ultimately the impact mainstream education was having on their children’s mental health meant that all the parents in Kendall and Taylor’s (2016) study felt that they did not elect to home educate rather they had no choice.
Parents’ experiences of home educating their autistic children

Fig. 4. Thematic map of parents’ experiences of home educating autistic children

Sense of empowerment. Having agency and choice in their children’s education led to a sense of empowerment for some parents (Kidd & Kaczmarek, 2010).

I find it selfishly the best thing I have ever done in my life. It’s incredibly enjoyable... I have never done a job or anything like this, it’s brilliant. With hindsight I was awful when he was at school. I was so unhappy and stressed. I’m a better mother now (Parent; Taylor, Kendall & Forrester, 2011).

The parents shared that putting their energy into something positive was a lot more rewarding than the energy used on disagreements with school. Families that had chosen to home educate were strengthened (Hurlbutt, 2011; Kidd & Kaczmarek, 2010).

Reduced family stress. Parents reported improvement in their own mental health and wellbeing as they had been experiencing high levels of stress as their children reached crisis point (Simmons, 2016; Taylor et al., 2011). One parent commented, “I actually have more time for my daughter, and family time because I’m not dealing with screaming and crying” (Parent; Lawrence, 2017). No longer
having to communicate with education professionals and fight for services was a welcome relief to parents (Simmons, 2016; Taylor et al., 2011).

**Feelings of resentment.** A wide range of feelings were experienced by parents which demonstrates the complex and at times all-consuming role of being a home educating parent. As described above, some parents found it empowering but some reported feelings of resentment (McDonald & Lopes, 2014). A parent explained, “It’s also a lot more pressure on me...I could have had a life and had a job, or completed my studies” (Parent; Kidd & Kaczmarek, 2010). The resentment came from feeling forced due to a lack of flexible schools (Kendall & Taylor, 2016; Kidd & Kaczmarek, 2010; McDonald & Lopes, 2014).

**Pressure.** The dual roles of running a household and being a home educator was a considerable source of pressure for parents (Daniels, 2017; Kidd & Kaczmarek, 2010).

>The only problem with it (home schooling) is that it is a double-edged sword because then you take it all on and then it is your responsibility and you don’t have time for the other parts of your life. And I have found by taking on board everything with regard to Kim (son with an ASD) and doing home schooling and all the rest of it I am quite emotionally drained all of the time (Parent; McDonald & Lopes, 2014).

Being a full-time home educator meant that one parent was unable to work which was a substantial financial sacrifice for many families. However, all the parents in Kendall and Taylor’s (2016) study agreed that despite the financial implications they were less stressed and happier home educating as their children were less stressed and happier.

**Educational Support.** The parents who felt their only option was to home educate felt let down by the lack of support they received from school (Kidd & Kaczmarek, 2010). Some parents felt frustrated, “If he was in school he would get funding so it seems a bit of a cop out that there are no lending resources. It’s all cuts here. Speech therapists don’t work with him at all since he left school”
Sourcing appropriate resources and materials was time consuming and expensive (Hurlbutt, 2011). Whilst some parents were concerned by the lack of monitoring they were also relieved to be left alone, “It is easier not to be bothered by the school” (Parent; Hurlbutt, 2011).

Social Support. For some mothers home educating community groups were a lifeline, “We also got involved with a homeschool group in our community, and that group provides social interaction and support for both boys and for me. Homeschooling was a winning decision for all of us.” (Parent; Dolan, 2017). Whilst others felt that their children were not welcome due to their autism and associated perceived disruptive behaviour, “I want support, I need support but it’s finding it. I know there are homeschooling groups. Liam has such social problems that he would be uncomfortable and disruptive and the other parents may not be accepting of him” (Parent; Kidd & Kaczmarek, 2010). A lack of support meant that for home educating parents there was little possibility for time away from their children (Kidd & Kaczmarek, 2010). This was especially true for the mothers of children who could not tolerate strangers in the house and for single mothers. Not all of the mothers expressed needing time away from their child but it is likely that time to relax and engage in leisure activities is an important aspect of maintaining wellbeing for the majority of parents.

Financial Support. Parents across the studies reported that they did not receive financial help with resources, exams and specialist support, “It’s costly! All resources have to be provided by me and just one spelling programme costs £55. GCSEs will cost hundreds in addition to text books.” (Parent; Taylor et al., 2011). Many of the autistic university students in Dolan’s (2017) study benefited from counselling or psychology services; however, not all parents had the financial resources to access this.
Practices and pedagogical approaches used by parents to home educate their autistic children

Fig. 5. Thematic map of practices and pedagogical approaches

An *individualised flexible approach* centred on the child’s needs and interests informed the parents’ approach to planning and teaching across the studies. The frequency that learning was described as child-directed was *almost never* for 5.17% of participants, *once in a while* for 37.93%, *frequently* for 41.40% and *almost all of the time* for 15.52% (Simmons, 2016). Functional skills were prioritised (Hurlbutt, 2011) and mornings were generally spent focussing on basic literacy and numeracy skills with more informal physical and social activities happening in the afternoons (Daniels, 2017).

*At the moment, he’s really into dinosaurs and things and so for his last birthday everyone’s like, books of dinosaurs! And kids’ books of dinosaurs are amazing. We are learning so much, because it’s not just learning about that animal, you’ve got to read about them and you can find maths to do and science, all within it – but he’s just thinking we’re having a nice time together messing around, so it’s like ‘trick learning’ on a Wednesday afternoon* (Parent; Lawrence, 2017).

Parents welcomed the opportunity to develop their children’s areas of particular strength (Hurlbutt, 2011). For some children this meant studying at university level (Taylor et al., 2011). A child-centred
pedagogy was described across the studies as parents adapted their plans to meet the child’s needs and emotional state day by day (Daniels, 2017).

Extra-curricular activities. Community based learning was part of home education for the majority of parents surveyed, it occurred *almost all the time* for 42.37% of participants, *frequently* for 42.37% and *almost never* for 15.25% (Simmons, 2016). Providing opportunities for the children to socialise was a priority for most parents. Children across the studies attended clubs, sporting activities, church groups, home education groups and days out to zoos, museums and galleries.

*Outside agency intervention.* The parents in Hurlbutt’s (2011) American study had long lists of interventions that they had tried with their children including: speech therapy, occupational and physical therapy, music therapy, feeding therapy, social skills classes, chiropractic services, auditory integration therapy, applied behavioural analysis, early childhood special educational services, special diets, paying for private tutors/teachers and the Son-rise programme. Access to services was dependent on whether they were covered by medical insurance or if parents could pay for them meaning not all children could access the support they needed,

> He has gone to group therapy and individual therapy for seven years. It has actually been easier to find some services for our son now that he is an adult. We were actually told by one of his therapists when he was a teenager to have him arrested because then the judge could order services that we couldn’t afford to pay (Parent; Dolan, 2017).

Interestingly, the parents in Daniels’s (2017) British study did not list outside agency support as part of their provision.

*Flexi-schooling and alternative provision.* Flexi-schooling allows pupils to attend school part-time and to be home educated part-time; however, it is at the discretion of the head teacher whether to agree to this,
“I had planned to try to flexi-school but it’s so difficult to set up. It’s hard to find a head teacher that will do it to be honest. I’m not sure why because they would get full time funding for a part time place” (Parent; Taylor et al., 2011).

The parents in several studies felt that this could potentially provide a good balance and the flexibility that their child needed (Kendall & Taylor, 2016; Lawrence, 2017).

Australia’s Schools of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE) aims to support geographically isolated students and children whose needs cannot be met in school for a range of reasons (McDonald & Lopes, 2014). When children are enrolled at SIDE an individualised education plan is developed. The mothers in this study reported that SIDE alleviated some of the pressures of being solely responsible for their child’s education. Whilst SIDE is a distance learning institution, both children in McDonald and Lopes’s study were offered the opportunity to attend the main site several times a week to work one-to-one with a male special needs teacher. This allowed the boys to socialise, develop independence skills and access flexible and tailored tuition whilst giving their mothers some respite. This therefore felt like a better educational fit for these families.

The impact of home education on the outcomes for autistic students

Fig. 6. Thematic map of the impact of home education on the outcomes for autistic children
Improved social, emotional and mental health was reported across the studies. Parents reported a drastic increase in motivation for 51.16% of participants; a drastic increase in active engagement for 53.49%; a drastic decrease in problem behaviour for 57.78%; a drastic increase in family functioning for 56.9%; a drastic decrease in stress for 52.54% (Simmons, 2016). Mothers reported their children were displaying fewer ‘autistic traits’ such as head-hitting and meltdowns which are likely stress-related, “Since he has been home, days and weeks go by without him shouting. We haven’t taken away those feelings of anxiety and at times fear but he is learning to deal with them. Now... he is just so happy!” (Parent; Kendall & Taylor, 2016). Parents also reported that self-harm was no longer an issue for their children (Kidd & Kaczmareck, 2010). Parents across the studies reported feelings of relief that their children were no longer experiencing high levels of anxiety and were flourishing (McDonal & Lopes, 2014). Parents were in agreement that their children’s social skills improved with regular extra-curricular activities as they responded well to the structure, “He is now happy, healthy and confident. He is showing an interest in a huge range of subjects. He is socialising more and full of energy just like a child should be” (Parent; Taylor et al., 2011).

Academic attainment and higher education. Through the use of a personalised education plan, modified teaching strategies and flexibility, parents reported improvements in the volume of work their children produced and their subsequent progress (Kidd & Kaczmarek, 2010). Parents were pleased their children were able to reach their potential,

We’re looking now for advanced algebra and the beginning of quantum physics... he’s just built his own computer ... and he’s doing Cyber Security [with the] Open University. That is a structure that really works for him because it’s just so clear and he sees where he is and what he still has to do (Parent; Lawrence, 2017).

McDonald and Lopes (2014) reported that both of the boys in their study who were home-schooled with the support of SIDE had positive outcomes and went onto further education. Dolan’s (2017) study focussed on autistic university students who had been home educated as school aged children
and found that strong systems of family support that were developed during the home educating years facilitated young people to be successful at university, “I was ready for college classes... Being homeschooled is what helped me start to like learning, and my mother encouraged me to pursue subjects I liked doing” (YP; Dolan, 2017). Support included love and care as well as practical support such as living at home whilst attending university.

**Discussion and implications**

This systematic review aimed to thematically synthesise the extant literature investigating autism and home education. These high quality studies offer valuable insight into what is known about parents’ experiences of home education and outcomes for autistic children. The review has implications for autistic children, their parents and schools as well as local authorities and national policy makers which are discussed below.

*What are the experiences of families who home educate an autistic child?*

Taken together, the findings from this review highlight the multiple challenges that autistic children face in mainstream school and the worrying impact that this can have on mental health and wellbeing (Neal & Frederickson, 2016; Zainal & Magiati, 2016). Whilst school can be a demanding environment for lots of children some of the challenges seem to be exacerbated for autistic students whose complex needs may not be fully understood by teaching staff (Goodall & MacKenzie 2019; Majoko 2016). Home education for the autistic children in these studies provided the individualised approach that enabled them to flourish. Flexible approaches have been identified in good autism education (Preece & Howley, 2018). Fewer sensory and social demands reduced anxieties and parents reported less depressive symptomology once they began home educating.

Parents in this research expressed concern about the disproportionate time their autistic children spent with support staff rather than qualified teachers. Whilst many children would be unable to cope academically, socially or emotionally without a high level of adult support, there is also evidence that separate instruction delivered by untrained teaching assistants is ineffective and
undermines the inclusion, learning, socialisation and independence of SEN students (Sharma & Salend, 2016). Despite not receiving the same pedagogical training as teachers there is reportedly an expectation in schools that teaching assistants can work with children with complex cognitive profiles (Webster & Blatchford, 2019). Additionally, enduring concerns have been raised on the limited training that teachers receive on meeting the needs of SEN children (Webster & Blatchford, 2019). With specialist schools on the decline, the current expectation for schools to be inclusive is likely to remain (Webster & Blatchford, 2019).

Bullying was a common motivating factor for parents to home educate. Autistic children may be particularly vulnerable to bullying due to characteristics associated with autism (e.g. higher-order theory of mind abilities and communication difficulties), decreasing the likelihood of protective factors of bullying (e.g. friends and supportive peers) (Schroeder, Cappadocia, Bebko, Pepler & Weiss, 2014). Frequent victimisation (i.e. one or more incidents per week) of autistic children is associated with mental health problems including higher levels of anxiety and self-harm (Cappadocia, Weiss & Pepler, 2012). Autistic individuals are also at greater risk of depression, self-harm and suicidal ideation (Hirvikoski et al., 2016; Raja, 2014). Loneliness has been identified as a potential contributor to depression and self-harm with suggestions that supporting autistic people to feel connected to others may be beneficial to improving their mental health (Hedley, Uljarević, Wilmot, Richdale, & Dissanayake, 2018). Most autistic children have a desire for friendship but need support in facilitating and maintaining relationships (O'Hagan & Hebron, 2017).

A clear finding from this review is that home education can be a positive experience for families. For children who have had a difficult school experience resulting in anxiety, self-harm and school avoidance these symptoms can be alleviated through home education. Positive outcomes for communication and interaction were reported as well as good educational outcomes with some young people going on to study at university level. This supports the wider home education literature that indicates in regards to academic achievement, home educated children consistently
score well above the national average of mainstream educated children (Ray, 2013). The finding here of positive social outcomes for home educated autistic children is again in line with the general home education literature (De Carvalho & Skipper, 2019). Research suggests that home educated children are involved in more extra-curricular and social activities and their social skills are equivalent or further developed than their mainstream educated peers (Medlin, 2006).

Whilst the majority of parents were pleased with their decision to home educate, due to the detrimental impact school was having on their children’s mental health as well as causing their families considerable stress, they also felt they had no other option. Parents reported little help from school or local authority/state departments. Furthermore, Hurlbutt’s (2012) survey of 52 special education teachers revealed a perspective that parents do not have the skills or knowledge to teach and children would miss out on academic and social opportunities. However, the evidence presented in this review would suggest that this is not the case. It also likely that negative teacher perceptions on home education could increase the risk of marginalising this group by reducing motivation to collaborate with parents who home educate.

Home education is a huge investment by parents who would likely benefit from increased support to source resources, cover the cost of exams and access specialist education services. A need for greater emotional, social and financial support including respite for parents who home educate children with special education needs has been identified in this review and in the wider SEN literature (Arora, 2006; Parsons & Lewis, 2010; Reilly, 2007). However, in a climate of government budget cuts, how this is achieved requires further consideration.

Flexible provision such as SIDE and flexi-schooling were identified as ways to provide the personalised curriculum and social opportunities that autistic children need as well as respite for parents. Such models encourage the acceptance and accommodation of different cognitive and behavioural profiles. This supports the wider autism literature on alternative provision in the UK. For example, a centre for autistic children experiencing emotionally based school avoidance focussed on
developing individual strengths and promoting good mental health through a flexible approach and positive relationships (Preece & Howley, 2018).

Whilst many benefits of home education have been identified, it is not a viable option for all families. More needs to be done to support autistic children in school so they can thrive academically and emotionally and therefore avoid reaching ‘crisis point’. The factors that led to school-placements breaking down in the studies reviewed here were not unique to the home education literature. Similar themes have emerged in the autism and school exclusion literature (Sproston et al., 2017) and in autism and emotionally based school avoidance research (O’Hagan, 2020). Current available evidence (e.g. Preece & Howley, 2018; Whitaker & Preece, 2013) suggests that protective factors to successful schooling for autistic children include trusting relationships with school staff, positive peer relationships, good home-school communication, a flexible, personalised approach to teaching and learning, an environment adapted to reduce sensory overload and anxiety, quiet calm spaces for autistic children to work in, proportionate access to qualified teaching staff, appropriate intervention to meet communication and interaction needs and sufficient time for teaching staff to plan for individual needs (Charman et al., 2011).

Implications for policy and practice

Several implications for professionals have been identified. Ongoing training for school staff on what it means to provide an equitable, flexible and inclusive education is warranted. This also needs to include how adults can help facilitate friendships and positive peer relationships for autistic children to protect them from loneliness and bullying. In addition to good autism education practice being implemented for young people with an autism diagnosis there is also an implication to develop protective factors for younger children in early primary school with or without a diagnosis. The development of psychological factors such as: resilience; social support; social connectedness; self-efficacy; and managing perfectionist tendencies would help to prevent children from reaching crisis point. Such factors are developed through: trusting staff and student relationships; pupil participation; psychoeducation; social skills intervention; extra-curricular activities; and friendship.
is important that schools develop children’s understanding of autism and other needs from a young age through stories, characters and a whole school ethos of celebrating difference (McCann, 2019). Building friendships and acceptance of others from a young age can be protective factors to autistic children as they go through school and social relationships become increasingly complicated (McCann, 2019).

Increased awareness, understanding and support for home education at a local schools level and national government level would hopefully reduce the stigma and pressures experienced by parents. Home educating parents would benefit from increased access to resources.

**Implications for research**
This systematic literature review has identified several high quality papers in the field of autism and home education. The papers have predominantly focussed on the perceptions of the adults in the children’s lives; and whilst the evidence suggests that home education has been beneficial for children in reducing their stress and anxiety it would be useful to further listen to the child’s voice and their understanding of their own lived experience.

For the parents in this review and in the wider literature, home education can be a wonderfully rewarding experience and a relief to see their children flourishing (Catlin, 2019). However, being both parent and teacher means there is little time or space for respite and therefore home education is tiring for all parents, not just those of autistic children (Lois, 2013). Good mental health is a prerequisite for the resilience undoubtedly needed to sustain such an all-consuming role for many years. Therefore, how this could be supported through arrangements such as flexi-schooling or alternative provision warrant further exploration.

