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An Exploratory Study of the Experiences of Year 7 pupils with Autistic Spectrum Conditions (ASC) on Transition to Mainstream Secondary School

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

2015

Anita Bennett-Warne

School of Education
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Abstract

The University of Manchester

Anita Bennett-Warne

Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology

An exploratory study of the experiences of Year 7 pupils with Autistic Spectrum Conditions (ASCs) on transition to mainstream secondary school.

2015

The majority of children with ASC are educated within a mainstream secondary setting. The challenges within the new environment may lead to some children experiencing a breakdown in provision resulting in temporary or permanent exclusions. A gap in the literature highlights a need for research which seeks to understand the views and experiences of year 7 children with ASCs about their transition to mainstream secondary school.

The research involved four year 7 children with ASC, from across three settings, who had recently transitioned from a mainstream primary school to a mainstream secondary school (without resource based provision). The views of their parents and teachers were also sought.

A multiple-embedded case study design was employed involving four cases from across three school settings. This involved utilising a transition Q-sort and a semi-structured interview with four children and semi-structured interviews with six parents and three teachers. The data was analysed using content analysis and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The findings highlight a need for individualised transition planning for the child with ASC; consideration of co-occurring difficulties and the importance of including the views of the child and parents in transition planning. The findings are discussed in relation to psychological theories and existing literature. The implications for future research; local authority policy; school staff; parents and educational psychologists are considered.
Declaration

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The Author

Prior to starting the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology I was a teacher for 22 years. After originally graduating with an honours degree in Music and English Literature I completed a PGCE and for three years taught a year one class at an infant school in South Yorkshire. Following this I took up a teaching post abroad and for three years taught the Reception class at a British School in Seoul in South Korea before taking six months out to travel around New Zealand, Australia, Nepal and India.

Since returning to the UK I have taught at a specialist school for children with autism, as a primary teacher and SENCo in the private sector and as a teacher in a resource based setting for key stage two children with speech and language difficulties. During this time I completed a PGCert in SEN (specialising in dyslexia) and a further degree in psychology before applying to train as an educational psychologist.
Dedication

Firstly, I would like to express my deep thanks and appreciation to the children, parents and staff who participated in this study for their time and willingness to share their experiences. It was a pleasure working with you all. I would also like to thank the local authority staff and head teachers who gave permission for the research to be carried out.

Next, I would like to express my gratitude to both my research supervisor Dr Caroline Bond and co-supervisor Professor Kevin Woods for your expertise, humour and never ending patience and calm. Your positive approach, flexibility and support is truly appreciated.

Thank you also to my friends and family for your support, love and belief that I could achieve this. I am looking forward to re-connecting with you all properly again soon.

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List of Abbreviations

AET: Autism Educational Trust
ASC: Autism Spectrum Condition
APA: American Psychological Association
APPGA: All Party Parliamentary Group on Autism
ASD: Autism Spectrum Disorder
BPS: British Educational Society
DCSF: Department for Children Schools and Families
DfE: Department for Education
DfES: Department for Education and Skills
DSM-V: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (5th edition)
EP: Educational Psychologist
EPPI-centre: Evidence for Policy, Practice, Information and Co-ordination Centre
EPS: Educational Psychology Service
GCSE: General Certificate in Secondary Education
HFA: High Functioning Autism
HMIE: Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education
LA: Local Authority
NAS: National Autistic Society
NICE: National Institute in Clinical Excellence
Ofsted: Office for Standards in Education
PDD: Pervasive Developmental Disorder
RQ: Research questions
SEN: Special Educational Needs
UNESCO: United Nations Educational and Cultural Organisation
WHO: World Health Organisation
Chapter One: Introduction

The current thesis is written as part of the course requirements for the three year doctoral training in educational and child psychology at the University of Manchester and focuses on the transition experiences of pupils with ASC moving from mainstream primary school to mainstream secondary school. The researcher has a background of working in both mainstream and specialist provision with children and young people with autism and Asperger’s syndrome. For the purposes of this research autism and Asperger’s syndrome will, as far as possible, be referred to as Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) unless otherwise specified by or quoted by others. This is in recognition that the term ASC is considered to be less stigmatising than Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in that it acknowledges the difficulties as well as cognitive strengths associated with autism (Baron-Cohen, 2008).

As part of training as an educational psychologist the researcher has been on placement within a local authority (LA) in the Northwest of England. This has entailed working in a variety of educational settings with children and young people and their parents/carers and staff. The present research has grown out of an identified concern within the LA regarding the number of children with ASC transitioning to mainstream secondary schools whose placements are unsuccessful and a subsequent need to be placed within costly, out of borough, educational settings.

Transition for pupils with ASC has also been an area of specific interest for the researcher. In current and previous roles, including 22 years within education, the researcher has directly collaborated with children, staff and parents concerning issues relating to transitions for children with ASC and in particular from primary to secondary school.

Transition may be defined as the experience of moving from one educational stage to the next, as commonly undertaken by the majority of children in the UK education system at the age of eleven, when they move from primary to secondary
school (Evangelou et al., 2008). The move to secondary school typically happens at age 12 for children in Scotland and Northern Ireland. This occurs at a time when children not only begin to undergo the significant physiological changes, associated with early adolescence, but also have increased academic expectations and social functioning to contend with (Coffey, 2013; Crosnoe & Elder, 2004).

It is widely acknowledged that the transition to secondary school is an important milestone in a child’s education and an event which may provoke anxiety as well as eager anticipation (Zeedyk, et al., 2003). For many children it is not only a time of looking forward to making new friends and undertaking new learning experiences but also to some extent a time of saying goodbye to familiar faces, routines and the close support systems of the primary school (Ashton, 2008). Undergoing such changes may understandably cause concern for some children (Evangelou, et al., 2008) and indeed their parents/carers, yet given time and appropriate support the transition to secondary school for most children is a success (Topping, 2011).

However, children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) may be especially vulnerable on transition due to the demands of functioning in an often larger secondary school setting. Difficulties forming new friendships or adjusting to a new learning environment may lead to an increased susceptibility to isolation and bullying (Evangelou, et al., 2008).

Such susceptibility at times of transition may be especially pertinent for children with ASCs because of associated difficulties around communication, social interactions and coping with change generally (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Tobias, 2009). As increasingly higher numbers of children with ASC are being educated in mainstream secondary school settings (Ambitious About Autism, 2012) it is important to explore and address issues around transition and inclusion because of the potential effect a difficult transition may have on a child adapting positively to and succeeding at secondary school in the longer term (Rice, Frederickson & Seymour, 2011). Children with ASC are considered to have an increased risk of anxiety (Humphrey & Hebron, 2014; White, Oswald, Ollendick, & Scailhill, 2009) which may be exacerbated by the numerous elements of change inherent with the
move from primary to secondary school which also coincides with the personal changes associated with emerging adolescence. They may also be at an increased risk of social isolation as they move from the smaller primary school setting with one main teacher and class of peers to the much larger secondary school where children are required to negotiate social interactions with a wider group of peers and different teachers for each subject (Wainscott, Naylor, Sutcliffe, Tantam & Williams, 2008).

While it is reported that there is broad agreement with the aims of inclusion in mainstream schools there is concern that some schools and teachers may not fully equipped to meet the needs of pupils with ASC. Robertson, Chamberlain & Kasari (2003) identified that some mainstream teachers do not feel they have received sufficient training specifically aimed at supporting children with ASC. It is also argued that teachers may underestimate the difficulties that academically able children with ASC may have with social interactions; forming friendships and coping with the sensory demands of a noisy and busy secondary school environment (Humphrey & Symes, 2010). Such difficulties not only impact on the ability of the child with ASC to form and retain friendships at an individual level but also influence how accepted the child may be by his or her wider peer group.

Exploring and addressing the difficulties around inclusion into a mainstream setting is vitally important as around 40% of children with ASC attending mainstream schools will experience either temporary or permanent exclusion from school. This could have a significant impact on their friendships, self-confidence, academic achievements and even longer term prospects for employment (Ambitious About Autism, 2012). Furthermore the experiences of children with ASC moving into mainstream secondary school not only vary across regions but also from one secondary school to another within a given area (DCSF, 2009). Such differences within provisions may influence how a child experiences and views transition and as such highlights the dynamic interplay that occurs between the individual child and the school environment (Hannah &Topping, 2013). This may be seen through the particular inclusion and transition policies and procedures employed by a
scho and the effect they may have at an individual level. By also applying a more systemic, ecological perspective to the process of transition (Bronfenbrenner, 1992) it may be possible to gain a further level of understanding and insight into some of the factors which may promote or impede a successful move to mainstream secondary school for children with ASC.

Inclusive practice has long recognised the right for the voice of key stakeholders to be heard regarding decisions concerning educational provision (Lindsay, 2007) and the researcher is especially committed to seeking the views and experiences of children with ASC and their parents/carers. Directly consulting with parents/carers as part of school transitions and incorporating their views within the decision making process regarding their child’s education has also been highlighted as contributing to improved outcomes for children (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Driessen, Smit & Sleegers, 2005; Goodall & Montgomery, 2013). Furthermore, working in partnership with parents is fundamental to developing effective inclusive practice for children with special educational needs (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Frederickson & Cline, 2009). Indeed, there is an increased expectation for consultation between parents, children and school staff regarding SEN processes as highlighted within the revised Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (SEN CoP) (DfE, 2014) which emphasises that stakeholder views should be central to the decision making process and this is particularly so in relation to key educational transition points for CYP.

All children have the right to be consulted about decisions which directly affect them (UNESCO, 1994) and consulting with children has been shown to benefit teaching and learning and contribute to fostering a more open, supportive school ethos (Lundy, 2007). Incorporating the child’s views within research and the development of school systems recognises that children are active participants within their education with valid contributions to make to decisions which affect them (Tangen, 2008) and in informing the development of future provision. Furthermore, enabling children to express their views can be empowering and especially so for those who may have particular difficulties with communicating
and therefore at an increased risk of marginalisation as may occur for children with autism (Ainscow, 2008).

While there is a considerable body of research concerning transition to secondary school for the typical population and for children with more general SEN there is less research specifically concerning children with ASC (Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Hannah & Topping, 2012; Humphrey & Ainscow, 2006). Further still there is limited research which directly elicits the views and experiences of children with ASC regarding their transition to mainstream secondary school (Dann, 2011; Hannah, 2008; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008). Indeed the current research draws upon the findings in a pilot study carried out by the researcher as part of a previous placement in a neighbouring LA, which focused on gathering the views of children with ASC as they moved to a mainstream secondary school (Bennett-Warne, 2013). During the pilot study it was possible to evaluate approaches which elicited the views and experiences of children with ASC. Research into the contextual school and family factors which facilitate successful transition is also limited. It was therefore the intention of the researcher to broaden the initial pilot study to include an exploration of these factors in the current research.

As highlighted, a gap in the literature exists relating to eliciting the views and experiences of children with ASC concerning the transition from mainstream primary to mainstream secondary school. The current thesis aims to address the gap in the research by directly eliciting the views and experiences of children with ASC as they have moved from year 6 in a mainstream primary school to year 7 in a mainstream secondary school. This is also supplemented by interviews with their teachers and parents and documentary analysis of school policies. This enabled exploration of some of the wider contextual processes and factors which may impact upon the success of transition for the individual child with ASC. The researcher hopes that a deeper understanding of how a successful transition to mainstream secondary school may be further facilitated for the child with ASC.
An exploratory, multiple-embedded case study design was utilised as a method to gain the views and transition experiences of four children with ASC across three separate, mainstream secondary schools within the researcher’s placement LA. Within the case study design the views of the children with ASC are central to the research approach and a multi-informant picture of their transition experiences was gained by also seeking the views of their parents and staff at their schools. In total four children, six parents and three school staff participated in the current research and each school’s policies regarding transition, inclusion and provision for children with ASC, alongside recent Ofsted reports, were also considered as part of the wider context for each secondary school.

The next chapter outlines the key literature which informed this thesis. This will be followed by a detailed description of the methodology used in Chapter 3. The findings are outlined in Chapter 4. A discussion of the findings in relation to relevant literature is presented in chapter 5 along with the study limitations, implications for future research and the role of the EP.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Chapter overview
This chapter begins by outlining the literature review strategy adopted in order to identify relevant research related to transition to secondary school for children with ASC. This contains the aims of the review and details the literature returned from the search. The current study is then located within the wider body of literature in relation to transition to secondary school children with ASC and mainstream secondary school experiences identified as part of a more general review of transition literature.

For the systematic literature review articles most closely related to transition to secondary school for pupils with ASC which also elicit the views of the child with ASC and their parents/carers and teachers were identified. This literature is described and critiqued in detail in relation to its methodological quality and relevance to the current research by utilising weight of evidence criteria applicable to the evaluation of exploratory quantitative research (University of Manchester, 2014) and qualitative research (Spencer, Ritchie, Lewis & Dillon, 2003).

The current study was also informed by the wider ASC literature and previous expert practitioner reviews of research into autism which acknowledges the importance of the “real-world” nature of the research undertaken within the field of autism generally (Pellicano, Dinsmore & Charman, 2014).

2.2 Literature search strategy
Literature searches were carried out between November 2013 and January 2014 and between February to May 2015. The review strategy also included harvesting of references.

The following key questions were developed to guide the general literature review for the current study as follows:
• What are the key factors in transition for children moving from year 6 to year 7?

• What are the key factors in transition from year 6 to year 7 for children with SEN?

• What are the experiences of children with ASC on transition from year 6 mainstream to year 7 mainstream?

• What are the wider factors which may contribute to transition to mainstream secondary school for pupils with ASC?

• How are the views of year 7 children with ASC elicited regarding transition to secondary school?

To inform the gathering of relevant articles the following broad searches and terms were used:

• Transition + secondary school
• Transition + primary + secondary school
• Transition + key stage 2 + key stage 3
• SEN + mainstream secondary school transition
• Transition + autism (Asperger)
• Mainstream secondary school + autism (Asperger)
• Inclusion + autism (Asperger)
• Child’s voice + SEN
• Child’s voice + autism (Asperger)
• Parent/carers’ voice + SEN + autism (Asperger)
More focused searches were undertaken to identify key studies relating to ASC and transition specifically. The following search terms were used:

- Transition experiences + children with autism (Asperger)
- Child’s views + transition + autism (Asperger)
- Parents views + transition + autism (Asperger)

The search terms were used within the following databases:

- ERIC (Educational Information Resources Centre)
- PsychINFO
- BEI (British Education Index)
- Sage full text

Grey literature was also searched using both the University of Manchester thesis repository and the British Electronic Thesis Online Service (EThOS). Google Scholar and the National Autistic Society dedicated research database were also referred to particularly with regard to autism specific research into transition. Articles were further drawn from the National Autistic Society, Autism Educational Trust and Ambitious About Autism websites which are well-regarded sources of information in the field of autism. Documents retrieved in all the searches were also surveyed to ascertain any additional relevant articles.

Initial searches for the general literature review revealed high numbers of articles related to transition. Many of these were excluded for not being relevant to the secondary transition stage; being too subject specific or exclusively based in special schools. In addition to the general overview of the relevant literature a systematic literature review was also undertaken and is described in section 2.2.6.

The literature begins with a consideration of aspects of ASC relevant to the purpose of the current study; the wider theoretical framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1992; 1999) within which the current study is placed; good practice in autism
(Charman, Pellicano, Peacey L., Peacey, N., Forward, Dockrell, 2011); the voice of the child; transition to secondary school generally and transition to secondary school for wider groups of children with SEN. A critique of the specific literature pertaining to the transition experiences of children with ASC on transition to secondary school is presented. The research gap is then highlighted and the aims of the current study outlined.

2.2.1. Autism Spectrum Conditions.
Autism is considered to be a life-long, complex neurological condition which typically manifests itself early in childhood at around two to three years of age (Boucher, 2009; Frith, 2003; Happe, 1993; Wing & Gould, 1979). Its effects can be seen across a child’s development and presents as mild to severe difficulties across three key areas, namely social interactions, social communication and as impaired flexibility of thought and behaviour (World Health Organisation (WHO), 2013).

The core difficulties, have historically been described as the Triad of Impairments (Wing & Gould, 1979) which are associated, to varying degrees, with labels used in relation to autism including Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD); Asperger syndrome; High Functioning Autism (HFA); Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD) and PDD – Not otherwise specified (PDD- NOS) and Retts syndrome.

As briefly mentioned in the introduction for the purposes of the current study autism will be referred to as autism spectrum condition (ASC) unless it is necessary to specify otherwise in relation to the literature. Baron-Cohen (2008) highlights that the use of ASC acknowledges autism as a continuum rather than a medical disorder requiring a cure. It also accounts for the strengths and differences in thinking or “neurodiversity” often displayed by individuals with autism, such as attention to and memory for detail and pattern recognition for example. Baron-Cohen (2008) further argues that adopting a strengths based view of autism promotes research which positively focuses on interventions and approaches which enable individuals with autism to utilise their strengths through which they may lead positive and fulfilling lives.
More recently the established triadic model has been challenged with differing models having been forwarded (Ravet, 2015). Boucher (2009) argues that social communication and social interaction difficulties will always be reflected in each other and are therefore not dissociable. Furthermore, Boucher (2009) posits that a clearer understanding of ASC and account of the varying language abilities of children with ASC are achieved when the social interaction and social communication elements of the Triad of Impairment are forwarded as one element, namely “social-interaction-communication impairment” (p90). When considered along with “elements of behavioural flexibility”, Boucher (2009) argues that this forms a dyadic model of ASC. Indeed recent revisions to the diagnostic criteria within the DSM-5 (APA, 2013) acknowledge that language difficulties not only occur in children with ASC and recent revisions now include the presence of individual difficulties within the areas of i) social communication and interactions and ii) restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests, or activities. Sensory perception difficulties are considered as part of the second criteria.

It is further recognised that ASC may also co-occur with other difficulties and developmental disorders (Baron-Cohen, 2008). For instance, children may also have learning difficulties (Jordan, 2001); sensory processing difficulties (Bogdashina, 2003); motor coordination difficulties (Fournier, Hass, Naik, Lodha & Cauraugh, 2010), dyslexia (Frith & Happe, 1998) or ADHD (Mayes, Calhoun, Mayes & Molitoris, 2011). Additional difficulties may also relate to areas such as anxiety (White, Oswald, Ollendick & Scahill, 2009) and sleep (Mayes, Calhoun, Bixler & Vgontzas, 2009).

2.2.2. Diagnosis of ASC.
While there is no definitive test for diagnosing ASC it is recognised that best practise for assessment involves multi-agency approaches (NICE, 2011). Within a LA this may involve the adoption of an autism pathway through which professionals such as paediatricians, speech and language therapists and educational psychologists would be involved with the ASC assessment process.
Such a process would take into account difficulties encountered by the child, not only in relation to social communication and interactions (Wing & Gould, 1979) but also in relation to specific behaviours including unusual sensory perceptions (Bogdashina, 2003) and other areas of particular strength or difficulty.

Multi-agency assessments for ASC may be guided by applying the diagnostic criteria contained within the International Classification of Mental and Behavioural Disorders (ICD-10) (WHO, 1992) which utilises the triadic model and is soon to be updated (Ravet, 2015) or the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition (DSM-V) (APA, 2013). Under the recently revised DSM-5, sub-categories of PDD and Asperger syndrome have been subsumed under a general diagnosis of ASD.

The changes to the diagnostic criteria within DSM-5 have caused some disquiet among Asperger communities who feel the removal of Asperger’s syndrome as a category will to some extent remove part of their identity (Baron-Cohen, 2008). Conversely, it may also be argued that the use of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), as used within DSM-5, further embraces the notion of autism being on a continuum and that clinicians will need to specifically acknowledge the individual’s patterns of difficulties and strengths and also allow for wider consideration of autism occurring alongside other development disorders as part of diagnosis (Wing, Gould & Gillberg, 2011).

### 2.2.2.1. Prevalence of autism.

Early estimates of the prevalence of autism were 4-5 in every 10,000 children (Wing & Gould, 1979). More recent figures estimate that in the UK this figure is now approximately 116.1 in 10,000 or around 1.1% (Baird et al., 2006) which includes wider diagnostic criteria encompassing ASD and as referred to in DSM-5.

Such changes may be partly accounted for by an increased understanding and awareness of autism by clinicians, professionals and the wider public, leading to a reduced chance of cases being undiagnosed (Boucher, 2009). Wider complexities may also need to be considered such as improvements in methods used in studies.
of prevalence and an increased willingness by clinicians to diagnose ASC with cooccurring difficulties (Charman, 2002).

ASC occurs more commonly in males than females at a ratio of 4:1 which has changed little since Kanner’s times (Fombonne, 1999). As further highlighted by Boucher (2009) this figure covers a wide ASC range and differences occur when considering either extreme of the spectrum. In high functioning autism males outnumber females by 6:1 and at the lower ability end of the spectrum the ratio is 4:1 (Fombonne, 1999). Also, ASC in girls tends to be diagnosed later than for boys possibly because their difficulties with social communication and friendships are not as apparent earlier in childhood (Wing, Gould & Gilberg, 2011).

2.2.2.2. ASC and social communication and interactions.

Children with ASC display particular difficulties with the reciprocation of social and emotional interactions which may particularly affect their ability to form relationships with their peers (Attwood, 2007). When friendships are formed they may be different to those formed by their wider peers in that they tend to be with a small number of particular children, are shorter in duration and fulfil a specific purpose (Bauminger & Shulman, 2003). Children with ASC find it difficult to follow social rules such as sharing and co-operation which may often lead to misunderstandings or sometimes disinterest on the part of the more typical peer and lead to a risk of social isolation for the child with ASC (Attwood, 2007). Social isolation may leave children with ASC especially vulnerable to the effects of teasing and bullying particularly within mainstream settings (Humphrey & Symes, 2010) and is considered a barrier to successful transition to mainstream settings (Reid & Batten, 2006).

2.2.2.3. ASC and co-occurring difficulties.

Children with ASC are considered to be a heterogeneous group in that, while they may have a diagnosis in common, they each have a unique pattern of strengths and difficulties (Waterhouse, 2013). These strengths and difficulties are affected by the severity of their autism, the presence and level of associated language and
learning difficulties and the occurrence of wider co-occurring difficulties (Boucher, 2009). It is also important to consider wider developmental issues for individuals with ASC, such as emerging adolescence, and its influence on self-awareness and the development of relationships with peers (Humphrey & Symes, 2011; White, Oswald, Ollendick et al., 2009).

As highlighted in the previous section there appears to be an increased willingness by clinicians to diagnose ASC alongside other difficulties (Charman, 2002). For children with ASC co-occurring difficulties are considered to be common and for some individuals their main difficulties may arise out of a related physical or medical condition such as cerebral palsy or epilepsy, for instance, and not primarily from difficulties associated with ASC (Boucher, 2009). Other co-occurring difficulties may be considered as being within the remit of mental health and well-being and individuals with ASC are at an increased risk of developing difficulties such as depression (Humphrey & Symes, 2010; Medical Research Council, 2001) and specific anxiety conditions (Hannah & Topping, 2012; Medical Research Council, 2001) beyond those primarily related to the triad or dyad of Impairment.

A full discussion of all co-occurring difficulties or conditions associated with ASC is beyond the remit of the current research and therefore this will be limited to a consideration of sensory perception difficulties and certain anxiety based conditions as these are especially relevant to the current research. In particular selective mutism will also be considered within the literature as this is particularly relevant to a participant in the current research.

A wider consideration of ASC and general and specific learning difficulties such as language impairment or dyslexia will not be covered either as the participants within the study were not identified as having these co-occurring difficulties or indeed any wider medical or physical conditions (see individual participant information in chapter 4).

### 2.2.2.4. Sensory perceptual difficulties and ASC.

A significant number of children with ASC are affected by difficulties processing sensory information. Research estimates that between 45-95% of individuals with
ASC demonstrate significant difficulties in this area (Ben-Sasson, Hen, Fluss, Cermak, Engel-Yeger, et al., 2009). Individuals with ASC who write about their everyday experiences (Williams, 1998; Grandin & Panek, 2014) also highlight the difficulties they encounter because of their sensitivity to particular sensory information especially regarding sound, light and touch. Many such sensitivities may be broadly related to hypersensitivity to stimulation, such as avoiding certain noises or lights or to seeking out stimulation, hyposensitivity, and for some children a need for particular deep pressure touch or movement (Baranek, David, Poe, Stone & Watson, 2006).

Such difficulties perceiving and processing sensory information may be viewed as being along a continuum which to a lesser extent may be present across the wider population and not only present for people with ASC (Wing, Gould & Gillberg, 2011). Such sensitivities may be very specific to the individual and quite contextualised, for example within school environments fluorescent lights in a particular room and noise levels in a crowded cafeteria may cause significant distress for some individuals with ASC (Bogdashina, 2003).

It is further recognised that sensory perception difficulties should be considered a core difficulty for those with ASC, and not only a co-occurring difficulty, due to the high prevalence and significance of difficulties encountered (Bogdashina, 2003; Ravet, 2015). Again, this is acknowledged within recent revisions to the DSM-5 (APA, 2013) which include consideration of sensory processing difficulties as part of the behavioural criteria for diagnosis. Given the busy and stimulating nature of the secondary school environment the impact of possible sensory processing difficulties needs to be considered for children with ASC and accounted for in the move to mainstream secondary school.

2.2.3. Anxiety and ASC.
Anxiety is highlighted as being the most commonly reported mental health concern for school age and adolescent children with ASC (Ghaziuddin, 2002) which is believed to affect between 11-84% with a diagnosis (White, Oswald, Ollendick & Scahill, 2009). While the basis of such anxiety may not be ascribed to a particular
cause it is not difficult to appreciate how the changes in routine, teaching approaches and coping with the demands of the secondary school environment may contribute to increased anxiety for children with ASC (Hannah & Topping, 2013).

An increased expectation for interactions with peers in secondary school may also increase feelings of anxiety as this involves an area of key difficulty for individuals with ASC. Difficulties with social communication and interactions in particular may be associated more specifically with social anxiety and lead to further avoidance of social interactions with same age peers (Myles & Simpson, 2001). Such difficulties could particularly impact upon children with ASC as they transition to secondary school and are expected to contend with the associated expectations of forming friendships from across a larger peer group. A developing awareness of their own social difficulties in comparison with their peers ASC (White, Oswald & Ollendick and Scahill, 2009) may further contribute to an increase in social anxiety at a stage in development when children are considered to begin to seek wider interactions and support from their peers (Erikson, 1968).

### 2.2.3.1 Selective mutism and ASC.

In certain circumstances anxiety may develop into significant difficulties in interactions with both peers and adults in particular contexts as may be evident for children with selective mutism (DSM-5, 2013). There is a lack of research specifically concerning selective mutism and autism (Cline & Bladwin, 2004). However, some indication of prevalence may tentatively be ascertained from figures in relation to the wider population which indicate that selective mutism may occur between 0.02 and 0.18% of the general population (Kopp & Gillberg, 1997). Gillberg & Billstedt (2000) highlight case study reports of autism and Asperger syndrome disorder in children which note possible co-occurring and familial links between ASD and selective mutism. Furthermore, the researchers also highlight that in a population study of selective mutism, Kopp & Gillberg (1997) found that one out of five school age children with selective mutism also met full diagnostic criteria for Asperger syndrome.
While the prevalence may be low, given the difficulties regarding social communication and interactions for children with ASC, it is possible to consider a bidirectional interaction between ASC and selective mutism in terms of the effect on developing wider relationships with peers. Difficulties being able to speak in certain situations may also have a significant impact upon a child’s social learning experiences as teachers may feel at a loss as to how to support the learning of children with selective mutism (Clive & Bladwin, 1994).

**2.2.3.2. Adolescence, ASC and the transition to secondary school.** Transition to secondary school occurs at a time when children are undergoing significant physiological changes associated with puberty and adolescence (Sebastian, Blakemore & Charman, 2009). This is a time when individuals begin to carve out a sense of their own identity, cope with physical changes and develop an increased need for independence and autonomy (Nichols, Moravcik & Tetenbaum, 2009). This period of development is also associated with changes in the nature of friendships with peers in ways that require more sophistication (Frith, 2004). Howlin (2003) highlighted that young people with ASC also compare themselves less favourably with peers in terms of social skills which may further impact upon their confidence to keep trying to form wider friendships at a crucial time in their secondary school experience.

Alongside a growing need to seek wider friendships and support from peers is an emerging independence which makes it more difficult to accept support from adults (Attwood, 2007). This may compound difficulties because such changes occur at a time when it may be likely that some mediation is needed by an adult to enable the child with ASC to continue to develop social skills and interactions in the new secondary school environment (Boucher, 2009).

It is also perhaps important to give wider consideration to some of the gender differences in social interactions of young people with ASC on entry to secondary school (Cridland, Jones, Caputi, Magee, 2014). Girls with ASC are often diagnosed
later than boys (Attwood, 2007; Baron-Cohen, 2008) and their difficulties with social interactions and friendships become more evident in adolescence when more complex levels of social communication, such as social problem solving and reciprocal sharing are seen as a particular aspect of friendships between adolescent girls (Solomon, Miller, Taylor, Hinshaw & Carter, 2012). Adolescent friendships for girls are based on talking and a more sophisticated level of the understanding and use of the pragmatics of language which is an area of difficulty for children with ASC (Baron-Cohen, Leslie & frith, 1985). The friendships of adolescent boys tends to be based around doing things and the sharing of mutual interests (Nichols, et al.,2009) which may put boys with ASC somewhat at an advantage compared with girls with ASC when developing wider friendships on transition to secondary school (Hsiao, Tseng, Huang & Gua, 2013). However, being able to develop friendships is recognised as being difficult for both boys and girls with ASC generally.

Coping with multiple changes involved with transition to secondary school along with the physical, emotional, social and cognitive changes associated with adolescence and core difficulties associated with ASC may lead to an increased susceptibility to mental health difficulties for this group primarily related to an awareness of being different to their peers (Attwood, 2007; Baron-Cohen, 2008). Such susceptibility highlights the importance of developing effective support strategies which both recognise the child’s difficulties and which also build upon their strengths and resilience (Brooks & Goldstein, 2012) in order to facilitate a successful transition to year 7 for the child with ASC.

2.2.3.3. Theoretical framework.
In order to better understand the child with ASC within their social world and particularly during the transition to secondary school a wider theoretical framework is needed to help make sense of the multiple systems and factors involved (Tobell, 2003). Bronfenbrenner’s framework within the ecological model (1979; 1992) enables the researcher to place the child at the centre of different systems which may influence and shape their experiences and development, such
as those found within a family or at school (see figure 1). Within this model Bronfenbrenner highlights that the child’s development is best understood when research is based in situ as part of “real-world” contexts and identifies influences at broadly different levels as follows:

1. **Microsystem**- which concerns the child, their immediate environment and the relationships within it such as parents and siblings.

2. **Mesosystem** – which includes all the microsystems and the overlapping relationships between them such as between family and school and as seen in relationships between the child and their peers and teachers.

3. **Exosystem**- such as the wider, larger whole school system and the community it is in.

4. **Macrosystem**- which includes the wider cultural, political and belief systems such as those at a local authority level.
Figure 1: Example of ecological model of transition to secondary school (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

By undertaking research which seeks to explore both individual and contextual factors a more detailed picture may be built of the complexities of transition to mainstream secondary school for children with ASC (Tobell, 2003; Wicks, 2013).

2.2.3.4. **Inclusion in the UK.**

The right for all children with special educational needs (SEN), to be included within mainstream education was first established within government legislation as part of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Act (DfES, 2001). This enabled parents to be more involved in the decision making process regarding their child’s educational provision as they were entitled to express their preference for the type of provision or school they wanted for their child. Further expectations to create
equal opportunities for children with autism within the mainstream setting arose through governmental policies such as *Removing Barriers to Learning* (DfES, 2004) and more autism specific policies (All Party Parliamentary Group on Autism (APPGA), 2012; DCSF, 2009; NAS, 2014) which have sought to increase the success of inclusion by considering the factors involved in transition and how they may act as barriers and facilitators to successful inclusion.

### 2.2.3.5. Inclusion and ASC.

A “rights” based view of inclusive education argues that all children should be provided with opportunities to attend their local mainstream secondary school with adjustments made to enable all children to access the setting (Rieser, 2011). Ravet (2011) highlights that there is now a presumption for the majority of children with ASC to be educated within mainstream schools which continues to have implications for the training of teachers in autism awareness and specific interventions which are designed to further support children with ASC within the mainstream setting (Batten, Corbett, Rosenblatt, Withers & Yuile, 2006).

Conversely a “needs” based argument supports the notion that children with ASC should have their needs met in a fully adaptable setting which accommodates the child, if necessary, on a specialist basis (Ravet, 2015). However, such opposed thinking may lead to practitioners in both types of provision applying a “one size fits all” approach to meeting the needs of children with ASC when what is often needed, in both specialist and mainstream settings is a flexibility in approach and an understanding of ASC in order to meet the individualised needs of a heterogeneous group of children (Jordan, 2008). Furthermore, while inclusion for all children is the basic premise of the SEN Code of Practice (2014), it is also acknowledged that the needs of some children with ASC may be best met in specialist provision (Warnock & Norwich, 2010).

In many respects factors to successful inclusion for children with ASC are common to those with SEN generally (Frederickson & Cline, 2009). For all children with SEN a clear vision for inclusion and leadership are identified as key factors (Ainscow, 1995; McLaughlin, 1995) along with the adoption of effective teaching approaches and high expectations of learners. However, to be considered successful a setting
must also address social inclusion for children with autism (Gibb, Tunbridge, Chua & Frederickson, 2007). Inclusion within mainstream settings provides both a challenge to and opportunities for developing friendships for children with ASCs (Jones & Frederickson, 2010) and for children who are able to establish peer support or friendships with peers this may be considered a protective factor against the effects of teasing or bullying that may be experienced.

More recently the views and wishes of children with ASCs and their parents have been given greater credence within the Children’s Act (2011) and as highlighted within the processes contained within the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (2014). A 2010 survey highlighted by Reed, Osborne and Waddington (2011) noted that 60% of children with ASCs were being educated in mainstream classes. More recent figures estimate that 71% of children with ASCs are now educated in mainstream schools (Ambitious about Autism, 2012). However, the provision itself is varied across local authorities and it could be argued that inclusion has failed to keep pace with the specific needs of children with ASC educated in mainstream settings (Humphrey & Ainscow, 2006). Although in terms of academic achievement there have been small but encouraging gains for children with ASCs (Up 2% to 24.4% gaining 5 A*-C at GCSE 2010/11) many children with ASCs do not reach their expected academic outcomes and a majority leave school with no alternative training to prepare them for employment (Ambitious about Autism, 2012).

Humphrey and Symes (2008) highlight that such academic underachievement for some children with ASC may, in part, be due to a lack of a more detailed understanding of how to more effectively assist and encourage their participation in learning. Although an understanding of autism is fundamental for teachers working with children with ASCs, children with autism are not a homogeneous group and teaching approaches will often need to be adapted to the specific needs of the individual if they are to succeed (Dunlop et al., 2009).

**2.2.4. Good practice in education for children with ASC.**

While the majority of children with ASC in the UK are now educated in mainstream settings (Ambitious About Autism, 2012) variability still exists across provision
Charman et al., (2011) carried out a small scale study involving 16 schools from across mainstream, specialist and resourced base provision into what is considered good practice in autism education. The age ranges considered were from early years to 19 years of age with views gathered via in-depth interviews with pupils with ASC, their parents/carers and teachers. From across the different types of provision findings highlighted the following key areas as reflecting good practice in the education of children with autism (see table 1)
Table 1: Good practice in autism (Charman et al., 2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good Practice in Autism Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Ambitions and aspirations</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethos of enabling children with ASC to reach their full potential and promote independence at school and home settings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Monitoring progress</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use multiple assessments to monitor the progress of individual children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Adapting the curriculum</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed approach to adapting the curriculum to meet individual needs with personalised learning as needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Involvement of other professionals/services</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of effective collaborative work with a range of professionals including the EP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5. Staff knowledge and training</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff are highly motivated and well trained in autism specific approaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6. Effective communication</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents, children and staff are kept well-informed regarding information concerning individual children and parents and children have central role in processes affecting them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7. Broader participation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children with ASC are enabled to participate in wider school/community activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8. Strong relationships with families</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals recognise that families may need extra support and involvement in order to enable their child with ASC to achieve fully at school. Schools work in partnership with parents/carers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the Charman et al., (2011) best practice guidelines offer a framework for settings to begin to perhaps audit their own provision for children with ASC this information was drawn from a small number of settings from across different types of provision and not just mainstream, making it difficult to identify key or relatively more important factors in facilitating mainstream inclusion.

The school’s inclusive approach to supporting children with autism was recognised by Ofsted as being outstanding and as such, perhaps, offers a particular example of good practice within a mainstream setting. The authors highlight that this is based on an integrative ethos which considers elements of both a rights and needs based approach for children with ASC. This incorporates a whole school rolling response to meeting the needs of individual children with ASC along with highly individualised programmes as needed. Key aspects of this good practice are highlighted as follows:

• A key person identified within school who acts as an “agent of change” regarding provision for children with ASC.

• Positive ethos underpins work with all children and particularly those with ASC (Humphrey, 2008)

• Interventions and adaptations to the learning environment are based on proven ASC approaches.

