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The Education of Autistic Learners in Wales

Considering the perspectives of autistic learners, their parents, and educators to develop a clear picture of how the education system in Wales currently works and explore the efficacy of the model of inclusive education.

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July 2025

Thesis submitted to Swansea University in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Education)

School of Education

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Swansea University

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Declaration and Statements

Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted for candidature for any degree.

Date: 15th July 2025

Statement 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. External sources have been acknowledged and cited in APA style, with an extensive reference list appended.

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I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be made available for electronic sharing and inter-library loaning.

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All original research undertaken though the course of this project has been compliant with university ethical standards. Ethical approval was gained from the Swansea University College of Arts and Humanities Research Ethics and Governance Committee.

Date: 15th July 2025

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Abstract

Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition impacting an individual's ability to make sense of, and interact with, the world around them. In Wales, the number of autistic learners increases annually, between 2016/17 and 2020/21 the average annual increase was around 10%, equating to over 700 additional autistic students every year. The latest data, the first published during the Additional Learning Needs reform transition period, recorded 9,995 autistic learners, accounting for 2% of the school population, suggesting 1-in-50 learners in Welsh schools were autistic.

Whilst the National Autistic Society regularly produce reports considering parent and pupil perspectives of education in England, there appears to be very little published material emanating from Wales. This research aims to rectify the imbalance, considering the perspectives of autistic learners, their parents, and educators, to develop a clear picture of how the education system in Wales currently works, exploring the efficacy of the Welsh Government's model of inclusive education.

This thesis reports on the data received from 988 individuals, illustrating the challenges faced in educating autistic learners across Wales. Results suggest that whilst 77% of educators generally felt confident in their understanding of autism, 48% of parents felt that their child's current placement was not meeting their individual needs. From the autistic learners' perspective, just 28% said that they felt safe whilst at school, with 76% indicating that they had been the victim of bullying.

Results reported within this thesis indicate educational experiences are significantly enhanced amongst autistic students attending specialist provisions, when compared with their peers, educated in mainstream. The first substantive research in this space in Wales, this thesis makes an original contribution to knowledge, providing an important baseline for further investigation across research, policy and practice in the coming years, to establish if current educational reforms have improved the experiences of autistic learners across Wales.

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List of abbreviations (in alphabetical order)

AAA	Ambitious About Autism
ACCAC	Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales
AEP	Alternative Educational Provisions
ALN	Additional Learning Needs
ALNCo	Additional Learning Needs Coordinator
ALNET	Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal
AN	Additional Needs
APA	American Psychiatric Association
APPAG	All Party Parliamentary Group on Autism
APQ	Autistic Pupil Survey Questionnaire
APsA	American Psychological Association
ASC	Autism Spectrum Condition
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
BMA	British Medical Association
BPS	British Psychological Society
CDD	Childhood Disintegrative Disorder
CGS	Control Group Study
COAHREC	College of Arts and Humanities Research Ethics and Governance Committee
CPAG	Cross-Party Autism Group
DSM	Diagnostic manual of mental health disorders
DWP	Department of Work and Pensions
EC	European Council
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan (England)
EHE	Elective Home Education
EOTAS	Education Otherwise than at School
ESQ	Educator Survey Questionnaire
EU	European Union
FSM	Free School Meals
GLD	General Learning Difficulties
HCEC	House of Commons Education Committee
ICD	International Classification of Diseases
IDP	Individual Development Plan
IEP	Individual Education Plan
IP	Internet Protocol

ITT	Initial Teacher Training
LA	Local Authority
LD	Learning Difficulties
LEA	Local Education Authority
NAS	The National Autistic Society
NCCMH	National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health UK
NHS	National Health Service
NICE	The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence
NPI	New Policy Institute
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
NSPCC	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PCQ	Parent/Carer Survey Questionnaire
PDD	Pervasive Developmental Disorders
PDD-NOS	Pervasive Developmental Disorders-not otherwise specified
PID	Participant Information Document
PLASC	Pupil Level Annual School Census
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
SA	School Action
SA+	School Action Plus
SEBD	Social Emotional Behaviour Difficulties
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCo	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
SPD	Sensory Processing Disorder
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WG	Welsh Government
WHO	World Health Organisation
WTSK	What Teachers Should Know

Chapter 1: Introduction

The aims of this thesis are to present an overview of how the education system in Wales is working for autistic learners. By engaging with autistic learners themselves, together with their parents and carers, and their educators, I aim to develop an understanding of whether the Welsh Government's model of inclusive education, is perceived to work for this group of learners.

As autism is central to the project, this first chapter begins by offering the reader a brief introduction to the condition. Within Section 1.1, we take a look at what autism is, its history, and the developments in diagnostic criteria, and scientific, academic, and societal, knowledge and understanding. Consideration will be given to what is known about causation, epidemiology, prevalence, and sex/gender differences. Section 1.2 acknowledges the sensitivities surrounding the use of language and terminology when discussing autism. The conception, and most of the planning for this project coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The main participant engagement activities took place whilst the country was still grappling with the pandemic, therefore, Section 1.3 presents a brief overview of how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted education in Wales. In Section 1.4, there is a brief introduction to the author, providing an explanation for why this project was of interest, and what drove the desire to ensure that autistic young people were able to share their views on their experiences of being educated in Wales. To conclude this introductory chapter, Section 1.5 offers a brief overview of the make-up of this thesis, signposting the contents of each chapter.

1.1 What is autism?

> *'Autism is the name given to a behaviour pattern, produced in a complicated way, as the end result of a long chain of causation and there is no way of explaining it in a few words*' (Wing, 1990, p.1).

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE, 2011) define the term autism, as a description of indicators including impairments and differences in social communication skills, in combination with restricted interests and repetitive behaviours. Autism is a lifelong neurological and biological developmental condition (National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health UK (NCCMH), 2013). The National Autistic Society (NAS) (2016) state that autism is an incurable disability that impacts an individual's communication and interaction with others, affecting their ability to relate to and experience the environment that surrounds them. Curators of the diagnostic manuals of mental health disorders (DSM) the American Psychiatric Association (APA) (2018) highlight the heterogeneous nature of autism, suggesting that no two autistic individuals present with the same symptomology, with presentation and severity varying widely. Intellectual ability amongst the autistic community is just as varied and can extend from the most severe of impairment to extremely superior levels of intelligence or skillset (WHO, 2019a). Autism, as a condition, is understood to appear throughout the world and can be found amongst all racial and ethnic populations (American Psychological Association, 2020).

1.1.1 Autism: An early history

Whilst autism, as we currently understand it, was not defined as a condition until the works of Leo Kanner and Hans Asperger were published in the mid-1940s, retrospective analysis of historical documented evidence has prompted many authors to recognise accounts of autism, or at very least individuals displaying autistic behaviours, dating back many centuries before.

As far back as the twelfth century, 'The Blessed Fools of Old Russia' were said to be venerated by the general population as wise prophets. Retrospectively, the behaviours these 'blessed fools' are reported to have displayed could be considered closely related to more current thinking on autism (Challis & Dewey, 1974; Frith, 2003; Moore, 2001; Trevett, 2009). 'The Wild Boy of Aveyron' is a story from France, of a feral child abandoned and left to survive in the wild in the early 1800s (Boucher, 2017; Shattuck, 1976; Wing, 1990). Taken in and given the name Victor,

he was reported to take the hands of an adult and lead them to a wheelbarrow, in which he enjoyed being wheeled around, and placing the adult's hands on the handles before climbing in. He demonstrated frustration and impatience by destroying toys. Victor was also said to have a 'decided taste for order' which he displayed through becoming unsettled until removed items were returned to their rightful place. Wing, (2002) considers most parents of autistic children would find similarities in the behaviours Victor was recorded as displaying, with those of their own children today, despite the centuries between them.

Retrospective analysis of accounts and case notes from British physicians and psychiatrists, throughout the nineteenth century have also provided insights of possible autism cases. Dr John Haslam described a five-year-old boy admitted to his clinic, whom from the age of two became harder to control, presenting with delayed speech and late walking (Deisinger, 2011; Gillberg, 2006; Wolff, 2004). The boy was said to have been distracted, agitated, displaying signs of hyperactivity, and obsessive behaviours, whilst constantly referring to himself in the third person. He never attempted to join others in their play and would pull on his mother's arm to gain her attention whenever he wanted something.

Reflecting on Haslam's work, Vaillant (1962) suggested that his account of the boy came the closest to anticipating the modern understood definitions of autism. Waltz and Shattock (2004) analysed the case notes of Dr William Howship Dickinson, a doctor working in the mid to late nineteenth century within the fledgling Great Ormond Street Hospital, London. Patient notes referred to developmental delays, lack of or delayed speech, attention and gaze difficulties, unusual patterns of play, repetitive movements, feeding complications with bowel complaints, and restricted interests alongside self-harming behaviours (Waltz, 2013). Dr Dickinson used the term dementia within the diagnoses for the boys, a term frequently used at the time for schizophrenia (Feinstein, 2010). Henry Maudsley (1879) published 'The Pathology of Mind' containing a chapter in which

he discussed 'the insanity of childhood' (Goldstein & Ozonoff, 2009). Describing one thirteen-year-old boy, Maudsley explained how he was unable to learn like his peers and displayed no interest in associating with them, he lacked social and moral sympathies and preferred to spend hours staring directly at a world map, rather than at play. This boy demonstrated an incredible knowledge of places from across the world and would recite them all. Wolff (2004) considered the child within these case notes as a candidate for meeting modern diagnostic criteria for autism.

At the turn of the twentieth century, psychologist Sante De Sanctis identified a deterioration of cognitive function amongst a cohort of Italian children. Describing the sudden onset of unusual mannerisms, withdrawal, and negativity, symptomologies we would now class as classic autism-related behaviours (Feinstein, 2010; Morgese & Lombardo, 2019; Stefanatos & Joe, 2016). Austrian Theodore Heller used the term '*dementia infantilis*' in 1908 to describe the acute developmental reversion he had witnessed in children aged between three and four years, who had apparently displayed normal development to that point. Areas of regression included language, social skills, motor-skills, play behaviour or bladder and bowel control (Wicks-Nelson & Israel, 2009; Volkmar et al., 2005). This condition would become known as '*childhood disintegrative disorder*' (Deisinger, 2011). Swiss psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler is widely recognised as the first person to use the term autism in 1911, combining the Greek terms '*autos*' (*self*) and '*ismos*' (*a suffix used in describing an action or state*) to coin the German word '*autismus*' (*the state of the self*) (Deisinger, 2011; Feinstein, 2010; Goldstein & Ozonoff, 2009). Bleuler suggested that '*autismus*' was an extreme, severe form of schizophrenia that placed individuals deep into their own world, leaving them somehow detached from reality (Dilly & Hall, 2018; Kuhn & Cahn, 2004). Bleuler (1950) describes the autistic symptomology as including loss of contact with reality, or care for the world around them, bizarre and impulsive behaviours, a sense of aimlessness and distraction, whilst also demonstrating '*whimsical obstinacy*', obsessional mannerisms, and involuntary, instinctive acts. '*Childhood schizophrenia*', as initially defined by Bleuler was the first diagnostic term employed to describe what we now

consider to be autism and remained in use until the 1960s (Fombonne, 2003a; Rutter, 1978).

1.1.2 Kanner and Asperger - The pioneers

Dr Leo Kanner an Austrian paediatric psychiatrist working at John Hopkins University, first employed the term autism in his research paper 'Autistic Disturbances of Affective Contact' (Kanner, 1943), in which he described his observations of 11 children. Kanner considered that he was studying clinical examples of a yet unidentified syndrome not reported upon previously, that appeared to be unique to childhood (Roth et al., 2010). His study sample were all found to have exhibited a predilection for '*extreme solitude*' from birth (Neumärker, 2003, p. 207). Kanner also described various language difficulties including echolalia and mutism (Schreibman, 2005), delays in language development and a peculiar communication style (Bernier & Gerdts, 2010). Repetitive behaviours and unrelenting interests (Sanders, 2009), an absence of imagination, and a constant requirement for uniformity and sameness (Wolff, 2004) were also reported, which Kanner considered demonstrated *'an inborn disturbance of affective contact'*. The children were said to have remarkable visuo-spatial skills combined with excellent rote memory for recalling lists, facts, and information, whilst also meeting classification for learning disabilities (Wing, 1996). It was reported that in all cases these symptoms and behaviours were found to have been observed from birth, this, Kanner suggested, differentiated what he was reporting from schizophrenia, a condition known to develop over time (Dilly & Hall, 2018). Kanner's ground-breaking view was that autism should be classed as a developmental disorder, a divergence from neurotypical development, as opposed to a degenerative state (Wicks-Nelson & Israel, 2009). Kanner labelled this 'new' condition 'Kanner syndrome' or 'Infantile autism'.

The following year Dr Hans Asperger, chair of paediatrics at Vienna's University Children's Hospital, independently published his work considering 'Autistic

Psychopathy in Childhood' (Asperger, 1944/1991). He discussed the cases of four boys aged between 6 and 11 years, whom he considered to be intellectually competent (Klin et al., 2005), employing the term 'little professors' in his description, who displayed unusually elevated interest levels in particularly specific topics (Dilly & Hall, 2018). Despite their strong cognitive abilities, the boys all presented with poor social and emotional skills (Deisinger, 2011). Whilst Asperger found no apparent language delay, he noted their communication was inflexible, and their use of language was adult like and monotonous (Sanders, 2009; Wing, 1996). Asperger utilised the term autistic to represent the self-absorbed social isolation he observed in his patients (Roth et al., 2010), and psychopathy to signify the disturbed personality traits they displayed (Klin et al., 2005). Proposing that this condition was more aligned with deficiencies in personality as opposed to disabilities in development (Dilly & Hall, 2018). Wolff (2004) noted Asperger's belief that this condition he had described, whilst becoming apparent in the child's early years, would continue through adolescence into adulthood.

There can be no disputing the validity of the work of these pioneers. Whilst some of their original findings may differ somewhat to the modern day thinking of what autism is, the core characteristics of both Kanner's '*infantile autism*' and Asperger's '*autistic psychopathy*' are still considered the markers which shape our current understanding of Autism Spectrum Disorders. It could be said however, that some of their findings, in combination with the language and terminology of the time, have had a lasting impact on the stereotyping of autistic individuals, leading to discrimination. In the decades that followed their work, much has been done to develop a better understanding of the condition and its impact on the individual.

1.1.3 Autism: Developments in understanding and diagnostic history

The diagnostic history of autism is one of constant change as research increases the knowledge and understanding of its complexities, unlike most conditions which once discovered can be instantly incorporated into diagnostic manuals (Zeldovich,

2018). Whilst both Kanner and Asperger published their articles within a year of each other, Kanner's work, written and distributed in the English language, was widely available, yet Asperger's work presented in the German language remained greatly unknown. In the period since both Kanner published their theories, several key periods have defined current understanding of autism and influenced its diagnostic categorisation (Figure 1.1.3 below).

In the 1970s Kolvin (1971) and Rutter (1972) established a clear distinction differentiating autism from schizophrenia. Rutter (1978) also published a synthesised review of Kanner's work establishing four key diagnostic areas for consideration; the early onset of symptomologies, a distinct impairment of social development, a marked deficiency in communication skills, and behaviour considered unusual, including fixation on routine and sameness. 'The Camberwell Study' (Wing & Gould, 1979) was the first to suggest autism was a spectrum condition, found in a range of individuals with widely varying levels of intellectual capability. They also suggested the likelihood of autism often co-occurring alongside a variety of developmental, physiological, and psychological conditions.

It was not until the third edition of the DSM (APA, 1980) that autism made its diagnostic debut as a condition in its own right. Prior to this the official diagnostic term of childhood schizophrenia was employed to describe autism-related presentations (Volkmar, 2008). The work of Kolvin (1971) and Rutter (1972) was highly influential in ensuring the DSM-III (APA, 1980) incorporated Infantile Autism as a distinctive disorder within the new diagnostic category of Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDD) (Spitzer et al., 1979). Three key indicators were included in the diagnostic criteria for this newly defined condition: a definite lack of interest in other people, severely impaired communication, and unusual reactions to the environment, with development occurring within 30 months of birth (Zeldovich, 2018).

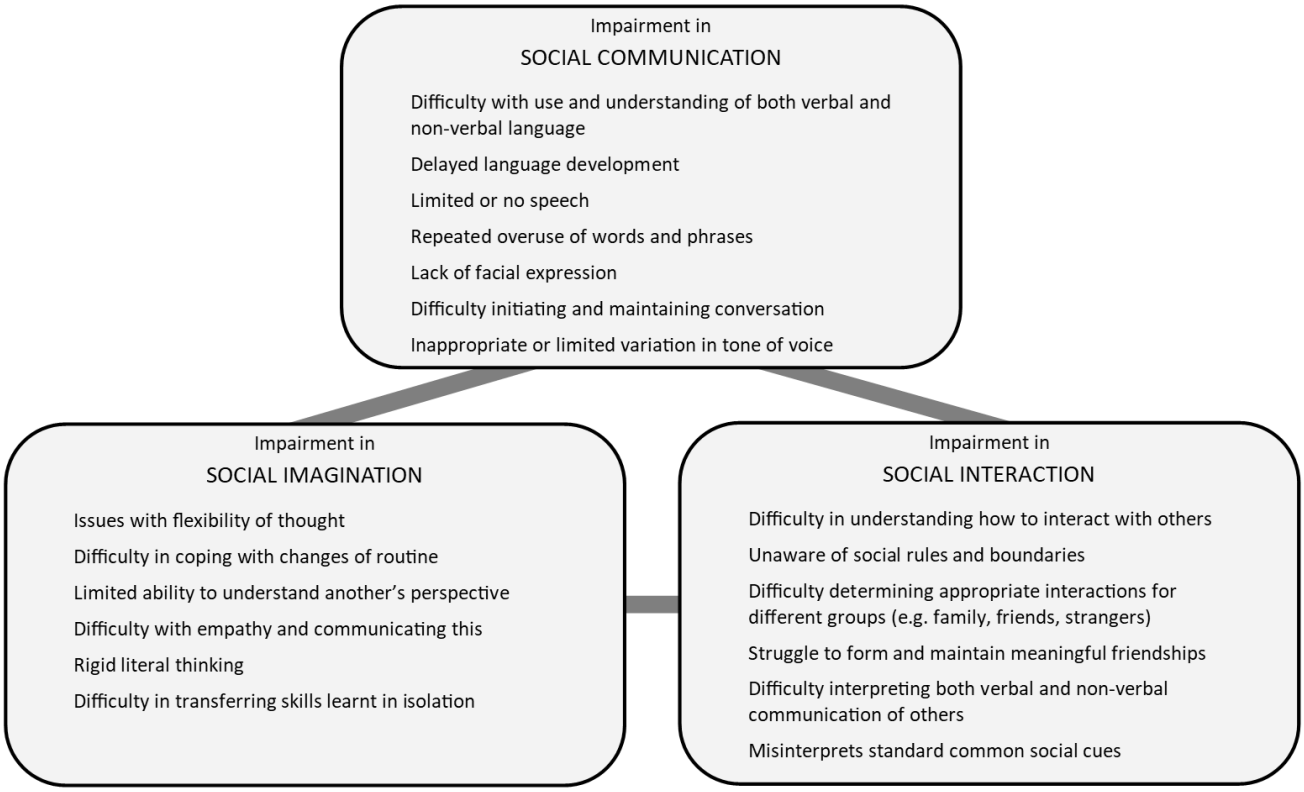
Figure 1.1.3 - A timeline of understanding and diagnostic developments 1970-the present

Developments in understanding			Diagnostic developments	
	Kolvin	1971		
Differentiating Autism from schizophrenia	Rutter	1972		Autism not specifically a recognised diagnostic condition, often classed as Childhood Schizophrenia or classed as 'other psychoses'
Identifying of diagnostic criteria	Rutter	1978		
The Camberwell Study	Wing & Gould	1979		
		1980	APA DSM-III	Infantile Autism appears under Pervasive Developmental Disorders
'Triad of impairment'	Wing	1981		
	Gould	1982		
Theory of mind	Baron-Cohen, Leslie, and Frith	1985		
		1987	APA DSM-III-R	Autistic disorder seen as a spectrum condition within Pervasive Developmental Disorder – not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS)
English translation of Asperger's 1944 paper	Frith	1991		
		1993	WHO ICD-10	Autism Spectrum used as an umbrella term including Asperger's Syndrome, Rhett Syndrome and Childhood Disintegrative Disorder
		1994	APA DSM-IV	
Asperger's Syndrome could describe a 'High Functioning Autism'	Wing	1996		
		2000	APA DSM-IV-R	Distinction clarified between Asperger's Syndrome and PDD-NOS
	Akshoomoff, Pierce, & Courchesne	2002		
Selection of notable studies investigating cerebral differences in the Autistic brain	Hill, & Frith	2003		
	Bauman, & Kemper	2005		
		2013	APA DSM-V	A new diagnostic approach employing Autism Spectrum Disorder as the cover-all diagnostic term.
		2019	WHO ICD-11	Triad of impairment reduced to dyad.
		2022	APA DSM-V-R	Language changes for clarity

Wing and Gould continued their work, and by the start of the 1980s were discussing the 'triad of impairment' (Gould, 1982; Wing, 1981a), a significant theory that would shape thinking of autism for decades. They proposed autism as presenting difficulties in three key areas; social communication, social imagination and social interaction, alongside restricted interests or repetitive behaviours (see Figure 1.1.3a). Baron-Cohen et al. (1985) developed the '*Theory of Mind*' concept suggesting autistic children struggled to understand and process the thoughts and feelings of others, in a way which was unique to autism.

Figure 1.1.3a - Wing & Gould's triad of impairment

The triad of impairment (Gould (1982) and Wing (1981a))



As research into autism developed, the revised and updated DSM-III-R (APA, 1987) reflected this greater understanding. Focusing more on developmental aspects, and presenting a more flexible diagnostic approach, the terminology was changed with

the creation of the diagnostic term Autistic Disorder (Jackson & Volkmar, 2019). Incorporating the understanding of autism being a spectrum condition, Pervasive Developmental Disorder - not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS) was also introduced.

Uta Frith played a prominent role in the development of autism understanding in the 1990s. Frith's (1991) book *'Autism and Asperger Syndrome*' presented the first fully translated and annotated English language version of Asperger's work. Whilst Wing (1981b) introduced the work of Asperger, she later suggested that had they better understood Asperger's work at the time, they would have undoubtedly found many more children fitting into their concept of the autism spectrum (Wing, 1996), believing Asperger's syndrome to be a form of '*High Functioning Autism'*. Throughout the 1990s Frith published numerous autism focused articles covering cognition, language and communication difficulties, and expanding on her earlier Theory of Mind work (Frith & Happé, 1994a; 1994b; Happé, & Frith, 1995; Hermelin & Frith, 1991).

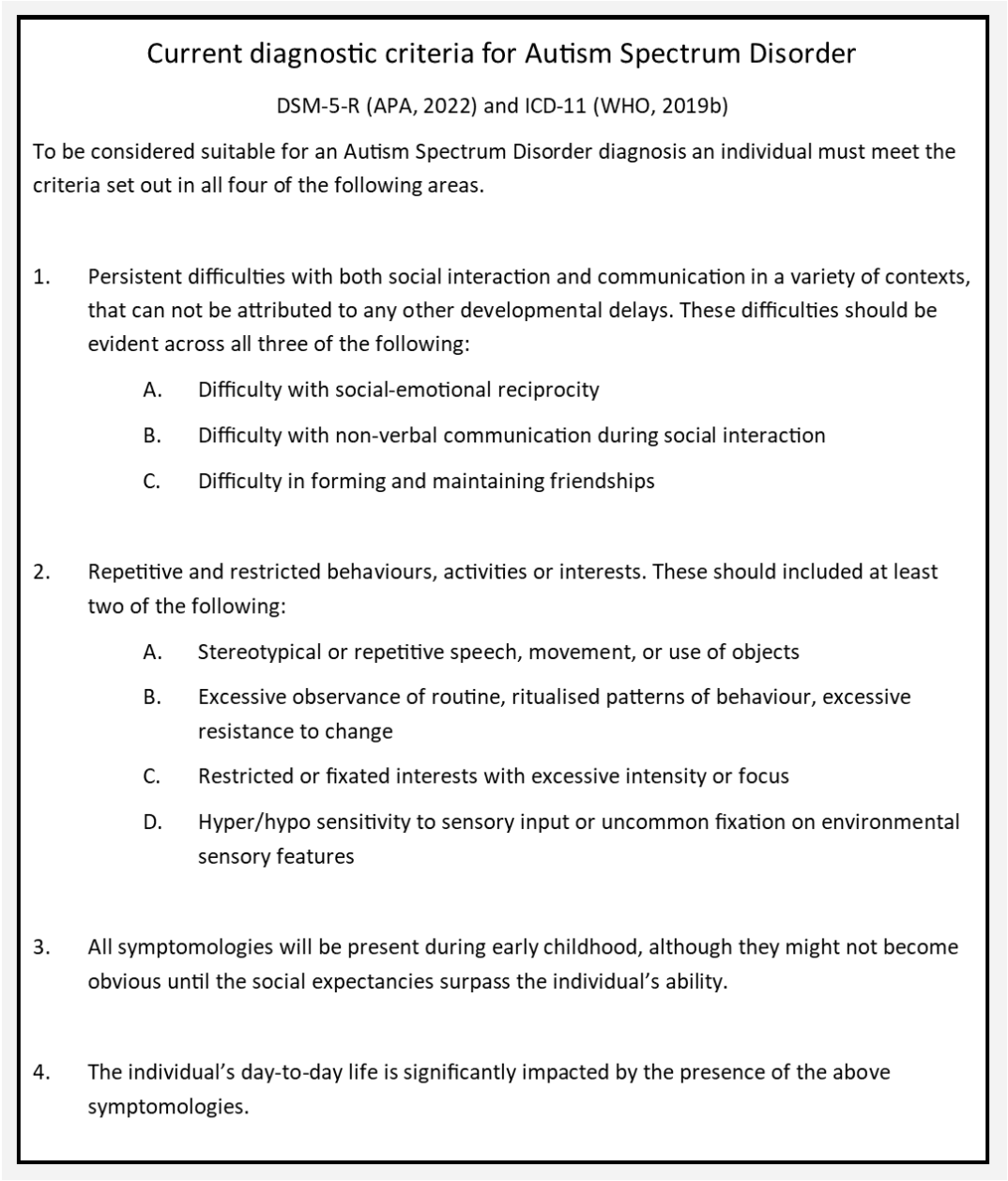
With the publication of DSM-IV (APA, 1994) there was close alignment with the ICD-10 (WHO, 1993), which was considered a breakthrough (Jackson & Volkmar, 2019). Both manuals presenting autism as a spectrum disorder for the first time, including five conditions under the autism spectrum umbrella. Asperger Disorder and Rhett Syndrome (Tsai, 1992) were introduced alongside Autism and PDD-NOS (Szatmari, 1991). Whilst Childhood Disintegrative Disorder (CDD) was utilised for cases where symptomologies were thought to have developed in later childhood (Volkmar, 1992). Having this unified approach to the diagnostic understanding of autism across the two renowned institution manuals provided clinicians with a clear definition to consider during assessment. A revised DSM-IV-R (APA, 2000) was published with a detailed amendment to text, clarifying differences between Asperger's Disorder and PDD-NOS, in response to research (Buitelaar et al., 1999; Miller & Ozonoff, 1997), but no diagnostic criteria were changed.

At the turn of the millennium, studies endeavoured to establish if any cerebral deficiencies or differences were to be found in the autistic brain. Variations in numerous regions of the brain, such as the cerebellum, temporal and frontal lobes and the limbic system were identified (Akshoomoff et al., 2002; Bauman & Kemper, 2005; Hill & Frith, 2003).

Both diagnostic manuals, DSM-5 (APA, 2013) and ICD-11 (WHO, 2019b) signalled significant change in the diagnostic criteria for autism (Figure 1.1.3b). Adopting the concept of autism being a continuous spectrum, incorporating an all-inclusive diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (Zeldovich, 2018), eliminating diagnoses of Asperger's Disorder and PDD-NOS, whilst moving Rhett's and CDD into other diagnostic categories. The previously recognised triad of impairment was condensed into a new dyad of impairment (Wing et al., 2011), combining impairments of social interaction and social communication into one area of concern, alongside restricted behaviours. The criteria for developmental abnormalities updated, requiring these should now have been apparent within the early developmental period. These changes, designed to increase diagnostic specificity (Jackson & Volkmar, 2019) have been met with concern of decreased sensitivity (Hazen et al., 2013). The latest update presented in DSM-5-R (APA, 2022) is likely to decrease sensitivity further by requiring deficits to be identified across all three areas; social-emotional reciprocity, in non-verbal communicative behaviours used for social interaction, and in developing, maintaining and understanding relationships.

Over the years, as researchers understand more about autism, the diagnostic parameters have altered to reflect this increased knowledge. Focusing on the DSM criteria, much has changed since autism was first identified as a diagnosable condition, in DSM-III. These changes have aided practitioners to develop a more focused idea of what autism is, and what behaviours and symptomologies are required to meet the diagnostic criteria. As illustrated above, changes over time

Figure 1.1.3b - Autism Spectrum Disorder: Current diagnostic criteria (APA, 2022; WHO, 2019b)



Current diagnostic criteria for Autism Spectrum Disorder

DSM-5-R (APA, 2022) and ICD-11 (WHO, 2019b)

To be considered suitable for an Autism Spectrum Disorder diagnosis an individual must meet the criteria set out in all four of the following areas.

1. Persistent difficulties with both social interaction and communication in a variety of contexts, that can not be attributed to any other developmental delays. These difficulties should be evident across all three of the following:
    - A. Difficulty with social-emotional reciprocity
    - B. Difficulty with non-verbal communication during social interaction
    - C. Difficulty in forming and maintaining friendships
2. Repetitive and restricted behaviours, activities or interests. These should included at least two of the following:
    - A. Stereotypical or repetitive speech, movement, or use of objects
    - B. Excessive observance of routine, ritualised patterns of behaviour, excessive resistance to change
    - C. Restricted or fixated interests with excessive intensity or focus
    - D. Hyper/hypo sensitivity to sensory input or uncommon fixation on environmental sensory features
3. All symptomologies will be present during early childhood, although they might not become obvious until the social expectancies surpass the individual's ability.
4. The individual's day-to-day life is significantly impacted by the presence of the above symptomologies.

have included the introduction of variants, such as Asperger's syndrome, Rhett syndrome, and PDD-NOS, which carried separate diagnoses. However, the most recent manuals, mark a return to the use of the umbrella diagnosis of ASD. The DSM-5 and DSM-5-R diagnostic definitions have had a mixed reception amongst both the autism community and practitioners (Nicholson, 2013; Wing et al., 2011). Many previously diagnosed with variant conditions feared a loss of their identity,

however, pre-existing diagnoses remain valid. There may be a narrowing of the criteria, which could decrease the number of individuals receiving a diagnosis, but judgement on this will only be possible with the passage of time.

1.1.4 Autism: Medical and social models of disability

It is worth acknowledging that despite these developments in understanding and diagnostic classifications, autism is still generally viewed through a medical perspective. The medical model of disability considers any identified impairment as a deficit, something that requires fixing. Autism, as discussed, is a condition which impacts the social competencies of individuals. Medical approaches are unlikely to help improve life experiences for those diagnosed as being autistic. A more appropriate perspective in trying to support and understand autistic individuals would be the social model of disability, as identified by Oliver (1990). The social model of disability focuses on challenges in the relationships between the individual and the environment around them (Goodall, 2019). Within education, this social approach is key in the formation of inclusive practice, as discussed within Chapter 2, as a central element of this thesis.

1.1.5 Autism: Causation

There have been many theories and discussions surrounding the possible causes of autism, dating back to Kanner's own thoughts when first reporting on the condition. Early hypotheses focused on psychogenic theories, suggesting deficiencies in parental contact during a child's formative years were the main cause of a child developing autism (Jordan, 2010). Bettelheim (1956; 1967) introduced the '*refrigerator mother*' concept, suggesting being brought up within an unloving environment would cause the child to develop autistic behaviours. Kanner, initially considering biological factors to be the main cause of autism, became a key supporter of this theory (Strathearn, 2009), having himself theorised a '*lack of maternal warmth'* may be an influencing factor (Kanner, 1949). Others propose biological causation was more likely (Bernier & Gerdts, 2010). Rimland (1964)

suggested autism was entirely a biological condition, whilst Folstein and Rutter (1977) established strong evidence of genetic links behind the disorder. More recent studies support this, suggesting a risk factor of between 10-20% of siblings being autistic (Constantino et al., 2010; Ozonoff et al., 2011). Lombardo et al. (2011) amongst others have mapped out differences in brain function, yet even with recent advances in science there is still no single determining genetic factor that can be pinpointed as a root cause of autism (Muhle et al., 2018). There is no firm evidence pointing to any single biological or environmental cause of autism (NHS, 2019), whilst the NAS (2021a) propose autism is the result of various biological factors impacting the development of the brain.

1.1.6 Autism: Prevalence and epidemiology

Numerous studies present widely varying prevalence rates for autism. The WHO (2023) suggest that around 1 in every 100 children are autistic, whilst the APA (2023) report that approximately 1 in every 36 American children at the age of eight years, were diagnosed autistic. The great disparity in these two figures can be attributed to the studies from where the data originated and the period in which they were undertaken. The WHO use data from Zeidan et al.'s (2022) systematic review of published global prevalence rates between 2012 and 2021. Their work incorporated data from 71 studies presenting prevalence estimates from 34 different countries, including estimated prevalence rates ranging from 0.01 per 100 up to 4.4 per 100. Meanwhile, the APA data is derived from a singular study, Maenner et al.'s (2023) Centres for Disease Control and Prevention 2020 survey across 11 sites in the United States of America. The British Medical Association (BMA, 2020) use data from the 2011 national census suggesting approximately 1% of children in the UK were autistic.

Many factors influence the reported prevalence rates from studies around the world, including availability of efficient and effective diagnostic services, awareness and understanding amongst professionals and quality of health care systems

(Goodall, 2019). Major factors shaping global prevalence rates include differences in cultural views and constructs of autism (Kim, 2012; Zaroff & Uhm, 2012), and data collection processes (Hansen et al., 2015; Joseph et al., 2015). Zeidan et al.'s (2022) review of global autism prevalence rates, quickly identifies disparities in three key areas. Published data presenting prevalence rates varies widely between regions, as does the number of available studies available for consideration, both factors heavily impact the resulting estimated headline data. Different cultures have varying views of what can be considered as '*normal*' developmental milestones (Mandell & Novak, 2005), whilst varying cultural perceptions of the presentation and severity of symptoms, and appropriate behaviours (Daley, 2002) impact standardised assessment protocols as a result (Rogler, 1993). What is widely accepted, is that prevalence rates of autism are on the increase around the world (Matson & Kozlowski, 2011; Qiu, et al., 2020; Sahin & Sur, 2015) and have been since autism was first established as a diagnosable condition. Jang et al. (2014) consider autism to be amongst the most prevalent of neurodivergent disorders.