**Study limitations**
This review aimed to examine the experiences of parents who home educate autistic children and has successfully provided an overview of the studies in this area. There are possible limitations to be considered. First, as an emerging field of research the number of studies is small and so the breadth
and depth of this phenomenon requires further exploration. Due to the limited available research all studies meeting the inclusion criteria were included regardless of methodological quality. However, only one study was categorised as low-quality and six were categorised as high-quality reflecting reliability and validity of this research. The theses all scored highly which is likely related to the available word count. Shorter papers may be disadvantaged which the quality appraisal framework does not take into account. Finally, the review was limited to peer reviewed studies which omitted other high quality research such as book chapters and masters-level dissertations.

Conclusions
The decision by parents to home educate their autistic child tends to be influenced by the child’s social experiences at school, whether their educational needs have been met and the interplay this has with the child’s mental health. Parents who have felt empowered by home educating their autistic children and who have received appropriate support in the form of emotional, social and financial resources, are in a good position to provide their child with a flexible, balanced and individualised education leading to positive academic and life outcomes.

Acknowledgement
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Paper Two: Autistic Girls and Emotionally Based School Avoidance: Supportive factors for successful re-engagement in mainstream high school

Prepared for in accordance with the author guidelines for submission to the Journal of Autism Developmental Disorders (Appendix 6)
Abstract
School can be challenging for autistic girls who are at risk of internalised anxiety which can ultimately lead to school avoidance. Low attendance is acknowledged as negatively impacting on educational attainment and exacerbating mental health difficulties. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three autistic girls aged 13-15 years from different high schools, their parent(s) and key adult. Thematic analysis identified the first phase of re-engagement is developing a trusting student-key adult relationship. This provides the foundation for social and emotional intervention. Challenges were also acknowledged and possible improvements reflected upon. These results will aid educators and researchers aiming to support the successful inclusion of autistic girls at risk of experiencing emotionally based school avoidance in mainstream high schools.

Keywords
Autism spectrum disorders, female, school avoidance, school refusal, exclusion, non-attendance

Introduction
Emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA) is significantly higher among autistic children and adolescents than their typically developing peers (Munkhaugen, Gjevik, Pripp, Sponheim & Diseth, 2017). Impaired social communication is one of the two domains under which autism is defined (APA, 2013) and the one that most significantly impacts on autistic girls’ ability to sustain positive relationships with friends and teachers (Jamison & Shuttler, 2017). A discrepancy between social competence and a desire to feel socially included is linked to the development of school anxiety in autistic girls (Cook, Ogden & Winstone, 2018). Whilst it might appear that girls are coping in school, parents report that girls are aware of their differences and try to camouflage them which is exhausting and emotionally draining (Jarman & Rayner, 2015; Sutherland, Hodge, Bruck, Costley & Klieve, 2017). Negative social interactions with peers and teachers increases the risk of high levels of internalised anxiety, stress and depression for autistic girls which can ultimately lead to EBSA (O’Hagan & Bond, 2019).
Terminology used to conceptualise EBSA has been thoroughly debated but remains rather confused in the literature due to the heterogeneity of the phenomenon (Elliott & Place, 2019). This study uses the term EBSA as it focusses on the cause of the school avoidance as specifically related to mental health difficulties and therefore does not include truancy. Second, the word avoidance is preferred over the word non-attendance as it encompasses the continuum of school avoidant behaviours described by Kearney (2006) from pleading, crying, and clinging, to missed lessons, missed days or complete non-attendance. The autistic girls in the current study also preferred the term EBSA over school refusal as they felt this better reflected their debilitating anxiety.

It is well documented that school can be a challenging environment for autistic children but autistic girls seem better equipped to blend in and cope during their primary school years (Jarman & Rayner, 2015). It is theorised that young girls are more able to imitate social behaviour and assimilate with their neuro-typical peers compared to autistic boys (Hiller, Young & Weber, 2014; Sedgewick, Hill, Yates, Pickering & Pellicano, 2015). However, on closer investigation, it appears autistic girls are likely to be in close proximity to their female peers but with little reciprocal engagement (Dean, Harwood & Kasari, 2017). Given the social communication impairments which define autism, girls can struggle to interpret the subtle cues of female interaction such as eye rolls, smirks and shared glances (Dean, Adams & Kasari, 2013). Not conforming to social norms increases the risk of social isolation (Cook, Ogden & Winstone, 2018). Therefore, masking skills can serve as a protective factor (Jarman & Rayner, 2015). However, as social relationships become more complicated and require more sophisticated skills it becomes increasingly difficult for girls to maintain the friendships they desire (Dean et al., 2014; Sedgewick et al., 2015). Girls are therefore more likely to experience social isolation and bullying in high school and subsequently report feelings of loneliness (Honeybourne, 2015). Feeling isolated and unsafe increases the risk of school avoidance (Cook et al., 2018).
In addition to difficulties in sustaining peer relationships, autistic girls also find conforming to the social expectations of student-teacher relationships difficult (Sproston, Sedgewick & Crane, 2017). This is likely compounded by several other risk factors for increased levels of anxiety and stress for autistic girls in mainstream high schools. These may include:

- striving for academic perfection
- adhering to implicit social norms
- a lack of order and predictability
- sensory sensitivities
- frequent transitions
- busy corridors and canteens (Sproston et al., 2017).

The above challenges experienced by autistic girls are linked with a rise in behavioural problems and subsequent punitive exclusions (Sproston et al., 2017). Girls who could once internalise their anxiety may eventually reach crisis point and display externalising behaviours such as meltdowns or sitting silently unable to engage. Educators with limited knowledge of autism can find challenging behaviours difficult to manage, leading to inflexibility and inappropriate sanctions such as cycles of school exclusion (Brede, Remington, Kenny, Warren & Pellicano, 2017). Autistic girls have identified teachers’ understanding of autism as the fundamental factor that could improve education for them (Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019). Equally, teachers have expressed concern over their lack of training and knowledge to support autistic children within mainstream school (Majoko, 2016). Parents also report little confidence in the capacity of schools to provide their autistic children with a safe, enjoyable and inclusive experience, especially as they transition into high school (Makin, Hill & Pellicano, 2017). It is therefore unsurprising that a lack of flexible and inclusive practice, poor student-teacher relationships, punitive punishment, social exclusion and the child’s subsequent poor mental health are risk factors to autistic girls being marginalised in high school and experiencing EBSA (Sproston et al., 2017).
EBSA is correlated with poor academic attainment (Department for Education [DfE], 2017), social exclusion (Hebron and Humphrey 2014) and the exacerbation of mental health difficulties (Kearney & Fornander, 2016). Autistic boys and girls are both at an increased risk of experiencing EBSA and whilst their needs are similar in many ways, there are subtle differences which may require a more tailored approach for girls. For example, a systematic review of the literature identified that compared to autistic boys, autistic girls are more likely to experience challenges with response inhibition, age-related expectations of play behaviours in adolescence, and internalised symptoms that become more externalised in adolescence (Hull, Mandy & Petrides, 2017). Autistic girls tend to have greater cognitive flexibility than autistic boys which may be why they are able to develop techniques to mask their social communication difficulties until the social context becomes too complex (Lehnhardt, 2015). Therefore, it is crucial that educators are provided with the knowledge and skills they need to support autistic girls who experience EBSA to promote good mental health stemming from positive relationships in the school community. The present study therefore consulted with autistic girls, their parents and educators to explore the supportive factors that have helped autistic girls successfully re-engage in mainstream high school and maintain their attendance following a period of EBSA.

**Method**

**Design**

This research was underpinned by a critical realist position which recognises that knowledge can be fallible and that reality cannot be understood with complete certainty. Critical realism uses elements of both positivism and constructivism and interprets reality as divided across three interacting levels: the empirical, the actual and the real (Fletcher, 2017). For example, how people interact with, interpret and construct understanding of the world is related to their own experiences. This study is the first to explore the influences, at different ecological levels, on successful re-engagement for autistic girls who have experienced EBSA. Critical realism will therefore support the aim of exploring
the interrelationships between autistic girls and their environments, to explain how re-engagement in education is possible within complex systems.

A qualitative exploratory multiple case study design was selected to address the following research question, allowing an in-depth enquiry about the contemporary phenomenon of the process of re-engagement of autistic girls who experience EBSA in the real-life context of schools (Yin, 2014) (see appendix 7 for case study detail):

(1) What are the supportive factors that help autistic girls who experience EBSA re-engage and maintain their attendance in mainstream high school?

Each case study explored how the same aim across the cases (i.e. re-engaging an autistic girl in education) was achieved. The objective phenomenon investigated was influenced by the mechanisms and processes operating in the context at a particular time. For example, intervention around school avoidance is influenced by school and local policies, available resources and skills of professionals working with the child, school, and family. A critical realist approach searches for causation in order to explain why things are the way they are (Fletcher, 2017).

Three cases of autistic girls who had successfully re-engaged and maintained their attendance in mainstream education following EBSA were selected from three different local authorities. For each case, data were gathered from the young person, her parent(s) and a member of school staff enabling multiple sources of evidence to be triangulated.

Schools were recruited to take part in the study through the researcher’s contacts in local authority educational psychology services and specialist autism services. The schools were based in England and Wales. Schools were contacted in the first instance and briefed on the inclusion criteria. The participants were selected by a member of the school staff who worked closely with the autistic pupils based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) Must have a diagnosis of autism from a recognised medical practitioner or Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS); (2) Aged
between 11 and 16 years and attend a mainstream high school; (3) Female; (4) Must have had a period of EBSA with a decrease in attendance followed by an increase in school attendance.

Whilst there were no specific criteria in regards to the percentage of missed school as EBSA can be understood on a continuum (Kearney, 2006), the Department for Education’s (2017) categorisation of persistent absenteeism as missing 10% or more of possible sessions was used as a broad cut-off.
### Participants (All names are pseudonyms)

#### Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Autistic girl</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Year group</th>
<th>Key adult’s job role</th>
<th>SEND status</th>
<th>School setting</th>
<th>Ofsted/Estyn rating</th>
<th>Demographic of school</th>
<th>SEN provision in school</th>
<th>Outside agencies that work with the school</th>
<th>Policies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Erin</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>High Level Teaching Assistant</td>
<td>Statement of SEN with funding</td>
<td>Mainstream high school for 11-16 year olds with 840 pupils.</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Located in an affluent, small rural village. Pupils travel from a variety of areas. Most pupils are white British. Proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. Proportion of pupils with SEN is slightly lower than national average. Proportion of pupils with a Statement of SEN is higher than national average.</td>
<td>Specialist resource base for 35 autistic pupils and a specialist resource base for 7 dyslexic pupils.</td>
<td>EPS, Local Authority Support Officers, School Nurse, CAMHS, Sensory Service, SALT, Specialist Teacher Advisers, Social Services, NSPCC, Parent Partnership Service</td>
<td>School policy on attendance does not address EBSA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Chloe</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Pastoral Support Officer</td>
<td>SEN support without funding</td>
<td>Mainstream high school for 11-18 year olds</td>
<td>Good and Outstanding for personal development</td>
<td>Located in an affluent suburb of a small city. Most pupils are white British. Proportion</td>
<td>SEN base for all year groups. Additional learning resource base/nurture space for pupils with a</td>
<td>EPS, SALT, Sensory Impaired Service</td>
<td>Attendance policy states that when attendance drops below</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
with 1022 pupils. of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. Proportion of pupils with SEN and the number of EHCPs is average. modified curriculum. ‘Safe haven’ for vulnerable pupils at break and lunch time. Sensory room for autistic pupils. Year 7 nurture group. 1-1 and small group sessions for pupils with mental health difficulties. Paediatricians Autistic pathway Behaviour pathway Information, Advice and Support Service. School health Primary CAMHS Specialist CAMHS School Health Advisor Medical Needs Team Young People’s Services Social Care Drugs and Alcohol Team Early Intervention in Psychosis Team REFLECT: Children’s Bereavement Services Safeguarding Children in Education 86% for whatever reason an action plan will be drawn up.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Current Position</th>
<th>Additional Notes</th>
<th>Mentoring Team</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Jasmine</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Learning Support Assistant</td>
<td>EHCP with funding</td>
<td>Mainstream high school for 11-18 year olds with 1983 pupils.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Located in a large city, it is a multi-cultural and multi-faith school. Proportion of pupils with an EHCP is average. Pupils with SEN support is below the national average. Pupils whose first language is not English is well above the national average at 30.8%. Pupils eligible for free school meals is above the national average at 33.2%.

Pupils with mental health difficulties are offered:
- Breakfast club
- Inclusion classroom
- Lunchtime drop-in and time out passes
- Intervention groups
- In-class support
- Additional groups e.g. boxing, ‘she’ club and gardening
- Bereavement group
- Peer mentoring
- Pupil Profile
- Red/green wristband for anxiety.
- Flexible/bespoke timetables
- Art therapy

**Excel Mentoring Youth Offending Team Catch 22**

**School policy on attendance and truancy does not address EBSA.**
**Erin.** Erin’s mother started to have concerns regarding Erin’s development when she was 18 months old; health professionals hypothesised she was autistic and she was diagnosed at the age of seven. Erin began to display school avoidant behaviours in Year 5 and her attendance dipped. Transition into high school was difficult for Erin and her attendance went down to 81%; she found communicating with teachers and complying with expectations difficult and experienced intimidating behaviour on her journey to and from school in the local authority funded taxi for special educational needs (SEN) children. In Year 8, Erin experienced two family bereavements and parental illness at which point she began to self-harm and her EBSA increased. This was expressed through leaving lessons, running home, and having up to a week off at a time. School support was ongoing for Erin but it was bereavements counselling with an outside agency that triggered the start of her re-engagement with school. Erin’s attendance began to improve in the spring term of Year 8.

**Chloe.** Chloe’s mother sought a diagnosis for Chloe in Year 6 but her case was closed as school staff were unwilling to provide the evidence requested. Chloe had a difficult transition into high school and found the environment loud and difficult to navigate. Chloe’s EBSA began in the first week of Year 7 following a breakdown in relationship with a particular teacher. Chloe found navigating social interactions with teachers and peers confusing and complex and experienced bullying. Chloe spent time in internal exclusion (a form of punitive punishment where children are removed from their class to work in isolation) and became distrusting of the school community. Chloe quickly began to experience anxiety which was expressed through not eating, hiding in the toilets, running out of lessons, crying and increased school absence. Through Chloe’s mother’s persistence she was diagnosed with autism in Year 8. Chloe changed schools in the last term of Year 8 and her attendance greatly improved.

**Jasmine.** School avoidant behaviours were first expressed in nursery and Reception; she would scream at the door whilst four members of staff tried to coax her in. At the age of five, Jasmine spent a lot of time in hospital due to stomach pains which, on reflection, Jasmine’s mother suspects were due to anxiety and school-related stress. Jasmine eventually made a friend and settled into
school life. When her friend left in Year 3 Jasmine began to struggle again and her attendance declined. Jasmine had low attendance in Year 5 and the pressure of Year 6 tests was a further barrier for her. When Jasmine’s mother was diagnosed with cancer that year Jasmine stopped attending school. Jasmine began high school in Year 7 and for the first month it seemed to go well. By October, Jasmine was being badly bullied and her nose was broken by a peer. The bullying increased and Jasmine became unwell with depression, anxiety, self-harm and psychosis. Jasmine did not attend mainstream school for almost two years. Jasmine was diagnosed with Asperger’s syndrome in Year 8. She had a phased return from a hospital school back into mainstream towards the end of Year 8. She is now doing very well emotionally, socially, academically and is attending school full time.

**Procedure**

Ethical approval was granted by The University of Manchester on 7th March 2018 (appendix 8). The researcher carried out all interviews. The interview schedules (appendix 9) were influenced by the interview schedules utilised by Nuttall and Woods (2013), the bio-ecological systems outlined by Bronfenbrenner (1979), and the researcher’s exploratory study (O’Hagan & Bond, 2019). Each interview schedule was adapted to the participant group (e.g. for parents there were more questions about diagnosis and history) but all primarily focused on school attendance experiences and factors which supported re-engagement with school. Before interviews, all participants were given information outlining the research and completed written consent (appendix 10). The parent and school staff participants were given the semi-structured interview schedule prior to the interview to provide time for participants to think about the questions. The girls were not given the interview schedule in advance to reduce the possibility of them feeling it was additional homework or increasing anxiety. For each case, the researcher first interviewed the mother. This was followed by a short interview with the young person. The purpose of the first short interview was to build rapport and begin to explore the young person’s world with general discussion about their friends, family, school, hobbies and holidays. The next interview conducted was with a member of staff who worked closely with the young person. The last interview was the second interview with the young
person which focussed on the supportive factors to re-engagement following EBSA. Interviews were transcribed and transcripts were sent back to participants for member checking - no changes were made.

Chloe was not comfortable talking to an unfamiliar person and so completed the interview schedule as a written questionnaire. Chloe’s responses to the written questionnaire were short and concise. There is a possible limitation that a questionnaire does not provide the same opportunity for the interviewer to explore answers in the same depth as in a face-to-face semi-structured interview. However, Chloe’s mother and key adult described Chloe as very quiet and therefore it is likely that her written answers reflected what she would have communicated verbally if she had felt comfortable enough to do so.

**Analysis**

Inductive thematic analysis was utilised (see appendix 11 for an example of initial coding of interview transcripts) to suit the research purpose of exploring the interacting systems that support re-engagement in education (Braun & Clarke, 2019). In line with critical realism and Braun and Clarke’s (2019) stance that thematic analysis is a process of reflexive interpretation of meaning rather than a discovery of an accurate reality or truth, inter-rater reliability measures were not utilised. However, a collaborative and reflexive approach was taken between the researcher and research supervisors to make-meaning from the analysis (see appendix 12 for an example of data analysis from transcript extract to initial code, basic theme and global theme) (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Cross-case analysis was conducted to enable an in-depth exploration of the supportive factors and barriers to re-engagement in mainstream education, with a view to draw out practical implications to support autistic girls experiencing EBSA. Consideration was also given to analysing each case individually which may have provided further opportunity to increase the prominence of the young person’s voice. However, the aim of this research was to support practitioners working
with highly anxious autistic pupils and therefore cross-case analysis enabled the combination of factors that led to successful outcomes to be explained in detail. From this tentative theory on the phases of re-engagement can begin to be developed.