• A focus for unstructured times is provided and based on individual interests for lunchtime clubs.

• Flexibility around school rules and systems to meet individual needs of child.

• Typical peers participate in awareness raising around ASC which is implicated in a reduction of the incidences of bullying for children with ASC at the school.

• Staff participate in a rolling programme of training regarding ASC.

• Inclusion for children with ASC in the school is embedded within approaches and not viewed as an add-on.
Further research is warranted which explores the factors to inclusion in the mainstream setting for children with ASC as highlighted by Morewood, Humphrey & Symes, (2011). Only one school was included in this review and the views of the stakeholders within the process were not specifically included as far as the researcher could ascertain.

2.2.4.1. Voice of the child with ASC.
More recently the rights of the child to have a “voice” in the decisions made regarding their education have been detailed in The Equalities Act (Equalities and Human Rights Office, 2010). A wider exploration of the experiences and views of children with ASC are needed in order to more fully understand the complexities of transition and inclusion in mainstream settings for this group (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008). This is also further reflected in a proposal to challenge professional views by undertaking research which also directly includes the views of those with autism (Charles, 2012; Grandin & Panek 2014).

Dann (2011) highlights that research around inclusion in mainstream tends to rely on anecdotal accounts or governmental policy on ASC and there is a lack of research which directly involves the voice of the child with autism. A key reason for this may be concerned with the perceived complexities of gaining the views of those with autism because of associated difficulties with communication and social interaction (Lewis & Porter, 2004). A small number of research articles concerned with gaining the views of children with autism highlight the importance of seeking approaches for eliciting the views of children which generate genuine responses (Lundy, 2007).

However, wider concerns, around eliciting the views of children with SEN generally need to be considered (Frederickson & Cline, 2009). These include the uncertainty that exists about the selection of the most appropriate methods to use and the need to balance the rights of the child with protecting the child from having to participate in situations which may be perceived, in some instances, as over burdensome to them. Furthermore, it is important to consider that some children, such as those with ASC, may find it particularly difficult to relay personal
experiences and emotions through talking methods alone due to associated social communication difficulties (Losh & Capps, 2003).

Several research studies have explored techniques for eliciting the views of children with ASC regarding their transition experiences. For example Humphrey and Lewis (2008) utilised a mixed- methods approach involving semi-structured interviews, diary entries and pupil drawings to gain an “insider account” of the wider experiences of children with ASC age 11-17 years attending a mainstream setting. This research involved 20 children from across four schools within the same LA. One of the key aims of the Humphrey and Lewis (2008) research was to afford children with ASC full opportunity to relay their experiences and view of mainstream secondary school. The researcher utilised diary entries made by the children, although the response rate was low a child centred approach to enabling participation, as evidenced by incorporating the drawings of one child who preferred to express their views through the medium of art, was central to the research. The use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as used by Humphrey and Lewis (2008) also enabled lived experiences to be captured (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). However, as the purpose of IPA is not to generalise findings, themes highlighted are in relation to the specific participant group. These concern heightened anxiety for the children related to difficulties with social interactions and negotiating difficulties within the school environment such as noise. Positive peer relationships also seemed to have more influence, regarding feelings of inclusion, than the relationship with the teacher for this group.

Although the methods used by Humphrey and Lewis (2008) are not without limitations this research highlights the use of an innovative approach to capturing the views of children with autism.

Children with ASC may also be seen as experts in their own experiences and gaining the views of the child is considered to be a key component when effecting change, such as when trying to enable the adoption of a more inclusive approach within a school system (Ainscow, 2008). However, it is also acknowledged that gaining the views of children with ASC is not without its difficulties (Billington, 2006). Further research has been called for which prioritises the sharing of good
practice in accessing the views of children with autism (Charman et al., 2011) and which explores the use of innovative techniques to elicit the views of this group of children (Brooks, 2014; Germain, 2004).

When considering the wider systemic factors involved in transition, gaining the views of the child is considered to be a key component to effecting change within a school system such as the adoption of a more inclusive approach (Ainscow, 2008). Therefore, a consideration of further approaches to gain the views of the child with ASC is also contained within the specific literature review.

**2.2.4.2. Transition pilot study.**

Prior to undertaking the current study the researcher carried out a transition pilot study regarding the views of year 7 children with ASC as they transitioned to mainstream secondary school (Bennett-Warn, 2013). The transition pilot study focused on gaining the views of the child with ASC about their transition experiences and a key aim of the pilot study was to trial the use of a transition Q-sort as a tool for gathering the views of the child with ASC. The views of other stakeholders such as parents and teachers were not included in the pilot study and neither were wider contextual factors. One aim of this study was to explore a structured approach as a method for supporting the elicitation of pupil views. This involved four children and utilised mixed methodology which comprised the use of a Q-sort about transition, devised by the researcher and follow-up semi-structured interviews with each participant. Significant consideration was given to devising the statements for the transition Q-sort pilot study which then formed the basis for the statements used in the current research (See appendices G and H for a detailed explanation of how the statements were devised).

A partial Q-factor analysis was carried out (a full Q-factor analysis was not possible due to the small sample size) and the interviews were transcribed in full and analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Findings from the pilot study Q-sort and thematic analysis highlighted the individualised nature of each child’s transition to secondary school with key facilitators noted in the themes of friendships; support from adults and peers; availability of lunchtime clubs and transition planning. Factors which appeared to act as barriers to the success of the
children's transition were highlighted as a lack of understanding of their difficulties by adults and wider peers; teasing and bullying and issues concerning sensory sensitivities.

All four children within the pilot study attended the same mainstream secondary school. However, for a third of the timetable in year 7, they were taught in a class consisting of 17 children with varied educational needs by the same experienced SEN teacher. The class size of approximately 17 for these lessons was also considerably smaller than the typical secondary class of approximately 30 pupils. Although more in-depth exploration of the set-up of the class for children with SEN was beyond the scope of the transition pilot study, anecdotally it seemed that having a supportive teaching base may also have offered a protective factor for the participant children during transition. This provision was further noted as continuing into year 8 and in some cases into year 9 reflecting a particularly enhanced approach to transition for children with SEN generally in the pilot study school.

Given the small sample size of the pilot study and some of the unique contextual factors it was not possible to apply findings across transition for children with ASC generally and furthermore the pilot study did not seek the views of parents and teachers as stakeholders within the transition process. A further limitation of the pilot study was that the research only involved one mainstream secondary school. It was highlighted that further research would also benefit from including a higher number of secondary schools as this would further facilitate a wider exploration of some of the systemic factors concerning transition to mainstream secondary school for children with ASC.

2.2.5. Transition.

2.2.5.1. Overview of wider transition literature.

Transition may be understood as being a move from one place or state of existence to another as may be seen in the significant changes experienced when a child moves from one stage of education to the next (Coffey, 2013; Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009; West, Sweeting & Young, 2008). The transition from primary to secondary
school education can be a difficult time and is often a source of anxiety for both children and parents (Ashton, 2008). Children are expected to adjust to changes in social, emotional and learning expectations while also adapting to a new physical environment with increased independence (Barber, 1999). Certain aspects of transition may be considered more immediate and obvious such as a physical change of school building and timetable (Ashton, 2008). Other elements suggest that transition is a process of adaptation occurring over a period of time such as when children form new friendships or experience the social and curriculum demands of the new school environment (Bloyce & Frederickson, 2012; Riglin, Frederickson, Shelton & Rice, 2013).

Within the UK education system children typically undergo a number of transitions between key stages throughout their education. The first of these transitions may be from the home to the nursery or pre-school setting, then into primary school at 4 years of age, followed by the move to secondary school at 11 years of age. For most children the move to secondary school occurs at the end of Year 6 and while the transition to secondary school involves multiple external factors it also typically occurs at a time in life when a child is experiencing considerable social, biological and cognitive developments (Barber, 1999; Dillon & Underwood, 2012).

In the UK transition to secondary school is seen as a significant stage in a child’s life and is often described as a time of “anxious readiness” when most children are looking forward to the challenges of starting secondary school yet feeling somewhat anxious about the changes ahead (Zeedyk, et al., 2003).

2.2.5.2. Effects of transition.
For most children the anxiety provoked as a result of the transition to secondary school is temporary and lessens over time as they adjust to the new school on a physical and logistical level such as when finding their way around, adapting to a new timetable and coping with the increased class and homework demands (Lucey & Reay, 2000; Sirsch, 2003). However, for some children a longer period of time is needed to adapt to the social and academic demands of secondary school as they
become part of a wider, less personalised educational system than may have been experienced at primary school (Topping, 2011).

While changes in school setting may have an effect at any point in a child’s life, particular academic effects have been seen in transition, such as highlighted in a large scale study by Galton, Gray & Rudduck (1999) which found that almost half of Year 7 pupils make no increase in National Curriculum levels in English and Science and a third make no gain in Maths attainment levels by the end of their first year in secondary school. The reasons proposed for such a dip in academic achievement are complex and as yet research has not found a direct causal link with transition (Bloyce & Frederickson, 2012; West, Sweeting & Young, 2008). However, it is suggested that for some children adapting to the increased social demands of the secondary school environment may have an effect on academic achievement as they move from the familiarity of having one teacher for all or most subjects in the primary school to negotiating the differing teaching and learning styles of multiple teachers within the secondary school system (Coffey, 2013; Tobell, 2003; Topping, 2011).

Most children, however, are excited about the new learning opportunities that secondary school provides while teachers may also underestimate the academic abilities of year 7 children. Children in year 7 may be provided with learning activities which are insufficiently challenging and in some instances could lead to children becoming somewhat disengaged with their learning (Fouracre, 1993) as they cover lessons already taught in primary school (Barber & Olsen, 2004; Fouracre, 1993; Galton et al., 1993). Interestingly, a mixed method study using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with year 7 children (Coffey, 2013) in six large secondary schools highlighted that for some children disengagement with learning may also occur due to an increase in external pressures to succeed in a results driven education system that treats them more impersonally.

A longitudinal qualitative study by Jindal-Snape and Foggie (2008) highlights that on transition children move from being the most experienced, eldest children in the school to being the youngest and those with the least experience of the
secondary school setting. Added to this children also have to contend with the significant biological and emotional changes associated with puberty (Dillon & Underwood, 2012) and an increasing preference for support and guidance from peers rather than adults (Hunter & Boyle, 2004).

Forming new friendships, while trying to maintain existing ones, may often be a main concern for many children during the move to secondary school (Ashton, 2008; Coffey, 2013; Zeedyk, et al., 2003) and positive peer relationships are seen as providing a protective factor during transition. Having an older friend or older sibling is also associated with a positive impact on well-being on transfer to secondary school (Evangelou, et al., 2008; West et al., 2008). Conversely, bullying is raised as another main concern regarding transition to secondary school as reported by parents (Evangelou, et al., 2008; Zeedyk, et al., 2003) and children (Ashton, 2008; Coffey, 2013; Rice, Frederickson & Seymour, 2011). A longitudinal study by Pellegrini and Long (2002) highlights that incidences of bullying temporarily increase on transition to secondary school, ranging from low level to more systematic levels, which the authors suggest could be linked to how adolescents may contend with new social groups and issues of social dominance.

While support from school is vital it is also highlighted that most children may be able to draw on further supportive relationships within friendship groups, family and the wider school community which may also act as a protective factor against incidences of bullying at times of transition (Newman & Blackburn, 2002).

**2.2.5.3. Transition and children with SEN.**

Key aims of inclusion for children with SEN in mainstream settings are to remove barriers to achievement, remove discrimination and improve outcomes for all children (Frederickson & Cline, 2009) and such aims are particularly pertinent as children with SEN transition to secondary school. Children with SEN, such as children with ASCs, are particularly susceptible to difficulties with transition (Osborne & Reed, 2011) as their specific differences and needs make them especially vulnerable to the risk factors associated with transition for typically developing children.
Evangelou et al. (2008) highlights that children with SEN are especially vulnerable to incidences of bullying. Children with difficulties in communication or lower academic attainment are at an increased risk of isolation while effective peer relations are shown to be a protective factor and an indicator of effective transition (Topping, 2011). However, not all children with SEN will have difficulty adapting to a new setting and that adjustment is dependent on the transition experiences of the individual child and how the setting supports this process (Maras & Aveling, 2006).

2.2.5.4. Factors related to transition for children with ASC.
While there is a considerable body of research concerning transition to secondary school for the typical population there is less research specifically concerning children with ASCs (Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Hannah & Topping, 2012; Humphrey & Ainscow, 2006). Furthermore there is limited research which directly elicits the views and experiences of children with ASC (Dann, 2011; Hannah, 2008; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008). Of the articles identified in the general literature search concerned with transition to secondary school one was concerned with transition to secondary school for children with SEN (Maras & Aveling, 2006); one was concerned with transition to secondary school for children with ASCs (Dillon & Underwood, 2012) and three were specifically concerned with the views of children with ASC and secondary education and/or transition (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Dann, 2011 and Hannah & Topping, 2013).

Given some of the difficulties associated with transition to secondary school for typically developing children, and for those with SEN generally, it is not difficult to appreciate how these may be compounded for children with ASC. A view of transition which takes into account the effects of within child factors, in relation to the dyad/triad of impairment, behaviours and individual characteristics; the interactions between the child, the wider contextual factors of the home and school setting may promote wider understanding of transition for children with ASC (Gumaste, 2011).
There are multiple issues to consider as part of transition for children with ASC such as friendships in a new school; coping with multiple changes in the delivery of the school curriculum; the logistics of being taught by many more teachers; the ethos of inclusion within the setting and meeting the academic needs of cognitively able children with ASC not able to cope with the demands of the mainstream setting (Brooks, 2014). All of these could be potential facilitators or barriers to successful inclusion and influence the extent to which children with ASCs are able to successfully adapt to secondary school (Osborne & Reed, 2011).

There are also important implications for the well-being of children with ASC as coping with such changes at transition can significantly increase anxiety for some children which have been further correlated to higher incidences of depression compared with typical peer groups (Hannah and Topping, 2012).

2.2.6. Review of specific literature pertaining to secondary school transition for children with ASC.

The literature search terms and databases outlined in section 2.2 were applied and a total of 46 articles were highlighted as potentially meeting the inclusion criteria for the systematic review. The complete papers of these articles were screened against the inclusion criteria (see table 2) and 39 were excluded. A full list of excluded articles is contained in appendix A along with an indication of the exclusion criteria pertaining to each article. A remaining 7 articles (four journal articles and three theses) were retained due to most closely meeting the inclusion criteria for the current study. The 7 identified articles were further considered and criteria for evaluating the quality of exploratory quantitative research (University of Manchester, 2014) (See appendix B) and qualitative research (Spencer et al., 2003) (see appendix C) were applied. A rating score was applied to each article across the weight of evidence criteria and an overall rating considered (See appendix D). Each article was further evaluated for appropriateness against the criteria contained within the weight of evidence framework (Gough, 2007) (See appendix E). In the mixed-methodology articles the weightings were adjusted to be
comparable with single method studies with further consideration being given to qualitative methods as being most relevant to the current research.

**Table 2: Inclusion/exclusion criteria for literature review**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inclusion Criteria</th>
<th>Exclusion Criteria</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Focuses on the experiences of children with ASC at transition from primary to secondary school</td>
<td>1. Not year 7 transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Views of child with ASC are included about their experiences at transition to secondary school (various methods) and/or</td>
<td>2. Does not focus on the experiences of transition to secondary school of children with ASC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Views of parents of children with ASC are included about their child’s transition to secondary school (various methods) and/or</td>
<td>3. Is a systematic literature review or meta-analysis (except for reference harvesting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Views of teachers of children with ASC are included about their experiences of transition to secondary school.</td>
<td>4. Review articles</td>
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</table>
The following systematic literature review questions (SLRQs) were particularly relevant to the specific literature pertaining to mainstream secondary school transition for children with ASC.

SLRQ1: What are the experiences and views of children with ASC on transition from year 6 mainstream to year 7 mainstream?

SLRQ2: What are the wider factors which may influence transition to mainstream secondary school for pupils with ASC?

SLRQ3: How are the views of year 7 children with ASC elicited regarding transition to secondary school?

Table 3 contains a summary of each of the seven specific literature review articles selected. Table 4 contains the weight of evidence ratings for the 7 articles highlighted within the systematic literature review. The overall weight of evidence rating was arrived at by a consideration of the number of ratings given for preceding weight of evidence categories e.g. a rating of high, medium, medium would be considered to be an overall medium rating.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research article and focus</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Limitations/research gap</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brooks, 2014 (thesis) Experience of secondary school for children with ASD from the perspective of child, parent and teachers. Across secondary age and year 7 included as small sample (1 participant) Exploration of within child and school factors related to experiences across secondary school including post 16.</td>
<td>16 boys with varied diagnoses of autism. Specialist, resourced base and mainstream secondary schools. Views of child, parent and teacher.</td>
<td>Mixed methods Quantitative: measures of within child factors: cognitive profile (WISC abbreviated 2nd edition) anxiety (Spence Scale); sensory (Adult/adolescent sensory scale) Qualitative: Semistructured interviews with children, parents and teachers. Thematic analysis</td>
<td>Autistic behaviours significantly associated with type of provision. Main difficulties around meeting needs of cognitively able child with ASD not able to cope with mainstream setting. Mitigating factors in success at secondary school: transition planning; teaching strategies; professional involvement and home-school communication. Late admissions into secondary school caused difficulties. Transitions into mainstream better than other types of setting. Children across ages experienced incidents of teasing/bullying; sensory difficulties with noise; wanting more friendships. Similar school/contextual factors were important to all types of secondary provision. Role for EP in transition support; accessing child’s views; mediating</td>
<td>Females not represented in the participant child sample. Medium sample size with small numbers represented across different types of provision and age ranges. Absence of LA perspective. Across LAs so contextual variation. Need for further multi informant research regarding secondary school experiences for children with autism. Need to support eliciting the views of the child not further supported beyond the use of a semistructured interview. Need for research which gathers the views of children with ASC using innovative approaches.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Parent/Child Perspectives</td>
<td>Number of Participants</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Key Findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dillon &amp; Underwood (2012) (Journal article) Parental Perspectives of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders Transitioning From Primary to Secondary School in the United Kingdom.</td>
<td>between parent/child when difference of opinion occurs.</td>
<td>15 parents only (of 12 boys and 3 girls). Mainstream secondary (type of provision not stated for primary)</td>
<td>Focus groups and semistructured interviews. Four time intervals over 15 months (10 participants for final interview).</td>
<td>Small sample group of parents. Need for individualised approaches not “one size fits all”. Need to harness the expertise of parent’s knowledge of their own child’s autism. Need for staff awareness and training to support child with ASC. Understanding that child’s behaviour may be very contextualised. Pivotal role of friendships for child with ASC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah &amp; Topping (2013) (Journal article) The transition from primary to secondary school: Perspectives of students with autism spectrum disorder and their parents.</td>
<td>Negative pre-transition association and more positive post for children and parents. Need for good transition planning and information highlighted.</td>
<td>9 (boys only) (6 mainstream and 3 in unit provision) Parents (not teachers)</td>
<td>Evaluation of transition programme Pre-post transition questionnaire. Focus group (children with ASC)</td>
<td>Small sample size Content analysis of questionnaires led to loss of rich data. Focus group approach with ASC not piloted. Further research of transition programmes needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles (2012) (thesis) Moving to secondary school: Combining IPA and focus groups to explore the</td>
<td>Themes include anxiety; social challenge; school environment and sensory difficulties.</td>
<td>5 (4 boys, 1 girl) Focus group Views of child only. 4 mainstream</td>
<td>Qualitative IPA with focus group. Pre and post transition focus groups.</td>
<td>Limitations of eliciting individual views of children with ASC using focus group method. Further research seeking view of child with ASC as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experiences of pupils with ASD</td>
<td>1 resourced base</td>
<td></td>
<td>Expert in their own experiences.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>--------------------------------</td>
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**Gumaste (2011) (thesis)**
An examination of the transition from primary to secondary school for children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder in one local authority

15 (13 boys, 2 girls)
Year 6/7/year Views of child, parent and teachers.
7 mainstream schools & Specialist provision

Mixed methods.
Quantitative-WASI; Social Responsiveness scale; Sensory profile.
Questionnaires and semistructured interviews. Thematic analysis Pre and post measures.

Found no significant child intrinsic factors which were correlated as being significant with transition to secondary school.
Mainstream primary to specialist secondary transitions highlighted as most difficult.
Anxiety highlighted as an issue in year 6.
Noise in secondary school highlighted as a theme.
Tension between the parent and the LA.
Visual sequence of research activity was useful for child participants.

Need to also consider wider intrinsic characteristics such as motivation, attention and focus as possibly impacting on transition.
Limitations of particular measures (questionnaires) as perhaps not capturing whole picture.
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dann (2011) (Journal article) Secondary transition experiences for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Conditions.</td>
<td>6 children (5 boys, 1 girl) Parents and staff Mainstream and specialist</td>
<td>Semistructured interviews/semi-structured analysis. “Talking Mats” and vignettes to support understanding. Focus groups for adults. Pre-post measures.</td>
<td>Themes-pre-transition—need for home/school liaison. Anxiety/positive; emotional impact on adults. Post- factors which support transition—additional visits; structure and routines; benefits of specialist provision; early days-ongoing challenges; pupils with ASC are individuals first; mainstream staff support; social interactions</td>
<td>SEN control group. Specialist provision compared with mainstream provision. Research which further elicits the views of higher functioning children with ASC to support their understanding and ability to express their views fully given their associated language difficulties.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: Overview of evaluation of selected studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Methodological quality</th>
<th>Appropriateness of method in relation to SLRQs</th>
<th>Appropriateness of findings in relation to SLRQs</th>
<th>Overall weight of evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brooks, 2014</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Although very small sample size for year 7- one child)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dillon &amp; Underwood, 2012</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low (Parents view only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah &amp; Topping, 2013</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles, 2012</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium (IPA with a group of children and adults)</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gumaste, 2011</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jindal-Snape et al., 2006</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dann, 2011</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium (no wider contextual data and findings amalgamated)</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The review of this literature particularly considers research which has sought the views of the child with ASC, parents and teachers regarding transition experiences from within a mainstream secondary setting. A critique of the aims and methods used in each article, along with the findings, limitations and recommendations will be presented and discussed.
**Article 1: Brooks, 2014**

This unpublished thesis focuses on the wider secondary school experiences of children with ASC from the ages of 11-15 and considers the influence of the intrinsic factors of each child and wider contextual factors of the different types of provision. This research involved eight specialist, two resourced base and six mainstream secondary settings. Out of the 16 children who participated only the views of one year seven child in a mainstream setting was gained and therefore limited data is available regarding transition to mainstream secondary school in this research.

Mixed methodology was utilised within the study which included the use of standardised pre-transition measures for each child’s cognitive profile, social skills, sensory needs and anxiety levels and post-transition semi-structured interviews. The findings from the exploration of intrinsic child factors highlighted a significant association between a child’s severity of autism and attendance at specialist provision. For cognitively able children with ASC difficulties were highlighted around meeting their academic and social needs when they were not able to cope with a mainstream setting.

A multi-informant approach was also used whereby the views of the children, parent and teachers were also gathered using semi-structured interviews and analysed using thematic analysis. As the findings for the thematic analysis were combined from all settings it was not possible to disaggregate those pertinent to year seven. However, across the differing age ranges, and types of provision for children with ASC, themes highlighted include children with ASC wanting more friendships; children experiencing sensory difficulties with noise in the settings and incidences of teasing and bullying. More specifically for transition points in all types of setting the use of clear transition planning had a mitigating effect and the use of enhanced transition groups were reported by parents as being particularly beneficial to helping their child prepare for the move to secondary school. Across the age range in secondary school effective teaching strategies, the involvement of outside professionals and effective home-school communication were also highlighted as being positive systemic factors.
Limitations in this study point towards a lack of females being represented in this research which is perhaps understandable given the purposive sampling and male prevalence in autism.

A visual emotions cue card was utilised in this research to support each child’s ability to express themselves in relation to questions asked in the interviews. They were also given the option to have a familiar adult present during the interviews which was taken up by five of the child participants.

Although the mainstream transition data available from Brooks (2014) is limited to one child, this highlights that transition to mainstream secondary school seemed more successful than that experienced by the children in specialist or resourced base settings. Further exploration of the experiences of children with ASC as they transition to mainstream secondary school alongside the specific contextual factors associated with transition for children with ASC, which were not explored in the research by Brooks, warrants further exploration.

**Article 2: Dillon & Underwood, 2012.**

This study aimed to capture a detailed picture of parental views of transition to mainstream secondary school for children with ASD through pre-post focus groups and semi structured interviews. A content analysis highlighted the heterogeneous needs of children with autism. It was also noted that secondary school settings could also do more to harness the detailed knowledge that parents have regarding their child, especially at times of change such as transition to secondary school, as the research found that often this knowledge may lead to minor adjustments by the setting which may have a big impact on how well a child with ASC settles into secondary school. This was evidenced when a child with sensory sensitivities found certain paper “scratchy” and staff were able to accommodate this which was reported as lessening the child’s distress.

The focus groups consisted of nine participants at a pre-transition point and six participants post transition (one a term in and a second a year into transition) with content analysis. Findings emphasised the need for individualised approaches to
supporting transition to secondary school and not a “one size fits all approach” for children with ASC; the pivotal role of friendships for this group of children; an understanding of the contextualised nature of the behaviour for children with ASC and the need for wider staff training and awareness raising of ASC.

While focus groups allow for a larger number of participants the application of a content analysis may have impacted on gaining a rich picture of the parents’ views of their child’s transition (Howitt & Cramer, 2008; Mertens, 2010). Further supportive methods aimed at eliciting the voice of the child and the effect of wider contextual factors upon transition experiences were not evidenced within this research.

This research did not include the voice of other stakeholders in the transition process, namely the teachers and the voice of the child with ASC was absent from this research thereby limiting the possibility to strengthen the findings through the triangulation of multiple sources of data (Flick, 2004).

**Article 3: Hannah & Topping, 2013**

Research by Hannah & Topping (2013) makes use of group interviews to elicit the views of children with ASC about transition to mainstream secondary school. This study involved nine children (all boys) and their parents and explored key factors around transition. The findings reflected previous research by Jindal-Snape & Foggie (2008) that the actual experience of transition can be more positive than anticipated.

This research employed the use of pre-transition questionnaires and post-transition group interviewing techniques and one to one interviews. Prompts and probes were utilised by the researchers to ensure that the child participants understood the questions being asked. A focus group was held with the children with ASC prior to leaving primary school and individual interviews were employed at the post transition stage once they had been at their new secondary school for a term. The key focus of this research was the evaluation of a specific programme designed to support transition into secondary school for children with ASC within
different types of provision. No control group was used in the research so it is
difficult to reliably ascertain the effects of the transition programme.

Findings reflected that the children experienced feelings of being nervous or
frightened prior to transition with concerns around getting lost in secondary
school, increased work expectations, stricter teachers and being teased by peers
which echo the findings of previous research (Jindal-Snape, Douglas, Topping, Kerr,
& Smith, 2006). Children and parents also expressed appreciation of the
preparatory transition activities undertaken and particularly being able to meet
with other children with ASD during enhanced transition visits.

The need for further multi-informant research which also involves the views of the
teachers and wider professionals involved in transition processes was highlighted.

**Article 4: Charles, 2012**

This unpublished thesis is concerned with gaining a rich detailed picture of the
transition experiences for a small group of five children with ASD as they
transitioned to mainstream secondary school. A visual timetable was adopted by
the researcher to support the understanding of events by the participant children
and a range of sensory toys was provided in order to provide wider stimulation if
social interactions became too much within the focus group activity. By utilising IPA,
which is intended to gain the insider or expert view of individual lived experiences,
the researcher identified such themes as anxiety, hopes, expectations, challenges in
practical, social and sensory perceptions and individual pupil perceptions of the
support available during the move to secondary school.

This research gained a rich picture of the views of children with ASC of their
transition to secondary school. However, such accounts are considered to be more
reliable if the views of wider stakeholders are also included in the process, and
triangulated with those of parents and staff (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) although this
was not the case in the research by Charles (2012). Further details of the wider
systemic factors, such as the interplay between home and school or processes
involved within school systems which may impact upon transition would also add
to a more complete picture of transition to mainstream for children with ASC (Jordan, 2008) although this again was not explored in Charles (2012).

The use of a relatively new approach to IPA, through focus groups, may also be considered to have resulted in limitations to the findings as group interview situations may not necessarily provide the same opportunity for detailed reflection as are afforded by individual interviews (Hopkins, 2007). This may be linked to the level of social interaction and communication skills required to effectively participate in a focus group which are considered to be especially difficult for children with ASD (Hollander, 2004) and may have inhibited individual voices in the process.

**Article 5: Gumaste, 2011**

Through the use of mixed methods involving standardised assessment tests, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with children, parents and teachers, Gumaste (2011) intended to explore how the cognitive and behavioural intrinsic factors of 15 children with ASD may have impacted on their transition to secondary school. Wider systemic factors were also taken into account during interviews carried out on three occasions which were pre and post transition. Prior to starting the interviews with each child the researcher utilised a visual structure card to support the child’s appreciation of each task they were asked to undertake within the research. A mind map was also utilised to enable each child to share how they felt their school could be different. The findings from the data gathered from the children were reported and considered separately within the findings overall.

While this research found no significant child intrinsic factors that were correlated with transition the results from questionnaires and interviews highlighted that that the move to specialist provision seemed most difficult. Tension was also highlighted between parents and the LA regarding the timing in transition process and allocation of specialist places.

Gumaste (2011) highlighted that further research in this area would perhaps need to take wider intrinsic characteristics into account such as motivation and focus as
well as systemic factors possibly impacting on transition for individual children.
While the views of the child, parent and staff were sought through the use of
questionnaires and short interviews this approach may have limited the richness of
information gathered about transition (Mertens, 2010).

**Article 6: Jindal-Snape et al., 2006**

A case study approach involving five children and up to 19 parents and
professionals utilised by Jindal-Snape et al., (2006) in order to gain a deeper
appreciation of the complexity of transition for children with ASC. Wider themes
from the solution focused interviews highlighted that parents were not always fully
aware of the types of provision available for their child and that delays in decisions
around placement were associated with increased anxiety at the time of transition.

The children were somewhat supported in the study to give their views via the
utilisation of a scaling activity pertaining to the current research although it was
not possible to view the question schedule used with the children or ascertain the
number of times they were interviewed. The views of the children are given only
small consideration within the findings and there is no evidence of this aspect of
the findings being related directly to the data.

While this research may have limitations, regarding the small sample size of five
case studies and difficulties gaining a rich picture, associated with the use of a
short three question questionnaire (Mertens, 2010), it appears to be unique in that
the views of other professionals involved with transition processes, such as speech
and language therapists and educational psychologists, are also included. Such an
approach may be considered to provide a more detailed account of some of the
systemic factors involved in transition. These move beyond the home-school
mesosystemic level to some of those seen at the local authority macro-systemic
level. Indeed findings point towards how the support offered to both parent and
child by autism outreach services was perceived as contributing to a decrease in
anxiety during transition. The role that specialist teachers and EPs have to play in
planning effective transitions for children with autism is also noted.
Article 7: Dann, 2011

As highlighted earlier, research by Dann (2011) specifically sought to gain the views of parents, staff and children with ASC concerning inclusion within secondary school settings. Six children with diagnoses of autism and high functioning autism or Asperger Syndrome and with statements of SEN were involved in the study (1 girl and 5 boys) along with six parents and eighteen members of staff from specialist resourced provision and SEN bases within the secondary school settings. In order to support each child’s understanding during the interviews “Talking Mats” were utilised (Murphy, 1998; Murphy and Cameron, 2008) which consist of the use of symbols as a visual aid for answering questions about transition. Semi-structured interviews were used with parents and group interviews were used with staff members. Data was gathered pre and post transition from the participants and analysed and presented collectively. It was therefore not possible to disaggregate findings directly relevant to transition to a mainstream secondary setting within the findings. Further contextual factors related to the setting each child transitioned to were not alluded to within this research.

A thematic analysis highlighted themes concerning the logistics of transition e.g. timetable, lunchtimes, the provision of a quiet space and the importance of sharing information across staff groups. A preference for kind and understanding teaching staff was highlighted as important by the children and a need for further training in autism awareness and approaches was raised by the staff participants. Dann further noted that staff positivity increased along with higher levels of knowledge and training.

The children in this research were reported as seeking friendships even if it proved difficult to maintain them and specialist provision appeared to facilitate closer friendships. However, bullying appeared to be an issue across all types of provision as five out of the six children in the study were reported as having experienced it.

A key strength of the research by Dann (2011) may be considered to be the use of an approach specifically intended to support each child’s ability to express their
views about transition and the use of symbols may visually support the individual child’s understanding. However, some caution may need to be exercised as not all children with ASC have been taught to use symbols and care would need to be taken if adopting this approach to ensure a shared understanding and use of the symbols selected with “Talking Mats”. A sample of the symbols used in the research by Dann (2011) was not included in the appendices and so further details of the content of the interviews used with the children in the study are not known. For children with high functioning autism the use of other forms of visual support such as statement cards constructed to take the reading and comprehension levels of participants into account have also been shown to be effective for eliciting views about transition (Bennett-Warne, 2013).

2.2.6.1. Summary of specific literature review.

The research articles discussed (Brooks, 2014; Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Hannah & Topping, 2013; Gumaste, 2011; Jindal-Snape et al., 2006; Dann, 2011) have all explored transition to both mainstream and specialist secondary school for children with autism. Two of the articles (Brooks, 2014; Gumaste, 2011) adopted a mixed methods approach with a focus on pre-post measures of intrinsic child factors followed-up with multi-informant interviews to explore wider systemic factors. However, the research by Brooks (2014) is concerned with general experiences of secondary school and not only at the point of transition.

All the research articles, except Dillon and Underwood (2012), involved both mainstream and specialist or resourced base secondary school settings. From the studies overall a mixed pictures emerges of success with regards to the type of provision a child with ASC transitions to. Gumaste (2011) highlights that for some children the transition from mainstream primary to specialist secondary provision proved most difficult. Conversely Dann (2011) notes benefits associated with specialist staff indicating that they felt trained to meet the needs of children with ASC at times of transition. Further consideration of the wider systemic factors found in transition to both specialist and mainstream secondary settings is warranted. While there may be factors common to children with ASC regarding
transition planning a picture is emerging of the need for more specific transition planning which is individualised for each child.

Within five of the seven articles reviewed the researchers specifically elicited the views of the child and utilised supplementary processes to aid this further. Brooks (2014) and Gumaste (2011) utilised visual support cards to aid the child’s understanding of the structure of the research activities and enabled them to indicate their opinion about questions asked in the interviews as needed. It could be argued that the child’s responses may be limited to those on the visual cue cards and consideration needs to be given to methods which support children with ASC to give their full opinions (Nind, 2008).

During focus groups with children, parents, teachers and wider professionals, such as speech and language therapists and educational psychologists, Hannah (2008) utilised post it notes to capture the views of the children. Jindal-Snape (2006) adopted the use of a ten point scale for the parents, children and teachers to answer questions about transition against. Again while this approach may support the child to answer the questions (examples of questions used with the children were not available to view and so it is not possible to comment on the complexity of these) there are also elements to this which may also limit their responses.

Talking Mats (Murphy & Cameron, 2008) are used to support the children with ASC when giving their views about transition in research by Dann (2011). The visuals used on the Talking Mat may be adapted for the individual child. However details of how the mats were utilised exactly were not available within the research by Dan.

2.2.6.2. Implications from the SLR for the current research
The specific literature review highlights a number of implications particularly with regards to the rationale for using or not using particular approaches in the current research. The use of standardised measures within the quantitative element of the mixed methodology studies, such as utilised in Brooks (2014), Dillon & Underwood (2012) and Gumaste (2011), were not considered appropriate to the epistemological stance of the current research as they were unlikely to elicit the child’s views about their individual transition experiences.
Further approaches, such as IPA, were considered suitable for gaining the views of the child but were discounted because they would not allow for a more holistic picture of transition experiences. While IPA is considered to be a method that is primarily concerned with eliciting the lived experience of the participants, this method would not allow for a consideration of the views of multi-informants (parents, teachers) or the wider contextual factors involved in transition. Therefore, IPA was not adopted as an approach for the current research.

Within the research by Dann (2011) talking mats were specifically used to further support the individual child with ASC. It was not possible to ascertain how the talking mats were specifically adapted for the research in Dann, (2011). Wider literature pertaining to talking mats (Murphy & Cameron, 2008; Murphy, 1998) indicated that visual symbols are used to support the child to think about and give their views on a given topic. However, the researcher felt that using symbols may cause confusion for the participant group as it would not be possible to find pictures that could accurately represent some of the more complex concepts around transition. Furthermore, not all children with ASC have had experience of using symbols and visual supports. Given the high level of functioning of the participant group it was felt that the use of suitably devised statement cards may be a more appropriate and engaging approach for the participants and this was also evidenced within the transition pilot study (Bennett-Warne, 2013) which utilised statement cards within the Q-sort.

A key finding, not necessarily related to the methodology of the current study, which, however helped inform the researcher’s understanding of what is considered to be good practice for children with ASC, is the importance of highly individualised, detailed transition planning (Beaney & Kershaw, 2006; Bond & Hebron, 2013). This also recognises children with ASC as being part of a heterogeneous group with individualised communication, social interaction and learning needs.