To get a clear picture of how prevalent autism is amongst children here in the UK, it is possible to analyse data harvested within annual school censuses. McConkey (2020) compared 2010/11 census data from the four nations with that from 2018/19 to demonstrate prevalence increase. Across all four nations there were large increases in the number of pupils reported as being autistic, disproportionate to differences in overall pupil population. Secondary analysis of the data presented in McConkey's study demonstrates that whilst the overall UK school population increased by 8% between 2010/11 and 2018/19 the number of autistic learners increased by 153%. As a central element of this project, Wales' specific school census data is presented in Chapter 2.

There are numerous reasons considered to provide explanation for the increased instances of autism amongst the populations of the world. Wing (1997) anticipated an upsurge in the number of cases stimulated by the spectrum encompassing

numerous conditions. However, awareness, understanding, and perceptions of autism have changed greatly over the years leading to decreased stigmatisation and a greater willingness to seek diagnosis amongst parents of autistic children and young people (Martin, 2012). An increased understanding and appreciation of autism amongst education professionals leads to earlier identification (Goodall, 2019), whilst there is firm evidence to suggest that continued refinement in diagnostic criteria and practices is intrinsically linked to increases in incidence (King & Bearman, 2009).

1.1.7 Autism: Sex/gender ratios and differences

It has been the long-held belief that autism is a condition mainly prevalent in the male population. Asperger believed that girls were not affected by the syndrome he introduced, although he later changed his opinion. There is a longstanding conviction that males are four times more likely to be autistic than females (Ehlers & Gillberg, 1993; Fombonne, 2003b; Gray & Tonge, 2005), not differing greatly from the sample in Kanner's original study, however, reporting of gender ratios vary widely (NAS, 2021b). Studies suggest co-occurring intellectual impairment increase the chances of autism being diagnosed in females (Hiller et al., 2014), possibly accounting for the disparity in Wing's (1981) findings, where ratios were as high as fifteen boys for every girl, yet in those with recognised learning disabilities the ratio dropped to 2:1. More recent studies indicate a lower male to female ratio (Loomes et al., 2017; Rutherford et al., 2016; Zeidan et al., 2022). Whilst current diagnostic rates may not differ widely from the established 4:1 ratio, it is believed, females are just as likely as males to be autistic, yet remain undiagnosed, due to gender differences in presentation (Goodall & MacKenzie, 2018; Kreiser & White, 2014). These differences in presentation can make identifying, understanding, and supporting autistic females more challenging for educators.

Females are more likely to have a range of co-occurring conditions (Margari et al., 2019; Rynkiewicz & Łucka, 2018) leading to diagnostic overshadowing (Fletcher-

Watson & Happé, 2019, pp.42-43), they display less restricted interests, and repetitive behaviours appear less obvious or unusual than their male peers (Antezana et al., 2019; Harrop et al., 2015). Many autistic females have developed masking skills and are considered more adept at camouflaging their autism (Rynkiewicz et al, 2016; Sedgewick et al., 2021; Tierney et al., 2016). This 'masking' presents itself in many ways, including demonstrating more proficient expressive language skills, often achieved by effectively modelling the behaviours of others (Lai et al., 2015). Some diagnostic practices, and preconceived expectations of professionals, remain biased toward male presentation (Dean et al., 2017). Several diagnostic tools have mixed results in identifying gender differences (Øien et al., 2018; Rodgers et al., 2019), leading to females going undiagnosed, despite presenting with similar or more severe autism symptomologies (Baldwin & Costley, 2016). Differences between the educational experiences of the sexes form a crucial part of the results within this study and are discussed throughout the thesis.

The question of gender identity is becoming more commonplace amongst the autism community, with evidence linking gender dysphoria and autism (NAS, 2021c). A significant proportion of autistic individuals feel they either do not align with their gender assigned at birth or either of the perceived 'normal' male/female gender constructs (Cooper et al., 2018) which adds further complexity to the understanding of diagnostic gender ratios.

1.2 The language of autism

Before entering into the main body of the thesis, it is worth considering the language used when discussing autism, an area which is intensely debated (Fletcher-Watson & Happé, 2019; Milton, 2019) by academics and professionals, as well as the autistic community and their families. Thoughtless use of descriptive language can stigmatise, especially when used to draw comparisons between those with and without disabilities (Gernsbacher, 2017), using examples of '*typically developing*' in comparison to '*child with autism or autistic child*' immediately

suggests the latter is somewhat '*less than*' and encourages connotations of lower ability (Pellicano et al., 2017).

Diagnostic language can also be a minefield (Lawrence, 2019), with the current diagnostic term being Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (APA, 2013; WHO, 2019b). Many consider the use of '*disorder*' as indicating a deficit and prefer the use of Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) with '*condition*' more aligned to difference (Goodall, 2019). The core diagnostic term '*spectrum*', which portrays a linear visualisation of impact, is also seen by many as challenging, Lawrence (2019) believes the phrase wrongly implies a range of autism from mild to severe. Goodall (2019) highlights how the inappropriate use of terms such as high and low functioning present the idea that the autistic person is either one or the other, whereas it is widely considered that many autistic individuals present with '*spiky profiles*'. A '*spiky profile*' refers to a neurodivergent individual that may have great strengths in in certain areas, but severe weaknesses in others, these extremes are usually more pronounced than seen in the rest of the population. Having a '*spiky profile*' can be most challenging in an educational context. At school, learners are expected to undertake a variety of tasks, needing to use and develop various skills, whereas, in adult life, it is easier to specialise, making the most of those skills in which you excel (Gilham, 2023).

When considering diagnostic terminology, it is worth mentioning the changes of categorisation introduced in both latest updated of diagnostic manuals (APA, 2013; WHO, 2019b). The removal of diagnoses of previously identifiable conditions such as Asperger's Syndrome, has raised concerns amongst those diagnosed with the condition, a community who already have great issues with unexpected change (Lawrence, 2019), many still identify with and wish to continue using terms such as Asperger's or '*Aspie*'.

A foremost area of importance is the terminology used when discussing the individual person, it is crucial that the language used is respectful (Fletcher-Watson & Happé, 2019). Fortunately, it is possible to follow guidance from autistic

individuals, through their own writing and research, to minimise the possibility of causing upset or offence. The use of '*person-first*' language (i.e., person with autism) as preferred by the American Psychological Society (Lawrence, 2019) is seen as offensive by many. Clare Sainsbury, writing in her book, '*Martian in the Playground*', where she shares her experiences of attending school with an Asperger's syndrome diagnosis, recorded her objection to this use of '*person-first*' language:

> *'We are not people who 'just happen to have' autism; it is not an appendage that can be separated from who we are as people, nor is it something shameful that has to be reduced to a sub-clause' (Sainsbury, 2000).*

Sinclair (2013) concurs with this view, highlighting the use of perceived neutral or positive adjectives as always being '*characteristic-first*' (artistic person, right-handed person etc). He suggests '*person-first*' language when discussing autism (i.e., person with autism) presents the idea that autism is viewed as neither neutral nor positive, but something negative. Sinclair concludes that he is autistic because the autism is an indispensable part of him, as an individual. Kenny et al. (2016) produced a study which clearly identified significant differences in such language use between autistic individuals, their families and carers, and professionals working in the field. Almost 60% of autistic respondents and those closest to them preferred the use of '*identity-first*' terminology such as '*autistic*' whereas 49% of professionals advocated the use of the '*person-first*' concept. However, looking deeper into the data it is clear there are still disagreements within the autism community, although 61% approved the use of '*autistic person*', 28% suggested their preference for person-first terminology such as '*has autism*', whilst around 20% were found to be happy with either '*has autism*' or '*person with autism*'.

Taking these points into consideration, throughout this work the umbrella terms '*autism*' and '*autistic*' will be employed, other than where direct quotations, historical reference, or diagnostic terminology, and respondent language differs.

Similarly, the author will endeavour to use '*identity-first*' language when referring to autistic individuals. Again, there may be certain applications when '*person-first*' language is preferential, mostly when referencing direct quotes.

Having explored autism, as a core element within this thesis, looking at its origins, and the developments in our understanding of the condition, we now look at the context in which this project was undertaken (section 1.3), and why the project was important to the researcher (section 1.4).

1.3 The context of this study

The initial discussions regarding this project took place in early March 2020. As the COVID-19 virus started to spread, it was announced that the education sector in Wales, was to be closed to all learners, with the exception for the children of key workers and those in vulnerable groups, from Friday 20th March 2020, and just a few days later the entire country was placed into lockdown. Over subsequent months learning was moved to online provision, and exams were cancelled. Schooling would take more than a year before some form of normality would resume. In terms of this project, the proposal, candidature application, and the planning and preparation for the first phase of participant engagement and data collection, were conducted during the first year of the pandemic, throughout the various lockdowns. With the focus of this thesis involving education in Wales, it is important to acknowledge how severely schooling was disrupted during this period. The timeline of the pandemic's impact on the education sector (Figure 1.3 below) illustrates just how much face-to-face education learners in Wales lost during this period, immediately prior to the role-out of this project. Whilst education made provisions for vulnerable learners, which would include autistic young people, to continue to attend schools throughout, the general upheaval and dramatic changes to routine, were unsettling. Much literature exists demonstrating the particular challenges this period presented for autistic learners (Hill et al., 2023; Crane et al., 2021; Kouroupa et al., 2022). These education shutdowns impacted on my

experiences as a post-graduate researcher, too. Throughout the formative months of the project, all supervisory meetings were virtual, a pattern which continued throughout the period of candidature.

Figure 1.3 - COVID-19 and education in Wales: A timeline (WG, 2021)

18th March 2020	In Wales, Minister for Education Kirsty Williams announces that all schools will close early for Easter from Friday 20th March. Schools will remain open only to particularly vulnerable pupils and children of critical key workers. No formal examinations will go ahead this year.
23rd March 2020	Prime Minister Boris Johnson issues a 'stay at home' message, placing the UK into a full lockdown from midnight.
3rd June 2020	Kirsty Williams announces a limited phased return to school for all pupils from June 29th
29th June 2020	Schools reopened for limited 'check-in' before the end of summer term. Numbers attending schools were limited to a maximum of one-in-three pupils at any one time.
17th July 2020	Most schools close for the summer holidays
24th July 2020	The remaining schools close for the summer holidays
1st September 2020	Autumn term begins with a phased return of pupils
14th September 2020	Schools open to all pupils for the first time since March
19th October 2020	Schools that remained open for the extra week at the end of the summer term have a two-week half term break
23rd October 2020	All remaining schools start half term break
23rd October 2020	Wales has 'firebreak' lockdown until 9th November
2nd November 2020	Schools return from half term. Pupils in Year 9 and above remain at home for online learning
14th December 2020	All secondary schools and many primary schools closed for the last week of term; remote learning available
19th December 2020	First Minister Mark Drakeford announces a Christmas lockdown from midnight due to rapid spread of new Covid variant
20th December 2020	Wales moves into full lockdown
4th January 2021	Schools remain closed at the start of the new term. Again, schools remain open only to particularly vulnerable pupils and children of critical key workers. Online learning in place
22nd February 2021	Gradual, phased return of pupils begins with those in the Foundation Phase (3–7-year-olds)
15th March 2021	The remaining primary school pupils return to the classroom together with secondary pupils in years 11 and above. Pupils in years 7-10 were able to make brief returns to 'check-in' with teachers.
12th April 2021	All remaining pupils able to make a full-time return to schools.

1.4 Why this project?

My first personal encounter with autism came when I started working as a one-to-one pupil support within a mainstream primary school. The first child I worked with had a dual autism and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) diagnosis. This was a steep and at times traumatic learning curve, both professionally and personally, however I managed to create a bond with the child, which made the process a lot smoother. I spent ten years working in this environment, during which time I undertook much training and research, including my undergraduate studies, which focused heavily on inclusive practice in education, where I chose to specialise in autism across many modules. During the ten-year period, I supported numerous young autistic learners through their primary school journeys and was frequently called upon for advice or support by their class teachers. The local authority also seconded me out of school for two years, to help set-up and roll-out and innovative early screening and identification programme, looking at speech, language, and communication development. This unique programme was employed as a key tool for identifying primary aged pupils who might be considered for autism diagnostic assessment. Part of my role was to work with schools to support these young people and prepare evidence for multi-disciplinary panel consideration.

Whilst working at the school, it became apparent that my youngest daughter, herself a pupil at the same school, was displaying neurodivergent symptomologies. Whilst she remains undiagnosed for her autism, she has an impressive catalogue of diagnoses for numerous of the most common co-occurring conditions, such as ADHD, dyspraxia, sensory processing disorder, learning disability and hyper-mobility. It was also identified that she has an extremely rare genetic disorder, at the time this was discovered she was the only recognised case worldwide, and this has proven to be what autism diagnostic professionals have cited when declining to provide her with an autism diagnosis.

My time supporting young autistic children through mainstream primary school was brought to a sudden and premature end, when I suffered a near fatal subarachnoid brain haemorrhage, in 2017. This dramatic event, led to a stroke and several brain surgeries, rendering me physically unable to work in this, or any environment. As part of the recovery process, I started undertaking several online courses, to try and keep my mind active, when I was able. Having gone as far as I could with this, I became aware of the autism and related conditions master's programme offered by the medical school at Swansea University. It was whilst researching for this master's programme I became aware of the paucity of autism related research emanating from Wales. With my experience of working in education and the struggles of trying to get my daughter's autism recognised, my two main areas of research interest were education and sex/gender differences in young people. Undertaking the final research module, looking at parent reported sex/gender differences in autistic young people across the United Kingdom, I found an interest in the processes of conducting research, which was nurtured by my project supervisor. It was he who, upon completion of the master's programme, recommended that I should develop my research experience and consider undertaking a PhD.

In recent years, especially post haemorrhage, I have become more aware of my own differences, whilst reflecting upon the many challenges I have faced throughout my life. The more I researched and learnt about autism, the more apparent it became, that I display many neurodivergent behaviours. Having wrestled with the decision about whether or not to seek a diagnosis, I thought there would be no harm in seeking professional insight. Undertaking this at my age is not easy, but I have undergone the initial gatekeeping assessment processes and now sit with countless others on the extremely long waiting list. Diagnosis or not, to be true to myself, I self-identify as autistic.

In considering the possibility of undertaking further postgraduate research, I was always likely to focus on autism and the autistic community. Having explored

sex/gender difference in my previous UK wide research, my thoughts for this project were to focus on Wales. As stated above, there are a limited number to studies and reports which focus solely on the autistic community based in Wales, especially so in relation to education. The NAS produce regular reports presenting the views of autistic children, young people, and their parents, relating to educational experience in England, many of which are referenced regularly throughout this thesis, but no similar publication is available relating to those receiving their education in Wales. This discrepancy was my starting point, as I began to draw up a research proposal for this project.

As someone with a unique perspective, having been an educator, the parent of an autistic young person and autistic myself, I felt that eliciting the views of the three key stakeholder groups would help provide a clearer overview of the current situation relating to the education of autistic learners across Wales. Whilst the NAS England studies focused on the parents and the young people, including the educators within this study was always part of the plan.

1.5 Thesis overview

Having looked at what autism is and how our understanding of the condition has developed over the years, alongside the rationale for undertaking this project, below will present an overview of the remaining chapters within the thesis.

1.5.1 Chapter 2: Literature review

Chapter two considers the landscape for autistic learners, through presentation of Welsh Government data, and extensive literature reviews. Looking first the national focus of the study, Wales. Reference is made to the population make-up, and governance, before reflecting upon the country's education system and recent transformation developments. Welsh Government data is used to illustrate the educator and pupil populations, focusing on the number of autistic learners

registered. Elements of education which are of interest to the study are explored, including the concept of inclusive education, the debate surrounding mainstream and specialist provisions, and school exclusions. The chapter summarises what the literature tells us about the three key stakeholder groups featured within this study, autistic learners, their parents and their educators. Literature relating to the educational experiences of autistic young people is presented, reflecting upon areas that studies suggest may prove the most challenging. The role of parents and carers, and what research tells us about their views relating to their children's education, is covered. Finally, chapter two considers the role of educators, and looks at what the literature highlights as the most critical areas of interest. The review concludes with the presentation of the research questions which for the basis of this work.

1.5.2 Chapter 3: Methodology

Chapter three reports upon the methodological approaches for data collection, handling, and analysis, employed throughout this project. Explanations and reasonings are offered around areas such as the sampling and recruitment of survey participants, and the overall research philosophy, methods and approaches. The importance of data protection and security is discussed alongside other ethical considerations, such as consent and assent. Reference is made to the challenges involved when researching with autistic young people, whilst methodologies for supporting their engagement in the proposed surveys are discussed. Details of the analytical approaches employed when working with the harvested quantitative and qualitative data are outlined. Also, within chapter three, a brief overview of each of the five component studies is offered.

1.5.3 Chapter 4: Results - Autistic learners

Chapter four, the first of three results chapters, focuses on the educational experiences of autistic learners, in Wales. Within this chapter, data harvested from

three component cross-sectional, mixed-methods studies are analysed and reported, to present a wide-ranging overview;

1. The autistic pupil questionnaire
2. What I wish my teacher knew about autism
3. The non-autistic learner experience questionnaire

Initially focusing on the autistic pupil questionnaire, results are presented across the ability levels, before the whole sample results are offered. There is a focus considering any reported differences in experience, between respondents attending mainstream and specialist provision settings. Secondly, utilising qualitative data harvested from the 'What I wish my teacher knew about autism' follow-up study, five key themes are presented, offering an insight into where autistic young people feel their teachers would benefit from greater understanding. In trying to establish where autistic learner experiences may differ the most from their non-autistic peers, the third study is introduced. Firstly, the general results across the non-autistic cohort are presented, before comparative analysis looks at each area covered, highlighting areas where differences are proven to be significant.

1.5.4 Chapter 5: Results - Parents and carers

Within chapter five, parental perceptions and experiences relating to their autistic child's education, emanating from the survey of parents and carers, are presented. This cross-sectional, quantitative study, looks at the views of parents across several areas of interest, emerging from the extensive literature reviews. Topics covered include school satisfaction, educational support, statements and individual education plans, home/school communication and staff interactions, educational inclusion and school exclusions.

1.5.5 Chapter 6: Results - Educators

Chapter six presents the results of the survey of education professionals, to consider educator perceptions and experiences relating to the education of autistic

learners. There are six threads of interest referred to throughout the chapter: experience, information sharing, support, training, knowledge and understanding, access to resources and confidence. The results of this cross-sectional, quantitative study are presented across the sample, before focusing on teaching staff, support staff and those who have experienced working as a one-to-one, supporting an autistic learner. Reference is also made to agency and supply school staff, and student and newly qualified teachers.

1.5.6 Chapter 7: Discussion

Having presented the results across the previous three chapters, chapter seven firstly offers an overview of the results, blending them across the cohorts. The discussion looks at the results from each of the three cohorts, taking each element of the studies and cross referencing the results with what the wealth of literature previously discussed has taught us.

1.5.7 Chapter 8: Conclusion

Chapter eight considers all the results from the original research presented within this thesis to draw a conclusion as to whether the current model of inclusive education, whereby the majority of autistic learners attend mainstream settings, with varying levels of support, working for autistic learners in Wales. The chapter considers what we have learnt through this study, and looks at its impact, the identified limitation of the work are discussed, before the thesis draws its final conclusions.

Chapter 2: The landscape for autistic learners in Wales

2.1 Introduction

Having taken a detailed look at what autism is, and how knowledge and understanding of the condition has developed, in Chapter 1, this chapter reviews the literature to gain an insight into how autism impacts educational experiences. To gain an understanding of the backdrop for this study, section 2.2 introduces Wales, its population and governance structure. An explanation of what makes the education system in Wales unique, within the UK, is offered, before current educational reforms are briefly explained. To complete the picture, Welsh Government annual school census data provides an overview of educator and pupil populations across Wales, at the time of the study. With the focus of this study being the efficacy of inclusive education practices in supporting autistic learners in Wales, section 2.3 aims to define the concept of inclusive education and consider how it functions in practice. Further consideration is given to the difference between mainstream and specialist education provisions, and the debate around which can provide the most suitable learning environment for autistic learners, in section 2.4. Section 2.5 investigates school exclusions including classroom behaviours, exclusion practices and the impact of exclusion on autistic learners. The various challenges autistic learners must contend with as they progress through their education are the focus of section 2.6, whilst the role of parents and carers is investigated in section 2.7, before the role of educators considered in section 2.8. The chapter rounds off with a concluding summary (Section 2.9), identifying gaps in the literature (Section 2.10), and presenting the research question in section 2.11.

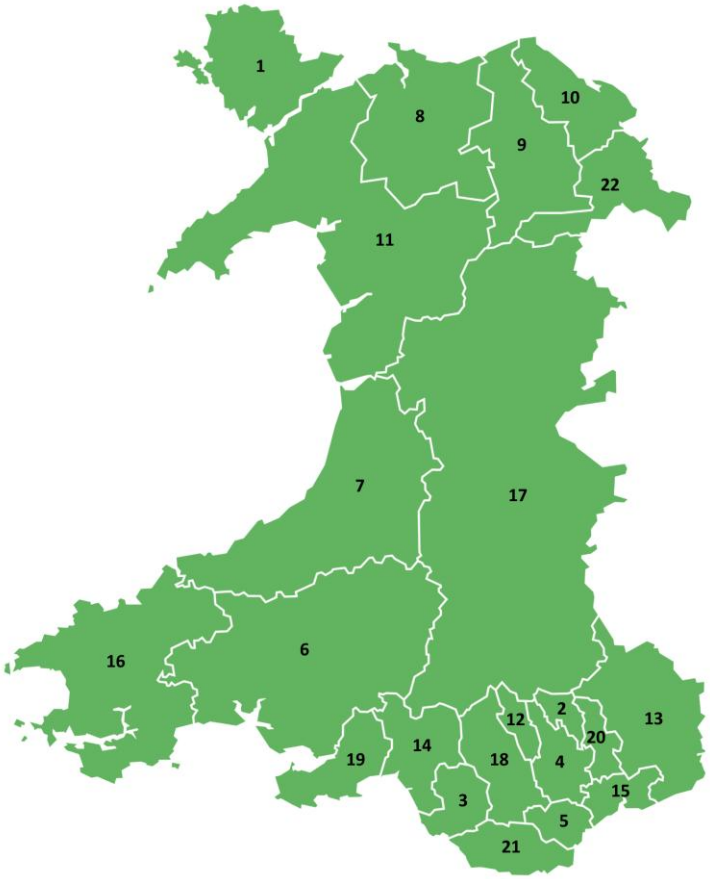
2.2 Education in Wales

2.2.1 Wales

Wales, one of the four constituent nations of the United Kingdom, is home to a population over 3.1 million (ONS, 2022). Administratively, Wales is a devolved

nation, with its own parliament (Senedd) taking responsibility for laws and policies, overseeing health, social care, transport and education, amongst others (Knight & Crick, 2022). Local governance is managed by 22 Local Authorities (LAs) (Figure 2.2.1), guided by the WG and its legislature. The country is a combination of densely populated urban hubs and sparsely populated rural communities.

Figure 2.2.1 - Local Authority regions in Wales



Wales - 22 Local Authorities

1 Isle of Anglesey County Council
2 Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
3 Bridgend County Borough Council
4 Caerphilly County Borough Council
5 Cardiff Council
6 Carmarthenshire County Council
7 Ceredigion County Council
8 Conwy County Borough Council
9 Denbighshire County Council
10 Flintshire County Council
11 Gwynedd Council
12 Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
13 Monmouthshire County Council
14 Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
15 Newport City Council
16 Pembrokeshire County Council
17 Powys County Council
18 Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
19 City and County of Swansea Council
20 Torfaen County Borough Council
21 Vale of Glamorgan Council
22 Wrexham County Borough Council

Welsh is recognised as the official language of the country, although just 18% of residents aged three and over can speak it to some degree, the lowest proportion ever recorded (WG, 2022a). The language is most predominantly spoken in the west, with more than half of the residents of Gwynedd (64%) and Anglesey (56%), and around 50% from Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire and Conwy able to speak Welsh. English or Welsh was considered the first language of 97% of the population (WG,

2022b). The ethnic make-up is largely White (94%), whilst 3% identified as Asian, 2% being Mixed ethnicity and 1% were Black (WG, 2022b). Children and young people (CYP) aged nineteen or below (n = 689,700) accounted for 22% of the population, amongst this cohort the sex ratio was reversed with 51% being male (ONS, 2022). One-in-five of the population aged five and over were said to be in full-time education (20%), and despite 12% of those aged sixteen and above having no formal qualifications, 32% indicated they had attained a Level 4 qualification or higher (WG, 2022c).

2.2.2 Child poverty in Wales and its impact on education

Wales has long struggled with the issue of child poverty. Data collected over a three-year period, which included the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, indicated that whilst across the UK rates of child poverty had fallen, Wales saw an increase, with 34% of children said to be living in relative poverty (PA, 2022). Department for Work and Pensions data (DWP, 2022) indicate that more than 100,000 children in Wales were in families living in absolute poverty, impacting their educational prospects. A report by Kellogg's (2013) found that teachers believed that children who come to school hungry often struggle to concentrate, appear lethargic, and are unable to learn. Whilst there is a question of the motives behind the report, with Kellogg's having a vested interest, as a breakfast supplier, the findings are worthy of note. The study is part of the company's campaign to set-up breakfast clubs across the country, for which they provide considerable financial support. Save the Children suggest that 33% of children that live in poverty struggle to keep up in their education, with 50% not attaining grades equivalent to those who are not, whilst 23% fail to meet language development milestones in their early years (Save the Children, 2023). Children living in poverty report feeling excluded and stigmatised by their inability to afford similar essential items as their peers and often become the victims of school bullies (Holloway et al., 2014). In respects of this thesis, studies suggest that educational inclusion of autistic learners is challenged in areas of high poverty (Knight et al, 2024; Oliver-Kerrigan et al., 2023), whilst poverty is considered to elevate challenging behaviours amongst

neurodivergent young people (Flouri et al., 2023). In Wales, the Welsh Government have published a series of strategy documents outlining their plans for tackling child poverty, the latest iteration in 2015 (WG, 2015), is due to be updated in 2024. In 2021, the Welsh Government announced plans to provide universal free school meals to all children attending primary education (WG, 2021c). The scheme formed part of the government's campaign to address child poverty issues and ensure young learners were not going hungry at school (WG, 2022). The roll out began with the youngest learners and aimed to provide all primary school pupils access to a free lunch by the school year 2024/25.

Literature would suggest that poverty has a direct impact on various aspects of a learner's education and their outcomes. With child poverty levels in Wales on the increase, how this impacts the experiences of those responding to this project must be kept in mind. Although the component studies make no reference to the socioeconomic status of respondents, it was felt acknowledgment of the situation was pertinent.

2.2.3 Developing education in Wales

Prior to devolution, whilst still being overseen by the UK government in Westminster, education in Wales had a distinctive difference from that offered in England. In the late 1800s, post-primary education was offered in Wales, long before England (Carradice, 2013). The Education Act 1944 ensured schools teaching using the Welsh language (Welsh medium education) could be state funded for the first time (Benedictus-van den Berg et al., 2014). In the 1970s the UK Government Welsh Office oversaw the introduction of the Welsh language as being an essential element of the curriculum for all pupils up to the age of fourteen (WG, 2017). Following a referendum, in 1997, The Government of Wales Act 1998 made provision for the establishment of a National Assembly for Wales (Senedd, 2021). The new Assembly was given few legislative powers but controlled many social and environmental services one of which was education (Knight & Crick, 2022). One of

the first changes introduced was extending the compulsory education of the Welsh language up to the age of sixteen (WG, 2017). In 2010, the introduction of the Foundation Phase, marked the first major educational policy change. Enveloping previous educational age ranges of the early years and Key Stage 1, the Foundation Phase aimed to encourage a more creative and imaginative approach to teaching and learning, for three to seven-year-olds (WAG, 2008).

2.2.4 The current period of educational reform

At the time of undertaking this study, the WG is pushing ahead with possibly the most significant period of educational system-level reform, since its inception. Changes are being made to core elements of education, including a new curriculum and qualifications regime, significant investment in the teaching profession, alongside a new system for supporting learners with learning needs (Harris et al., 2020).

The Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021 laid out the legislation for the introduction of the new Curriculum for Wales. The key element of the new scheme places responsibility on individual schools and teachers to develop a curriculum that works for their pupils, within guidelines and parameters set out within the legislation (WG, 2022f). The phased roll out of the new way for learning was initiated, in primary education, in September 2022, with the aim of completing the transition for all secondary school pupils by September 2026 (Lewis & Crick, 2022; WG, 2022g).

Following devolution, the way learners who require extra support at school was regulated by the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (Knight et al., 2023; WAG, 2004). The term Special Educational Needs (SEN) was employed to encompass all school age learners who were considered to have some difficulty which meant they were requiring additional provision to support their education

(WAG, 2004). Support was provided through a system of graduated response; School Action (SA) being where support was accessible through in-house resources, School Action Plus (SA+), where some additional support was required from external providers, or in cases of greatest need, a Statement of Educational Need (Statement) was issued by the LA. Any learner identified as having SEN was issued with an Individual Education Plan (IEP), setting out targets and methods by which a school would support them (WAG, 2004). The Statement laid out exactly what support was required and who was responsible for its provision.

The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act (ALNET) 2018 set about reforming the way such provision was assessed and provided, linking support provision throughout a learner's time in education, up to twenty-five years of age. The new Additional Learning Needs Code (WG, 2021a) replaced the SEN term with additional learning needs (ALN), and a more inclusive definition to include any learner with a learning difficulty or disability, from a diagnosed condition or otherwise, who may require additional learning support (Knight & Crick, 2022; WG, 2021a). Statements were to be phased out, together with IEPs, both being replaced by an overarching legally binding Individual Development Plan (IDP), transferrable between schools and further or higher education providers. The new code places the learner at the centre of the process, including their views, in the planning processes of drawing up IDP support plans.

The ALN Code is being phased in over a proposed three-year period, placing new expectations on teachers and practitioners in Wales (Knight et al., 2022). Having been delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic the first phase of the roll out was introduced in September 2021, for learners up to year 10 who were newly identified as having ALN. At the time of writing, the phased roll out aims to have moved all learners from the existing SEN scheme to the new ALN system by the end of summer term 2024 (WG, 2022h). The early impact of this is considered in sections 2.2.6 and 2.2.7, below.

2.2.5 Schools, educators and learners in Wales

At the time of this study there were 1,470 maintained schools in Wales (Stats Wales, 2022a). A quarter of schools (26%, n = 375) teach solely through the medium of Welsh, whilst 64% (n = 945) are English language settings (Stats Wales, 2022a), the remainder are either dual stream (offering both Welsh and English language classes), bilingual, or not language specific (such as specialist settings).

The census data relating to school staff (Stats Wales, 2022b) indicates there were 27,655 teachers assisted by 27,990 support staff working in maintained schools across Wales. The education workforce was predominantly female (75% teachers - 84% support staff). Half of the teaching staff (49%) were working at primary school level, as were most support staff (62%). Overall teaching numbers fell by 1% since 2013, whereas support staff numbers increased slightly over the same timeframe (1%, n = 270). Discounting the large increase in staffing numbers at middle schools, specialist settings were the only sector to benefit from increased staffing, of both teaching and support staff, since 2013.

As of February 2022, there were 471,131 learners registered in Wales' maintained schools (Stats Wales 2022c), 51% male (n = 240,035), 49% female (n = 231,096). In the ten years since 2013, pupil numbers have been rising steadily, peaking in 2021 at 474,724. The majority of learners were enrolled at primary settings (57%, n = 266,574), whilst 37% (n = 175,957) were attending secondary schools. The special school population increased by 27%, over ten years, with 5,473 pupils now being educated in a maintained specialist setting. The increasing use of middle schools now cater for 22,516 pupils, accounting for 5% of the pupil population. Just 17% (n = 77,693) of learners attended Welsh medium settings, whilst 73% (n = 344,411) were taught using the English language.

Census data (Stats Wales, 2022d) shows that three-in-four registered pupils were White British (74%, n = 350,842), however, learners educated across Wales were from a wide range of cultural backgrounds with 7% (n = 31,690) not having either Welsh or English as their first language. Over the ten-year period, there has been a 20% increase in the number of learners eligible for free school meals (FSM) (Stats Wales, 2022e). At the time of the school census of 2022, 21% of the pupil population (n = 100,305) were receiving FSM, this data refers to the period before the roll-out of universal FSMs was initiated.

2.2.6 Learners with additional learning needs in Wales

There were 74,661 learners recorded within school's ALN registers, in February 2022, accounting for 16% of the learner population (Stats Wales, 2022f). Learners with ALN made up 16% of infants attending maintained nursery settings, 14% of those in primary, 12% of young people at middle schools, and 17% of secondary pupils. Within the graduated response framework, 19% of ALN pupils had a statement, 34% were at SA+, 45% SA, whilst 4% were issued with the newly introduced IDPs.

The 2022 data is the first published since the phased roll out of the new ALN Code (WG, 2021) was initiated, the resulting impact on case numbers is marked. Case numbers in 2022 were 19% lower than the previous year, a reduction of 18,027 individual entries. The Welsh Government attribute the reduction to two key factors: the phased removal of the SEN category 'General Learning Difficulties' (GLD) and a general 'review' of registers conducted by schools in preparation for the transition from the SEN to ALN system (WG, 2022j). The largest reduction (31%) was seen in those at SA, the lowest level of additional support, there were 21% fewer learners at SA+ and 0.5% less Statements were in use, however there were 3,315 of the newly introduced IDPs in circulation.

To understand the context of this change in reported learners requiring additional assistance in their education, it is important to consider the long-term trend. The number of pupils recorded as having additional needs remained constant from 2013, peaking at 105,625 in 2018 (23% of pupil population). In the subsequent years the number of learners receiving additional support reduced yearly, before the marked descent witnessed in 2022. Coincidentally the peak in 2018, and subsequent decreases, coincide with the adoption of the new ALNET (WG,2017), in December 2017. There were 30,964 fewer reports of pupils with identified ALN in Wales in the 2022 census, when compared with the peak in 2018, a drop of 29%, whilst the overall pupil population rose slightly (1%) in the same timeframe. Since 2018, the proportion of pupils recorded in ALN registers fell from 23% to 16%. Whilst there were 1,125 more Statements in circulation, there was a 28% reduction in pupils at SA+ and 44% fewer receiving support at SA level.

Despite the reduction in numbers of learners reported as having ALN in Wales' schools, the 16% of learners registered as requiring additional support with their learning still represent a significant proportion of the wider pupil population.

2.2.7 Considering why the number of learners registered as having ALN may have decreased

The considerable reduction in reported cases of learners receiving additional support with their education coincided with the unveiling of and initial transition to the new ALN system, as discussed in section 2.2.4. Almost 31,000 fewer students are recorded in ALN registers since the ALNET act (WG, 2017) was passed into law, meaning 31,000 learners who were deemed to require additional support in 2017, were reportedly no longer accessing such support.