**Findings**

Eight main themes were identified following the data analysis see Fig. 7 for full thematic map. They are presented as an overarching synthesis to explicitly highlight the relationships and provision that supported the girls’ re-engagement with school.

**Fig. 7. Full thematic map**

**Relationship with key adult and wider staff team**

At the start of their re-engagement journey each girl had significant anxiety and a distrust of school, educators and peers: “She was quite distrustful of people when she first started and she’d be very withdrawn. She’d use her body, she’d use her hair to withdraw and to keep you at bay, to keep you away” (Jasmine’s key adult). The first phase of re-engaging the girls was to develop a trusting relationship with a key adult (roles included: higher level teaching assistant; pastoral support officer; learning support assistant) which as Chloe’s key adult commented, “Took a long, long time to get
that bond... it’s really only been time that’s enabled us to help Chloe because we’ve just had to get to know her.” School had not been a place where the girls felt safe and understood making the relationship of the key adult and eventually the wider pastoral and SEN teams core to the girls’ re-engagement; Jasmine commented: “They support me and they are always there to talk to, and they know me very well, so they understand things and stuff.” Establishing trusting relationships laid the foundation for more complex mental health intervention to address self-harm and develop self-esteem. Jasmine’s key adult explained:

“This usually comes from internalising everything, closing down and shutting down and all they can do then is cut for relief... It was intensive one-to-ones... We got past the shame, she was very ashamed. The key thing was talking about emotions as well. Just making her realise that she wasn’t a freak, that’s what she felt like at the time.”

Erin’s key adult promoted confidence and self-worth through providing opportunities for meaningful rewards and for Erin to have responsibility for administrative jobs that helped her to feel valued and useful. All the girls still experienced anxiety and maintaining their attendance took effort and determination. Promoting optimism and hopefulness was prominent:

“She’s got low self-esteem anyway and if we keep going on and on at her, it’s not going to help that situation. I think if we can build her self-esteem up I think things would be a lot more positive for her at school because she’s so negative towards everything, that’s hard. She’s in that rut and it’s about trying to get her to think a bit more positively about herself and situations” (Erin’s key adult).

Developing a trusting relationship with the girls took skilled educators time, persistence and dedication and was therefore influenced by wider systems including SEN provision and funding. Schools received additional funding for Erin and Jasmine which supported staff to provide the flexible and individualised approach they needed. Chloe did not receive SEN funding and therefore staff were initially reluctant for her to access SEN resources. However, as Chloe had acute anxiety which frequently prevented her from accessing mainstream lessons and it was not viable for her key
adult to always be with her, the pastoral and SEN teams worked together to support her flexibly: “It wasn’t like anyone was having to be employed to look after Chloe or anything, it was just trying to absorb it in our normal roles” (Chloe’s key worker).

All of the girls had difficulty managing student-teacher relationships and a break-down in these relationships affected their self-worth and attendance. For example, Erin’s relationship with the special educational needs coordinator had broken down and she perceived that staff found her annoying:

“I’ve been having trouble with the school so I get like a bunch of detentions, exclusions and stuff, not necessarily ‘cause I’m bad ‘cause like I’m not, it’s more I’m annoying I think the word is” (Erin).

At times, teachers’ insufficient understanding of and empathy for autism led to inappropriate sanctions. Erin found internal exclusion particularly difficult: “I get really uncomfortable in there… it just like gives me a trapped feeling” (Erin). A breakdown in trust made it difficult for relationships to be repaired. Chloe was early on in her re-engagement journey and still felt that: “Teachers could be more understanding and helpful” (Chloe). Staff perceptions of autism and associated behaviours were a challenge for the girls which meant that having a key adult who understood them and advocated for them was a significant supportive factor in their re-engagement; Erin’s mother commented: “She’s [key adult] got a great connection and understanding with Erin so thankfully at least there’s one there. One is better than none isn’t it?” However, if only one member of staff had a trusting relationship with the girls it was challenging for that person to manage their wider job role and responsibilities. Due to relationships that had broken down and the time it took to build relationships with the girls it could be difficult to widen their support network. This was further compounded by not all staff having the same understanding of autism and flexible approach to managing the girls’ needs. This was illustrated by Erin’s key adult:
“Last year she had maths with a particular teacher and she just didn’t hit it off with that teacher from day one and that was it for the rest of the year and the times I would go down and catch her and she would be standing outside the classroom because she’d been sent out...and every lesson was exactly the same.”

The process of integrating further within the school community is discussed under the theme of belonging.

Relationship with peers and friends

The girls all had a desire for friendship which was a motivating factor for attending school as Erin’s mother commented: “she throws herself into the social side of things.” A lack of friendship and feelings of loneliness and isolation were risk factors to low attendance, Jasmine’s mother explained: “It’s all about friendships really not feeling isolated and alone because that feeds into the negativity and the depression.” Therefore, when Chloe and Jasmine returned to school, staff quickly identified developing friendship as a priority. However, the girls found social relationships confusing making it difficult for them to form and maintain fulfilling friendships. They benefited from staff identifying peers and facilitating the friendship. The girls also benefited from ongoing support with maintaining and understanding their friendships especially in regards to managing the intensity of close relationships and widening their friendship groups:

“One of the key things in our one-to-ones was we discussed any social aspects and ... how to expand those friendships, less of the intensity without it moving the depth of emotion away” (Jasmine’s key worker).

The girls all talked about their friends as an important factor in their enjoyment of school and valued having people to spend break and lunchtimes with which is likely to have also served as a protective factor from bullying.
Belonging in the school community

The girls’ sense of belonging in the school community was promoted through developing positive relationships with peers and staff:

“They just basically look out for her, everyone’s really friendly and always supportive. All the teachers are always offering, ‘Hi Jasmine.’ Giving her a smile because she likes that, she likes to be acknowledged and it really helps her get through the day” (Jasmine’s mother).

Over time, Jasmine became integrated within the school community by taking part in extra-curricular clubs: “I run a LGBT club with my friend. For the younger students who are struggling... We normally just sit and talk and it’s like a safe place for anyone to come and talk about their issues and stuff” (Jasmine). However, getting to this sense of belonging had taken two years of support from school staff as her key worker explained: “Making her feel that this is her second home because before then it was very much home and she had to be here because you have to go to school.” The pastoral team started by encouraging Jasmine to speak to staff members by asking her to deliver messages. The aim was to develop Jasmine’s confidence in social interaction without making her feel desperately uncomfortable. This moved on to interacting with her peer group, making friends, and joining clubs.

Erin would have also liked to be further involved in school life as sport was important to her:

“Last year I used to do like loads of sports like rugby, basketball, dance, football, cricket, and rounders. I really did want to do more but I ended up stopping doing all of them because no one was there to pick me up after school so I’m like really disappointed too. Rugby was my favourite” (Erin).

For Erin team sport had been a supportive factor in her attendance but as she was reliant on funded transport for SEN children, the interplay between the systems became a barrier. Whilst Jasmine and Erin each had a wide group of friends, Chloe had one close friendship and her involvement in the school community was limited. At the time of the interview, Chloe had been at her current school
for about a year and whilst she had made huge progress she seemed to be at an earlier stage in re-engagement and developing a sense of belonging within the school community.

**Individualised flexible approach**

Individualised curricula were valued to meet the girls’ needs as well as their academic potential. For example, to accommodate Jasmine’s anxiety, social understanding and academic ability her provision included gardening, personal development sessions and extended project time (equivalent to 50% of an A Level). Alternative provision was utilised to provide Erin with an individualised approach; she spent one day a week at a specialist school working with animals and in a cafe. Her mother felt: “It’s good for her really because like we said, she’s not very good with the social side.”

For Erin, this gave her the opportunity to increase her independence and social skills whilst doing something she enjoyed. It also reduced the pressure of a full week in mainstream school.

Access to safe calm areas in the school was highly prominent. The girls utilised these areas when overwhelmed, anxious, on a reduced timetable and at break and lunch. The girls each had a time-out card that enabled them to leave lessons but this could still pose challenges such as not all staff honouring it and the girls being embarrassed to use it:

“She has been given a time-out card but she felt a little bit embarrassed by using that … I don’t know if she’s passed that phase or not but every time you think, ‘yeah OK, we’ve got this problem, here’s a solution, try this.’ It works for a short spell and then you can pretty much throw it out the window and you’ll have to look at another solution” (Erin’s mother).

**Incorporating the voice of the young person into their support plan**

The girls appreciated being able to work collaboratively with school staff and take an active role in planning their support. Chloe’s key adult explained how staff originally expected Chloe to fit within the school system but it soon became evident that a flexible approach was required:

“When she first started we very much tried to fit her into the box but you know, it quickly became apparent because although she can be silent, she’s quite forcefully silent, so it’s like
this just isn’t going to work. There’s no amount of forcing, the more you became pushy with her, the further away she withdrew. So it was like, you know: ‘We need some buy in from you’ and it was just like: ‘How can you buy in?’ So it was 100% led by Chloe.”

The girls saw the value in re-engaging with school and Chloe and Jasmine were particularly self-motivated to do well. Jasmine described the importance of keeping her mind busy and her mother agreed that studying had been pivotal in improving Jasmine’s depression. However, her perfectionism was a risk factor to burn out and subsequent low attendance and so this needed to be monitored sensitively by staff.

**Parent advocacy**

Not reinforcing school avoidance whilst prioritising their daughters’ health was a delicate balance identified by the mothers:

“I’ve been seeing a therapist through [local autism charity] for myself because I’ve been suffering a little bit recently and she’s autistic herself and has an autistic son. I was talking to her about how I never know how far to push Chloe to go into school because I think the right place is for her to be in school and [Chloe’s key adult] agrees, but it’s turned ugly in the past when I’ve pushed too far, so I am cautious. But this lady said to me when she was at high school she was extremely anxious and her mum just let her stay off school and she said, she realises now that reinforced to her that school was worth being anxious about” (Chloe’s mother).

Collaborative home-school communication enabled parents and staff to share concerns and suggestions and the mothers praised the flexibility of staff when arranging meetings and returning phone calls. The mothers had all had a difficult journey navigating the systems for diagnosis and SEN support and so it was a relief to eventually feel supported by school staff:

“They work with me, they always try and find out when she’s been off, why she’s been off. Whereas [previous high school] weren’t interested in finding out and helping and seeing if
they could do something differently. Whereas [Chloe’s key worker] has always phoned and said, ‘How’s Chloe? There’s no rush but when she does come back is there something we can do to help?’” (Chloe’s mother).

Relationships with outside agencies
A trusting relationship with therapeutic professionals was central to the success of external support. Due to self-harm and suicidal ideation all three girls had been referred to CAMHS. Following the initial assessment Erin did not meet the threshold for further support. However, she received counselling through a local bereavement charity which her mother felt was a hugely supportive factor in her school attendance:

“We put the referral in but we had to go on a waiting list and we were in the queue for a couple of months but once we’d got it, it seemed to work wonders. It was one-to-one with a gentleman, brilliant, the pair of them hit it off immediately. Where I thought as a family we were quite open and free to speak as we see fit, she didn’t want to with us, but she spoke openly with the counsellor and once she started opening up, then it seemed she started to come out into a calmer Erin. And her time in school became fuller days” (Erin’s mother).

The relationship between Erin and her counsellor enabled her to share her concerns and without breaking confidentiality the counsellor made suggestions to Erin’s mother and key adult on what needed to change at school. Chloe had a few sessions at CAMHS and with a private therapist but was unable to engage with unfamiliar people. As seen with Erin, a trusting relationship is essential to therapeutic support and therefore CAMHS offered to provide Chloe’s key adult with coaching, she commented: “I mean it many ways, gosh, I’m out of my depth but unfortunately we’re dealing with it more and more so any knowledge is going to help.”

Jasmine had been under CAMHS for over four years and had received both therapy and medication. For Jasmine, the medication sertraline helped: “her to feel happy and like she wants to leave the house and come to school, happy with life” (Jasmine’s mother). Jasmine did not find the therapeutic
sessions with mental health practitioners beneficial but she built a bond with her psychiatrist who discussed autism with her which helped her to make sense of her experience.

**Diagnosis supporting girls’ re-engagement**

The mothers had all been pivotal in their daughters receiving a diagnosis and SEN support, Jasmine’s mother commented: “I applied for the Education, Health and Care plan because the school wouldn’t do it. No one would help me so I did it myself.” All the mothers agreed that an autism diagnosis helped their daughters to get the support that they needed and for school staff to understand their behaviour as related to SEN. Jasmine and Chloe’s mothers felt that their daughters’ transition into high school would have been improved with a diagnosis:

> “I’d like to think something could have been put in place for her starting and they could have been better prepared and I perhaps could have had some coaching so that I knew what to expect from school. So yes, it has impacted dramatically on her schooling and her mental health” (Chloe’s mother).

Learning about autism also helped Jasmine and Chloe reduce their anxieties around perceived difference which supported their re-engagement in education:

> “She knew she was different and she couldn’t understand why and then she had a big light on things when the psychiatrist said, “You’ve got Asperger’s and you know, you will have trouble with social communication skills and making friends, just school will be difficult” (Jasmine’s mother).

**Discussion**

This study aimed to explore the supportive factors that help autistic girls who experience EBSA re-engage and maintain their attendance in mainstream education. The findings tentatively demonstrate that trusting relationships are the foundation for autistic girls to re-integrate into the school community and this begins with establishing trust between the child and key adult. Positive
student-teacher relationships have been identified as significantly influencing autistic girls’ experiences of school (Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019; Honeybourne, 2015; Jarman & Rayner, 2015). In the cases of Erin and Chloe, an identified barrier to positive student-teacher relationships were staff perceptions of autism in girls and subsequent inflexibility and inappropriate sanctions which is echoed in recent literature (Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019; Sproston et al., 2017). As autism in girls is a relatively new area of research, educators’ limited knowledge on the presentation of female autism has been acknowledged (Cridland, Jones, Caputi & Magee, 2014; Honeybourne, 2015; Jarman & Rayner, 2015). Teachers are less likely to identify autistic girls’ difficulties compared to autistic boys which impacts on the support and provision they provide (Hiller et al., 2014). Further training in this field has been called for (Majoko 2016).

Relationships take time to build and are supported by wider school systems such as supportive leadership (Symes & Humphrey, 2011) and SEN funding. During the first phase of re-engagement the girls were not accessing mainstream lessons and therefore benefited from safe spaces where they could develop positive relationships with staff. In support of this, McKay-Brown and colleagues’ (2019) study of re-engagement following EBSA found the young people benefited from a safe space to learn how to re-engage in an educational setting, how to cope with school, develop their self-worth and positive relationships with teachers. Aligned with this, the key adult relationship in the current study supported the girls to engage with mental health intervention to promote self-worth and positive thinking. The importance of mental health intervention in supporting EBSA is evident in the wider literature (Heyne, Floor, Ollendick, Van Widenfelt & Westenberg, 2014; McKay-Brown et al., 2019). Chloe and Jasmine found it easier to engage with school staff once a relationship was established rather than with outside agencies. Similarly, teacher led intervention has been identified as producing the largest overall effects for autistic students (Watkins, Ledbetter-Cho, O’Reilly, Barnard-Brak & Garcia-Grau, 2019). The safety of trusting relationships also supported the girls to express themselves which was pivotal to their participation in planning their support and helped the
girls to feel listened to, understood and created a sense of agency. Whilst good participation practice was evident in the success of these girls, worryingly, the literature reports that autistic girls do not always feel valued, respected or listened to in mainstream schools (Goodall & MacKenzie, 2019). The findings here emphasise the importance of person centred planning to support re-engagement in education through an increased understanding of the individual’s barriers to and motivators for success (Preece & Howley, 2018).

The girls benefited from ongoing support with social skills and friendship development; enhancement of these skills is likely to reduce social anxiety (Cook et al., 2018). However, it is concerning that despite the well documented evidence that autistic children experience difficulties with socialisation, emotional wellbeing and behaviour, it is reported that these fundamental areas are under-addressed in support plans (Gelbar, Bruder, DeBiase & Molteni, 2018; McDonald et al., 2019). All three girls desired friendship and connection with their peers but required continued support to develop social skills, identify potential friends, initiate and maintain friendships (Jamison & Schuttler, 2017; Sedgewick et al., 2015).

A number of important factors related to good autism practice supported the girls in this study to manage school life. These factors include:

- a relationship based approach (Preece & Howley, 2018)
- facilitation of positive peer relationships (Jarman & Rayner, 2015)
- positive teacher relationships (Honeybourne, 2015)
- effective communication and partnership between staff and parents (Kendall & Taylor, 2016)
- an individual and whole school approach to promoting good mental health (Tomlinson, Bond & Hebron, 2019)
- incorporating the voice of the young person in planning (DfE/DoH, 2014)
• a flexible approach including individualised timetables with provision for academic potential as well as SEN (Kidd & Kaczmareck, 2010)
• calm environment with safe spaces (Kendall & Taylor, 2016)
• flexible school systems that reflect an understanding of autism such as meltdowns being understood as a result of a child being overwhelmed by emotion who needs to be treated with compassion and inclusion (McDonald & Lopes, 2014)
• sense of belonging in the school community and a school ethos of acceptance and tolerance (Bond & Hebron, 2016; Humphrey & Symes, 2013).