2.2.6.3. Broad aims of current study.
The current study aims to build upon previous research by exploring the potentially varied experiences of children with ASC as they transition from mainstream
primary to mainstream secondary school. The research will integrate the views of the child, the parents and teachers and consider systemic factors relevant to each individual. Comparison between individuals will also be made in order to identify similarities and differences in their transition experiences.

Previous research calls for the views of children with ASC to be given further credence, particularly in relation to planning effective approaches to inclusion within mainstream settings (Dan, 2011; Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008). The current research proposes that by providing an opportunity for the participant groups to talk openly about transition a more detailed picture of the transition experiences for children with ASC may emerge. Such detail may contribute to the development of further effective transition planning which promotes facilitators and addresses barriers to inclusion to mainstream secondary school for children with ASC.

As further highlighted within the review of the transition literature for children with ASC it would be considered good practice for the views of the child, as experts in their own experiences, to be central to the transition process (Billington, 2006; Hannah & Topping, 2013; Hebron, 2012). The current research specifically intends to support this process by employing a data gathering tool, namely a transition Q-sort, followed by the use of semi-structured interviews to enable individual children with ASC to express their views about transition.

While the child’s view may be central to the current research the views of parents and teachers as wider stakeholders also need to be considered (Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Hannah & Topping, 2008) and an exploration of wider systemic factors involved in transition is also required in order to better understand the complexities of transition for children with ASC (Charles, 2012; Dan, 2011; Jordan, 2008). These are included in the current research and are viewed through the application of an ecosystemic model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1992) which also takes into account the Charman et al., (2011) framework for best practice in autism education.

It is the intention of the researcher to address the aims of the study by utilising the following research questions:
Research question 1: How do year 7 children with ASC experience the transition from mainstream primary school to mainstream secondary school?

Research question 2: What factors affect the experiences of year 7 children with ASC as they transition from mainstream primary school to mainstream secondary school?
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction
The purpose of this chapter is to present and critically discuss the methodology used in the current study. Following a summary of the rationale, presentation of research questions and outline of the method chosen, the epistemological stance of this research is explored in relation to the research methods selected. A detailed description of the design of the study is then presented which includes the sampling and participant recruitment strategies, data collection and analysis techniques and the steps taken to address issues concerning the validity and reliability of the research. Ethical concerns of the research are presented and a critique of the methodology used.

3.2 Rationale
A main focus of the proposed research was to gain a more holistic, in-depth picture of the transition experiences of children with ASC by providing an opportunity to talk about their transition experiences and for their views to be considered as part of a wider approach for future transition planning within school and the wider local authority. This was further enhanced by also exploring the views of parents and teachers of children with ASC regarding the child’s transition to mainstream secondary school and to contribute towards a wider exploration of some of the key factors, which may act as facilitators and barriers to transition, in relation to the wider mainstream school setting.

3.2.1. Research Questions.
This research is aimed at exploring the experiences and views of children with ASC as they transitioned from mainstream primary to mainstream secondary school and the facilitators and barriers encountered to this process.

Research question 1: How do year 7 children with ASC experience the transition from mainstream primary school to mainstream secondary school?
Research question 2: What factors affect the experiences of year 7 children with ASC as they transition from mainstream primary school to mainstream secondary school?

A multiple-case study design (Yin, 2014) was chosen in order to gain a more holistic, richly detailed picture of each child’s transition experience. The methods used to gather data consisted of the use of a transition Q-sort with the children; semistructured interviews with the children, their parent/s and the adult who knew the child best in school. Grey data such as school transition policies; inclusion policies; SEN policies and specific support for children with ASC and Ofsted reports were also analysed when considering the facilitators and barriers to transition to secondary school. Field notes and a research journal were also kept throughout the research in accordance to criteria outlined by Altrichter & Holly (2005) and referred to as part of the data analysis.

The transition Q-sort results were hand recorded on a blank concourse sheet for each participant and analysed using content analysis (Hseih & Shannon, 2005) based on statement rankings as utilised by Watts and Stenner (2012). Field notes were taken during the completion of the Q-sort and considered as part of the qualitative analysis. The semi-structured interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and transcribed and analysed using Braun and Clark (2006) six step thematic analysis. The grey data was analysed using content analysis which involved a directed content approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) and was based upon factors from the “What is Good Practice in Autism?” report by Charman et al. (2011).

3.3 Epistemological stance of the research
The views and beliefs about knowledge held by a researcher influence and direct the choice of methods selected in research (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). Views about what can be known and how it can be known not only provide justification for the choice of methodology but also for how knowledge gained from research may be constructed (Carter & Little, 2007). Such reflections take into account some of the philosophical underpinnings of research approaches and are
based upon a consideration of three key areas. These are the research ontology (what can be known or the nature of reality); epistemology (how it can be known; the relation between the knowledge and the knower) and axiology (researcher’s personal experiences of the phenomenon being studied) and how each of these influence and shape the other as part of a wider discussion of the theory of knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 2011; Morgan, 2015).

Guba and Lincoln (2011) further highlight that basic beliefs concerning knowledge influence the choice the researcher makes in relation to the research paradigm adopted within a methodology. For example, a researcher with a post-positivist stance would hold that there is one objective reality and that quantitative methods, perhaps used out of situ, would capture a phenomenon best, discounting individual, subjective experiences (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Conversely, a researcher with a relativist view would emphasise that each individual has a unique interpretation of reality and that each is equally valid (Mertens, 2010). In this instance the methods adopted would be specifically adapted to the needs of the research and questions asked. However, not all research can fit neatly within either stance.

In social research so much of what it is to be human cannot be seen or captured by purely objective methods (Mertens, 2010) and it is not possible to explore these aspects using methods which do not take the changing nature of social context into account. Conversely, positivists would levy that knowledge cannot exist unless it has a “universal truth” to it which may only be gained by direct observation and testing (Robson, 2011). However, while positivist approaches may address the “what” questions generated within research, alternative methodologies are required to explore possible reasons as to “how” or “why” an event happens or is experienced in a particular way.

Robson (2011) further proposes that research which is concerned with real world issues requires more realist approaches in order to more fully account for the context, the subjective reality of those participating in the research and how this knowledge is influenced and shaped by the researcher. Such an approach is found
within what is known as a critical realist stance which employs methods which are emancipatory, in that they are especially concerned with the views of the participants (House, 1991).

Critical realism is considered as providing a theoretical perspective which is midway between an objective, positivist stance and the subjective stance of relativism (Kelly, 2008). As such, critical realism provides a framework from which the researcher is able to acknowledge that individual experience or knowledge is related to the “place, time and position of the knower” (Bhaskar, 1998) and that events do not repeat exactly across settings, due to the effects of multiple factors (House, 1991). For educational psychologists a critical realist approach enables the practitioner to apply scientific analysis to the socially constructed environment of the classroom and wider educational setting (Kelly, 2008). Therefore, due to the subjective nature of how transition may be experienced by individual children and how the knowledge of this is shaped by the researcher’s telling, the epistemological stance of this research is critical realism.

Within the epistemology of critical realism, the axiological position of the researcher, namely the researcher’s existing knowledge and experience, is particularly relevant to establishing the reliability and validity of the research (Guba & Lincoln, 2011). This is somewhat accounted for by exploring the relationship between the researcher and the participants, through an acknowledgement of the researcher’s existing knowledge and experience of the area of research and how the findings from the research are, to an extent, jointly constructed (Mertens, 2010). Therefore it is important to acknowledge the researcher’s experience prior to undertaking the current study. The researcher was a teacher for 22 years having worked in a variety of educational settings including teaching children and young people with ASC in both specialist provision and mainstream settings. Furthermore having previously worked as a Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) the researcher has been involved with planning transitions at different key stages and particularly from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 for children with ASC. The researcher also has a degree in psychology and a
postgraduate qualification in SEN. Issues concerning how the views and experiences of children with ASC are elicited and included within the planning for educational provision is an area of particular interest for the researcher and is what primarily shaped the choice of methodology and data gathering tools adopted for the study. It was also important to the researcher that the experiences of the participants as year 7 children going to mainstream secondary school were the primary consideration and not that each child had a diagnosis of ASC. It was a deliberate choice of the researcher to minimise incidences of specifically referring to the child’s diagnosis of ASC with either the child, the parents and, to a lesser extent the staff unless specifically mentioned by them within the research activities. The researcher checked with school staff and parents that each child was aware of their diagnosis of ASC and whether or not it would be ok to talk about it if it occurred during the research. It was important to capture the views of the participants as year 7 children first and not only through an ASC lens.

The current research acknowledges that, while transition to secondary school may have elements of similarity for children, there is no one absolute truth about how transition is experienced or the views held about it for children with ASC.

3.4 Design of the study
The current research uses case study design and is intended to explore the transition experiences and views of four year 7 children with ASC in mainstream secondary schools and the facilitators and barriers to transition. The suitability of case study design to address the research questions is discussed within this section of the methodology followed by a description of the current case study design.

Yin (2014) highlights that it is appropriate to select a case study method when the research is exploratory in nature and the questions asked about the particular phenomenon are particularly concerned with “how and why?” an event may have occurred in the way it did. Robson (2011) further notes that Yin (2014) emphasises that case study research is an appropriate strategy when the research involves …an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence (p136).
Furthermore it is argued that case study design is especially pertinent when the events to be studied are inextricably linked with the social and physical setting in which they occur and to phenomenon over which the researcher has little or no control (Yin, 2014; Robson, 2011).

Case study designs enable a richer, more holistic picture to be gained of an individual case or multiple-cases with common elements (Mertens, 2010). Stake (2005) emphasises that the more individual and unique the area of interest is the greater the rationale for utilising case study design and that in the effort to find “scientific generalizations” it is important not to lose the detail of individual cases. However, it is feasible within variations of case study design to cover multiple cases from which a single set of cross-case conclusions may be drawn particularly if the cases are concerned with a topic that is of continuing public interest (Yin, 2014).

The experience of transition to mainstream secondary school for children with ASC may be considered to be suitable for case study design as a review of the literature highlighted that transition may be influenced by multiple factors such as transition planning in primary and secondary schools (Stradling & MacNeil, 2000; Evangelou et al., 2008), approaches to inclusion within the setting (Jordan, 2008; Lynch & Irvine, 2009), friendships and peer group acceptance (Humphrey & Symes, 2010; Coffey, 2013), and planning which is autism specific and individualised (Beaney & Kershaw, 2006; Charman et al., 2011).

A key factor when selecting case study research methods is to consider which other methods to discount and why (Robson, 2011). Experimental designs seek to deliberately separate a phenomenon from the context in which it occurs in order to control variables within the environment and would not acknowledge the real world nature of when, how and why the event occurs (Yin, 2014). Similarly, questionnaires and surveys were discounted as an approach as they are only able to deal with contextual information in a limited way due to methodological constraints and associated methods of analysis and would not gain the rich detail of experience of transition as lived by the participants. Furthermore, direct observation of the phenomenon would not be possible because transition covers
far more points of interest than could have been observed in the time allowed and
is not restricted to a single event occurring at a particular moment.

Within case study designs it is more feasible to consider multiple points of interest
or salience within an area of research than may have been accounted for in data
collection. Such points are then triangulated via evidence which is gathered from
multiple sources. Such data gathering and analysis in case study design is guided by
the prior development of a set of propositions (discussed later in this section) (Yin,
2014).

However, there are concerns regarding the use of case study as a form of empirical
inquiry, (Yin, 2014; Robson, 2011) particularly in relation to scientific rigour and
generalisation of findings. In order to increase the rigour of case study research
“systematic procedures” need to be planned and followed as part of an overall
protocol through which to guide the researcher in carrying out the case study
approach.

Yin (2014) outlines five key components for case study design as follows:

1. Case study questions (if any)
2. Propositions (if any)
3. Units of analysis
4. The Logic linking the data to the propositions
5. The criteria for interpreting the findings

Through a review of the literature it was possible to identify gaps in transition
research for children with ASC and to focus the questions for the current study
(Yin, 2014) as follows:

1. How do year 7 children with ASC experience the transition from
   mainstream primary school to mainstream secondary school?

2. How do transition factors affect the experiences of year 7 children with
   ASC as they transition from mainstream primary school to mainstream
   secondary school?
Furthermore a gap in the literature highlights a lack of research concerning the transition experiences of children with ASC moving to secondary school which directly elicits the child’s voice (Dann, 2011). A multiple-embedded case study design allowed the researcher to employ tools such as a Q-sort and semi-structured interview in order to provide an opportunity for the children with ASC participating in the study to directly express their views and experiences regarding their transition to secondary school. Further semi-structured interviews with their parents and their teachers enabled a richer picture of their experiences to be gathered which allowed for further triangulation of their views through the perceptions of the adults most closely involved in their care and education (Stake, 2005).

While it is acknowledged that exploratory case studies often do not have propositions it is important to have a purpose, as far as is feasible, in order to provide a focus for data analysis and criteria for judging the success of the case study (Yin, 2014). Prior to the current research a pilot study of the experiences and views of children with ASC as they had transitioned to year 7 was undertaken by the researcher (Bennett-Warne, 2013).

The key purposes for the current study are, in part, derived from a review of the literature on transition and the findings of the pilot study. These consist of five key factors regarding transition which were used to devise Q-sort statements and as part of a guide to carry out qualitative analysis of the Q-data in the pilot study. Following the pilot study these factors were reviewed and further developed for the current study (see table 5).
### Table 5: Transition Q-sort factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transition factor</th>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Logistics         | • journey to school  
|                   | • finding way around school  
|                   | • timetable  
|                   | • break times and lunch times  
|                   | • school rules | Transition literature/researcher’s experience |
| Learning          | • different learning expectations  
|                   | • different teachers  
|                   | • learning styles and needs | Researcher’s experience/transition literature |
| Support from adults | • parents  
|                   | • staff | Researcher’s experience/transition literature/pilot study |
| Support from peers | • friendships  
|                   | • wider peer support | Pilot study/transition literature |
| Teasing and bullying | • from own peer group  
|                   | • from wider school groups | Transition literature |
| Sensory issues    | • noise levels  
|                   | • smells  
|                   | • lighting  
|                   | • tactile | Transition literature  
Pilot study |
for the study which help to define and “boundary” the unit of analysis thereby increasing the feasibility of the study (Yin, 2014).

For the current research a multiple case study design was adopted with multiple embedded units of analysis. The cases were four children with ASC who experienced transition from year 6 in a mainstream primary to year 7 in a mainstream secondary school. The first embedded unit of analysis is the experience of transition from the perspective of the child, their parent/s and their teacher. The second unit of analysis is concerned with the factors which act as barriers and facilitators to transition for year 7 children with ASC. Grey data such as school policies and procedures re transition; inclusion; provision for children with ASC, Ofsted reports and fieldwork notes are referred to in order to add further contextual information to the case studies. The four child participants with ASC were drawn from across three different secondary schools within the same local authority (see figure 2).

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was chosen to analyse the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews as this method enables the researcher to carry out an in depth, detailed analysis which the researcher considered particularly salient in relation to eliciting the child’s views. Content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) was used to analyse both the Q-sort data and the supporting documentation.
Figure 2: Multiple-embedded case study design.
3.5 Case study protocol
Yin (2014) advocates that when carrying out a multiple-case study it is essential to devise and follow a case study protocol. This is intended to act as a guide for the researcher and following the protocol procedures may significantly increase the reliability of the case study research (Robson, 2011).

The current research utilised a case study protocol (see appendix F) which took into account Yin’s (2014) four key procedures as follows:

1. **Case study overview**
2. **Procedures for data collection**
3. **Questions used in the data collection**
4. **Guide to reporting the findings**

Within these transparent procedures were followed regarding each stage of the case study. For example, to further ensure that the child’s view is central to the research the protocol for data gathering and analysis explicitly detail that in each case the child’s view is gained and analysed first.

3.6 Sampling and participant recruitment
A purposive sampling approach was used to select the participant schools because they were considered to be typical examples for the purposes of the research (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011) such as mainstream secondary schools educating children with ASC in year 7 who transitioned from a mainstream primary school. A purposive sampling approach was also used to select the participant group because the research is concerned with the views of a specific group of people within the population i.e. year 7 children with ASC who have recently transferred from a mainstream primary school to a mainstream secondary school. It is recognised that this approach to sampling limits the applicability of findings beyond the sample group (Robson, 2011). However, it may be possible to draw conclusions which may be of relevance to the wider ASC population by making analytic or theoretical generalisations based upon the findings (Yin, 2014).
The researcher was aware through discussion with SEN colleagues and senior educational psychology colleagues in the LA, that while the majority of children with ASC in the LA are educated in mainstream secondary schools a number of these placements result in temporary or permanent exclusions. Exact figures were not available from the LA. Some of these decisions result in the child with ASC being placed in specialist provision which is not often in the child’s best interest as previous assessments highlighted that their educational needs could be met in a mainstream setting.

### 3.6.1. Sampling approach.

The sampling approach took into consideration the following inclusion criteria (see table 6).

**Table 6: Case study inclusion criteria**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inclusion criteria</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream secondary schools in the LA within similar geographical contexts (without resourced based provision) who have year 7 children with ASC on roll.</td>
<td>Homogeneity of context and provision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child has diagnosis of ASC.</td>
<td>Research specifically concerned with gaining the views of children with ASC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child attends year 7 mainstream having transitioned from mainstream primary school.</td>
<td>Research specifically concerned with child’s experiences within mainstream setting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consideration of child’s language ability and reading age.</td>
<td>Able to access research materials. Child able to read and understand the sentences on the statement cards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child able to participate in scaling activity (Diamond Nine).</td>
<td>Able to place statements along a scale and understand that own opinion is needed to complete the task.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect on child of possible co-occurring difficulties.</td>
<td>Consideration of how co-occurring difficulty may affect child’s ability to access research materials i.e. attention or specific language difficulties. Not used as an exclusion criteria per se.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.6.1.1. Sampling of participant schools

Through liaison with educational psychology colleagues two schools were initially identified as potential participant schools and the SENCo from each school was approached initially by e-mail and then in a face to face meeting to discuss the requirements of the research. This outline information was then discussed with the head teacher from each school and following initial interest further detailed information regarding the research was e-mailed and the schools invited to take part.

Two schools were recruited initially and the head teachers passed on liaison for the research to the learning mentor (school A), and the SENCo (school B). These individuals were also the members of staff who best knew the children participating in the research. When a fourth participant was needed for the study, as one of the participants selected did not wish to take part and there were no other children with ASC in the current year 7 in either school A or B, the researcher directly approached a third school (school C) within the LA which met the selection criteria. The third school (school C) was approached by the researcher following a discussion with a placement supervisor who was able to access a database indicating which mainstream secondary schools year 7 children with ASC attended in the LA. The database information was referred to anonymously and the researcher was not aware of specific pupil names prior to approaching the school to participate in the research. A potential school was discounted on the grounds that the researcher’s own child attended year 7 in the school. This may have created a conflict of interest for the researcher in terms of confidentiality and anonymity and also possible researcher bias as the school’s transition procedures were already known to the researcher. Furthermore this school did not meet the inclusion criteria in terms of where it was situated in the LA when comparing the indices of deprivation in relation to school A and school B. The researcher was concerned with recruiting schools which were situated in broadly similar areas to increase the validity of the research.
The same approach to participation was adopted as per school A and B. For school C, liaison for the research was initially handled by the SENCo and then the learning mentor who knew the child best in school.

### 3.6.1.2. Sampling of child participants

The sampling for child participants was undertaken using a staged approach. Following discussion between the researcher and the identified key adults prospective participants were discussed on an anonymous basis in order to clarify whether or not they would fulfil the initial selection criteria. Once this had been determined detailed information regarding the research was sent to the parents of prospective children to take part in the study and consent gained for their child to participate in the research. The parents of each child were also invited to participate in the research and consent gained. Child assent was also sought. Of the four children originally selected all four parents consented for their child to take part and to take part themselves. However, only three out of the original four children took part in the research as one child did not wish to participate. A further participant was recruited from school C. The number of possible participants was limited due to the purposive sampling approach adopted because the research was concerned with the views of a specific group (children with ASC), at a specific time (transition to year 7), in a specific setting (mainstream secondary school without resourced base provision) having moved from a specific setting (year 6 in a mainstream primary school).

Once consent was gained for participation from the parents the researcher liaised again with the key member of staff in order to apply further sampling approaches to ascertain each child’s suitability to participate in the next stage of the research. Information was gathered concerning a general profile of each child which included academic levels and information regarding ASC. Particular attention was paid to the reading ages of the children and any specific difficulties with language which may impact on the child’s ability to independently access and understand the statements on the transition Q-sort cards. All four children were considered to have reading ages which indicated they should be able to access the Q-sort activity. The
researcher was also mindful of the associated language difficulties for children with ASC which could impact upon the ability of each child to fully understand and respond to the statement cards in the Q-sort interpret instructions or answers questions.

The Q-sort activity was not part of the sampling approach but formed a key part of the data gathering. However, it is important to note that the semi-structured interviews, which were also a key data gathering approach, took place two weeks after the Q-sort activity to enable as full a recall as possible of the initial transition activity.

One child was reported as having a co-occurring difficulty, namely a diagnosis of selective mutism which could impact upon participation. Further advice was taken from a university supervisor and a speech and language therapist both with expertise in this area before a decision to proceed with the research with this child was undertaken as the researcher was concerned about the process being unduly burdensome for this participant. The researcher also keenly recognised the child’s right to be afforded an equal opportunity to participate in the research. Further discussions with the learning mentor, who worked most closely with the child, the parent, once consent was gained, and an initial meeting between the child and the researcher took place. As a result the researcher’s approach to communication with this participant was further adapted to enable the fourth child to participate without altering the overall case study design or unduly affecting the validity of the research. This is detailed in section 4.5.1.

3.7 Data gathering methods
The researcher utilised a multiple-embedded case study design in order to explore the experiences of year 7 children with ASC as they transitioned into mainstream secondary school. Data was gathered from the perspective of the child, parent and teacher with particular focus being on eliciting the views of the child.

In order to gain a rich picture of the individual child’s transition experience and to strengthen the validity of the research via triangulation (Patton, 2002) data was
gathered from multiple sources using multiple methods. The data was gathered using the following methods: Q-sort to elicit the views of the child; semi-structured interviews to elicit the views of the child, the parent, the teacher. Grey data in the form of documentation from each school setting was also collected. The rapport building activity, Q-sort and semi-structured interviews with the children occurred in March which was the middle of the second term of the academic year they had transitioned to secondary school. There was no more than a two week gap between completing the Q-sort and the interviews in order to further support recall regarding transition so that the initial transition activity would still be relatively recent for each participant prior to talking about these in more detail in the interviews. For the fourth child participant, who was recruited later than the first three participants, the extended rapport and data gathering activities occurred at the end of the second term and into the start of the third term.

The interviews with the parents then staff were carried out following data gathering with the children and occurred from the end of the second term until the start of the third term. The interview with the fourth parent occurred in the middle of the third term.

The research questions were addressed by employing the tools and methods for gathering data as seen in figure 3.
Figure 3: Data collection

RQ1. How do year 7 children with ASC experience the transition from mainstream primary school to mainstream secondary school?

RQ2. What are the factors in transition from mainstream primary school to mainstream secondary school for year 7 children with ASC?

1. Child’s view - Q-sort
   S.S. interview

2. Parent’s view - S.S. interview

3. Teacher’s view – S.S. interview

Grey data
School policies and procedures regarding the following:
- Transition
- Inclusion
- Provision for children with ASC.

Fieldwork notes
3.7.1 Q-sort
This section begins with a general discussion of Q-methodology and consideration of how a Q-sort is usually developed, administered and analysed. A detailed description of the development of the Q-set used for the current study follows and includes a critique of the methodology. An acknowledgement of how this method for data gathering is placed within the epistemological position of social constructionism and critical realism is presented (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

Q-methodology was first introduced by William Stephenson (1935) as an alternative approach to empirical methods which were largely concerned with seeking objective truth as opposed to the subjective, lived experience of the participant (Stenner, 2008). Q-methodology traditionally involves both qualitative and quantitative approaches to data gathering and analysis.

The purpose of Q-method is to seek insight into the subjective views of people concerning a particular topic of research as it acknowledges that there are no absolute facts but multiple viewpoints around a topic (Stainton-Rogers & Stainton-Rogers, 1990). Q-methodology has been utilised in a variety of studies in research within education; health; clinical psychology; social sciences and environmental policy, for instance (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Within Q-methodology this is explored through the use of a Q-sort, which utilises a Q-set (statement cards about a given topic) as a tool used to gather data about the subjective viewpoint of individual participants (Stenner, 2008).

A Q-set consists of a group of statement cards, usually between 20-60 in number (Webler, Danielson & Tuler, 2009), which are placed by the participant along a given scale. By giving a numerical label to these statements it is possible to analyse data from Q-sorts in order to look for a commonality of view about an issue within a homogeneous group of people. Such data may be analysed quantitatively using Q-sort analysis or qualitatively, using for example, content analysis.

3.7.1.2. Procedure for Q-sort
Prior to inviting the participants to complete the Q-sort a number of further points were considered as suggested by Watts & Stenner (2012), as follows:

- The condition of instruction
• The instructions given to participants during the Q-sort
• Gathering of salient information generated during the completion of the Q-sort
• Capturing data from the Q-sort
• Analysis of Q-sort data

Participants were given a set of instructions both verbal and written which highlighted the steps to be carried out to complete the Q-sort. These emphasised that there is no right or wrong way to sort the cards and that it is the subjective view of the individual which is of most interest to the researcher (Brown, 1980). The Q-sort was completed in person with the researcher in order to allow field notes of salient information to be made and to offer support if needed. It was also carried out this way to enable the researcher to clarify, to a certain extent, how the participant engaged with the process and the level of subjectivity they applied (Webler, Danielson & Tuler, 2009). This would not have been possible if conducted on-line or via post and it may have proved difficult for the participants to take part without a demonstration of the process.

The completed Q-sort concourse was also re-presented to each participant immediately prior to undertaking the semi-structured interview. This served as a way of checking that the participants meant to place statements where they did, thereby increasing the validity of the findings.

3.7.1.3. Traditional analysis of Q-sort data

Once a Q-sort is completed the researcher is able to analyse the numerical data generated to look for patterns of commonality of view between the participants around a given topic of interest (Stephenson, 1935). Within Q-methodology this ordinarily involves initially looking at the data in a qualitative way while considering the salience of information gathered during completion of the Q-sort. This is to aid the interpretation of the factors produced from the Q-factor analysis (Stephenson, 1935) which may be carried out using dedicated Q software packages, such as the freely available PQ Method (Schmolck, 2002).
3.7.1.4. *Rationale for Q-sort for current research*

For the purpose of the current study the Q-sort was used as a tool to gather the views of the children in the research and analysed using content analysis (Hseih & Shannon, 2005). This approach was selected because the researcher was aware of the need to utilise a method which provides support to the participants to enable them to give their views while also allowing for more open ended, subjective responses. The use of the statements in the transition Q-sort provided a visual scaffolding for the participants to think about their transition to secondary school. Being able to place the statements freely along a scale and to talk openly about the statements also encouraged the expression of individual views.

The Q-sort was analysed using content analysis (Hseih & Shannon, 2005). The rationale for not applying Q-factor analysis to the Q-sort data is that four participants is considered an insufficient number of participants for this purpose. An appropriate number of participants needed in order to produce a valid quantitative analysis of the Q-sort data is between 40 and 60 (Watts & Stenner, 2012); Exel & Graaf, (2005) note that Q-factor analysis produces acceptable results if the number of participants is approximately the same as the number of statements in the Q-set.

Recruiting sufficient numbers of participants for this purpose would have proved unwieldy given the nature of the study, time constraints related to a need for the research to occur during the year of transition to secondary school and the purposive sampling. Therefore, on this occasion, a detailed description of the rationale and traditional methodology for Q-factor analysis will not be presented. However, a detailed description of the use of Q-factor analysis may be found in Watts & Stenner (2012); Exel & Graaf (2005) and Brown (1993).

A detailed description of the content analysis approach used for the Q-sort data is presented in section 3.8.1.

3.7.1.5. *Development and use of Q-sort for the current study*

The Q-sort statement cards used with the children in the current study were initially used in a pilot study (Bennett- Warne, 2013) as highlighted in section two. A
detailed account of how the statements were devised, initially used and how they were reviewed for the current study may be found in appendices F and G.

Following the pilot study a summary of the key points considered is contained below:

- Negatively worded statements were changed as not necessary for Q-sort (Watts & Stenner, 2012) and to reduce chances of confusion for children with ASC due to possible associated language difficulties (Losh & Capps, 2003).
- A check to ensure the wording of the statements were in line with the reading ages and general levels of understanding of the current participant group. The reading ages of the children in the current study ranged from 7.9 -13 years. A further check was carried out to ascertain the approximate reading age required to access the transition statements devised for the Q-sort. Using the Flesch (1948) readability formula this was estimated to be approximately 8.3 years.
- To ensure a balanced Q-set was used a further four statements were added to the sensory perception theme (Watts & Stenner, 2012) (see appendix H for the transition Q-sort statements).
- Prior to undertaking the Q-sort with each child participant the researcher met individually with the participants to build rapport and to ensure they were comfortable with expressing their views. On these occasions the researcher was able to meet individually with participant 1, participants 2 and 3 together (as this is how they wished to proceed at this point as they attended the same school) and participant 4 individually in order for them to complete the Diamond Nine activity. This was a freely downloadable activity resourced by the researcher as suitable for the participant group (appendix J). This activity was chosen for two key reasons. Firstly, as a fun activity which was not onerous for the participants to complete and to enable them to experience expressing their views to the researcher prior to the completion of the Q-sort. The researcher was especially committed to ensuring that the views of the participants were genuinely gained. The use
of a pre Q-sort activity was intended to put participants at ease and an opportunity for the researcher to demonstrate to the participants that their views were both valid and valued. Secondly, as gleaned from previous teaching experience not all children have opportunities to undertake activities which involve scaling items and the Diamond Nine activity provided an accessible introduction to this type of activity.

At a second meeting each child participant was asked individually to complete the transition Q-sort intended as a tool for gathering the child’s view. Prior to starting the researcher checked that each participant understood the wording used for the descriptors at the top of the scale and appreciated the colour coding strip as representing a scale with the right side representing really agree (green), the left side representing really do not agree (red) and with the centre of the scale representing neutral /do not mind either way (white) (see appendix F, figures 1a and 1b). This element of the Q-sort grid was adapted by the researcher in situ as was necessary for the participant and noted in the findings for each participant. Completed Q-sort data was recorded on a blank Q-sort sheet for analysis by the researcher. Field notes were made of salient information noticed during the completion of the Q-sort. The corresponding number for each statement card was recorded on a blank copy of the Q-sort grid.

Following completion of the Q-sort participants were asked the following about their Q-sort:

- Are there any statement cards that you wish to place differently? If so, could you say why? (The participant was then invited to move the card/s accordingly)
- Could you comment on the statement cards placed at either end of the scale? (really agree or really do not agree)
- Were there any cards which were especially difficult for you to place on the grid?
- If you could write your own statement card about transition what would you write?
The participant was then invited to say or write this down. They could add as few or as many statements as they wished.

The Q-sort was carried out in the middle of the spring term after the children had been at secondary school for a term. This was in order to allow sufficient time for each child to settle in to their new secondary school so that they would be in a position to reflect about their transition rather than only reacting as may have been the case if their views were sought at the start of the academic year immediately as they transitioned.

3.7.1.6. Critique of Q-sort as an approach.

Other methods of gaining the child’s view about transition to secondary school were considered such as keeping a diary or completing a structured questionnaire. It is acknowledged within the current research that children with ASC may find it particularly difficult to self-reflect (Sofronoff, Attwood & Hinton, 2005), as may be required when completing a diary for instance, and as highlighted in the research by Humphrey and Lewis (2008). While diary entries would have allowed the researcher to capture a somewhat subjective view of transition experiences the commitment to keeping a diary on a regular basis is also considerable and may have resulted in an inconsistent and possibly biased response across the participant group (Robson, 2011). Conversely the use of a structured questionnaire was considered to be too restricting and may have unduly limited the views and experiences the child may wish to talk about (Mertens, 2010; Robson, 2011).

There are key advantages as to why a Q-sort was selected as a tool for gathering the views of children. Firstly, the use of the statements within a Q-sort provided a supportive, visual structure which may enable children with ASC to better self-reflect upon their experiences (Dann, 2011; Knott, Dunlop & Mackay, 2006). Also as a novel and engaging activity the Q-sort (Mckenzie, Braswell, Jelsma & Naidoo, 2011) was considered by the researcher an appropriate tool to engage the participants in thinking about their transition to secondary school. This was also evidenced as such during the transition pilot study (Bennett-Warne, 2013) (see section 2.2.4.2).
A Q-sort is also considered as promoting empowerment for individuals who belong to minority groups, such as individuals with ASC, by enabling their voices to be heard (Brown, 2006; Capdevila & Lazard, 2008). To some extent this is further enabled by removing or reducing the power imbalance between the researcher and the participant such as occurs when completing a Q-sort (Parker & Alford, 2010). The participants are considered to be “doing research” rather than having research done to them by the researcher when completing Q-sort (Ellingsen, Storksen & Stephens, 2010; Ellingsen, Thorsen & Storksen, 2014).

Furthermore, the use of Q-sort methodology (Stephenson, 1935) was adopted to enable the researcher to gain the views of a specific group of individuals more systematically while allowing for the subjective experiences of the participants (Wint, 2013; Watts and Stenner, 2012). By actively sorting a set of statements along a scaled distribution participants were able to impose their own viewpoint upon the issues concerned. This effort after meaning coupled with a search for byperson commonalities highlights Q’s ability to produce more detailed, holistic data (Stainton Rogers, 2003). As such a Q-sort is a useful tool for pursuing research within a social constructionist paradigm (Brown, 2006; Watts & Stenner, 2012).

However, there are also some potential disadvantages associated with the use of a Q-sort. From a researcher point of view they are time consuming to devise and pilot prior to utilising fully. Furthermore, depending on the number of statements included a Q-sort may also be lengthy and somewhat burdensome for participants to complete (Klooster, Visser & de Jong, 2008). For the current research care was taken to minimise these possible effects by limiting the number of statements to 35 which could reasonably be sorted within a thirty minute time scale. Care was also taken to ensure the statements were understood by the participant group in order to reduce the ambiguity participants may experience when ascribing meaning to them (Watts & Stenner, 2012).
A further disadvantage levied at Q-sort as an approach is that the participants may sort the statements according to how they think they should be sorted and not place them where they would actually like them to go (Cross, 2005). Again, this is a factor the researcher pre-empted to an extent, based upon previous work with children, and is partly why the children were asked to complete the Diamond Nine activity. This was intended to reduce the effect of wanting to give socially acceptable responses as care was taken to explain the value placed on each child’s views within the research.

3.7.2 Semi-structured interviews.
Semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to gather a richly detailed picture of participants’ views and are considered an appropriate method to employ within a flexible research design (Robson, 2011). While the questions within a semistructured interview are devised to explore particular aspects of a research topic the researcher is allowed a certain freedom regarding the order in which questions are asked or rephrased and supporting prompts may be utilised to further enable the participant’s responses. This is especially conducive when the research design is exploratory in nature and the researcher wishes to elicit the participants’ accounts of their lived experiences (Howitt & Cramer, 2008). Semi-structured interviews have been selected as a research method for capturing the views of children with ASC because, as Humphrey and Parkinson (2006) emphasise, this approach enables this participant group an opportunity to fully express their thoughts, feelings and views more directly than is the case in more impersonal, quantitative studies. Semistructured interviews are also particularly complementary as a follow on from an initial data gathering tool, such as the Q-sort (Watts & Stenner, 2012), as they enable the researcher to gain wider, in-depth views of issues raised in the preliminary enquiry. Furthermore, the use of semi-structured interviews has been demonstrated as an effective method for gathering the views of children with ASC (Calder, Hill & Pellicano, 2013; Kirby, Dickie & Baranek, 2014). An overall guide to constructing and undertaking semi-structured interviews was followed and as outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006)
Interview schedules were adapted to meet the needs of differing participant groups within the same case study with care given to the language used with children and with adult participants (Cohen et al., 2011). The nature of such adaptations were largely discerned through the use of a pilot prior to undertaking the research fully (Howitt & Cramer, 2008). The interview schedule for the child participants was originally trialled in the transition pilot study (Bennett-Warne, 2013) with minor adjustments made to the order of the questions (see appendix K). The interview schedules for the parents and teachers (see appendices L and M) were piloted as part of case 1. No revisions were considered needed and so the same interview schedule was used with cases 2, 3 and 4.

Following the completion of the Q-sort, semi-structured interviews took place individually with each of the children participating in the research. Semi-structured interviews may have limitations as a method for gathering data with children with ASC as they rely on the participant being able to understand the questions and concepts involved and express themselves in response to the question. This potential difficulty is acknowledged by the researcher in the current study and hence why the transition Q-sort was adopted as a tool for gathering data about the children’s transition experiences. The interviews all took place within two weeks of each child completing the transition Q-sort to maintain the validity of the research. The completed Q-sort grid was re-presented to each child participant as an aide memoire prior to starting the interview and to focus the participant’s attention back onto the research topic prior to speaking about their transition experiences. Providing visual aids when asking questions has been demonstrated as an effective tool to support the understanding and recall of the experiences of children with ASC (Dan, 2011; Murphy, 1998; Murphy & Cameron, 2008).