It is worth considering the definition of ALN presented within the new ALN Code:

> *'A person has additional learning needs if he or she has a learning difficulty or disability (whether the learning difficulty or disability arises from a medical condition or otherwise) which calls for additional learning provision.'* (WG, 2021a)

This phrase '*additional learning provision*', defined as '*educational or training provision that is additional to, or different from, that made generally for others of the same age*' (WG, 2021a), might be an indicator for why so many schools have removed considerable numbers of their students from ALN registers. Although the code makes no reference to the phrase, '*universal provision*' is generally used to describe the in-house support which is said to be available to all learners, in any individual setting (Estyn, 2023). It is at each setting's discretion to identify the types of support they offer which can be considered as '*universal provision*', therefore what learners might have access to in one school, may not be available to them in another (Estyn, 2023). How schools interpret this may explain why nearly a third of learners benefitting from in-house support, at SA level, were removed from ALN registers. As an example, if a learner was identified as being considerably behind in their reading age, previously they would have been identified as having SEN, and given an IEP, at SA level. One of their IEP targets would have been to improve their reading age, and with in-house support be enrolled on a '*catch-up*' reading programme.

Under the new ALN system, if a school deemed such provision as 'universal', as it is readily available to all students, should it be required, the child would no longer be registered as having ALN. Estyn (2023) found that Local Authorities and schools were using various terms such as '*universal*', '*targeted*', '*specialist*', and '*additional*', as a graduated level of support provision. As set-out within the code, only those deemed to require '*additional*' support are issued with an IDP and therefore registered as having additional needs. Under the previous SEN system, those receiving '*targeted*' support would be registered at SA level, and those requiring

'*specialist*' support would have been SA+. It is reported that parents feel '*universal provision*' provides a '*blanket approach*' regardless of the need of the individual learners, meaning their needs are not being met (Senedd, 2024a). Both Estyn (2023) and the Senedd's Children, Young People and Education Committee (Senedd, 2024a) call for a clear definition of what constitutes both '*universal*' and '*additional*' learning provisions, to ensure a uniform approach across settings, regions, authorities, and nationwide.

2.2.8 Autistic learners in Wales

At the time of the 2022 census (Stats Wales, 2022f) there were 9,995 pupils enrolled in maintained schools across Wales, with autism identified as one of their needs. They account for 2.1% of the whole school population, suggesting that one-in-fifty pupils in Wales were autistic. Three quarters were attending mainstream (76%), accounting for 1.6% of the mainstream pupil population, whilst 2,430 attended specialist settings, making up 44.4% of the pupils educated this way. Within mainstream, at pre-school level 2.5% of infants were autistic, whilst autistic young people accounted for 1.4% of primary, 1.5% of middle and 2% of secondary school students. Of those attending mainstream primary, middle and secondary settings; 85.5% were in English language schools, with 14.5% learning through the medium of Welsh.

More than half (54%) had a Statement, 30% received support at SA+ and 10% were at SA (Stats Wales, 2022f). Autism was the most commonly supported type of need referenced in active Statements, accounting for 22% of all Statements in circulation. Autism was also recorded as a type of need in 16% of the newly issued IDPs. Conwy borough, in north Wales, reported the highest proportion of their pupil population being autistic (3%), whilst Gwynedd recorded the lowest, at just 1.2%. The most autistic students were registered in Swansea where 1,005 learners accounted for 2.8% of the pupil population, the least were in Ceredigion, where 165 autistic young people made up 1.7% of the learners in the county.

In 2017 the way schools reported cases of SEN/ALN was altered, enabling schools to enter multiple needs for each SEN registered pupil, prior to this schools were only required to enter a pupil's major type of need. As a result, the 2017 census reported a 30% increase in the number of autistic learners, from 5,327 (1.1% of pupil population) in 2016, to 6,910 (1.5% of pupil population). In the ensuing years, the number and proportion of autistic learners continued to rise. Since 2017 there has been an overall increase of 45% in the number of autistic students, over the same period the pupil population has risen just 1%. In the same timeframe the number of pupils identified with ALN has decreased 29%, due in part to the introduction of the new ALN system (Stats Wales, 2022f).

Over this period, there has been an increase of 42% in the number of autistic pupils receiving their education in mainstream settings, while the wider mainstream pupil population increased just 0.8%. Although the number of young people attending specialist settings increased just 16%, there was a 51% growth in autistic students at these provisions. The number of autistic learners with a Statement increased 38%, whilst the Statements in circulation increased just 13%, as the proportion of Statements issued including autism as one of the pupil's needs increased from 18% in 2017 to 22% in 2022.

As school census data illustrates, the proportion of the learner population in Wales identified as being autistic continues to increase year-on-year, emphasising the importance of understanding how this cohort feel about their educational experiences.

2.3 Inclusive Education

In the late 1970s, following a four-year review of the education of learners considered to be 'handicapped by disabilities of body and mind' (Evans, 1995), the Warnock Report (1978) marked a monumental shift in educational policy and

provision, for learners with additional needs. Championing the use of a new term 'Special Educational Needs' (SEN), and framing need as a continuum (Gibson & Blandford, 2005), the report heralded a shift from the segregation of disabled learners to integration into mainstream, based on an ideology of 'education for all' (Lauchlan & Grieg, 2015).

2.3.1 Defining inclusion in education

When considering what educational inclusion is, what it should look like, and how to make it work, it is beneficial to have an overarching definition of the term. However, whilst the concept of inclusive education is fiercely debated, a definitive description remains elusive (Cigman, 2007; Imray & Colley, 2017). At its core, inclusion should embrace difference and disability, celebrate diversity, and decrease exclusion (Artiles et al., 2006; Barton, 1986). Inclusive education should focus on equality, social justice, and the rights of the child, promoting acceptance, empowerment, and a sense of belonging (Goodall,2019). Inclusion is not the provision of similar resources to all learners, as this does not assure equal opportunity (De Valenzuela, 2006), rather a response to the need of each individual pupil, supporting their engage in all activities (Woolfson, 2011). Educational inclusion should afford all learners an opportunity to play an active role in the community of the school (Judge, 2003). Four key elements shape inclusion within an educational context; presence (attending classes, without withdrawal or exclusion), participation (partaking in all educational and community experiences), acceptance (from both staff and peers), and achievement (socially and emotionally, not just academically) (Humphrey, 2008).

In Wales, the Welsh Government propose that:

> *'Inclusion is a process through which all pupils access common opportunities in ways relevant to their needs, and which ensures that they fully belong to the school community'* (WG, 2016, p.2)

Schools should ensure they adapt to support and encourage the involvement of all learners across all aspects of school life. LAs and schools are expected to create

environments that include all pupils, enabling them to achieve to their potential. The views of pupils and their parents or carers are listened to, respected and acted upon, safeguarding the rights of each young person (WG, 2016).

2.3.2 Inclusive education in practice

It is said that an '*inclusive school is every school*', or at least what every school should strive to be (Smith & Stephenson, 2021). Inclusive education should focus on individual need though appropriate teaching (Clough & Nutbrown, 2004), listening to pupil opinion and encouraging involvement (Borg et al., 2011). Inclusion requires strong policy, practical accommodations, and appreciation of diversity (Corbett & Slee, 2000; Petriwskyj, 2010), across national, regional, and local levels. Inclusion in education should ensure all stakeholders; educators, learners, parents and local organisations, work to promote and support learning (Booth & Ainscow, 2004). To embrace inclusion within schools, teachers are required to include all learners, respecting individuality (Nutbrown & Clough, 2009), to develop a learning community where everyone feels valued (Frederickson & Cline, 2009).

The best suited school for any child is one in which they felt valued and included, where they feel part of a community, giving them a sense of achievement (Warnock & Norwich, 2010), whether this should be mainstream, ALN provisions within mainstream, specialist settings or alternative educational provisions (AEPs) (Ballard, 1999; Goodall, 2019a; Smith & Stephenson, 2021). Often, learners with ALN are expected to fit into the system, rather than the system making accommodations to fit them (Hodge et al., 2019; Rioux, 2013). Attending mainstream, many face victimisation (Fink et al., 2015; Trundle et al., 2023), leading to exclusion educationally, socially and emotionally (Goodall, 2015b). Including learners with ALN impacts the learning of others (Brown, 2016), often those requiring substantial levels of support, or exhibiting challenging behaviours, complicate the drive to raise standards and meet targets (Runswick-Cole, 2011; Warnes et al., 2022). Standardised scoring and league tables are in direct competition with creating a

truly inclusive learning environment, ignoring progress made in numerous other social, emotional, or behavioural areas (Goodall, 2019). How practitioners manage this challenging conundrum, between meeting targets and learner need, can define how truly inclusive their practices are.

Teachers must balance supporting learners with ALN without detracting from the learning experiences of the others (Cameron, 2014), yet some continue treating all pupils equally, disregarding the need to identify and address an individual's needs (Lacey & Scull, 2015). In an equal system provision tends to be the same for each learner, students would be better served with equity, so individual learners are given the tools they require to reach the same end goal as their peer group. Teachers who have difficulty differentiating work frequently disengage learners with ALN from activities, or remove them from class, with many of these learners losing significant proportions of learning time (Cameron, 2014; Lacey & Scull, 2015; Westwood, 2015).

Warnock (2005) now considers the philosophy of an education system catering for all learners under one roof, irrespective of individual difference, as fundamentally flawed, instead, now proposing learners receive their education, wherever they feel comfortable. The current landscape of inclusion generally creates more educational, social and emotional exclusion (Warnock, 2005), presenting significant challenges for those trying to avoid repetitious exclusions (Slee, 2011).

2.4 Mainstream and specialist education provisions

Following the work of Warnock (1978) and subsequent national and international legislative frameworks, mainstream education is now the default option available to parents when considering their child's first school placement. Combining definitions of mainstream from both Oxford and Collins dictionaries the words '*typical, normal and conventional*' are used, whilst the Cambridge dictionary refers to mainstream

education as '*education for children who can be taught in the same way as most other children*'. At the turn of the millennium around 50% of Autistic pupils were receiving their education within mainstream settings (Barnard, 2000). Current data from the WG indicates that 76% of autistic learners educated in maintained schools in Wales were registered in mainstream, with one-in-four attending special schools (see Section 2.2.7, Stats Wales, 2022f).

Morewood et al. (2011) highlight the misconception that autistic young people who may have higher levels of functioning and academic ability, are able to manage in mainstream education, however it can be their social difficulties (Kasari et al., 2011) and sensory differences (Gentil-Gutiérrez et al., 2021) which make the environment challenging.

There are numerous studies suggesting autistic young people can see benefits across several areas when included within mainstream classes (Smith, 2012). Crisman (2008) reported that modelling behaviours displayed by non-autistic peers, autistic learners see improvements in their generalised social behaviours and skills (Lindsay et al., 2013; Reiter & Vitani, 2007) and a reduction in their own autism related behaviours (Harrell et al., 1997), whilst Eldar at al. (2010) found some had acquired skills to cope with transitions and changes to routine. Such improvements, however, could be the result of autistic masking, where individuals feel forced into behaving in certain ways that others consider acceptable, in order to fit in, and not appear different. Simply placing an autistic learner in mainstream without a support network is not acceptable (Keane et al., 2012; Ochs et al., 2001). Being unsupported in a classroom with non-autistic pupils, does not guarantee social skills are development (Locke et al., 2010; Moore, 2007), indeed this can lead to social isolation for many (Chamberlain et al., 2007).

Whilst it has been argued that educating autistic learners within the mainstream can enhance quality-of-life and improve academic function (Connor, 2000; Knight et al., 2009; Strain, 1983), evidence to the contrary suggests many face discrimination, isolation and exclusion (Recio et al., 2020). McIntyre et al. (2006) found that for autistic young people with poor social competences, both academic and behavioural outcomes are reduced within mainstream schooling. Focusing on the quality-of-life enhancements reported above, plenty of discussion has been reported of the increased stress and anxiety many autistic young people suffer at school (Sedgewick et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2019). Sadly, suicide amongst autistic young people is common (Masi et al., 2020; Nowicki et al., 2014; Oliphant et al., 2020), with Brown et al. (2024) reporting autistic individuals were up to eight times more likely die from suicide than their non-autistic peers. McKinlay et al. (2021) report exclusion and isolation at school as being relevant risk factors underlying these issues.

Generally, parents of autistic young people report concerns about their child's mainstream education (Falkmer et al., 2015; Lindsay, 2003; Norwich, 2005), worrying about the school's ability to meet the particular needs of their child (Makin et al, 2017; McNerney et al., 2015; Tissot, 2011). Parental reports suggest they face stigmatisation from teachers (Broady et al., 2017; Farrugia, 2009; Mitter & Scior, 2019; Salleh et al., 2020), who do not listen to their concerns and frequently blame their parenting methods for the child's behaviours (McKinlay et al., 2021).

When considering the above, it is understandable to recognise how Florian (2014) came to conclude that mainstream education might work for some autistic learners, but not all. Whilst mainstream can offer a wealth of academic support and opportunities to interact with non-autistic peers, special schools are served by dedicated specialist teachers, working with significantly lower student numbers, supporting, and nurturing better quality social interactions (Kishida & Kemp, 2009). Special education can be delivered in a variety of settings, outside of the

generalised special school. Goodall (2019) emphasises the role of autism specific schools, in offering inclusion through '*empowerment, acceptance and belonging*' through a caring, understanding approach where autism is central to every aspect of the teaching and learning (Goodall, 2015; Lynch & Irvine, 2009).

Currently, one of the most popular approaches to providing special education is through resource bases attached to mainstream settings. These offer a more agreeable environment enabling specialist teaching with a blended mainstream experience (Taylor, 2005). Attwood (2007) highlighted the difficulty autistic learners face, with little opportunity for educational breaks or time to rest and relax away from the sensory stimulations of mainstream environments, these 'ALN hubs' offer such a space. Fredrickson et al. (2010) report greater parent satisfaction with mainstream education when access to resource bases is available, using such spaces offers autistic learners greater flexibility and enables some relief helping to reduce stresses and anxieties (Kidd & Kaczmarek, 2010). Specialist teachers staffing these spaces, will have knowledge and understanding to support learners in a nurturing environment (Fredrickson et al., 2010) and can work with the pupils to successfully reintegrate into more mainstream classes (Bond & Hebron, 2016).

Another benefit teachers in specialist provisions have, is the ability to adapt curriculum to suit the learning needs of individual pupils, enhancing opportunities for success and development (Farrell, 2006), they also have better access to suitable resources and knowledge of various strategies so support all pupils (Vlachou et al., 2016). Generally, autistic learners within special schools have greater needs than those at mainstream (Waddington & Reed, 2017), however, Szumski and Karwowski (2012) found they had more constructive social experiences within the more supportive environment.

There is limited research reflecting the valuable role of special education settings, when compared to the mainstream alternatives (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Smith, 2012). Whilst it has been suggested that special school teachers generally have lower expectations for their pupils (Karvonen et al., 2011), children with behavioural difficulties are consistently seen to make better academic progress than their peers within mainstream (Smith & Matson, 2010). Similarly, Panerai et al. (2009) found that autistic learners attending specialist provisions saw improvements across a range of areas, on par with or better than those enrolled in mainstream schools. Reed et al. (2012) reported more socialisation and improved behaviour amongst autistic young people educated within special schools, in contrast, those in mainstream did not make such progress (Ashburner et al., 2008; Waddington & Reed, 2009; Zingerevich, 2009). General development across social skills was also thought to be better amongst autistic learners attending specialist placements (Reed et al., 2009).

2.4.1 Mainstream or specialist provision: The debate

Many consider the pressure to mainstream is motivated by the ideology rather than what is considered best for the individual learner (Norwich, 2005). Several factors have been postulated as determining factors in deciding whether an autistic child is suitable for mainstream education, often the main drivers are levels of function and IQ (Eaves & Ho, 1997; Harris & Handleman, 2000), however, family background and involvement are also determinants (Szumski & Karwowski, 2012). Caution should be taken when assessing autistic young people's suitability for mainstream based on their academic and adaptive functioning levels (Morewood et al., 2011), as much research suggests these alone do not ensure the ability to cope with the mainstream environment (Humphrey & Symes, 2010; McGillicuddy & O'Donnell, 2014; Goodall, 2018). Marshall and Goodall (2015) warn that mainstream's '*one size fits all*' methodology is not suitable for the heterogeneous autistic pupil population, indeed teachers and parents have both voiced concerns of the efficacy of mainstreaming for autistic learners (Eldar et al., 2010; Shevlin et al., 2008).

The evidence reported within the existing literature draws differing conclusions. Depending on the literature you read, and your own personal perceptions within the debate, it is possible to conclude that mainstream provides the best academic opportunities for the autistic learner, or on the contrary, that setting has no impact on outcomes. Both Lindsay (2003) and Waddington and Reed (2017) found no definitive evidence to suggest mainstream promoted better academic outcomes. There is however a wealth of literature indicating that autistic learners educated within mainstream record outcomes on par, or better than their peers attending specialist provisions (de Graaf et al., 2013; Dessemontet et al., 2012; Freeman & Alkin, 2000; Ruijs & Peetsma, 2009; Szumski & Karwowski, 2014; Turner et al., 2008). Whilst the literature discussed above may present a contradictory overview of the outcomes between those educated within mainstream and specialist education, it highlights the individuality of learners. What may prove successful for learner A, may ultimately have the opposite impact on learner B.

It should be acknowledged that academic achievement is not the only end goal for some autistic learners. Whilst mainstream education is heavily focused on targets and academic outcomes, specialist provision staff are more pupil centred, helping the individual to embrace their difference (Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2010). Mainstream teachers place greater expectation on academic learning, whilst those in special schools are often more focused on supporting the development of active citizens (Klang et al., 2020). Studies suggest that whilst including autistic learners within mainstream classes benefits all pupils, by developing their understanding of difference and disability (Egel & Gradel, 1988; McGregor & Vogelsberg, 1998), there is little evidence to suggest autistic learners' social skills benefit (Durbach & Pence, 1991; Hardiman et al., 2009; Harris et al., 1990; Reed et al., 2012). Norwich and Lewis (2005) believe that careful thought needs to be given to the suitability of mainstream for autistic learners, as not all will have the ability to cope in such an environment (Conn, 2014; McGillicuddy & O'Donnell, 2014). There is frequently a disconnect between the structured mainstream activities and the challenges faced by autistic learners (Humphrey & Symes, 2010; McGillicuddy & O'Donnell, 2014),

which increase school related stress and anxiety (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008a, 2008b; Browning *et al.*, 2009; Humphrey & Symes, 2011; Hebron & Humphrey, 2014; Poon et al., 2014; Sreckovic et al., 2014; Sproston et al., 2017).

There are numerous options available when considering the best educational placement for an autistic child. The majority enter education at the mainstream level, and it is not until they fail repeatedly that the alternative options are considered (APPGA, 2017). Wing (2007) questioned the morality of forcing vulnerable autistic young people to endure mainstream environments, whilst even the architect of the move towards mainstream inclusion later denounced the ideal of the 'all learners under one roof' approach (Warnock, 2005). Although mainstreaming was purported to help improve the socialisation of autistic learners (Boutot & Bryant, 2005; Knight et al., 2009), much evidence exists suggesting this is not the case, in practice (Humphrey & Parkinson, 2006; Reed et al., 2012).

Specialist provisions in their many forms can provide a nurturing environment to support autistic learners of all abilities (Fredrickson et al., 2010; Kishida & Kemp, 2009), however places are often favoured for those with the most severe of symptomologies (Waddington & Reed, 2017). Many see the benefit of autism-specific special schools (Goodall, 2015b; Iovannone et al., 2003; Marshall & Goodall, 2015), that offer an inclusive environment tailored to pupils' needs (Goodall, 2015), including those who have faced exclusion (Brede et al., 2016). It is clear that a variety of provisions, catering for a diverse spectrum of need, should be maintained, offering an appropriate education for all (Parsons et al., 2011), with Warnock (2005) advocating that individual learners should have access to an education within a context where they feel comfortable.

2.5 School exclusion

Several layers of exclusion can impact young people, in an education context, physical exclusion refers to the removal of a learner from classes or even the wider school grounds (Fazel & Newby, 2021). School exclusion, as we discuss it, involves sanctioning a behaviour by removing the young person from lessons (Gill et al., 2017). A learner is considered '*at risk of exclusion*' when their behaviours escalate beyond the school's ability to effectively manage their safety, or the safety of other pupils or staff (Cole et al., 2019). To gain a more detailed understanding in this area, a review of literature relating to school exclusions starts by briefly looking at classroom behaviour, before considering exclusion practices, and consequences. An overview of what the literature tells us about exclusions involving autistic learners, will be followed with a consideration of Welsh Government data, relating to reported exclusions.

2.5.1 Classroom behaviour

All behaviours are considered a form of communication (RCSLT, 2019). Research suggests many pupils who display challenging behaviour in the classroom, and are 'at risk of exclusion', or have already been excluded, have some form of speech, language and communication need (SLCN) (Clegg, 2004; RCSLT, 2019; Ripley & Yuill, 2005). When learner behaviours do not conform with educator expectations, they are frequently marginalised (Goodley, 2017; Holt, 2016), increasing their disengagement and heightening their behaviours, initiating what Guldberg et al. (2021) refer to as a '*cycle of exclusion*'. Societal factors can influence behaviours at school (Caslin, 2021), including poverty, insecure home environment, and ethnicity (Graham et al., 2019). These can lead to disengagement, which often present as challenging behaviour (Briggs, 2010), eventually resulting in exclusion (Graham et al., 2019).

Children are often labelled for their behaviour (Holt, 2016; Timimi, 2010), and perceived as being problematic, when it should be acknowledged that there may be

underlying problems (Parsons & Howlett, 1996), whilst learners may have differing ways of responding to various stimulus within the environment. Studies of teacher perceptions found that educators believe problematic behaviours are caused by deficits in the child, poor parenting, or social disadvantage (Armstrong, 2019; Kulz, 2015, MacLeod et al., 2013). Many regard challenging behaviours at school to be an expression of frustration at being misunderstood resulting from unmet needs (Armstrong, 2019; Caslin, 2021; Parsons & Howlett, 1996). Where educators are understanding, meeting the needs of the learner, positive relationships are formed and challenging behaviours are reduced (McCluskey et al., 2016; Orsati & Causton-Theoharis, 2013).

2.5.2 Exclusion practices and consequences

Formal exclusion from school can either be '*fixed-term*' (*also known as a suspension*), where learners are required to stay away for a set period of time, or 'permanent', where the child is removed from the school register, and is not welcome back (Brede et al., 2017). These external exclusions are legally required to be logged with LAs and national governments. Many schools are known to employ various informal exclusion methods (Parsons, 2018), resulting in missing data and a general under-reporting of exclusion statistics (Gazeley et al., 2015). Timpson (2019) highlighted the practice of 'off-rolling' (schools 'encouraging' parents to educate at home, or find an alternative placement), and 'managed moves' (headteachers planning to move a pupil 'at risk of exclusion' to an alternate school or provision), both are in affect a permanent exclusion, but go unrecorded (Daniels et al., 2019; Hutchinson & Crenna-Jennings, 2019). The practice of preventing a child from attending an off-site visit or sending them home due to staff shortage or lack of support, is commonplace, and effectively a '*fixed-term*' exclusion, however many schools employ such methods informally, failing to register these instances make such practices illegal (Atkinson, 2013).

School exclusions, thought to cost the UK economy around £2 billion, frequently lead to social exclusion in adult life (Gill et al., 2017). Learners who experience exclusion are often stigmatised by peers and often feel ignored by their teachers (Quin & Hemphill, 2014). Parsons and Howlett (1996) refer to excluded students being failed, as schools endeavour to remove certain pupil cohorts from education, these learners suffer long term effects that greatly reduce their quality of life, in post-school years (Berridge et al., 2001). The mental health of learners who have faced exclusions often suffer, whilst many develop physical health issues (Pirrie et al., 2011). Their long-term opportunities are limited with many not entering further education, employment, or training (Berridge et al., 2001). Literature suggests many excluded young people resort to offending and crime, culminating in a cycle within the criminal justice system (Coles et al., 2002; Daniels et al. 2003; Gill et al., 2017; Pirrie et al., 2011; Whear et al., 2014).

2.5.3 School exclusion and autistic learners

There is much research to suggest autistic learners, regardless of academic capability, face a significantly higher risk of school exclusion than their non-autistic peers (Brede et al., 2017; Simonoff et al., 2008). Whilst autistic pupils are no more likely to be absent from school due to illness, they miss considerably more time at school through persistent exclusion (Green et al., 2005). Brede et al. (2017) consider exclusion as 'inevitable' for autistic learners that display challenging behaviour at school. Reports suggest that 20% receive a fixed-term exclusion, whilst 5% are permanently excluded, with nearly half of all autistic young people having been illegally excluded in some form (Archer et al., 2016; Moore, 2016).

Literature also highlights the excessive use of informal exclusion practices (Parsons, 2018). Schools demonstrate an inconsistent or selective appreciation of their legal obligations when it comes to excluding autistic learners (Justice, 2019), who are thought to be three times as likely as their non-autistic peers to face an informal exclusion (Cooke, 2018). Approximately 60% of autistic learners having experienced

an informal exclusion at some point during their education (Cooke, 2018), having a detrimental impact on their self-esteem, mental health, and academic attainment (APPGA, 2017). Recurrent exclusions affect the wider family, with 50% of parents forced to give up work due to the constant need to care for their child during exclusions, whilst the remainder had to take substantial time away from work (AAA, 2014). Exclusions also increase parental stress, financial hardships, and cause difficulties for siblings (Guldberg et al., 2021).

Previous experience of autism is key to developing inclusive practice (Robertson et al., 2003); however, teachers struggle to include autistic learners, due to inadequate resources and training (Humphrey & Symes, 2013; NASUWT, 2018; Witmer & Ferreri, 2014). Communication difficulties cause tensions within the demanding environment of the classroom, often presenting as challenging behaviour, leading to marginalisation, and ultimately exclusion (Brede et al., 2017; Guldberg et al., 2021; Gutman et al., 2018). Guldberg et al. (2021) emphasised the importance of understanding the triggers behind such behaviour and identify steps that can be taken to manage situations as they arise, avoiding exclusion (House of Commons Education Committee (HCEC), 2018).

Sproston et al. (2017) reported three significant areas considered influential in determining pathways towards exclusion; unsuitable learning environments, difficulties with relationships at school, and issues with staff interactions (Sproston et al., 2017). Curricula are often inaccessible to autistic learners (NAHT, 2018), the importance of facilitating learning by ensuring a school system that works for autistic students should be a priority (Fazel & Newby, 2021). The increasing complexities of education place substantial demands on students, which autistic learners struggle to cope with (Brede et al., 2017). Autistic young people often have difficulty managing their learning, leading to challenging behaviour (Ashburner et al., 2010; Keen et al., 2016). Schools are full of sensory stimuli providing numerous challenges for autistic students (Ashburner et al., 2008; Pellicano, 2013), sensory

overwhelm at school can impact learning, triggering challenging or aggressive behaviours (Bogdashina, 2016; Schaff et al., 2011). Subtle changes to the school environment could help reduce the frequency of challenging behaviour (Mazurek et al., 2013). Autistic young people struggle to manage their emotions and behaviours (Berkovits et al., 2017), form and maintain friendships (Bauminger & Kasari, 2000; Calder et al., 2013), cope with conflict (Humphrey & Hebron, 2015; Sedgewick et al., 2016), and experience positive interactions with teachers (May et al., 2014). These difficulties make including autistic learners challenging (HCEC, 2006), as teachers struggle to provide emotional support, and manage challenging behaviours (Humphrey & Symes, 2013; Westling, 2010).

Autistic young people are often physically restrained at school, as teachers favour reactive intervention, when being proactive could avoid escalation (Hibbard & Desch, 2007; Lindsay et al., 2014; Ryan & Peterson, 2004). Autistic students often fall victim to school bullies (Hebron et al., 2015; Sedgewick et al., 2018) and can react aggressively in response (Humphrey & Symes 2011), effective management of bullying is key to reducing risk of exclusion (Fazel & Newby, 2021). Positive relationships with teachers and peers could play a significant role in halting the trend of repeated exclusion (Fazel & Newby, 2021). Schools can be very structured and rigid in both their management and teaching, where reasonable adjustments are lacking, for autistic learners, the risk of exclusion increases (Cole et al., 2019). Specialist support is often lacking, and with limited knowledge, teachers are unable to provide adequate support to help with social and emotional difficulties (McGregor & Campbell, 2001; Smith et al., 2018; Soto-Chodiman et al., 2012), This, together with a lack of understanding and failure to meet the needs of individual learners, often result in a deterioration of behaviour, and increases the possibility of exclusion (Brede et al., 2017; Fazel & Newby, 2021; Sproston et al., 2017). An inability to comprehend the challenges faced by autistic learners hinders practitioners' engagement in practices aimed at providing an alternative to exclusion (Timpson, 2019).

2.5.4 Reported school exclusions in Wales

The process of school exclusions in Wales is governed by The Education (Pupil Exclusions and Appeals) (Maintained Schools) (Wales) Regulations (2003), supported by Guidance document 255/2019 (WG, 2019). General exclusion data is published online annually, the most recent data, relating to the academic year 2020/21. The data shows a rapid increase in formal exclusions since 2011/12, in the years leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic (+29%), peaking during the last full academic year pre-COVID-19, 2018/19. Whilst the trend of fixed-term exclusions of more than five days was decreasing (-25%), those excluded for five days or less increased (+32%), the permanent exclusion rate increased sharply over the same period (+170%) (WG, 2022j). The data for the subsequent years (2019 through to 2021) is unstable due to factors related to the COVID-19 pandemic, when schools were closed to most learners for long periods of time, therefore, exclusion reports from 2018/19 will be the focus. During the school year 2018/19, there were 19,071 fixed-term exclusions involving 4% of the learner population, 18,286 were for periods of up to five days, with 785 involving exclusions over five days or more. Permanent exclusions were issued to 246 learners, accounting for 0.05% of the whole school population (WG, 2022j).

Welsh Government guidance (WG, 2019) states that schools must avoid imposing permanent exclusions on pupils who have a Statement and should endeavour to avert excluding any learner with identified ALN. Referencing the Equality Act (2010), guidance highlights the school's responsibility to actively ensure learners considered to have 'protected characteristics' such as disabilities are not discriminated against, this includes punishment for behaviours directly associate with the individual's disability. Regardless of this, pupils with additional needs were seemingly disproportionately represented within the WG exclusion data (WG, 2022j). In 2018/19, nearly two thirds of formal exclusions involved learners with additional needs (72%), at a time when SEN pupils made up less than a quarter of the pupil population (22%). More than half of all permanent exclusions involved

learners with identified SEN (54%), whilst SEN registered pupils accounted for the majority of fixed-term exclusions (*> 5 days,* 72%*; ≤ 5 days,* 77%).

Data separating exclusion statistics by type of learning need, is not freely published by the WG, however in response to a request for information, the data relating to autistic students was provided (WG. personal communication, December 8, 2021). The number of autistic learners permanently excluded in the year 2018/19 was withheld, as a result of it being disclosive, however 564 autistic students (7%) were sanctioned with a fixed-term exclusion during the period, accounting for 3% of all such exclusions. Twenty-seven were excluded for a period over five days, 0.3% of the autistic learner population (3% *of all fixed-term exclusions over 5 days*), whilst 6% (n = 537) of autistic students were excluded for five days or less (3% *of all such exclusions*). This indicates that autistic learners were overrepresented within exclusion data, especially when compared to learners with no additional needs.

2.6 Educational challenges for autistic learners

The NAS school report (Brayford, 2021) paints a bleak picture of how autistic young people in England feel about their educational experiences. Just a quarter felt happy at school (26%), with similar proportions believing they were being included (24%). Whilst 70% of autistic students felt their educational experience would be improved, if their teachers understood autism, 54% indicated the worst part of going to school was that their teachers did not understand them. It was reported that there was also a general lack of understanding amongst their peers, whilst 51% said they would like support to help develop positive peer relationships. With day-to-day school life being challenging, reports from Ambitious About Autism (AAA) suggest 80% of autistic learners suffer school related anxiety on a daily basis, whilst 58% of those often miss school as a result (Archer et al., 2016).

Autistic learners have numerous difficulties that make attending school challenging, of which impacts their educational experiences (Fleury et al., 2014), many of which are not often identified in the wider pupil population (Carmona-Serrano et al., 2020). To develop a deeper understanding of these challenges, and the reasons behind the difficulties autistic learners face, an extensive review of literature is summarised below. The findings reported were critical in the decision-making processes used in the formation of the first phase surveys. Section 2.6.1 gives a brief overview of some of the areas of difficulty, before sections 2.6.2-2.6.5 looks more closely at four of the key areas; anxiety, social difficulties, peer relationships, and understanding.

2.6.1 What makes education challenging for autistic learners?

A strong predilection towards routine and structure, is something which leads many autistic individuals to struggle with any unexpected changes to their school day (Fleury et al., 2014). The introduction of new or temporary teachers or support staff, often unavoidable in the modern classroom, is known to heighten autistic young people's difficulties (Jones, 2012; Wire, 2005). It is difficult, in the busy and often unpredictable space of the classroom, for practitioners to always mitigate for unexpected changes to routine. However, should the teacher have a good understanding about autism, and more importantly the individual learner, it is possible to manage certain situations to limit any possible distress for the learner. This can be much easier where support staff can be on hand to support the learner through various methods which are known to alleviate stressful situations for the student. It is also possible to employ strategies which rely heavily on routine to encourage and support autistic learner engagement in activities they may otherwise exclude themselves from. I would suggest, this can be achieved where teacher or support staff have worked to form a positive and understanding relationship with the individual learner.

Executive functioning difficulties are common amongst the autistic community (Fernandez-Prieto et al., 2021), resulting in troubles with problem solving and the organisation and planning of work (Escolano-Pérez et al., 2019: Fleury, et al., 2014). When combined with troubles in the understanding and use of language (Adams & Gaile, 2020), there are frequently issues following instructions and completing tasks set out by the teacher (Sulek et al., 2021), often compounded by sensory issues. Simple classroom strategies that all teachers could employ, include careful delivery of instructions, whilst managing expectations. Providing clear and basic step-by-step instructions for the task set, not only help autistic learners, but can benefit the entire class. Displaying instructions and expectations making sure these are also clear and concise enable learners to continuously refer to them, guiding them through the set work. Visual timetables, often used as a display to explain the events of the day for the whole class, can have varying levels of efficacy, these can be beneficial, but the strategy is not suitable for all. Where teachers and support staff have a good understanding of the individual learner, the use of visual work schedules can prove highly successful. These resources need to be unique to the individual student, and evidence suggests when used correctly, visual schedules can improve independent working, and on-task behaviours, whilst reducing challenging behaviour (Knight et al., 2015; Macdonald et al., 2018; Pierce et al. 2013; Watson & DiCarlo, 2016).