Whilst the girls in this study had similar experiences, it is important to see them above all as individuals with their own strengths and needs. Hence, schools that have successfully included autistic young people emphasise the need for flexible provision to accommodate individual needs as described in the whole school saturation model for effective inclusion of pupils with autism (Morewood, Humphrey & Symes, 2011). For Erin, her individualised provision included one day per week at an alternative provision to relieve the pressure of a full week at school. The benefits of flexible provision for autistic children have been highlighted in McDonald and Lopes’s study on Australia’s Schools of Isolated and Distance Education which provide tailored tuition and the opportunity for young people to socialise and develop independence skills.

Schools received additional funding for Erin and Jasmine. As discussed above, having a key adult to get to know the girls, build a trusting relationship with and provide emotional support had a tremendous impact on their mental health, development of friendships and ability to integrate in the school community. The girls benefited from high levels of pastoral support, quiet safe rooms, gardening sessions, and one-to-one coaching sessions. Additional funding supported staff to provide the flexible and individualised approach needed by these girls.
Chloe did not receive SEN funding which had a detrimental impact to her in her previous school. Chloe had been unable to cope in mainstream lessons and so spent her time in an unsupervised (due to staffing resources) hub with a mixture of other pupils who were not in lessons for a variety of reasons such as behaviour. In an attempt to fit in, Chloe bought drugs from a peer which triggered her leaving the school. When Chloe started her new school without funding or an EHCP, staff were initially reluctant for her to access SEN resources. As Chloe had significant mental health needs she spent a lot of time with the pastoral support officer which made it difficult for the member of staff to fulfil her wider responsibilities. Chloe was therefore encouraged to access a revision area for year 11 students, the SEN department and the sensory rooms which were all staffed full time. The school had received a grant to build the sensory rooms but showed resourcefulness and flexibility in meeting Chloe’s needs without additional funding. However, not every school has sensory areas specifically designed for autistic pupils or areas that are supervised by staff all day. Therefore, SEN funding can help to support the implementation of the supportive factors to re-engagement including time to develop relationships with staff.

Later diagnosis meant that Chloe and Jasmine had spent much of their childhood feeling different to their peers and not understanding their experience which led to low confidence and self-esteem. Following diagnosis, psycho-education helped them to understand their autism and Jasmine was particularly empowered by an increased awareness of her strengths and difficulties. All three girls were aware that they thought and behaved differently to their peers, teaching about autism helped them to understand this and form a more positive relationship with their autism. This resonates with recent studies on the educational experiences of autistic girls which suggests for some girls diagnosis can lead to a reduction in masking and the development of a healthy self-image (Milton & Sims, 2016; Tomlinson et al., 2019; Salter, 2019). Psycho-education is emerging in the autism intervention literature and suggests that teaching on specific challenges of autism, as well as the associated strengths is empowering for autistic children and young people (Backman et al., 2018; Gordon et al.,
The findings here emphasise the importance of holistic planning and provision to meet the varied needs and strengths of autistic pupils.

To enable Chloe to participate in this research, the data gathering method was adapted from a semi-structured interview to a written questionnaire. This reflects the finding that a flexible approach is required when working with autistic children and young people. Within the field of autism research, ‘participatory research’ is conceptualised as incorporating the views of autistic people on the areas to be researched and the methods used (Fletcher-Watson et al., 2019). Accommodations and multiple formats of participation to support effective communication have also been recommended in practice guidelines for the inclusion of autistic people in research (Nicolaidis et al., 2019). A developing awareness on the importance of conducting research collaboratively with participants highlights the responsibility of researchers to be flexible with the methods used to support the participation of autistic children and young people in research (Fayette & Bond, 2018).

**Limitations and directions for future research**

This study focussed on autistic girls as previous research identified EBSA as a risk factor of late diagnosis for girls (O’Hagan & Bond, 2019). There are also reported differences in the male and female phenotype such as autistic girls are more likely to experience greater internalising difficulties whilst boys present more externalising behaviours which will influence the support required (Jarman & Rayner, 2015; Moyse & Porter, 2015). However, as autistic boys are more likely to experience EBSA than typically developing boys they too would benefit from future research into the supportive factors to re-engagement in education. The sample size was also small and the girls in this study were all of high cognitive ability with good speech and language skills. This may have positively influenced their ability to participate in the planning of their support, develop relationships and engage with social and emotional intervention. A functionally similar group is helpful when identifying effective support and developing intervention. However, as autism covers a wide spectrum, it would be beneficial for future research to include a wider range of autistic young
people. The findings from the cross-case analysis are highly context-bound due to the nature of the phenomenon investigated. For example, the girls all went to schools rated as ‘good’ by Ofsted and each had a key adult who advocated for them. Additionally, Jasmine and Erin received SEN funding and Chloe’s school had autism friendly provision such as sensory rooms. Therefore, the supportive factors identified in this study are context-bound which may limit their generalisability to other contexts. Finally, this was an exploratory study and so findings are tentative however the identified themes align with the existing autism and EBSA literature (e.g. Preece & Howley, 2017; Sproston et al., 2017) and the general EBSA literature (e.g. McKay-Brown et al., 2019) supporting the reliability of the findings.

**Conclusion**

This is the first study to explore the supportive factors for autistic girls who have successfully re-engaged with mainstream education following EBSA. A shift of research focus onto autistic girls who have overcome barriers to education and who are thriving in high school has highlighted supportive factors to successful re-engagement. The relational aspects of education are at the core of autistic girls feeling a sense of belonging and acceptance. This is underpinned by educators having a good understanding of female autism, an ethos of flexibility based on individual need and the resources to provide safe spaces and person centred intervention.

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Paper Three: The dissemination of evidence to professional practice
Paper Three: The Dissemination of Evidence to Professional Practice

Introduction
This paper will first explore the conceptualisation of evidence-based practice (EBP) and practice-based evidence (PBE) in regards to the role of Educational Psychologists (EP). EBP in the field of autism will then be considered. Following this, an exploration of the effective dissemination of research. The implications of the findings from Paper One and Paper Two will be considered at the research site, organizational and professional practice levels. Finally, strategies for disseminating and evaluating the impact of the research will be discussed.

Evidence-based practice, practice-based evidence and the role of the Educational Psychologist
The American Psychological Association (APA) defined EBP as, “the integration of the best available research with clinical expertise in the context of patient characteristics, culture, and preferences” (APA, 2006, p. 273). The aim of EBP is to increase the chances of achieving the desired outcomes by making informed decisions (Briner, 2019). For that reason, £135 million was allocated by the Department for Education (DfE, 2014), to develop educational research and the application of EBP in British schools (DfE, 2014). In line with the APA definition, when applying EBP to decision making, four sources of evidence should be gathered and synthesised: research evidence, organizational data, stakeholders’ concerns, and professional expertise (Briner, 2019). The four areas of EBP decision making will be considered in relation to EP practice.

Research evidence
The definition of EBP proposed by the APA (2006) states ‘the integration of the best available evidence’. The notion of ‘best’ research has led to a contentious hierarchy of research evidence with randomised controlled trials (RCTs) considered to be the most rigorous form of research:

1. Several systematic reviews of RCTs

2. Systematic review of randomised controlled trials
3. Randomised controlled trials

4. Quasi-experimental trials

5. Case control and cohort studies

6. Expert consensus opinion

7. Individual opinion

(Scott, Shaw & Joughin, 2001).

The hierarchy of research evidence places systematic reviews of RCTs at the top as reviews are often considered to provide the highest standard of evidence as they comprise of ‘pooled data from multiple trials’ (Sur & Dahm, 2011). The first database of meta-analyses, developed by Chalmers, and Enkin, provided evidence for the 1989 book, ‘Effective Care in Pregnancy and Childbirth’. This was one of the earliest resources aimed at bridging the gap between research evidence and practice which remains the aim of EBP. Systematic reviews are a useful way to synthesise the best available evidence which can increase the reliability of findings and identify gaps in the literature. However, as seen in Paper One, depending on the research question, systematic reviews of studies that utilise other research methods, not solely RCTs, are also useful sources of evidence.

The hierarchy of research purports a positivist theoretical perspective that there is an objective truth which can be tested (Fox, 2002). However, as a researcher’s aims and underpinning theoretical model will influence the design and methodology considered as the most appropriate to answer the research question, the notion of a hierarchy of research is flawed (Jadad & Enkin, 2007). This is not to say that RCTs do not have their place within the fields of education and psychology (e.g. Styles & Torgerson, 2018), but rather other methods are more appropriate for different research questions and aims. For example, as psychologists are inherently concerned with human experience, qualitative research may enable a deeper understanding of particular processes in human development (Bolte, 2014), this was demonstrated in Paper Two. Qualitative research can also
provide an empowering voice to the people being studied which is particularly significant to EPs who aim to be advocates for children, families and educators. Therefore, when interpreting ‘best available research’, consideration needs to be given to the aims of the research and the appropriateness of methodology utilised to answer the research questions.

Organizational data
Evidence from the local context has been included in several models of EBP (e.g. Barends, Rousseau & Briner, 2014; Briner, Denyer & Rousseau, 2009; Rycroft-Malone et al., 2004). This fits particularly well with EP practice as EPs are well versed in taking an ecological approach to understanding the needs of the child at multiple levels and across time (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). EPs predominantly work within educational organizations comprising of complex systems which need to be navigated during the decision making process. This can make the process of EBP challenging. For example, the school’s resources or the skills of the staff may influence the suitability of a particular evidence-based intervention. The EP therefore needs to be skilled at mediating research evidence, organisational data, and stakeholders’ concerns with their professional expertise.

Stakeholders’ concerns
The key stakeholders concerned in EP EBP will generally include educators, parents and significantly the child or young person at the centre of the work. Managing power imbalances and advocating for children is at the heart of educational psychology. EPs work within several sets of guidelines which each emphasise the importance of supporting children and young people to convey their views on decisions affecting them (BPS, 2018; DfE & DoH, 2014; HCPC, 2016). EPs need to be skilled in overcoming several challenges including: gaining the views of ‘hard to reach’ children (Hardy & Hobbs, 2017); interpreting children’s views (Ingram, 2013); and ensuring that views are used in a co-productive non-tokenistic manner (Lundy, 2007). Tokenistic practice of pupil participation has been acknowledged in the EBP literature. For example, pupil views on curriculum, teaching and learning styles, behaviour and achievement were gathered in a qualitative study to inform practice (Wood, 2003). However, the extent to which teachers incorporated this evidence base into their practice
was limited. It was therefore concluded by Wood (2003) that the insights of young people may need to be synthesised with practitioner expertise and research. This is in line with Briner’s (2019) model and the role of the EP in EBP.

Professional expertise

The fourth part of Briner’s (2019) model and the APA’s (2006) definition of EBP is bringing research evidence, organizational data, and stakeholders’ concerns together with professional expertise. EPs work with school staff to implement cycles of assess-plan-do-review to ensure that the impact of implemented intervention is monitored. From this process PBE evolves which informs future decision making (Woods, McArdle & Tabassum, 2014). To ensure that the decision making process is evidence-based, EPs use professional practice frameworks that support the APA’s (2006) definition and Briner’s (2019) model of EBP. That is integrating multiple sources of information to gain a holistic view in order for hypotheses to be tested and psychological formulation to be drawn (Monsen, Graham, Frederickson & Cameron, 1998). From here, EPs use PBE such as their knowledge of the school, staff skills, and available resources to make judgements on how the best available evidence can be implemented. In this context of bridging the research evidence into practice, EPs’ PBE may be considered as more ecologically valid than EBP. Additionally, not all areas of education and psychology are well researched which means there may not always be an evidence base for EPs to draw upon. This was found to be a challenge faced by EPs working with autistic girls in the exploratory study for Paper Two (O’Hagan & Bond, 2019). A review of the use of evidence based interventions for autistic children by EPs in the UK and Ireland found that 30% of EPs’ caseloads involved them supporting the implementation of interventions for autistic children (Robinson, Bond & Oldfield, 2018). The study identified that EPs frequently used three quarters of 31 evidence based interventions identified by systematic literature reviews. The factors that influenced EPs’ decisions were in line with models of EBP and included the stakeholders’ concerns and the school context (Robinson et al., 2018).
**EBP and PBE in Autism research**

The number of children receiving an autism diagnosis is rising and there are now 95,363 autistic children and adolescents who attend state-funded mainstream schools in England, which is about 72% of the total number of school aged autistic students (DfE, 2019). With this rise of diagnosed autistic children in mainstream schools, there has been an increase in demand for research to inform intervention, provision and practice. It is acknowledged that autistic pupils have a range of strengths and areas of difficulty that can be supported through intervention (Wong et al., 2015). To assist educators to support autistic pupils and to make best use of available resources a deeper understanding of EBP is required which will be considered in relation to the four areas of Briner’s (2019) model.

There is a wealth of autism education research covering areas such as intervention, therapies and best practice. Through a systematic literature review, Wong and colleagues (2015) identified 27 evidence based practices in autism education. The predominant research design was experimental including RCTs reflecting the imbedded perspective that for research to inform EBP it must be quantifiable (Guldberg, 2017). However, the dominance of experimental research has arguably led to a prolonged gap between research and practice in autism education (Parsons & Kasari, 2013). To support effective dissemination from research evidence to practice, the Autism Focused Intervention Resources and Modules (AFIRM 2018) project aims to provide practitioners and educators with online training modules in the 27 areas of EBP identified by Wong et al. (2015). The practices include visual supports, social skills training and parent-implemented intervention. An analysis of AFIRM found that it is a widely used platform particularly by special educational teachers, educators and university students; it is accessed internationally with predominant use in America (Sam, Cox, Savage, Waters & Odom, 2019). The analysis concluded that AFIRM provides an effective source of dissemination to support educators in their EBP but that each module provides basic procedural information of the intervention so further more in-depth coaching and feed-back may be necessary to ensure fidelity to the intervention (Sam et al., 2019).
Disseminating findings and transferring knowledge from autism research to create positive change within schools is difficult. There are several compounding issues that influence this process. Firstly, experimental data being the predominant method in the autism field creates specific challenges for dissemination for action. Such studies are likely to over-look the context specific nature of schools and the flexibility required to work with autistic children in complex systems with competing demands (Guldberg, 2017). As seen in Paper Two, there are several influencing factors on the success of an intervention such as the buy-in and skills of educators, the incorporation of teachers’ professional expertise through PBE and the time and resources available which is not always reflected in experimental evidence (Kasari & Smith, 2013). Therefore, whilst quantitative methods have their place within autism research, qualitative methods allow for in-depth investigation into the barriers and supportive factors for the success of autism intervention and vitally enable the lived experiences of autistic people to be heard.

There is an issue of agency within education research to inform EBP, including a risk of a perspective that the researcher is the expert required to transfer knowledge to the teacher. However, Briner’s (2019) model and the APA’s (2006) definition of EBP identify that stakeholder’s concerns are integral to evidence-based decision making. Indeed, autistic people want to be active research participants and partners, calling for “nothing about us without us” (Nicolaidis et al., 2019). Autistic individuals have raised concerns that their views on research priorities have not been recognised leading to a discrepancy between research evidence and the realities of autistic people’s lives (Pellicano, Dinsmore & Charman, 2014). Hence, there have been calls for autistic people to be actively involved in all stages of the research process (Pellicano et al., 2018).

Briner (2019) states that evidence based practitioners should skilfully select the most reliable and reliant evidence available. However, not all aspects of autism education have been thoroughly researched leaving professionals such as teachers and EPs to draw upon their professional expertise more heavily than the research evidence. For example, the exploratory study for Paper One found
that EPs frequently worked with autistic girls experiencing emotionally based school avoidance but without an evidence base on how best to support this population they drew upon their PBE (O’Hagan & Bond, 2019). Likewise, PBE is arguably more predominant than EBP in the classroom as teachers are likely to draw upon multiple theoretical models of child development and education and adapt intervention to the specific needs of the autistic child (Guldberg, 2010; Howlin, 2010). This suggests a perception among educators that best practice involves drawing upon multiple sources of information and adapting it rather than fidelity of implementation which is at the heart of the quantitative evidence base (Guldberg, 2017). However, for teachers to be able to successfully provide individualised intervention to autistic children they need to have a good understanding of autism through effective dissemination of research (Guldberg, 2010).

The effective dissemination of research and notions of research impact
For research evidence to be purposeful, findings and the implications of them need to be disseminated to researchers and importantly to practitioners to implement. Dissemination is defined as a ‘planned process that involves consideration of target audiences and the settings in which research findings are to be received’ (Wilson, Petticrew, Calnan & Nazareth, 2010, p.2). This process has previously been criticised as being an ‘afterthought’ of research whereas more emphasis should be placed on planning for dissemination (Keen & Todres, 2007). The aim of research in the education field is to improve practice and create positive change for children and young people and therefore research needs to be effectively disseminated to the target populations (Vanderlinde & van Braak, 2010). Within education there are likely to be multiple target populations that each require a specific plan for dissemination. For example, a useful way to disseminate to researchers may be through journal publications and conferences, whereas as educators may be better reached through training.

A three level process of dissemination has been proposed by Harmsworth and Turpin (2000). The first level, dissemination for awareness, aims to raise awareness of the research and outcomes amongst a target audience. The second level, targets the population who would benefit from a
deeper understanding of the research. The third level, dissemination for action, focuses on agents of change within organisations who have the capacity to implement the research findings. For example, the dissemination for action for Paper One would likely target local authority education welfare officers who have the capacity to implement more support for home educating families. The three levels each have a different aim and focus on different populations and the way in which findings are presented are likely to impact on how they are received (Hemsley-Brown, 2004). In a similar vein, Aarons highlights, “Dissemination and implementation of evidence-based practices (EBPs) into real-world settings represent organizational change that may be limited or facilitated by provider attitudes” (2004, p. 61). In light of this a well-considered dissemination strategy is needed to bridge the gap between research and practice.

Summary of policy, practice and research implications from the current research
The following sections outline the implications of the research at the research site (i.e. mainstream high schools), organisational level (i.e. local authorities) and professional level (i.e. educational psychology practice).