Further interviews took place with parents, then the school staff member who knew the child best. In total four children, six parents and three members of staff were interviewed. Of the parent interviews two involved both parents of two of the child participants i.e. a double interview. For one of the staff interviews the SENCo was interviewed about two children as they attended the same school.
For the child participant in case study 4 considerable adaptations were made to the approaches used to elicit the child’s views. This was to accommodate the child’s specific difficulties with communication associated with a co-occurring diagnosis of Selective Mutism (see section 2.2.3.1 for further details).

Each interview (apart from that with child participant four) was recorded using a digital voice recorder and transcribed in full and anonymised for analysis. The interview with child participant four was captured using an adaptive approach utilising and alternative method for communication as highlighted as good practice for children with Selective Mutism (Cleave, 2009; Johnson & Wintgens, 2001). Notes and written responses made by the participant and researcher were also gathered during the interview with child participant 4.

3.7.3 Grey data.
Documentary evidence relating to the organisation or setting which the participants are involved can provide important contextual data to a case study design. Yin (2014) further highlights that it provides another layer of detail to the research findings and an avenue for triangulating data with other sources gathered as part of the overall case study. However, such data needs to be treated with some caution as each document will have been produced with a particular audience in mind and may contain the unknown bias of the author (Yin, 2014).

For the purposes of the current study grey data for each school’s policies on inclusion, transition and support for children with ASC, were requested from the SENCo as part of the informed consent to participate and information gathered at the start of the research.

3.7.4 Research journal and field notes.
The completion of a research journal can substantially increase the validity of the case study design protocol as it contains evidence of the chain of research events as they happened throughout the study (Yin, 2014). Research journals enable the researcher to keep a log of research activities undertaken, reflections on aspects of
the research as it unfolds and provide an opportunity to record possible next steps (Altrichter & Holly, 2005). Such reflections are considered to be essential in being able to “push the research forward” and the research journal, while rather personal and informal in many ways, benefits from containing key elements to capture relevant research details. However, a particular awareness is needed when completing and reflecting on the content in research journals. In order to guard against a tendency towards researcher bias, distortion of events and misattribution of reasoning about the research the researcher needs to have what Sartre described as a “mind that watches itself” (Altrichter & Holly, 2005) and to be mindful of alternative possibilities within the research.

A research journal was kept by the researcher throughout the research process and formed a log of each step of the research process. This also partly served as an organisational tool for keeping the research on track. It also contains reflective notes and questions raised at each stage of the research which informed the next steps in data gathering. Notes were handwritten throughout each step of the data gathering and comprised of the following steps as outlined by Altrichter & Holly (2005)

- Date
- Brief description of research activity
- Salient information relating to each case study and observations i.e. contextual data
- Note of any items forgotten/overlooked or needing further clarification
- Questions asked by the researcher to guide next steps

The research journal served as part of an audit trail of the research and along with the fieldwork notes served to strengthen the reliability of the case study (Robson, 2011; Yin, 2014) by providing a clear audit of each step of the research process.

Fieldwork notes were also taken in situ during each rapport building activity and subsequent data gathering activities for each of the child participants. These were recorded by hand by the researcher onto paper which also contained a blank Q-sort grid used for recording the rankings of the Q-sort statements. The fieldwork notes
were especially significant during the Q-sort activity as they added a rich layer of further detail. The fieldwork notes largely consisted of points of salience for each participant, as noted by the researcher.

3.8 Data analysis methods
The data was analysed as shown in table 7:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Q-sort data.</td>
<td>Content analysis (directed) (Hsieh &amp; Shannon, 2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fieldwork notes</td>
<td>Thematic analysis (Braun &amp; Clarke, 2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Full transcripts of semi-structured interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Full transcripts of semi-structured interview</td>
<td>Thematic analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Full transcripts of semi-structured interview</td>
<td>Thematic analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grey data- school policies</td>
<td>Content analysis (directed)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.8.1. Analysis of Q-sort data in current study.
Due to the nature of the research there were insufficient participants for the Q-sort as required to carry out a Q-factor analysis (Stephenson, 1935) which is the usual method of analysis. As the recording of the completed Q-sort produced numerical data around given transition themes, it was decided, following discussion with a university supervisor, that a directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) was an appropriate, alternative method to analyse the Q-sort data. Directed content analysis was also applied to the salient points noted by the researcher within the field notes made during the Q-sort activity.
Content analysis is an approach which enables the researcher to make valid and reliable inferences from a set of data through the process of reducing multiple texts and words into smaller units by applying codes or statements to the data (Weber, 1990). This allows the researcher to relate such units of analysis to the wider considerations of the research.

Applying a protocol for content analysis contributes to ensuring the analysis has high validity and the inferences are reliable and such a protocol was applied to the current research (see table 8).

**Table 8: Content analysis protocol (Weber, 1990)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description of stages in content analysis protocol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Define the recording units (e.g. word or whole text within the protocol)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Define the categories within the protocol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Test coding on a sample of the text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Assess accuracy or reliability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Revise coding rules</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The completed Q-sort grid, as annotated by the researcher was considered to be a data source suitable for content analysis and a directed approach was used (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The researcher used the categories presented within the initial analysis stages utilised for Q-sort analysis as outlined by Watts & Stenner (2012).

The transition Q sorts were annotated and analysed on a case by case basis then a cross case analysis carried out. By looking for polarised rankings (-4 and +4) the researcher began to uncover the transition statements the participants perhaps felt most strongly about and ones that may also most strongly resonate for each child when participating in the semi-structured interviews. Statements ranked at 0 were considered to be those the participants felt neutral or least strongly about. Salient points, such as comments noted from the participants were recorded in the field notes and considered as part of the coding process for the content analysis. Information regarding similarities and differences of statement rankings were
considered individually as part of the content analysis and later across the four cases as part of a cross-case analysis (Yin, 2014).

3.8.2. Analysis of semi-structured interviews.

The recorded data from each of the semi-structured interviews was transcribed in full and initially analysed case by case to begin to identify key themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher employed a hybrid thematic analysis to the data. This involved an inductive, data driven, bottom-up, approach (Fereday & MuirCochrane, 2006) while also being mindful of themes within the data which confirmed or contradicted codes from the analysis of the transition Q-sort data, field notes and the factors associated with good transition practice for children with ASC (Charman et al. 2011). A hybrid approach to analysis was necessary in order to also acknowledge the researcher’s existing experience in planning transitions for children going to secondary school and for those with ASC in particular and to consider themes which seemed to be particularly resonant for the participants.

The themes within the data were identified to some extent at a latent level. That is to a certain degree the researcher interpreted the themes beyond the surface level of the data and began to interpret them at a more implicit level. A latent approach was used particularly in relation to how the participants felt about moving to secondary school. A more semantic approach was applied when considering the factors within the school system and the strengths and difficulties associated with ASC which may be a factor in transition.

The researcher acknowledges that to a certain extent an a priori structure in relation to timescales in the transition process was applied to the data and to a wider extent in relation to the views of the children. The timescales emerged from analysis of the responses from the parents and staff. While applying such assumptions to the children’s data provided a structure to aid the telling of their transition experiences this could also contribute to a more limited interpretation of the child’s view. The researcher further acknowledges that previous experience in transition planning and reading for earlier transition research may also have influenced the development of the themes related to times scales.
A six stage thematic analysis was applied (Braun and Clarke, 2006) (see table 9). Data from the interviews was also verified by the participants to increase the validity the findings from the research (Yin, 2014). The findings were further strengthened via inter-rater reliability by consulting with a university doctoral colleague to check the codes and themes identified by the researcher in the thematic analysis.

A copy of a transcript and the researcher’s initial codes and sub-themes was shared with a colleague and discussed.

### Table 9: Stages in thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage of analysis</th>
<th>Description stages in thematic analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Familiarisation with the data-</td>
<td>Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Generating initial codes.</td>
<td>Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Searching for themes.</td>
<td>Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Reviewing and refining themes.</td>
<td>Checking in the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Defining and naming themes.</td>
<td>Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells; generating clear definitions and names for each theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Producing the report.</td>
<td>The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.8.3. Analysis of contextual documents.
A content analysis using a directed content approach (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005) around themes relating to factors in transition was carried out on the grey data (contextual documents) which consisted of policies on SEN; inclusion; transition and support for children with ASC and findings from the latest Ofsted report for each of the three schools. This analysis was structured using the eight key factors considered to be good practice in education for children with autism as highlighted in the “What is Good Practice in Autism ?” report (Charman et al., 2011) (see table 1). Where policy/procedural information was unclear clarification was sought by speaking directly to the school SENCo. The analysis of each case was given further consideration in light of the content analysis. Following individual case analyses final inferences were drawn from a cross-case analysis (Yin, 2014)

3.8.4 Cross-case analysis.
Following an individual case analysis a final cross-case synthesis was undertaken by the researcher via identification of similarities and difference across the individual cases in relation to the original research questions (Yin, 2014). The results of the process undertaken by the researcher in synthesising such findings from across the multiple cases is presented in section 4 (Yin, 2014).

3.9 Critique of case study method
Case study method is a widely accepted approach to research which is concerned with gaining a deep, richly detailed picture of a complex social phenomenon (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Mertens, 2010; Yin, 2014) such as exploring pupil experience of transition to secondary school. Flyvbjerg (2006) further highlights that the flexibility within case study design makes it particularly suitable for research which is exploratory in nature and is concerned with individuals from a particular group. Such flexibility allows for the researcher to employ multiple methods best suited to capturing the “complexities and contradictions” inherent within real world research and which may not be accounted for within more quantitative approaches (Mertens, 2010). By employing a multiple-embedded case study design the researcher was able to explore the phenomenon of transition from varied
perspectives including pupil, parent and teacher while also considering the wider social context of the school.

In order to ensure the rigour of a case study it is important to consider aspects of validity and reliability not only at the design stage but throughout each stage of the case study (Robson, 2011). Yin (2014) also highlights that the criteria used for ensuring such rigour within case study research are similar to those applied to other types of social science research as follows:

Addressing issues around construct validity involve the use of appropriate data collection methods with a “clear chain of evidence” (Yin, 2014) which account for subjective bias on the part of the researcher (Robson, 2011). This was achieved in part by keeping a research journal and fieldwork notes outlining salient points as the research was conducted.

3.9.2. Internal validity.
This concerns the researcher being true to the data and not just imposing preconceived ideas during analysis and interpretation. It also means giving credence to findings which are outside of the researchers expectations which Flyvbjerg (2006) refers to as “finding a black swan” when looking for white ones. Acknowledging and accounting for such anomalies in the data within case study research generally leads to more detailed analysis (Robson, 2011). Findings from within the data could also be given further validity by triangulating evidence from multiple sources of information, re-presenting data back to participants for verification and by having a second observer view the findings (Robson, 2011; Mertens, 2010; Yin, 2014).

Issues of internal validity were addressed within the current research as follows:

- Transcripts of the interviews were e-mailed to the parents and children and the parents were asked to read through the interviews with their child and to clarify whether or not they would like to clarify or change any points
made in the interviews. The transcripts were e-mailed as the participants expressed a preference for this. The researcher clarified that the transcript represented what they said and intended to say. Participants are made aware that they could amend the transcripts if they so wish.

• Transcripts of the interviews with school staff were posted to each of these participants with an invitation to contact the researcher if they wished to amend their transcript. The researcher posted these transcripts as the staff participants expressed a preference for this.

• Likewise with the completed Q-sort concourse which was re-presented to the child participants immediately prior to participating in the semistructured interview. Each participant was given a further opportunity to change the ranking of the Q-sort statements if they so wished. This served the purpose of validating the initial responses they gave and also acted as an aide memoire for the participants before answering questions about their transition experiences in more detail.

• The findings from the Q-sort and interviews with the child participants were triangulated with findings from the parent and teacher interviews and analysis of the grey data.

• The analysis of the data was looked at by a colleague to verify the findings of the researcher. This consisted of presenting an interview transcript to a colleague with the researcher’s initial codes and subthemes. This was followed by an informal discussion about further or alternative codes and potential subthemes as highlighted by the colleague.

3.9.3. External validity.
While case study methods are particularly suited to researching small sample sizes a critique often levied at case studies concerns the external validity of the findings and how applicable these are to the larger population. It could be argued however that the purpose of case study research is not to reveal findings which may be generalised across a wide population but to present a detailed, holistic picture of findings which may be generalised to similar cases within a specific sample of the population (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Stake, 2005). Robson (2011) highlights that, although
in case study research the participants are not drawn from a randomly selected representative sample of the population, the findings from case study research may help in the development of a theoretical understanding of other similar cases or situations such as possible implications for other children with ASC transitioning to mainstream secondary school.

### 3.9.4. Reliability.

Demonstrating reliability within research is an important part of building reliability in the methods used, tools used to gather data and how the data is analysed and interpreted (Robson, 2011). This is perhaps more readily demonstrated in quantitative approaches where standardised tools may be available and test variables can be more easily controlled for (Howitt & Cramer, 2008). Within case study research reliability could be somewhat protected by the researcher keeping a detailed account of all aspects of research activities rather like an “audit trail” supported by a research journal; raw data and clear evidence of how analyses were carried out and inferences reached almost as if someone is “looking over your shoulder” (Yin, 2014). There should be sufficient detail recorded of the research activities to enable another researcher to replicate that specific case study. A detailed record was kept by the researcher in the form of a research journal, as mentioned previously and the case study protocol followed.

### 3.9.5. Ethical considerations.

Before undertaking the research the researcher applied for ethical approval to the University of Manchester’s School of Education Research Ethics Committee. Ethical approval was gained in January 2014 (appendix N). Throughout the course of the study the researcher adhered to the ethical guidelines outlined by the British Psychological Society Code of Ethics (BPS, 2006) namely respect, competence, responsibility and integrity. The Health Care Professions Council’s Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics (2008) and the University of Manchester guidelines for Research Risk and Ethics Assessment (RREA, 2012) were consulted throughout.
Confirmation of permission to carry out the research was sought from each of the three settings. Each participant was provided with information regarding the details of the research project and written consent gained from the parents of each of the children prior to gaining assent and further verbal and written consent from each child.

A key ethical consideration for the researcher was ensuring that each child participant made a fully informed choice concerning their decision to consent to participating in the research. One potential participant did not want to participate, even though parental permission was given and therefore the rights of this child to not take part in the research were fully respected as research participation is a voluntary activity (Morrow & Richards, 2002). Although disappointed at not being able to participate themselves the child’s parents also respected his decision.

The researcher was also very aware of the right for all children to be given the opportunity to participate in research regarding matters which affect their everyday lives and for their views concerning decisions which affect them to be fully included and heard within the research (Wiles, Crow, Heath & Charles, 2006).

The researcher’s commitment to an inclusive approach to enabling participation was further reflected in the inclusion/exclusion criteria applied to participant sampling in a way which was considerate of their needs. A fundamental part of the participant sampling approach was concerned with the researcher ensuring that each child was able to understand what was being asked of them as a participant and to demonstrate the researcher’s commitment to genuinely eliciting the views of each child.

Information sheets (appendix O) and letters of consent (appendix P) were sent to parents of the children highlighted as meeting the initial criteria for participation three weeks prior to participant selection. Once informed parental consent had been given the researcher provided each participant with a description of the research and a letter of assent (see appendix Q) before asking for their consent, both verbally and in writing, to participate. A copy of the assent letter was sent to
each parent and they were asked to read this with their child once they had agreed to participate. The researcher then shared the assent letter with each participant and answered any questions they may have had about the process. The researcher felt it was also important to gain assent for each separate research activity the child participants took part in to ensure they understood the process and were able to give fully informed consent for each data gathering activity.

Informed consent to participate from the teachers was also gained (see appendix R). Teachers were also given a copy of the parent/teacher information letter and informed consent gained. Each participant was given a copy of the information letter to keep. They were also informed of their right to withdraw from the research at any time without having to say why.

At all times, throughout the research, the researcher respected the individual’s right to privacy and confidentiality by ensuring privacy during research activities. Any data gathered through the Q-sort activity or semi-structured interviews was anonymised and stored securely. Such data is to be kept only for as long as necessary and in line with the University of Manchester’s guidelines (RREA, 2012).

The researcher was aware of a duty of care towards the participants especially as they are from a vulnerable group (BPS, 2006) and, due to associated difficulties with having ASC, further consideration was given to ensuring that the participants understood what they were consenting to and that they understood each aspect of the research as it progressed. This was on an individual basis and was enhanced by the use of further explanation of Q-statements and questions in the semistructured interviews as needed.

Particular care was needed while working with one of the child participants as she had a co-occurring difficulty of selective mutism. Consent was gained through written response to the letter of assent. The researcher was aware of the need to allow for extra rapport building time in order to explore possible ways to enable the participant to feel comfortable communicating.
The researcher was also aware of the potentially sensitive nature of recalling transition experiences for the participants with the need to stop a research activity acknowledged and identified staff available to support children as needed. This was not necessary during the current research however an incident of bullying was reported to a staff member as requested by the participant. A member of the mentor team or a teaching assistant was available during and immediately after each research activity undertaken by the participants in order to offer emotional support as needed.

Each participant was debriefed at the end of the research to ensure their welfare and thanked for taking part in the research. The researcher debriefed the parents and staff of the school involved either directly and/or in writing at the end of the project and allowed opportunities for further questions to be asked as needed.
Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Chapter Overview
Each of the four cases within this multiple case study design was analysed separately and the findings reported in-line with the order in which the data was collected on a case by case basis. In total four cases are reported from across three schools. The findings for each case begins with a presentation of the directed content analysis of the school’s general SEN policy and Ofsted report pertinent at the time the research was carried out. The categories outlined in a report by Charman et al., (2011) concerning best practice for children with autism were used as the basis for the directed content analysis of the school documents (see appendix S for an example content analysis grid of grey data gathered from school A). A further three additional themes were explicitly added within the eight existing Charman categories for consideration in the content analysis namely, *voice of the child; voice of the parent* and *equal opportunities*. These three categories were determined as a result of the researcher’s reading, previous experience and consideration of the overall purpose of the current study. The findings from the three additional categories are subsumed as part of the Charman et al. (2011) best practice categories. The content analysis findings are reported as a profile for each school at the start of the findings for each case. In cases 2 and 3 the children attended the same school and therefore only one school profile is included for both cases.

Following the school profile a pen portrait for each child participant is presented. This is drawn from information gathered as part of the research, participant recruitment and sampling processes. This refers to information within existing pupil profiles, academic progress accounts and ASC specific profiles outlined in information from school or external agencies such as ASC outreach teams. Salient information drawn from fieldwork notes taken during initial rapport building sessions with each child are also included in the pen portraits as necessary.

Next, a directed content analysis of the Q-sort data (Hseih & Shannon, 2005) and salient information from fieldwork notes are reported for each case. Relevant
fieldwork notes are subsumed within each of the transition Q-sort categories which were formulated and used by the researcher when devising the statements. While the Q-sort is primarily considered as a tool for gathering the child’s views, directed content analysis highlights some of the key transition areas each child perhaps felt strongly about and which were explored further in the semi-structured interviews.

The Q-sort findings are then followed by a report of the thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews for each case. A thematic map for each research question is presented and a brief narrative for each theme given. Once the findings are presented, on a case by case basis, consideration is given to findings from across all four cases as part of a cross-case synthesis.

The thematic maps are colour coded as follows: purple for organising themes; blue for themes, green for sub-themes. While each theme and sub-theme are highlighted as separate entities for the purpose of data handling it is important to acknowledge that there may in reality be overlap and links between these as is to be expected when considering elements that are part of wider, complex systems.

Quotes for each participant are coded and numbered as follows: C1 = child participant 1; P1 = parent of child participant 1; S1 = staff member who best knows child participant 1. In cases 1 and 3 both parents participated jointly in the semi-structured interviews and therefore quotes from these participants are referred to as P1a and P1b and P3a and P3b.

Each child is given an anonymised name in order to protect their identity, which is highlighted at the start of the findings for each case. As the child’s experiences and views of transition are central to the research their quotes and the parent views are prioritised in reference to research question 1, whenever possible. In relation to research question 2 a balance of quotes is referenced from child, parent and staff to illustrate each theme.

4.1.1 Overview of findings from the thematic analysis.
As highlighted within the methodology the labels for the themes within the thematic analysis were derived using both a semantic and latent approach to consideration of the data. The organising theme of *mixed emotions* was arrived at
after considering how the children in the research experienced transition. This included contemplation by the researcher about both what the children reported they experienced before and during transition and how they appeared to feel about it. The researcher acknowledges the difficulties involved in defining what constitutes an emotion or a feeling and a more detailed debate is beyond the scope of the current research. For the purposes of this study the use of the wording mixed emotions is intended to encapsulate the different feelings each child appeared to experience as part of their overall transition experiences. The use of mixed emotions is also intended to capture the dynamic nature of transition in that it occurs over a considerable period of time and involves more than one event which may provoke a variety of feelings or emotions for the participants which may have been transient or longer lasting for some of the participants. This is further reflected in the use of the terms (feeling) more settled, (feeling) reassured and (feeling) initially unsettled as some participants appeared to transition more readily than others and experienced varying emotions and feelings at different points in the process than other peers. Some themes are drawn directly from the quotes, such as the semantic subthemes seen in all four cases of anxious or worried. Other more latent sub-themes, as seen in case 1 (before transition) of daunted and reassured, are extrapolated from the quotes along with a consideration by the researcher of the saliency of the experiences relayed by the children. Although greater weight is given to comments made by the children the latent sub-themes are, when possible, triangulated by quotes from the parents and from staff members. While the questions asked in the interviews were not explicitly linked to specific time points within the transition process some responses from parents and staff clearly referred to specific points in time before and during and after the first term in secondary school. This contributed to the development of time related themes (before transition, during 1st term and after 1st term) within the organising theme of mixed emotions.

While the thematic analysis is based upon data from the semi-structured interviews it is important to acknowledge that when considering what seemed especially salient about the transition experiences for each child the researcher was also privy to another layer of salience regarding transition experiences as evidenced in the
fieldwork notes taken during the rapport building and Q-sort activities. However, it was not possible to describe this in details given the constraints of the thesis.

The second organising theme of factors in transition was derived by a consideration of the data for each case at a more semantic level. This was based on the researcher’s prior knowledge of the literature on transition combined with an awareness of best practice for children with ASC. Wider systemic factors, which may have impacted upon each child’s transition experience, were also taken into account and for each child a different pattern of facilitators and barriers to transition is presented.

The thematic maps presented for each case are somewhat similar to each other in terms of organising themes and sub-themes. This is to be expected given that the same research foci and structure for semi-structured interviews was applied across the cases. The difference in findings between cases are more evident at the sub-theme and code level and which are illustrated within the detailed thematic analysis write up for each case.

4.1.2. Local authority background information.
The research data for the four cases was collected from three schools situated within a Local Authority (LA) within the Northwest of England. There is a mixed picture of social and economic deprivation within the LA with a number of areas of Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs), a marker for the governments Child Well-Being Index, being ranked within the top 10% of the most deprived areas nationally (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2011). Conversely, a number of other areas are considered to be within the top 5% least deprived areas nationally.

With regard to achievement indicators used by the government 78% of children within the LA achieved a level 4 or above in both English and Maths at the end of key stage 2, in 2013 (DfE, 2013). This figure is above the national average of 76% for 2013.
At the end of key stage 4 in 2013 60.9% of children in the LA achieved 5 A*-C at GCSE. This is just above the national average of 59.2% achieved for the same year (DfE, 2013).

Specific data concerning educational provision and achievement of children with ASC within the local authority was not available. However, it is estimated on a national basis that approximately 71% of children with ASC are now educated in mainstream settings and that approximately 24.4% achieve 5 A*-C at GCSE (Ambitious About Autism, 2012).

4.2 Findings case: 1: School A: Profile
School A is a smaller than the national average sized secondary school. Most of its students are white British with below average numbers of students from minority ethnic backgrounds. The number of students eligible to receive the pupil premium is well above average. At the time of data gathering the proportions of students with a disability or those considered to have special educational needs supported by school action were above average. The school was considered to meet the government floor standards for pupil attainment and progress.

The Ofsted (2011) inspection current at the time of the research placed school A within category 3 (requiring improvement). When the latest Ofsted report and school SEN policy are viewed in terms of the directed content analysis regarding the best practice categories for educational provision for children with autism (Charman et al., 2011) the findings for school A are as follows:

1. Ambitions and aspirations

The progress of children with disabilities and SEN is in-line with their peers and in some cases their achievement is accelerated by the support provided by the school. Ofsted made particular note of the equality of opportunities available for all children at the school. As it was a general SEN policy specific mention was not made regarding particular provision for children with ASC.
2. Monitoring progress

School A recently introduced more challenging targets aimed at encouraging all children to exceed expected targets.

3. Adapting the curriculum

An inconsistent picture is highlighted in the Ofsted report regarding the differentiation of work suited to the needs of groups and individual children across the school.

Within the school SEN policy specific mention is made of the role of the SENCo in transition arrangements. This outlines that children with SEN will already be known to the SENCo when starting secondary school.

4. Involvement of other professionals and services

The role of external agencies are explicitly highlighted within school A’s SEN Policy and the school is noted by Ofsted as engaging effectively with such agencies to support individual children.

5. Staff knowledge and training

Autism specific training is not highlighted within either the Ofsted document or the school SEN policy. The school’s priority at the time of data gathering with regards to staff training was to ensure that the subject leaders were trained and skilled enough to lead improvement in teaching across the whole school.

6. Effective communication

The relationship between staff and children is reported as being very positive. Children feel well cared for and behavioural expectations are conveyed clearly to parents and children. The SENCO shares individual information about children via the use of pupil profiles which are regularly updated.

Including the views of children and parents, particularly within SEN processes, is explicitly highlighted within the school SEN policy.
7. **Broader participation**

The school is noted for making full use of LA off-site provision for vulnerable students and is fully committed to ensuring that children with SEN are able to participate in wider activities with their peers.

8. **Strong relationships with families**

Parents are reported as being happy with and supportive of the school. A partnership between staff and parents is emphasised in the SEN policy. Children with SEN and their parents are expected to play a central role in the decision making process particularly at times of transition.

4.2.1. **Case 1: Hannah (Background information)**

Prior to the transition to secondary school, Hannah attended a feeder primary school which had well-established links with the secondary school with programmes in place for transition. Hannah participated in enhanced transition with a small group of other children with SEN. This consisted of extra visits at times when school was quieter. Hannah lived at home with her parents, older brother and older sister. Her brother also had a diagnosis of autism and her older sister attended school in the same academic year as Hannah. They were in the same tutor group but in different subject classes throughout the day. Hannah was known to the staff at school prior to starting secondary school because of the close liaison needed concerning her older brother who was already at the school. As a result the school building and some staff members were already familiar to Hannah sometime before transition.

Hannah was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome via a multi-agency panel in the summer term before her transition to secondary school. She was reported as having excellent attendance at school, a good attitude to her learning and was achieving at expected levels of progress in core subjects. Hannah expressed her enjoyment of maths as a favourite subject and dislike of P.E. At the time of data gathering Hannah had been referred to see an occupational therapist following concerns regarding her gross motor-coordination.
During rapport building activities Hannah came across as quiet and reserved which may have been linked to her associated difficulties with social interaction and communication. However, she appeared to enjoy participating in the rapport building activities and was able to read and understand the initial Diamond Nine statements and to scale the statements accordingly. Further discussion was needed to clarify that it was her opinion that the researcher was most interested in hearing and not what she thought the adults may like to hear. Following a demonstration of the Q-sort activity and explanation of what would be involved with the interview Hannah gave her assent to participate further in the research project.

4.2.1.1. Q-sort findings

For the purposes of the current research it was decided that the Q-sort data would be more meaningful to the reader if the statements were discussed in relation to the transition factor they are relevant to and where they were rated on the scale is highlighted. The statements devised for the current study may be seen in appendix H. The most salient statements for each child are highlighted within each of the transition Q-sort factors. The Q-sort rankings for each child are presented in appendix T.

Hannah was able to complete the Q-sort independently with reassurance given as needed that she was completing the process accordingly and that it was her opinion that was most important during this activity. Initially the number of statements (35) seemed somewhat daunting for Hannah and sorting them into the initial three broad categories of really agree (+4), neutral/don’t mind either way (0), really don’t agree (-4), helped her proceed with more ease to complete the task.

The overall content analysis for Hannah’s transition Q-sort is as follows:

- **Logistics**

Hannah placed statement No.25 *I enjoy my journey to school* at -3. Although Hannah sometimes felt “travel sick and a bit worried” on the way to school she also reported her initial visits to the school as being a positive experience. She placed statement No.13 *I can go to lunchtime clubs* at -1 as she was not aware of clubs she could go to but did have an identified quiet space to go at break times. She also
really agreed (+4) with statement No.16 *I understand the rules in school.* Hannah placed statement No.7 *Sometimes I get lost in school* at -2 and highlighted that she got lost when she first started secondary school.

• **Learning**

Hannah placed statements within this factor across -1, 0 and +1. She slightly agreed with statement No. 11 *staff at my work help me when my work is difficult* and No. 29 *I can do my homework by myself* by placing them at +1. She was less in agreement with how she feels she learns at school as indicated by the placing of No.5 *I can learn well at my school* at -1.

• **Support from adults**

Hannah placed statements within this factor across -1, 0, +1 and +2. She highlighted that she found it helpful to be able to speak with the learning mentor at regular times throughout the day as indicated by the placement of statement No. 28 *At school there is someone I can talk to if I feel unhappy or worried* at +2.

• **Support from peers**

Friendships are highlighted as especially important for Hannah and she placed statements within this factor across -2, 0, +1, +2 and +3. Hannah talked about enjoying having her sister in the same year and they shared friends as evidenced in her placing of statement No. 26 *The other children in school understand me.* Hannah placed No. 17 *I can share my hobbies and special interests with people at school* at -2. She noted that she enjoyed talking about fashion with her friends and was happy sharing her hobbies with them.

• **Teasing and bullying**

Although Hannah expressed an overall dislike of going to school having placed statement No.1 *I like going to school* at -4 (really don’t agree) stating “I don’t like it…..it’s boring” she was not able to expand on this further. To rate this statement so strongly raised concerns for the researcher and this issue was tentatively
explored further with her learning mentor and within the subsequent interview with Hannah and her parents.

While she did not report any particular incidents of teasing or bullying during transition when completing the Q-sort she knew who she could speak to if she had. She rated statement No. 3 *I feel safe in school* at +1 indicating some agreement with this.

- **Sensory issues**

Within the transition factor of sensory issues Hannah placed the related statements widely from -3, -2, -1, 0, and +2. Hannah placed No.35 *I like messy activities in school* at -3 (almost at really disagree) stating that she did not like to get her hands or clothes dirty. Hannah quite strongly agreed with statement No. 15 *Secondary school is noisy* as she placed this at +2 and said that she found the playground to be “noisy and boring” particularly at lunchtimes.

- **Own statement**

When asked what she would write as her own transition statement for other children to sort Hannah said “*I like having a packed lunch*” and that she would rank it at “really agree” (+4) on the scale. She noted that she likes having more choice over what she eats, can choose to sit outside with her friends and does not have to queue inside the café.
4.2.1.2. Thematic map 1, case 1

Organising theme 1: Mixed emotions

Figure 4: Thematic map 1, case 1.
4.2.1.3. Mixed Emotions

Hannah reported mixed emotions regarding her move from primary to secondary school. These concerned feeling excited and reassured about learning new subjects but also worried, anxious and daunted by the changes involved and especially having different teachers (see figure 4).

Before transition

Hannah recalled how excited she felt during the transition activities she participated in while in year 6 and especially at the thought of trying out new subjects at secondary school.

“I remember on a taster day we did a fun experiment in science and made a chart in maths.”(C1)

Contrasted with these emotions were also feelings of worry and anxiety concerning a change in school work and meeting new people.

“I felt ….nervous….worried about hard questions....like we did in I.T on the taster day.” (C1)

Hannah further expressed feeling somewhat daunted prior to transition to secondary school.

“ I liked the taster days at secondary school but.....I didn’t want to go all the time......I liked being at my old school (primary)......with my friends...” (C1)

However, she felt reassured by the support provided by the learning mentors.

During the first term

When Hannah started secondary school she expressed that she was excited about forming new friendships which was also accompanied by a contrasting emotion of a sense of loss of previous friendships

Did any of your friends move to secondary school with you?

“Some are my sister’s friends and mine from primary. Some didn’t come to this school. I don’t really see them now.” (C1)
Conversely, she also experienced further contrasting emotions of anxiety and frustration which seemed to occur at the end of a brief initial period of seeming to settle in.

**Is there anything you didn’t like about starting secondary school?**

“We can’t ask for help in … we have to do “ask three before me”. I can’t do it… it’s too hard.” (C1)

(“Ask three before me” is a system used by the geography teacher whereby pupils are required to ask three other people for help in a lesson before approaching the teacher).

**After the first term**

After her first term in secondary school and following an initial positive start Hannah seemed to experience a dip in how she felt about moving to secondary school. This was particularly reflected in the interviews with Hannah’s parents and key member of staff and highlighted as her being initially unsettled and anxious at the start of the second term.

“Hannah started off okay, really good, really positive and then at the end of the first term, it was…. she wasn’t happy. You could see her changing, quite dramatically as well.” (P1a)

Following this period of unsettlement further pastoral support was put in place.

“Once she’d gone back after Christmas, again, it started off not good and then it’s improved slowly. I feel like we’re turning a corner now but it’s only since pastoral care has been put into place.” (P1a)
4.2.2. Thematic map 2, case 1. Organising theme 2: Factors in transition

Figure 5: Thematic map 2, case 1
4.2.2.1. Child’s characteristics.
While the child participants in the research may be considered to have things in common, such as a diagnosis of autism and a transition into year 7 in secondary school, the theme of *child’s characteristics* acknowledges that the participants are part of a heterogeneous group with quite individual characteristics. (See figure 5 for overview of theme 2).

Within this theme are factors which, to some extent, may be considered to be within-child, such as the sub-themes of *personality* or *attitude* and *resilience*. These may be thought to influence individual experiences such as transition and the interplay between the individual and the transition context is acknowledged as being complex and multi-directional by the researcher.

The sub-themes of *personality* and *attitude* were derived from consideration of how the participant may have spoken about a transition experience or have been described by their parents or member of staff. Further sub-themes such as *resilience* were drawn from the researcher’s consideration of data at a semantic and latent level.

The theme of *child’s characteristics* outlines factors which to some extent may be considered to be within-child factors such as reflected in the sub-themes *personality*, *attitude* and *resilience* which may impact upon individual transition experiences.

Hannah is described as being quiet and not wishing to draw attention to herself in school by her learning mentor and generally at home by her parents. However, she is also noted as being able to assert herself at home.

“*She doesn’t speak a lot anyway, she’s very quiet.*” (P1a)

Hannah highlighted a mixed attitude towards school generally. She noted that she disliked having to go.

“*I don’t like school……..it’s always boring.*” (C1)
However, she liked being with her friends and was motivated by certain subjects she enjoyed.

“Well my favourite lesson is art because I’m good at drawing and I like painting.” (C1)

Although Hannah was reported as experiencing difficulties towards the end of the first term and at the start of the second term of the transition to secondary school she also demonstrated resiliency in continuing to attend school and adapting to the changes.

“We knew her sister wouldn’t be there all the time in secondary school….she’s had a lot to deal with.” (P1b)

4.2.2.2. ASC.
The theme of ASC was derived from a consideration of a number of factors individual to each child concerning the effect of ASC on their transition experiences. While ASC has been treated as a separate theme in transition for the participant group the researcher acknowledges that there may be a complex interplay between aspects of ASC and the child’s characteristics.

Sub-themes of late diagnosis; friendship; communication; sensory perceptions and co-occurring difficulties were highlighted as being most salient for Hannah.

A key issue regarding her transition appeared to be that she received a diagnosis in the summer term prior to starting secondary school.

“….Hannah received a diagnosis quite late into primary. In fact we didn’t actually get the written confirmation of diagnosis until she was already here.” (S1)

Although Hannah did not have a detailed ASC profile in place at the time of the interview her parents highlighted that she appeared to enjoy social interactions with a small number of peers in school.
“They all sit and talk together. She seemed happy that she’d got the three of them.” (P1b)

Communication also appeared to be an area of difficulty for Hannah in that her parents noted that she found it very difficult to communicate with unfamiliar adults. This could have been further complicated by having a slight stammer when expected to speak in front of the class.

“Hannah doesn’t communicate very well so it was a case of “if you’re not sure, ask the teacher”. She wouldn’t ask anybody.” (P1a)

Within the secondary school setting Hannah reported that she found particular places difficult to go to, such as the lunch room, because of the noise levels.

“I like Thursdays...we go second into lunch...the café’s noisy so we can eat quicker and go and chat in the garden. It’s quiet there.” (C1)

Hannah had also been referred to the occupational therapy service following concerns raised by her parents regarding her gross-motor skills. Her parents highlighted difficulties participating in some aspects of P.E. lessons.