Many autistic individuals struggle with motor functions. Developmental issues with muscle tone and postural control (Shillingsburg et al., 2015) impact their general quality of life, including in their education (Ardalan et al., 2019). Compared to their non-autistic peers, a variety of both fine and gross motor issues are observed (Crucitti et al., 2020). As a result, autistic young people often have difficulty with ball games and physical activities (Green et al., 2009), whilst poor fine motor control leave many struggling with their writing (Zajic et al., 2021). From a personal perspective, it is important that educators, especially those working with the youngest learners, adopt a patient and supportive approach to help those who struggle in these areas develop their skills. There is often a lot of pressure placed on

young learners, especially within primary school, to produce neat, legible handwriting, again educator understanding in this area can help alleviate a lot of the stress this place on autistic learners. As learners progress through their education, there are often opportunities to use technology, such as laptops and tablets, to remove some of the unnecessary handwriting requirements.

One of the key elements of autism is the difficulty in making sense of the surrounding environment (NAS, 2016), often a result of difficulties in processing sensory input, including conversely being both hyper and hypo sensitive to a variety of stimuli (Schaaf et al., 2014). A school environment will often be overloaded with sights, sounds, smells, and tactile sensory inputs (Gentil-Gutiérrez et al., 2021). Sensory challenges can make coping with every-day situations incredibly difficult for autistic young people. Within a school environment the provision of a safe and quiet space to help with sensory regulation can help alleviate the distress of sensory overstimulation, avoiding an escalation of unwanted and sometimes challenging behaviours. Again, the most influential factor in supporting autistic learners in this area is understanding. Where educators appreciate the difficulties these sensory challenges can present, learners will feel more at ease and less likely to become overstimulated.

2.6.2 Anxiety

Anxiety related disorders one of the most common areas where autistic individuals are likely to have co-occurring diagnoses, research suggests they more likely to suffer with anxiety than the non-autistic population. (Sedgewick et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2019; van Steensel et al., 2011). Anxiety is thought to have a greater impact on quality of life, than autism, amongst children with both (Adams et al., 2020). Whilst anxiety can severely impact the educational experiences of all learners (Langley et al., 2004; Weissman et al., 2009), autistic students with anxiety struggle to cope with the added pressure of expectation, both educationally and socially (Ashburner et al., 2010; Fuji et al., 2013). White et al., (2014) discuss the

bidirectional impact of anxiety amongst autistic young people, suggesting that whilst anxieties may stem from the challenges associated with social and academic pressures at school, it is also likely they contribute to them. Anxiety is understood to be a barrier to education and attainment, amongst autistic learners (Wood & Gadow, 2010) and often what is seen by others as challenging behaviour, can be identified as a release of pressure resulting from overwhelming anxiety (APPGA, 2017).

2.6.3 Social difficulties

One of the core elements of autism are difficulties around social communication and interaction (NICE, 2011). Co-occurring anxiety further impacts social interactions in autistic young people, negatively impacting their ability to form and maintain friendships, and function socially (Kerns et al., 2015). Social anxiety can lead to avoidance of social situations, decreasing social motivation (Joosten et al., 2009; Stein & Stein, 2008), presenting as difficulties with social skills, communication ability, and peer acceptance (Halls et al., 2015; Pickard et al., 2017). As well as anxiety, social skills development has been found to be impacted by motor and executive functioning (Fong & Iarocci, 2020; Ohara et al., 2019). There are many social skills interventions and strategies available to aid autistic learners in developing some of the key foundation skills (Gray & Garand, 1993; Gross, 2017; Kelly, 2018), and Brayford (2021) indicates autistic young people are looking for school to provide such support. However, schools often overlook such interventions, focusing more on academic aspects (Barnard, 2000), despite evidence suggesting autistic learners with enhanced social skills achieve stronger educational attainment (Estes et al., 2011). Autistic females frequently demonstrate more typical social competencies than their male peers, comparable to sex differences displayed in non-autistic young people (Wood-Downie et al., 2021).

A key coping mechanism used by many autistic individuals to help navigate the complexities of social situations is masking or camouflaging. Although a relatively

recent phenomena, especially in research terms, the '*camouflage hypothesis*' (Bond & Hebron, 2019), emanates from Wing's (1981) study where it was suggested that girls were less likely to be identified as autistic due to '*compensatory mechanisms*'. Masking is '*pretending to be normal*' (Bargliea, 2019), the process of trying to blend in with the crowd by mimicking others, it is not something unique to the autism community (Miller et al., 2021). Autistic masking, seen as a compensatory strategy (Livingston & Happé, 2017), is not confined to females (Pearson & Rose, 2021), and can be employed to appear neurotypical (Willey, 2014) and conceal autistic behaviours (Cook et al., 2021). Autistic individuals are most likely to slip on their mask in challenging situations or when interacting with strangers (Howard & Sedgewick, 2021). Masking in schools is thought to be increasingly used to help manage the often stressful, overwhelming social expectations within the learning environment. The strategy, however, does not come without cost, keeping up the pretence throughout the school day can be incredibly draining and is understood to exacerbate the anxieties it is intended to manage (Sedgewick et al., 2021). This often results in, what has become known as the '*Coke bottle effect*' (McDougal & Efstratopoulou, 2020), where educators report no apparent issue at school, yet once within the safety of home, all the day's efforts and frustrations are released in a barrage of meltdowns, outbursts, and challenging behaviours (Brownlee, 2020; Phipps, 2022).

2.6.4 Peer relationships

With these underdeveloped social skills and difficulties interpreting social situations autistic individuals generally have trouble in making and maintaining friendships (Hebron et al., 2015). Autistic young people often report feeling misunderstood by their peers (APPAG, 2017), with many aware of their differences (Carrington et al., 2003; Portway & Johnson, 2005). Communication difficulties and misinterpretation of social cues (Koning & Magill-Evans, 2001), combined with trouble making sense of others' perspectives and feelings (Fletcher-Watson & Happé, 2019), can often lead to social isolation, despite a desire to participate in activities and engage within social groups (Daniel & Billingsley, 2010). Autistic young people find it difficult to

gain acceptance from non-autistic peers with many having limited success in accessing play and social networks (Chen et al., 2019; Locke et al., 2013). There are some clear indications to suggest autistic females and males have different levels of social motivation (Sedgewick et al., 2019). Autistic girls are more inclined to seek social contact, enjoying the social opportunities school can bring (Sproston et al., 2017), whilst boys are less socially motivated and often form just fleeting relationships (Sedgewick et al., 2016). The friendships of autistic girls were observed to be similar to those of their non-autistic peers, although they do not cope as well with issues of conflict within social groups (Cook et al., 2018).

Autistic young people face countless challenges during each school day. Social and behavioural difficulties leave them particularly vulnerable to school bullies (Barnard, 2000; Hebron et al., 2015; Sedgewick et al., 2018). Studies have found autistic learners face a significantly higher risk of being bullied at school, than their non-autistic peers (Maiano et al., 2016; Park et al., 2020). These vulnerabilities are more evident amongst those without a support network of friends (Humphrey & Symes, 2010) and appear more prevalent in mainstream settings (Zablotsky et al., 2014), where educators are less able to manage the needs of autistic pupils (Cook et al., 2016). Being bullied negatively impacts autistic learners' mental health and wellbeing (Sedgewick et al., 2018), with many considering being picked on to be the worst part of going to school (Reid, 2011).

2.6.5 Understanding

As stated above, the main element most autistic learners believe would improve their educational experiences and outcomes is understanding, from educators and peers (Brayford, 2021). Goodall (2015) reports that, for autistic young people, the understanding and acceptance of teachers is critical for enabling access to learning. To ensure a whole school approach can prove successful, the sharing of what understanding they have, amongst practitioners is essential (Eldar et al., 2010). When a teacher demonstrates an understanding of the challenges learners face

during the school day, a stronger teacher/pupil relationship is formed (Saggers et al., 2011). Autistic students acknowledge that positive relationships with teachers, greatly improve their educational experiences and academic outcomes (Honeybourne, 2015; Tobias, 2009). It is important that education professionals appreciate the heterogeneous nature of autism (APA, 2018) and consider the autistic pupil they are faced with, not the generalised autism label, if they are to positively impact their learning experiences (Goodall, 2018).

This is even more critical from the perspective of autistic females, who often present differently from the typical autism stereotype, meaning teachers often do not recognise them as autistic (Moyse & Porter, 2015). Many autistic females go through education under-supported, in comparison to males with an identical diagnosis, due to a lack of educator understanding in this area (Cridland et al., 2014; Moyes & Porter, 2015). Leblanc et al. (2009) highlight the importance of educator understanding in ensuring autistic learners feel included at school, whilst a lack of understanding of challenges around sensory overstimulation, heightens the difficulties they face (Jarman & Rayner, 2015). For teachers who display a level of understanding the next challenge is to successfully promote an ethos that nurtures peer acceptance (Lindsay et al., 2013). Whilst Dillenburger et al. (2015) found that generally peer acceptance increased with age, many autistic young people struggle with social acceptance and developing peer relationships throughout their time in education (Chamberlain et al., 2007). Where autistic students have the opportunity of explaining their condition and how they experience the world, to their peers, a greater acceptance and tolerance can be achieved (Aubineau & Bilcharska, 2020).

2.7 The role of parents and carers

Parenting an autistic child can be challenging, every day brings new challenges, and new battles that need to be fought, as they try to ensure their child can access the services and support, they require. The increased demands faced by parents with autistic children can at times be overwhelming, placing incredible strain on the

family unit (Dardas & Ahmad, 2015; de Aguiar & Pondé, 2019; Isa et al., 2016). Parents often report feeling stigmatised (Swabb et al., 2021), suffer increased risk of stress (Enea & Rusu, 2020; McStay et al., 2014; Tsermentseli & Kouklari, 2021), anxiety (Ou et al., 2010; Stein et al., 2011; Tobin et al., 2012), and depression (Estes et al., 2013; Hayes & Watson, 2013; Ingersoll & Hambrick, 2011; Weitlauf et al., 2014). Whilst limited research exists indicating that autism can unify and strengthen the family dynamic (Bayat, 2007), more suggest that parenting autistic young people can impact a caregiver's self-efficacy (Coleman & Karraker, 2003; Dunn, 2001; Karst & Van Hecke, 2012), and ultimately lead to separation and the break-up of the family unit (Gau et al., 2012; Hartley et al., 2010; Hartley et al., 2017; Lee, 2009).

Parents and carers play a significant role in supporting their autistic children's education, and their input to this study was seen as vital in trying to understand the current challenges they might be facing. Through extensive reviews of literature, reported below, this section aims to present an overview of what is already understood about the role of parents and some of the key areas in which their involvement is critical. Most of the knowledge discussed below was used in the design of the parent survey and will be used as a baseline when discussing the results, later in the thesis.

2.7.1 Parent voices in recent National Autistic Society reports

One of the first education related challenges facing parents with autistic children is trying to find a placement suited to the individual needs of the child. The APPGA (2017) reported 40% of parents feeling the school their child was attending was not meeting their needs. Parents rightly believe a suitable school and its staff should understand autism and the challenges it can present, however, when this isn't the case, repeated failure and risk of permanent exclusion is expected before LAs consider an alternative, more suitable placement (APPGA, 2017). Brayford (2021) reported that 74% of parents now consider their child's needs were not being met

at their current school, whilst only a half of parents said their child's school was their preferred option. Just 13% of parents believed their child's needs were being fully met at school, whereas 44% indicated these needs were not being met (Brayford, 2021).

As these NAS studies are all centred on learners educated in England, there are no references to statements, just the English equivalent, the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Like the newly introduced IDP system in Wales, the EHCP document continues beyond school age (up to 25 years) and identifies needs and support requirements across three domains; education, health and social care (UK Government, 2023). The APPGA (2017) found that 40% of requests for an EHCP assessment for autistic children had been rejected, whilst just 10% of parents were happy with the processes involved in obtaining the EHCP. Where an EHCP has been approved, only 30% of parents believed the document accurately summarised their child and their individual needs, only 38% were happy with elements of the educational provisions set out within the document, whilst just 33% were satisfied with the prescribed outcomes (Brayford, 2021).

As already mentioned, being the parent of an autistic young person can greatly increase parental stress levels (Tsermentseli & Kouklari, 2021). Cooke (2018) found that 90% of the parents had suffered sleepless nights, caused by stress related to trying to ensure their child had access to suitable levels of support in their education. The APPGA (2017) report, 70% of parents felt that their child had waited too long for adequate support to be provided, whilst 55% said they had experienced delays of more than a year. By 2021, 26% said their child had been without suitable support for over three years (Brayford, 2021). Both the APPGA (2017) and Brayford (2021) referred to significant levels of unmet need, with parents feeling their child was currently unable to access much needed support across a variety of areas.

Parents believe that having teachers with a sound knowledge and understanding of autism and its associated challenges, is the most important element in ensuring a successful education experience for their child (APPGA, 2017). However, parents generally feel this knowledge and understanding is lacking amongst teaching staff, with Brayford (2021) reporting that 40% believe their children's SENCo did not have the appreciation required to ensure adequate support was made available. Brayford (2021) also highlighted parent belief that insufficient effort was being made to adapt the learning environment to help autistic learners achieve to the best of their ability, and schools were failing in their duty to make reasonable adjustments and adopt flexibility in their approaches.

2.7.2 Parental involvement in their child's education

Parents play a critical role in supporting their child through education, even more so when the child has additional needs (Goldrich Eskow et al., 2018). As advocates, the parents of autistic young people must involve themselves in key decision-making processes (Blackmore & Hutchison, 2010). This involvement encompasses support provided both at home, in areas such as home enrichment of in-school learning and personal development, (Green et al., 2007), and direct involvement with school related issues such as pushing for suitable support (Clarke et al., 2010; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; O'Toole et al., 2019). Research suggests socio-economic factors influence the degree to which parents actively involve themselves in their child's education. More affluent parents, and those with a higher level of education, often take a more active role (Guryan et al., 2008, Stevenson & Baker, 1987). It must be acknowledged that for some parents from poorer socio-economic backgrounds, the lack of engagement does not necessarily represent a lack of interest in their child's education, more so that they may lack the resources to engage proactively. As discussed above, parents of autistic young people suffer more mental health and stress related difficulties and these often inhibit the level of parental involvement (Kohl et al., 2000; LaForett & Mendez, 2010), with symptom severity seen as an indicator of the level to which parents engage (Benson et al., 2008). Despite this, parents of autistic children must work constantly, battling the system, to ensure

their child receives the support required to access a fair education, suitable to their abilities. A crucial element of this, is the fostering of positive and productive partnerships with educators (Syriopoulou-Delli & Polychronopoulou, 2019).

2.7.3 Parent/educator partnerships

A successful parent/teacher partnership with effective cooperation is greatly valued by educators and caregivers alike (Davern, 1999; Syriopoulou-Dellia et al., 2016; Timberlake et al., 2013). Without an efficient partnership between home and school autistic learners are unlikely to receive sufficient support to enable them to achieve to their potential. Benson et al., (2008) reported an association between quality of parent/teacher collaborative working and pupil access to school-based activities, whilst Goldman and Burke (2019) referenced how positive outcomes were achieved through positive partnerships. Research indicates a constructive parent/teacher relationship can reduce parent stress levels (Burke & Hodapp, 2014; Krakovich et al., 2016), improving the quality of family life outside of school (Davis & Gavidia-Payne, 2009; Goldrich Eskow et al., 2018; Summers et al., 2007). This reduction in parent stress is supported by the positive impact such collaborative relationships can have on learners' academic attainment (Goldrich Eskow et al., 2018; Garbacz et al., 2016), progress toward targets prescribed within their IEPs (Burke & Hodapp, 2014; Dunst & Dempsey, 2007; Ruble et al., 2010) and successes, both inside and outside of school (Cheatham & Ostrosky, 2011; Mautone et al., 2015). The level of parental involvement and efficacy of parent and teacher relationships, are driving factors in determining general levels of parental satisfaction with the school their child attends (Starr & Foy, 2012; Whitaker, 2007; Zablotsky et al., 2012). Constructive and effective communication between parents and educators is fundamental to creating productive partnerships to support a child's learning and development (Cheatham & Ostrosky, 2011; Dunst, 2000) at home and school (Mautone et al., 2015).

2.7.4 Communication between home and school

The quality of communication between home and school can be critical, especially for parents of autistic children who have difficulty with effective communication (Azad et al. 2016). Research suggests that teachers who can effectively communicate with parents are more likely to gain their trust (Angell et al., 2009; Blue-Banning et al., 2004). Bi-directional communications between home and school, sharing information relating to the child and their education, can be written or verbal (Epstein 2018; Manz et al., 2004), and can be actioned in countless forms including face-to-face meetings and conversations (Epstein 2018; Hess et al., 2006), home/school diaries or notebooks (Stoner et al., 2005), and regular progress reports (Burke, 2012). Zablotsky et al. (2012) found that whilst parents of autistic learners were more likely to attend parent-teacher meetings, they were also more inclined to be dissatisfied with their communications with their child's teachers.

Whilst positive communication facilitates effective collaboration, poor communication can act as a barrier to accessing required support (Tucker & Schwartz, 2013). Allen and Blackston (2003) emphasised the importance of problem solving through parent/teacher communication, in ensuring valuable and timely support can be put in place for the autistic learner (McNaughton et al., 2007). Parent voices often refer to ineffective methods of communication as reasons for their frustration at the lack of support provided (Hess et al., 2006), and continually champion the requirement for more quality communication with educators (Stoner et al., 2005).

2.8 The role of educators

Education professionals play a significant role in the lives of our CYP, next to close family, teachers are the most meaningful presence in their early lives (Woolfson & Brady, 2009). With the number of autistic pupils attending schools rising every year, the likelihood is that, during a life working in education, every teacher will at some point experience working with an Autistic pupil (Archer et al., 2016). There is often

an anxiety amongst teachers when considering how best to manage autistic learners, especially within mainstream classes (Barnard et al., 2002; 2000), which can influence their approach (Jordan, 2005). The challenges autistic learners face, and their barriers to learning, lead teachers to consider autistic students amongst the toughest to include (Humphrey & Symes, 2013). It is thought experience of autism outside of the professional role, empowers teachers with a greater knowledge and understanding (Dillenburger et al., 2013; Unigwe et al., 2017), which promotes improved approaches to including autistic learners in their classroom (Park & Chitiyo, 2011; Robertson et al., 2003). Where this experience and understanding is lacking, inclusion is less successful, elements of conflict can occur (Wainscot et al., 2008), and pupil outcomes are negatively impacted (Sciutto et al., 2012).

For this thesis, the experiences of educators add an additional layer of understanding to the overview of how the education system in Wales works for autistic learners. The literature referenced below was critical to the design processes of all three first phase surveys, and when discussing the results, this literature will be used as a point of reference.

2.8.1 Including autistic learners

Autistic learners and those with other additional needs are often viewed as a burden, a drain on budgets and a risk to school performance targets (Paget et al., 2018). The personal attitudes of teachers and access to available resources are seen as key factors in the success of inclusive practice (Balshaw & Farrell, 2002; Farrell & Ainscow, 2002; Goldan & Schwab, 2020). Ensuring educators have positive inclusive approaches and an appreciation of the challenges faced by autistic learners is vital to providing an inclusive learning environment, in which they can succeed (Sproston et al., 2017). Where suitable resources are lacking there is a credible threat to the inclusive learning ideal (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Russell et al., 2022), the need to ensure resources are suitable for the individual pupil adds further challenges to

supporting autistic learners, especially in mainstream classrooms (Busby et al., 2012; Ruel et al., 2015). Hummerstone and Parsons (2020) reported a focus on teaching to the whole class, whilst ignoring the individual needs of learners, despite the knowledge that autistic learners frequently required individualised teaching approaches (Jordan, 2005a). Most teacher anxieties around including autistic learners within mainstream classes stem from core autism symptomologies (Chapter 1), including social communication difficulties (Emam & Farrell, 2009), however, where teachers were prepared to engage with autistic students, involving them in planning and decision making, outcomes were much improved (Hummerstone & Parsons, 2020). Engagement like this, together with flexibility and acceptance are all considered essential to creating an inclusive environment where autistic learners can thrive (Sproston et al., 2017).

2.8.2 Information sharing

Another important element to consider when striving to include autistic learners is the information sharing. All autistic students are different, with their own unique set of challenges (Morrier et al., 2011), whilst most struggle to engage with conventional teaching strategies (Jones, 2013). There is no one intervention, or strategy, that works for all (Morrier et al., 2011), therefore educators have to embrace unfamiliar approaches (Leach & Duffy, 2009). Transitions present a significant challenge for autistic learners, practitioners must plan ahead by sharing relevant information (Lee et al., 2014; Stoner et al., 2007), where teachers are made aware of strategies known to be successful, they are better placed to support pupils in the new environment (Rous et al., 1994; Wong, 2019).

2.8.3 Autism-related training

Whilst there is general concern about a lack of understanding relating to teaching and supporting learners with additional needs amongst NQTs (Archer et al., 2016), many schools provide some form of autism-related training through in-service days

and external courses. It is debated as to whether, or not, the additional training provided fills the gaps.

Segall and Campbell (2012) report inadequacies in autism-related training, whilst teachers themselves consider training provision to be unsatisfactory (AAA, 2013), with basic 'awareness' training not empowering staff to support autistic learners in the classroom (NASUWT, 2018). This leads to apprehension when including autistic students in mainstream class activities (Busby et al., 2012), and anxiety over the lack of training and knowledge (Glashan et al., 2004; Witmer & Ferreri, 2014), to equip them with the required skills to provide adequate teaching (Listiakova & Preece, 2020). Studies have proven the efficacy of targeted in-service training in the development of self-efficacy and belief in teaching practice (Leblanc et al., 2009; Vincent & Ralston, 2020). Such training improves knowledge and understanding, develops capabilities and aids the provision of more inclusive learning environments (Agyapong et al., 2010; Cassimos et al., 2015; Gillespie-Lynch et al., 2015). Van Herwegen et al. (2019) conclude autism-related training should be a prerequisite for all mainstream educators, with particular focus on those in the early years, who are key in facilitating early identification (Gómez-Marí et al., 2021).

2.8.4 Knowledge and understanding

Whilst teachers are crucial to ensuring early identification (Bargiela et al., 2016; Whitlock et al., 2020), and ensuring appropriate support is in place, many fell they are ill equipped, and lack sufficient knowledge to enable this (Posserud et al., 2006). This early identification can be particularly challenging when considering the female presentations of autism (Hiller et al., 2014), due to their proficient masking (Attwood, 2007; Lai et al., 2017), subtle presentations (Osler, 2006; Wagner, 2019) and absence of stereotypical behaviours (Dworzynski et al., 2012; Hiller et al., 2014; Mandy et al., 2012). Many autistic young people feel misunderstood by their teachers (Hummerstone & Parsons, 2020), wishing educators could appreciate the challenges they experience day-to-day, whilst at school (Bailey & Baker, 2020;

Symes & Humphrey, 2010). Lu et al. (2020) suggested a lack of knowledge and understanding negatively impacts educator opinions of autistic students, which can be a barrier to ensuring appropriate support is put in place (Bennie, 2019). Knowledge and understanding is critical to ensuring parental satisfaction in their child's education (Renty & Roeyers, 2006), and seen as valuable in developing learner confidence at school (Zilli et al., 2020). However, autistic young people still feel understanding is lacking (Brayford, 2021), creating a frustrating, unhappy school experience (Hummerstone and Parsons, 2020), whilst research demonstrates that educator knowledge is generally inadequate (Gómez-Marí et al., 2021). Whilst it is assumed that engaging autistic learners in decision making processes is hindered by perceived communication difficulties (Greathead et al., 2016), efforts should be made to involve them to develop understanding of their individual needs (Hummerstone & Parsons, 2020).

2.8.5 Educator/learner relationships

Several studies highlight a general lack of confidence amongst teachers working with autistic learners in their classes, many feel uncomfortable during pupil interactions, leading to anxiety and apprehension (AAPGA, 2017; Anglim et al., 2018; NUT, 2006). Emam and Farrell (2009) noted a tension in educators, who lacked understanding and belief when encountering autistic students, resulting in challenging situations for both learner and teacher (Simpson et al., 2003). The nature of the relationship formed between teacher and pupil is central to inclusive practice and making progress toward educational attainment (Hughes et al., 2014; Pianta, 2013). Where teachers do not understand or feel unable to meet the needs of the autistic students, the teacher/pupil relationship can breakdown (Emam & Farrell, 2009; Horgan et al., 2023). Rubie-Davies (2007) identified characteristics learners seek in their teachers, where a teacher demonstrated a level of trust, sincerity, and generally took an interest in the learner, educational experiences and outcomes were improved. Developing a sense of belonging is important to autistic young people, and the formation of positive relationships with teaching and support staff help nurture this at school (Neal & Frederickson, 2016; Saggers et al.,

2011). Sciutto et al. (2012) noted the positive impact an understanding teacher can have on autistic learners' self-esteem and confidence, which in turn is known to reduce difficult behaviours, improving the educational experience for the individual student and the wider school community (Jones, 2013).

Support staff are seen as a crucial element in shaping the educational experiences of autistic learners (Dillon et al., 2016; Woodfield & Ashby, 2016). Studies indicate where such support is available, teachers are more prepared to include autistic students (Croll & Moses 2000; Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Support staff are seen as invaluable resources, who often work directly with learners (Emam & Farrell, 2009), providing not just educational support, but assistance and guidance on a more personal level (Saggers et al., 2011). Support staff are often considered a reliable constant (Falkmer et al., 2015), recognising the challenges autistic learners face, and listening to their views (Dillon et al., 2016), providing assistance in many areas and guiding them through challenging experiences (Hill, 2014). However, Humphrey and Lewis (2008a) report some autistic students believe that close contact with support staff can at times be stigmatising, further highlighting their differences to peers, whilst also minimising their relationships with teachers (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008b).

2.9 Concluding summary

There can be no doubt that the core symptomologies of autism make attending school and succeeding in education challenging (Fleury et al., 2014). These challenges can increase the severity of school-based anxieties, which then become an additional challenge for the autistic learner to contend with (White et al., 2014). School is, by nature, a busy social environment, unsympathetic to the needs of young autistic people, it is filled with noises, smells, bright colours, and lights, which can overwhelm their sensory sensitivities (Gentil-Gutiérrez et al., 2021). Many autistic learners long to 'fit in' and develop friendships and meaningful relationships with their peers, yet they often fall victim to school bullies, increasing their anxieties

further (Hebron et al., 2015; Sedgewick et al., 2018). Having a teacher who understands autism and the individual learner is key to help support autistic students through their education, however, many feel misunderstood and excluded (Brayford, 2021; Goodall, 2015).

The challenges of parenting an autistic child are many (de Aguiar & Pondé, 2019). Parents often battle each day to try and get the best support for their child, frequently to the detriment of their own mental health and wellbeing (Tsermentseli & Kouklari, 2021). As one of the key symptomologies of autism is difficulty with communication, parents frequently must be the voice for their children, conveying the challenges they face, and questioning the quality of the services being delivered (Blackmore & Hutchison, 2010). Fighting for access to a suitable education is one of their key challenges, searching for a placement that understands and meets their child's individual needs (APPGA, 2017). Often parents feel unsatisfied with their child's school, facing a lack of understanding, and scarcity of specialist support (Brayford, 2021). To monitor their child's progress and ascertain the level of support provided, parents must frequently engage with educators. If they are to ensure the best outcomes, for their child, forming positive relationships with their teachers is critical (Benson et al., 2008).

There is no doubt of the significant role educators have in the lives of the young people they teach (Woolfson & Brady, 2009). Teachers are under enormous pressure to raise attainment levels and ensure pupil success across a myriad of measures (Paget et al., 2018). Practitioners are tasked with creating and maintaining an inclusive learning environment, facilitating the learning of students with a diverse range of abilities and disabilities (Cameron, 2014), often with insufficient training (AAA, 2013). Much research points to the unease teachers feel when faced with including autistic students within mainstream classes, especially when presented with challenging behaviours and insufficient support (Emam & Farrell, 2009). The importance of sharing information relating to a learner's

individual needs, and planning around periods of transition, is paramount for professionals aiming to provide the best possible outcomes for autistic learners (Lee et al., 2014). It is also critical for teachers and their support staff to form positive relationships with these learners, to facilitate a more productive learning experience for not just the autistic student, but all other learners within the classroom (Hughes et al., 2014).

2.10 Research gap

The literature discussed within this review considers various aspects of educational experience relating to autistic young people, reporting on the viewpoints of educators and parents whilst including the views of autistic learners themselves. What becomes apparent through even the most basic search of available literature is the lack of research emanating from Wales. With its own devolved and bilingual education system, it is possible that autistic learner experiences within Wales' schools differ from those reported in England or the rest of the world. The NAS produce a regular report, every five years, based on parent and pupil responses to their surveys (APPGA, 2017; Brayford, 2021; Moore, 2016; Reid, 2011), however these are entirely focused on participants from England. These reports feature prominently in the discussions above, as they present a yardstick to help understand how autistic learners and their parents feel about their educational experiences.

2.11 The research question

This study aims to fill that void in the literature. Gathering information with a view to present a general 'state of the nation' summary of how the effective education of autistic learners in Wales is currently, from the perspectives of the three main stakeholders: educators, parents and autistic students. The key aim of the study is to listen to the experiences of some of the nearly 10,000 autistic young people registered within Wales, presenting their views on what education feels like for them, on a daily basis, to understand the challenges they may face. Through

listening to their parents, it is intended to present a summary of the difficulties encountered in trying to ensure their child's education is meeting their needs. Including the perspectives of teachers, support staff and other educational professionals, will help complete a holistic overview of the education of autistic learners in Wales. This study is timely, as all data was collected before the introduction of the new ALN code (WG, 2021a), therefore if repeated in a few years' time, it will give an indication of whether the new ALN transformation has achieved its goals in making improvements to the educational experience for learners with additional needs.

To help address these aims, one overarching research question will be the focus of the thesis:

- Is the current model of inclusive education, whereby the majority of autistic pupils attend mainstream settings, with varying levels of support, working for Autistic pupils in Wales?

To fully investigate this, it would be necessary to explore the following three sub-questions:

- What are the views of the young autistic community in Wales, on their educational experiences?
- How do the parents of autistic school children in Wales view their child's education and what are their personal experiences of dealing with the educators and the education system?
- Do educators in Wales really understand autism and are they confident in their abilities to support autistic pupils and their families in a range of educational settings?

The next chapter will look at the methods and methodologies employed during the original research elements of this project, as reported in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, in response to these research questions.

Chapter 3: Methodological approaches for data collection, handling, and analysis

3.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to present and overview of the processes employed when engaging with participants and collecting and analysing their data across the various studies reported within this thesis. Section 3.2 considers sampling, to ensure the engagement of the most appropriate participants to provide a suitable response to the overarching research question which forms the basis of this work. Section 3.3 looks at the target participants within the first phase of engagement. Within section 3.4, the research methods are discussed, looking at both the quantitative and qualitative elements employed within the survey designs. Section 3.5 presents an overview of the research approach, including design, piloting, and recruitment processes. Here, details regarding each constituent study are presented, alongside the phased approach to their participant engagement activities. Consideration of the ethical challenges for each participating cohort will be discussed, together with acknowledgements of the importance of General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) regulations, confidentiality, anonymity, and consent, in section 3.6. Within section 3.7 the challenges of engaging autistic young people in research are considered alongside methods to encourage and support their engagement. Section 3.8 considers research philosophy underlying the project, before the analytical approaches employed are outlined in section 3.9.

3.2 Sampling

One of the first key decisions for any researcher, involves the question of sampling. Identifying the population the research is focusing on and deciding what elements of this population does the study wish to engage with. There are three main sampling frameworks, which are briefly outlined below. Researchers have several techniques available to them, within each of the identified frameworks.

Probability sampling, often used for randomised control trials, involves the random selection of participants from the wider population, where a study seeks to present generalised output, aiming to be representative of the general population (Cohen et al., 2018). Non-probability sampling, commonly used for quantitative research purposes, is not necessarily representative of the wider population (Taherdoost, 2016). Such methods tend to be cost effective, and relatively straightforward to manage (Cohen et al., 2018). Mixed methods sample designs infuse various research approaches, focusing on both qualitative and quantitative data, and can make use of both probability and non-probability sampling cohorts (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

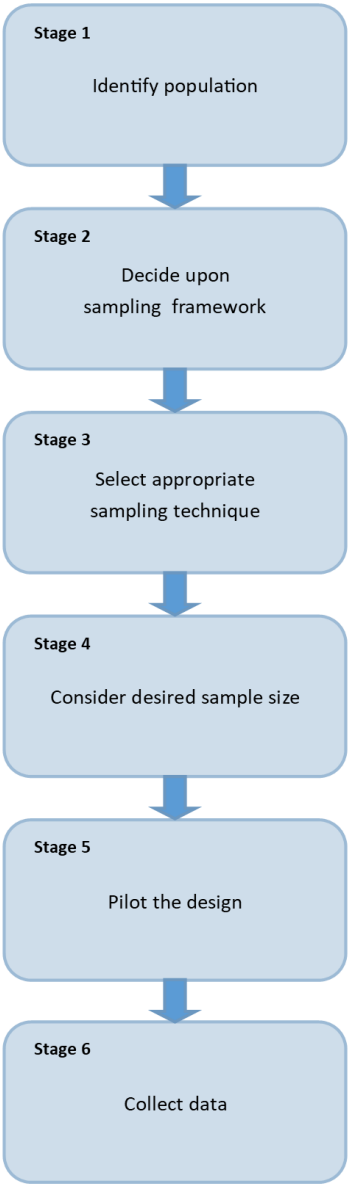
3.2.1 Planning the sampling approach for this study

The process for planning the sampling approach for this study, follows the structure illustrated in Figure 3.2.1 (below). The first step of any research is the identification of the population with which the study will engage. With the focus of the research being the education of autistic learners in Wales, it was critical that their views were heard. From the outset, it was the intention that autistic learners' experiences would be the central element of this study. However, knowing that the parents of these learners play a critical role in supporting and managing day-to-day encounters with educators, it was felt essential to also seek their input. In trying to appreciate the wider picture, hearing from the educators, would add another layer, of understanding. It is hoped that by engaging with these three stakeholders, a holistic overview of what education is like for autistic learners across Wales, will be forthcoming.

Having identified three separate populations of interest, decisions needed to be made about how best to engage them. We know from Welsh Government data that at the time of the study, there were 9,995 autistic learners registered in schools across the country (Stats Wales, 2022f). However, this just represents those actually receiving support with their education and does not include those educated outside

of maintained provisions, or those in further, and higher education. We can reasonably assume that these learners are supported by an equivalent number of parents or carers, so have an indicative idea of the parent population. Welsh Government data also identifies the number of teachers (27,655), and support staff (27,990), employed in maintained schools (Stats Wales, 2022b). However, these figures do not include those working in other roles, as in agency staff, local authority roles, or further and higher education.