Research site: mainstream high schools
Paper One and Paper Two both identified that autistic children are at risk of experiencing challenges in school in relation to managing social relationships with peers and teachers, complying to the expectations of school life, coping with academic demands, sensory sensitivities, frequent transitions and a lack of order and predictability. The accumulation of such pressures led to the autistic children in Paper Two being unable to access mainstream school due to debilitating anxiety and mental health difficulties. The evidence therefore suggests that some educators are finding it very difficult to provide a safe and inclusive environment in which autistic children can thrive. The implication is that school staff require further training on what it means to provide an equitable and flexible education, alongside practical support on how this can be implemented so that schools are supported to become truly inclusive.
Paper One identified that home education can enable parents to provide their children with the flexible and individualised education that they require to meet their needs. Educators having an increased understanding of home education would enable them to further support parents emotionally and practically to make this difficult decision. Flexi-schooling can also provide the balance that some autistic children and parents need. Again, head teachers having a deeper awareness of the benefits of flexible arrangements would be valuable.

Paper Two identified that building a trusting student-key adult relationship is the first phase for autistic girls’ re-engagement. This is underpinned by educators having a good understanding of female autism, an ethos of flexibility based on individual need and the resources to provide safe spaces and person centred intervention.

Paper Two brings to the forefront the high levels of internalised anxiety that autistic girls are at risk of experiencing. As autistic girls are more likely to internalise their feelings until they reach crisis point they are at risk of being over-looked by educators. The implication here is that school staff need to be aware of the autistic female phenotype and how positive student-staff relationships can serve as a protective factor of children’s mental health.

Organisational level: local authorities

Paper One found that home educating parents of autistic children who received appropriate support in the form of emotional, social and financial resources, were in a good position to provide their child with a flexible, balanced and individualised education. This led to positive academic and life outcomes for the child, reduced family stress and a sense of empowerment for the home educating parent. There are two important implications here for local authorities. Firstly, that home education can have good outcomes for families and should therefore be considered as an educative option when appropriate.

The second implication here is that whilst the level of support wanted by home educating families varied and families did not want to be excessively monitored, they did want some form of social,
educational and financial support. Home educating families particularly wanted support with sourcing and paying for resources and with the cost of exams. The implication here is that the money local authorities save when a child leaves the school system could support children to receive the resources that they need at home. Additionally, families also found it more difficult for their child to access additional services such as speech and language therapy when they withdrew from school. The implication here is for local authorities to provide further support and guidance to families on how to access additional services. This could have the dual benefit of reducing family stress and enabling local authorities to address their child protection responsibilities.

Paper Two revealed that relationships are at the core of autistic girls’ experiences of school. Positive relationships with key adults created a foundation for which the complex needs of autistic girls’ could be supported. The role of the key adult included facilitating mental health intervention, ongoing mentoring, advocating for the girls in the school community, facilitating friendships, academic in-class support and communicating with parents. The implication here is that schools need to be appropriately funded and resourced to give professionals the time to provide autistic children with the complex support they need.

Paper Two also highlighted that autistic girls value psychoeducation to support their understanding of autism. An increased awareness of the strengths and difficulties associated with autism helped the girls to feel empowered and reduced feelings of difference. The implication here is to further embed psychoeducation in local authority diagnostic pathways for autism. The mothers in Paper Two would have also appreciated further knowledge and advice on parenting an autistic child.

**Professional level: educational psychologists**

Paper One has several implications for EPs. Through training, consultation and casework, EPs can support schools to develop inclusive practice through whole school policies such as the development of equitable behaviour policies that aim to support positive mental health. As well as developing the practice of educators, EPs can support the development of children’s resilience and coping. For
example, through the development of autism friendly environments where children feel safe and understood. Supporting good autism education practice would hopefully prevent many autistic children from reaching crisis point and being removed from school or experiencing EBSA.

Paper One has identified that home education can be very successful and lead to good outcomes for some autistic children. EPs could support this option of education by: working with parents and carers at home around the provision for their autistic child; multi-agency working with local authority teams (e.g., Education Welfare Officers; other professionals as appropriate); challenging unhelpful local authority policies and procedures that militate against home education.

Paper Two originated from an exploratory study into the experiences of EPs whose role it was to assess and provide intervention for girls with autism or difficulties consistent with the autism spectrum (O’Hagan & Bond, 2019). The exploratory study revealed a predominant theme of high school girls being referred to the EP service due to concerns around mental health and low attendance; through further investigation it transpired in many of these cases that the difficulties were a result of unidentified autism. There was a sense of frustration among the EPs over the lack of literature of how to support the specific needs of these girls. Therefore, Paper Two aims to address this gap and provide EPs with increased knowledge on the supportive factors of successful re-engagement in education for autistic girls. The EPs in the exploratory study (O’Hagan & Bond, 2019) also highlighted the investment of time required to support these girls and hoped that an evidence-base would provide support for the ongoing relationship-based intervention needed to support emotionally vulnerable autistic girls. Paper Two identified what good practice would look like when supporting autistic girls to re-engage in school and maintain their attendance. EPs have a role to disseminate this knowledge through training, consultation and casework. Additionally, EPs are well placed to support autistic girls and those who work closely with them to develop strategies to manage difficulties associated with autism in general and also characteristics of the female autism phenotype such as: perfectionist tendencies; social support; social connectedness; self-efficacy and
understanding of autism. The participants in Paper Two felt that earlier diagnosis may have enabled the girls to access support at an earlier stage which may have served as a protective factor against EBSA. This highlights the role that EPs have in raising awareness of female autism amongst educators and helping to identify the holistic needs of girls which may be masked by mental health needs.

**Implications for the research community**

Paper One highlighted the high quality of the research in the autism and home education literature. However, the inclusion of the voice of autistic children was limited. As noted in Briner’s (2019) model of EBP, stakeholders’ concerns are a fundamental element of EBP decision making and therefore it is important that future research works to incorporate the voice of the child.

Paper Two was the first study to explore the supportive factors of autistic girls who have successfully re-engaged in school. The reliability of the findings is supported by studies which also highlight the impact of relationships, feelings of safety and belonging and good autism education practice on the school experiences of autistic children and young people (e.g. Preece & Howley, 2017; Sproston, Sedgewick & Crane, 2017). However, as the field of autism and emotionally based school avoidance is in its infancy further research would increase the reliability of findings. As Paper Two included a homogenous participant sample to support the identification of common themes, further research with autistic boys and a range of autistic pupils across the spectrum is needed. Additionally, as this paper has highlighted, the autistic community want to be fully involved in research and so further efforts should be made in future studies to include autistic people and incorporate their views into every part of the research process.

**Research dissemination and impact evaluation strategy**

*Dissemination for awareness*

The aim of this first phase of dissemination is to raise awareness of the research. This was done in two ways. Firstly, the gap in the literature identified by the exploratory study highlighted that autistic girls are at risk of internalised anxiety that without early support can lead to debilitating
anxiety communicated through self-harm and emotionally based school avoidance (O’Hagan & Bond, 2019). At crisis point, schools have been turning to EPs for advice who were concerned at the lack of evidence to support their practice (O’Hagan & Bond, 2019). Paper Two aimed to address this gap in the literature to support EBP in educational psychology. To raise awareness of this amongst practice EPs, a collaborative presentation at The Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP) Annual Conference, 2018, was held (appendix 13) to make EPs aware of the research. The seminar was well-attended and the feedback was very positive. To further increase awareness of this research within the autistic community, a short piece was written in regards to the AEP conference for the Autism@Manchester, Winter Newsletter, 2019 (appendix 14). For Paper Two, the dissemination of awareness amongst researchers and autistic people, was supported through a second short piece written for the Autism@Manchester, Winter Newsletter, 2020 (appendix 15). This piece outlined the design of the study, the findings and the implications.

Dissemination for understanding

The second stage of dissemination aims to focus on a specific population whose practice may benefit from a detailed understanding of the research findings and implications. To begin the dissemination of understanding amongst EPs, the findings from Paper Two were presented at the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology programme stakeholders’ event at the University of Manchester in July 2019 (appendix 16). The event was attended by a significant number of trainee educational psychologists and EPs which provided a good opportunity to disseminate understanding of the role of EPs when supporting school staff who are trying to meet the complex needs of autistic girls. At an international level of dissemination the findings and implications of Paper Two were planned to be presented at the International School Psychology Association conference workshop in July 2020. This would have been attended by a large number of educational and school psychologists from around the world providing an excellent opportunity to increase understanding of the challenges faced by autistic girls and how as an evidence-based profession, psychologists are well placed to help.
As well as developing EP understanding of the research findings, it is hoped that through publication, the findings can reach a wider international audience of educators and researchers. Paper One has been submitted to the journal, Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders and Paper Two has been submitted the Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders.

**Dissemination for action**

The final stage of dissemination is to work with the populations who have the capacity to effect change within the systems they work (Harmsworth & Turpin, 2000). For this research, those audiences are EPs, school staff and local authorities. There are plans to disseminate the findings from Paper One and Paper Two through an interactive workshop with the researcher’s local authority educational psychology service. The aim of this workshop will be to disseminate the findings and explore how EPs may incorporate the evidence into their practice. To support school staff who work with autistic girls who are at risk of experiencing emotionally based school avoidance, a staff training will be developed as part of the researcher’s local authority educational psychology services’ training offer. Education welfare officers are likely to have a good awareness of children who have stopped attending school to be home educated and children who are experiencing emotionally based school avoidance. Therefore, to reach a local authority level the researcher will conduct joint work with the education welfare officers from her placement local authority to explore how the findings from Paper One and Paper Two can inform local authority practice.

**Evaluating the impact**

The dissemination objectives are as follows:

1. To increase awareness nationally and internationally that for some families home education can provide autistic children with the individualised and flexible education they need. Home education can lead to good social and academic outcomes and reduce the child’s anxiety and family stress. Families would benefit from more social, financial, educational support from
schools and local authorities. Increased awareness, understanding and support for home education at a local schools level and national government level would hopefully reduce the stigma and pressures experienced by parents.

2. To develop knowledge and understanding, nationally and internationally, of supportive factors leading to the successful re-engagement of autistic girls in education.

3. To contribute to ongoing training for school staff on what it means to provide an equitable, flexible and inclusive education. A relationship-based approach should be prioritised when working with autistic children as this provides a foundation for further social, emotional and academic intervention. Schools would benefit from an increased understanding of good autism practice and how it can be effectively implemented and individualised.

4. To develop Educational Psychologists’ knowledge of ways to support schools with the objective of re-integrating autistic girls in education.

The dissemination of knowledge is a process that takes time, the success of which should be evaluated in relation to its objectives as outlined above (Hamsworth & Turpin, 2000). At a school level, the success of dissemination is influenced by the quality of the interactions and relationship between the researcher/EP and practitioners (Becheikh, Ziam, Idrissi, Castonguay & Landry, 2010). Therefore, EP delivered training in high schools on the supportive factors to re-engagement for autistic girls experiencing EBSA would likely be part of the wider EP role within the school and local authority. This includes consultation, assessment, intervention, research and training (Fallon, Woods & Rooney, 2010). EPs are therefore in a good position to support school staff to implement the training received at a whole school level through developing policies and good practice in autism education as well as at an individual level through case work. EPs are able to work collaboratively with school staff to develop the processes around supporting highly anxious children to access education. As well as working in individual schools EPs are able to develop and evaluate practice across the local authority. For example, EPs are well positioned to work with other professionals in the local authority such as education welfare officers to develop a local offer to
support home education and education managers to develop creative provision. It would therefore be hoped that the establishment of a network of key individuals in the local authority such as through a steering group would provide a space to discuss, plan and qualitatively evaluate the impact of change in practice. Finally, in relation to broader dissemination amongst researchers and educational professionals at a national and international level, if the papers are accepted for publication, the impact of this could be measured through impact statistics and altmetrics e.g. citations, downloads, social media sharing etc.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the conceptualisation of EBP and PBE in relation to the role of EPs and autism research. It has been acknowledged that schools are complex systems with a variety of competing demands and so educators need to be flexible in their approach to supporting autistic children. This means that a variety of research evidence is needed including qualitative research that captures the views of the key stakeholders: educators, parents and importantly autistic children and young people. Paper Two explored multiple perspectives to address an important gap in the literature. It is hoped that the effective dissemination plan outlined in this paper will support autistic girls to re-engage and thrive in education.
References


**Appendix 1: Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders author guidelines**

**GUIDE FOR AUTHORS**

**MANUSCRIPT PREPARATION & SUBMISSION** Use of word processing software

Files must be saved in the native format of the word processor and the text should be in 10-point Arial font, single-column format, double spaced, with standard 1 inch page margins (2.54 cm). Please keep the layout of the text as simple as possible, as most formatting codes will be replaced on processing the article. In particular, do not use the options to justify text or hyphenate words. However, do use bold face, italics, subscripts, superscripts etc. Note that source files of figures and text graphics will be required whether or not you embed them in the text. See also the section on Electronic artwork below for details on preparing figures and graphics.

**Language (usage and editing services)**

Please write your text in good English (American or British usage is accepted, but not a mixture of these). Authors who feel they require support in editing to eliminate possible grammatical or spelling errors and to conform to correct scientific English may wish to use the English Language Editing service available from Elsevier's WebShop (http://webshop.elsevier.com/languageediting/).

In relation to terminology, we ask that authors carefully consider their choice of wording when describing the patterns of strengths and difficulties that are associated with autism. Specifically, based on a paper by Kenny et al., (2015; http://aut.sagepub.com/content/early/2015/06/10/1362361315588200.abstract) we ask authors not to describe participants as 'low-functioning' or 'high-functioning' but to provide precise information about participants’ abilities and areas of difficulty instead, ideally as assessed using relevant standardised tools. Autism should also not be described as a 'disease' or 'illness'. Finally, authors are encouraged to avoid language that inappropriately pathologizes certain characteristics or behaviours of autistic individuals (e.g., 'abnormality', 'impairment', 'deficit' etc) choosing less laden descriptions instead (e.g., ‘difference’; ‘tendency’, ‘preference’, etc) - we note, however, that there are contexts where it may be appropriate to describe certain characteristics as, for example, an impairment (e.g., language impairment).

Reviews: Papers of up to 10,000 words that provide a comprehensive overview of a significant area of research. Quantitative (e.g., meta-analyses) and qualitative reviews are welcome as long as they go beyond a mere description of the available literature and synthesise new knowledge with clear implications for future directions and practice. For systematic reviews and meta-analyses, authors must demonstrate adherence to the PRISMA guidelines (www.prisma-statement.org) and include the relevant flow diagram and checklist.

**NOTE:** Word limits do not include the title page, abstract, figure legends, tables and reference list.

**Submission**

Our online submission system guides authors stepwise through the submission process. The system converts article files to a single PDF file used in the peer-review process. Editable files (e.g., Word, LaTeX) are required to typeset your article for final publication. All correspondence, including notification of the Editor’s decision and requests for revision, is sent by e-mail.

Elsevier accepts electronic supplementary material such as supporting applications, high resolution images, background datasets, sound clips and more. These will be published online alongside the electronic version of your article in Elsevier Web products, including ScienceDirect: http://www.sciencedirect.com. For further information, please visit our artwork instruction pages at https://www.elsevier.com/artworkinstructions
To increase the transparency of editorial information within the framework of single/double blind peer review, RASD displays the number of unique reviewer reports received in the first round of review with each published article. This policy will be in place for original research articles submitted from 1 January 2016 that are accepted for publication.

Manuscript Format

All manuscripts must include a Title, Abstract and Highlights on separate pages, followed by the main manuscript text. The main manuscript text of brief reports, regular articles and quantitative reviews should include subsections carrying the headings Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion & Implications. Reviews may deviate from this structure but must include a methods section that provides details on how the relevant literature was searched. The structure of commentaries is at the discretion of authors.

Essential Title Page Information

Title: Titles must be concise and informative and should have no more than 20 words. Titles are often used in information–retrieval systems. Avoid abbreviations and formulae where possible.

Author names and affiliations: Please clearly indicate the given name(s) and family name(s) of each author and check that all names are accurately spelled. Present the author’s affiliation addresses (where the actual work was done) below the names. Indicate all affiliations with a lowercase superscript letter immediately after the author’s name and in front of the appropriate address. Provide the full postal address of each affiliation, including the country name and, if available, the e-mail address of each author.

Corresponding author: Clearly indicate who will handle correspondence at all stages of refereeing and publication, also post-publication. Ensure that the e-mail address is given and that contact details are kept up to date by the corresponding author.

Present/permanent address: If an author has moved since the work described in the article was done, or was visiting at the time, a ‘Present address’ (or ‘Permanent address’) may be indicated as a footnote to that author’s name. The address at which the author actually did the work must be retained as the main affiliation address. Superscript Arabic numerals are used for such footnotes.

Abstract & Keywords

The abstract page must include a structured abstract of no more than 250 words that includes the following subsections:

Background: A brief summary of the research question and rationale for the study.

Method: A concise description of the methods employed to test the stated hypotheses, including details of the participants where relevant.

Results: A brief description of the main findings.

Conclusions: This section must include a clear statement about the implications of the findings for practice.

Immediately after the abstract, a maximum of 6 keywords should be provided, avoiding general and plural terms and multiple concepts (for example, avoid ‘and’, ‘of’). Be sparing with abbreviations: only abbreviations firmly established in the field may be eligible (e.g., ADOS, ASD, etc). These keywords will be used for indexing purposes.

Introduction

The introduction should develop a clear rationale for the presented work on the basis of a concise overview of the relevant literature. Detailed literature reviews should be avoided.
Methods

This section will typically include sub-headings for a description of the Participants, Materials & Design, Procedures and Analysis. However, alternative sub-headings may be used to suit particular research approaches (e.g., case-studies, meta-analyses, imaging studies etc.)