“She walks with her foot turned in just slightly. In P.E. now they’re having to run round a track and she doesn’t like it. I raised that with school and it’s now gone on her care plan. She’ll probably not dread P.E. as much.” (P1b)

4.2.2.3. Family.
The support Hannah received from her parents and siblings appeared to positively contribute to her transition to secondary school. Her parents had previous experience having supported her older brother’s move into year 7. Also as her sister was born in the same academic year as her they started secondary school together.

For Hannah the sub-themes of parental endeavour; siblings; parental links with schools and sharing information were highlighted.

Hannah’s parents noted how they felt they had to persist when trying to gain support when Hannah was struggling at the end of the first term.
“We were having to chase support all the time and you feel like a pest. We felt like we had to fight if you like.” (P1b)

Her sister features prominently as a supportive factor in her transition to secondary school. They had been together throughout primary school and were in the same tutor form at secondary school.

“I go to the garden after lunch with my sister and our friends. She’s in the same year as me. There’s eleven months between us. We share friends.” (C1)

Links between Hannah’s family and both the primary and secondary school were well established because of previous experience supporting her older brother at both the primary and secondary school.

“The learning mentors came too and talked to us after. I knew one of the mentors cos I met her when I went to school for my brother……she helped us on the taster days.” (C1)

While waiting for a diagnosis to be confirmed Hannah’s parents were able to share their understanding of difficulties Hannah experienced with the learning mentor when liaising about her sibling who also has ASC.

“….I knew speaking with mum what her concerns were, and so I was watching from day one.” (S1)

4.2.2.4. Primary school.
The primary feeder school Hannah attended prior to transition was in close physical proximity to the secondary school, literally across a narrow road. She had attended the primary school since Reception class and the sub-themes of links with secondary school; transition procedures and peers are highlighted as further positive factors contributing to Hannah’s transition experiences.

The close geographical position of the primary school facilitated the sharing of information and transition visits to be more readily undertaken.

“Because we do a lot of primary liaison she has been in and out of the school a lot so that has also made it an easier transition.” (S1)
The primary school was also highlighted as having transition procedures in place for year 6 children which could be adapted flexibly to meet the needs of the individual child as necessary.

“We also try to do some enhanced transition with some of the students, where they have additional time to come over so that they can get a little bit more familiar with the building and the staff.” S1

Hannah had a small but established group of friends from primary school which appeared to be a supportive transition factor.

“You would always see Hannah with her sister but with her friendship group and on the edge of that friendship group.” (S1)

4.2.2.5 Secondary school.
While the secondary school was considered a somewhat familiar place to Hannah, there were still many aspects that were unfamiliar and involved significant changes. These became more evident as her transition progressed in the first term and is seen within the sub-themes of transition procedures in secondary school; identified member of staff; safe place; peers; individual learning needs; channels of communication; staff awareness and training in ASC; individual achievements and interests; other agencies.

The transition procedures in place at the secondary school Hannah attended appeared to be a mix of proactive and reactive approaches. The proactive approaches included a well-established programme of transition for everyone:

“We do the standard transition program which all students take part in, where we go over and do some sessions and talk about change.” (S1)

A programme of enhanced or extended transition was provided when needed:

“We got a tour around the school......and then went into the classes to see what they were like..... there were students who took us around and then we went into taster lessons.” (C1)
For children with ASC specific transition procedures were offered proactively, such as a lunch queue or a lesson pass.

“Yes, there is nowhere for them to sit otherwise, and it becomes just chaotic down there, and that is a very scary environment for a child with ASD.” (S1)

Hannah chose not to use the lunch pass, however: “I just queue with everyone else.”

While Hannah seemed somewhat reluctant to talk about difficulties she encountered during transition both her parents and the learning mentor noted that she became especially upset in the first term when she could not find her way round or follow her timetable quickly enough.

“A timetable would have been helpful beforehand. That frightened her going from lesson to lesson. She panicked thinking she’s going to be late.” (P1a)

A more reactive approach was used in response to Hannah’s difficulties towards the end of the first term as seen in how an identified member of staff was assigned to support her.

“I think the personalised learning plan, the pastoral support program they work really well. Because that is based on the needs of that child, and not the needs of an ASD student, textbook, because I know Hannah’s particular needs are totally different.” (S1)

Similar support was offered to Hannah’s parents following their concerns during the first term and the identified adult also acted as a main point of communication for Hannah’s parents.

“Knowing that I can phone the learning mentor and I know that she’s comfortable and I’m comfortable and I don’t feel like I’m a pest when I’m phoning her anymore.” (P1)
A transition procedure which appeared to support Hannah included the availability of a safe place to go such as the mentor’s room during lessons if needed or the garden at break time. There was also a choice of quiet places particularly for children with ASC.

“I go there after lunch....it’s quiet and we can chat.” (C1)

As highlighted previously having a small group of friends established in primary school and her sister in the same year group appeared to provide a protective factor for Hannah when she transitioned to secondary school. This seemed essential particularly when she experienced teasing by children in her wider peer group.

“She didn’t want to go to school, she didn’t like school. There were girls picking on her. Her sister actually witnessed an incident and told the teacher.” (P1b)

A further difficulty encountered by Hannah during her first term was having to become familiar with lots of different teachers who were not always aware about her specific strengths and needs.

**What don’t you like about school?**

“Going to Geography..... because there is this teacher and she is always nasty.” (C1)

**In art, which you said you really like...... how does the teacher help you?**

“She shows you.... She demonstrates it to you.” (C1)

Hannah’s parents expressed frustration at what appeared to be a lack of detailed, clear communication about Hannah’s learning needs and felt that this perhaps contributed to her difficulties towards the end of the first term in secondary school.

“In the secondary school one teacher would know about her disability but then she’d go to another class and they’d have no knowledge of her. It just feels like there’s no communication.” (P1b)

At that point in the transition process Hannah had not been referred to the autism outreach service and it appeared that autism specific detail was needed in the information provided to Hannah’s secondary school teachers.
Teaching assistants and learning mentors at the secondary school received general awareness training in ASC as highlighted by the learning mentor with further input available regarding specific approaches to support individual understanding of social situations. Each child with an identified need also had a pen portrait. However, in Hannah’s case the autism specific detail was only added later into her transition.

“Someone come in and did the comic strip conversations with us and the social stories training with the teaching assistants so we disseminate that training. We just try to keep the teachers up to date through the PEN pictures and things of the specific needs of the students who are in their classes.” (S1)

Hannah’s academic achievements were acknowledged during the first term when she was given a progress award for maths. Her overall progress was reflected in her end of term report in spite of difficulties she experienced towards the end of the first term and at the start of the second.

“She got an award at Christmas for Maths because she moved up a group. She got the Maths award for the whole year.” (P1a)

Hannah’s parents further remarked on the benefits of further involvement from outside agencies requested at the time when Hannah was experiencing difficulties with expressing how she may be feeling.

“The speech and language therapist went in and addressed a few problems and they spoke to staff about strategies for her and then we’ve spoken to the learning mentor and she put pastoral care in place.” (P1b)
4.3 Findings case 2: School B: Profile
An over view of how the findings were derived and presented is contained at the start of section 4.

School B is a larger than average secondary school and the percentage of students eligible for free school meals is below the national average. A very small minority of students are from ethnic minority backgrounds. The number of students with SEN is in-line with the national average. Children at the school achieve above average national levels of achievement.

The Ofsted inspection current at the time of the research placed school B within category 2 (Good). When the latest Ofsted report and the school SEN policy are viewed in terms of the directed content analysis regarding the best practice categories for educational provision for children with autism (Charman et al., 2011) the findings for school B are as follows:

1. Ambitions and aspirations
At school B the opportunities for children with SEN to gain a wider range of qualifications continues to increase and their achievement overall is considered to be good. Children with SEN are able to access courses which are more tailored to their interests and abilities which Ofsted highlights as being an especially motivating factor. Specific mention of children with ASC is not made as the policy is intended to apply to wider groups of children with SEN.

2. Monitoring progress
School B endeavours to identify children with SEN early and monitor their progress closely as detailed in the school SEN policy. The progress and individual needs of specific groups of children with SEN is also recognised, monitored and analysed

3. Adapting the curriculum
The Ofsted report for school B highlights that the inclusion team has worked hard to further ensure a closing of the attainment gap between different groups of children
through individually tailored curriculum for children with SEN and/or disabilities. The school policy emphasises that children with SEN are provided with the same range of curriculum subject choices as all other students and modified to meet each child’s needs.

4. Involvement of other professionals

School B is highlighted as working extremely well with external agencies, including ASC specific agencies. A comprehensive list of agencies and the process by which involvement is sought is detailed in the school SEN policy.

5. Staff knowledge and training

Ofsted recognise the strong subject knowledge of the majority of teachers in school B and that the in-service training is considered to be of a high quality. However, Ofsted also note the variable quality of the support offered to children with SEN. The SEN policy outlines the extensive range of training opportunities available for staff to support their work with children with SEN.

6. Effective communication

Students at school B are noted by Ofsted as speaking favourably of the support and guidance they receive from their teachers and are well aware of exactly who to speak to if they have a problem. A very large majority of parents are noted as being happy with their child’s school experience while a small minority felt that the school could improve its channels of communication.

The school SEN policy emphasises the importance of clear communication and sharing of information concerning children with SEN and with parents and external agencies.

Termly SEN meetings occur to ensure close links between faculties and the SEN team to share information about individual children with SEN. The role of the SENCo in ensuring effective communication is explicitly detailed in the SEN policy. Profiles of the children with SEN are used to ensure key information is passed to teachers.
Specific details of how the school encourages and supports both student and parent voice are included in specific sections within the SEN policy.

7. Broader participation

A wide range of extra-curricular activities is offered at the school for all children to access as highlighted by the school’s Ofsted report and full inclusion is a key aim within the SEN policy.

8. Strong relationships with families

School B is considered by Ofsted to generally have good relationships with parents and carers and throughout the school’s SEN policy there is an emphasis placed on staff and parents working closely together to support the child.

4.3.1. Case 2: Todd (Background information).

Todd attended a local feeder primary school prior to transition to secondary school B with reportedly well-established links between the two schools. A programme of transition was undertaken by the SENCo from school B and key support staff visited year 6 children prior to their move to secondary school. Todd was able to take part in an enhanced transition programme devised via liaison between the primary and secondary SENCOs. Key information for this was based on a very detailed assessment of his strengths and needs by the autism outreach team.

As Todd had received a diagnosis of Asperger syndrome, via a multi-agency social communication panel, earlier in year three at primary school, staff were able to build a complex picture of how to support him during his transition to secondary school. He accessed visits with his peers and also with his key worker from primary school. Todd worked on a transition booklet, suggested by the autism outreach team, which served as a point of discussion with follow up activities after each visit.

Todd lived at home with his mother and older sister who also attended the same secondary school as him in year nine. At the time of data gathering he was reported as having very good attendance at school and a good attitude to his learning.

Although he was achieving at below age related expectations he was considered to be on track for the targets set for him.
Todd noted that he enjoyed art lessons and really disliked having to sit tests and exams in school. During the rapport building activities Todd came across as chatty and keen to ensure he completed activities, such as the Diamond Nine, correctly. Todd assented to participate further in the research project following a demonstration of the Q-sort activity and explanation of the interview process.

4.3.1.1. **Q-sort findings for case 2.**

Todd was able to complete the Q-sort independently and sought clarification when unsure. He also chatted freely throughout expanding on some of his reasons for placing statements at particular points on the scale. From information contained in Todd’s ASC profile the researcher was aware that he tended to interpret language literally. Todd asked for the scaling phrases to be changed to the terms *highly agree* (at +4) and *disagree* (at -4) and for these to be written at the top of the Q-sort. He was reassured that his opinion was what the researcher was most interested in.

The overall content analysis for Todd’s transition Q-sort is as follows:

- **Logistics**

  Todd placed statement No.7 *Sometimes I get lost in school* at -2 and commented that although he initially got lost he soon got used to finding his way around school. He indicated that being able to walk to and from school by himself would improve his journey to school and he placed No. 25 *I enjoy my journey to school* at +1. He placed statement No.13 *I can go to lunchtime clubs* at +1 and also commented that it was important for him to be able to go to the games club at lunchtimes because he found the long breaks difficult. He also placed No. 20 *I like to go on the playground at break times* at -3 indicating that he did not like it.

- **Learning**

  Todd placed statements concerning *learning* across -4, 0 and +2. At -4 (really disagree) Todd placed statement No.28 *I need help to do my class work* at -4 and stated that he could do it by himself and that the teachers helped if he needed it.
- **Support from adults**

Todd was able to identify three key members of staff who he could talk to if unhappy or worried about anything at school and he placed statement No. 24 *My teachers understand me* at +3 *quite agree*. He placed statement No. 18 *My primary school helped me when I moved to secondary school* at +3 *quite agree* and noted that he was able to discuss his transition visits with his primary school staff. He noted that he is able to discuss his transition visits with his primary school staff. He noted that he is able to organise his own bag ready for school and placed statement No. 12 *My parents help me get my books and equipment ready for school*.

- **Support from peers**

Todd placed statement No. 22, *I have a best friend at school*, at +4 *really agree* and spoke fondly of three children he considered to be his best friends in school. He also further commented that “*friendship is just precious.*” He also liked having his sister in year 9. At morning break times Todd noted that he could feel a bit lonely unless he found his friends for a chat.

- **Teasing and bullying**

Todd placed statement No. 9 *The children in my class are nice to me* at -3 *close to really disagree* and No. 19 *Other children tease me at school* at +2. He highlighted that some of his peers tease and shout at him and that he also knew who to speak to about these incidents.
• **Sensory issues**

Todd’s sorting of the statements did not highlight any particular difficulty with sensory sensitivities within secondary school.

• **Own statement**

When asked to write his own transition statement for other children to sort Todd stated that he would add “*It is very crowded in P.E*” and ranked it at +4 *highly agree.*
4.3.1.2. Thematic map 1, case 2.
Organising theme 1: mixed emotions

Figure 6: Thematic map 1, case 2
4.3.1.3. Mixed Emotions.
Todd expressed mixed emotions about his transition to secondary school. He reported feeling nervous about all the changes involved and excited about new opportunities to make friends and learn new skills. Access to enhanced transition activities provided some reassurance while allowing him to feel generally positive about starting secondary school (see figure 6).

Before transition
Although Todd had noted that he was looking forward to starting secondary school and was feeling positive about the move he also experienced feelings of nervousness.

“I was excited to try new things like on the visits… cooking and drama but I was nervous because I might get lost.” (C2)

During the first term
During the first term Todd described how he experienced some strong emotions as seen in the sub-themes of shocked, and feeling scared. Perhaps for Todd there was a difference between the experiences of the initial transition visits and the reality of the actual move to secondary school.

“The first thing I remember was like the front entrance near the hall and the science block and I was kind of shocked how big it was like….” (C2)

While Todd expressed a certain level of frustration at dealing with the various changes involved with starting secondary school he also seemed reassured over time and through the support given by key adults in school.

Can you think of what helped when you first came to secondary school?

“...the staff, well, they have assistants around which was kind of really nice for them to do and they helped us which was really nice.” (C2)
After the first term

After his first term in secondary school Todd remained positive and excited about his move to secondary school and he also described on-going worries concerning teasing by some peers in secondary school.

How do the children in your class treat you now?

“They tease me and I hate it and I absolutely hate it and I walk away.” (C2)

Conversely Todd also described new relationships with his peers which perhaps may have counteracted some of the teasing he experienced resulting in him being more settled generally

“I only had one best friend in primary now I’ve got three best friends!” (C2)
4.3.2. Thematic map 2, case 2: Organising theme 2: Factors in transition

Figure 7: Thematic map 2, case 2
4.3.2.1. Child’s characteristics.

For child 2, Todd, sub-themes of personality, attitude and emerging autonomy were evident from the thematic analysis (see figure 7 for overview) as follows:

Todd is described as being friendly towards his peers and a popular member of the class which may have helped him feel part of his new school.

“In his classes he has no set particular friend but he would work with anybody and he’s quite amenable to work with anybody.” (S2)

While Todd acknowledged that some aspects of the transition were difficult for him he also adopted a positive approach to the new challenges such as making new friends.

“I said "Hi" and I was really friendly cos we like watching films, right.” (C2)

While Todd may have required adult mediation during his transition to secondary school there was also a sense of his emerging autonomy seen in Todd wanting do things more independently, more for himself.

“... the only thing that uncomorts me with the homework is that my mum just watches me doing it and I say "Mum could you please, please just....I wanna do this by myself ." (C2)

4.3.2.2. ASC.

While there are overlaps in areas within this theme for all child participants a consideration of the data for Todd highlighted salience in the sub-themes earlier diagnosis; friendships; communication and sensory perceptions as follows:

Todd received a diagnosis of Asperger syndrome via a panel decision while in year 3 at primary school. As a result his primary school staff were able to provide the SENCo at the secondary school with a detailed understanding of his needs and
further specialist support for transition was accessed through liaison with an autism outreach service.

“The information made a massive difference to his transition...the work they do with the transition booklet and the visits were tailored to him.” (S2)

A protective factor for Todd appeared to be that while he may have found some of the nuances of social interaction difficult he was able to make friends.

“He can sustain friendships. What they talk about I don’t know. Whether they actually understand what each other is saying, that I’m not so sure.” (S2)

Todd came across as a friendly, chatty child which was evident during the research activities and commented upon by the SENCo at his secondary school. His pen portrait highlighted that he took things other people said quite literally. This may have contributed to difficulties experienced with his wider peer group during the first term at secondary school.

“He’s had a couple of issues with some of the other boys. I think others can see how he is and how to wind him up at times and he does get very emotional very quickly.” (P2)

While Todd did not specifically allude to any particular sound sensitivities during the research a dislike of alarms was highlighted on his transition profile which was addressed as part of his transition planning.

“Another one of his fears was the fire alarm so we showed him what happens when a fire alarm takes place. That was on one of his taster sessions.” (S2)
4.3.2.3. Family.
Todd lived at home with his mum and older sister who attended year 9 at the same secondary school. While he did not appear to rely on his sister at secondary school he seemed reassured that she was there. While sub-themes of sibling and parental concerns were highlighted for Todd the sub-theme of parental concerns was especially evident.

Todd’s mother was concerned that he may experience difficulties with his peers during his transition to secondary school and was particularly keen to ensure he was offered support to “fit in”. As Todd adjusted to being at secondary school and had largely positive experiences the number of times his mother needed to contact school lessened.

“I was really worried, really anxious. The main concern was him being bullied, to be honest, if he’s not going to fit in, he’s going to be bullied.” (P2)

Both Todd and his mother identified his older sister as a person he could talk to if he was upset at secondary school and she was considered a source of support for him.

Who would you speak to if you were upset?
“I’d say my sister cos she’s kind of an adult…. she’s 14” (C2)

Todd’s mother highlighted the close links she felt she had with his primary school and how well prepared for starting secondary she thought he was by staff at both the primary and secondary school.

“We’ve also had a big transition meeting and all got together and discussed what his needs were as well.” (P2)
4.3.2.4. Primary school.
Todd attended a feeder primary school with good links and an established enhanced transition programme with the secondary school. Subthemes of enhanced transition procedures; peers and links to secondary school were highlighted.

As part of individualised, detailed enhanced transition procedures staff at Todd’s utilised a transition booklet called “Getting Ready for secondary School”. Todd was able to write in key pieces of information and place in photos of his visits. Both Todd’s mother and the SENCo at the secondary school felt the enhanced transition strongly contributed to the overall success of his move to secondary school.

“I couldn’t fault it because, again, Mr X’s help and Miss X also doing that transition, I felt it was really important.” (P2)

Todd also transitioned with a group of familiar peers from primary school which his mother felt was beneficial.

“I only have one best friend from my old school......we see each at lunch time and breaks.” (C2)

4.3.2.5. Secondary school
Similar sub-themes of transition procedures in secondary school; identified member of staff; safe place; peers; individual learning needs; channels of communication; staff awareness and training in ASC; individual achievements and interests; other agencies are also highlighted for Todd.

As part of enhanced transition each child was asked to write a letter about how they felt about their move to secondary school. This enabled the secondary SENCo to tailor individual transition visits.
“We also asked him to write a letter of all his fears and any questions that he had for me. Then when I went in and met him I was prepared with the answers that he wanted to know.” (S2)

The transition procedures that Todd experienced seemed to be proactive in that the additional visits could be readily accommodated and adapted to his needs particularly in regard to his sensory sensitivity to certain sounds.

“Another one of his fears was the fire alarm so we showed him what happens when a fire alarm takes place. That was on one of his taster sessions.” (S2)

Again staff at the school took a proactive approach to assigning an identified person available to offer Todd pastoral support on entry to secondary school.

“I usually just go to mentor base and see XXX and talk to her.” (C2)

The option of a safe place in the form of a daily lunchtime games club was made available to Todd but he did not always access this.

....and where do you go after you’ve eaten lunch?

“I don’t really go anywhere sometimes I just walk around.” (C2)

Todd appeared to have a mixed experience in the relationships with his peers. He had a small but supportive group of friends.

“The year eight boys that he’s friendly with are on the spectrum and they gravitate towards each other and they’ve got a nice friendship.” (S2)

Conversely he also experienced difficulties with being teased and bullied by some of his wider peers
“I’d change all the boys and then they’d all be nice...be nice to each other cos the only worry I’ve had in school is all these popular kids ...and they’ve been mean to me and I keep on thinking I’m the least popular kid there is...” (C2)

During his time at primary school Todd was able to access almost full-time one-to-one support in school. Once he started to attend secondary school Thomas was considered to need less time being directly supported in lessons.

“He needs that help and support. Mainstream is where he needs to be to continue in that way.” (P2)

Todd’s parent was happy with the levels of communication offered to her at each stage of the transition process and was confident about who to speak to receive further guidance and help for her son.

“He was having issues with the name calling, saying he didn’t want to go. I got on the phone, we’ve sorted them out and he seems to be enjoying it.” (P2)

The school SENCo specifically noted that the majority of staff received at least basic training in ASC which partly demonstrated the inclusive ethos of the school.

“All of our teaching assistants and the majority of staff have been trained by Autism outreach. Staff are trained on what is ASD and then the strategies so that they have a bit of a better understanding. That’s helped us a lot.” (P2)

Todd was considered to have achieved the learning targets set for him in maths and numeracy and both his parent and the SENCo were pleased with his overall achievement. However, this was following some initial dissatisfaction with the lack of detail provided about his learning.
“I think I need to have a word just to see. Yes, because the first parents evening we went to wasn’t helpful to be honest. They put in a stand-in student who didn’t really know Todd.” (P2)

Since starting at secondary school Todd developed an interest in attending drama productions and was encouraged to attend further extra-curricular activities such as a trip to the theatre in London.

“He went to see the shows and he really wanted to go. He wanted to go with friends and things, wants to stay over again so, anyway, he really enjoyed it.” (S2)

The SENCo at Todd’s secondary school highlighted that staff regularly liaised with external agencies and did so with the autism outreach staff during his transition. This liaison was considered to be beneficial by both his mother and the secondary school SENCo.

“The autism person was really focused, he really knew. Everything with Todd, that was in the pen portrait.” (P2)
4.4 Findings case 3: School B: profile
An overview of how the findings were derived and presented is contained at the start of section 4.

The child in case 3 attended the same school (school B) as the child in case 2. The school profile information is the same for case 3 (see section 4.3 for details).

4.4.1. Case 3: Nick (Background information).
Prior to transition Nick attended a small primary school out of the catchment area of secondary school B. Nick was one out of four children from his primary school who attended the same secondary school and staff had not yet established further links beyond transition meetings and visits. However, the SENCo from secondary school B was proactive in visiting the primary school at the start of the summer term to establish transition visits and liaise with staff. The SENCo was also aware that Nick had been referred to the social communication panel following concerns raised regarding his social interactions at the start of the transition process in April. However, he only received a diagnosis of Asperger syndrome in the July just before he was due to start at secondary school and he had not been able to undertake an enhanced transition. Detailed profile information was not available to the school SENCo prior to Nick starting at secondary school. Further information gathered via assessments from speech and language therapy highlighted that he could be rigid in his thinking and become upset if people “broke rules”. On-going involvement with occupational therapy also highlighted that he had difficulties with hand-eye coordination.

Nick lived at home with his parents and did not have any siblings. He was more familiar with adult company and especially enjoyed spending time with his parents and grandparents. He was described by his parents as being a “home bird” who did not have established friendships with his peers outside school. At the time of the data gathering Nick was reported as having very good attendance at school and described as being keen to learn. He was achieving at age related expectations and above in most subjects.
During the rapport building activities Nick was very articulate and keen to get his point of view across. He commented that he especially enjoyed history lessons in school and being able to go to games club at lunch times and had a strong dislike for P.E. lessons.

Nick assented to participate further in the research following a demonstration of the Q-sort and an outline of the types of questions that may be asked for the interview.

4.4.1.1. Q-sort findings for case 3.

Nick completed the Q-sort independently and commented that the sentences on the statement cards helped him think about his move to secondary school. He spoke freely about his experiences and about where he had placed the statements on the scale. He also expressed a wish to be able to place as many statements under +4 or -4 as he wished and not only what the scale suggested. This was explored further with Nick during the Q-sort session. Nick appeared genuinely appreciative of the opportunity presented to express his views and was an enthusiastic participant.

Nick was able to read and understand the statements on the Q-sort cards and preferred the scale descriptors as really agree (+4) and really disagree (-4).

The overall content analysis for Nick’s transition Q-sort is as follows:

- **Logistics**

Following the rules of secondary school was highlighted as being very important to Nick. He placed the statement *I understand the rules in school at + 4, really agree* and commented that “the teachers don’t always see when the children break the rules. There should be more rules in school so everyone would know what to do”.

Having an early lunch pass was highlighted as making a positive contribution to Nick enjoying lunchtimes more:

“I did go for cold lunch at first or was late going in. Early lunch pass made a difference. Now I can have a hot meal.”
• **Learning**

Nick placed statements regarding his learning across the -1, 0, +1 and +2 ranks of the Q-sort scale. It was noted that he felt that his teachers understood him and that he was able to complete his work independently. Nick was also achieving well academically and therefore this was not a main concern for him in secondary school whereas settling in and making friends appeared to be.

• **Support from adults**

Nick was also clear about who were the identified people he could speak with at school if he was upset or needed help with something.

• **Support from peers**

Nick talked positively about having made friends in secondary school and that he “likes jokes, especially slapstick comedy”. He also commented that “without lunchtime clubs it is boring” and that this was a good opportunity for him to share his interest in games and a chance to make friends.

• **Teasing and bullying**

He also highlighted that other children can tease him when walking in-between lessons. When completing the sorting of the cards in the neutral ranking Nick spoke about a specific incidence of being teased and bullied by his wider peer group.

• **Sensory issues**

Nick did not especially enjoy activities where he would get messy and that he “just doesn’t like the noise” in secondary school and that he is able to “block it out”.

“I am getting used to this business. When I first started I was a nervous wreck. I was so anxious and worried but now not so much at all really.” Nick
spoke of being able to access a quiet space in the learning mentors’ room if
the lunchtime games club was not available.

• **Own statement**

When asked to write his own transition statement for other children to sort Nick
stated that he would add “I feel the changing rooms are extremely chaotic” and
ranked it at +4 (really agree) himself.

He further commented that “The changing rooms are chaos. Ties are turned into
whips. I’m laughing about it now but I didn’t like the changing rooms then.” (N.B.
Nick started to access another room to change for P.E. and joined a different
group in the second term which he said had helped him settle more into the
lesson).
4.4.1.2. Thematic map 1, case 3. Organising theme 1: mixed emotions

Figure 8: Thematic map 1, case 3.
4.4.1.3. **Mixed emotions.**
Nick expressed mixed emotions concerning his transition to secondary school as reflected in the salience of the subthemes *anxious; reassured; intimidated; nostalgia for primary school; initially unsettled; settled and reassured* (see figure 8).

**Before transition**
Nick highlighted that during transition visits he felt *anxious* though somewhat *reassured* about starting secondary school.

> “Well, I was a bit anxious at the start, you know...then it was just normal getting used to going round.” (C3)

**During the first term**
Following feeling somewhat reassured after his initial transition visits once he actually started secondary school Nick continued to feel mixed emotions about the move and highlighted feeling *intimidated*.

> “I was one of the biggest in my old school (primary) and then when I came here (secondary) there were all these people towering above me.” (C3)

He even noted feelings of what could be identified as *nostalgia* for his primary school once he fully transitioned to secondary school.

> “Like, I never even wanted to go to (primary) school because it’s school and.... like now that I’m here at secondary I look back and I think it was so easy at primary.” (C3)

Both Nick and his parents identified him as feeling especially *initially unsettled* during his first term at secondary school which they linked to uncertainties he experienced around routines and with his peers.
What helped when you first came to secondary school?

“Lunch club ……of course the times lunch club changes it throws my whole world upside down.” (C3)

“In the first sort of couple of months certain children were taking his pens and messing about with him. We had to have him moved away from certain children and things in class. He said he wanted to run out of the school.

That’s how bad he felt.” (P3a)

After the first term

After a term in secondary school Nick continued to experience mixed emotions such as feeling more settled yet somewhat still anxious.

What do you think about secondary school now?

“It’s more or less alright….there are some lessons that I don’t like that much cos people mess.” (C3)

These feelings for Nick seemed to be also underpinned by a developing sense of feeling more reassured as time went on and as he adapted to a new routine.

“Then when I am an adult I might look back on this time and think secondary school was easy and then primary school will look like a breeze.” (C3)
4.4.2. Thematic map 2, case 3.

Organising theme 2: Factors in transition

Figure 9: Thematic map 2, case 3
4.4.2.1. Child characteristics.
For child 3, Nick, sub-themes of personality, sense of humour, resilience and motivation were evident from the thematic analysis (see figure 9).

Nick's parents described him as being “bright, generally happy”, reserved around people he does not know and preferring to be at home.

“He’s socially awkward, doesn’t mix very well. He closes himself off quite a bit.” (P3b)

Throughout the interview Nick applied a sense of humour and was described as being humorous by his parents and secondary school SENCo. Having a sense of humour could be considered to be a protective factor for Nick in that he was able to see the funny side of a situation.

Is there anything else apart from history and games club that you like about school?

“I’d say “The toilets are great” wink,wink.” (C3)

“He’s got, you know, a sense of humour he’s quite sarcastic.” (P3a)

While Nick experienced initial difficulties especially in his first term at secondary school he also demonstrated an ability to overcome such difficulties.

What was it like when you first came to secondary school?

“I got through it eventually, I just did it but you know I was a bit anxious to start with.” (C3)

Nick’s ability to keep attending in spite of difficulties he encountered were particularly noted by his parents and the secondary school SENCo.

“The way he is, the fact that he was getting to school every single day, with no time issues. It hasn’t been great, but I think he’s done well, and I think we’ve done well in getting him there.” (P3b)
Nick was perhaps particularly motivated to attend school because of the range of subjects available that he liked and being able to access certain extra-curricular activities.

“**History is my favourite subject and we didn’t get it that much at primary school and here you get it more and you learn a bit more…it’s more interesting.”** (C3)

### 4.4.2.2. ASC

An overview of the theme of ASC is contained in section 4.2.2.2. While there are overlaps in areas within this theme for all child participants a consideration of the data for Nick highlighted differences evident in the subthemes **late diagnosis; social interactions; rules; communication and sensory perceptions.**

Nick was only diagnosed with Asperger syndrome in the July just before he was due to transition to secondary school. This affected the amount of detailed information available to his secondary school SENCo prior to starting and he did not access enhanced transition planning. His parents noted that they were still coming to terms with Nick’s diagnosis of Asperger syndrome at the same time as he was about to start secondary school.

“**Nick was only diagnosed about three months before he was due to move. We’re learning. We’re still learning about this.”** (P3b)

Nick was described by his parents as being someone who prefers the company of adults than his peers at home.

“**Yes, he needs a lot of prodding (prompting to socialise) at home, but doesn’t seem to…. obviously at school doesn’t need as much.”** (P3a) At secondary school Nick appeared to find social interactions with his peers also difficult to negotiate and he still sought out adult company at unstructured times during the first term. His parents and school staff were especially concerned about the difficulties he encountered forming friendships in secondary school.
“Then the first day, sorry, the first two weeks he had a teaching assistant assigned. Then it was becoming a bit of co-dependence where at break times he would come here, every morning he would come here.” (S3)

For Nick strictly complying with rules and agreed actions appeared to be very important to him and perhaps contributed to him trying to create order within the changing, complex secondary school context. This was reflected in his approach to participating in the research project when he brought his watch to time the sessions and the sense of injustice he seemed to feel when a whole class detention was given out.

“You know, it’s because my teacher’s a bit strict...he gave me a detention because he was keeping the entire class behind and I didn’t do anything.” (C3)

Nick’s pen portrait did not highlight any sensory perception difficulties and it may have been the case for Nick that this was not an area that caused particular difficulties for him. However Nick highlighted that he tried to avoid certain areas within secondary school or developed strategies to cope with noise and crowds as highlighted by Nick and his parents.

“Oh, I always used to get a sandwich even though I don’t like them that much but it was the quickest way to get out of the lunch hall.” (C3)

4.4.2.3. Family

Nick lived at home with his parents. He did not have siblings but appeared to enjoy close relationships with members of his wider family. Sub-themes of parental endeavour and parental links to schools were salient.

Nick’s parents highlighted that they have felt they had to be proactive in seeking support and information regarding Nick’s diagnosis of Asperger syndrome especially as it occurred so close to the time at which he moved to secondary school.
“I went to see somebody to do with a parent support group because I try and see anybody I can who can help me. We didn’t know what we could do.” (P3b)

Links between Nick’s parents and the primary school he attended appeared to be well established. His parents appreciated the close contact that the primary setting was able to facilitate and noted the difficulties of being able to do this within the much larger secondary school setting.

“I find it hard from being able to nip into the primary school and have a word with the teacher, I can’t do that anymore. I can’t just nip in.” (P3a)

4.4.2.4. Primary school
Nick attended a primary school which was out of his secondary school catchment area. Apart from standard transition visits further links were not established with Nick’s primary school and perhaps this contributed to a lack of opportunity to facilitate enhanced transition procedures.

“...although we knew later on he’d not had any extra visits and he could have benefited from that, getting to know the school, going round the school, what it was like at lunchtime because he didn’t like lunchtimes.” (S3) Nick took part in general transition visits along with a small group of four peers from year six. The visits did not appear to be adapted to take Nick’s specific transition needs into account and this may have been a factor in the initial difficulties Nick’s experienced during the first term in secondary school.

“Nick had places, a safe place he could go at breaks and lunches but because he’d not had the transition that we’d had with Xxx, he was coming to my room every break” (S3)

Although Nick transitioned with some of his peers they were not familiar to him even though they had attended the same primary school since reception class.
“No, he didn’t really have any friends. I would say more acquaintances, to put it that way.” (P3a)

4.4.2.5. Secondary school

Similar sub-themes of transition procedures in secondary school; identified member of staff; safe place; peers; individual learning needs; channels of communication; staff awareness and training in ASC; individual achievements and interests; other agencies were highlighted for Nick.

As part of his transition Nick had the opportunity to visit the secondary school for a full day and two further short visits as part of the standard transition visits for his primary school. Nick’s parents highlighted that they felt that the school could have been more proactive in providing him with specific support and felt that they had to battle for it.

“Or have the passes in place and give them up if need be because we don’t think he needs them rather than to fight and fight and fight to get something.” (P3b)

Further into the first term at secondary school Nick it was noted by the SENCo and his parents that he had begun to feel comfortable enough to approach key staff and other staff identified by himself that he felt able to speak to.

“I spoke to one of the teachers who, you know, speaks to me a bit more or my form tutor Mr Xxx. All I have to do is hang back and speak to him and tell him.” (C3)

The availability of a safe or quiet space appears to be an important factor in providing Nick with support and with opportunities to be occupied during the long lunch breaks.

“The times lunch club changes….I don’t know what to do because I like having something to occupy me.” (C3)
Nick’s parents expressed frustration that details of support that could have been readily available for Nick such as access to a lunch pass, lesson pass, quiet space and lunch time club were not highlighted to them as part of a transition information pack.

“I found out through X’s mum that X has this pass, so I went to the SENCo, and she gave him passes. So, why didn’t he have them in September instead of waiting until January?” (P3a)

Some of the frustration Nick’s parents may have felt regarding channels of communication could perhaps be attributed to changing from the logistics of the smaller primary environment to the larger less personalised secondary school setting.

“I can’t just nip in and say things, now I’ve got to make phone calls, emails, can’t get in touch with the teachers, get a phone call three days later. I don’t feel in control.” (P3a)

During the first two terms especially the SENCo felt that Nick’s parents perhaps needed specific support regarding his diagnosis.

“I’ve tried to support parents with his diagnosis because they didn’t understand it. It was very new to them. They just wanted to wrap him up in cotton wool.” (S3)

For Nick the sub-theme of peers seemed particularly salient not least because his views perhaps contrasted with those of his parents and the SENCo to some extent. The SENCo expressed concern that he had not been encouraged to try and socialise at primary school and that his preferences were met so well they put him at a disadvantage when he started secondary school.
“He didn’t have to go outdoors to play. They accommodated him so brilliantly but in some ways didn’t do any favours for when he was coming to us, mainstream secondary.” (S3)

Nick’s parents perhaps also felt that he was especially vulnerable to being isolated at secondary school because of not having identified friends.