Figure 3.2.1 - Stages to identify sampling strategy



Adapted from: Cohen et al. (2018) and Taherdoost (2016)

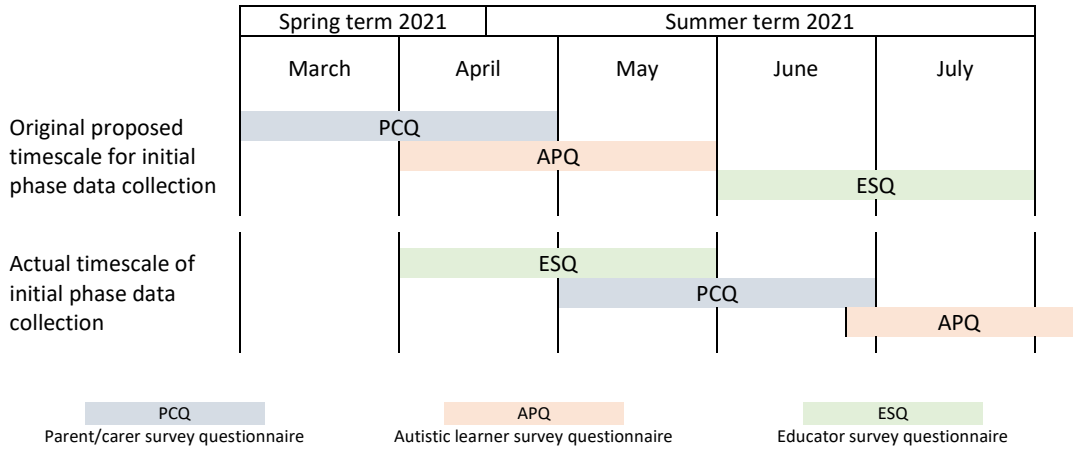
When considering which of the sampling frameworks would provide the best approach for the populations in question, it was felt that a non-probability framework would provide the most efficient way to engage with large proportions of all three populations. Although, not considered representative of the wider population, this approach would allow access to a wide variety of possible participants from all three cohorts, generating large volumes of useable data for quantitative analysis. Having previous experience of undertaking research using the volunteer sampling method, this seemed like the most appropriate fit for the intended studies. Volunteer sampling relies upon recruiting participants from pre-identified populations to the study, through promotion of the study. Whilst no claims of generalisation of the representative nature of the data output can be made (Cohen, et al., 2018; Taherdoost, 2016), there is still great value in presenting the views of potential participants. Whilst the option to cap the number of responses received is available, the volunteering approach can also offer the researcher flexibility, in not having to meet a target sample size, from within the chosen participation criteria from the chosen population. For this project, there was no cap on participant numbers, across all three populations, with the researcher, instead setting a prescribed 'active' time frame for each of the separate studies. This was done to enable as many participants as possible, who wished to share their views, an opportunity to do so. The processes employed during the data collection phases are explained in detail within Section 3.5.

3.2.2 The phased approach to sampling procedure

Having identified the populations of interest and the sampling methodology to be used, it was decided on using a phased approach to engagement and data collection. The initial phase would include surveying the three stakeholder groups, during the spring and summer academic terms of 2021, with a follow-up phase to expand on any areas of interest arising from the analysis of resulting data. Initially, in the initial phase, it was the plan that the parent/carer survey would be the first to launch, with the second survey seeking the input of autistic learners launching in the weeks that followed, with both being active simultaneously for a period. This

was considered appropriate, in that parents might be more inclined to support and encourage their child's engagement in the learner survey, having already taken part in the parent study. Early response data from these two studies would then shape the direction of the third survey, for education professionals (Figure 3.2.2). However, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic meant that Wales was in full lockdown for the early part of 2021, with schools remaining closed to most pupils, until all were allowed to return after the Easter break, on April 12th 2021. Consequently, the proposed timeframe was altered, as illustrated in Figure 3.2.2. It was necessary for the educator survey to be the first to launch, as Wales' teachers were working throughout, whether in school or not. The parent/carer survey followed, once all pupils had returned to school, whilst the autistic learner survey was held back until the end of the summer term, allowing time for pupils to have readjusted to school life, following the COVID-19 shutdowns.

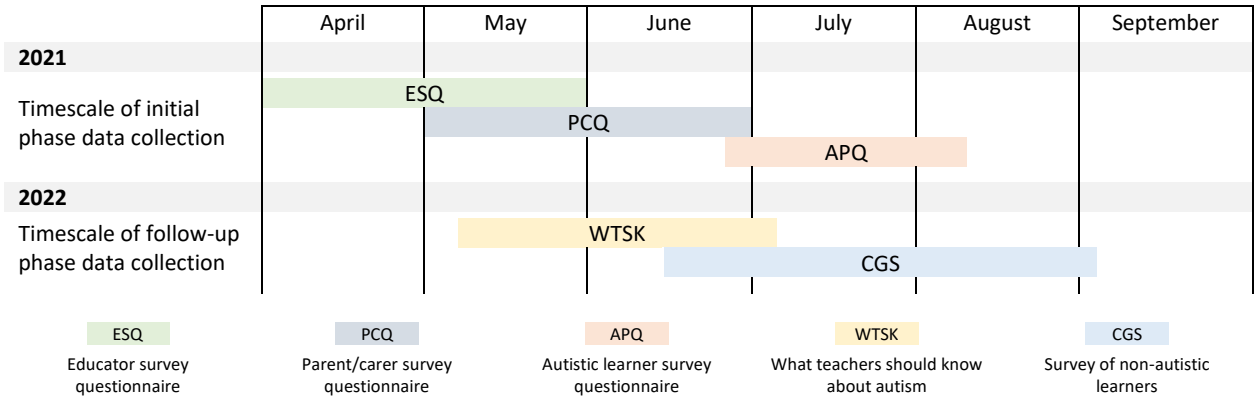
Figure 3.2.2 - Proposed and actual timescale of initial phase data collection



Following a presentation of the preliminary findings from the first three surveys to the Welsh Government's Cross-Party Autism Group (CPAG), two areas of interest emerged. There was an interest in seeking to understand what autistic learners wanted their teachers to know about autism, to develop educator understanding, and improve autistic students' educational experiences. It was agreed that a study asking autistic learners what they wished their teachers knew about autism, would

be of value. Several LA representatives and other education providers suggested it would be beneficial to have some comparative data, to identify any specific difference of experience between autistic and non-autistic learners. As a result, following discussions with the supervisory team, the decision was taken to undertake a survey of non-autistic learners across Wales, to facilitate some comparative analysis. The timeline for these follow-up studies is illustrated in Figure 3.3.3a.

Figure 3.2.2a – Timeline of follow-up phase data collection in relation to the initial phase



3.3 Survey respondents and participation criteria

It was decided that the focus of the study would be the education of learners aged 18 years and younger, therefore all three studies would include this within the criteria for inclusion. For the autistic learner study (APQ), contributions were sought from autistic young people, aged 18 and below, who were educated in Wales. As many have difficulty in accessing neurodevelopmental assessment and diagnostic services, formal autism diagnosis was not necessary for participation, and no proof of diagnosis status was required. Potential respondents who wished to take part in the parent study (PCQ), had to be over the age of 18, and living in Wales. They were expected to be the primary carer of an autistic young person, aged 18 or under, educated in Wales. Again, the child's diagnostic status was not a prerequisite for inclusion, and responses were also encouraged from those whose children were

self-identifying as autistic. The survey of education professionals (ESQ) sought the input of those working in any role, supporting the learning of young people aged 18 and under, across Wales. The minimum age for participation was 18 years, and whilst respondents could reside outside of Wales, they needed to be working within a Wales based role. There was no requirement for participants to have prior experience of working with autistic learners, and those without such experience were actively encouraged to participate. This was considered appropriate in order that responses may give a better reflection of the wider workforce, and not just hearing from the perspective of those with experience of having worked with autistic students.

3.4 Research methods

From the outset it was always the intention to embrace the powers of the internet for the data collection elements of this study. However, with the COVID-19 pandemic impacting all areas of life, the online world has played such a crucial role across every element of the project, with all but one of the monthly supervision meetings being held through the virtual meeting rooms of Zoom or Microsoft Teams. All original participant engagement and data collection activities reported within this thesis were undertaken online, utilising the sampling procedures discussed above (Section 3.2).

3.4.1 On-line and internet researching

Using the internet as a data collection tool (Buchanan & Zimmer, 2021; Markham & Buchanan, 2012), is defined by the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2021) as the remote procurement of information from human contributors using the internet or associated online tools. The internet not only provides opportunities to collect data, but can offer secure storage solutions, whilst also providing methods for the promotion and distribution of research (Jones, 2011; Orton-Johnson, 2010). Utilising the internet to undertake research seeking the views of a population has numerous advantages. The internet enables quick and widespread distribution of material,

accessing a varied cross-section of society, offering a convenient opportunity for participants to engage at a time and place suitable to them, and removing the necessity for travel either by researcher or participant (Aldridge & Levine, 2001; Fowler, 2014). Utilising the internet in this way was particularly advantageous when considering the ongoing implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the requirement to limit social contact where possible. It should be acknowledged that this strategy might have unintended consequences of excluding potential participants who did not have access to internet services. Welsh Government suggest that just 7% of the population were 'digitally excluded' (Audit Wales, 2023). Having decided to use the power of the internet to engage with a Wales wide population throughout the participant engagement process, consideration was given to the most appropriate method of data collection.

3.4.2 Survey questionnaires

Magee et al., (2013) highlight the importance of deciding whether a survey is the most suitable method of gathering data to help answer the research questions. A survey can be an effective tool when trying to establish the thoughts, attitudes, perspectives, preferences, and experiences of a population (Aldridge & Levine, 2001; Dillman et al., 2014). Data harvested through surveys can be employed to develop a cross-sectional study, which presents a 'snapshot' of the current 'state-of-play' (Cohen et al., 2018). Taking this into consideration, it was clear that surveying the three cohorts would provide the best opportunity to gather sufficient data required to answer the research questions, as laid out in Chapter 2. In doing so, the data harvested would enable the presentation of a multi-level perspective 'state of the nation' in relation to the education of autistic pupils in Wales.

Utilising the power of the internet to host and distribute the survey questionnaires can have many advantages, for both researcher and participant. Internet questionnaires can be quick and easy to set-up, can be personalised to meet the need of the researcher and appeal to the target participants, presenting a

questionnaire that looks the same for every participant, whilst reaching a wide audience, (Aldridge & Levine, 2001; Bernard, 2011; Callegaro et al., 2015; Fowler, 2014). They can also reduce errors in data entry and transfer, improve data cleaning and coding processes and enable a cross-sectional analysis of large samples (Alessi & Martin 2010; Cohen et al., 2018; Callegaro et al., 2015). Use of online tools also improve flexibility within a questionnaire, enabling skip-logic or branching (*the process of skipping to question X if answered A, or question Y if answered B*) to be automatic (Ball, 2019). Callegaro et al. (2015) suggest online surveys are preferred by participants for the autonomy of being able to complete in their own time, wherever they feel most comfortable, thus increasing response rates. However, the internet does not reach everyone, even in these days of smartphone technology and high-speed broadband, potential participants without internet access are likely to miss out (Andrews et al., 2003). There is also a risk of sample bias or over representation when communities share the questionnaire links amongst those who share the same point-of-view (Alessi & Martin 2010; Ball, 2019).

When planning a survey, a researcher needs to consider what the research question is, the participants they intend to engage, what data is required to effectively answer the research question and what questions need to be asked to ensure the response data satisfactorily provides that answer (Cohen et al., 2018; Sapsford, 2007). The most used tool for gathering survey data from large populations is a questionnaire (Bhandari, 2022). Questionnaires offer a cost and time effective method for participant engagement, eliciting a standardised response to which potential participants can freely choose whether or not to respond (Cohen et al., 2018). Self-administered questionnaires provide potential participants with autonomy, enabling them to complete their responses in their own time, with no pressure constraints applied by researchers. However, Duckworth and Yeager (2015) highlight the burden this can apply to some respondents, and Krosnick (2018) identifies the demands completing such a survey can place on participants, including the challenge of reading and understanding the questions and interpreting personal experience into a valuable response. It is critical not to overload potential

participants (Champagne, 2014), or there is a risk of them deciding not to participate or withdraw before completing (Denscombe, 2021). Researchers must consider the type of questions asked and the language used to ensure participants of all abilities are comfortable responding (Wilson & Sapsford, 2006). Ensuring questionnaires were appropriate, suitable for the target participants, and inclusive would enable as many potential participants as possible, who wished to take part, the opportunity to do so.

3.4.3 Survey design: Quantitative design aspects

Quantitative research harnesses numerical and statistical data to consider social trends (Watson, 2015). When aiming for a generalised outcome, with good external validity focusing on response ratios, quantitative research is the most appropriate approach (Johnson & Christensen, 2020; 2014). Within a survey, using closed-questions that follow a structure can encourage greater engagement, they also generate quantitative data that has the potential to be quicker to analyse, whilst enabling cross-cohort comparison (Bailey, 1994, Cohen et al., 2018; Oppenheim, 1992). Closed questions require respondents to give a particular response from the options provided for them, within the structure of the questionnaire (Thomas, 2017). There are various options available when considering the type of closed question to use, depending on the response data you wish to collect. The first phase questionnaires which make up the original studies reported within this thesis employed: dichotomous, multiple choice, and rating scale style questions. Further details regarding the questions used are detailed within Section 3.5.2 below.

3.4.4 Survey design: Qualitative design aspects

Qualitative research can provide a more insightful exploration of participant experiences (Tenny et al., 2017). The term ‘qualitative research’ covers a vast array of techniques and has a multitude of meanings (Preissle, 2006; Hammersley, 2013). At its core, qualitative research is the study of words (Bryman et al., 2008), with the aim of developing an understanding of real-life experiences (Sandelowski, 2001),

presenting valuable internal validity to the study (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Within a survey, open-ended, free-text response questions can encourage participants to provide researchers with a more in-depth understanding of their perspectives (Krosnick, 2018).

3.4.5 Survey design: Justifying the approaches employed

This study focuses on the education of autistic learners in Wales, and as already highlighted above, engaging the three main stakeholders in this area was key, with the central element of the study being the autistic learners themselves. It was clear from the outset, that the most effective and efficient way to engage with participants from all three stakeholder groups was through the use of online, internet-based survey questionnaires. It was important to identify the type of questions to pose, ensuring they were appropriate (Champagne, 2014) and encourage responses of value (Abascal & Diaz de Rada, 2014), for later analysis.

The use of closed questions, harvesting quantitative data, enables objectivity, ensuring researcher bias is removed from the outcomes, and offering others the ability to replicate and agree on the findings (Allwood, 2012; Antwi & Hamza, 2015; Cohen et al., 2018). Closed questions used across the studies, were made up of dichotomous and multiple-choice options, producing nominal data, which would enable chi-square analysis (Abascal & Diaz de Rada, 2014; Cohen et al., 2018; Cohen & Holliday, 1996), alongside Likert (1932) style rating-scale questions, to generate ordinal data (Abascal & Diaz de Rada, 2014). The quantitative data generated through these closed questions, could be enhanced with the provision of free-text response, open question options, offering participants an opportunity to expand and share more detailed experiences was employed across all studies. This mixed method approach, was thought to be the best method to encourage greater engagement, whilst providing the researcher with sufficient quantitative data to present an overview of the experiences from all three cohorts. Any qualitative data generated, where appropriate, would offer a deeper insight into participant

experiences. Having considered the methods employed throughout the original research undertaken during this project, below sets out how they were employed within the research approach.

3.5 Research approach

In order to better understand the educational experiences of autistic learners in Wales, this project aimed to present a holistic overview, including the views of not just the learners, but also their parents and carers, as well as education professionals. As discussed previously, the three initial phase studies consisted of surveys of the key stakeholder groups. It was always the intention that further follow-up studies would be undertaken to expand upon some areas emerging from the initial surveys. Following early analysis of the data harvested from the three first phase studies, a '*Preliminary Report*' document was published (Appendix 4), starting a discussion about some of the key findings, and the idea for the two follow-up studies, as outlined in section 3.2.2 above.

In this section, the processes employed to: write and pilot the questionnaires (Sections 3.5.2/3), identify a suitable platform to host the online data collection (Section 3.5.4), and promote the studies and recruit participants (Section 3.5.5) are detailed. For each area, where pertinent, there is a general discussion, before the processes employed in each constituent study are presented, in chronological order.

3.5.1 The Welsh language

With the study being solely interested in participants' experiences of education in Wales, there was a responsibility to adhere to guidelines set out within the Welsh Language Act 1993. This legislation placed the Welsh language on an equal footing with English and proposed that wherever possible, publicly available material should be made available in both language formats (WG, 2021b). As a result, all

openly accessible materials produced throughout the duration of this project, including promotional and information literature, the questionnaires and subsequent published reports were translated to be made available in both the Welsh and English language. As a non-fluent Welsh speaker, the translation process evolved in two stages. Initially, all materials were produced in the English language, before being roughly translated into Welsh, by the researcher. A former colleague, a now retired deputy headteacher, voluntarily agreed to review all translations, correcting any errors. The system worked effectively and efficiently, with her professional experience and interest in the field, ensuring Welsh language material was readily available, should it be required. Every English language promotional item, information document, and survey, that were made public, was accompanied by a Welsh language version, and potential participants had the opportunity to choose whichever they preferred.

3.5.2 Developing the questionnaire schedules

The first task was to devise a draft schedule of the key questions to be put to each group, providing a foundation from which the remainder of each questionnaire could be developed. This process took its lead from findings published within the APPGA report (2017) with the aim of enabling some comparative analysis of autistic learner and parent experiences, between those reported in England, and what participants in Wales, describe in this study. These core questions were then expanded using key themes that became evident from extensive reviews of literature, as described in Chapter 2, coupled with the researcher's personal experience. Across all three of these first phase studies, the questions were set out in themes, breaking down each questionnaire into sections. Each theme concludes with an open-ended free-text response question, offering participants to voluntarily expand on their responses and discuss in more detail.

3.5.2.1 Initial study: Educator survey design (ESQ)

The ESQ was formulated to gather data from education professionals, working in a number of roles, across various provision settings. To be eligible to participate, the survey was open to all education professionals, working with students aged 18 or under, in any education settings across Wales.

Reviews of literature in combination with professional and personal experience identified six key areas of interest: experience of autism, support accessed whilst working with autistic learners, autism-related training, knowledge and understanding of autism and educator confidence relating to autism, around which the main survey was constructed. The main questionnaire consisted of basic demographic questions and enquiries about participants' professional roles, before entering the question sections relating to the areas mentioned above. Demographic details requested enquired about respondents' sex, age and autism status. With such a wide age range of potential participants, respondents were asked within which 10-year age range they fell. They were also asked whether they were diagnosed or self-identifying as autistic. Questions relating to their professional role enquired about the main language used in their role, the LA area in which they worked, their job title and the sector and provision setting in which they were based. The main body of the survey was broken down into seven categories and featured a total of 22 quantitative and five qualitative questions. Most sections were formed mainly of quantitative questions, with a free-text response, open question, offering respondents the opportunity to share more information, if they desired. Not every respondent was asked all questions, with variances depending on their role and responses to previous questions, using the skip logic facility of the SurveyMonkey platform. The breakdown of questions per section is presented in Table 3.5.2.1, whilst the question schedule can be accessed in Appendix 2a. The analysis of data collected from this survey is presented in Chapter 6.

Table 3.5.2.1 - Educator survey: question overview

Section	Questions
Demographics	Language selection – Sex – Age – Autism status
Professional role	Professional language – LA – Professional role – Sector – Provision
Experience of autism	3 quantitative (all dichotomous)
Information sharing	4 quantitative (3 dichotomous, 1 multiple choice) & 1 qualitative
Support	3 quantitative (all dichotomous) & 1 qualitative
Autism related training	4 quantitative (1 dichotomous, 3 multiple choice) & 2 qualitative
Knowledge and understanding	2 quantitative (multiple choice)
Access to resources	3 quantitative (1 dichotomous, 2 multiple choice)
Confidence	3 quantitative (all Likert scale)
Any other comments	1 qualitative
Total questions including demographics	31 quantitative, 5 qualitative

3.5.2.2 Initial study: Parent/carer survey design (PCQ)

The PCQ was the lengthiest and most in depth of the three first phase survey questionnaires. Respondents were required to be the parent or carer of an autistic child or young person, aged eighteen years or younger, who were at time of participation, resident in, and currently, or had until recently been, educated in Wales.

As evidenced in Table 3.5.2.2 (below), the main body of questions were again separated into 11 areas of interest arising from the researcher's personal experience and extensive reviews of literature. Demographic questions posed related to the autistic child of the participating parent/carer, as opposed to the participant themselves. This was considered most appropriate, as the focus of the wider study was the learners. Basic demographic data relating to the child's age, sex, gender identity, ethnicity and first language, were collected alongside data relating to the child's autism diagnostic status (*no official diagnosis was required to participate*) and other types of need the child may have. The child's education status formed the final element of the demography sections including in which LA,

sector and provision type they were educated. Parents were guided to questions based on the type of provision their child attended; mainstream, specialist, flexi/blended pathway, educated at home and those not currently in education. Whilst the full questionnaire consisted of approximately 200 questions, not every participant was asked each question, with branching and skip logic facilities offered by the SurveyMonkey platform, used to direct participants based on their responses. The main parent/carer survey question schedule can be viewed in Appendix 2b. and the results are presented in Chapter 5.

Table 3.5.2.2 - Parent/carer survey: question overview

Section	Questions
Demographics (relating to the child)	Language selection – LA – Sex – Gender ID – Age – Ethnicity – First language
About the child's autism	10 quantitative (2 dichotomous, 8 multiple choice) & 3 qualitative
About the child's education	15 quantitative (7 dichotomous, 7 multiple choice, 2 Likert) & 1 qualitative
Statement of educational need	4 quantitative (all dichotomous) & 1 qualitative
Educational support	27 quantitative (11 multiple choice, 16 Likert) & 2 qualitative
Individual education plan	5 quantitative (1 dichotomous, 4 multiple choice) & 1 qualitative
Home - school communication	7 quantitative (1 dichotomous, 1 multiple choice, 5 Likert) & 1 qualitative
Inclusion	32 quantitative (8 multiple choice, 24 Likert) & 6 qualitative
Exclusion	14 quantitative (5 dichotomous, 4 multiple choice, 5 Likert) & 3 qualitative
Bullying	7 quantitative (2 dichotomous, 5 Multiple choice) & 1 qualitative
Peer relationships	7 quantitative (all Likert scale)
Parent interactions with educators	3 quantitative (all Likert scale) & 1 qualitative
Educator interactions with learners	3 quantitative (all Likert scale) & 1 qualitative
Additional closing questions	12 quantitative (all Likert scale)
Any further comments	2 qualitative
Total questions including demographics	153 quantitative, 23 qualitative

3.5.2.3 Initial study: Autistic learner survey design (APQ)

The final survey of the project's first phase was the APQ, seeking responses from autistic young people, aged eighteen and under who were at time of participation living in and educated in Wales, those who had recently left education were also

able to participate. The challenge of the APQ was to create an inclusive survey, which was accessible to participants of all ages and abilities. As referenced in section 3.7, there are some key considerations to bear in mind when engaging autistic young people in research: consulting the autistic community and seeking input of parents and carers (Harrington et al., 2014; Beresford et al., 2004), providing potential autistic participants with advanced information (Gowen et al., 2019), the effective use of visual aids (Grandin, 1995), and an opportunity to make choices.

With the experiences of autistic learners being the central element of the study, it was vital to ensure that respondents were comfortable with the process of completing the online survey. The plan was to offer a survey that mainly consisted of straightforward dichotomous questions, requiring simple yes/no responses, utilising picture prompts to help guide contributors to the answer of their choosing. It was felt that offering potential respondents the choice of three levels of questioning, where Level 1 was formed minimal basic questions, Level 2 expanded on these, whilst Level 3 further expanded with the inclusion of some Likert scale questions to complete the survey, would ensure those of all abilities felt able to contribute their perspectives.

It was essential that potential respondents were provided with sufficient and appropriately accessible advanced information, in order that they could make an informed decision about their involvement. To facilitate this, a question preview document was prepared (see Appendix 1d), presenting the project information, and most importantly all the questions included at each level, set out as it would appear to them on screen, should they choose to take part. Within the survey design, after first selecting the language with which they wished to proceed, potential respondents needed to indicate whether they were aged 15 or under, or aged between 16 and 18 years. Those in the older age group were then able to continue into the project information and consent sections, independently. Respondents

aged under 16 years, were directed to information informing them that parental consent was required (see Section 3.6.5). Once the consent of an adult had been confirmed, age-appropriate information was provided for the young person, in order that they could provide their own agreement to take part (see Section 3.6.6). Upon completion of the tick-boxes to accept the information relating to the study and consent to participation, respondents were able to access the demographic section, within the main body of the survey.

Table 3.5.2.3 - Survey of autistic learners: question overview

Section	Questions
Demographics	Language selection – LA – Sex – Gender ID – Age – Ethnicity – First language
About the young person's autism	4 quantitative (1 dichotomous, 3 multiple choice)
About the young person's education	9 quantitative (6 dichotomous, 3 multiple choice) & 1 qualitative
Level selection	1 quantitative (multiple choice)
LEVEL 1	4 quantitative (all dichotomous) & 2 qualitative
Level 1 questions including demographics	25 quantitative & 3 qualitative
Level 2	
Going to school	2 quantitative (both dichotomous) & 1 qualitative
At school	3 quantitative (all dichotomous) & 1 qualitative
Friends and others at school	3 quantitative (all dichotomous) & 1 qualitative
In school	4 quantitative (all dichotomous) & 1 qualitative
Closing questions	4 qualitative
Level 2 questions including demographics	33 quantitative & 9 Qualitative
Level 3	
Going to school	2 quantitative (both dichotomous) & 1 qualitative
At school	3 quantitative (all dichotomous) & 1 qualitative
Friends and others at school	3 quantitative (all dichotomous) & 1 qualitative
In school	4 quantitative (all dichotomous) & 1 qualitative
Educator understanding	3 quantitative (all Likert scale)
Support and sensory issues	3 quantitative (all Likert scale)
A different school?	3 quantitative (all Likert scale)
Closing questions	4 qualitative
Level 3 questions including demographics	42 Quantitative & 9 Qualitative

Table 3.5.2.3 (above) presents an overview of the question structure within the questionnaire. Demographic data relating to the young person's age, sex, gender identity, ethnicity and first language were collected, before questions to establish their autism diagnosis status, and education experience, completed the section. Within the final format of the APQ, in addition to the demographic questions, Level 1 consisted of four yes/no questions, with two free-text response questions asking what they like and dislike about school. Expanding on the previous level, Level 2 had twelve additional yes/no questions and a question asking respondents to provide three words to describe how being at school makes them feel. There was also an opportunity of participants to expand on their answers, with each section having a free-text response option. Level 3 built on the previous level with the addition of 9 Likert scale questions. Across all three levels, respondents were reminded that they did not have to answer every question and were free to pass over any they did not wish to answer. The results emanating from data harvested from the APQ are reported in Chapter 4.

3.5.2.4 Follow-up study: What teachers should know about autism (WTSK) study design

To expand on data harvested in the first phase, this study was centred around a perceived lack of educator understanding about autism, reported by both parents and pupils. It was felt that asking the straightforward question 'What do you wish your teacher knew about autism?' would encourage participants to share their perspectives.

Having met with autism support groups and advocacy networks, following the publication of the preliminary report, they recommended that autistic adults could also have a valid role to play in this study, reflecting upon their educational experiences. For the purposes of this thesis, just responses from those aged 18 and under would be considered, in order that the sample demographic matches that of the participants in the initial APQ study. The response data from older respondents,

will be useful for further study, and reporting, to consider how adult reflections compare to those currently in education. Taking this into consideration, the inclusion criteria for the WTSK study stated, participants needed to be autistic, living in Wales, and were at time of participation, or had previously been educated in Wales.

An online form was created, through the SurveyMonkey platform, under the guidance of the 'Autistic UK' network. The data collected included very basic demographic information: age, sex, gender identity, education status and setting last attended; followed by the one question 'What do you wish your teacher knew about autism?'. Participants were given the option of either typing their free text response, in the space provided, or uploading either an audio, PDF or JPEG file. The results of this study form part of the autistic learner experiences, as reported in Chapter 4, identified as Phase II.

3.5.2.5 Follow-up study: Non-autistic learner survey design (CGS)

As stated above, following the publication of the '*Preliminary Report*', it was suggested that a comparison of educational experiences between autistic and non-autistic learners would be beneficial, for enabling resources to be focused on the areas of greatest need. Following discussions with the supervision team, it was agreed that undertaking a follow-up study focusing on the educational experiences of non-autistic learners would be of value. Whilst it is recognised that direct comparison would be difficult, due to the data being collected at different times, it was felt there would be benefits in having a general evaluation of the different perspectives of the two cohorts.

The online survey utilised the same format, including visual aids, as the APQ, with the removal of the autism specific questions. Whilst there was no level selection offered, again questions were separated into seven sections, there were clear

reminders at the head of each section, informing participants that they did not have to answer any questions they did not want to. As with the APQ, a question preview document was produced, enabling potential participants to view the questions and consider their responses in advance. Table 3.5.2.5 (below) presents an overview of the structure of the survey, whilst the question schedule can be seen in Appendix 2c. Again, the resulting data from this study, are included as part of the reporting of autistic learner educational experiences, within Chapter 4, identified as Phase III.

Table 3.5.2.5 - Survey of non-autistic learners: question overview

Section	Questions
Demographics	Language selection – LA – Sex – Gender ID – Age – Ethnicity – First language
About the young person's ALN	2 quantitative (1 dichotomous, 1 multiple choice)
About the young person's education	3 quantitative (1 dichotomous, 2 multiple choice)
Going to school	2 quantitative (both dichotomous) & 1 qualitative
At school	3 quantitative (all dichotomous) & 1 qualitative
Friends and others at school	3 quantitative (all dichotomous) & 1 qualitative
In school	3 quantitative (all dichotomous) & 1 qualitative
About your teachers	3 quantitative (all Likert scale)
About your school	3 quantitative (all Likert scale)
Closing questions	2 qualitative
Total questions including demographics	29 Quantitative & 6 Qualitative

3.5.3 Testing and piloting the questionnaire formats

Owen, Fox and Bird (2016) indicated the importance of testing a questionnaire, ahead of any launch, to ensure ease of access, and understanding from a participant's perspective. For the first phase studies, pre-testing was conducted for each survey, making use of the researcher's personal contacts with experience relevant to each individual study. These consultation periods sought to identify any issues with grammar, language or style of the questions. Feedback from these piloting periods was considered prior to any of the surveys going 'live'. When researcher and supervision team were happy with the online presentation of each

survey questionnaire, a second pilot was undertaken, through a '*soft launch*' process. Initial online access was limited to personal acquaintances, to test out the functionality of the questionnaire, ensuring that at time of full launch, all elements were working as required. More details of this process, relating to each individual study, are presented below.

3.5.3.1 Piloting the ESQ

An initial draft copy of the ESQ survey was shared with ten former colleagues working in the education sector, including a head and deputy head teacher, ALNCo, class teachers and support staff working in both mainstream and specialist provisions. This piloting process enabled a testing of the survey, and the efficacy and appropriateness of the proposed questions and layout. Feedback was positive, with no alterations required. A '*soft launch*' of the ESQ was conducted through the researcher's own personal social media channels from 7th April, with nineteen responses being harvested over a five-day period. No feedback of any issues with the functionality of the survey were received, therefore on 12th April 2021, a full launch was initiated. The ESQ online survey remained active until 28th May 2021, when it was closed to new participants.

3.5.3.2 Piloting the PCQ

A consultation period involving an initial draft paper copy of the PCQ was undertaken in November 2020, prior to a completed draft being submitted for ethical approval. Input was received from five parents of autistic young people during this process, providing valuable feedback regarding some of the questions asked and the language used. As a result, minor alterations to the phrasing and terminology of some questions were made, whilst some additional options were added to questions around inclusion, educational support and the general closing questions. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 situation, as discussed above, the launch of the PCQ was delayed until all schools had fully reopened to all pupils. Again, proceeding with a '*soft launch*' the survey was publicised through personal

Facebook pages on 4th May 2021, receiving twenty-two responses within the first week, no apparent problems with the online presentation or mechanisms were reported. The PCQ was fully launched on Monday 10th May 2021, and remained active until 30th June 2021.

3.5.3.3 Piloting the APQ

The draft APQ survey was made available to a selection of acquaintances from within the autism community to gather feedback around language, format and accessibility, the general response from 10 parent and learner pairings was positive. The feedback from this consultation period did not necessitate any changes to be undertaken. Prior to launch the question preview document was made available to download, and links to this document were included in every subsequent post promoting the survey, for the lifespan of the study. The APQ was '*soft launched*' on 21st June 2021. With no issues identified in the functionality of the online survey, a full launch was initiated a week later, on 28th June 2021. Due to the delays in achieving ethical approval and the COVID-19 situation in schools, the survey remained active beyond the end of the summer term, closing on Sunday 8th August 2021.

3.5.3.4 Piloting the WTSK online form

As there was minimal substance to the proposed schedule of the WTSK study, and following previous consultation with advocacy groups, no initial piloting of the online form was undertaken. The WTSK study was '*soft launched*' on 11th May 2022 and with no initial concerns raised, remained active for two months, closing to new participants on 13th July 2022.

3.5.3.5 Piloting the CGS

As the CGS largely followed the structure of the initial APQ, it was not felt necessary to undertake a piloting process, prior to the initial '*soft launch*'. In order to ensure

the functionality of the survey was satisfactory, this process went active on 16th June 2022, twelve responses were received in the first week, with no feedback reporting any concerns, therefore the study was fully launched on 23rd June 2022. As this was close to the end of the summer term, the study remained active throughout the summer break and for the first couple of weeks of the new school year, closing to new participants on 15th September 2022.

3.5.4 Identifying a suitable platform

Once the draft questionnaires were complete, finding a suitable online platform to host the surveys was the next challenge. It was important to identify a provider which offered a user-friendly experience, presenting the questionnaires the same way to all participants (Crawford et al., 2014; Mann & Stewart, 2000). Considering the freely available options of Google and Microsoft forms, both offered a clear, straightforward, easy to use interface, however, neither had the capacity to support a complete survey, presented in both Welsh and English languages. Reverting to a platform with which the researcher's previous research experience had proven successful, it was decided to use SurveyMonkey.

SurveyMonkey presents an easy-to-use experience for both researcher and participant, offering opportunities to customise the presentation of the questionnaire, giving the researcher more control over participant experience. The platform is compatible with all modern media and therefore readily accessible to researcher and participant, via mobile phone technology, making the process of completing the questionnaire more accessible to anyone wishing to participate. The platform is fully compliant with current GDPR regulations (see Section 3.6) and provides assurances as to the security processes employed to protect user data, with all data being encrypted during transmission and storage (SurveyMonkey, n.d.). SurveyMonkey provides transfer of quantitative participant data into Microsoft Excel workbooks and onto IBM SPSS Statistics, in preparation for data analysis. Likewise for qualitative responses, SurveyMonkey can prepare open ended

question responses for transfer into Microsoft Word for analysis, through Word Clouds or thematic analysis.