The participants section should provide demographic information (age, sex, ethnicity, socio-economic status, etc.), and include details on where and how participants were recruited and how relevant clinical diagnoses were verified. Additional clinical information (e.g., intellectual functioning, co-morbidities, use of medication etc.) is desired and may be necessary for some research designs. Sample sizes should be justified by suitable power calculations although it is appreciated that it is not always feasible to obtain desired numbers of participants.

The materials, design and procedures must be described in sufficient detail for the work to be replicable. Authors must also include a statement confirming that the work was carried out in accordance with the ethical standards of the responsible committee on human experimentation (institutional and national) and with the Declaration of Helsinki as revised in 2000. In this context confirmation should also be given that participant or guardian informed consent was obtained where appropriate.

The analysis section should provide details of the statistical methods used including information on the significance thresholds and the methods used to correct for multiple comparisons where necessary. Information on inter-rater reliability and any data filtering / transformation that was applied should also be included here.

Results

The results should be set out transparently and in full and should conform to the formatting style of the American Psychological Association (http://www.apastyle.org/). Effect sizes must be reported for all significant and non-significant effects, and sufficient descriptive statistics must be provided for the effect size calculations to be replicated.

Tables

Please submit tables as editable text and not as images. Tables can be placed either next to the relevant text in the article, or on separate page(s) at the end. The formatting of tables should conform to APA guidelines (http://www.apastyle.org/).

Discussion and Implications

The discussion section should draw together the findings and must end with a clear indication of the implications of the findings for practice under a separate subheading (Implications).

Acknowledgements

Collate acknowledgements in a separate section at the end of the main manuscript text and before the references. List here any sources of funding (including grant numbers where relevant) and briefly describe the role of the sponsor(s), if any, in study design; the collection, analysis or interpretation of data; the writing of the report; and the decision to submit the article for publication. If the funding source(s) had no such involvement then this should be stated.

Conflict of interest

At the end of the main manuscript text and before the references, authors must disclose any actual or potential conflict of interest including any financial, personal or other relationships with other people or organizations within three years of beginning the submitted work that could inappropriately influence, or be perceived to influence, their work. If no such conflict of interest
exists, this must be clearly stated. For further information and examples of conflict of interest statements please visit the following: https://www.elsevier.com/conflictsofinterest http://service.elsevier.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/286/supporthub/publishing A decision may be made by the Journal not to publish on the basis of the declared conflict.

References

In–text citations should conform to the formatting style of the American Psychological Association (http://www.apastyle.org/). Please ensure that every reference cited in the text is also present in the reference list (and vice versa). Any references cited in the abstract must be given in full References in a special issue.

Please ensure that the words 'this issue' are added to any references in the list (and any citations in the text) to other articles in the same Special Issue.

Reference management software

Most Elsevier journals have a standard template available in key reference management packages. This covers packages using the Citation Style Language, such as Mendeley (http://www.mendeley.com/features/reference-manager) and also others like EndNote (http://www.endnote.com/support/enstyles.asp) and Reference Manager (http://refman.com/support/rmstyles.asp). For example, if you manage your research with Mendeley Desktop, you can easily install the reference style for RASD through this link: http://open.mendeley.com/use-citation-style/research-in-autism-spectrum-disorders


Reference to a book:


Reference to a chapter in an edited book:

## Appendix 2: Evaluative frameworks

D.Ed.Ch.Psychol. 2017

### Review framework for qualitative evaluation/ investigation research

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**References**


D.Ed.Ch.Psychol. 2017

Review framework for quantitative investigation research

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<td>Population subgroup data collected</td>
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<td>e.g. participant gender; age; location</td>
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<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
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<td>Missing data analysis</td>
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<td>e.g. Level and treatment specified</td>
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<td>Time trends identified</td>
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<td>e.g. year on year changes</td>
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<td>Geographic considerations</td>
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<td>e.g. regional or subgroup analyses</td>
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<td>Appropriate statistical analyses (descriptive or inferential)</td>
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<td>e.g. coherent approach specified; sample size justification</td>
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<td>Multi-level or inter-group analyses present</td>
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<td>e.g. comparison between participant groups by relevant location or characteristics</td>
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<td>Data interpretation</td>
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<td>Clear criteria for rating of findings</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>e.g. benchmarked/justified evaluation of found quantitative facts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Limitations of the research considered in relation to initial aims e.g. critique of method; generalizability estimate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Implications of findings linked to rationale of research question e.g. implications for theory, practice or future research</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<td>Mean % agree</td>
<td>Mean % agree</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

References


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Reason for exclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>De Carvalho, E., &amp; Skipper, Y. (2019). “We’re not just sat at home in our pyjamas!” A thematic analysis of the social lives of home educated adolescents in the UK. <em>European Journal of Psychology of Education</em>, 34(3), 501-516.</td>
<td>Less than 50% of the parent participants were home educating an autistic child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citation</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
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<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McDonald, J. (2010). <em>Seeking progressive fit: a constructivist grounded theory and autoethnographic study investigating how parents deal with the education of their child with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) over time</em>. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Western Australia).</td>
<td>The primary focus of this research was not autism and home education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mouzourou, C., Santos, R. M., &amp; Gaffney, J. S. (2011). At home with disability: One family's three generations narrate autism. <em>International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education</em>, 24(6), 693-715.</td>
<td>The primary focus is of this research was not autism and home education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parsons, S., &amp; Lewis, A. (2010). The home-education of children with special needs or disabilities in the UK: views of parents from an online survey. <em>International Journal of Inclusive Education</em>, 14(1), 67-86.</td>
<td>Less than 50% of the parent participants were home educating an autistic child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simmons, C. A. (2014). <em>Homeschool decision making and evidence-based practice for children with autism spectrum disorder</em> (Master’s dissertation, University of Georgia).</td>
<td>Unpublished master’s dissertation and therefore was not peer reviewed at doctorate level or by a journal.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Appendix 4: Process of data analysis for Paper One.**

| Phase 1 | The researcher familiarised herself with the papers by reading them and completing the table on p.25. This included:  
|         | 1. Citation details  
|         | 2. Focus of the study/aims  
|         | 3. Sample design analytical approach  
|         | 4. Findings  
| Phase 2 | Several papers were scored for methodological quality.  
| Phase 3 | Inter-coder reliability with thesis supervisor was carried out; three papers (1 low score, 1 high score and 1 thesis) were scored and debated until 100% agreement was reached.  
| Phase 4 | The remaining seven papers were scored.  
| Phase 5 | Now very familiar with the papers, thematic analysis was used to generate meaning from the papers.  
|         | Deductive and inductive analysis was utilised.  
|         | Papers were coded by highlighting the relevant sections with a colour which corresponded with one of the three parts to the research question (i.e. reasons/motivations, experiences and outcomes). Such as pink for motivations and reasons to home educate. Each code was written on an index card in the corresponding colour.  
|         | Codes included: attitudes of staff; fighting for child’s rights; negative experiences; SEN not met; SEMH not met.  
| Phase 6 | Basic themes were then generated such as: bullying; relationships; teacher understanding; therapy; child directed learning.  
|         | Themes were evidenced with a quote written out on a post-it note in the colour assigned to the global theme such as motivations/experience/outcome.  
| Phase 7 | The next stage was organising the themes to ensure coherence. Basic themes were assigned to an organising them which came under a global theme. For example, therapy (basic theme)- outside agency intervention (organising theme)- practices and pedagogical approaches (global theme).  
| Phase 8 | The themes were then given a final name and organised into an overall narrative.  
| Phase 9 | Papers were scored for WOE C. maximum 3 points. 1 point for each part of the research question addressed.  

Appendix 5: Example of data extraction for Paper One

Examples of data and how they were coded are shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data extract</th>
<th>Basic theme</th>
<th>Organising theme</th>
<th>Global theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The frequency that learning was described as child-directed was almost never for 5.17% of participants, once in a while for 37.93%, frequently for 41.40% and almost all of the time for 15.52% (Simmons, 2016).</td>
<td>Child directed learning</td>
<td>Individualised flexible approach</td>
<td>Practices and pedagogical approaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘He has gone to group therapy and individual therapy for seven years’ (Dolan, 2017).</td>
<td>Therapy</td>
<td>Outside agency intervention</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘I had planned to try to flexi-school but it’s so difficult to set up. It’s hard to find a head teacher that will do it’ (Taylor, Kendall &amp; Forrester, 2011).</td>
<td>Challenges of flexi-schooling</td>
<td>Flexi-schooling and alternative provision</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Since he has been home, days and weeks go by without him shouting’ (Kendall &amp; Taylor, 2016).</td>
<td>Externalising behaviours</td>
<td>Social, emotional and mental health</td>
<td>Impact of home education on the outcomes for autistic children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘He’s doing Cyber Security [with the] Open University’ (Lawrence, 2017).</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>Academic attainment and higher education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘It’s also a lot more pressure on me...I could have had a life and had a job, or completed my studies’ (Kidd &amp; Kaczmarek, 2010).</td>
<td>Negatives from home education</td>
<td>Feelings of resentment.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s costly! All resources have to be provided by me and just one spelling programme costs £55. GCSEs will cost hundreds in addition to text books” (Taylor et al., 2011).</td>
<td>Expense of home educating</td>
<td>Financial Support.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 6: Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders author guidelines

MANUSCRIPT FORMAT

All JADD manuscripts should be submitted to Editorial Manager in 12-point Times New Roman with standard 1-inch borders around the margins.

APA Style

Text must be double-spaced; APA Publication Manual standards must be followed.

As of January 20, 2011, the Journal has moved to a double-blind review process. Therefore, when submitting a new manuscript, DO NOT include any of your personal information (e.g., name, affiliation) anywhere within the manuscript. When you are ready to submit a manuscript to JADD, please be sure to upload these 3 separate files to the Editorial Manager site to ensure timely processing and review of your paper:

A title page with the running head, manuscript title, and complete author information. Followed by (page break) the Abstract page with keywords and the corresponding author e-mail information.

The blinded manuscript containing no author information (no name, no affiliation, and so forth).

The Author Note

Articles, Commentaries Brief Reports, Letters to the Editor

The preferred article length is 20-23 double-spaced manuscript pages long (not including title page, abstract, tables, figures, addendums, etc.) Manuscripts of 40 double-spaced pages (references, tables and figures counted as pages) have been published. The reviewers or the editor for your review will advise you if a longer submission must be shortened.

Style sheet for Letter to the Editor:

A title page with the running head, manuscript title, and complete author information including corresponding author e-mail information

The blinded manuscript containing no author information (no name, no affiliation, and so forth):

- 6 or less double spaced pages with shorter references, tables and figures

- Line 1: “Letter to the Editor”

- Line 3: begin title (note: for “Case Reports start with “Case Report: Title”)

- Line 6: Text begins; references and tables, figure caption sheet, and figures may follow (page break between each and see format rules)

Order of manuscript pages

Title Page with all Author Contact Information & Abstract with keywords and the corresponding author e-mail information.

Blinded Manuscript without contact information and blinded Abstract, and References

Appendix

Figure Caption Sheet
Submission of a manuscript implies: that the work described has not been published before; that it is not under consideration for publication anywhere else; that its publication has been approved by all co-authors, if any, as well as by the responsible authorities – tacitly or explicitly – at the institute where the work has been carried out. The publisher will not be held legally responsible should there be any claims for compensation.

Permissions

Authors wishing to include figures, tables, or text passages that have already been published elsewhere are required to obtain permission from the copyright owner(s) for both the print and online format and to include evidence that such permission has been granted when submitting their papers. Any material received without such evidence will be assumed to originate from the authors.

Online Submission

Please follow the hyperlink “Submit online” on the right and upload all of your manuscript files following the instructions given on the screen.

Please ensure you provide all relevant editable source files. Failing to submit these source files might cause unnecessary delays in the review and production process.

Title page

The title page should include:

The name(s) of the author(s)

A concise and informative title

The affiliation(s) and address(es) of the author(s)

The e-mail address, telephone and fax numbers of the corresponding author

Abstract

Please provide an abstract of 120 words or less. The abstract should not contain any undefined abbreviations or unspecified references.

Keywords

Please provide 4 to 6 keywords which can be used for indexing purposes.

Text

Text Formatting

Manuscripts should be submitted in Word.

Use a normal, plain font (e.g., 10-point Times Roman) for text.
Use italics for emphasis.
Use the automatic page numbering function to number the pages.
Do not use field functions.
Use tab stops or other commands for indents, not the space bar.
Use the table function, not spreadsheets, to make tables.
Use the equation editor or MathType for equations.
Save your file in docx format (Word 2007 or higher) or doc format (older Word versions).

Headings
Please use no more than three levels of displayed headings.

Abbreviations
Abbreviations should be defined at first mention and used consistently thereafter.

Footnotes
Footnotes can be used to give additional information, which may include the citation of a reference included in the reference list. They should not consist solely of a reference citation, and they should never include the bibliographic details of a reference. They should also not contain any figures or tables.

Footnotes to the text are numbered consecutively; those to tables should be indicated by superscript lower-case letters (or asterisks for significance values and other statistical data).

Footnotes to the title or the authors of the article are not given reference symbols.

Always use footnotes instead of endnotes.

Acknowledgments
Acknowledgments of people, grants, funds, etc. should be placed in a separate section on the title page. The names of funding organizations should be written in full.

Body
The body of the manuscript should begin on a separate page. The manuscript page header (if used) and page number should appear in the upper right corner. Type the title of the paper centered at the top of the page, add a hard return, and then begin the text using the format noted above. The body should contain:

Introduction (The introduction has no label.)

Methods (Center the heading. Use un-centered subheadings such as: Participants, Materials, Procedure.)

Results (Center the heading.)

Discussion (Center the heading.)

Headings
Please use no more than three levels of displayed headings.

Level 1: Centered

Level 2: Centered Italicized

Level 3: Flush left, Italicized

Footnotes

Center the label “Footnotes” at the top of a separate page. Footnotes can be used to give additional information, which may include the citation of a reference included in the reference list. They should not consist solely of a reference citation, and they should never include the bibliographic details of a reference. They should also not contain any figures or tables.

Footnotes to the text are numbered consecutively; those to tables should be indicated by superscript lower-case letters (or asterisks for significance values and other statistical data). Footnotes to the title or the authors of the article are not given reference symbols.

Always use footnotes instead of endnotes. Type all content footnotes and copyright permission footnotes together, double-spaced, and numbered consecutively in the order they appear in the article. Indent the first line of each footnote 5-7 spaces. The number of the footnote should correspond to the number in the text. Superscript arabic numerals are used to indicate the text material being footnoted.

Author Note

The first paragraph contains a separate phrase for each author’s name and the affiliations of the authors at the time of the study (include region and country).

The second paragraph identifies any changes in the author affiliation subsequent to the time of the study and includes region and country (wording: “authors name is now at affiliation”).

The third paragraph is Acknowledgments. It identifies grants or other financial support and the source, if appropriate. It is also the place to acknowledge colleagues who assisted in the study and to mention any special circumstances such as the presentation of a version of the paper at a meeting, or its preparation from a doctoral dissertation, or the fact that it is based on an earlier study.

The fourth paragraph states, “Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to…” and includes the full address, telephone number and email address of the corresponding author.

Citation

Cite references in the text by name and year in parentheses. Some examples:

Negotiation research spans many disciplines (Thompson 1990).

This result was later contradicted by Becker and Seligman (1996).

This effect has been widely studied (Abbott 1991; Barakat et al. 1995; Kelso and Smith 1998; Medvec et al. 1999).

Ideally, the names of six authors should be given before et al. (assuming there are six or more), but names will not be deleted if more than six have been provided.

Reference list
The list of references should only include works that are cited in the text and that have been published or accepted for publication. Personal communications and unpublished works should only be mentioned in the text. Do not use footnotes or endnotes as a substitute for a reference list.

Reference list entries should be alphabetized by the last names of the first author of each work.

Journal names and book titles should be italicized.


Appendix 7: Case study detail

A qualitative exploratory multiple case study design with embedded units of analysis, informed by Yin (2014), was used to explore how three autistic girls in different high schools were able to return to school after a period of EBSA.

Yin (2009) states that case studies have two critical features:

1. A case study is an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.

2. The case study inquiry copes with the technical distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis. (p.18)

Paper Two incorporated each of the critical features outlined above; it investigated the contemporary phenomenon of the process of re-engagement for autistic girls who experience EBSA in the real-life context of schools. It incorporated several variables and triangulated multiple sources of evidence through gaining the views of pupils, their parents and key adult. The findings were mapped onto the propositions established from the literature review (e.g. Nuttall & Woods, 2013), and new ones were developed.

Yin (2009) states that for case studies, five components of the research design are especially important:

- A study’s questions
- Its propositions if any
- Its unit of analysis (UoA)
- The logic linking the data to the propositions and
- The criteria for interpreting the findings (p.27)

In line with Yin’s framework, each of these components for this study are explained:
Questions

The aims of the research have informed the following research question:

What are the supportive factors that help autistic girls who experience EBSA re-engage and maintain their attendance in mainstream high school?

Propositions

To date there had not been any previous research that has focussed on the specific process of re-engaging autistic girls experiencing EBSA. However, the findings of Nuttall and Woods (2013) suggested that the following propositions may have also been revealed as supportive factors in the re-engagement of autistic girls:

- The promotion of psychological factors such as developing a sense of security and belonging
- Schools taking a flexible and individualised approach
- Positive working relationships between home and school
- Role of professionals such as having a key adult

Units of Analysis

Table 1 illustrates the overall case study design and each of the units of analysis for the three schools.