“Because he was like a gazelle in a pack of lions, or a wildebeest on his own, kind of thing, you know? That’s what I worried about, because he wasn’t going in with any friends, or any strong friendships, he went completely on his own.” (P3a)

When reflecting back on the process of transition for Nick the SENCo identified ways in which support regarding friendships could have been put in place sooner for Nick in a more proactive way.

“Really, we could have looked at the form groups as we do now and put them together. We’ve buddied him up now but it would have been nice for him to have that buddy from day one.” (S3)

While Nick acknowledged that he did not have a particular friend from his primary school going through with him to secondary he did seem to view this as an opportunity to make friends.

“Well, it was hard you know but there were a few people who were alright and yeah after a bit I did make a few friends. Everyone goes out and finds the crowd. It took me a bit longer but I did as well.” (C3)

Nick was able to access his learning independently within secondary school. He did have support during practical lessons such as DT and food technology because of difficulties he experienced organising equipment.
His parents felt that perhaps he found it difficult to cope with having to move around school to go to lessons and adjust to being in a different class with different, largely unfamiliar people.

“As well as the moving from class to class and the crowds, the fact that he’d been so used to staying in the one class with the same teacher and the same kids all day every day. He found that difficult to adjust to.” (P3a)

Nick was highlighted by the SENCo as achieving well across the curriculum.

“ Academically, he is quite capable, targeted level, fives and sixes so yes.” (S3)

Nick was also especially keen to attend games club during lunchtime break and attended film club after school. Having interests in these areas could perhaps be seen as social currency for Nick as they were interests he could share with his peers and which offered a type of vehicle through which he could begin to explore friendships more on his own terms.

Do you have friends in the games club?

“Yeah, that’s how I got a few friends….the lunch pass and the games club that’s all I really need.” (C3)

Nick attended the same school as Todd (case 3) and the ASC training staff received and noted in Todd’s case also applies to Nick.

His parents did note however that they felt that information about Nick’s diagnosis was not perhaps communicated to staff as thoroughly they would have liked.

“We had to tell them he’d got Asperger’s. We were told that every teacher had been made aware of it but some were still shouting at him.” (P3a)

Nick’s parents could perhaps be considered proactive in seeking support and help for him regarding ASC and keen to access further activities.
“That’s what I do. I just phone, like X who is an ASD nurse. There’s X. There’s the speech therapist, X. She got us the pass for the gym for Nick.” (P3a)

Once Nick received a formal diagnosis the school SENCo was able to request further support via external agencies.

“I asked for autism outreach to be involved. They had never been involved at primary because he was late being diagnosed.” (S3)
4.5 Findings Case: 4: School C: Profile
An over view of how the findings were derived and presented is contained at the start of section 4.

School C is a smaller than average sized secondary school. The majority of pupils are from white British backgrounds with a small number of children who speak English as an additional language. An average number of children are eligible to access pupil premium and free school meals. There is resourced provision for children with physical disabilities and a small number of pupils access off site vocational courses. The number of children supported at school action plus or with a statement of SEN\(^1\) is above average. The school meets the governments minimum level expected for students’ achievement and progress.

The Ofsted (2012) inspection current at the time of the research placed school C within category 3 (requiring improvement) across all categories. When the latest Ofsted report and school SEN policy are viewed in terms of the directed content analysis regarding the best practice categories for educational provision for children with autism (Charman et al., 2011) the findings for school C are as follows:

1. **Ambitions and aspirations**

   As outlined in the Ofsted (2012) report children with special educational needs make similar progress to their peers in school C. As the SEN policy is a general SEN policy specific mention is not made regarding details of the provision specific to children with ASC.

2. **Monitoring progress**

   Children with physical disabilities are considered to make good progress, as outlined within the Ofsted report, because of the carefully targeted support provided alongside encouraging independence. Targets for children with identified SEN are based upon a detailed information about the child and their progress is regularly tracked and rigorously monitored.

\(^1\) From September 2014 statements of SEN will be replaced by Education, Health and Care plans.
3. **Adapting the curriculum**

The school SEN policy outlines that a varied and flexible approach is adopted in meeting the needs of all children within the school and especially those with SEN. Specific approaches are highlighted in the SEN policy including access to developmentally appropriate materials and resources and adaptations to how learning materials are presented.

Specific mention is made within the school SEN policy of transition arrangements. Access to a transition support group is offered during the summer holidays for identified children.

4. **Involvement of other professionals and services**

The Ofsted report does not allude to involvement between school C and other professionals and agencies. The school SEN policy contains specific mention of requesting involvement from outside agencies as needed.

5. **Staff knowledge and training**

The Ofsted report highlighted that a greater consistency of quality of teaching was needed across subjects within the school and training priorities at the time of the research were focused understandably on the overall school priority to improve teaching. Within the school SEN policy the role of teaching assistants is clearly outlined in relation to targeted support for children with SEN alongside fostering their independence.

6. **Effective communication**

Within the Ofsted (2012) report for school C it was noted that many parents expressed satisfaction with the school and that the links between the school and local community continue to develop. The school SEN policy outlines the consultation between staff and parents regarding their child’s progress at each stage of the SEN process.
7. **Broader participation**

_School C_ has resourced base provision for children with physical disabilities and a detailed access plan is contained within the SEN policy. Details of how adaptations may be made to enable all students with SEN to participate in extra-curricular activities as fully as possible was recognised by Ofsted (2012) inspectors.

8. **Strong relationships with families**

_School C’s_ SEN policy contains details of key points for communicating with parents regarding their child as part of the staged approach to SEN. Emphasis is placed within the SEN policy of creating a supportive atmosphere where parents are fully included in the decision making process regarding their child’s education and overall well-being.

4.5.1. Case 4: Amy (Background information).

Prior to transitioning to secondary school Amy attended a local feeder primary school. Links between the two schools and detailed programmes of transition were well established. Children from the feeder primary visited the secondary school for activities and events throughout their primary years so the building was somewhat familiar to most children when they transitioned to year 7. Amy also took part in the summer school transition programme for children with ASC which consisted of a week-long visit to the secondary school during the holidays.

Amy was highlighted as having difficulties with social communication and interactions in year five and was formally diagnosed as having Asperger syndrome in year six. Although her formal diagnosis, via the community paediatrician, came quite late into year six it was reported that Amy accessed an enhanced transition. Amy also had a diagnosis of selective mutism which her parent highlighted as probably starting earlier in primary school and which was formally diagnosed in the first term of secondary school following further involvement with a speech and language therapist regarding the assessment for autism.
Amy lived at home with her parents and two younger siblings who attended the same primary school as she did prior to transition. She was reported as having good attendance at school and was achieving at above age related expectations across core subjects. Within school Amy mostly communicated using non-verbal methods. The exceptions to this were during French lessons where, according to her form tutor, she was comfortable speaking French. She would also speak with her maths teacher and occasionally to some peers during group work. Amy’s mother reported that at home she was happy to chat openly with her parents and siblings.

During extended rapport building meetings with Amy she indicated through written responses that she enjoyed art, maths, science and ICT most of all and that she especially disliked homework because she liked to do her own thing when school finished. Following consultation with her parents and staff members the extended rapport building activities were undertaken with Amy to enable her to feel comfortable enough to express her views in her preferred way.

The researcher made it explicit to Amy in the first meeting that there would be no expectation for her to speak and over two rapport sessions she indicated that as well as using some gestures and facial expressions she would prefer to communicate with me using written responses. Amy seemed to especially like using post-it notes to write on which were made available for her in each meeting. A further “All About Me” scaling check list from the Selective Mutism Handbook (Johnson & Wintgens, 2001) was also shared with Amy in order for the researcher to find out more about Amy in a way in which she was comfortable with. Within this she demonstrated a sense of humour when she laughed at statement 24 *people say I talk too much* which she scaled as 0 (definitely not true).

The researcher was especially aware of the importance of genuinely gaining informed assent from Amy. She was able to read through the participant information sheet independently and the researcher provided a precis of key points. Amy was asked if she would like to meet again to discuss her move to secondary school which she appeared keen to do and which she communicated through nodding, smiling and writing the word “yes”. The researcher also clarified with Amy’s parent that she wished to continue with the research.
Amy was able to complete the Diamond Nine activity about homework independently and spent time rearranging some of her answers. This was taken as an indication that she was engaging with the process of scaling the statements and that she would be able to complete the transition Q-sort. When shown the transition Q-sort Amy indicated by nodding that she was able to read the statements independently and appeared to understand how to use the scaling method. This was again reaffirmed later during a discussion with her mother. Amy was also able to indicate by shaking her head and writing on a post-it note if she disagreed with what the researcher said or the researcher misinterpreted what she had indicated.

Completion of the semi-structured interview with Amy required creative thinking around adaptation of this aspect of the methodology. Amy had indicated that she was happy to write down her responses to the questions in the interview schedule. In further consultation with Amy, her mother and the learning mentor it was thought that she may respond better if she was able to see the questions and write her responses at home. The researcher provided a question schedule and explained that during a semi-structured interview the questions acted as a guide to key areas of focus for the research overall and that a certain degree of flexibility exists when the researcher and the participant undertake a face to face interview. A time allowance was made to complete the semi-structured questionnaire and the researcher checked in via a courtesy call a few days before the re-arranged appointment that Amy still wished to meet a final time her to share her responses to the interview questions.

The researcher anticipated that Amy would write full-responses to the questions as reassured by her mother and staff member she was able to do. However, Amy completed the questions using only brief responses. Some of her responses were extended when shared with the researcher and indicated via gestures, facial expression and written responses on post-it notes. For the purposes of the thematic analysis for Amy’s interview the researcher used some of her written responses to questions asked during rapport building activities to build a fuller picture of her transition experiences. Amy’s view of transition is therefore gained from consideration of her written responses during rapport building activities,
semistructured interview written responses and completion of the Q-sort activity. Her completed Q-sort was represented to her, by way of member checking, prior to sharing her responses to the interview questions. The interviews undertaken with Amy’s mother and learning mentor were complete and therefore when necessary greater weight was given to quotations from the interviews with adults from case 4.

4.5.1.1. Q-sort findings for case 4.
Amy was able to complete the Q-sort largely independently and used facial expression and gesture to indicate when she was uncertain about how to respond. She indicated by nodding that she understood the descriptors across the top of the scale and preferred to keep really agree (+4), really do not agree (-4) and agree (0 neutral). Again Amy was reassured that it was her opinion about transition to secondary school that the researcher was most interested in. Amy initially needed support to begin to sort the first pile of cards (broadly agree) but then was able to complete the rest of the Q-sort independently. Amy did not indicate or write any further comments about the statements she sorted apart from writing that she was not bothered about there not being lunchtime clubs as long as she could go to the learning mentor room.

The overall content analysis for Amy’s transition Q-sort is as follows:

- **Logistics**

Amy ranked statement No. 7 *Sometimes I get lost in school* at -4, really do not agree, indicating that she was familiar with the school building. She also ranked No. 4 *I like going to the school canteen for lunch* at -2, suggesting that she did not like to go to the canteen. She also negatively ranked statements about break times and activities during lunchtime (No. 20 *I like to go on the playground at break times* was placed at -2 and No. 13 *I can go to lunchtime clubs* at -2). Through positively ranking statements No. 21 *I can follow my timetable* and No. 16 *I understand the rules in school* at +3 Amy suggested that she knew which lessons she had each day and was able to understand the rules in school.
• **Learning**
Amy indicated that she feels she can learn well in secondary school (statement No. 5 *I can learn well at my school* placed at +4) and that she can complete her work independently (statement No. 28 *I need help to do my class work* at -2) homework work independently.

• **Support from adults**
Amy was able to identify an adult she was able to talk to if she was worried or upset at secondary school (No. 23 *At school there is someone I can talk to if I feel unhappy or worried* was placed at +1). She also indicated that she had somewhere to go if she felt upset by placing statement No. 30 *If I get upset there is a safe place for me to go to* at +2.

• **Support from peers**
Amy ranked statements regarding support from peers across -1, +1 and + 2 of the scale. She placed statement number 6 *I have friends at school* at +2. These placements may suggest that she has made friends at secondary school.

• **Teasing and bullying**
Amy placed statement number 3 *I feel safe in school* at +2 and ranked statements within this factor across -1, 0 and +2. She indicated that her wider peer group accepted her by placing statement number 9, *The children in my class are nice to me* at +2 on the scale.

• **Sensory issues**
Amy’s Q-sort highlighted that sometimes she needed to go to a quiet place in secondary school especially at break and lunchtimes (statement number 31 *Sometimes I need to go to a quiet place* was ranked at +1).

• **Own statement**
When asked to create her own transition statement Amy wrote down “*There is too much homework*” and indicated that she would place it at +4 *really agree.*
4.5.1.2. Thematic map 1, case 4.

Organising theme: Mixed emotions

Figure 10: Thematic map 1, case 4
4.5.1.3. Mixed emotions.
How Amy felt about her transition to secondary school is largely interpreted through the views of her parent and the learning mentor who was her identified person in school (see figure 10 for the thematic map).

Before transition
Amy directly expressed that she felt both worried and excited about her transition to secondary school when asked about visits she had undertaken while still at primary school.

“I was a bit excited and a bit worried….too many people and homework.” (C4)
During enhanced transition visits Amy was described as being excited about going to her secondary school and especially about taking part in new lessons.

“She was nervous but at the same time excited, it was a new thing and she was going to have subjects and lessons separately and she was quite excited about that.” (P4)

During the first term
During the first term at secondary school a particular incident highlighted how Amy appeared to experience heightened levels of anxiety and became upset around the new rules and routines she had to learn.

“In the first week I heard from the mentor that Amy was in the corridor lost and crying and there were issues using the locker system. She won’t have anything to do with that.” (P4)
Amy was described as not talking about her feelings much at home by her mother but during her first term at secondary school she noted that Amy continued to appear to be excited about aspects of secondary school.

How do you think Amy felt when she first moved to secondary school?
“I think she felt excited about learning. You know, new things, the opportunity to learn really. That’s what she sees school as being.” (P4)
After first term

After the first term in secondary school Amy was reported by her parent and learning mentor as appearing to be *more settled* in school yet still experiencing feelings of *anxiety*.

*How do you think Amy found the first term in her new school?*

“I think she probably found coming in quite daunting, but she seems to have settled very well.” (S4)

While Amy continued to experience feelings of *anxiety* after the first term in secondary school she also seemed to be *excited* about the new opportunities presented.

“*She is very excited. She is going on a school trip to France for four days in July. She is really keen and keeps talking about it.*” (P4)
4.5.2. Thematic map 2, case 4
Organising theme: Factors in transition

Figure 11: Thematic map 2, case 4.
4.5.2.1. Child's characteristics.
The theme of child's characteristics explores the Individual differences within the participant group of children. For child 4, Amy, sub-themes of personality, resilience and motivation were most salient from the thematic analysis (see figure 11).

Amy was described by her parent as being very quiet in school and someone who did not like to draw attention to herself. While having a co-occurring difficulty of selective-mutism impacted upon her communication with others especially at school, there were peers and members of staff with whom Amy would speak with.

“She is just such a lovely girl and what I gather from the teachers is she has people that she will talk to and she’ll work happily with in class when they are doing group work.” (P4)

While Amy experienced difficulties settling into secondary especially in the first two terms she continued to attend, to achieve well in her lessons and chose to access extra-curricular school trips. Both her parent and learning mentor commented on how she kept going even when certain situations were difficult for her.

“I feel like she is coping I think. She has not really had, you know, she’s had no breakdowns, she hasn’t had stroppy things like that.” (P4)

For Amy being able to learn seemed to be a principle motivator for her to attend school even when the social interactions, communication and inherent changes appeared difficult for her to cope with at least initially.

“She loves learning, and she likes the reading – oh my God she loves reading, yes, she can’t stop and maths she absolutely loves maths - she is brilliant at it.” (P4)
4.5.2.2. ASC.

An overview of the theme of ASC is contained in section 4.2.2.2. While there are overlaps in areas within this theme for all child participants a consideration of the data for Amy highlighted differences evident in the sub-themes *late diagnosis; social interactions; communication, sensory perceptions* and *co-occurring difficulty*.

Amy was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome in the July just before she was due to transition to secondary school. While this limited the amount of detailed autism specific information available prior to starting secondary school she still accessed enhanced transition planning.

“Well, they spent a week I think there before the summer, from Year 6 I think they spend a week there.” (P4)

Amy was described by her parent as seeing school as a “place to go and learn” and that she found social interactions difficult.

“It’s not, I don’t know, I don’t think she knows how to do it, she just doesn’t. She doesn’t seem to know how to respond to people.” (P4)

At school while Amy was not reported to have particular friendships she appeared to be reassured when she was in lessons with familiar people.

“She got really upset, but I think it was because they’d put her in the wrong set, so she wasn’t with the same people, obviously, who’d she gained friendships with and familiarity, more than anything.” (S4)

While Amy may have experienced specific difficulty initiating and sustaining interactions with her peers she highlighted ways in which she was able to interact with her peers without talking.

“I draw pictures for them in my book.” (C4)
Shortly after starting at secondary school Amy was diagnosed with selective mutism by the speech and language therapist and the paediatrician. Amy’s parent highlighted that she found it difficult to speak in certain situations and that this difficulty increased significantly during transition.

“I think it’s become more since she was at secondary, she didn’t talk much at primary school, but she did talk. I think it’s like her coping strategy.” (P4)

Amy’s selective mutism was most evident within school. Speaking in school was highlighted as being very difficult for her and she could only speak with particular people such as the teachers she had for French and maths.

“The teacher gets up and she uses daft humour which is how Amy will best respond.” (P4)

Opportunities for communicating with her peers were also very limited as they rarely spoke to each other in lessons and during break times Amy went to the learning mentor room.

“The other kids don’t really speak to her, they wouldn’t come over and start speaking to her, generally. They find it difficult, they don’t know how to converse with her, they don’t know what to say.” (S4)

Amy noted that she disliked noisy, crowded places in school and preferred to access the learning mentor room during these times.

“I don’t really like assembly or the canteen. There are too many people and it’s too noisy.” (C4)
4.5.2.3. Family.
As highlighted previously Amy lived at home with her two younger sisters and parents. Amy was the first child in the family to attend the secondary school and therefore did not have access to sibling support within the school on transition. While similar sub-themes emerged for Amy as did for other participants the subtheme of siblings seemed especially salient for Amy.

Amy’s two younger sisters continued to attend the primary school she had attended. While Amy did not refer specifically to her sisters her parent noted that she enjoyed a good relationship with them at home. Having such opportunities for communicating may have provided a protective factor for Amy against the difficulties she faced with social interactions in secondary school.

“When she’s at home with her sisters and her cousins and things like that she is great, but they have similar interests and they just chat about that and Minecraft and silly games that they play.” (P4)

Both staff and Amy’s parent highlighted concerns they had about her accessing wider curricular activities at secondary school. This was particularly in relation how vulnerable Amy could be if she was not able to ask when she needed help on school trips.

“She's never been abroad before either, so it's kind of a big first for her, but they are going on the channel tunnel thing. I don’t think I’d have let her go if it was on a ferry, I’d have been panicking too much.” (P4)

Amy’s mother noted that she felt she had close links with her primary school. While she did not feel she needed to be so forthcoming at primary school she felt she needed to be at secondary school because the opportunities for contact with staff had changed.
“I wasn’t given an awful lot of information. I’m not one of those pushy, pushy parents and stuff, well not at primary school I wasn’t. Maybe a bit more at secondary because you have to be, I reckon she needs it.” (P4)

4.5.2.4. Primary school.
Amy attended a feeder primary school and the sub-themes of links with secondary school and enhanced transition procedures are evident.

Both Amy’s mother and the learning mentor highlighted the links that were established between the primary and secondary school. These visits throughout primary school could have contributed to Amy’s familiarity with her secondary school prior to transition.

“They were always doing days where they go up there, so she pretty much knew the layout of the place anyway.” (P4)

Amy was able to access an enhanced transition programme although at that point she had only just received a diagnosis of Asperger syndrome and was being assessed as possibly having a co-occurring difficulty of selective mutism. Amy’s mother highlighted the discussions they shared which she felt helped to prepare her for the move to secondary school.

“The primary school, I mean they were great, but because it was so late there wasn’t a great deal they could do there, but they were very helpful with the moving to secondary and stuff. We talked about it a lot and we walked the route to the school.” (P4)

At primary school it was noted by Amy’s mother that she was familiar with a group of children who were also going to the same secondary school as her but did not appear to have any particular friendships with her peer group at primary school. “Yes I did think she did know some of them but not particularly, she is not friends with them as such. (P4)
Amy did not report any teasing or bullying by her peers and neither did her parent or the learning mentor highlight such incidences.

“It might happen in front of the teachers, but I think if I’m honest it would go over Amy’s head anyway, because she wouldn’t get it I hope.” (P4)

While Amy may not have appeared to have particular friends at secondary school the learning mentor felt that she was included by her peers in the learning mentor base at break times.

“But, as far as I know, at lunch time and at break time, she does go in the support room and I’ve heard other TAs say the girls do involve her and she does get involved with them.” (S4)

4.5.2.5. Secondary school.
Similar sub-themes for the theme of secondary school were evident for Amy as were identified for the other participants. The sub-theme of safe place and identified staff seemed particularly salient for Amy.

Although somewhat familiar with the secondary school Amy initially appeared to find it difficult to cope with the reality of attending full-time.

“Then when she started in September she was a bit confused at first but she wouldn't tell me very much.” (P4)

Amy herself noted that the children she was most familiar with went to a different secondary school to her and she felt this could have affected her experience of transition.

What didn’t help when you moved to secondary school?
“A lot of my friends went to a different school.” (C4)
A lunchtime pass was made available to Amy and she noted that this did not help her particularly.

“I can eat my lunch in the support room. I do not like the canteen.” (C4)

A lesson pass was also available at the secondary school but this was used reactively once it became more obvious that Amy needed support to enable her to communicate her needs without an expectation to speak. Also this pass appeared to be held by the learning mentor who provided pastoral support outside of the lessons which added a further level of communication for Amy to negotiate.

“I was given this pass just in case I was ever with her and she needed to go, or somebody had to come and get me if there was something wrong in class.” (S4)

The school took a proactive approach in assigning an identified adult to offer pastoral support for Amy as she started secondary school. However, the learning mentor who worked closely with Amy felt that it would have been more beneficial for both herself and Amy if she could have been assigned to work with Amy during the transition visits.

“I would have preferred to have met Amy at primary school before she came to secondary school, so she knew my face, I could introduce myself and we felt comfortable with each other.” (S4)

Amy was able to check in with the learning mentor each morning and she also identified her as the person she would speak to if upset.

“Having myself in the classroom in the morning, I think it has helped her start the day off, perhaps, on the right foot as well. She always looks for me in the morning.” (S4)
As Amy found verbal communication especially difficult within school she was able to use her talent in art to draw pictures for people she wanted to communicate with. Utilising this skill may have provided a protective factor against feeling isolated within secondary school and provided some sort of social currency for Amy to use in the interactions she felt comfortable to initiate.

“She comes into form in the morning and she’ll show me what she’s sketched the night before or at the weekend. She’s very keen to show me.” (S4)

Having access to a safe, quiet space in school seemed especially salient for Amy and was highlighted as an opportunity to begin to establish some friendships with her wider peer group.

“I don’t like going out a break times so I go to the support rooms.” (C4)

Amy’s parent noted that she was happy about the levels of communication between school staff and herself.

“Secondary school staff have been brilliant, they've kept me informed and stuff. I've been in for meetings to discuss any problems, I mean I'm quite happy with the way the school have handled it.” (P4)

The learning mentor further highlighted difficulties that occurred regarding incomplete information being shared with staff regarding Amy’s recent diagnosis of selective mutism. It could also have reflected a need for further staff training in an area of difficulty relatively unknown to staff members.

“She didn’t speak to the teacher and I think she got into trouble on a couple of occasions through that. But that was only, obviously, through lack of
While Amy may not have appeared to have established particular friendships at secondary school with her immediate peer group the learning mentor felt that she was included by her peers in the learning mentor base at break times.

“But, as far as I know, at lunch time and at break time, she does go in the support room and I’ve heard other mentors say the girls do involve her and she does get involved with them.” (S4)

Amy did not report any teasing or bullying by her peers and neither did her parent or the learning mentor highlight such incidences.

“It might happen in front of the teachers, but I think if I’m honest it would go over Amy’s head anyway, because she wouldn’t get it I hope.” (P4)

Amy also indicated that she was able to make friends in lessons.

**How have you made friends in secondary school?**

“By working together in class.” (C4)

As Amy was achieving very well academically she was not expected to need individual support with her learning within classes and that approaches for children with ASC were expected to be drawn upon by class teachers.

“I think they’ve put in place certain strategies for pupils with autism and then they build on those strategies that are learnt in the classroom.” (S4)

Amy also expressed her dislike for certain subjects, such as history, which she found difficult to access.
“I don’t really like history all that much. I don’t really understand it.” (C4)

She enjoyed other subjects because she felt she had a good relationship with the teacher.

“I like drawing best in art and the teacher. She is friendly and smiles a lot.” (C4)

Amy noted that at secondary school she was able to share her talent in art with her peers. Her academic achievements were also highlighted by her parent and the learning mentor.

“Maths, she absolutely loves maths - she is brilliant at it. Her maths teacher she said, she’s absolutely blown away by her, she said she is doing really well.” (P4)

Amy’s learning mentor highlighted that all staff at the secondary school participated in ASC awareness training. However, it was also highlighted by Amy’s mother that there were inconsistencies around this.

“I don’t think that all the teachers particularly knew that she had a diagnosis at that point, I don’t think it was made clear to a lot of them what her abilities were and weren’t.” (P4)

Both the learning mentor and Amy’s mother felt that a personal approach to supporting Amy in secondary school evolved as the staff got to know her individually.

“Not having come across a child with Amy’s difficulties before, I found it quite difficult to know how to communicate with her. But, we’ve learnt our strategies together and it’s good, yes.” (S4)
Amy’s parent highlighted that she had been signposted to the specialist autism nurse and autism outreach by the school SENCo and was considering whether or not to request further involvement.

“The SENCo had given us lots of leaflets and stuff, we’ve not really done anything with it yet, but a lot of it is based in XXX and it’s just getting there. I don’t drive.”

(P4)
4.6 Cross-case synthesis

While there are limitations to making generalisations from across a case study a cross-case synthesis was carried out in order to explore some of the key similarities and differences between each of the four case studies (Yin, 2014). By carrying out a systematic cross-case synthesis the findings from a case study are more likely to be robust (Yin, 2014).

Initially a cross-case synthesis of the grey data for each school profile is presented as a brief comparison of the most salient findings in relation to the Charman et al., (2011) best practice categories. This is followed by a summary paragraph of key similarities and differences in the four transition Q sorts. This takes into account some of the broad transition factors initially used by the researcher when devising the Q-statements.

Tables highlighting key areas of similarities and differences across the thematic analysis from all four cases are then presented. This is followed by a summary section of the whole cross-case synthesis to highlight the most salient elements from the fieldwork notes, grey data, transition Q-sort data and the thematic analysis. This is presented in relation to each of the research questions.

4.6.1. Cross-case synthesis of findings from grey data used for each school profile.

While there may appear to be many similarities across the three secondary schools there were also subtle contextual differences which may have had an impact upon each child’s transition experience.

Secondary schools A and C were smaller than the average size secondary school. They also had above average numbers of children eligible for free school meals and children considered to have special educational needs (SEN). School B was larger than the average size secondary school with below average numbers of children eligible for free school meals or with SEN.

All three secondary schools had a general policy of SEN and therefore did not specifically highlight approaches for children with ASC. Children with SEN at all three schools were
considered by Ofsted to generally make progress similar to other children and an inconsistent picture of levels of appropriate differentiation was presented for different groups of children with SEN across each school. Transition programmes were well established within all three secondary schools with enhanced transitions available as needed. School A and school C proactively sought enhanced transitions for the children who had not received a formal diagnosis of ASC.

All three schools were noted as actively engaging with external agencies and schools B and C in particular in relation to involvement with the speech and language therapy service, occupational therapists and EPs.

Schools A and C were being closely monitored by Ofsted at the time of the research. Therefore, understandably an overall training priority for staff at both of these schools was to raise teaching standards for all children and not just for those with SEN or ASC specifically. School B was noted as providing good quality training for staff to support all children with SEN. All three schools highlighted that learning support staff receive basic training in ASC but not all teachers had.

Parents and carers across all three schools were noted as being generally satisfied with the levels of communication between school and home. School A specifically highlighted the importance of including the views of children and parents within SEN processes and Ofsted (2011) made particular note of the good relationships between parents and school staff in school B.

A whole school commitment to fully including all children with SEN was outlined in the SEN policy of each of the three schools and all children within the research accessed extra-curricular activities such as lunchtime clubs or field trips abroad with their wider peer groups.

4.6.2. Cross-case synthesis of transition Q-sort statements. Across all four cases only a small number of similarities occurred in how the participants sorted the statements. In both cases 1 and 3 the participants ranked statement no.16 *I understand the rules in school* (Q-transition factor, logistics) at +4 (really agree). This may perhaps reflect the importance of understanding the structure and everyday rules found within the system of the secondary school for these two participants.
In cases 1, 2, and 4 the participants ranked statement no. 8 *My teachers know how I like to learn* (Q-transition factor B, *learning*) at 0 (neutral). This may indicate that the participants may not have had any strong view about this statement, did not comprehend what it meant, did not know how to measure this or that it was difficult to answer due to variability of knowledge and approaches among the staff.

In cases 1, 2, and 3 the participants ranked statement no. 30 *If I get upset there is a safe place for me to go to* (Q-transition factor C, *support from adults*) at +1 (agree). All participants noted that they had an identified person within secondary school and knew where to find support as needed.

Apart from the similarities noted each participant sorted the transition statements differently with no other distinct patterns of similarities evident from looking at the content analysis of the Q-sort data. This could indicate that the transition statements were not as pertinent to this group of participants. However, given the results from the pilot study, it may be due to the small sample size of the current research and that each child’s experience of transition to secondary school was unique which is reflected in the highly individualised Q-sort data.

**4.6.3. Cross-case synthesis of thematic analysis.**

For the cross-case synthesis of the data for the thematic analysis from the transition interviews a list of subthemes was collated from each case and synthesised along with the themes and wider organising themes (see tables 10 and 11). While the theme levels showed similarities the case study descriptions illustrate the differences between individuals.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Case 3</th>
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### Table 11: Cross-case synthesis for organising theme 2: Factors in transition.

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### 4.6.4. Cross-case synthesis in relation to research question 1.

Findings from the Q-sort data and semi-structured interviews for each child are integrated in order to give a full consideration of the findings in relation to RQ1. While the transition Q-statements were largely designed to elicit the views of the children regarding wider systemic factors the comments made by the participants revealed what they may also have felt about aspects of their transition experience. These are reported within the presentation of each child’s findings. The first synthesised organising theme of *mixed emotions* relates to how the children appeared to experience the transition to secondary school. Across all four cases it was evident that the children had in many ways experienced quite unique transitions to secondary school. This is perhaps seen in the different pattern of emotions they each appeared to experience immediately before, during and after their first term in secondary school and is perhaps reflected in the largely individualised Q sorts.

All four children were highlighted as positively looking forward to aspects of starting secondary school, such as learning new subjects or opportunities to make new friends and reflected in feeling as though their primary school helped prepare them for the transition as gleaned from the Q-sort data. Conversely each child also expressed feeling worried or anxious about having to cope with, for example, many new teachers instead of the familiarity they may have enjoyed with one or two key members of staff at primary school.

During the first term both Hannah and Todd initially appeared to feel more settled and reassured about their move to secondary school having had some time to adjust to their
new settings and adapting to new routines, timetables and the expectations of different teaching staff. Yet Hannah experienced a period of feeling unsettled again at the start of the second term until further pastoral support was put in place for her. For both Nick and Amy it took until the second term for them to begin to feel more settled with Nick expressing what appeared to be feelings of nostalgia for his primary school.

After the first term Nick seemed to gain reassurance from support offered by key adults and from developing friendships with peers. For two children feelings of excitement about new learning experiences and their achievements appeared to be mixed with continued feelings of anxiety or worry which persisted beyond the first term of secondary school.

4.6.5. Cross case synthesis in relation to research question 2.

Data from the Q-sort relating to wider contextual transition factors, findings from interviews with each child, parent and teacher and content data from school policies are integrated in the synthesis in relation to answering RQ2.

While the first organising theme, as drawn from the interview data, deals primarily with how the children appeared to feel about their transition experiences these experiences were influenced by wider contextual issues as seen in the second organising theme factors in transition. In this respect, to some extent, there is an overlap between the two organising themes and elements of this are considered in the cross-case synthesis in relation to research question two.

While each child’s experience of transition had aspects that were individual there were also strong commonalities across all four cases particularly with regard to the logistics or practicalities of transition. All four children were able to access a transition programme as a result of links between the primary and secondary schools. This finding is evident from within Q-sort data, highlighted in each child’s interviews and explored within the responses from parents and teachers at each school. Two of the schools (A and C) specifically highlight transition procedures within their SEN policy, while school B which enabled the most flexible and individualised transition plan for Todd, does not specifically
mention transition planning in the SEN policy. This highlights a further finding that a discrepancy may occur between what happens in transition practice and what is explicitly detailed in policies, as this may be driven forward by key individuals in the process reacting to the needs of individual children rather than only doing what is detailed in the policy. While each child’s transition plan was qualitatively different the basic provision for transition visits included elements of the following: becoming familiar with the school building; an introduction to aspects of the new timetable and the meeting of some, if not all, key staff. These seemed to positively impact on each child’s experience prior to the actual move to secondary school. Hannah, Todd and Amy also accessed an enhanced transition programme. For Todd autism outreach support workers were directly involved in devising very detailed autism specific information, which served as a guide to shape his initial transition experience in a proactive way, and which appeared to have a positive impact on his transition experience overall.

With regards to other factors in transition it appeared that all four children were able to access a safe or quiet place either at break times or as needed throughout the day. This was evidenced within Q-sort data, within interviews with the children, parents and teachers but not explicitly detailed in the school policy data. Access to a safe place appeared to be a fundamental need for Hannah, Nick and Amy who also highlighted that they found noise levels upsetting when they were in crowded places in school. Having an identified person was also an important factor for all four children and particularly for Amy who was only able to communicate in particular situations and with particular people and so the need for an identified person was especially salient.

All four children had access to lunchtime and lesson passes. However these appeared to not be given proactively to the children. For all four children either one or other of the passes was given reactively once an incident had occurred or they had to access them via an identified adult which added another level which limited access to the pass. Difficulties accessing lunchtime and lesson passes were particularly evident within the interview data from the parents.

Each child’s individual characteristics appeared to have an impact on their transition experiences. For Nick a sense of humour appeared to provide a protective factor during transition, which may have been particularly salient for him as he received such a late
diagnosis of ASC. This resulted in Nick not being able to access an enhanced transition plan which may have contributed to his difficult start at secondary school. Todd a need to become more independent generally appeared to provide impetus to try new learning situations. These findings were also echoed in the interview with his parents and teachers. While Hannah experienced difficulties with social interactions generally she appeared to enjoy the support gained from her friendships with a small number of specific friends. For Amy and Nick a love of learning seemed to enable them to overcome some of the difficulties they may have encountered in other aspects of their transition which was evident from across their Q-sort data, interviews and reflected in the inclusive learning ethos from school B’s SEN policy.

For Todd, Hannah and Nick specific incidents of teasing or bullying were highlighted within the Q-sort as the statements regarding these issues prompted them to talk about it during the process. For Hannah her parents reported that they felt it was dealt with quickly and appeared to be a one off incident. Todd reported in his interview that it had occurred more than once and that he had wanted more to be done about it. Having wider peer support was highlighted by all four children both in the Q-data and their interviews and appeared to be a protective factor for each of the four children during transition to secondary school. Each of the children also appeared to experience friendships on different levels. Todd appeared to enjoy friendships which he had been able to sustain both in school and at home while Hannah appeared to gain support from being in the company of particular peers and her sister at school. For Nick it was when sharing an interest in films and playing games and for Amy when using alternative ways of communicating such as drawing pictures for her friends in school.

Adapting to having lots of new subjects and teachers was highlighted as a difficulty across all four cases. This was initially raised within the Q-sort data and explored further in the interviews with children, parents and teachers. Linked to this appeared to be that for three of the children there seemed to be a need for more autism specific detail about each child especially with regards to adaptation to communication, understanding and approaches to learning. All four children highlighted lessons they enjoyed within their interviews and some they found more difficult for different reasons. For Hannah and Amy
it was highlighted that they enjoyed lessons more when the teacher was friendly. These findings were confirmed in the parent and teacher interviews also.