3.5.5 Promoting the studies and recruiting participants

Keeping potential participants and interested parties informed of the project was a critical element to raise awareness and increase response rates. During the planning and preparation phase, and before any of the surveys went 'live' a bilingual general participant engagement document was produced. The document provided readers with an overview of the project, what its intended outcomes were, and details of who would be able to participate, and was promoted through the researcher's own personal social media. To help increase the audience, a dedicated profile for the study was set up on Facebook, this online presence was created as the focus for the promotion of the studies. Bilingual promotion of each study was mainly conducted through the project's dedicated Facebook page, with details shared to appropriate autism group and discussion pages based in Wales.

For the ESQ, in addition to the general promotional activity discussed above, the researcher gathered contact emails for most maintained schools, and further education providers, across Wales. Over the first fortnight of the survey being fully active, emails were sent to each, containing relevant information relating to the study, together with a link to the online questionnaire.

3.6 Ethical considerations

The component studies reported within this thesis were individually reviewed and approved by the Swansea University Ethics Board College of Arts and Humanities Research Ethics and Governance Committee (COAHREC) (Table 3.6).

Table 3.6 - Component study ethical approval references

Component study	Abbreviation	Approval date	Reference
Parent/carer survey	PCQ	9th February 2021	*090221/3629*
Educator survey	ESQ	29th March 2021	*290321/3814*
Survey of autistic learners	APQ	29th April 2021	*290421/3788*
What teachers should know	WTSK	7th April 2022	*070422/5037*
Survey of non-autistic learners	CGS	3rd May 2022	*030522/5044*

The ethical integrity of this research is critical, and the following guidelines and framework policies have been adhered to throughout the planning, preparation, data collection, analysis and reporting stages of this study.

- Swansea University Research Integrity Framework (Swansea University, 2021)
- British Educational Research Integrity Framework (BERA, 2018)
- The Data Protection Act (UK Government, 2018)

The BPS (2021) highlight four areas of concern researchers undertaking internet-based research should take into consideration, the independence and well-being of participants, the value of the research being undertaken, a responsibility to maintain social structure, whilst seeking to minimise harm and maximise benefit. Questions of ethics often focus on four key areas: privacy, anonymity and confidentiality, consent and data security (Buchanan & Ess, 2009; Im & Chee, 2002; Williams, 2012).

The processes described below, all aim to ensure the studies which form the original research element of this thesis, are fully compliant with GDPR regulations and guidelines laid out in the Data Protection Act. Considerable efforts were made to ensure potential participants were given as much information about the project, why their engagement was of value, what their data would be used for and how it would be stored and later destroyed, in line with the guidelines set out within the

Swansea University Research Integrity Framework (2021). As explained, in more detail below, each study was approved by the College of Arts and Humanities Research Ethics and Governance Committee (COAHREC). Areas including the provision of information, the gathering of consent, and the handling, storage and deletion of participant data, were all considered to meet the regulatory frameworks, in place.

3.6.1 Participant anonymity and confidentiality

Cohen et al. (2018) define anonymity as data collected from participants where the researchers are unaware of their identity, whilst confidentiality refers to situations where the researcher has access to personal details of participants but does not share these with others. They go on to suggest that when research is undertaken over the internet, participant confidentiality, anonymity and privacy are intrinsically linked (Cohen et al., 2018). Hash and Spencer (2009) recognise that completing an online questionnaire, lends itself to participant anonymity, although this can be problematic for the researcher, as they are not able to confirm whether or not a participant is who they say they are within their demographic responses (Williams, 2012). It should be recognised however, that completing any task online leaves a trace, with Internet Protocol (IP) addresses being recorded by service providers, even if the researcher has no direct access to this information this data makes guaranteeing anonymity difficult (Buchanan & Zimmer, 2021).

Throughout the data collection elements of this study, participation has been voluntary, and no personally identifiable information has been collected. In each of the free-text response, open questions, participants have been reminded not to enter information such as names of participants, their children, or peers, teachers or schools. The SurveyMonkey platform enables response data to be downloaded, without identifiable information such as participant's' IP addresses, and this facility was utilised, meaning the researcher, at no point, had access to these details.

3.6.2 Ensuring the potential participants are well informed

In addition to the general project information document (see Section 3.5.5), each study was accompanied by its own participant information document (PID). The PID provided all relevant information relating to the study including: its purpose, information on who can take part, what happens when taking part, the right to withdraw, GDPR information, complaint procedures and some detail of the SurveyMonkey cookies policy, together with contact details for researcher and supervisors alongside signposts to some autism support organisations.

3.6.3 Participant consent

The BPS (2021) consider participant consent should be obtained for any research involving data which is not publicly available. Consideration should be given to the sensitivity of data, public accessibility, participant interaction and vulnerability when thinking about issues of consent (McKee & Porter, 2009), gathering informed consent is crucial to protecting the rights of participants (Whitehead, 2007). When considering an online questionnaire, Alessi and Martin (2010) propose the most efficient way to gather consent is to present details of the study and information about data security at the start of the form, this should be accompanied by a tick-box enabling participants to say they agree to take part in the study. If the consent box is unticked, then potential participants are unable to access the online form. Gathering informed consent through an online platform can be difficult, especially considering the research has no knowledge of who is completing the form, or how truthful the details they enter can be (Cohen et al., 2018). Alongside consent, it is important that participants are aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any time (BPS, 2021).

Each survey, opened with a welcome page which offered participants the choice of completing the questionnaire in either the Welsh or English language, with the software then directing to the relevant pages. Participants were then presented with the information, identical to that provided within the downloadable PID.

Before being able to access the main questionnaire, participants had to check off a series of tick boxes to confirm they had read and understood the information, met the participation criteria, and consented to take part. Participants were reminded of their right to withdraw, at any time prior to submitting the completed questionnaire. Once submitted, with no identifiable information collected, and due to the anonymous nature of the study, it was impossible for the researcher to delete any individual entry.

3.6.4 Informed consent

Krishnamurthy (2004) highlighted the importance of ensuring participants had access to relevant information, to make an informed decision as to whether to take part, as such all PID documents (see Appendix 1b) were made available for download prior to any survey being launched publicly. Potential participants were afforded multiple opportunities to access the PID documents, to enable them to understand the requirements of the study, an make an informed choice prior to survey engagement. Initially shared as posts on the project's dedicated social media platform, links to the relevant downloads were then shared alongside every piece of promotion, throughout the active lifespan of the surveys. The same information was presented to those who clicked the link to access the surveys, and again, made available to download before the '*click to consent to participation*' box, similarly the links were presented, at the end of the survey, before the final submit button.

3.6.4.1 Parental consent

When research involves collecting data from CYP, it is necessary for researchers to take extra precautions to safeguard vulnerable participants (Cohen et al., 2018). A balance needs to be struck between protecting their wellbeing, and their rights to share their views (NSPCC, 2023). The NSPCC (2023) guidelines for researching with participants aged under eighteen years, state that all participants aged eight years or under require parental consent, as do the majority of those between eight and fifteen years, whilst participants aged sixteen and over with capacity, are able to

provide their own consent. With the autistic learner study, the opening pages differed slightly in that those participants aged 16-18 years were able to complete their own consent and continue independently, whilst those aged 15 years and under were required to provide parental consent. Participants who had received parental consent also had an opportunity to indicate their own consent or assent on a dedicated page of easily understood, age-appropriate information.

3.6.4.2 Consent and autistic young people

There are significant challenges in acquiring consent from autistic research participants, where an individual gives consent in one context, it should not therefore be assumed that they consent in another (Loyd, 2012). Pursuing consent/assent should be interactive and continuous throughout the course of the research (Ramcharan, 2006), participants should be encouraged to consider and then approve their consent freely (Rodgers, 1999) and should not be placed under any pressure or feel coerced into consenting (Cameron & Murphy, 2007). Whilst autistic participants may have the intellectual skills required to consent, some remain unsure of the implications, and what engagement would entail for them (Jordan, 1999). It is common practice to seek the input and support of parents/carers in communicating information that will help them to consider their consent and counteract any misunderstanding (Walmsley, 2004). Goodall (2019) identified four crucial considerations in acquiring informed consent:

1. An understanding of the research
2. Voluntary engagement
3. Explicit consent
4. Renegotiable engagement (the right to withdraw)

Presenting potential participants with information in a format that they can understand and is accessible to all helps develop understanding (Harrington et al., 2014), this may entail preparing material tailored to the specific needs of individual participants, incorporating visual supports (Scott-Barrett et al., 2019). Reminding the participants that their role is entirely voluntary throughout the project, can be

combined with the on-going process of seeking assent (BPS, 2014). Researchers must ensure participants are competent to offer their own consent, based on their understanding of the information presented to them (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001). The approaches employed within this project are set out within section 3.5.2.3, above.

3.6.5 Data protection and security

The protection of data in the UK is governed by the Data Protection Act 2018, which implements the European Union (EU) General data protection regulation (GDPR). Whilst the laws introduced through the Act were significant, Cornock (2018) believed most were already considered good practice in the field of research and formed the basis of many codes of practice. The Act laid out responsibilities to ensure information was accurate and up to date, handled sensitively and securely and only stored for as long as is necessary (UK Government, 2018). Data use should be transparent, lawful and fair, information gathered must be for a specific purpose, and used only when necessary (UK Government, 2018). GDPR regulations also afford individuals with the right to receive information regarding how their data will be used, object to the use of their data, and the right to have their data erased (UK Government, 2018). GDPR protects individuals from having their data misused, highlighting the importance of gaining consent regarding how data is collected and subsequently used. Information about consent should be accessible and easy to understand, enabling the individual to make an informed choice (Cornock, 2018). Equally the right to withdraw should be explained, with people having the right to have all of their information erased (Information Commissioner's Office, 2018). CYP have the right to information that is presented in an age-appropriate manner, whilst those under sixteen years of age require parental consent (EU, 2016).

Whilst no personally identifiable information was collected, in any of the component studies, great care was taken to ensure all downloaded response data

was stored securely. Raw data, as downloaded, was stored within password protected folders, stored in the online Swansea University student OneDrive secure storage facility. All subsequent updated files created during the data cleansing process were added to these folders. All data files will remain stored within this protected environment for a period of ten years, before being destroyed, in line with university policy (Swansea University, 2021).

3.7 Supporting the recruitment and engagement of autistic learners

Whilst it is acknowledged that autistic learners did not contribute to the development and design of the research, throughout the process, the researcher was mindful of their needs. The research methodologies employed were considered the most effective approach to enabling the survey engagement of as many autistic young people, with varying ability levels, as possible. Central to this was the aim of ensuring potential respondents felt able to share their thoughts and feelings freely, in order that their input could be at the heart of the findings reported within this thesis. Conducting research seeking to elicit the views of autistic young people is not necessarily a straightforward process. Each autistic individual has their own unique set of differences, and these need to be taken into consideration, when planning any project wishing to engage their involvement.

Within education there are considered to be three categories of need, characterised by the degree to which they were experienced amongst the cohort: 1) common needs are those shared widely within the population, 2) exceptional needs, appear within a smaller proportion of the group and 3) individual needs are unique to each learner (Norwich, 1996). Generally, autistic learners are likely to present somewhere within all three categories, however, each will have individual strengths and weaknesses, and their severity of need will be unique (Wing, 1993). The ever-evolving understanding of autism, coupled with its heterogeneity present many challenges for researchers, who need to appreciate the needs of each potential respondent within their target sample (Runswick-Cole et al., 2016). Such

complexities can impact the decision-making processes of researchers, resulting in reduced opportunities to recruit autistic learners to respond to their surveys (Lewis, 2009). The wide and varied set of impairments and vulnerabilities experienced by autistic young people, is thought to unsettle researchers, often leading to their exclusion (Goodall, 2019; Lewis, 2009; Preece, 2002).

3.7.1 Perceived communication barriers to survey engagement

Some of the core symptomologies of autism include social communication difficulties (Ellis, 2017; Harrington et al., 2014), Beresford et al. (2004) identify these as reasons for why many researchers are reluctant to recruit autistic respondents. Whilst many remain non-verbal through their lives (Fombonne, 1999; Howlin, 1998), those who gain spoken language often struggle with its complexities. Autistic individuals often struggle with recognising and decoding subtle non-verbal cues, many have a literal interpretation of language, whilst abstract language use, such as metaphors, idioms, and commonplace figures of speech, can be confusing (Martin & McDonald 2004; Mitchell et al., 1997; Myles, 2005). Many have difficulties with both expressive and receptive language skills, sometimes using advanced skills in one area to camouflage deficits in the other (Mitchell et al., 2006; Saalasti et al., 2008). For some, processing information can be challenging, making forming responses to questions difficult (Attwood, 2007; Baron-Cohen, 1988; Jordan, 2004), whilst difficulties recollecting and re-counting past personal encounters, impacts their ability to reliably self-report (Brown et al., 2012; Bruck et al., 2007; Millward et al., 2000; Pandolfi et al., 2012). An inflexibility of thought in some autistic young people, makes recognising and discussing complex emotions challenging (Losh & Capps, 2006; Preece & Jordan, 2010; Wing, 1996).

Although these communication difficulties appear comprehensive, it isn't the case that each autistic child will have trouble in each area, similarly each will be impacted with varying degrees of severity. It therefore makes sense for a cautious and methodical approach to be employed when seeking to recruit autistic learners

as part of any research sample. Whilst it is worth remembering that everyone communicates in one form or another (O'Neill, 1998), Tisdall (2012) identified the exclusionary impact perceived communication difficulties can cause. However, rights decree that potential respondents are provided with suitable resources to facilitate their expression through whichever method they prefer (Fayette & Bond, 2018; United Nations, 2006).

3.7.2 Methodological approaches to support survey engagement and response

In trying to recruit young autistic young people to respond to the study's survey questionnaires, it was crucial that the abilities of the intended respondents are considered in the design, to ensure an inclusive approach. In doing this, it was imperative that sufficient information was made available, in an age and ability appropriate format. Lomax (2012) discusses the need to find solutions, using innovative methods, to give non-verbal children and young people the opportunity to share their experiences, and that such methods should also be considered for the benefit all young people.

Hunleth (2011) noted the difficulties autistic children have expressing emotions and complex ideas. The more inclusive the methods employed to gather the views and support the engagement of this cohort, the more varied their input will be, providing insights not easily expressed through standardised approaches (Dardyshire et al., 2005). The validity of trying to encourage autistic learners to respond to surveys such as the ones employed in this project is clear, however questions remain regarding to what degree they can be supported effectively, and the appropriate methods required to ensure surveys such as these are accessible and inclusive (Lewis & Porter, 2004; Whyte, 2006).

Researcher attitude is important, if a child feels the researcher is interested in what they have to share, they are likely to be more forthcoming in their survey responses

(Goodall, 2019). Part of this is enabling potential respondents to feel at ease. Gowen et al. (2019) recommend providing potential survey participants with clear information in advance. Including an outline of the project aims, will help give the target sample some reassurance ahead of any engagement. When it comes to engaging autistic young people, Clark and Moss (2011) recommend employing various methods encompassed within one project, accompanied by seeking input from caregivers. As previously indicated the heterogeneity of autism is considerable and researchers should be prepared to constantly reorganise and reimagine their methodological approaches to ensure appropriate accessibility is available for all potential survey respondents (Beresford, et al., 2004).

Alongside difficulties in communication, many autistic individuals have trouble processing various forms of informative material presented to them (Courchesne, 1991; Whitehurst, 2007). The effective use of visual supports can scaffold the use and understanding of both written and spoken language (Grandin, 1995), supporting those with processing difficulties (Quill, 1997). Visual supports are considered more user-friendly than the spoken or written word alone (Preece, 2002), are proven to increase engagement (Ashburner et al., 2013) and provide an effective tool for helping autistic children identify, relate to, and discuss, a range of emotions (Losh & Capps, 2006). Successful use of visual supports is not straightforward, care must be taken to ensure visual aids are suited to the intended use, and meaningful to the individual (Scott et al., 2006). Effective utilisation of visual supports can assist autistic survey respondents in preparation for the process of involvement (Harrington et al., 2014).

As detailed in section 3.5.2.3 above, the researcher has taken most of these approaches on board at every stage of the process, to support the recruitment and survey engagement of autistic learners.

3.8 Research philosophy

Having detailed the positionality of the researcher in Chapter 1, it is worth considering the epistemological approach employed in the process of conducting the research reported within this thesis. Numerous definitions as to what epistemology is, exist (Crotty, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Potter, 2017), whilst they all centre around the study of knowledge, Couper (2020) suggests two questions are at the core "what is knowledge?" and "how do we know something?". There are numerous research approaches which are considered to fall under the umbrella of epistemology, including positivism, interpretivism and pragmatism, although there are countless more. Positivism implies that our knowledge is only developed through experimentation and observation (Cohen et al., 2018). French philosopher Auguste Comte first referred to a positivist philosophical position (Cohen et al., 2018). In epistemological terms positivism focuses on detectible facts acquired by scientific methods (Flick, 2018). Interpretivists disagree with the positivist belief, favouring an interpretive perception of facts as the driver of knowledge (Gray, 2004). Interpretivism promotes a more subjective approach to research (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). Pragmatists concern themselves with identifying practical resolutions to pre-existing problems, adopting an open-minded approach to find workable solutions (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). It is the pragmatists' view that knowledge can be acquired through various means, including, but not limited to, those solely advocated by positivists and interpretivists (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

Utilising prior experiences of the researcher, the component studies are constructed around the need to respond to the research questions, building upon experiences from past research, time working as an educator, and being a parent of an autistic learner. As with most aspects of life, I prefer to adopt a pragmatic approach to the project, with realistic expectations and sensible planning and preparation. Pragmatism is based on the use of mixed methodological approaches to illustrate lived experiences in forming a response to the research question (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Pragmatists focus on that overarching research

question and construct a response based on the collection of data and subsequent analysis, through a continuous process of self-evaluation (Morgan, 2007; Ormerod, 2006).

3.9 Analytical approaches

As part of the data cleansing process, qualitative data was separated from the mostly quantitative data, in order to prepare the data files for transfer to the statistical analysis software. Maintaining the original downloaded data files ensured any qualitative data provided was attributed to the participant demographic from which it originated. Quantitative data from each study, once cleaned, was transferred to IBM SPSS-28 data analysis software (IBM, 2022). Qualitative data obtained through the 'free text response' sections of the surveys were transferred from Excel worksheets into Microsoft Word documents and analysed through thematic content analysis. The processes employed for both quantitative and qualitative data analysis are briefly outlined below.

3.9.1 Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics present an overview of participant response data and form the core of the quantitative analysis reported within this thesis, using both numerical and graphical presentation. Within the results chapters to follow, each result is presented within an ordered framework. Initially, the overall participant response data is presented, indicating how many reported a positive or negative experience. Where the questions relate directly to learner experience, the mean age, including standard deviation (*SD*), of each response group is also reported. Following this, the differences between a select group of variables are stated. The variable subgroup of particular interest is the type of provision setting, investigating any difference in experience between those referring to mainstream and specialist provision settings. When considering data relating to young people, the differences between the biological sexes, and the sector in which they are educated are also presented. The study aims to identify where any variances between subgroup cohorts are

significant, to explore this, Chi-square analysis is used, to test each reported response.

3.9.2 Chi-square analysis

Chi-square statistical analysis enables a formulated testing of hypotheses, identifying any significance in differences between two variables (Pallant, 2016). By comparing the response data from two subgroup variables it is possible identify if either significantly impacts the results. As stated above, the variables of greater interest within this thesis are the differences in experience reported between participants referencing either mainstream or specialist education settings, although, for clarity, the reported differences between the sexes and the provision sectors are also tested, in this way. Using the IBM SPSS statistical analysis software to carry out Chi-square testing, provides the '*2-sided asymptotic significance*' (*p*-value). The *p*-value presents the probability of the null hypothesis being valid, the lower the *p*-value the more likely that the two variables being tested are related (Bevans, 2023). Where a *p*-value of 0.05 or lower is reported the differences between the two variables tested is thought to be statistically significant.

Caution should be used not to place too much importance on the basic headline *p*-value result of statistical significance testing, especially in regard to the learners' studies presented within Chapter 4 of this thesis. The relatively low sample size of both the APQ and CGS studies, alongside the comparative study between the two cohorts, can question the reliability and validity of null hypothesis significance testing and any resulting *p*-value (Plonsky, 2015, pp.25). Whilst reporting a significant *p*-value can demonstrate differences between subgroups and experiences, some trends can be underlying in the data, and whilst not meeting the statistical significance threshold, these should not be overlooked.

3.9.3 Regression analysis

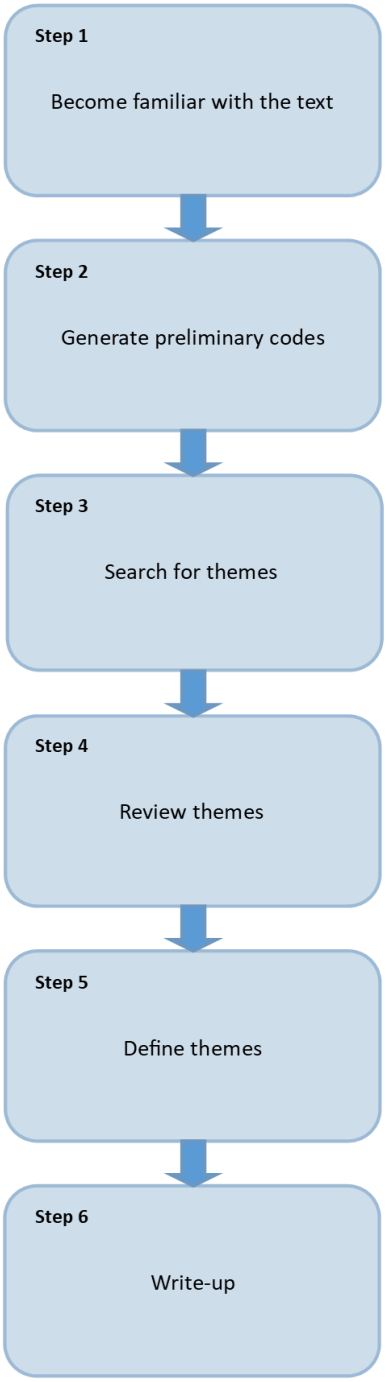
Where Chi-square analysis considered how differences between independent variables impact results in isolation, regression analysis can identify any relationships between multiple variables while adjusting for confounding variables (Cohen et al., 2018). Within this thesis, regression analysis is employed to consider how independent variables such as biological sex, the type of settings, and the sector attended, impact learner experience, in combination, across the four questions posed to autistic learners responding to all three levels of questioning. With the sex, setting and sector, variables being of a binary nature, logistic regression is used to understand what the data tells us about the influence of each variable, when part of the overall learner experience (Chapter 4: section 4.11). IBM SPS output offers *Exp*(*B*), 95% confidence intervals (95%*CI*), and significance (*p*-value), whilst additional regression analysis produced a collinearity VIF, for each independent variable within the equation (Pallant, 2016).

3.9.4 Thematic analysis of qualitative data

As described above, all three first phase studies, together with the survey of non-autistic learners, offered participants the opportunity to provide further information, and expand upon their answers through a series of free-text response questions which concluded each section of the individual surveys. These qualitative responses were analysed using Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-step framework for thematic analysis (Figure 3.9.4 below).

Focusing on response data entered by autistic learners, as these were considered the most meaningful of the study, after first downloading all responses to a series of Microsoft Word documents, in the sections from which they originated all qualitative data was amalgamated into one file. This process ensured all responses were considered across all areas, thus not precluding any response from the general thematic analysis approach. Following the Braun and Clarke framework (2006), step one of the process involves familiarising oneself with the full body of data, reading

Figure 3.9.4 - Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-step framework for thematic analysis



Adapted from: Braun & Clarke (2006)

and re-reading through every response. Taking notes helps to ensure some early themes can be identified, which helps progression into step two, the generating of early codes. The codes that emerge help to organise the volume of data into more

meaningful and manageable sections. In step three, whilst studying the data aiming to identify themes, a process of colour coding was employed to easily identify the various themes as the emerged from wider text. When reviewing the themes, in step four, while examining each entry for validity, participant comments identified for each theme were copied and pasted into separate documents, in order that they could be further analysed in order to define themes and comments that were valuable to the study (step five). Relevant entries which were thought to add value to the reporting of results in Chapter 4, were then cross referenced with the original SurveyMonkey downloaded Excel file, in order that they could be attributed to the participant demographic. Finally, arriving at step six, the identified participant responses of relevance were written up and entered into the results.

3.10 Summary of chapter

This chapter has outlined the processes and reasoning behind the research design and approaches employed when planning and preparing the original research elements reported within this thesis. Consideration has been given to the specific challenges that need to be taken into account when working with specific populations, especially the autistic community and young people aged under eighteen years of age. The specific ethical considerations and regulations which have been followed throughout the participant engagement and data collection elements have been discussed, as have the steps taken to ensure participant data is protected and handled sensitively and securely. Finally, the analytic approaches used in generating the results, as reported, have been included.

The subsequent results to emerge from the data harvested from the five constituent studies as detailed above, are presented in the three chapters that follow. Chapter 4 looks at the educational experiences of autistic learners in Wales, including results from the APQ, WTSK and CGS studies. Chapter 5 considers parental perceptions and experiences relating to their autistic child's education, taking the results from the PCQ study. In Chapter 6, educator perceptions and experiences

relating to the education of autistic learners, are presented, reporting the results from the ESQ.

Chapter 4: The educational experiences of autistic learners in Wales

4.1 Introduction

Traditionally, research relating to the education of autistic learners has been reliant on the input of parents, carers and professionals (Sproston et al., 2017). From the inception of this project, it was the intent to ensure the experiences of the autistic learners themselves, were the central element of the discussion. It is considered that to truly appreciate what educational life is like for autistic learners, they themselves should be understood, as their unique insight can prove invaluable in trying to establish exactly what challenges are faced on a day-to-day basis within an educational context (Goodall, 2019).

4.2 Aims of this chapter

This chapter comprises of three phases of data collection involving young people. Firstly, this chapter presents results from analysis of the Phase I data harvested through participant responses to the survey of autistic learners in Wales (APQ), as described in Chapter 3. Secondly within this chapter, in response to the APQ findings relating to educator understanding of autism, qualitative data from the 'What Teachers Should Know' follow-up study, identified as Phase II, will be presented. Finally, to illustrate and highlight any areas where autistic learner experience may differ from that of their non-autistic peers, data from the CGS study will be introduced, and presented for comparative analysis, which is Phase III. Combining the three studies within this one chapter, will provide a comprehensive overview of the experiences of autistic learners in Wales. The findings will be central in guiding an answer to the research questions below:

1) Is the current model of inclusive education, whereby the majority of autistic learners attend mainstream settings, with varying levels of support, working for autistic learners in Wales?
2) What are the views of the young autistic community in Wales, on their educational experiences?

4.3 Chapter overview

Within section 4.4, there is a brief introduction to the Phase I APQ study, before section 4.5 presents the demographics for the whole APQ sample. As discussed in Chapter 3, the APQ was planned to ensure accessibility for all, encouraging and supporting engagement from autistic learners of all abilities. To achieve this, questions within the survey were presented in three ability levels, each one expanding on questions within the previous level. The ability levels are introduced and explained in section 4.5.1. Section 4.6 provides the route map for how the APQ results will be presented, based on these levels. The APQ results will follow, in sections 4.7 to 4.12.

Section 4.13 introduces the Phase II, WTSK study, including the sample characteristics. Following thematic analysis of the WTSK response data (see Chapter 3), this segment of the results will highlight the five most common areas current autistic learners referred to in their responses. Section 4.14 will introduce the Phase III, CGS study. Within section 4.14.2 the whole sample demographic data for the CGS will be presented, before sections 4.14.3 to 4.14.11 present a brief overview of non-autistic learner experience, utilising the CGS response data. Based on participant numbers and focusing on mainstream experience (section 4.15), section 4.15.1 compares sample characteristics of both autistic and non-autistic samples. Comparative analysis of data, from the two cohorts; autistic, and non-autistic learners, features in sections 4.15.3 to 4.15.9, with an overview summary closing this analysis, in section 4.15.10. Data tables for the sections in 4.15 can be viewed in Appendix 3a. Finally, section 4.16 presents a summary overview of the Phase I, II, and III, studies, concluding the chapter.

4.4 Phase I: The autistic pupil questionnaire (APQ)

As described in Chapter 3, the survey of autistic learners (APQ) was launched at the end of June and remained active throughout July and August 2021. It was promoted through social media, utilising support groups and networks across Wales and attracted 163 responses, with a completion rate of 43%. Following the initial data cleansing process 92 unique responses were entered into the analysis presented within this chapter. The youngest respondent completing the questionnaire with parental support was three years old, providing responses to the four yes/no questions asked in level one. Other responses were received from across all ages up to eighteen, (*M age* = 13.52 years, *SD* = 3.84), with the most respondents being either sixteen or seventeen years old (n = 14 each). As with the other studies undertaken, questions were devised through reviews of literature, as discussed earlier in the thesis. Questions were also developed to gain an appreciation of the autistic learner experience in several areas of interest:

- Going to school
- General experience in school
- Feeling of inclusion whilst at school
- Peer relationships at school
- School work
- Sensory differences at school
- Educator understanding

4.5 The APQ sample demographics

Nearly all respondents (99%, n = 91) chose to respond to the English language version of the survey, with just one using the Welsh language option. Whilst 93% (n = 86) indicated English to be their first language as spoken at home, 5% (n = 5) were Welsh speakers and one used British Sign Language as their main medium of communication. Autistic young people taking part were predominantly of a White ethnic background (93%, n = 86), with four of mixed ethnicity, the remaining two did not declare. There was at least one respondent educated in each of the 22 Local

Authority regions of Wales. Table 4.5 presents the main sample characteristics across cohorts and sub-groups.

Table 4.5 - APQ whole sample demographic overview

Variable			Participant age		
	n	%	Median	Mode	Mean (*SD*)
All participants	*92*	100.0	15	16/17	13.52 (*3.84*)
Biological sex					
Male	*55*	59.78	14	12	13.24 (*3.60*)
Female	*36*	39.13	16	18	13.92 (*4.23*)
Gender identity					
Male	*54*	58.70	13.5	12	13.20 (*3.66*)
Female	*29*	31.52	15	16	13.17 (*4.29*)
Non-binary	*6*	6.52	17	17	16.50 (*1.76*)
School provision					
Mainstream	*72*	78.26	13.5	12	13.17 (*3.95*)
Specialist	*14*	15.22	16	16	14.71 (*2.89*)
Sector					
Primary	*20*	21.74	8	8	7.85 (*1.79*)
Secondary	*53*	57.61	15	12/16	14.55 (*1.92*)
Post-16	*15*	16.30	17	18	17.33 (*0.72*)
Level of survey					
Level 1	*15*	16.30	12	12	11 (*4.52*)
Level 2	*33*	35.87	15	16	14.09 (*2.97*)
Level 3	*44*	47.83	17	15	13.95 (*3.91*)

4.5.1 The APQ respondent accessibility, ability levels

As described in Chapter 3, and 4.3 (above), questions within the survey were presented in three ability levels, each level expanding on questions within the previous one, utilising picture prompts within each answer option. Levels one and two consisted of straightforward dichotomous (yes/no) questions. Level 1 included just four questions. Level 2 contained an additional eight (12 in total), with 'free text response' options available for respondents to share additional information, should they wish. Level 3 further expanded to include a series of nine multiple-choice Likert scale questions asking respondents whether they agreed, disagreed or neither, with

a series of brief statements relating to their education. To enable potential participants and/or their parents/carers to make an informed decision about which ability level would suit them best, a question preview document was prepared. This was available to download prior to the survey being launched and was also signposted throughout the promotion of the study and included all relevant participant information. The frequency response data for each level is presented in Table 4.5.1 below.

Table 4.5.1 - Level selection demographic overview frequency response data for each ability level

	All participants		Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
All responses	*92*	100.0	*55*	59.78	*36*	39.13	*72*	78.26	*14*	15.22	*20*	21.74	*53*	57.61	*15*	16.30
Level 1	*15*	16.30	*11*	73.33	*4*	26.67	*10*	66.67	*3*	20.00	*6*	40.00	*6*	40.00	*2*	13.33
Level 2	*33*	35.87	*19*	57.58	*13*	39.39	*24*	72.73	*7*	21.21	*5*	15.15	*26*	78.79	*1*	3.03
Level 3	*44*	47.83	*25*	56.82	*19*	43.18	*38*	86.36	*4*	9.09	*9*	20.45	*21*	47.73	*12*	27.27

4.6 Presentation of APQ results

Results within this chapter are, at first presented by the level of questions, reflecting the presentation of the survey. Each level of questions is reported, based on the sample size that opted to respond to each level, as highlighted in 4.4.2 (above) (additional data tables are presented in Appendix 3a), before consideration will be given to the results across the following subgroups, where sufficient sample size allows: biological sex of participant, type of setting (mainstream or specialist provision), and sector attended (primary, secondary or post-16). Analysis comparing response data across these subgroups will be included, again providing sample sizes allow. Based on theoretical and empirical evidence, data will be used to explore any marked differences of experience between cohorts, the significance of this will be tested, across key demographics including sex, gender, sector and provision. Note, as the sample sizes in the analyses across the levels are small, tests of statistical significance will be underpowered to detect true differences, and due to this,

proportional differences will be considered in addition to significance testing where sizeable.

Throughout the reporting of quantitative data across the whole sample (section 4.11), where sufficient and pertinent qualitative data has been entered within the free text response areas of the questionnaire, this will be included to illustrate and support the results as presented. Each respondent comment referred to within this chapter is accompanied by their participant number, with a list of their basic demographics being shown within Appendix 3a.

4.7 APQ Results: Level 1

Designed to encourage even those of the lowest ability to participate in this study, level 1 was selected by 15 respondents, with a range of educational experiences (Table 4.7 below). Whilst the small sample size within this level does not carry sufficient weight to produce a reliable answer to the research question, the input of these individuals is critical in understanding the experiences of those with the lowest ability and contributes greatly to the wider sample results presented later (Section 4.11). As described above, there were just four dichotomous questions put to level 1 respondents, individually, all fifteen provided a response to each question.

4.7.1 Level 1: Going to school

There was an even split between those respondents, who opted for level 1 questions, that enjoyed going to school (47%, n = 7), and those who did not (53%, n = 8) (Table 4.7.1 below). Respondents who indicated they did not enjoy going to school (Mean age 13.88 years, *SD* = 3.80) appear considerably older than those that did (Mean age 7.71 years, *SD* = 2.69). Despite the small sample size at this level, the differences between primary (83%) and secondary (17%) aged respondents who enjoyed going to school were statistically significant. Sex and setting differences were not identified as significant, as shown in Table 4.7.1.