Linking data to propositions and criteria for interpreting the findings

Braun and Clarke’s (2019) thematic analysis framework was adopted to identify themes from the data which were then used to support or disagree with the propositions and help to build explanations around why these outcomes have been found from the study. The use of more than one school and various participants in each of the schools supported the interpretation of the study’s findings (Yin, 2014).
Table 1: Units of Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case A: The reintegration of pupil A</th>
<th>Case B: The reintegration of pupil B</th>
<th>Case C: The reintegration of pupil C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contextual data will be gathered from school policy documents regarding processes around EBSA.</td>
<td>Contextual data will be gathered from school policy documents regarding processes around EBSA.</td>
<td>Contextual data will be gathered from school policy documents regarding processes around EBSA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embedded UoA 2: Factors that help autistic girls reintegrate into school and maintain their attendance.</td>
<td>Embedded UoA 2: Factors that help autistic girls reintegrate into school and maintain their attendance.</td>
<td>Embedded UoA 2: Factors that help autistic girls reintegrate into school and maintain their attendance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References


07/03/2018

Dear Mrs Siobhan O'Hagan and Dr Caroline Bond

Study Title: Autism and School Refusal

University Research Ethics Committee 1

I write to thank you for submitting the final version of your documents for your project to the Committee on 06/03/2018 14:22. I am pleased to confirm a favourable ethical opinion for the above research on the basis described in the application form and supporting documentation as submitted and approved by the Committee.

Please see below for a table of the title, version numbers and dates of all the final approved documents for your project:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document Type</th>
<th>File Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Version</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Topic Guide</td>
<td>Interview Schedules for autism and school refusal</td>
<td>05/12/2017</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distress Protocol/Debrief Sheet</td>
<td>distress protocol Autism and school refusal</td>
<td>05/12/2017</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional docs</td>
<td>Internal review form</td>
<td>15/02/2018</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Topic Guide</td>
<td>Autism and school refusal interview schedule V3</td>
<td>25/02/2018</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Information Sheet</td>
<td>Autism and school refusal PIS V2</td>
<td>25/02/2018</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consent Form</td>
<td>Autism and school refusal consent form V2</td>
<td>25/02/2018</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional docs</td>
<td>Autism and school refusal letter to schools V1</td>
<td>25/02/2018</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consent Form</td>
<td>Autism and school refusal consent form V3</td>
<td>25/02/2018</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional docs</td>
<td>Autism and School Refusal Revisions to Ethics Applications V1</td>
<td>27/02/2018</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone Worker Policy/Procedure</td>
<td>Lone Working</td>
<td>27/02/2018</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This approval is effective for a period of five years however please note that it is only valid for the specifications of the research project as outlined in the approved documentation set. If the project continues beyond the 5 year period or if you wish to propose any changes to the methodology or
any other specifics within the project, an application to seek an amendment must be submitted for review. Failure to do so could invalidate the insurance and constitute research misconduct.

You are reminded that, in accordance with University policy, any data carrying personal identifiers must be encrypted when not held on a secure university computer or kept securely as a hard copy in a location which is accessible only to those involved with the research.

Reporting Requirements:

You are required to report to us the following:

Amendments

Breaches and adverse events

Notification of progress/end of the study

Feedback

It is our aim to provide a timely and efficient service that ensures transparent, professional and proportionate ethical review of research with consistent outcomes, which is supported by clear, accessible guidance and training for applicants and committees. In order to assist us with our aim, we would be grateful if you would give your view of the service that you have received from us by completing a UREC Feedback Form. Instructions for completing this can be found in your approval email.

We wish you every success with the research.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Karen Lythe

Secretary to University Research Ethics Committee 1
Appendix 9: Interview schedules

Semi-structured interview schedule for parents

Before each interview the participant will be asked if they are happy for the interview to be recorded. The extent of the confidentiality procedure will be explained and it will be reiterated that the interviewee has the right to withdraw from the interview and pass on any questions. The interviewee’s understanding will be checked and questions invited.

Context questions

When was your daughter diagnosed with autism?
How do you think the timing of this diagnosis has impacted her school experience?
How do you think autism has impacted her school experience?
Can you tell me about the time leading up to your daughter not wanting to go to school?
What factors do you feel led her to school avoid?

Factors that support the return to school

Can you tell me about her school avoidance?
Did she attend an alternative provision? If so, what was that like?
Can you tell me about the support she received to help her return to school?
How were you involved in supporting her return to school?
Can you tell me about any support that you received as a parent?

Factors that support reintegration and daily attendance

How is your daughter getting on at school at the moment?
What provision is in place for her?
What factors do you think have helped her reintegrate into mainstream?
How is her attendance now?
What factors do you think help her maintain her attendance?
How are things different in school now?
How do you think her wellbeing is promoted?
What might have led to more success?
Is there anything else that you would like to add?
Semi-structured interview schedule for school staff

Before each interview the participant will be asked if they are happy for the interview to be recorded. The extent of the confidentiality procedure will be explained and it will be reiterated that the interviewee has the right to withdraw from the interview and pass on any questions. The interviewee’s understanding will be checked and questions invited.

Context questions

In what role do you work with the young person?
How long have you worked with the young person?
How do you think autism and her diagnosis of autism have impacted on her school experience?
If you worked with the young person prior to her school avoidance, can you tell me about the time leading up to her not wanting to go to school?
What factors do you feel led her to school avoid?

Factors that support the return to school

Can you tell me about the support school provided whilst she was off?
Did she attend an alternative provision? If so, how do you feel that helped her?
Does your school have specific policies on how to work with young people who school refuse?
Can you tell me about the support she received to help her return to school?
What factors do you think worked well in getting her back to school?

Factors that support reintegration and daily attendance

How is the young person getting on at school at the moment?
What provision is in place for her?
What factors do you think have helped her re integrate into mainstream?
How is her attendance now?
What factors do you think help her maintain her attendance?
How are things different in school now?
How do you think her wellbeing is promoted?
What might have led to more success?
Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Semi-structured interview schedule for focus young people

Before each interview the participant will be asked if they are happy for the interview to be recorded. The extent of the confidentiality procedure will be explained and it will be reiterated
that the interviewee has the right to withdraw from the interview and pass on any questions. The interviewee’s understanding will be checked and questions invited.

**Context questions**

How are you getting on at school at the moment?

What do you like about school?

**Factors that support reintegration and daily attendance**

What things make your day at school easier?

When you feel like you don’t want to go to school, what helps you to come in?

**Factors that support the return to school**

When you had some time away from this school, did you go to a different school? If so, what was that like?

What helped you come back to this school?

How do you think school is different now compared to before you had some time away?

Is there anything that you think could be better?

Is there anything else that you would like to add?
Appendix 10: Participant information sheets and consent forms

Autism and Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA): An investigation into the supportive factors of reintegration into mainstream education

Dear Headteacher,

Your school is being invited to take part in a research study that will explore the supportive factors that have helped children and young people with autism who have had a period of EBSN return to school and maintain their attendance. The study will involve interviewing a pupil who has experienced EBSA and returned to school, their parent/guardian and member of staff who knows them well. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the study?

Siobhan O’Hagan, Trainee Educational Psychologist, University of Manchester.

Title of the study

Autism and EBSA: An investigation into the supportive factors of reintegration into mainstream education

What is the aim of the study?

The study aims to explore and understand the experiences of students with autism who due to their anxiety have had periods of time away from school. The aim is to identify supportive factors that have worked well in helping students return to school. It is hoped that this research will provide information and support to professionals working with children and young people on the autism spectrum.

Why have I been chosen?

Your school has been chosen as it has one or more of the following: an autism resource unit; a high percentage of pupils with autism; an excellent reputation for supporting pupils with autism. The purpose of this research project is to better understand the students, teachers and parents’ perceptions of what helps pupils with autism with EBSA reintegrate into school. The research will require three students from three different schools- one pupil from your school in any year group. As there is a shortage of literature focusing on girls with autism we will aim to have an all-female participant group. However, if this is not possible we will happily have male participants as it is not specifically a gender study. Pupil participants must have a diagnosis of autism and have a had a period of school nonattendance (i.e. attendance at around less than 90%) followed by an increase in attendance. For the parent-participants they must be the parent/guardian of the pupil-participant and to have had custody of the pupil-participant prior to and during the pupil’s period of school refusal. For the staff-participant to be included in the study they need to be a teacher, teaching
assistant or member of pastoral support staff and to have worked closely with the pupil-participant since they returned to school. Each participant will take part in a face to face interview.

**What would I be asked to do if I took part?**

All participants types will be asked to take part in an interview and it would be preferable for these interviews to take place within the school premises to ensure safety of participants. The interviews will be audio taped but will be anonymised when the researcher transcribes them.

Pupil-participants will be required to take part in two or three interview sessions that last up to 30 minutes. The first interview will be a ‘getting to know you’ session to help the pupil feel comfortable with the process and allow the researcher to adapt the future sessions and interview schedule to make it more accessible to the pupil if needs be. The following one or two interviews will follow a semi-structured interview schedule and will last up to 30 minutes.

The parent interview will take place over one or two sessions that last up to 60 minutes.

The staff member interview will be one session lasting up to 60 minutes.

**What happens to the data collected?**

The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed at which point all identifying information will be anonymised. All anonymous data will be stored securely on the researcher’s university ‘p’ drive. The data will be analysed to identify themes within the data which describe elements of support that have been successful. The data will be written up into the researcher’s thesis project and may be published.

**How is confidentiality maintained?**

All names will be replaced with pseudonyms when the audio files are transcribed and in the final report to ensure confidentiality. Once transcribed the digital audio files will be deleted and will not be used for any other purpose without written consent from the participants. Participant responses will not be linked to their names in any written or verbal report of this research project. Participation in this study will be confidential, and there are no foreseeable risks or discomforts.

There are two exceptions to anonymity which are: if a participant reveals that they are being harmed in any way or if a participant states that they have or intend to harm someone then the researcher has a duty to report this to their university supervisor who is Dr Caroline Bond. Dr Bond will follow both your school’s and The University of Manchester’s policy on reporting safeguarding disclosures.

**What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?**

Participants are under no obligation to participate in the research and it is optional to take part. Please note that because the data will be anonymised and aggregated, it may not be possible for all data to be retrieved and discarded after data analysis has commenced. Therefore, participants are free to withdraw without giving a reason and without detriment, prior to the commencement of data analysis. If participants decide to withdraw before data analysis, then any data collected from them will be deleted.

**Will I be paid for participating in the study?**

There will not be a payment for taking part in the study.
What is the duration of the study?

Pupil-participants will be asked to take part in two or three interviews lasting up to 30 minutes.
Parent-participants will be asked to take part in one or two interviews lasting up to 60 minutes.
School staff-participants will be asked to take part in one interview lasting up to 60 minutes.

Where will the study be conducted?

For adult-participants in a meeting room at school.
For pupil participants either in a meeting room at school or in a place at school where they feel more comfortable such as within an autism resource unit.

Will the outcomes of the study be published?

The researcher will aim to publish the final report.

Criminal Records Check

The researcher has undergone an enhanced satisfactory criminal records check as per the requirements of The University of Manchester.

Contact for further information or regarding any concerns:

If you have any questions about this study the researcher can be contacted by email: siobhan.elliott@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk.

The supervisor for this project is:
Dr Caroline Bond
Room A6.20
Manchester Institute of Education School of Environment, Education and Development
Ellen Wilkinson Building
University of Manchester
Oxford Rd
Manchester
M13 9PL
Tel: 0161 2753686
Email: caroline.bond@manchester.ac.uk

What if I want to make a complaint?

Minor complaints contact:
Dr Caroline Bond
Room A6.20
Manchester Institute of Education School of Environment, Education and Development
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University of Manchester
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M13 9PL
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If you would like to make a formal complaint about the conduct of the research you should contact:
The Research Governance and Integrity Manager
Research Office
Christie Building
University of Manchester
Oxford Road
Manchester
M13 9PL
Email: Research.Complaints@manchester.ac.uk
Tel: 0161 275 7583 or 275 8093.

What Do I Do Now?
If you would like your school to take part then please confirm within the next two weeks with
Siobhan O'Hagan, email: Siobhan.elliott@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk
Autism and Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA): An investigation into the supportive factors of reintegration into mainstream education

Student Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in a research study which will explore what helped you return to school after a period of EBSA. Before you decide if you want to take part it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the study?

Siobhan O’Hagan, Trainee Educational Psychologist, University of Manchester.

Title of the study

Autism and EBSA: An investigation into the supportive factors of reintegration into mainstream education

What is the aim of the study?

The study aims to explore what helps students with autism who have experienced EBSA return to school and feel that they can cope when there.

Why have I been chosen?

You and two other students have been chosen to explore your experiences of returning to school after being off due to EBSA

What would I be asked to do if I took part?

You will be asked some questions in two or three sessions that will take about 30 minutes. The sessions will be at school and there will be a teacher there or nearby. The sessions will be audio taped.

What happens to the data collected?

The information collected in the sessions will be written up into a report. To make sure the information collected from you during the sessions accurately reflects your views, the transcript will be sent to you. This means you can check it and amend it if you wish.

How is confidentiality maintained?

To keep what you say in the sessions confidential your name will be changed in the report. Your name will not be linked to what you have said in the sessions in any written or verbal report of this project.

There are two exceptions to anonymity which are: if you reveal that you are being harmed in any way or if you state that you have or intend to harm someone then the researcher has a duty to report this to their university supervisor who is Dr Caroline Bond. Dr Bond will follow both your school’s and The University of Manchester’s policy on reporting safeguarding disclosures.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?
It is up to you to decide whether to take part. You are free to withdraw without giving a reason and without detriment, prior to the commencement of data analysis as your interview transcript will be anonymised. If participants decide to withdraw before data analysis, then any data collected from them will be deleted.

**Will I be paid for participating in the study?**

There will not be a payment for taking part in the study.

**What is the duration of the study?**

Two or three 30-minute interviews.

**Where will the study be conducted?**

At School.

**Will the outcomes of the study be published?**

This study aims to publish a journal article.

**Criminal records check**

The researcher has undergone an enhanced satisfactory criminal records check as per the requirements of carrying out this research involving children.

**Contact for further information or regarding any concerns:**

If you have any questions about this study the researcher can be contacted by email: siobhan.elliott@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk.

**The supervisor for this project is:**

Dr Caroline Bond  
Room A6.20  
Manchester Institute of Education School of Environment, Education and Development  
Ellen Wilkinson Building  
University of Manchester  
Oxford Rd  
Manchester  
M13 9PL  
Tel: 0161 2753686  
Email: caroline.bond@manchester.ac.uk

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Manchester Institute of Education School of Environment, Education and Development  
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Research Office
Christie Building
University of Manchester
Oxford Road
Manchester
M13 9PL
Email: Research.Complaints@manchester.ac.uk
Tel: 0161 275 7583 or 275 8093.

**What Do I Do Now?**

If you have any queries about the study then please contact:
Siobhan O’Hagan, email: Siobhan.elliott@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk
If you would like to take part then please discuss this with your parents/guardians who will let the researcher know.
Autism and EBSA: An investigation into the supportive factors of reintegration into mainstream education

STUDENT ASSENT FORM

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the assent form below

Please initial box

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above project and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw without giving a reason and without detriment, prior to the commencement of data analysis as my interview transcript will be anonymised. If I withdraw before data analysis, then any data collected from me will be deleted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I agree that any data collected may be published in anonymous form in academic books or journals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I agree that any data collected may be passed to other researchers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I agree to being audio recorded during the interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I agree to myself taking part in the above project.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Name: 

Signature:  
Date:
Autism and Emotional Based School Nonattendance (EBSA): An investigation into the supportive factors of reintegration into mainstream education

Parent Information Sheet

You and your child are being invited to take part in a research study which will explore the factors that have helped students with autism return to school after a period of EBSA. Before you decide to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the study?

Siobhan O'Hagan, Trainee Educational Psychologist, University of Manchester.

Title of the study

Autism and EBSA: An investigation into the supportive factors of reintegration into mainstream education

What is the aim of the study?

The study aims to explore and understand the experiences of students with autism who due to their anxiety have had periods of time away from school. The aim is to identify supportive factors that have worked well in helping the students return to school. It is hoped that this research will provide information and support to professionals working with children and young people on the autism spectrum.

Why have I been chosen?

Your child has been chosen as they have had a period of EBSA but are now back in mainstream education. Parents can provide unique insight into what has worked well for their children and how things could have been improved. This information is crucial in helping professionals to develop their practice. For this research to be able to provide practical and useful suggestions for future practice it is important that the voice of the young person, their family and the school is listened to.

What would I be asked to do if I took part?

The research will require you to participate in one or two face to face interviews (each lasting up to 60 minutes). The interview will take place at school at a time that is convenient for you.

With your permission, your child will also be asked to take part in two or three face to face interviews (each lasting up to 30 minutes). The first interview will be a short ‘getting to know you interview’ and the following one or two interviews will follow a semi-structured interview schedule. The interview will take place at school at an agreed time. A member of staff will either sit in the interview or will be in close proximity. It is up to you and your child to decide if you would like to sit in on their interview.

What happens to the data collected?

The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed at which point all identifying information will be anonymised. To make sure the information collected from you during the sessions accurately
reflects your views, the transcript will be sent to you. This means you can check it and amend it if you wish.

All anonymous data will be stored securely on the researcher’s university ‘p’ drive and analysed by Siobhan O’Hagan. The purpose of this will be to look for themes within the data which describe elements of support that have been successful. The data will be written up into the researcher’s thesis project and may be published.

**How is confidentiality maintained?**

Both yours and your child’s name will be replaced with a pseudonym during coding and in the final report to ensure confidentiality. The audio files will be transcribed and will not be used for any other purpose without your written consent. Once your interview has been transcribed the audio file will be deleted. Your response will not be linked to your name in any written or verbal report of this research project. Your participation in this study will be confidential, and there are no foreseeable risks or discomforts.

There are two exceptions to anonymity which are: if a participant reveals that they are being harmed in any way or if a participant states that they have or intend to harm someone then the researcher has a duty to report this to their university supervisor who is Dr Caroline Bond. Dr Bond will follow both your school’s and The University of Manchester’s policy on reporting safeguarding disclosures.