Factors concerning family were highlighted across all four cases. Having siblings already at the secondary school seemed to be a supportive factor for Hannah and Todd as highlighted in interviews with them, their parents and their teachers. While the Q-sort data did not have a statement specifically related to family or siblings thinking about people who helped the child settle into secondary school provoked comment about siblings and this was raised through the use of prompts and probes in subsequent interviews as relevant to each child, their parent and teacher. Amy had younger siblings still at primary school and they were also highlighted as being a positive factor in her life outside of school. Nick did not have siblings and had until starting secondary school largely sought out the company of adults. Although somewhat difficult initially, moving to secondary school also provided opportunities for Nick to begin to develop friendships with his peers. For Nick, Todd and Amy a motivating factor in the move to secondary school was the access to lunchtime and after school clubs which not only provided a safe place but also widened opportunities to form friendships through the sharing of common interests which was reflected in his Q-sort, interview data but not specifically highlighted in the school policy.

A key theme that emerged was that of parental involvement and endeavour. This was not only evident within the Q-sort data from Todd who expressed a wish to be able to do more things without his mum’s involvement. For Hannah’s parents and Nick’s a strong feeling that they had to fight for support for their children is evident within their interviews and the strength of their involvement with their child’s education and development was also found within the interview data with the teachers.

As highlighted within the Charman et al., (2011) good practice guidelines parental involvement is fundamental to promoting successful transitions between settings and all three secondary schools within the study specifically highlighted details of parental involvement and liaison in the policy documents analysed.
Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Summary of the research
This research has explored the experiences and views of children with ASC as they transitioned from mainstream primary to mainstream secondary school. The views of their parents and teachers were also gained and wider contextual and systemic factors considered in relation to influences upon transition to secondary school.

The findings from each case study have been presented followed by a cross-case analysis. In accordance with the case study guide (Yin, 2014) a discussion follows which considers the findings in relation to each of the research questions and places them within the context of existing literature, psychological theory and the best practice in autism framework (Charman et al., 2011). Limitations of the current research and the reflexivity of the researcher are then explored and recommendations for future research suggested. Implications for schools, professionals and in particular the role of the EP are then presented.

Overall findings highlight the importance of factors from Bronfenbrenner’s ecosystemic framework (Bronfenbrenner 1979; 1992). At the within child level, micro systemic factors are implicated as having an influence, resulting in transition experiences which were highly individualised for the children who participated in the research. At a wider meso and exo-systemic level family factors, individual transition planning, relationships with peers, whole school staff awareness of the needs of children with ASC and the role of specialist outreach staff are indicated as key factors in transition although the specific ways in which these factors are experienced varied between individuals. These will be explored more fully in the following sections, particularly in answering RQ2.

5.2 Research question 1: How do year 7 children with ASC experience the transition from mainstream primary school to mainstream secondary school?

Findings from the current research highlight that all the children experienced a mixed emotions during their transition to mainstream secondary school and such feelings
reported during their last term at primary school were still noted following the first term of secondary school. These findings are concurrent with research by Evangelou et al., (2008) which indicates that for children with SEN generally and more specifically for those with ASC (Dillon & Underwood, 2012) the period of adjustment is perhaps longer than is typical for the majority of children moving from year 6 to year 7.

5.2.1. Before transition.
During the term before starting secondary school three of the four children reported a mix of worry and excitement with one child expressing feelings of both anxiety and reassurance. These findings mirror those found in transition research for all children whereby they experience “anxious readiness” (Zeedyk et al., 2003) as they undergo uncertainty around all the changes involved yet look forward to new opportunities to make new friends and learn new subjects. More specifically the children in the current research spoke of anxieties around the logistics of attending secondary school such as getting lost in the bigger, unfamiliar setting and increased levels of homework. Such findings may also be found in the wider secondary transition population (Ashton, 2008; Barber & Olsen, 2004) and for children with SEN (Evangelou et al., 2008) at the time of transition.

Difficulties adjusting to social and academic demands of secondary school were raised as a specific concern for two children in the current research as they expressed worries about having to contend with too many people and being able to meet the increased learning expectations of their new teachers. Such anxieties are also reflected in previous research regarding secondary school experiences for children with ASC (Wainscott et al., 2008).

All four children were able to take part in transition activities and enhanced transition was in place for three of them prior to starting secondary school. This may have had the effect of lessening the anxiety they may have felt. For one child, Nick, it was not possible to undertake an enhanced transition and he was reported as experiencing significant difficulties settling in, particularly during the first term in secondary school. Although it was not an aim of this research to measure the extent of the effect of any particular transition programme it may be noted that while Todd shared similar anxieties as his
peers, he also expressed feeling positive overall prior to the move to secondary school. This may have been linked to the specific, detailed transition planning he received as a result of liaison between the primary and secondary school and the autism outreach service which may have served to allay some of his fears prior to transition. The overall positive transition experience for Todd may partly verify previous research which identified a lack of research into the importance of flexible and individualised transition planning for children with ASC and highlights this as an important area for consideration when planning transitions for children with ASC (Adreon & Stella, 2001; Bond & Hebron, 2013; Parsons, Guldberg, MacLeod, Jones, Brunty et al., 2009; Bond, Symes, Hebron, Humphrey & Morewood, (in press).

5.2.2. During the first term.
All of the children experienced a period of intense adjustment to their new setting during the first term in secondary school as is reflected in coping with the logistics of transition that is common for all children (Lucey & Reay, 2000; Sirsch, 2003). One child in particular expressed shock on transition which perhaps suggests a difference in the expectations held and the actual reality of transition and as seen in the wider transition literature (Evangelou et al., 2008; Fouracre, 1993). One child appeared to experience nostalgia for primary school and a sense of loss during their first term which is an experience also noted as occurring across differing groups of children following the move to secondary school (Barber & Olsen, 2004).

One child expressed feeling intimidated by the size of the building and of peers within secondary school. This may be something akin to a reverse of the “big-fish-little-pond” effect (Seaton, Marsh & Craven, 2009) which may be seen as children move from being the eldest and most experienced in primary school to the being the smallest and least experienced members of secondary school or a “little fish in a big pond” (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008). Interestingly, when this notion was put to Nick during the research he said transition to secondary school felt more like being a “little fish going into a big ocean”.

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5.2.3. After the first term.
Frederickson, Rice & Seymour (2011) highlight that for most children anxieties associated with transition are typically short-lived and significantly decline in intensity after the first term. Similar findings were also reflected for children with ASC in transition research by Dillon and Underwood (2012). In the current research two of the children appeared to experience feeling more reassured or more settled in secondary school after the first term. One child was noted as appearing quite settled initially into her first term and afterwards experienced difficulties coping with the different teaching and learning expectations which required specific pastoral support at the start of the second term. An initial honeymoon period of settling in contrasted with then being unsettled. Feelings of anxiety or worry were noted well into the second term for all of the children in the current study and this reflects findings from further previous research which indicates that children with ASC are at an increased risk of developing feelings of anxiety during transition which may be longer lasting than for other groups of children (Humphrey & Hebron, 2014; White, Oswald, Ollendick, & Scahill, 2009).

While during transition children with ASC may experience feelings similar to their more typical peers or as other groups of children with SEN the findings from the current research suggest that the intensity of these concerns may be quantitatively different and longer lasting into year 7 for this group of children. Similar findings are reflected in the research by Dan (2011).

5.3. Research question 2: What factors affect the experiences of year 7 children with ASC as they transition from mainstream primary school to mainstream secondary school?

The discussion of the findings in relation to RQ2 takes into consideration the wider systemic factors involved in transition to secondary school for children with ASC and how these may interact with each child and impact upon their transition experiences. These factors may impact upon the individual child’s experience of transition in positive or negative ways or indeed may not particularly have an effect either way. As each child with ASC has individual strengths, needs and preferences factors in transition may act as either facilitators or
barriers to a successful transition to secondary school and the overall experience will be unique to the individual with ASC.

The application of an eco-systemic model (Bronfenbrenner 1979; 1992) enables the transition experiences of the individual child to be explored as part of a wider context. This allows for a deeper understanding of the child’s development by exploring contextual factors which may be proximal, such as seen within close relationships between the child and parents or teachers. More distal effects may also be evident as a result of the factors operating within the wider school setting such as transition procedures which may impact upon transition for the individual child. Such an approach enables a move away from a largely within-child focus (Humphrey & Ainscow, 2006) and allows for the child’s experiences to be researched in the context within which they occur (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1992; 1999). Bronfenbrenner’s framework within the ecological model enables the researcher to place the child at the centre of different systems which may influence and shape their experiences and development, such as those found within a family or at school (see figure 1). Within this model Bronfenbrenner highlights that the child’s development is best understood when research is based in situ as part of “real-world” contexts and identifies influences at broadly different levels. For the children within the current study their main “real world” contexts are the home, the classroom, the school and to a lesser extent the local authority classroom. The nature of the relationships between key individuals and the policies and procedures adopted within these contexts may be evidenced at the following levels:

- micro- the individual child
- meso- peers, family, teachers/classroom and the relationship between them and the individual child.
- exo- wider school context
- macro- local authority

The application of this theoretical framework is well established within the body of research concerning the transition to secondary school for children with ASC (Brooks, 2014; Gumaste, 2011; Hannah, 2008; Humphrey, 2013) and is particularly suited to the exploratory nature of the current research.
5.3.1. Child’s characteristics.

Bronfenbrenner (1999) highlighted that factors at an individual child (micro) level interact with processes, such as relationships or procedures, within the systems the child experiences in school (meso) level. Within the current research while each of the child participants has a diagnosis of autism, with associated features in common, each child also brought their unique presentation of ASC, individual personalities, attitudes and experiences to the process of transition.

Gumaste’s (2011) findings highlighted that while individual factors such as cognitive ability, levels of anxiety and sensory sensitivities may be measured and considered in relation to wider factors in transition for children with ASC this information may only provide a partial account and a deeper understanding may emerge from a consideration of each child’s wider intrinsic characteristics such as personality, motivation and attitude.

Both of the girls within the current research were described as having quiet personalities by their parents and teachers. One girl was diagnosed with a co-occurring difficulty of selective-mutism and found speaking within the school context especially difficult although at home she was reported as being “chatty” and more outgoing. Both of the boys in the current research were noted as being quite outgoing in their interactions with the researcher and their ability to sustain conversations to a certain level with familiar adults and peers was remarked upon by their parents and teachers. While having a quiet personality is not necessarily associated with a difficult transition to secondary school previous research highlights that generally children with more outgoing personalities may be more inclined to put themselves forward to form wider friendships within the new school environment (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008; Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009) although for the child with ASC the complexities of doing so are acknowledged.

Similarly, certain dispositions and attitudes may be considered to be protective factors for the children in the current research as they faced the challenges of transition. One child appeared to approach the new experiences within secondary school with a sense of optimism and positive attitude in spite of also feeling somewhat anxious about transition. Lucey and Reay (2000) note that while a certain level of anxiety may be needed in order
for personal growth and development, a “tinge of optimism” is perhaps also needed in order to adapt to different circumstances and new experiences. Hannah (2008) also further highlights in transition research that for some children with ASC a sense of optimism may be seen as a protective factor in relation to coping with the anxiety associated with the changes inherent in the move to secondary school.

Other individual characteristics, such as motivation and sense of humour, may also be considered to provide protective factors during transition and when considered together may be viewed as contributing towards individual resilience. While a detailed consideration is beyond the scope of this research, resilience may be viewed as a dynamic process which involves both risk and protective processes pertinent to the individual that act to modify the effects of difficult life events such as transition to secondary school (Rutter, 1999). All four children in the current research may be considered to have demonstrated resilience to some degree in that despite some of the difficulties they encountered during transition all four children continued to attend school and were assessed as meeting their academic targets towards the end of year seven.

Other personal attributes may also be considered to contribute towards an individual’s resilience such as having a sense of humour (Brooks, 1994). As demonstrated by one child in particular in the current research being able to see the funny side of a situation may have enabled him to make sense of and cope with some of the difficulties he experienced during transition albeit at a certain “slapstick” level. Nick was able to describe difficulties he encountered in certain situations in secondary school through a comedic lens and also expressed his enjoyment of watching comedy films with peers during the weekly after school film club which he was instrumental in starting in school.

The transition to secondary school occurs at a time during which the individual is also undergoing the physiological changes associated with adolescence which adds further social and biological complexities for the child with ASC (Humphrey & Symes, 2014; White, Oswald, Ollendick et al., 2009). Aspects associated with adolescence seemed especially pertinent for one child in particular in the current research. Todd, expressed his emerging autonomy by trying to negotiate completion of his homework more independently from his parents and by getting his own equipment and books ready for
school each night. These elements seemed very important to Todd in that they allowed him to assert his growing independence. Again such incidences highlight that the child’s transition experiences are shaped by wider systemic factors which occur as a result of the interaction between the individual child and adults and peers within the child’s home and school environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1999) and that factors other than ASC may also need to be given wider consideration at times.

5.3.2. Planning to support pupils with ASC.
The wider transition literature highlights the importance of effective planning for all children prior to starting secondary school and more so for children with identified needs such as ASC as this time is recognised as one that may be particularly stressful for both the child and their family (Parsons et al., 2009). Being able to share information about individual children in a timely manner is considered to be a contributory factor in transition success for children with ASC (Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Hannah, 2008) and is considered good practice in autism education (Charman et al., 2011; NICE, 2011).

While aspects of ASC may be considered at an individual or micro level it may also be argued that these differences may to a certain extent only become a difficulty for the individual when there is not a shared understanding amongst the individuals who work with and support the child with ASC. This may be seen at a meso and exosystemic level when considering the processes which operate within a school for how and when information is shared about individual children prior to transition.

Within the current study the benefits of transition planning may have been especially evident. For Todd, very detailed information was produced in liaison with an identified person from an autism outreach service. Such detail was used to plan specific transition visits according to his identified needs and the outreach person was able to accompany Todd on visits and return to the primary setting to discuss his concerns. While it was not possible to pre-empt every transition difficulty for Todd many of his anxieties and concerns appeared to have been anticipated prior to starting his secondary school. The importance of individualised planning is highlighted within both the wider transition literature (Topping, 2011) and for children with ASC (Bond & Hebron, 2013; Bond, Symes, Hebron, Humphrey & Morewood, 2014).
For three children within the current research the sharing of information was somewhat affected by receiving a diagnosis late into the term prior to transition to secondary school. For two of the children, Hannah and Amy, a proactive approach on the behalf of staff at the primary and secondary schools prior to diagnosis enabled them to access enhanced transition plans. Adopting a proactive, flexible approach to transition for these children may have contributed to enabling the staff to get to know them prior to starting secondary school transition (Bond & Hebron, 2013). While their information may not have had the level of detail seen in Todd’s planning Hannah and Amy were at least able to become more familiar with their new school, staff and peers before September. Nick received a diagnosis of ASC very late into the summer term and had not been able to access enhanced transition therefore very little information regarding his diagnosis was known prior to starting to school which may be reflected in the difficult start he experienced. Receiving a late diagnosis may have a particular consequence for the child with ASC as this may prevent or significantly delay access to specific social skill interventions which could be put in place prior to transition to secondary school (Dunlop et al., 2009). These influences upon a child’s transition may be considered to be operating at both a mesosystemic level, whereby delays in diagnosis may be related to reluctance on the part of parents and/or differences of opinion regarding professionals involved with the identification of ASC (Russell & Norwich, 2012). These influences may also interact at a wider exosystemic level, such as seen within the local authority assessment processes for children with possible ASC.

Children with ASC may also present with co-occurring difficulties which may impact upon their transition experiences as much as aspects of social communication and interaction or behaviour may do (Waterhouse, 2013). Two children in the current study had referrals to the occupational therapist regarding concerns raised around the development of their gross motor skills. Both children also expressed a dislike of P.E generally which the staff attributed to aspects of their diagnosis of ASC, such as a dislike of noise and crowds, but may also have been related to possible cooccurring motor skill difficulties. Similar findings are evident within the research by Charles (2012) where difficulties in P.E. lessons experienced by children with ASC may have been misattributed to difficulties with group
social interactions when some of the participants had diagnosed gross motor-skill difficulties that some staff had not been made aware of.

Within the current research the importance of recognising the impact that cooccurring difficulties may have for children with ASC is especially evident. Amy was formally diagnosed as also having selective mutism in the first term of starting secondary school and while her teachers were reported as having received at least basic training in autism awareness it appeared that for some of her teachers they were at a loss as to how to support her in regards to having selective mutism. This may, as Cline and Baldwin (1994) highlighted, have had an effect upon her social learning experiences. There is a paucity of research which explores the experiences of children with selective mutism and none that the researcher is aware of which explores the views of children with a diagnosis of both ASC and selective mutism and so it is not possible to compare this aspect of Amy’s secondary school experiences with the wider literature.

5.3.3. Family.
Bronfenbrenner (1979; 1999) recognised the importance of the social functions within the family context and how these may influence the individual child’s experiences within contexts immediately outside of the family such as the schools system. From the findings of the current study parental endeavour and concerns were especially evident for parents of two of the children in particular. The parents described feeling as though they “had to fight” for their concerns to be taken seriously and for support to be put in place for their child and that this was even more so once they had moved into secondary school. A key factor appeared to be that the parents felt that the bigger more impersonal secondary school setting impacted on how readily they felt able to approach staff within the school. As one parent commented “I can’t just nip in” as they had been able to in primary school. This perception of secondary school being less accessible may have contributed to increased anxiety for parents with regards to feeling able to support their child as they had felt able to in primary school. Parents of typical children transitioning to secondary school are also reported as not being as fully included in the information sharing process prior to transition in research by Osborne and Reed (2011).

Indeed Gumaste (2011) and Osborne and Reed (2011) found that parents who were not fully included in transition discussions early on in the process experienced increased
anxiety around the time of actual transition and such feelings may have in turn influenced the level of anxiety their child felt about starting secondary school.

Having siblings was identified as a possible protective factor for the children in the current study. Two of the children spoke positively about having an older sibling already at their secondary school and this may have served to allay some of the concerns of individual children as they were able to share these with their siblings prior to starting secondary school. They also appeared to gain reassurance from having a sibling in school even though they may not have had direct contact with them on a daily basis in the school setting. In research by Evangelou et al., (2008) children moving to secondary school were generally able to seek reassurance from talking about the experiences of their older siblings.

5.3.4. Primary school.
Within the current research wider exo-systemic factors were implicated within transition for the participants in relation to the primary school setting and how links may have been facilitated with the secondary schools the children in the current study transitioned to. For three of the children there were already well-established links between feeder primary schools and the chosen secondary school and these children already had a certain level of familiarity with the setting and some staff members prior to undertaking transition. Being able to visit the secondary school as part of transition is highlighted as being important for all groups of children (Ashton, 2008; Evangelou et al., 2008 and Jindal-Snape et al., 2006). This also facilitated the sharing of information about individual children with secondary school staff as part of good practice for transition (Charman et al., 2011; Dann, 2011; Evangelou, et al., 2008; Parsons et al., 2009). Such a different transition experience reported for one child by his parents and secondary school staff highlighted how adopting a proactive approach may have lessened the difficulties he encountered during the first term.

Friendships within primary school were reported as being important for all the children in the current study although each of the children appeared to hold differing views of what they understood friendship to mean. Wider research highlights that being able to form friendships has an influence upon the extent to which children with ASC perceive
themselves as being socially accepted by their peers and is also considered to be an indicator of transition success (Calder, Hill & Pellicano, 2013). For two of the children it was reported by parents and staff that being able to move to secondary school with friends from primary was a supportive factor in transition and these children also maintained these friendships outside of school. Two of the children described the nature of their friendships with peers more akin to companionship as opposed to the more sophisticated level of friendship which emerges during early adolescence (Frith, 2004). However, these relationships may be considered as significant to these children as they appeared to experience a sense of loss when they left these friendships behind once they left primary school.

5.3.5. Secondary school.
When considering the move to secondary school for children with ASC it is recognised that not only do they have changes to contend with that occur when moving from one setting to another, on an exo-systemic level, but that they also have to contend with changes on a daily basis once in the secondary school setting (Hannah & Topping, 2012). Coping with change is considered to be especially challenging for children with ASC in relation to difficulties related to flexibility in thinking (Wing & Gould, 1979). Transition procedures and enhanced transition procedures in particular are fundamental to enabling children with ASC begin to adapt to the new setting (Tobias, 2009) and this would usually be facilitated via close liaison between key personnel such as the SENCos in both settings. Three children in the current study were able to access enhanced transition procedures and for one of the children this involved attendance at a transition summer school, which was reported as being especially beneficial in helping her feel more familiar with the procedures and to get to know staff and peers prior to starting secondary school.

When considering factors in transition related to the secondary school environment for all of the children in the current study it appears that all three secondary schools provided basic support from a logistical point of view in terms of visits to the school, maps of the buildings and an outline timetable. Having an identified member of staff to speak with, a quiet space to go to and having lunchtime passes were all reported as being available and used by all the children in the study to varying degrees. For two children attending
different schools lunchtime passes and the use of a quiet space were given reactively in response to initial difficulties. However, while two children in the current research attended the same secondary school both had reported quite different transition experiences. For one child this may have been due to not being able to access enhanced transition due to late diagnosis. Two other children also had a late diagnosis but they were able to access enhanced transition which may have contributed to a smoother start to secondary school. A contributory factor to experiencing a smooth start to secondary school may be due in part to being supported by a proactive, flexible and individualised approach to transition which is recognised as part of good practice in transition for children with ASC (Bond & Hebron, 2013).

Of course individualised transitions may only be developed based on detailed information being shared between the child, parents and key staff members between the primary and secondary school (Dann, 2011; Evangelou et al., 2008; Hannah, 2008) through identified channels of communication. Gumaste (2011) highlighted that parents valued being able to communicate openly about their child’s individual needs and being able to contribute to the transition process and beyond. Such information is particularly vital when a child may be awaiting formal assessment for ASC late into year 6 at primary school.

Being able to speak with identified members of staff as needed was highlighted as important by all four children in the current study and is noted as part of good practice for children with autism (Charman et al., 2011). Indeed good practice specifies that there should be high levels of staff availability for the child with ASC. This was particularly evident in the school which operated a learning mentor system, as this enabled a more flexible approach adapted to meet the needs of the child, as there was always a member of staff available within the mentor base. This also enabled the child to gradually become familiar with more than one member of support staff and for them to get to know her well. The learning mentors were also able to liaise with individual staff members on behalf of the child and parents based on a detailed knowledge of the child. Having a safe place to go and an identified person to speak with were also highlighted as an important factor in supporting their child by the parents in the research by Hannah (2008).

While detailed knowledge of the individual child with ASC is an important factor in developing appropriate support for the individual this also needs to be backed up by all
relevant staff having knowledge and understanding of why, when and how specific support is needed (Jordan, 2008). For all four children within the current research it was not entirely clear the extent to which whole school ASC awareness raising or training in interventions for children with ASC had been undertaken by staff at the three secondary schools. Within policies of SEN two schools highlighted that all staff take part in basic ASC awareness raising. One school noted that teaching assistants and learning mentors undertook training because they worked most closely with each child with ASC. Three parents within the current research highlighted that they felt that not all members of staff were aware of their child’s diagnosis of ASC and this led to misunderstandings and enforcement of what they perceived as unfair detentions. It appeared that these situations may have occurred because channels for communicating key information about individual children were perhaps not clearly defined and not all staff had accessed training in ASC awareness, which is echoed in the findings by Gumaste (2011) and Dillon and Underwood (2012).

One of the indicators of a successful transition is that the child experiences curriculum continuity (Evangelou et al., 2008) which may be broadly measured by the academic progress a child makes once starting at secondary school. All four children in the current study while having differing academic needs were reported by their teachers and parents as achieving or exceeding their academic targets. Two of the children noted that while they enjoyed lessons overall they felt that sometimes some of their teachers did not understand them and that for one child in particular it was difficult to accept the perceived injustice of whole class detentions.

Enjoying successful relationships with peers is another indicator of a successful transition (Evangelou et al., 2008) and the fostering of social interactions is highlighted as good practice in the provision for children with autism. Within the current research all four children highlighted that friendships were important to them which is a finding also reflected in the wider ASC transition research (Dann, 2011; Charles, 2012). To varying degrees each child had forged friendships with members of their peer group and to some extent opportunities for this were fostered by the school providing lunchtime and after school clubs which some of the children attended. Conversely, three of the children also experienced incidences of teasing and bullying which school staff were reported as
dealing with effectively once they were aware of them. However, the children themselves reported that such incidences tended to occur at times when adults were not visible such as when children were moving between lessons, at break times outdoors and in the changing rooms for P.E. and during these times the children may have been particularly vulnerable.

In summary, the data from the current study indicate that a range of factors at different levels are important for successful transition for pupils with ASC. These are likely to be mediated by how these factors interact for each child and school which may or may not be facilitated by the policies, procedures, knowledge and ethos of the people within the each of the systems related to the child’s school experience.

5.4 Limitations of the current research
When considering the findings of the current research it is important to do so with the limitations of the study in mind which are highlighted within this section.

As a case study with a relatively small number of participants caution must be taken when considering the findings in relation to the wider population (Yin, 2014) of children with ASC transitioning to secondary school. Furthermore although the research took place across three secondary schools these were from within one local authority and the findings may not be as applicable within the context of other LAs.

While the research includes the views of children with ASC and co-occurring difficulties, such as motor-coordination difficulties and selective mutism, the sample sizes for these are very small and therefore caution would need to be exercised when interpreting the findings in relation to other children with similar difficulties. The case study approach adopted in the current thesis may form the basis for further research which explores the transition experiences of children with ASC and wider co-occurring difficulties (Yin, 2014).

Furthermore some of the interview data for child 4 was not a full as the other children in the study. This was partly due to the participant also having selective mutism and therefore not being able to speak her answers to the semi-structured interview questions. The planned adaptation to this method of enabling the participant to write her answers at home did not produce the richly detailed information in the interview as
anticipated from this child and so, as necessary, greater weighting was given to quotes from her parent and teachers. Cleave (2009) highlights that research which elicits the views of children with selective mutism tends to be carried out within clinical settings which in itself may increase anxiety for this group of children and further inhibit their speech. Difficulty with speaking for children with selective mutism is not only linked to the setting but may also be concerned with whom the individual may be asked to communicate with (Omdal & Galloway, 2007) and it was not possible to ascertain more details of the interplay between ASC and selective mutism for the child in the current study.

The current study to some extent relied on participants being able to recall details of transition events which happened during their last term at primary school prior to starting secondary school and to a lesser extent their first term in secondary school. Difficulties with accuracy concerning retrospective accounts of an event are acknowledged as a limitation within research generally (Howitt & Cramer, 2008; Mertens, 2010). While the Q-sort statements may have served as an aide memoire more accurate recall may have been possible during the semi-structured interviews if data was gathered at the time instead of relying on retrospection for some of the questions asked. For children with ASC speaking about their experiences may be problematic due to associated language difficulties and social communication (Losh & Capps, 2003). In the current research some of these difficulties appear to have been ameliorated due to the use of a supportive structure, such as the transition statements, to encourage self-reflection (Knott, Dunlop & Mackay, 2006) and triangulation with their responses in the semi-structured interviews and as highlighted as being beneficial in the previous pilot study (Bennett-Warne, 2013). The researcher also acknowledges that the number of statements included within each transition factor could have led to participants focusing on a particular aspects of transition more than others. For example, the factor of logistics and sensory issues contain 8 and 7 statements respectively, compared with 4 statements related to learning and 5 related to teasing and bullying. This could primarily be accounted for because the factor of logistics was frequently highlighted within the transition literature while teasing and bullying was noted less frequently. The researcher also did not want to over emphasise potentially negative experiences for the participant group while being mindful of enabling opportunities for them to talk about sensitive
issues as needed. The participants were able to comment freely upon the statements contained in the Q-sort and how they had chosen to sort them, by way of member checking. This was captured via the use of fieldwork notes and each participant was also asked to contribute their own statement/s to the Q-sort. This was to acknowledge that the researcher had only tapped into the key areas related to transition and that there may be aspects that individual participants would wish to include in future transition Q sorts to ensure more of a balance between the researcher’s identification of relevant issues and those identified by the participants. The follow up interviews also provided an opportunity for the participants to add further detail regarding their transition experiences and to emphasise aspects which they themselves viewed as a priority while further clarify the researcher’s understanding of their experiences.

The researcher also further acknowledges that the validity of the findings from the thematic analysis could have been even further strengthened had there been an opportunity and time to carry out a more robust, standardised method to explore inter-rater agreement.

While the current study is similar to wider ASC studies, in that it contains a small number of participants, it does add depth and rich detail to the research concerning the transition experiences of children with ASC by triangulating the data from the Q-sort, fieldwork notes and semi-structured interviews with the views of wider stakeholders and by considering the wider factors found within the contextual data for each child, their families and schools (Patton, 2002; Flick, 2004).

5.5 Reflexivity of the researcher in the current study
The researcher acknowledges that as the current study is a qualitative piece of research it is important to acknowledge the position of the researcher in relation to why the chosen area of research is of interest to the researcher, methods selected to research the chosen topic and how personal experiences may influence the analysis of the data and how findings are presented. Consideration of this may initially be in relation to the epistemological and axiological position of the researcher and as outlined in chapter three. The researcher also kept a research diary throughout the process and used this as reflective tool as well as a log for research activities.
The original impetus for this research came from two areas initially. The first was an interest by the researcher in wanting to carry out research which directly involved working with children and young people with autism. Having been a teacher for children with autism in both specialist and mainstream primary provision the researcher was very interested in the different experiences children with autism seemed to have once they moved to secondary school. The second reason for undertaking the current study was to gather the views of children with ASC regarding the processes they may experience as part of their education as there seemed to be little representation of this in the literature read prior to starting the current study.

On a personal level during the time of the pilot study, data gathering and write-up of the current study the researcher’s own children transitioned to secondary school which served as a source of insight into the process of transition and how a child may feel about moving to secondary school. On an even more personal level, during the process of writing up the current study the researcher had cause to reflect on her own transition to secondary school and how some of the wider circumstances and factors influenced her own experiences. The researcher was also aware of how possible preconceived ideas regarding transition may influence the interpretation of the data and reflected upon some of these notions with colleagues and in supervision.

The researcher experienced most satisfaction during the research process when data gathering and working directly with the children, parents and teachers involved in the research. Being able to quickly forge effective relationships with the participants built on mutual respect and trust was fundamental to the success of the data gathering stage. Also the researcher found devising and utilising the transition Q-sort as a tool for gathering the children’s views particularly rewarding especially when learning about a new methodology with the potential to be adapted for use with a range of participants. Retaining the use of the Q-sort as a data gathering tool within the current study was important for the researcher in terms of building upon findings from the pilot study which also enabled the researcher to feel the research process retained elements of creativity and innovation. The researcher was also aware of having a possible positive bias regarding the effectiveness of the Q-sort as a tool and that is why colleagues were
consulted about the Q-sort and partly why semi-structured interviews were also used with the children in order to gain a richer picture of transition.

The researcher is also aware of the strengths and limitations around the type and quality of data gathered using the policies, Q-sort and semi-structured interviews. Given the potential limitations of each of these methods using them in combination enabled the researcher to draw upon their strengths to address the gaps in the data using the different data gathering tools. The Q-sort in this instance was intended to act as a tool for gathering data about the child’s experiences of transition. The findings from each child’s Q-sort was considered and used to build in more detail around the probes and prompts within each child’s semi-structured interview. Similarly the researcher took care to ensure that interviews were completed with the children prior to starting interviews with each parent, then teacher. At each interview stage prompts and probes were built in to the interview schedule which took into account the information gained from the prior interview e.g. the Q-sort data informed the interview schedules with the child which in turn informed those with the parents, which informed those with the teachers. Grey data for each school was read in detail just prior to undertaking the teacher interviews and therefore aspects of the policies and procedures were considered within the probes for questions asked regarding wider school factors for each child. The researcher was able to utilise different data gathering tools, Q-sort, interviews, school policies to build a sequential and incremental approach to gathering data and as set out in the case study protocol.

When viewed individually the data produced from the Q-sort, interviews and policy documents provides details of particular aspects of transition from certain perspectives. By considering the views of the child, the parents, the teacher and the interaction with the wider home and school factors a more complete and holistic picture of transition is gained for the children with ASC in the current study. Some of the insights gained from the Q-sort provided further impetus for probes and prompts to be added to interview schedules when speaking with parents. This was particularly true when exploring possible incidences of teasing and bullying experienced. Examples of good practice or discrepancies between policy and procedure highlighted by parents could be subtly explored further during interviews with the teachers. When viewed individually the data
from individual sources could only provide a one dimensional view of transition. Drawing upon multiple pieces of data enabled the researcher to build a more complete picture of the transition experiences of the children with ASC participating in the research.

A main driving force to carrying out the research was the opportunity to enable children with ASC to give their views and for their voice to be central to the research process. It was intended that by doing so insights would be gained into their transition experiences. While formal evaluation of the use of the transition Q-sort was not undertaken in the research three of the children commented that having the statement cards helped them remember and think about moving to secondary school. The researcher felt that for all of the children seeking their views directly about their experiences and placing importance upon them seemed somewhat novel for them.

5.6 Recommendations for future research
This research was intended to gather a rich picture of the transition experiences of children with ASC as they moved into mainstream secondary school by seeking the views of the children, their parents and their teachers after a term in secondary school. This was in order to allow them to reflect upon their experiences rather than react to them. While the Q-sort may have supported the children’s recall of perhaps distant events future research may benefit from taking a more longitudinal approach. Data may be gathered before transition, a term afterwards and when the children are about to leave year 7 and beyond as findings from the current research suggest that effects of transition may be longer lasting for children with ASC (Hebron & Humphrey, 2014; White, Oswald, Ollendick, & Scanhill, 2009).

Although the current study did not measure the effects of intrinsic characteristics, such as cognitive ability, anxiety levels and the sensory perceptions of the children as previous research has done (Brooks, 2014; Gumaste, 2012) it did informally explore some aspects related to personality, motivation and resilience. Findings are highlighted which tentatively suggest that wider intrinsic characteristics may have some influence upon transition experiences and further research, particularly with regards to the role that motivation and resilience may have for children with ASC, warrants further investigation. Such research may then inform wider support strategies to be developed which focus on
the individual developing aspects of their motivation or resilience as a protective factor during times of challenge such as transition.

5.7 Implications for schools and local authorities

The wider systemic factors implicated in the transition to secondary school for children with ASC highlight the importance of devising well-planned programmes of transition which are flexible enough to meet the individual needs of the child with ASC. A wider proactive approach to anticipating the needs of children with ASC during transition, as highlighted by Bond and Hebron (2013), could be adopted as good practice within both primary and secondary schools. During the current research the findings highlighted that to a certain extent it was not always clear whether the primary school staff or the secondary school staff were taking the lead in planning and carrying out the transition programmes and this was more evident when there were not already established links in place such as with feeder schools. There is scope for the specific roles and responsibilities regarding transition planning and procedures to be more clearly defined within both primary and secondary schools particularly in relation to approaches to sharing information and supporting children undergoing assessment but without a formal diagnosis of ASC.

It was not clear from the current research the extent to which individual schools utilised specific transition checklists or tools to support children with ASC except for one child who received specific support from autism outreach. The Transition Tool kit as developed by Autism Education Trust (Stobart, no date) or the Transition Toolbox (Dunlop et al., 2009) contain details for the gathering and sharing of information and identification of training needs by staff regarding children with ASC as part of the transition process.

Within the current study there was a mixed picture regarding the extent to which the expertise of parents was utilised within the transition process for their child. This was especially evident for one of the children who received a diagnosis very late into the summer term prior to starting secondary school. Knowledge of their child’s strengths and difficulties could have contributed to a more detailed transition plan being put into place thereby reducing the difficulties this child encountered initially.
Charman et al., (2011) also note within the good practice report that an identified transition person may be able to liaise between staff in the primary and secondary school setting, the child and parents. Although to some extent aspects of this role may be covered by EP involvement perhaps there is scope for the local authority to consider providing staff specifically trained and experienced with regards to autism to act as transition co-ordinators for children with ASC and perhaps for children undergoing social communication and interaction difficulties without a formal diagnosis. In any event the EP is also able to provide transition planning advice.

While a child is still attending primary school there are implications for staff regarding preparing the child with ASC for the move to secondary school perhaps for longer than would be necessary for more typical children. Further liaison between primary and secondary staff may enable primary staff to devise transition support packages which prepare the child with ASC in ways which may help develop their resilience. For one child in the current research it was noted by the secondary school teacher that the primary school had accommodated his needs so well, as in allowing him to stay in at playtimes, that he found the realities of a large busy secondary especially difficult to manage initially and that avoidance of social situations did not serve him well in the longer term. Perhaps transition preparations within primary school for children with ASC could also include consideration of the child’s longer term needs as they move towards starting secondary school and this type of preparation would perhaps need to begin earlier for children with ASC such as in year 5. Such findings are also commented on in the research by Gumaste (2011).

The children in the current research noted incidences of teasing and bullying during periods when adults in the school were less visible. School staff may need to consider how vulnerable children with ASC may be at such times and consider approaches to ameliorate or remove the chances of such incidences occurring. Utilising a buddy system, raising peer group awareness, or having staff more visible during these times could be considered.
5.7.1. Implications for parents.
The current research findings support the belief that the parents of children with ASC provide an expert view of their own children as suggested by the rich, detailed picture each parent was able to provide regarding their child and aspects of ASC. Parents should be consulted widely as part of transition planning procedures for their child with ASC and indeed consulting with parents regarding decisions which affect their child is a cornerstone of the SEN code of practice (DfE, 2014).