Table 4.7 - APQ Level 1 sample demographic overview

Variable				Participant age		
		n	%	Median	Mode	Mean (*SD*)
All level 1 participants		*15*	100.0	12	12	11.00 (*4.52*)
Biological sex						
	Male	*11*	73.33	12	12	10.82 (*4.64*)
	Female	*4*	26.67	10.5	N/A	11.50 (*4.80*)
Gender identity						
	Male	*11*	73.33	12	12	10.82 (*4.64*)
	Female	*4*	26.67	10.5	N/A	11.50 (*4.80*)
School provision						
	Mainstream	*10*	66.67	10.5	12	10.40 (*4.50*)
	Specialist	*3*	20.00	12	N/A	12.00 (*4.00*)
Sector						
	Primary	*6*	40.00	7.5	7	7.67 (*0.82*)
	Secondary	*6*	40.00	12	12	13.33 (*2.07*)

Table 4.7.1 - Level 1: Going to school: Data table

Level 1: Do you enjoy going to school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector			
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*7*	46.67	*5*	45.45	*	50.00	*6*	60.00	*	33.33	*5*	83.33	*	16.67
No	*8*	53.33	*6*	54.55	*	50.00	*	40.00	*	66.67	*	16.67	*	83.33
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(1) = 0.24$, $p = 0.88$)				($X^2(3) = 2.68$, $p = 0.44$)				($X^2(3) = 8.30$, $p = <0.05$)			

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

4.7.2 Level 1: At school

Again, respondents were equally split between those who felt happy at school (47%, n = 7), and their peers who were not (53%, n = 8) (Table 4.7.2). Although the age gap was narrower, it was still apparent that the older the participant, the less happy they were at school. The average age of those said to be happy at school was nine years (*SD* = 2.16), whilst those who reported being unhappy were on average over three years older (*M age* = 12.75 years, *SD* = 5.42). At this level, neither

biological sex, sector, nor type of setting attended were found to significantly impact the autistic learners' happiness at school (Table 4.7.2).

Table 4.7.2 - Level 1: At school: Data table

Level 1: Do you feel happy in school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector			
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*7*	46.67	*5*	45.45	*	50.00	*6*	60.00	*	33.33	*5*	83.33	*	33.33
No	*8*	53.33	*6*	54.55	*	50.00	*	40.00	*	66.67	*	16.67	*	66.67
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(1) = 0.24$, $p = 0.88$)				($X^2(3) = 2.68$, $p = 0.44$)				($X^2(3) = 6.30$, $p = 0.10$)			

Level 1: Do you enjoy play and break times at school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector			
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*9*	60.00	*7*	63.64	*	50.00	*5*	50.00	*	100.0	*	66.67	*	66.67
No	*6*	40.00	*4*	36.36	*	50.00	*5*	50.00	-	-	*	33.33	*	33.33
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(1) = 0.23$, $p = 0.63$)				($X^2(3) = 4.58$, $p = 0.21$)				($X^2(3) = 1.81$, $p = 0.61$)			

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

When asked if they enjoyed the unstructured times such as play and break times at school, whilst 60% (n = 9) did, a considerable proportion did not (40%, n = 6) (Table 4.7.2). Those who enjoyed these periods during their school day (Mean age 11.78 years, *SD* = 4.09) were, on average, two years older than their peers who did not (Mean age 9.83 years, *SD* = 5.27). None of the variable subgroup differences were identified as being statistically significant as illustrated in Table 4.7.2.

4.7.3 Level 1: Peer relationships at school

Whilst 60% (n = 9) of respondents, at level one, told us they had friends at school, 40% (n = 6) told us they did not (Table 4.7.3). Those with friends (*M age* = 11.77 years, *SD* = 4.09) were, on average, two years older than their peers who suggest they had no friends at school (*M age* = 9.83 years, *SD* = 5.27). Within the sample of

respondents at Level 1, differences reported between the sexes, across the sectors, and between settings were not significant (Table 4.7.3).

Table 4.7.3 – Level 1: At school: Data table

Level 1: Do you have friends at school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector			
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*9*	60.00	*8*	72.73	*	25.00	*6*	60.00	*	66.67	*	66.67	*	66.67
No	*6*	40.00	*	27.27	*	75.00	*	40.00	*	33.33	*	33.33	*	33.33
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(1) = 2.78$, $p = 0.10$)				($X^2(3) = 2.22$, $p = 0.53$)				($X^2(3) = 1.81$, $p = 0.61$)			

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

4.8 APQ Results: Level 2

Building on the questions in level 1, respondents who opted to take level 2 of the questionnaire, were asked an additional eight dichotomous questions (12 in total). In addition, respondents at level 2 had opportunities to enter qualitative data, in the shape of free-text response options for each subcategory of questions. In total 33 autistic young people responded to these level 2 questions (Table 4.8 below).

Table 4.8 - APQ Level 2 sample demographic overview

Variable			Participant age		
	n	%	Median	Mode	Mean (*SD*)
All level 2 participants	*33*	100.0	15	16	14.09 (*2.97*)
Biological sex					
Male	*19*	57.58	15	15/16	14.26 (*2.56*)
Female	*13*	39.39	16	16	13.69 (*3.82*)
Gender identity					
Male	*17*	51.52	15	15	14.24 (*2.66*)
Female	*13*	39.39	16	16	13.62 (*3.52*)
School provision					
Mainstream	*24*	72.73	14	16	13.63 (*3.13*)
Specialist	*7*	21.21	16	16	14.13 (*4.02*)
Sector					
Primary	*5*	15.15	8	8/10	8.40 (*1.67*)
Secondary	*26*	78.79	15	16	14.97 (*1.68*)

4.8.1 Level 2: Going to school

Whilst the majority of respondents to level 2 indicated they did enjoy going to school (61%, n = 20), a sizable proportion did not (39%) (Table 4.8.1). There was minimal age difference between both cohorts (enjoyed: *Mean age* 14.15 years (*SD* = 3.17) : did not enjoy: *Mean age* 14 years (*SD* = 2.77)). None of the subgroup variables were proven to be statistically significant in relation to the outcomes as demonstrated in Table 4.8.1.

Table 4.8.1 – Level 2: Going to school: Data table

Level 2: Do you enjoy going to school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector			
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*20*	60.61	*13*	68.41	*7*	53.85	*14*	58.33	*5*	71.43	*	60.00	*16*	61.54
No	*13*	39.39	*6*	31.58	*6*	46.15	*10*	41.67	*	28.57	*	40.00	*10*	38.46
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 2.27$, $p = 0.32$)				($X^2(3) = 2.58$, $p = 0.46$)				($X^2(3) = 2.20$, $p = 0.53$)			

Level 2: Does going to school make you feel anxious or worried?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector			
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*26*	78.79	*14*	73.68	*11*	84.62	*22*	91.67	*	42.86	*	80.00	*20*	76.92
No	*7*	21.21	*5*	26.32	*	15.38	*	8.33	*	57.14	*	20.00	*6*	23.08
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 0.83$, $p = 0.66$)				($X^2(3) = 11.77$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(2) = 0.60$, $p = 0.90$)			

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Regardless of the above, 79% (n = 26) of respondents said that going to school made them feel of anxious or worried. Those reporting increased school related anxiety (*Mean age* 13.96 years, *SD* = 3.07) were, on average, slightly younger than those who did not (*Mean age* 14.57 years, *SD* = 2.76). The type of setting was found to have a significant impact on learner's school related anxieties. Mainstream educated respondents were considerably more likely to struggle with worry and anxiety when going to school than their peers attending specialist provision settings

(49 p.p. difference). The differences reported between the sexes and across sectors were not significant, as shown in Table 4.8.1.

4.8.2 Level 2: At school

Again, even though most respondents felt happy whilst at school (56%, n = 18), a considerable proportion indicated the opposite to be the case (44%) (Table 4.8.2). There were minimal age differences between those who were said to be happy (*Mean age* 14.22 years, *SD* = 3.34) and those who were not (*Mean age* 13.93, *SD* = 2.67). None of the subgroup variables were statistically significant in relation to the outcome, as demonstrated in Table 4.8.2.

Table 4.8.2 – Level 2: At school: Data tables

Level 2: Do you feel happy in school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector			
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*18*	56.25	*13*	68.42	*5*	41.67	*12*	52.17	*5*	71.43	*	60.00	*14*	56.00
No	*14*	43.75	*6*	31.58	*7*	58.33	*11*	47.83	*	28.57	*	40.00	*11*	44.00
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(4) = 5.08$, $p = 0.28$)				($X^2(6) = 3.34$, $p = 0.77$)				($X^2(6) = 2.44$, $p = 0.88$)			

Level 2: Do you feel safe in school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector			
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*24*	77.42	*15*	78.95	*8*	72.73	*16*	72.73	*7*	100.0	*	75.00	*19*	76.00
No	*7*	22.58	*	21.05	*	27.27	*6*	27.27	-	-	*	25.00	*6*	24.00
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(4) = 3.74$, $p = 0.44$)				($X^2(6) = 7.20$, $p = 0.30$)				($X^2(6) = 2.72$, $p = 0.84$)			

Level 2: Do you enjoy play and break times at school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector			
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*16*	48.48	*9*	47.37	*7*	53.84	*11*	45.83	*	57.14	*	60.00	*11*	42.31
No	*17*	51.52	*10*	52.63	*6*	46.15	*13*	54.17	*	42.86	*	40.00	*15*	57.69
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 1.10$, $p = 0.58$)				($X^2(3) = 2.28$, $p = 0.52$)				($X^2(3) = 2.79$, $p = 0.43$)			

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

More than three quarters of all respondents at Level 2 said they felt safe at school (77%, n = 24), although 23% did not (Table 4.8.2). The difference in age between those who felt safe (*Mean age* 14.21 years, *SD* = 3.08) and those who did not (*Mean age* 14.29 years, *SD* = 2.81), was negligible. As shown in Table 4.8.2, no statistical significance was attributed to the differences reported in all three subgroups.

Generally, participants at this level were evenly split between those who did (48%, n = 16) and those who did not (52%, n = 17), enjoy play and break times during the school day (Table 4.8.2). Learners who enjoyed these unstructured times (*Mean age* 13.69 years, *SD* = 3.16) were slightly younger than those who did not (*Mean age* 14.47 years, *SD* = 2.83). Again, the differences between the sexes, across the sectors, and between settings, reported in Table 4.8.2 were not statistically significant.

4.8.3 Level 2: Feeling of inclusion at school

Whilst most respondents indicated that they felt different from others at school (82%, n = 27) (Table 4.8.3), there was no discernible difference in the average age of those who did (*Mean age* 14.15 years, *SD* = 3.12), and those who did not (*Mean age* 14.14 years, *SD* = 2.34) feel they were different from their peers. At this level, differences reported in response data between sexes, across sectors and between those educated in mainstream and specialist provisions were not statistically significant, as shown in Table 4.8.3.

Less than half of the level 2 respondents said they felt included at school (42%, *n = 13*) (Table 4.8.3). Those who felt included (*Mean age* 14.38 years, *SD* = 2.43) were slightly older than those that did not (*Mean age* 13.78 years, *SD* = 3.47). No statistical significance was established in the differences between subgroups, as demonstrated in Table 4.8.3.

Table 4.8.3 - Level 2: Feeling of inclusion at school: Data tables

Level 2: Do you feel different from the other children in school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector			
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*27*	81.82	*14*	73.68	*12*	92.31	*21*	87.50	*	57.14	*	80.00	*21*	80.77
No	*6*	18.18	*5*	26.32	*	7.69	*	12.50	*	42.86	*	20.00	*5*	19.23
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 2.03$, $p = 0.36$)				($X^2(3) = 3.83$, $p = 0.28$)				($X^2(3) = 0.48$, $p = 0.92$)			

Level 2: Do you feel included in school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector			
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*13*	41.94	*9*	50.00	*4*	33.33	*8*	34.78	*	66.67	*	20.00	*12*	50.00
No	*18*	58.06	*9*	50.00	*8*	66.67	*15*	65.22	*	33.33	*	80.00	*12*	50.00
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(4) = 1.76$, $p = 0.78$)				($X^2(6) = 5.22$, $p = 0.52$)				($X^2(6) = 3.79$, $p = 0.71$)			

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

4.8.4 Level 2: Peer relationships at school

Whilst 64% (n = 21) of respondents told us they had friends at school; a substantial proportion did not (36%) (Table 4.8.4). Those with school friends (*Mean age* 14.24 years, *SD* = 2.96) were, on average, slightly older than those without (*Mean age* 13.83 years, *SD* = 3.10). As shown in Table 4.8.4, negligible differences reported between the sexes, across the sectors and between the different provisions were not statistically significant, at this level.

Most respondents said they had been the victim of school bullies (79%, n = 26) (Table 4.8.4). Those who had been bullied at school (*Mean age* 14.62 years, *SD* = 2.37) were, on average, considerably older than those who had not (*Mean age* 12.14 years, *SD* = 4.26). Despite evident differences in experience, none of the subgroup variables had a statistically significant impact on the general outcome, as shown in Table 4.8.4.

Table 4.8.4 - Level 2: Peer relationships at school: Data Table

Level 2: Do you have friends at school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector			
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*21*	63.64	*13*	68.42	*8*	61.54	*15*	62.50	*5*	71.43	*	60.00	*16*	61.54
No	*12*	36.36	*6*	31.58	*5*	38.46	*9*	37.50	*	28.57	*	40.00	*10*	38.46
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 1.96$, $p = 0.38$)				($X^2(3) = 2.52$, $p = 0.47$)				($X^2(3) = 1.22$, $p = 0.75$)			

Level 2: Have you ever been bullied in school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector			
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*26*	78.79	*14*	73.68	*11*	84.62	*19*	79.17	*5*	71.43	*	40.00	*22*	84.62
No	*7*	21.21	*5*	26.32	*	15.38	*5*	20.83	*	28.57	*	60.00	*	15.38
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 0.83$, $p = 0.66$)				($X^2(3) = 0.77$, $p = 0.86$)				($X^2(3) = 5.57$, $p = 0.14$)			

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

4.8.5 Level 2: School work

When asked if they were able to cope with the work set for them at school, a slightly higher proportion said they were not coping (55%, n = 18) (Table 4.8.5). Those that found the work manageable (*Mean age* 14.73 years, *SD* = 2.87) were, on average, just over a year older than those who were struggling to keep up (*Mean age* 13.56 years, *SD* = 3.03). As demonstrated in Table 4.8.5, none of the variables were proven to be statistically significant to the general outcome.

Respondents at level 2, were evenly split between those who did (48%), and those that did not (52%) feel they were getting enough help at school (Table 4.8.5). Participants who felt they were receiving sufficient help (*Mean age* 14.44 years, *SD* = 3.18) were, on average, older than those who would like more help (*Mean age* 13.76 years, *SD* = 2.82). There were minimal differences between the sexes, and across the sectors, whilst compared to respondents taught in specialist provisions

(86%), learners in mainstream (38%), felt considerably less supported, at school. None of the differences were found to be of statistical significance (Table 4.8.5).

Table 4.8.5 - Level 2: School work: Data tables

Level 2: Do you cope well with the work in school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector			
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*15*	45.45	*10*	52.63	*5*	38.46	*8*	33.33	*5*	71.43	*	40.00	*11*	42.31
No	*18*	54.55	*9*	47.37	*8*	61.54	*16*	66.67	*	*28.57*	*	60.00	*15*	57.69
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 1.48$, $p = 0.48$)				($X^2(3) = 5.73$, $p = 0.13$)				($X^2(3) = 2.56$, $p = 0.46$)			

Level 2: Do you feel you get enough help school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector			
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*16*	48.48	*9*	47.37	*7*	53.85	*9*	37.50	*6*	85.71	*	40.00	*12*	46.15
No	*17*	51.52	*10*	52.63	*6*	46.15	*15*	62.50	*	14.29	*	60.00	*14*	53.85
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 1.10$, $p = 0.58$)				($X^2(3) = 7.05$, $p = 0.07$)				($X^2(3) = 2.33$, $p = 0.51$)			

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

4.8.6 Level 2: Sensory differences at school

Just over half of the sample (55%, n = 18) said that they had access to a safe, quiet space where they could go to relax and regulate (Table 4.8.6). There was no discernible age difference between those who had such a space, and those who said there was no provision of this type for them, at school. All seven respondents attending specialist provisions said they had access to a safe space, whilst just 42% of those educated in mainstream had a similar facility, these setting differences were proven to be statistically significant (Table 4.8.6). As demonstrated in Table 4.8.6, differences between the sexes and across the sectors were not statistically significant.

Table 4.8.6 - Level 2: Sensory differences at school: Data table

Level 2: Do you have a quiet space where you can go and relax in school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector			
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*18*	54.55	*9*	47.37	*8*	61.54	*10*	41.67	*7*	100.0	*	40.00	*15*	57.69
No	*15*	45.45	*10*	52.63	*5*	38.46	*14*	58.33	-	-	*	60.00	*11*	42.31
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 1.48$, $p = 0.48$)				($X^2(3) = 9.47$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(3) = 2.56$, $p = 0.46$)			

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

4.9 APQ Results: Level 3

Respondents who opted to participate at Level 3, were faced with the same questions as Level 2, with the addition of a series of Likert style questions. These additional questions asked participants if they agreed, disagreed, or neither agreed nor disagreed, with a series of brief statements. This section of the survey, aimed at those with the highest ability level was chosen by forty-four respondents (Table 4.9).

Table 4.9 - APQ Level 3 sample demographic overview

Variable			Participant age		
	n	%	Median	Mode	Mean (*SD*)
All level 3 participants	*44*	100.0	15	17	13.95 (*3.91*)
Biological sex					
Male	*25*	56.82	13	17	13.52 (*3.42*)
Female	*19*	43.18	17	18	14.53 (*4.50*)
Gender identity					
Male	*26*	59.09	13	12	13.54 (*3.46*)
Female	*15*	34.09	15.5	18	13.25 (*5.08*)
School provision					
Mainstream	*38*	86.36	14.5	17/18	13.61 (*4.06*)
Specialist	*4*	9.09	16.5	17	15.75 (*1.89*)
Sector					
Primary	*9*	20.45	8	9	7.67 (*2.35*)
Secondary	*21*	47.73	14	12/13	14.38 (*2.06*)
Post-16	*12*	27.27	17	17	17.33 (*0.65*)

4.9.1 Level 3: Going to school

Again, at this level, most respondents (59%, n = 26) said that they enjoyed going to school (Table 4.9.1). There was no discernible age difference between respondents who did (*Mean age* 13.96 years, *SD* = 3.85), or did not (*Mean age* 13.94 years, *SD* = 4.09) enjoy going to school. As shown in Table 4.9.1, despite some noticeable differences in the response data, neither sex, sector, nor setting, were found to significantly impact learner experiences in this area.

Despite the generally positive results above, 75% (n = 33) of respondents said that going to school increased their levels of worry and anxiety (Table 4.9.1). Those who struggled with this increased school-related anxiety (*Mean age* 14.39 years, *SD* = 3.70), were, on average, older than those who did not (*Mean age* 12.64 years, *SD* = 4.39). As evidenced in Table 4.9.1, although there are some variances in response data, none of the variable subgroup differences were proven to be statistically significant.

Table 4.9.1 - Level 3: Going to school: Data tables

Level 3: Do you enjoy going to school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*26*	59.09	*16*	64.00	*10*	52.63	*21*	55.26	*	100.0	*6*	66.67	*11*	52.38	*9*	75.00
No	*18*	40.91	*9*	36.00	*9*	47.37	*17*	44.74	-	-	*	33.33	*10*	47.62	*	25.00
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(1) = 0.58$, $p = 0.45$)				($X^2(2) = 3.07$, $p = 0.22$)				($X^2(3) = 4.75$, $p = 0.19$)					

Level 3: Does going to school make you feel anxious or worried?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*33*	75.00	*18*	72.00	*15*	78.95	*29*	76.32	*	50.00	*6*	66.67	*16*	76.19	*9*	75.00
No	*11*	25.00	*7*	28.00	*	21.05	*9*	23.68	*	50.00	*	33.33	*5*	23.81	*	25.00
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(1) = 0.28$, $p = 0.60$)				($X^2(2) = 2.04$, $p = 0.36$)				($X^2(3) = 1.02$, $p = 0.80$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

4.9.2 Level 3: At school

Whilst 60% of respondents told us they felt happy whilst at school (n = 26), a considerable proportion reported being unhappy (40%, n = 17) (Table 4.9.2). Those who were said to be unhappy at school (*Mean age* 14.65 years, *SD* = 3.14) were, on average, more than a year older than those who felt the opposite (*Mean age* 13.38 years, *SD* = 4.35). Every learner attending specialist provisions (n = 4) said they were happy at school, whereas just 58% of those in mainstream shared such a positive view of their time in school. The differences in experience between those in mainstream and specialist education, were statistically significant, however, the sex and sector differences were not (Table 4.9.2).

Table 4.9.2 – Level 3: At school: Data table

Level 3: Do you feel happy in school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*26*	60.47	*16*	64.00	*10*	55.56	*22*	57.89	*	100.0	*7*	77.78	*10*	50.0	*9*	75.00
No	*17*	39.53	*9*	36.00	*8*	44.44	*16*	42.11	-	-	*	22.22	*10*	50.0	*	25.00
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 1.66$, $p = 0.44$)				($X^2(4) = 11.94$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(6) = 7.38$, $p = 0.29$)					

Level 3: Do you feel safe in school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*29*	67.44	*17*	68.00	*12*	66.67	*24*	63.16	*	100.0	*8*	88.89	*11*	55.00	*9*	75.00
No	*14*	32.56	*8*	32.00	*6*	33.33	*14*	36.84	-	-	*	11.11	*9*	45.00	*	25.00
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 1.36$, $p = 0.51$)				($X^2(4) = 12.66$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(6) = 5.03$, $p = 0.54$)					

Level 3: Do you enjoy play and break times at school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*22*	51.16	*15*	60.00	*7*	38.89	*17*	44.74	*	100.0	*5*	55.56	*10*	50.00	*6*	50.00
No	*21*	48.84	*10*	40.00	*11*	61.11	*21*	55.26	-	-	*	44.44	*10*	50.00	*6*	50.00
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 3.20$, $p = 0.20$)				($X^2(4) = 15.03$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(6) = 1.21$, $p = 0.98$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Regardless of the data suggesting most learners enjoyed going to, and were happy whilst at, school, 33% of respondents said they did not feel safe in their place of education (n = 14) (Table 4.9.2). Those who felt safe (*Mean age* 13.28 years, *SD* = 4.26), were on average, nearly two years younger than those that did not (*Mean age* 15.14 years, *SD* = 2.85). Setting type was proven to significantly impact a learners' feeling of safety, at school, with all those in specialist education feeling safe, compared to just 63% of those educated in mainstream. As shown in Table 4.9.2, the sex and sector differences were not considered statistically significant.

There was little difference between those who did, and those that did not enjoy unstructured play and break times at school (Table 4.9.2). On average, respondents who enjoyed these periods (13.45 years, *SD* = 3.75) were approximately a year younger than those that did not (*Mean age* 14.33 years, *SD* = 4.14). Again, all respondents attending specialist provisions reported positive feelings about play and break times, whilst just 45% of their counterparts attending mainstream shared this view. These differences proved the type of setting attended as significant in shaping learners' opinions of unstructured periods (Table 4.9.2). As illustrated in Table 4.9.2, neither sex nor sector differences were statistically significant.

4.9.3 Level 3: Feelings of inclusion at school

When asked if they felt different to the other learners at school, 84% (n = 36) of the respondents said that they did (Table 4.9.3). Those who were aware of their differences (*Mean age* 14.36 years, *SD* = 3.77) were on average, older than those who were not (*Mean age* 11.43 years, *SD* = 4.04). Again, the setting in which a participant was educated was proven significant in shaping their views of these differences (Table 4.9.3). Just 33% of learners attending specialist learning provisions said they felt different from the others at school, by comparison 87% of their counterparts in mainstream were aware of their differences. No statistical

significance was established when considering differences between the sexes, and across sectors, as shown in Table 4.9.3.

At this level, most felt included at school, although 40% (n = 17) told us they did not (Table 4.9.3). Respondents that reported feeling excluded (*Mean age* 14.82 years, *SD* = 3.71) were, on average, a little over eighteen months older than those who felt the opposite (*Mean age* 13.16 years, *SD* = 4.05). Despite variances in response data across subgroups, neither the sex of the respondent, the sector attended, nor the setting in which they were educated were found to significantly impact their feeling of inclusion.

Table 4.9.3 - Level 3: Feelings of inclusion at school: Data tables

Level 3: Do you feel different from the other children in school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*36*	83.72	*19*	76.00	*17*	94.44	*33*	86.84	*	33.33	*7*	77.78	*16*	80.00	*11*	91.67
No	*7*	16.28	*6*	24.00	*	5.56	*5*	13.16	*	66.67	*	22.22	*	20.00	*	8.33
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 3.94$, $p = 0.14$)				($X^2(4) = 15.20$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(6) = 2.52$, $p = 0.87$)					

Level 3: Do you feel included in school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*25*	59.52	*15*	62.50	*10*	55.56	*21*	56.76	*	100.0	*7*	77.78	*12*	60.00	*6*	54.55
No	*17*	40.48	*9*	37.50	*8*	44.44	*16*	43.24	-	-	*	22.22	*8*	40.00	*5*	45.45
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 0.25$, $p = 0.89$)				($X^2(4) = 6.08$, $p = 0.19$)				($X^2(6) = 5.42$, $p = 0.49$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

4.9.4 Level 3: Peer relationships at school

Most respondents said they had friends at school (81%, n = 35) (Table 4.9.4). On average, those with friends (*Mean age* 13.54 years, *SD* = 4.00) were noticeably

younger than those without (*Mean age* 15.38 years, *SD* = 3.42). As seen in Table 4.9.4, whilst differences between the sexes and across sectors were not significant, the type of setting in which autistic learners were educated did have a statistically significant impact on their positive peer relationships.

Table 4.9.4 - Level 3: Peer relationships at school: Data table

Level 3: Do you have friends at school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*35*	81.40	*19*	76.00	*16*	88.88	*32*	84.21	*	100.0	*8*	88.89	*18*	90.00	*8*	66.67
No	*8*	18.60	*6*	24.00	*	11.11	*6*	15.79	-	-	*	11.11	*	10.00	*	33.33
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 2.49$, $p = 0.29$)				($X^2(4) = 19.92$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(6) = 5.51$, $p = 0.48$)					

Level 3: Have you ever been bullied in school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*32*	74.42	*20*	80.00	*12*	66.67	*28*	73.68	*	66.67	*	33.33	*18*	90.00	*10*	83.33
No	*11*	25.58	*5*	20.00	*6*	33.33	*10*	26.32	*	33.33	*6*	66.67	*	10.00	*	16.67
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 2.32$, $p = 0.31$)				($X^24) = 11.02$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(6) = 12.93$, $p = <0.05$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Three quarters of those responding to level 3 questions said they had been the victim of school bullies (74%, n = 32) (Table 4.9.4). The likelihood of having experienced bullying, at school, increased with age, with those having no experience (*Mean age* 11.27 years, *SD* = 5.35), being, on average, over three years younger than those who had (*Mean age* 14.78 years, *SD* = 2.89). In line with the age difference reported above, secondary school learners (90%) and those in post-16 education (83%), were more likely to have been bullied, than those in primary schools (33%). These differences being reported between the younger learners and their older peers, were proven statistically significant (Table 4.9.4). Most of those attending mainstream experienced being bullied at school (74%), whilst 67% of those in specialist education had also been bullied. Differences in bullying

experiences between those educated in mainstream and specialist settings were also statistically significant (p = <0.05).

4.9.5 Level 3: School work

Despite most respondents feeling they could cope with the work set for them at school (68%), a sizable proportion said they were not coping (32%, n = 13) (Table 4.9.5). Those who felt able to manage their work (*Mean age* 13.61 years, *SD* = 4.21) were, on average, slightly younger than those who found it difficult (*Mean age* 14.54 years, *SD* = 3.36). Perhaps understandably, given the learning environment, those in specialist education (100%) coped better with their workload than their counterparts in mainstream (68%). Chi-square analysis identified these differences as significant (Table 4.9.5). In this area, differences in response data between the sexes, and across the sectors, were not statistically significant.

Less than half of the level 3 respondents believed they were getting enough help with their schoolwork (47%, n = 20) (Table 4.9.5). Data would suggest that those who felt the help available was insufficient (*Mean age* 14.26 years, *SD* = 3.95) were slightly older than those who felt the opposite (*Mean age* 13.45 years, *SD* = 3.95). Interestingly, those in mainstream education (47%) felt better supported than their counterparts attending specialist provisions (33%). These differences between the cohorts in either setting type were proven to be significant, as shown in Table 4.9.5. Autistic females were considerably less likely to feel supported at school than their male peers (32 p.p. difference), although these differences between the sexes, and those across sectors were not considered statistically significant (Table 4.9.5).

Taking the above into consideration, it is unsurprising to see that just 35% (n =15) of respondents believed their teachers knew how best to support them at school, whilst 42% (n = 18) considered the opposite to be the case (Table 4.9.5). On average, those who felt their teachers understood their support needs (*Mean age*

13.53 years, *SD* = 4.34), were over a year younger than those who felt the opposite was more accurate (*Mean age* 14.61 years, *SD* = 3.74). As demonstrated in Table 4.9.5, in this area, differences in response data between the sexes, across the sectors, and between mainstream and specialist provisions, were not proven to be statistically significant.

Table 4.9.5 - Level 3: School work: Data table

Level 3: Do you cope well with the work in school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*28*	68.29	*15*	65.22	*13*	72.22	*25*	67.57	*	100.0	*7*	87.50	*12*	60.00	*8*	72.73
No	*13*	31.71	*8*	34.78	*5*	27.78	*12*	32.43	-	-	*	12.50	*8*	40.00	*	27.27
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 0.36$, $p = 0.84$)				($X^2(4) = 11.29$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(6) = 2.97$, $p = 0.81$)					

Level 3: Do you feel you get enough help school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*20*	46.51	*15*	60.00	*5*	27.78	*18*	47.37	*	33.33	*	44.44	*10*	50.00	*6*	50.00
No	*23*	53.49	*10*	40.00	*13*	72.22	*20*	52.63	*	66.67	*5*	55.56	*10*	50.00	*6*	50.00
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 5.68$, $p = 0.06$)				($X^2(4) = 10.42$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(6) = 3.07$, $p = 0.80$)					

Level 3: My teachers know how to support me

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Agree	*15*	34.88	*10*	40.00	*5*	27.78	*14*	36.84	*	33.33	*	44.44	*6*	30.00	*5*	41.67
Neither	*10*	23.26	*7*	28.00	*	16.67	*8*	21.05	*	33.33	*	22.22	*5*	25.00	*	16.67
Disagree	*18*	41.86	*8*	32.00	*10*	55.56	*16*	42.11	*	33.33	*	33.33	*9*	45.00	*5*	41.67
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(3) = 3.74$, $p = 0.29$)				($X^2(6) = 11.88$, $p = 0.07$)				($X^2(9) = 3.49$, $p = 0.94$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

4.9.6 Level 3: Sensory differences at school

Most respondents said they felt the school environment was often too noisy (74%, n = 32) (Table 4.9.6). There was a noticeable age gap between those who found the

noise excessive (*Mean age* 14.34 years, *SD* = 3.90) and their peers who didn't feel noise was an issue (*Mean age* 12.33 years, *SD* = 7.23). Whilst not one of those attending specialist provisions were worried by the noise levels, 79% of their counterparts educated in mainstream felt environmental noise levels were often too much. These setting differences were proven statistically significant, whilst variances between the sexes and across sectors were not significant, as shown in Table 4.9.6.

With so many respondents struggling to cope with noise pollution at school, having a safe, quiet space to help self-regulate is essential. Whilst most said they did have such a space available to them (63%, n = 27), 37% (n = 16) did not (Table 4.9.6). Those who had access to such a space at school (*Mean age* 13.52 years, *SD* = 4.11), were on average a year younger than those who did not (*Mean age* 14.50 years, *SD* = 3.63). Chi-square analysis again established the type of setting as significantly influential in this area, although as Table 4.9.6 portrays, differences between the sexes and across sectors were not proven statistically significant.

Table 4.9.6 - Level 3: Sensory differences at school: Data table

Level 3: School is often too noisy

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Agree	*32*	74.42	*19*	76.00	*13*	72.22	*30*	78.95	-	-	*6*	66.67	*14*	70.00	*10*	83.33
Neither	*8*	18.60	*5*	20.00	*	16.67	*7*	18.42	*	33.33	*	22.22	*5*	25.00	*	8.33
Disagree	*	6.98	*	4.00	*	11.11	*	2.63	*	66.67	*	11.11	*	5.00	*	8.33
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(3) = 2.18$, $p = 0.54$)				($X^2(6) = 25.84$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(9) = 3.64$, $p = 0.93$)					

Level 3: Do you have a quiet space where you can go and relax in school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*27*	62.79	*18*	72.00	*9*	50.00	*24*	63.16	*	66.67	*6*	66.67	*12*	60.00	*8*	66.67
No	*16*	37.21	*7*	28.00	*9*	50.00	*14*	36.84	*	33.33	*	33.33	*8*	40.00	*	33.33
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 3.50$, $p = 0.17$)				($X^2(4) = 10.39$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(6) = 1.47$, $p = 0.96$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

4.9.7 Level 3: Educator understanding

Whilst 28% (n = 12) of respondents agreed that their teachers understood about autism, a similar proportion disagreed (26%) (Table 4.9.7). Those who perceived their teachers' understanding to be sufficient (*Mean age* 11.00 years, *SD* = 5.13) were considerably younger than those who disagreed with the given statement (*Mean age* 15.00 years, *SD* = 2.76). Supporting these age differences, perceptions of how much teachers understood autism decreased as learners progressed through the sectors, from primary (67%), through secondary (25%), and into post-16 education (8%). For those attending mainstream settings, an equal number agreed and disagreed with the statement (30%), whilst not one of those attending specialist provisions disagreed. These sector and setting differences were identified as statistically significant, as demonstrated in Table 4.9.7.

When asked to consider whether their teachers understood them, as individuals, an equal proportion of respondents agreed, disagreed, or said they were unsure (33%, n = 14) (Table 4.9.7). There was minimal age difference between those who felt understood by their teachers (*Mean age* 14.07 years, *SD* = 4.45) and those who did not (*Mean age* 14.14 years, *SD* = 3.51). All those in specialist education believed their teachers understood them, whilst those attending mainstream were more likely to feel misunderstood (37%), than understood (29%). These differences identified the type of setting as a significant contributor, shaping learner perceptions of how their teachers understood them. Sex and sector differences were not proven to be significant in this area (Table 4.9.7).

More respondents considered their teachers' understanding of their sensory difficulties to be insufficient (42%, n = 18) than satisfactory (35%, n = 15) (Table 4.9.7). There was a considerable age gap between those who responded positively (*Mean age* 11.53 years, *SD* = 4.56), and their peers who had negative experience (*Mean age* 15.22 years, *SD* = 3.10). Again, the differences between mainstream and specialist setting learner experience were statistically significant. For those

attending mainstream settings, more disagreed (42%) that their teachers understanding in this area was sufficient, than agreed (34%), this was reversed when looking at the response data from those in specialist education provisions, as shown in Table 4.9.7. Sex and sector differences were not identified as being statistically significant.