**What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?**

You are under no obligation to participate in the research and it is up to you and your child to decide whether to take part. Please note that because the data will be anonymised and aggregated, it may not be possible for all data to be retrieved and discarded after data analysis has commenced. Therefore, you are free to withdraw without giving a reason and without detriment, prior to the commencement of data analysis. If you decide to withdraw before data analysis, then any data collected from you will be deleted.

**Will I be paid for participating in the study?**

There will not be a payment for taking part in the study.

**What is the duration of the study?**

One or two 30-60 minute interviews for parents.

Two or three 30 minute interviews for young people.

**Where will the study be conducted?**

In a meeting room at school.

**Will the outcomes of the study be published?**

The researcher will aim to publish the final report.

**Criminal Records Check**

The researcher has undergone an enhanced satisfactory criminal records check as per the requirements of The University of Manchester.

**Contact for further information or regarding any concerns:**
If you have any questions about this study the researcher can be contacted by email: siobhan.elliott@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk.

**The supervisor for this project is:**
Dr Caroline Bond  
Room A6.20  
Manchester Institute of Education School of Environment, Education and Development  
Ellen Wilkinson Building  
University of Manchester  
Oxford Rd  
Manchester  
M13 9PL  
Tel: 0161 2753686  
Email: caroline.bond@manchester.ac.uk

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Research Office  
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University of Manchester  
Oxford Road  
Manchester  
M13 9PL  
Email: Research.Complaints@manchester.ac.uk  
Tel: 0161 275 7583 or 275 8093.

**What Do I Do Now?**
If you have any queries about the study or would like to take part then please contact Siobhan O’Hagan within the next two weeks:  
Email: siobhan.elliott@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk  
Phone: 07964991714
Autism and EBSA: An investigation into the supportive factors of reintegration into mainstream education

PARENT CONSENT FORM

If you are happy for you and your child to participate please complete and sign the consent form below

Please initial box

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above project and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I understand that mine and my child’s participation in the study is voluntary and that we are both free to withdraw without giving a reason and without detriment, prior to the commencement of data analysis as our interview transcripts will be anonymised. If I withdraw before data analysis, then any data collected from me will be deleted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I agree that any data collected may be published in anonymous form in academic books or journals.</td>
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<td>I agree to myself and my child being audio recorded during the interviews.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Name of Child:

Name of Parent/Guardian:

Signature:  Date:
Autism and Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA): An investigation into the supportive factors of reintegration into mainstream education

Teacher Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in a research study which will explore the factors that have helped students with autism who have had a period of EBSA return to school. Before you decide to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the study?

Siobhan O’Hagan, Trainee Educational Psychologist, University of Manchester.

Title of the study

Autism and EBSA: An investigation into the supportive factors of reintegration into mainstream education

What is the aim of the study?

The study aims to explore and understand the experiences of students with autism who due to their anxiety have had periods of time away from school. The aim is to identify supportive factors that have worked well in helping the students return to school. It is hoped that this research will provide information and support to professionals working with children and young people on the autism spectrum.

Why have I been chosen?

The focus young people have been chosen as they have been known to have a period of EBSA but are now back in mainstream education. You have been chosen as a member of staff who knows the young person well and can provide a perspective of what has worked well from the school’s point of view. For this research to be able to provide practical and useful suggestions for future practice it is important that the voice of the young person, their family and the school is listened to.

What would I be asked to do if I took part?

The research will require you to participate in a face to face interview (approximately 60 minutes). The interview will take place at school at a time that is convenient for you.

What happens to the data collected?

The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed at which point all identifying information will be anonymised. To make sure the information collected from you during the sessions accurately reflects your views, the transcript will be sent to you. This means you can check it and amend it if you wish.

All anonymous data will be stored securely on the researcher’s university ‘p’ drive. The data will be analysed to identify themes within the data which describe elements of support that have been successful. The data will be written up into the researcher’s thesis project and may be published.
How is confidentiality maintained?

Your name will be replaced with a pseudonym when the audio file is transcribed and in the final report to ensure confidentiality. Once transcribed the digital audio files will be deleted and will not be used for any other purpose without your written consent. Your response will not be linked to your name in any written or verbal report of this research project. Your participation in this study will be confidential, and there are no foreseeable risks or discomforts.

There are two exceptions to anonymity which are: if a participant reveals that they are being harmed in any way or if a participant states that they have or intend to harm someone then the researcher has a duty to report this to their university supervisor who is Dr Caroline Bond. Dr Bond will follow both your school’s and The University of Manchester’s policy on reporting safeguarding disclosures.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?

You are under no obligation to participate in the research and it is up to you to decide whether to take part. Please note that because the data will be anonymised and aggregated, it may not be possible for all data to be retrieved and discarded after data analysis has commenced. Therefore, you are free to withdraw without giving a reason and without detriment, prior to the commencement of data analysis. If you decide to withdraw before data analysis, then any data collected from you will be deleted.

Will I be paid for participating in the study?

There will not be a payment for taking part in the study.

What is the duration of the study?

One 30-60 minute interview.

Where will the study be conducted?

In a meeting room at school.

Will the outcomes of the study be published?

The researcher will aim to publish the final report.

Criminal Records Check

The researcher has undergone an enhanced satisfactory criminal records check as per the requirements of The University of Manchester.

Contact for further information or regarding any concerns:

If you have any questions about this study the researcher can be contacted by email: siobhan.elliott@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk.

The supervisor for this project is:

Dr Caroline Bond
Room A6.20
Manchester Institute of Education School of Environment, Education and Development
Ellen Wilkinson Building
University of Manchester
What if I want to make a complaint?

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M13 9PL
Email: Research.Complaints@manchester.ac.uk
Tel: 0161 275 7583 or 275 8093.

What Do I Do Now?

If you have any queries about the study then please contact:
Siobhan O’Hagan, email: Siobhan.elliott@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

If you would like to take part then please confirm this with your school within the next two weeks and complete the attached consent form which will be collected from you prior to the interview.
Autism and EBSA: An investigation into the supportive factors of reintegration into mainstream education

TEACHER CONSENT FORM

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below

Please initial box

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Name:

Signature: Date:
Appendix 11: Example of initial coding of interview transcripts

Interviewer: Your mum was saying that you’ve been doing some gardening at school now, what’s that like?

YP1: I really, really like it.

Interviewer: What kind of things do you do?

YP1: Well, plant and like tend to the garden and I’ve learned a lot about...like wildlife and plants and yeah...

Interviewer: And is that on the school grounds?

YP1: Yeah.

Interviewer: And is it just you or are you part of a group?

YP1: Well, it was just me but recently a lot of other people have joined, so I don’t really enjoy it as much, but I haven’t said anything about it ’cause it’s fine.

Interviewer: What don’t you enjoy about having all the others there?

YP1: Because the others aren’t...I don’t really know them and it was kind of like...not in a selfish way, like my kind of alone time where I could de-stress but now there’s other people there that I don’t really know...and it’s kind of just like...yeah.

Interviewer: OK, when you did it before...others came, was it you and a member of staff or just you on your own?

YP1: Yeah...me and a member of staff and then the lady who...works there...volunteers there.

Interviewer: OK...so that was quite important for you to have that time alone in the day

YP1: Yeah

Interviewer: ...and just to kind of chill on your own...how often do you do the gardening?

YP1: It’s once a week on a Monday...

Interviewer: OK, is there any other times in the week where you can...where you don’t do something, so you’ve got something else like gardening to do...?

YP1: Well, I dropped geography recently...so now on a Monday and...a Wednesday I have like some free lessons where...well, I can just revise in [inclusion room].

Interviewer: OK, what’s that like for you?

YP1: It’s good because it’s like a dedicated time where I can revise instead of doing it all at home.

Interviewer: So on days where you haven’t got gardening and you haven’t got revision time, what are those days like?
Appendix 12: Example of data analysis from transcript extract to initial code, basic theme and global theme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript extract</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Basic theme</th>
<th>Global theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“She was quite distrustful of people when she first started and she’d be very withdrawn. She’d use her body, she’d use her hair to withdraw and to keep you at bay, to keep you away” Jasmine’s key adult.</td>
<td>Distrust Withdrawn</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Relationship with key adult and wider staff team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Took a long, long time to get that bond... it’s really only been time that’s enabled us to help Chloe because we’ve just had to get to know her” Chloe’s key adult.</td>
<td>Time/resources Relationship Bond Know them well</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“They support me and they are always there to talk to, and they know me very well, so they understand things and stuff” Jasmine.</td>
<td>Know them well Trust Support Relationship Reliable</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>“This usually comes from internalising everything, closing down and shutting down and all they can do then is cut for relief... It was intensive one-to-ones...We got past the shame, she was very ashamed. The key thing was talking about emotions as well. Just making her realise that she wasn’t a freak, that’s what she felt like at the time” Jasmine’s key adult.</td>
<td>Internalising feelings Female phenotype Self-harm Shame Anxiety Depression Talking Relationship Trust One-to-one Time/resources Safe Psychological factors</td>
<td>Mental Health</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“She’s got low self-esteem anyway and if we keep going on and on at her, it’s not going</td>
<td>Self-esteem Support Trust Relationship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
to help that situation. I think if we can build her self-esteem up I think things would be a lot more positive for her at school because she’s so negative towards everything, that’s hard. She’s in that rut and it’s about trying to get her to think a bit more positively about herself and situations” Erin’s key adult.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive thinking</th>
<th>Optimism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Appendix 13: The Association of Educational Psychologists Annual Conference, 2018

Supporting autistic girls in education

Caroline Bond, Siobhan O’Hagan and Carla Tomlinson
Manchester Institute of Education, University of Manchester, UK
AEP Conference, Manchester 2018

What is the EP role in supporting autistic girls?

Research findings from a qualitative focus group with Educational Psychologists

Siobhan O’Hagan

What is the EP role in supporting autistic girls?

Fallon, Woods and Rooney (2010) argue that

EPs are fundamentally scientist practitioners who utilise, for the benefit of children and young people, psychological skills, knowledge and understanding through the functions of consultation, assessment, intervention, research and training, at organisational, group and individual level across educational, care and community settings, with a variety of role partners. (p. 4)

Consultation

“The focus group EPs found schools frequently described girls with unidentified autism as presenting as having:

- Anxiety based school non-attendance
- Low mood
- Good expressive language
- Socially isolated since moving into secondary school
- Very bright and perfectionist
- One special friend who has now moved away
- Seems to cope well at school but parents report outbursts at home
- Spends lunchtimes in the library

Consultation

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Consultation

“With parent drop in, there was a parent who videoed their child because she felt that nobody understood how severe this behaviour was because it was being held and brought back to the home. Watching it was difficult, it was related to sensory seeking behaviour, and so it was like frantic movement in the bed to almost sensory seek but that wasn’t seen at school or anywhere else.” (Focus group EP)

Consultation

“It’s difficult then because the school are saying it’s not a school issue because the behaviour’s happening at home, but actually the behaviour is happening at home because school aren’t recognising or perhaps giving the child an outlet. Because they haven’t recognised it school almost wash their hands of it, by not seeing it as a school issue. However, the school should actually be doing more to meet those needs on site.” (Focus Group EP)
**Assessment**

"I’ve had to kind of look specifically at examples to
challenge that it’s not behaviour. So for example, there was
a primary girl who school felt was manipulative... There
was an example of her literal understanding of language
where I’d asked her (she liked horse riding and she liked
reading books): ‘Do you read any books on horses?’ She
looked at me and went: ‘You’d fall off!’ So it was those kinds
of examples that helped to challenge and shift perspectives
and that actually this isn’t manipulative behaviour – this is
difficulty around filtering situations and social contexts.”
(Focus group EP)

**Future Research**

An exploration of the supportive factors
that have helped autistic girls who have
school refused return to mainstream
education, reintegrate and maintain their
attendance.

**Intervention**

"The girl went and did rowing because rowing again is a
very active, and less conversational than being in the
yard. Her respite time was very sensory rowing back and
forth and school bought a rowing machine for her and
that was her bit of sensory time and then she could
socially interact – it worked wonders. Her little obsession
was learning number plates and so to give her a bit of
respite she would go into the car park and have a learn
of some number plates. I didn’t come up with these, the
school came up with those so very astute really and she
was a happy kid because of it.” (Focus group EP)

**Implications for schools, EP practice
and research**

In regards to the literature there are many research areas to explore:
- Although many good practice strategies are effective for boys and girls we
  need to understand how approaches might need to be tailored for girls
- We also need to understand specific needs e.g. educational experiences of
  autistic girls with gender identity difficulties

In regards to EP practice there are a number of important implications:
- Firstly, if a child appears to be coping at school but parents report that
  they are displaying signs of distress at home which may be due to the
  intense stress of having to fit in with school norms throughout the day,
  EPs can support schools to provide appropriate support at school which
  will hopefully decrease their externalising behaviours at home.
- EPs are in a unique position in regards to their relationships with schools
  and knowledge of pupils which could support the diagnostic pathway.

**Training**

- EPs are very well placed to provide training for
  schools, and other educational/children’s services,
  that can raise awareness of the needs and voices
  of a range of people with autism including girls.

- The National Autistic Society has also recently
  developed an online module aimed at
diagnosticians which can also help school staff to
develop their skills in working with autistic girls
(NAS, 2018).

**Implications for schools, EP practice
and research (cont.)**

- The research highlights a potential systemic role for EP’s in the
  training of staff around the particular presentation in girls, in
  an attempt to raise awareness of potential differences and
  further develop understanding of how their needs can be best
  supported.
Supporting Autistic Girls in Education Seminar

Dr Caroline Bond, Siobhan O'Hagan and Carla Tomlinson from The Manchester Institute of Education presented a seminar titled: Supporting Autistic Girls in Education, at the Annual Educational Psychology Conference. The seminar drew together academic research to date, personal accounts, small scale research studies and good practice to highlight key considerations for educational psychologists.

The seminar provided a brief overview of prevalence and some of the challenges in identifying autistic girls, particularly the emerging evidence for a female phenotype (Mandy et al., 2012) and limitations of current diagnostic tools. The findings of a small scale research study on the role of educational psychologists in identifying and supporting autistic girls was discussed and a case study of best practice in one secondary school was presented. The seminar was a popular choice with an engaged audience who took part in a fascinating and thought provoking discussion to conclude the session.
School can present many challenges for autistic girls such as understanding
unwritten social expectations and navigating peer relationships which with age
become increasingly complex. Girls may be more likely to internalise their feelings
and appear to be able to manage and cope within the learning environment.
Therefore, their difficulties can go unnoticed by school staff until behaviours such as
emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA) arise. It is important that education
professionals are aware of how girls can be supported to return to school, integrate
with their peers and meet their academic potential.

What was the study?
The aim of the study was to explore the supportive factors that have helped autistic
girls who have experienced EBSA return to and thrive in school. We interviewed three
autistic girls from different high schools who had successfully re-engaged in formal
education following a period of EBSA, their parents and their key adult in school. We
identified themes of supportive practice in schools.
LATEST FINDINGS

Autistic girls emotionally based school avoidance

What did we find out?

This was the first study to explore the supportive factors for autistic girls who have successfully re-engaged with mainstream education following EBSA. A shift of research focus onto autistic girls who have overcome barriers to education and who are thriving in school has highlighted pathways to successful re-engagement. Psychological factors which support re-engagement include a sense of belonging, identity, safety, acceptance and motivation which are developed through trusting staff and student relationships, pupil participation, psychoeducation, social skills teaching, friendship and good autism practice including safe spaces and a flexible approach.

What does this mean?

Positive staff and peer relationships appear to underpin good educational experiences for autistic girls. Friendship was important to all the girls in this study and they benefited from feeling connected to others and having a sense of belonging to the school community. The relationship between the young person and key adult provided a secure foundation for which the young person’s skills could be developed. This relationship was key to pupil participation and more in-depth social skills and mental health support being successful. The supportive factors for autistic girls to reengage in education following EBSA are likely to also be preventative factors to EBSA and may be considered as good practice in autism education.
Appendix 16: Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology programme stakeholders’ event

Autistic Girls Experiencing Emotionally Based School Avoidance: An investigation into the supportive factors of reintegration into mainstream education

Siobhan O’Hagan

A1

- T1 developed from A1 which explored the experiences of EHIs investigating autism in girls.
- EHIs conducted referrals for girls with autism who were heavily engaged in mainstream education.
- EHIs began working with the girls it transpired that the girls had autism.
- When providing intervention and support for autistic girls who were school avoidant, EHIs emphasised the importance of the lack of literature and evidence based information to support their practice.
- The EHIs used their wealth of knowledge in therapeutic techniques to support the girls.
- The EHIs felt that it would be easier to work with schools in supporting girls to return to school if they were backed up by evidence.

Findings

- The interaction of multiple factors increased the risk of autistic girls experiencing anxiety, depression, self-harm and EBAs.
- Family bereavement
- Parental illness
- Late diagnosis of autism
- Inflexibility of school and staff understanding of autism
- Peer relationships- bullying and lack of friendships
- Issues with the journey into school
- Educational pressures in the classroom and exams
- Relationships with staff and disability of particular subjects
- Sensory sensitivities to the school environment
- Transition- particularly from primary into secondary

T2 – empirical report

- R2 – What are the supportive factors that help autistic girls with EBBA return to school, reintegrate and maintain their attendance?
- 3 case studies at different mainstream secondary schools
- 3 participants aged 13-15 years old
- Semi-structured interviews with the girls, parents and members of staff
- Thematic analysis of transcripts

Findings

- Supportive factors that helped the girls successfully return to school, reintegrate and maintain their attendance:
  - Specialist mental health support
  - Change in educational setting
  - Education Health and Care Plan
  - Sense of identity- acceptance of sexuality, extra-curricular activities, aspirations
  - Feelings of belonging and connectedness- friendships (staff support to develop friendships), supportive relationships with staff and time to talk about feelings
  - Flexibility of school to fit around the needs of the YP, reduced timetable, safe haven (inclusion room/support base),destressing activities such as gardening
  - Parent and school communication