As some children within the current research experienced a late diagnosis of ASC prior to transition to secondary school it may be that parents have a more proactive role to play in sharing the detailed knowledge they have about their child in order to further facilitate the detailed individualised transition planning suggested for children with ASC.

Parents also have a significant role to play in helping their child prepare socially and emotionally for the move to secondary school and there is scope for close liaison with both the primary and secondary school regarding the development of support strategies that may be used at home to prepare for the changes involved with the move to secondary school.

5.7.2. Implications for Educational Psychologists.
During times of transition educational psychologists often work alongside children with ASC, their parents and teachers and may act as a point of liaison between the primary and secondary school settings and the home. Findings highlighted within the current research implicate a contribution to be made by the EP in supporting the process of transition at an individual, whole school and wider local authority level.

In order to better understand the process of transition for children with ASC their views need to be at the centre of the decision making process as experts in their own experiences (Billington, 2006) and EPs have a key role to play in helping to facilitate this as emphasised within the Children and Families Bill (DfE, 2014). By enabling children with ASC to express their views about transition more detailed information regarding their strengths and needs may be utilised as part of the information sharing which is highlighted as good practice in autism education (Charman et al., 2011). EPs could also contribute to the generation of detailed information about the individual child which
Seemed especially beneficial in the current research when devising tailored transition plans. EPs are also able to support school settings regarding inclusive practice for children with ASC in mainstream settings (Williams, Johnson & Sukhodolsky, 2005).

The EP may also be able to facilitate a shared understanding by staff, not only of key elements of autism and how these may be influenced by wider systemic factors within the home and school settings, but also in relation to any co-occurring difficulties individual children with ASC may experience. This seemed especially pertinent to the current research as for some of the children with ASC it appeared that co-occurring difficulties such as selective mutism may have presented as their key area of concern at times rather than aspects of autism necessarily. In this respect the EP is well placed to be able to provide a more holistic picture of the individual child’s strengths and needs.

At a wider whole school and local authority level the EP is able to provide support and training regarding the psychosocial aspects of ASC. More specifically they are well placed to enable schools to develop specific processes intended to support children with ASC as they transition to mainstream secondary school. Specific work may involve liaising with the setting to audit their practice using the Charman et.al., (2011) best practice in autism framework to devise effective processes and strategies to support individual children with ASC; to develop wider friendships or to enable a school setting to proactively manage teasing and bullying which children with ASC may experience, for instance, through activities to increase peer awareness.

EPs also have a role to play in awareness raising around ASC particularly in relation to providing support during transition for children who are being assessed as having possible social communication and interaction difficulties but who do not receive a formal diagnosis until late into primary school or indeed once they have started at secondary school. EPs may also provide support to enable parents understand key information regarding ASC particularly when a formal diagnosis of ASC for some children is made late into the transition process.

5.7.3. Contribution to knowledge.
A key aim of this research was to explore the transition experiences of children with ASC as they moved to mainstream secondary school in year 7. A particular focus of the
research was to support the children in being able to express their views by utilising a transition Q-sort as a data gathering tool and by adapting methods of communication to enable all participants to be fully included in the research process. To the researcher’s knowledge there are no articles pertaining to the use of Q-sort and how it may be adapted for use with children with ASC. The current research highlights in detail how this method may be adapted specifically with key considerations taken into account, such as minimising possible associated language difficulties when devising statement cards and how the layout of the Q-sort may be adapted for individuals while retaining the validity of the method.

By also considering wider systemic factors involved in transition to secondary school for children with ASC the researcher has highlighted the applicability of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979; 1992) ecosystemic model in relation to transition and highlighted within the research examples of what may be considered good practice in autism education as outlined by Charman et al., (2011).

While transition to secondary school for the typical population has been widely researched and, to a lesser extent, for children with SEN generally there is limited research specifically concerning the experiences of children with ASC as they transition from mainstream primary to mainstream secondary. More specifically there is a lack of research which directly elicits the views of children with ASC (or of those with ASC and selective mutism) and the views of wider stakeholders regarding the process of transition to mainstream secondary school such as parents and teachers. The current research provides a specific contribution to the knowledge regarding the transition experiences of children with ASC as they move to mainstream secondary school and an exploration of the wider systemic factors involved in relation to this as part of a wider theoretical framework. From the findings implications for future practice for schools, parents and educational psychologists are tentatively suggested and possible future research highlighted.
References


Stobart, A. (No date). Transition toolkit: Helping you support a child through change. Autism Education Trust (AET)


University of Manchester. (2014). D.Ed.Ch.Psychol. Review framework for quantitative investigation research


**Appendix**

**Appendix A: Excluded research articles**

These are listed by order of exclusion criteria and alphabetically therein.

**Excluded due to duplication of material in systematic literature review**


**Excluded, E1- Not year 7 transition**


**Excluded, E2- Does not focus on the experiences of transition to secondary school of children with ASC.**


Evangelou, M., Taggart, B., Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P. & Siraj-Blatchford, I.


**Excluded, E3- Is a systematic literature review or meta-analysis (except for reference harvesting)**


**Excluded, E4- Review articles**

Appendix B: Criteria to evaluate exploratory quantitative research (University of Manchester, 2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data gathering</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear research question or hypothesis</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate process for participant/ item identification</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate data gathering method used</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive data gathering method</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduction of bias within participant recruitment/ item selection</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response rate/ item elicitation maximised</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population subgroup data collected (e.g. participant gender; item context)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data analysis</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data analysis</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time trends identified</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographic considerations</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate statistical analyses (descriptive or inferential)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-level or inter-group analyses present</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data interpretation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear criteria for rating of findings</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of the research considered in relation to initial aims</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications of findings linked to rationale of research question</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total Score:** 0-5 = low, 6-10 = medium, 11-15 = high
### Appendix C: Quality of evidence criteria for qualitative studies (Spencer et al., 2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appropriateness of the research design</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear sampling rationale</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-executed data collection</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis close to the data</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergent theory related to the problem</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of explicit reflectivity</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensiveness of documentation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative case analysis</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarity and coherence of the reporting</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of researcher–participation negotiation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferable conclusions</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of attention to ethical issues</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rating category

0-4 low, 5-8 medium, 9-12 is high

For articles involving mixed methodology criterion from both University of Manchester (2014) and Spencer et al., (2003) were applied to the corresponding methods. The quantitative and qualitative methods are rated separately for those articles.
Appendix D: Scoring of articles for specific literature review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study in SLR</th>
<th>Score using criteria to evaluate exploratory quantitative research (UoM, 2014)</th>
<th>Score using criteria to evaluate qualitative research (Spencer et al., 2003)</th>
<th>Overall rating of methodological quality (priority given to qualitative score)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brooks, 2014</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dillon &amp; Underwood, 2012</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah &amp; Topping, 2013</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles, 2012</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gumaste, 2011</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jindal-Snape et al., 2006</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dann, 2011</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given the qualitative nature of the current research the final overall rating for methodological quality was arrived at by prioritising the qualitative research score.
Appendix E: Weight of evidence criteria (Gough, 2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Appropriateness of methodology to current research (W o E·B)</th>
<th>Appropriateness of findings to current research (W o E·C)</th>
<th>Overall weight of evidence criteria (W o E·D)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Methodology used allows for the detailed exploration of the experiences of transition to year 7 in mainstream secondary school for children with ASC. The child’s views regarding their experiences are gained directly and supplementary data collection is used to illuminate their experiences further. The methods used for gaining the child’s views are clearly outlined and critiqued.</td>
<td>The findings concern the year 7 mainstream secondary school transition experiences of the child with ASC. Findings are clearly and directly related to the data gathered and given weight within the reporting. The findings for the child are reported on an individual basis and based upon their experiences and clearly triangulated with the views of parents, teachers and findings from analysis of contextual information.</td>
<td>Number of ratings across the weight of evidence criteria amalgamated to form an overall weight of evidence rating. Consideration will be given to number of participants and how appropriate the method and findings are in relation to the current study. Weighting will be given to qualitative elements of mixed methodology studies and to those which utilise methods which especially support eliciting the views of the child with ASC as these aspects are most pertinent to current research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Methodology allows for some direct exploration of the child’s views and approaches used may limit the child’s responses. The views of parents and teachers are also explored. Wider systemic factors and contextual data are considered.</td>
<td>The findings of the views of the child with ASC are not closely related to the data and are not reported on an individual basis. Findings are amalgamated across groups of participants. Findings for wider contextual factors are not directly related to the child’s transition experiences.</td>
<td>Number of ratings across the weight of evidence criteria amalgamated to form an overall weight of evidence rating. Qualitative methods given greater weighting and consideration given to studies which focus on transition to year 7.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>The child’s views are not sought directly and their experiences are based on the views of their parents and teachers.</td>
<td>The findings may have a limited focus on Y7 transition and only relate to the views of wider stakeholders regarding the year 7 transition experiences of the child with ASC. The wider contextual factors are not considered.</td>
<td>Number of ratings across the weight of evidence criteria amalgamated to form an overall weight of evidence rating. Weighting given to qualitative methods. Voice of the child is not represented directly.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F: Case study protocol

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage of case study</th>
<th>Action/rationale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Overview of study   | • There is limited research regarding transition from mainstream primary to mainstream secondary school concerning children with ASC.  
• Research is needed which specifically and directly elicits the voice of the child with ASC particularly in relation to their experiences of transition and education generally.  
• The “voice of the child” and incorporating CYPs views as part of decisions affecting them is high on the SEN agenda particularly in relation to the recent legislative changes i.e. Children Act 2014  
• The current research focuses on approaches to elicit the views of children with ASCs as part of a wider exploration of their experiences of transition from a mainstream primary to a mainstream secondary school. |
| Overview of study design | • The research uses multiple-embedded case study design and is exploratory in nature.  
• The case is the child with ASC’s experience of transition from a mainstream primary to a mainstream secondary.  
• First unit of analysis: the experience of transition to secondary school from child, parent and teacher perspectives.  
• Second unit of analysis: Facilitators and barriers to transition for a Year 7 child with ASC.  
• There were four cases from across three mainstream secondary schools (Case 1 in school A; case 2 and case 3 in school B and case 4 in school C). All three schools are within the same LA in the Northwest of England. |
| Case study procedure | • See table 6 (section 3.6.1) for details of participant recruitment and selection. |
| Case selection | • Purposive sampling was used to recruit schools and participants for the study.  
• Inclusion criteria for the schools: mainstream secondary schools educating Year 7 children with ASC who transition from a mainstream primary school  
• Exclusion criteria: mainstream secondary schools incorporating resourced provision for children with ASC within the setting.  
• Inclusion criteria for child participants: Year 7 children with diagnosis of ASC having transitioned in September 2012 from a mainstream primary school to a mainstream secondary school. Participants with or without a Statement of Special Educational Need to be included. Wider co-occurring difficulties are not an exclusion criteria per se and were considered on an individual basis as part of further sampling approach ( see sampling approach in section 3.6.1)  
• Inclusion criteria for parents: parents/carers of Year 7 child with ASC having transitioned from a mainstream primary school to a mainstream secondary school in September 2012.  
• Inclusion criteria for school staff: member of staff who best knows the Year 7 child with ASC. Further information regarding school policies to be sought from the SENCo if necessary. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data gathering</th>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.</td>
<td>• Transition Q-sort with each child participant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.</td>
<td>• Semi-structured interview with each child participant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.</td>
<td>• Semi-structured interviews with each parent/s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.</td>
<td>• Request copies of policies from SENCo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.</td>
<td>• Semi-structured interviews with member of staff who knows the child best.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data analysis</th>
<th>Stage of analysis</th>
<th>Data source</th>
<th>Method of analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stage 1: Case by case analysis</td>
<td>• Completed Q-sort grid data.</td>
<td>Content analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Case 1: Child</td>
<td>• Full verbatim transcript of interviews</td>
<td>Thematic analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>• Full verbatim transcript.</td>
<td>Thematic analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>• Full verbatim transcript.</td>
<td>Thematic analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School context</td>
<td>• Grey data.</td>
<td>Content analysis (directed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Case 2</td>
<td>As above</td>
<td>As above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Case 3</td>
<td>As above</td>
<td>As above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Case 4</td>
<td>As above</td>
<td>As above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stage 2: Cross case analysis</td>
<td>Data analysed from across each case</td>
<td>The same process of analysis applied for each of the 4 cases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cross case synthesis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Reporting     |                    | The findings will be reported to the participants, school staff and the EPS where the research took place and the researcher works as a trainee EP. |
Appendix G: Q-sort process

Brown (1980) proposes that the selection and organisation of statements in a Q-sort is “more an art than a science”. However, through consideration of the statements a structure may emerge for organising and grouping the statements or a structure may be imposed by existing knowledge or theory the researcher has particularly focused on. Either way is acceptable as it is the participant which gives the statements meaning through the act of sorting them (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

To complete a Q-sort participants are asked to sort the statement cards according to their views and the salience they attach to the statements. They are requested to place each statement along a given scale which is often labelled numerically with descriptors attached which broadly describe the numerical categories (see figure 1a). The exact wording of the descriptors is not pre-ordained and may be adjusted according to the needs of the individual in order to support their understanding of what is required of them but need to reflect a polarised view in order to elicit what the participants may feel most strongly about (Combes, Hardy & Buchan, 2004; Watts & Stenner, 2012).

Figure 1a: Distribution scale for Q-sort

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most strongly disagree</th>
<th>Most strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-4</td>
<td>+4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-3</td>
<td>+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-2</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-1</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of points along the scale is largely determined by the number of statements in the Q-set. Brown (1980) advocates that a nine point distribution scale be used for Q-sets with 40 or less statements. In general the greater the number of statements the greater the number of points on the scale. However the scale is constructed it is important to consider the impact on the participant as a scale with too few points may cause the participants to feel somewhat restricted in expressing their views and too long a scale may increase unnecessary decision making on the part of the participant (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Indeed for some participants the use of negatively or positively signed numbers may cause difficulty or confusion when completing the Q-sort and therefore, for the purpose of administration, the point scale may be adapted to suit the needs of the
participant group i.e. use of colours or numbers without + or – assigned to them (Combes, Hardy & Buchan, 2004).

How many statement cards are placed under each scale point is guided by the type of distribution pattern adopted by the researcher. For some studies free distribution for sorting the statement cards is utilised which allows the participant to place as many or as few of the Q-sort cards under each point on the scale. Other Q-sorts employ a forced distribution for sorting. That is, a pre-set number of statement cards would need to be placed underneath each point on the scale. The format for a forced distribution should form an approximation of a normally distributed bell curve (inverted) (Stephenson, 1935) (see figure 1b)

Figure 1b: Q-sort Forced distribution grid

Appendix H: Development of Q-sort statements
Appendix H: Development of Q-sort statements

Significant consideration was given to generating the statements for the Q-sort. A structured Q-sort was decided upon because the research was intended to explore specific aspects of transition for children with ASCs. This involved researching literature on transition into Yr7 for typically developing children, transition for children with SEN and more specifically transition for children with ASCs. Further information was sought from transition guidelines produced by the National Autistic Society (NAS, 2006) and information regarding sensory issues for children with ASCs (Bogdashina, 2003). An initial guiding mind-map of key transition issues was drawn up by the researcher. This was used to devise the following sub-sets or themes:

Table 1: Transition Q-sort factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transition factor</th>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Corresponding statement No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Logistics</td>
<td>• journey to school</td>
<td>4,7,10,13,16,20,21,25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• finding way around school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• timetable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• break times and lunch times</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• school rules</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>• different learning expectations</td>
<td>5,8,11,28,29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• different teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• learning styles and needs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from adults</td>
<td>• parents</td>
<td>12,18,23,24,30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from peers</td>
<td>• friendships</td>
<td>6,14,17,22,26,27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• wider peer support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teasing and bullying</td>
<td>• from own peer group</td>
<td>1,3,9,19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• from wider school groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensory issues</td>
<td>• noise levels</td>
<td>2,15,31,32,33,34,35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• smells</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• lighting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• tactile</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From these themes more specific transition statements or propositions were developed.

The statements were written with due regard to the participants’ level of language understanding and reading ability. For the purposes of the study the participants’ reading ages were used as an approximate guide to ensure they would be able to access the Q-
statements as independently as possible. School records indicated that for the pilot study the participants’ reading ages varied between 8.5-10 yrs. Both the class teacher and the TLAs were shown sample Q-statements and concurred that the participant group should be able to read and understand them independently.

Once an initial set of statements was generated this was shown to two university supervisors with expertise in using Q-sort methodology and working with children with ASC. A further consultation was carried out with a fieldwork supervisor who specialises in issues related to transition for young people with ASC. Two statements were altered to take sensory issues more into account and simplify the meaning.

There were 30 statements in total for the pilot study (see appendix I statements 130). The number of statements decided on represents a best compromise between what is regarded as necessary to produce quantitatively satisfactory results (25-35 statements) and a requirement to take the needs of the participant group into account (Watts and Stenner, 2005). Therefore to minimise the risk of inducing anxiety or fatigue during the Q-sort, due to possible language difficulties, the number of statements were kept to a reasonable level. Statements were written with the over-arching transition factors in mind with consideration given to the number of statements within each theme to ensure a balanced set of Q-statements (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

Similarly, the Q-statements were worded to avoid more complex considerations (i.e. I enjoy school because the teachers always understand me) and double-barrelled items (i.e. I have made friends in and out of school). Some negatively expressed statements were included in the pilot study. On reflection following the pilot study the researcher changed the negatively expressed statements as they were especially problematic for children with ASCs (Losh & Capps, 2003) and not necessary for a Q-sort because the participants may scale any statement under -4,-3,-2,-1 if they so wished.

Each statement was printed onto a sorting card measuring (6cm x 6cm) using comic sans font size 16 and numbered unobtrusively. For the thesis research there were 35 statements in total. Items 31-35 were added following the pilot study.

The kurtosis or shape of the distribution of the Q-sort is determined by the researcher through consideration of the topic of interest and the sample group. If the participants
are considered not likely to hold strong views about the research topic then a steeper kurtosis, where more statements are placed in the centre of the Q-sort distribution grid, may be used. This would be in order to accommodate the higher number of statements the participants are likely to feel ambiguous about and to discern those they feel more strongly about as fewer statements will be placed at either end of the distribution scale (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

A *forced distribution* format is often selected in order to simplify the analytic process and, while this format may be criticised for being unduly restricting for some participants (Brown, 1980), employing a *free distribution* format does not add any additional information for the researcher (Watts & Stenner, 2012).
Appendix I: Q-statements

1. I like going to school.
2. I like wearing a school uniform.
3. I feel safe at school.
4. I like going to the school canteen for lunch.
5. I can learn well at my school.
6. I have friends at school.
7. Sometimes I get lost in school.
8. My teachers know how I like to learn.
9. The children in my class are nice to me.
10. I enjoy break times at school.
11. Staff at my school help me when my work is difficult.
12. My parents help me get my books and equipment ready for school.
13. I can go to lunchtime clubs.
14. I have friends from other classes in school.
15. Secondary school is noisy.
16. I understand the rules in school.
17. I can share my hobbies and special interests with people at school.
18. My primary school helped me when I moved to secondary school.
19. Other children tease me at school.
20. I like to go on the playground at break times.
21. I can follow my timetable.
22. I have a best friend at school.
23. At school there is someone I can talk to if I feel unhappy or worried.
24. My teachers understand me.
25. I enjoy my journey to school.
26. The other children in school understand me.
27. I have made new friends at secondary school.
28. I need help to do my class work.
29. I can do my homework by myself.
30. If I get upset there is a safe place for me to go to.
31. Sometimes I need to go to a quiet place.
32. The lights are too bright in school.
33. There are strong smells at school.
34. I can feel upset if people stand too close to me.
35. I enjoy messy activities in school.
Appendix J: Diamond Nine activity

HANDOUT 01: Diamond 9

Using the nine options below, complete the diamond nine ranking your highest priority when you go home from school to your lowest priority.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Watch TV</th>
<th>Play on the computer</th>
<th>Play sport</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Go out with friends</td>
<td>Homework</td>
<td>Shopping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See family</td>
<td>Got to a club e.g. youth club</td>
<td>Other (state what this is)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Name: ___________________________  bbc.co.uk/ps
Appendix K: Child interview questions

- Welcome, thanks and rapport building conversation.
- Recap of the main purpose of the research.
- Researcher to check child still assents to participating and remind them of right to withdraw.

Re-focus question

Do you remember sorting the cards about moving to secondary school? (Remind child with copy of their Q-sort if needed). Could you tell me about when you moved to secondary school?

1. How have the staff at school helped you to settle in to your new school?
2. Could you tell me more about how you made friends in secondary school?
3. How do the children in your class treat you? (Ask how incidences of teasing/bullying dealt with if this arises in the interview)
4. How do you share your hobbies and interests at school?
5. Where can you go at lunch times? (clubs etc)
6. What do you like best about school?
7. What don’t you like about school?
8. How do your teachers help you to learn?
9. How did your primary school help you when you moved to secondary school?
10. Can you think of anything that didn’t help when you moved to secondary school?
11. Who do you speak to in school if you are feeling upset?
12. What could you suggest that could help make the move to secondary school even better?
13. If you could change one thing about secondary school what would it be?
Appendix L: Parent interview questions

- Welcome, introductions and thanks.
- Rapport building conversation.
- Recap of key purpose of research.
- Clarify consent and right to withdraw.

Background questions

- Could you tell a little bit about XXX?
- What does XXX like to do out of school?
- Does XXX have brothers or sisters?
- How many schools has XXX attended before starting at XXX school?
- Did XXX know anyone at his/her new school?
- Did any of XXX friends transfer to secondary school with him/her?

1. Could you tell me a little bit about XXX’s move to secondary school?

2. How did XXX’s primary school help prepare XXX for the move to secondary school?

3. How did XXX feel about starting secondary school?

4. What was XXX most looking forward to about secondary school?

5. Did XXX have any worries about starting secondary school?

6. How did staff help XXX settle in to secondary school?

7. Could you tell be a bit about XXX’s friendships? (In/out of school)

8. How do you feel XXX is treated by the other children in his/her classes? (Wider school setting?)

9. Could you tell about any hobbies/interests XXX has?

10. What opportunities does XXX have for sharing his hobbies with his/her peers?

11. Could you tell me about any lunchtime or after school clubs that XXX is able to go to? (If not available ask what parent thinks their child might like).

12. How do staff support XXX’s learning in school?

13. Who can you speak to at school if you have any concerns about XXX at school?

14. What do you think XXX likes most about secondary school?
15. What do you think XXX likes least (or dislikes) about secondary school?

16. What does XXX school do to specifically support children with autism?

17. What do you think has really helped XXX with the move to secondary school?

18. Can you think of something that could improve the move to secondary school for XXX?
Appendix M: Staff interview questions

- Welcome, introductions and thanks.
- Rapport building conversation.
- Recap of key purpose of research.
- Clarify consent and right to withdraw.

Background/warm-up questions

- Could you tell me about your role at XXX school please?
- How long have you worked at XXX school?
- Could you tell me a bit about XXX?
- Could you tell me about your role supporting XXX?

1. Could you tell me how XXX has been during the transition to secondary school?
2. How was XXX prepared for the transition to secondary school?
3. Were you involved in the transition planning for XXX?
4. What links does XXX have with XXX’s primary school?
5. Could you tell me something about XXX’s friendships in school?
6. How is XXX treated by the other children in his classes? Wider school setting?
7. Could you tell me about XXX’s hobbies /interests?
8. What are the opportunities for XXX to share his interests with his/her peers?
9. What opportunities does XXX have to access lunchtime clubs?
10. Does XXX choose to access any of the lunchtime clubs?
11. How is XXX’s learning supported in school?
12. Could you tell me about any specific support there is in school for children with autism?
13. Are staff aware of any specific sensory difficulties that XXX may have? (Light/sound sensitivity etc)
14. If XXX is upset in school who is available to support him/her?
15. Does XXX have access to a quiet space to go to when needed?
16. What do you think has really helped XXX with the move to secondary school?
17. Can you think of something that could have enhanced the move to secondary school for XXX
Appendix N: Ethical approval

28/1/14
Dear Anita

Ref: PGR-8223650-A1

Project Title: An exploratory study of the experiences of Yr7 pupils with Autistic Spectrum Conditions (ASCs) on transition to mainstream secondary school.

I am pleased to confirm that your ethics application has now been approved by the School Research Integrity Committee (RIC) against a pre-approved UREC template.

If anything untoward happens during your research then please ensure you make your supervisor aware who can then raise it with the RIC on your behalf This approval is confirmation only for the Ethical Approval application.

Regards

Senior Programmes Administrator
School of Environment, Education and Development | The University of Manchester | Arthur Lewis Building 2.020 | Oxford Road | Manchester M13 9PL | UK
Appendix O: Participant Information sheet.

An exploration of the views of Yr7 children with Autistic Spectrum Conditions (ASCs) on transition to mainstream secondary school.

Parent Information Sheet

You and your child are being invited to take part in a research study that will be assessed as part of the researcher’s Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology. Before you decide 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 or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the research?

Anita Bennett-Warne: Educational Support and Inclusion (ESI), School of Education, Ellen Wilkinson Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL.

Title of the Research

An exploration of the views of year Yr7 children with Autistic Spectrum Conditions on Transition to mainstream Secondary School.

What is the aim of the research?

The aim of this research is to try and gain an understanding of the main issues and concerns for Yr7 children with Autistic Spectrum Conditions when they transition (move) from primary school to secondary school. Research into transition at this stage of education tends to focus on the experiences of typically developing children or children with other additional educational needs and there is little research which focuses specifically on the experiences and views of children with autism (ASCs).

Why has my child been chosen?

Your child has been chosen to take part because they have recently transitioned from Yr6 to Yr7 in a mainstream secondary school. There will be 4 different participants from two
secondary schools involved in the research. You have been chosen to take part as the parent of a child with autism who has moved into secondary school.

What would my child be asked to do if they take part?

The researcher will work with your child at school with the class teacher and the teaching and learning assistants in your child’s class.

This will involve your child participating in five activities with the researcher as follows:

- In the first activity your child will be involved in a rapport building activity during which they will be asked to rank statements about a school activity from 1 to 9. This is to introduce the idea of sorting items according to preference and will last 30 minutes.
- In the second activity your child will be asked to sort a series of statement cards about moving to secondary school and issues around this. The activity will be adapted to allow your child to participate fully. This will take up to 30 minutes.
- In the third activity your child will be asked questions regarding their experiences and views about moving to secondary school. This will last 30 minutes.

In the interviews your child will be asked to talk about their experiences of moving to secondary school. The interviews will be recorded using a digital voice recorder and written up for study purposes.

What will I be asked to do as a parent if I decide to take part?

You will be asked to talk about your child’s move to secondary school. You will be asked some questions about your experience and view of your child’s transition into Yr7. This will be recorded and the data written down. All recordings and written records will be confidential, anonymised and the identity only known to the researcher. Anonymised information will only be shared for the purposes of the research. The researcher will look at data from the interview to gather information about your child’s experience of transition to secondary school.

What happens to the data collected?

In the first activity anonymous copies of the completed Diamond Nine sorting activity will be kept for research purposes only. These will be considered only for the purpose of checking that your child is able to complete a ranking or scaling task successfully.

In the second activity the sorted Q-statements will be given an order number and the information analysed for patterns about which issues appear to be most important to your child. An anonymous set of initials will be used. Data will be collected and a number subscribed to the data to maintain anonymity.
In the third activity, your child’s interview will be transcribed by the researcher and any names/places will be anonymised. After this the researcher will look in detail at what was said in the interviews to try and identify themes relating to what has or has not helped with transition from the point of view of the children. The researcher hopes that this will lead to a better understanding of the secondary school transition experiences for children with Autistic Spectrum Conditions and promote discussion on how school staff, parents and Educational Psychologists can best support best practice for individual children.

How is confidentiality maintained?

All information that is collected during this study is strictly confidential. No-one other than the researcher will listen to the audio recordings of your child’s or your interview without your explicit permission. All recordings and transcriptions will be kept securely in a locked filing cabinet or on an encrypted data stick. The audio recordings and transcripts of your interviews will be stored securely for five years after being collected.

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

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you and your child are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to yourself or your school.

Will I be paid for participating in the research?

There will be no payment for participating in this research.

What is the duration of the research?

1 x 30 minute Diamond Nine ranking activity (Child)
1 x 30 minute Q-statement sorting activity (Child)
1x 30 minute interview (Child)
1 x 30-45 minute interview (Parent)
Your child will not miss any teaching time in core subjects to take part in this research.

Where will the research be conducted?

At the school at a time most convenient to your child and school and yourself.

Will the outcomes of the research be published?

The research will be written up into an assignment that will be assessed as part of the researcher’s Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology. The research may also be
published in a scientific journal and your permission will be sought via a consent form to use the data from your interview for this purpose. Again this will all be anonymous.

Criminal Records Check

The researcher has undergone a satisfactory criminal records check and can therefore conduct research on school premises.

Contact for further information

If you have any questions about this research the researcher and supervisor of the project can be contacted for further discussion on any aspect of this study.

Anita Bennett-Warne (researcher):
Address: Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology, Educational Support and Inclusion (ESI), School of Education, Ellen Wilkinson Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, UK, M13 9PL.
Email: anita.bennett-warne@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk
Telephone: 0161 275 3511 or 3460 (Please leave a message with Jackie Chisnall - Programme Secretary)

Caroline Bond (supervisor):
Address: Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology, Educational Support and Inclusion (ESI), School of Education, Ellen Wilkinson Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, UK, M13 9PL.
Email: Caroline.Bond@manchester.ac.uk
Telephone: 0161 275 3511 or 3460 (Please leave a message with Jackie Chisnall - Programme Secretary).

What if something goes wrong?

You can contact the researcher or supervisor at any point during or after the research if you require assistance with anything related to the research conducted.

If there are any issues regarding this research that you would prefer not to discuss with members of the research team, please contact the Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator by either writing to 'The Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator, Research Office, Christie Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL', by emailing: ResearchGovernance@manchester.ac.uk, or by telephoning 0161 275 7583 or 275 8093.
Appendix P: Parental consent letter

Dear Parent/Carer,

I am a trainee educational psychologist from Manchester University on placement with XXXX Local Authority (LA). I am planning to do a research project looking at the views of children with Autistic Spectrum Conditions about their move into secondary school.

It is important to gain the views of children with autism because there is not enough research which includes their opinions and experiences of moving to secondary school. The research project will involve pupils at XXXXXX school chosen by the school’s special educational needs coordinator and class teachers. I am hoping to share the findings of this research with the school staff to further support children with autism in secondary school.

I am writing to request your consent to invite you and your child to take part. Please see the enclosed information sheet which gives more details about what the research project involves.

If you agree to give consent for you and your child to take part in the research, please sign the consent slip below and return it to school. I also would like your consent to include your and your child’s data in the research project. All information will be kept anonymous.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss the research further, please contact me on XXXXXXXX or send me an email at XXXXXXXX. You can contact XXXX, the contact person in school, on XXXXXXXX.

Yours sincerely,

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Please return to XXXXX Secondary School.

Parental Consent (for child)

Name of child: ………………………… Date of Birth: ……… Contact

Telephone Number: ……………………………

I agree that my child’s data may be included in the research project.

Signature of parent/carer: …………………… Date: ……………

I consent to my child’s interview being recorded using a digital voice recorder.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I consent to quotes from my child’s interview being used anonymously as part of the research.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I agree that my child may take part in the research project about moving to secondary school.

Signature of parent/carer: …………………… Date: ……………
Consent to participate as parent

I consent to take part in the research project about moving to secondary school (as a parent).

Signed....................................................
Date:..........................................................

I agree that my data may be included in the research project.

Signature: ................................. Date: .................

I consent to my interview being recorded using a digital voice recorder.

Yes  ☐  No ☐

I consent to quotes from my interview being used anonymously as part of the research.

Yes  ☐  No ☐
When I Moved to Secondary School

The teachers and staff who work with you in school are very interested to learn what you think about your move to secondary school.

Your parents/carers would like to find out what you have to say about your new school too.

If you would like to tell them what you think about moving to secondary school there are two activities you could do to help them find out.

The first would be a card sorting activity.

- The cards have short sentences written on them.
- The sentences are about moving to secondary school.
- The person working with you will ask you to sort out the cards into different piles depending on if you agree a lot with the sentence, agree some of the time with it or do not agree with the sentence.
- There are no “right” or “wrong” answers. It is what you think that is most important.

The researcher is also very interested in what you think about using the card sorting activity so will ask you some questions about that too.

The second activity would be to talk all about it.
The person listening to you will ask you some questions about what it has been like for you moving to secondary school.

- The listener will record what you say on a digital voice recorder. It will be like doing an interview for the radio. You would be able to listen to your interview afterwards.
- The listener will write up the interview so that you can read it. Your name will not be on the writing. It will be anonymous.
- When the activities are finished the person working with you on the activities will talk to you about what it or has been really important for you about moving to secondary school.

Towards the end of Yr7 the researcher would like to meet with you once more to see if any of your views have changed about moving to secondary school.

After the activities, if you wish, the person will share your views with the teachers and staff who work with you. They will be able to use your ideas about moving to secondary school to further help you and other children as they move into school.

Do you have any questions about taking part?

You do not have to take part in these activities. If you do take part you can stop at anytime. Thank you for listening.

I would like to take part in the research about moving to secondary school

Signed..........................................................................
Date....................................
Appendix R: Letter of consent for the teacher

Teacher consent letter.

Teacher participants will also be given a copy of the parent/child information letter.

Dear XXXXXX (teacher),

I am a trainee educational psychologist from Manchester University on placement with XXXX Local Authority (LA). I am planning to do a research project looking at the views of children with Autistic Spectrum Conditions about their move into secondary school.

It is important to gain the views of children with autism because there is not enough research which includes their opinions and experiences of moving to secondary school. The research project will involve pupils at XXXXXX school chosen by the school’s special educational needs coordinator and class teachers. I am hoping to share the findings of this research with the parents and school staff to further support children with autism in secondary school.

I am writing to request your consent to invite you to take part. Please see the enclosed information sheet which gives more details about what the research project involves.

If you agree to give consent to take part in the research, please sign the consent slip below and return it to school. I also would like your consent to include your data in the research project. All information will be kept anonymous.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss the research further, please contact me on XXXXXXXXXXX or send me an email at XXXXXXXXX. You can contact XXXX, the contact person in school, on XXXXXXXXX.

Yours sincerely,

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Please return to the researcher Anita Bennett-Warne (Trainee educational psychologist)

I consent to take part in the research project about moving to secondary school.

Signed....................................................
Date:..................................................................

I agree that my data may be included in the research project. Please initial box.

Signature: ......................... Date: .................

I consent to my interview being recorded using a digital voice recorder. Please initial box.

Yes □ No □

I consent to quotes from my interview being used anonymously as part of the research. Please initial box.

Yes □ No □
## Appendix S: Example content analysis grid (school A)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case: 1</th>
<th>School: A</th>
<th>Data: SEN Policy</th>
<th>Data: Ofsted report</th>
<th>Best Practice Categories (Charman et al., 2011)</th>
<th>Occurrences in document</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Demonstrated (number of occurrences in report)</th>
<th>Elements requiring Improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ambitions and aspirations</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Monitoring progress</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Adapting the curriculum</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Transitions specifically mentioned</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Involvement of other professionals/services</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Staff knowledge and training</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Not ASC specific</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Effective communication</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Broader participation</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strong relationships with families</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Voice of the child</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Voice of the parent</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Equal Opportunities</td>
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</table>
## Appendix T: Case by case Q-sort rankings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category/code</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Case 1</th>
<th>Case 2</th>
<th>Case 3</th>
<th>Case 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Statement ranked at +4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Statement ranked at -4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Statements ranked at 0</td>
<td>21,24,9,18,31,14,19,8,32</td>
<td>21,29,31,26,27,17,33,8,23</td>
<td>5,14,15,28,4,22,7,19,9</td>
<td>34,8,15,12,29,18,35,25,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Statements ranked + (+1 to +4)</td>
<td>10,3,6,11,30,29,23,27,22,15,4,26,16</td>
<td>1,16,13,25,14,30,11,6,5,19,24,18,22</td>
<td>11,25,13,30,17,6,12,3,24,23,21,27,16</td>
<td>17,22,31,23,10,27,6,3,30,9,21,16,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Statements ranked - (-1 to -4)</td>
<td>25,35,17,2,20,7,34,28,5,33,13,12,1</td>
<td>34,12,32,35,3,10,4,5,2,7,20,19,28</td>
<td>10,29,26,8,18,1,20,32,34,2,33,31,35</td>
<td>14,19,11,2,26,24,28,13,20,4,32,33,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Salient information/statement</td>
<td>Fieldwork notes</td>
<td>Fieldwork notes</td>
<td>Fieldwork notes</td>
<td>Fieldwork notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Own statement</td>
<td>I like having a packed lunch</td>
<td>It's very crowded in P.E</td>
<td>I feel the changing rooms are extremely chaotic.</td>
<td>There is too much homework at secondary school.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix U: Example of thematic analysis process

Initial read through of transcript and start of coding process
Refining Initial codes

Selecting codes to group into subthemes and themes