Table 4.9.7 – Level 3: Educator understanding: Data table

Level 3: My teachers understand about Autism

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Agree	*12*	27.91	*7*	28.00	*5*	27.78	*11*	29.73	*	33.33	*6*	66.67	*5*	25.00	*	8.33
Neither	*20*	40.51	*14*	56.00	*6*	33.33	*15*	40.00	*	66.67	*	22.22	*7*	35.00	*9*	75.00
Disagree	*11*	25.58	*	16.00	*7*	38.89	*11*	29.73	-	-	*	11.11	*8*	40.00	*2*	16.67
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(3) = 4.62$, $p = 0.20$)				($X^2(6) = 13.75$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(9) = 16.76$, $p = 0.05$)					

Level 3: My teachers understand me

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Agree	*14*	32.56	*8*	32.00	*6*	33.33	*11*	28.95	*	100.0	*	33.33	*5*	25.00	*6*	50.00
Neither	*15*	34.88	*11*	44.00	*	22.22	*13*	34.21	-	-	*	44.44	*5*	25.00	*	33.33
Disagree	*14*	32.56	*6*	24.00	*8*	44.44	*14*	36.84	-	-	*	22.22	*10*	50.00	*	16.67
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(3) = 4.10$, $p = 0.25$)				($X^2(6) = 19.20$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(9) = 10.30$, $p = 0.33$)					

Level 3: My teachers understand that sensory differences can make some situations in school hard to cope with

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Agree	*15*	34.88	*10*	40.00	*5*	27.78	*13*	34.21	*	66.67	*6*	66.67	*7*	35.00	*	16.67
Neither	*10*	23.26	*7*	28.00	*	16.67	*9*	23.68	-	-	*	11.11	*	20.00	*5*	41.67
Disagree	*18*	41.86	*8*	32.00	*10*	55.56	*16*	42.11	*	33.33	*	22.22	*9*	45.00	*5*	41.67
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(3) = 3.74$, $p = 0.29$)				($X^2(6) = 12.86$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(9) = 11.16$, $p = 0.27$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

4.10 APQ Results: Overview and comparison of participant responses across the three ability levels

Generally, Level 1 respondents were evenly split between those who enjoyed going to, and were happy whilst at, school, with little difference between the experiences of the male and female respondents. Those attending mainstream, had a more positive experience in these two areas, whilst there were limited numbers attending special schools to make a valuable comparison. Age was clearly a contributory factor in shaping respondents' enjoyment in going and happiness whilst at school. Those in primary were considerably more positive in their views, with sector found to significantly impact their enjoyment going to school. At this level learners were more likely to enjoy unstructured times, and have friends, at school, with males reporting greater satisfaction in both areas, than their female peers. Both cohorts attending primary and secondary school, had equally positive experiences in the two areas.

Whilst the majority of the thirty-three participants, responding to the level 2 questions, enjoyed going to, and were happy whilst at, school, many said they didn't feel safe at school, whilst 79% said they struggled with increased school-related anxieties. Less than half of the respondents (42%) said they felt included at school, and while the majority had school friends, 79% say they had been the victim of bullying, at school. More than half (52%) said they were not coping with the work set for them, with similar proportions feeling they were not sufficiently supported at school. Generally, the biological sex of respondents, the type of setting in which they were educated, and the sector attended, were not found to significantly impact the overall educational experiences of this sample. However, analysis did indicate that they type of setting was a significant factor in two areas. Those attending mainstream were significantly more likely to have school-based anxiety than those attending specialist provisions. Access to a safe and quiet space was significantly more likely for those attending specialist provision settings, in comparison to their counterparts attending mainstream schools.

Forty-four participants responded to the third level of questions, aimed at encouraging participation of those of a higher ability level. As with both levels 1 and 2, most were happy at and enjoyed going to school. At this level, there were clear differences identified which suggest the type of setting attended, whether that be in mainstream or specialist provisions, significantly impacted the educational experiences of the young autistic learners. Respondent age, and the sector in which they were being educated, were also identified as making significant contributions to respondents' educational experience across several areas.

Comparing across the levels, for the four questions that each of the ninety-two respondents were asked, those responding to level 1 were less likely to enjoy going to school and felt less happy whilst there, and although they were less likely to have school friends, they were more inclined to enjoy unstructured play and break times. There was little between level 2 and level 3 respondents' views on going to school, but whilst at school, level 2 participants felt somewhat safer (10 p.p. difference). Similarly high proportions of both cohorts said they felt different from their peers, although those at level 3 were considerably more likely to feel included at school (18 p.p. difference). Respondents to level 3 were more likely to have school-based friends (17 p.p. difference) and slightly less likely to have experience of being bullied (5 p.p. difference). Being of a higher ability level, it is unsurprising that a considerably higher proportion of level 3 participants said they were able to cope with the work set for them (23 p.p. difference), yet more than half of both those at level 2 (52%) and 3 (53%) felt they were not receiving enough help, at school.

4.11 APQ Results: Whole sample: including comparison of experience between those taught in mainstream and specialist provision settings

As presented in section 4.4.1, in total 91 participants responded to the APQ, across the three ability levels. Below, the results from the sample, as a whole, are presented, where pertinent and sufficient qualitative data has been entered, this will be included.

Table 4.11 - APQ Whole sample: Mainstream and specialist provision sample demographic overview

Variable			Participant age		
	n	%	Median	Mode	Mean (*SD*)
All participants	*92*	100.0	15	16/17	13.52 (*3.84*)
School provision					
Mainstream	*72*	78.26	13.5	12	13.17 (*3.95*)
Biological sex		% of mainstream cohort			
Male	*43*	59.72	13	12	12.95 (*3.52*)
Female	*29*	40.28	15	18	13.48 (*4.56*)
Gender identity					
Male	*42*	58.33	13	12	12.90 (*3.59*)
Female	*23*	31.94	13	18	12.57 (*4.57*)
Non-binary	*5*	6.94	17	17	16.40 (*1.95*)
Sector					
Primary	*17*	23.61	8	8	7.76 (*1.86*)
Secondary	*14*	19.44	14	12	14.23 (*1.93*)
Post-16	*12*	16.67	17.5	18	17.33 (*0.78*)
School provision					
Specialist	*14*	15.22	16	16	14.71 (*2.89*)
Biological sex		% of specialist cohort			
Male	*7*	50.00	16	16	13.86 (*3.67*)
Female	*6*	42.86	16	16	15.67 (*1.86*)
Gender identity					
Male	*7*	50.00	16	16	13.86 (*3.67*)
Female	*5*	35.71	16	16	15.40 (*1.95*)
Non-binary	*1*	7.14	17	17	17
Sector					
Primary	*2*	14.28	9	8/10	9 (*1.41*)
Secondary	*11*	78.57	9	16	15.55 (*1.69*)
Post-16	*1*	7.14	17	17	17

To address the research questions (Section 4.2), particular attention is paid to identifying any differences in response data between respondents educated in mainstream and specialist provision settings. The characteristics of the cohorts and sub-groups of both samples of these of learners are presented in Table 4.11 above.

4.11.1 Whole sample: Going to school

Whilst most respondents enjoyed going to school (58%), a sizable proportion (42%, n = 39) said they did not (Table 4.11.1). On average, those who enjoyed going to school (*Mean age* 13.21 years, *SD* = 4.04) were slightly younger than those for whom going to school was not so enjoyable (*Mean age* 13.95 years, *SD* = 3.55). As evidenced in Table 4.11.1, neither sex, nor sector, differences were statistically significant.

Most respondents said that going to school made them feel anxious or worried (77%, n = 59) (Table 4.11.1), whilst those who struggled with increased school related anxiety (*Mean age* 14.20 years, *SD* = 3.41) were, on average, older than those that did not (*Mean age* 13.39 years, *SD* = 3.87). Despite differences reported between male and female respondents and across the sectors, neither subgroup variable had a statistically significant impact on the outcomes.

Table 4.11.1 - Whole sample: Going to school: Data table

Whole sample: Do you enjoy going to school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*53*	57.61	*34*	61.82	*19*	52.78	*41*	56.94	*10*	71.43	*14*	70.00	*28*	52.83	*10*	66.67
No	*39*	42.39	*21*	38.18	*17*	47.22	*31*	43.06	*4*	28.57	*6*	30.00	*25*	47.17	*5*	33.33
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 2.10$, $p = 0.35$)				($X^2(1) = 1.02$, $p = 0.31$)				($X^2(4) = 7.07$, $p = 0.13$)					

Whole sample: Does going to school make you feel anxious or worried?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*59*	76.62	*32*	72.73	*26*	81.25	*51*	82.26	*5*	45.45	*10*	71.43	*36*	76.60	*10*	76.92
No	*18*	23.38	*12*	27.27	*6*	18.75	*11*	17.74	*6*	54.55	*4*	28.57	*11*	23.40	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(4) = 2.58$, $p = 0.63$)				($X^2(2) = 7.17$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(8) = 10.80$, $p = 0.21$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Learners attending specialist provision settings were much more inclined to enjoy going to school, and felt less anxious and worried whilst there, than those educated in mainstream settings (Table 4.11.1). Whilst the differences were not statistically significant in shaping their enjoyment of going to school, they were in relation to respondents' levels of school-based anxiety, as shown in Table 4.11.1. Less than half of respondents discussing experience of special education said that going to school made them feel anxious or worried (45%), compared to 82% of those attending mainstream education settings.

Comments voluntarily submitted by respondents demonstrate a range of factors that trigger increased anxiety around going to school, including the busy and often noisy environment:

> *'I do feel anxious about crowded areas'* (Participant APQ23)

> *'…too many people, lots of noise'* (Participant APQ28)

A lack of understanding and support was also found to be a contributing factor:

> *'It can be scary when school doesn't support you directly one-to-one'* (Participant APQ69)

> *'School/college makes me feel anxious because I feel like I'm not understood and left behind'* (Participant APQ61)

4.11.2 Whole sample: At school

As demonstrated in Table 4.11.2, over half of the sample told us that they were happy at school (57%, n = 51). Those who were happiest (*Mean age* 13.08 years, *SD* = 4.08) were, on average, younger than those who were unhappy (*Mean age* 14.00 years, *SD* = 3.54). As seen in Table 4.11.2, whilst differences between the sexes and across the sectors were noticeable, they were not statistically significant.

More than a quarter of autistic learners said they did not feel safe at school (28%, n = 21) (Table 4.11.2), with those who felt safe (72%, n = 53, *Mean age* 13.70 years, *SD* = 3.77) generally being younger than those who did not (*Mean age* 14.86 years, *SD* = 2.80). Differences in response data between the sexes and across the sectors were not proven to be statistically significant, as shown in Table 4.11.2.

Submitted comments point to the threat of bullying as a key influence in determining how safe they felt at school:

> *'I did not feel safe at school, especially when I was being bullied'*
> (Participant APQ71)
>
> *'School can feel unsafe due to bullying from my autism'*
> (Participant APQ69)
>
> *'I feel safe now I'm in college, but at school I was bullied'*
> (Participant APQ61)

The whole sample were split, between those said to enjoy unstructured times (52%, n = 47), and those who did not (48%, n = 44) (Table 4.11.2), with little between the average age of respondents who did (*Mean age* 13.21 years, *SD* = 3.62), and did not (*Mean age* 13.77 years, *SD* = 4.09), enjoy periods such as play and break times. Again, differences between the sexes and across the sectors were not statistically significant, as shown in Table 4.11.2.

At school, those in mainstream education were found to have fewer positive experiences than their peers educated in specialist provision settings (Table 4.11.2). Special education learners felt happier and safer at school and were more likely to enjoy unstructured times during the school day. Despite these differences, the type of setting was not found to significantly influence the learners' feeling of happiness or safety, whilst at school as illustrated in Table 4.11.2. Setting was proven significant in shaping respondents' enjoyment of unstructured play and break times

at school, with 46% of those in mainstream enjoying these periods, compared to 77% of those educated in specialist provision settings.

Table 4.11.2 - Whole sample: At school: Data table

Whole sample: Do you feel happy in school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*51*	56.67	*34*	61.82	*17*	50.00	*40*	56.33	*9*	69.23	*15*	75.00	*26*	50.98	*10*	66.67
No	*39*	43.33	*21*	38.18	*17*	50.00	*31*	43.66	*4*	30.77	*5*	25.00	*25*	49.02	*5*	33.33
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(4) = 5.72$, $p = 0.22$)				($X^2(2) = 2.43$, $p = 0.30$)				($X^2(8) = 10.94$, $p = 0.20$)					

Whole sample: Do you feel safe in school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*53*	71.62	*32*	72.73	*20*	68.97	*40*	66.67	*10*	100.0	*11*	84.62	*30*	66.67	*10*	76.92
No	*21*	28.38	*12*	27.27	*9*	31.03	*20*	33.33	-	-	*2*	15.38	*15*	33.33	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(4) = 0.87$, $p = 0.93$)				($X^2(3) = 5.48$, $p = 0.14$)				($X^2(8) = 10.60$, $p = 0.23$)					

Whole sample: Do you enjoy play and break times at school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*47*	51.65	*31*	56.36	*16*	45.71	*33*	45.83	*10*	76.92	*12*	60.00	*25*	48.08	*8*	53.33
No	*44*	48.35	*24*	43.64	*19*	54.29	*39*	54.17	*3*	23.08	*8*	40.00	*27*	51.92	*7*	46.67
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(4) = 3.63$, $p = 0.46$)				($X^2(2) = 9.25$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(8) = 2.94$, $p = 0.94$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

4.11.3 Whole sample: Feeling of inclusion whilst at school

Most respondents (83%, n = 63) said that they felt different from their peers, at school (Table 4.11.3). On average, those who were aware of their differences (*Mean age* 14.27 years, *SD* = 3.48) were older than those who were not (*Mean age* 12.54 years, *SD* = 3.48). No statistical significance was attributed to the role of biological sex or sector attended as shown in Table 4.11.3.

Just over half of the sample felt they were included at school (52%, n = 38) (Table 4.11.3). Those who felt included (*Mean age* 13.58 years, *SD* = 3.59) were, on average, slightly younger than those who did not (*Mean age* 14.29 years, *SD* = 5.58). Again, sex and sector variables were not statistically significant in relation to the general outcomes (Table 4.11.3).

The data suggests that many autistic learners feel different from their peers, and whilst this should not necessarily be assumed as a negative, it can lead to some concerning educational experiences. Reviewing participant contributions submitted within the free-text response opportunities, many shared comments illustrating how this impacts their time at school.

> *'In school it was hard as people were judgemental and I didn't have anywhere to escape to when I felt upset or scared. I didn't know I was autistic until recently, so I felt like I was different and weird, now I know that I'm different but there are other people like me too'*
> (*Participant APQ 61*)

Respondents appear keenly aware of how their perceived differences were negatively affecting their peer relationships:

> *'I feel different and think people don't like me.'*
> (*Participant APQ 21*)
>
> *'people were horrible to me because I was different.'*
> (*Participant APQ 27*)
>
> *'I feel different to my friends because I can't do most of what they do.'*
> (*Participant APQ 19*)
>
> *'I was viewed differently but just got left in a bit of a void because of who I was.'* (*Participant APQ 69*)

One pupil who had recently transitioned from mainstream to specialist education provision shared the relief when realising they were not alone:

> *'I no longer feel different to my friends in school, as many have ASD like me.'* (*Participant APQ 46*)

Table 4.11.3 - Whole sample: Feelings of inclusion at school: Data table

Whole sample: Do you feel different from the other children in school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*63*	82.89	*33*	75.00	*29*	93.55	*54*	87.10	*5*	50.00	*11*	78.57	*37*	80.43	*12*	92.31
No	*13*	17.11	*11*	25.00	*2*	6.45	*8*	12.90	*5*	50.00	*3*	21.43	*9*	19.57	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(4) = 5.49$, $p = 0.24$)				($X^2(3) = 12.91$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(8) = 10.38$, $p = 0.24$)					

Whole sample: Do you feel included in school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*38*	52.05	*24*	57.14	*14*	46.67	*29*	48.33	*7*	77.78	*8*	57.14	*24*	54.55	*6*	50.00
No	*35*	47.95	*18*	42.86	*16*	53.33	*31*	51.67	*2*	22.22	*6*	42.86	*20*	45.45	*6*	50.00
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(4) = 3.06$, $p = 0.55$)				($X^2(3) = 6.57$, $p = 0.09$)				($X^2(8) = 10.50$, $p = 0.23$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Learners attending specialist provision settings were less likely to see themselves as different from their peers, and felt more included at school, than their counterparts attending mainstream settings (Table 4.11.3). Where 87% of respondents from mainstream schools said they felt different from the other learners at school, just 50% of those in special schools saw their peers as different from themselves. These differences were significant ($p = <0.05$). In relation to how included autistic learners felt at their place of education, noticeable differences between mainstream and specialist provision experiences were not proven statistically significant, as seen in Table 4.11.3.

4.11.4 Whole sample: Peer relationships at school

Whilst 71% (n = 65) said they had friends at school, 29% (n = 26) did not (Table 4.11.4). There were minimal age differences between those with (*Mean age* 13.52 years, *SD* = 3.73), and those without (*Mean age* 13.38 years, *SD* = 4.18), friends.

Differences between the sexes and across sectors were not significant, as shown in Table 4.11.4.

Most said that they had been the victim of bullying, at school (76%, n = 58) (Table 4.11.4). Those with experience of being bullied (*Mean age* 14.71 years, *SD* = 2.65) were, on average, older than those who said they had not suffered at the hands of school bullies (*Mean age* 11.61 years, *SD* = 4.84). Chi-square analysis identified the sector in which respondents were educated as a significant factor in determining their experience of being bullied (p = <0.05). Learners at primary school (36%) were considerably less likely to have been bullied than those in secondary (87%) and post-16 education (85%). Some free-text responses linked the difficulty of making and maintaining friendships and bullying:

> *'I found it hard to make friends and in school I was bullied'* (Participant APQ 61)
>
> *'Other children don't want to talk to me, sometimes they say I am fat and call me names'* (Participant APQ 28).

Whilst some referred to bullying, not just by fellow pupils, but by staff:

> *'Teachers allow pupils to bully me, and the teachers & dinner ladies bully me too'* (Participant APQ 82),
>
> *'I faced a lot of ableism in school from both teachers and students; it's never blatant remarks but I have been accused by the lead carer that cares for disabled students of being an attention seeker during my meltdown'* (Participant APQ 73).

Despite the data indicating otherwise, some suggest that, as they get older, the incidents of bullying do subside:

> *'I was bullied a lot in primary and again in secondary, but now I am older that seems to have stopped'* (Participant APQ 77)
>
> *'I was bullied a lot but not quite as much now I am older'* (Participant APQ 70)

'…in college it was a bit easier as I could spend more time by myself without being judged' (Participant APQ 61)

Table 4.11.4 - Whole sample: Peer relationships at school: Data table

Whole sample: Do you have friends at school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*65*	71.43	*40*	72.73	*25*	71.43	*53*	73.61	*10*	76.92	*15*	75.00	*38*	73.08	*10*	66.67
No	*26*	28.57	*15*	27.27	*10*	28.57	*19*	26.39	*3*	23.08	*5*	25.00	*14*	26.92	*5*	33.33
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(4) = 4.15$, $p = 0.39$)				($X^2(2) = 15.26$, $p = 0.07$)				($X^2(8) = 3.67$, $p = 0.89$)					

Whole sample: Have you ever been bullied in school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*58*	76.32	*34*	77.27	*23*	74.19	*47*	75.81	*7*	70.00	*5*	35.71	*40*	86.96	*11*	84.62
No	*18*	23.68	*10*	22.73	*8*	25.81	*15*	24.19	*3*	30.00	*9*	64.29	*6*	13.04	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(4) = 1.26$, $p = 0.87$)				($X^2(3) = 6.02$, $p = 0.11$)				($X^2(8) = 22.97$, $p = <0.05$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

There was little between the two cohorts when considering how the setting attended may impact autistic learners' peer relationships, at school, with the setting attended was not proven significant in either successfully forming friendships or being a victim of school bullies (Table 4.11.4).

4.11.5 Whole sample: School work

Whilst 58% (n = 43) of respondents felt they were coping well with the work set for them, at school, 42% (n = 31) were not (Table 4.11.5). There was no discernible age difference between those who were managing their workload (*Mean age* 14.00 years, *SD* = 3.80), and those who were not (*Mean age* 13.97 years, *SD* = 3.16). Minimal differences were evident in response data between male and female

respondents, whilst learners in primary and post-16 education, were coping better with their work than their peers attending secondary education. Neither sex nor sector differences were identified as being statistically significant, as shown in Table 4.11.5.

Less than half of the sample (47%, n = 36) felt they were receiving sufficient support at school (Table 4.11.5), with minimal age difference between those who felt supported (*Mean age* 13.89 years, *SD* = 3.62), and those who did not (*Mean age* 14.05 years, *SD* = 3.48). Again, the sex and sector variables did not have a statistically significant impact on the outcomes, in this area, as highlighted in Table 4.11.5.

When presented with the statement 'my teachers know how to support me', 35% (n = 15) of respondents agreed, while 42% (n = 18) disagreed (Table 4.11.5). Learners who believed their teachers knew their support needs (*Mean age* 13.53 years, *SD* = 4.34) were, on average, a year younger than their peers, who felt the opposite (*Mean age* 14.61 years, *SD* = 3.74). Differences reported between the sexes and across sectors were not found to be statistically significant (Table 4.11.5).

Many shared their displeasure at the volume of written work required at school, and whilst there were many comments suggesting the work was too hard, several respondents indicated they found the work too easy and felt unchallenged:

> *'…with the wrong teacher or TA the day can be difficult, if the teacher or TA don't explain the work properly'* (Participant APQ 46)
>
> *'Work can be a struggle to get my head around, I find it hard to concentrate'* (Participant APQ 70)
>
> *'I WANTED to learn, but I was left to work alone or on group tasks meaning I would under-perform'* (Participant APQ 86)
>
> *'I used to enjoy school but not when I got to the end of secondary when everything was focused on grades. It's like they cared less about how we felt and more about what marks we got'.* (Participant APQ 61)

Table 4.11.5 - Whole sample: School work: Data table

Whole sample: Do you cope well with the work in school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*43*	58.11	*25*	59.52	*18*	58.06	*33*	54.10	*8*	80.00	*9*	69.23	*23*	50.00	*9*	75.00
No	*31*	41.89	*17*	40.48	*13*	41.94	*28*	45.90	*2*	20.00	*4*	30.77	*23*	50.00	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(4) = 3.32$, $p = 0.51$)				($X^2(3) = 4.46$, $p = 0.22$)				($X^2(8) = 12.62$, $p = 0.13$)					

Whole sample: Do you feel you get enough help school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*36*	47.37	*24*	54.55	*12*	38.71	*27*	43.55	*7*	70.00	*6*	42.86	*22*	47.83	*7*	53.85
No	*40*	52.63	*20*	45.45	*19*	61.29	*35*	56.45	*3*	30.00	*8*	57.14	*24*	52.17	*6*	46.15
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(4) = 3.72$, $p = 0.45$)				($X^2(3) = 8.01$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(8) = 9.03$, $p = 0.34$)					

Whole sample: My teachers know how to support me

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Agree	*15*	34.88	*10*	40.00	*5*	27.78	*14*	36.84	*	*	*	*	*6*	30.00	*5*	41.66
Neither	*10*	23.26	*7*	28.00	*	*	*8*	21.05	*	*	*	*	*5*	25.00	*	*
Disagree	*18*	41.86	*8*	32.00	*10*	55.55	*16*	42.11	*	*	*	*	*9*	45.00	*5*	41.66
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(6) = 3.55$, $p = 0.74$)				($X^2(4) = 1.65$, $p = 0.80$)				($X^2(12) = 12.90$, $p = 0.38$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the nature of specialist provision settings, learners there felt better able to cope with schoolwork, and felt more sufficiently supported than their peers in mainstream (Table 4.11.5). That said, analysis only established the differences between type of setting attended as statistically significant in the degree to which respondents felt satisfied with the level of support provided at school, as shown in Table 4.11.5.

4.11.6 Whole sample: Sensory differences at school

Many respondents said that they felt school was often too noisy (74%, n = 32) (Table 4.11.6). Those who did not have an issue with excessive environmental noise at school (*Mean age* 12.33 years, *SD* = 7.23) were, on average, 2 years younger than their peers who found noise levels difficult to cope with (*Mean age* 14.34 years, *SD* = 3.90). There were minimal differences between the sexes, and although learners were more aware of environmental noise as they progressed through the sectors, neither sex, nor sector differences were significant, as shown in Table 4.11.6.

Table 4.11.6 - Whole sample: Sensory differences at school: Data table

Whole sample: School is often too noisy

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Agree	*32*	74.42	*19*	76.00	*13*	72.22	*30*	78.95	*	*	*6*	66.67	*14*	70.00	*10*	83.33
Neither	*8*	18.60	*5*	20.00	*	*	*7*	18.42	*	*	*	*	*5*	25.00	*	*
Disagree	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(6) = 1.93$, $p = 0.93$)				($X^2(4) = 17.99$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(12) = 13.02$, $p = 0.37$)					

Whole sample: Do you have a quiet space where you can go and relax in school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*45*	59.21	*27*	61.36	*17*	54.84	*34*	54.84	*9*	90.00	*8*	57.14	*27*	58.70	*8*	61.54
No	*31*	40.79	*17*	38.64	*14*	45.16	*28*	45.16	*	*	*6*	42.86	*19*	41.30	*5*	38.46
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(4) = 1.95$, $p = 0.75$)				($X^2(3) = 9.77$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(8) = 8.55$, $p = 0.38$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

A few respondents made comments about the busy environment and noise levels at school and the impact this had on their learning experience:

> *'school can be scary at times, all the pushing and noise'*
> (Participant APQ 70)

'naughty noisy kids scare me and take all the teachers' attention' (Participant APQ 21)

'I hated mainstream school until I went to private school with smaller classes and less noise' (Participant APQ 91)

Comments also reflected how the sensory overwhelm at school, can be scary:

'School can be scary at times, all the pushing and noise especially during changes between periods' (Participant APQ70)

'I didn't like how I was scared of all of the people and how loud/bright it was' (Participant APQ61)

With noise levels being a concern for most, it is important that autistic learners can access a safe, quiet space to help them relax and regulate from overstimulation. Whilst many respondents said such a space was available to them, for 41% (n = 31) this was not the case (Table 4.11.6). Respondents with access to a safe, quiet place at school (*Mean age* 13.78 years, *SD* = 3.64) were, on average, slightly younger than those who did not (*Mean age* 14.26 years, *SD* = 3.38). Differences evident in the response data, between the sexes, and across the sectors, were not found to be statistically significant, when it came to the provision of safe, quiet spaces, at school (Table 4.11.6).

The importance of having a safe space and the challenges of ensuring access to one was often discussed within the voluntary comments sections:

'it would have been nice to have a safe/quiet space at secondary school' (Participant APQ 61)

'I only had a safe space after I had multiple meltdowns that the head of year was brought to address' (Participant APQ 86)

'I only got an area for peace and quiet because I was able to talk to my art and media teacher about it and since I already had a bond with them they gave me a spare room to do work' (Participant APQ 73)

> *'I do have a safe and quite space inside and outside, but every term and year my mum has to remind the team I need access to this everyday just in case'* (Participant APQ 46)

Respondents educated within mainstream settings were more troubled with environmental noise at school and less likely to have access to a safe, quiet space to help them regulate, than those attending specialist provision settings (Table 4.11.6). Not one of the participants discussing their experience of special education complained about excessive noise in their place of learning, whilst 90% said there was a safe, quiet space available to them, should they need it. Conversely, while 79% of autistic mainstream learners said school was often too noisy, just 55% had access to a space where they could self-regulate. Analysis revealed that the type of setting played a significant role in shaping learners' experience with levels of environmental noise (p = <0.05), and whether or not a space for regulation was made available (p = <0.05).

4.11.7 Whole sample: Educator understanding

Just 28% (n = 12) of respondents agreed that their teachers had a good understanding about autism, whilst a similar proportion disagreed (26%, n = 11) (Table 4.11.7). There was a clear age difference between those who felt their teachers understood (*Mean age* 11.00 years, *SD* = 5.13), and those who did not (*Mean age* 15.00 years, *SD* = 2.76). The sector in which respondents were educated was found to significantly impact their perception of educator understanding of autism (Table 4.11.7). Corroborating the age differences highlighted above, those in primary (67%) had a much more positive view of educator understanding of autism than those in secondary (25%), and post-16 (8%), education. Whilst equal proportions of male and female respondents agreed that their teachers had a good understanding about autism, females were more likely to disagree (23 p.p. difference). That said, the sex differences were not statistically significant.

When considering whether their teachers understood them, as individuals, respondents were equally split (Table 4.11.7). Fourteen participants (33%) each agreed and disagreed with the given statement. There was little difference in the average age of respondents, between those who felt understood (*Mean age* 14.07 years, *SD* = 4.45) and their peers who believed their teachers did not understand them (*Mean age* 14.14 years, *SD* = 3.51). Again, the differences in response data across the sectors was proven to be statistically significant (p = <0.05). Whilst more primary aged respondents felt understood (33%) than misunderstood (22%), just 25% of those in secondary school felt their teachers understood them, whilst 50% felt the opposite to be the case. For those in post-16 education, 50% believed their teachers understood them, whilst just 17% felt misunderstood. Whilst response data suggests females were more likely to feel misunderstood than males (20 p.p. difference), the differences between the sexes were not statistically significant, as shown in Table 4.11.7.

When it came to how autistic learners perceive their teachers' understanding of their sensory differences and the difficulties these could present within school, 42% felt teacher understanding to be lacking, whilst 35% were satisfied with educator understanding, in this area (Table 4.11.7). Data would suggest that younger learners were more likely to believe their teachers understood (*Mean age* 11.53 years, *SD* = 4.56), whilst those who were sceptical of educator understanding were considerably older (*Mean age* 15.22 years, *SD* = 3.10). With age already alluded to as an influential factor in this area, differences in response data across the sectors were identified as being statistically significant as shown in Table 4.11.7. The proportion of those who agreed that their teachers understood their sensory differences decreased as learners progressed through the sectors. Whilst 22% of those in primary felt understanding was insufficient, this increased to 45% amongst secondary school, and 42% of post-16, learners. While there were clear variances in experience between the sexes in this area, Chi-square analysis did not attribute any statistical significance to these (Table 4.11.7).

Table 4.11.7 - Whole sample: Educator understanding: Data table

Whole sample: My teachers understand about Autism

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Agree	*12*	27.91	*7*	28.00	*5*	27.78	*11*	28.95	*	*	*6*	66.67	*5*	25.00	*	*
Neither	*20*	46.51	*14*	56.00	*6*	33.33	*16*	42.11	*	*	*	*	*7*	35.00	*9*	75.00
Disagree	*11*	25.58	*	*	*7*	38.89	*11*	28.95	*	*	*	*	*8*	40.00	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(6) = 4.46$, $p = 0.61$)				($X^2(4) = 9.53$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(12) = 28.39$, $p = <0.05$)					

Whole sample: My teachers understand me

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Agree	*14*	32.56	*8*	32.00	*6*	33.33	*11*	28.95	*	*	*	*	*5*	25.00	*6*	50.00
Neither	*15*	34.88	*11*	44.00	*	*	*13*	34.21	*	*	*	*	*5*	25.00	*	*
Disagree	*14*	32.56	*6*	24.00	*8*	44.44	*14*	36.84	*	*	*	*	*10*	50.00	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(6) = 3.92$, $p = 0.69$)				($X^2(4) = 12.01$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(12) = 21.38$, $p = <0.05$)					

Whole sample: My teachers understand that sensory differences can make some situations in school hard to cope with

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Agree	*15*	34.88	*10*	40.00	*5*	27.78	*13*	34.21	*	*	*6*	66.67	*7*	35.00	*	*
Neither	*10*	23.26	*7*	28.00	*	*	*9*	23.68	*	*	*	*	*	*	*5*	41.66
Disagree	*18*	41.86	*8*	32.00	*10*	55.56	*16*	42.11	*	*	*	*	*9*	45.00	*5*	41.66
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(6) = 3.55$, $p = 0.74$)				($X^2(4) = 9.679$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(12) = 22.65$, $p = <0.05$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

The three questions enquiring about respondents' perceptions around the level of educator understanding were all from Level 3, as such the results are already discussed above (Section 4.9.7). In summary, respondents educated within specialist provisions were more inclined to believe their teachers understood about autism, and the sensory challenges that school can create, they also felt better understood, as individual, by their teachers, than their counterparts attending mainstream schools. As demonstrated in Table 4.11.7, the type of setting was found to significantly impact learner responses across the three measures.

4.11.8 Whole sample summary

Reviewing the data from the sample as a whole, it is clear that some areas are a cause for concern. Whilst the majority enjoyed going to, and felt happy whilst at, school, a considerable proportion felt the opposite. Going to school was clearly identified as causing participants increased anxiety and worry, with 28% saying that they did not feel safe whilst at school. Respondents were evidently aware of their differences; this became more apparent with age. Just above half of respondents said they felt included at school (52%), however this feeling of inclusion decreased as the progressed through the sectors. Whilst most said they had friends at school, 76% had been the victim of bullying. The majority were coping well with their schoolwork, however, 53% felt support available was insufficient and 42% did not feel their teachers knew how best to support them. Many said that noise levels at school were often difficult to cope with, yet a considerable proportion did not have access to a space to help them regulate. Generally, respondents were unconvinced by the levels of educator understanding around their sensory issues, autism in general, or them as individuals. The sector attended was found to significantly impact several areas, mainly due to largely negative learner experiences of those attending secondary school.

There were clear differences in the experiences of autistic learners when comparing response data from those attending mainstream and specialist provision settings. Overall, those educated in specialist provisions reported more positive experiences than their counterparts' discussing experiences of mainstream education. The type of setting was identified as being a significant factor in shaping learner experience across many of the areas covered.

4.12 Creating overall construct of "Feelings about School" using four variables that are asked to Level 1, 2 and 3 learners.

In sections 4.7 to 4.11 analysis has focused on the effects of the variants age, biological sex, sector, and type of setting, on autistic learner experiences. Chi-

square analysis has identified several areas where one or more of these have significant impacts on general educational experiences. However, these individual variants are not exclusive, and thought should be given to their impact in combination with each other. In order to understand the relevance of each factor, binary logistic regression analysis presents an opportunity to understand the role of each variant, adjusted for the wider picture.

4.12.1 Do you enjoy going to school?

As presented in Table 4.12.1 (below), within this sample of ninety-two participants, neither age, sex, setting, nor sector were found to significantly impact learners' enjoyment of going to school, when considered in combination.

This analysis suggests that autistic females were 1.63 times more likely to enjoy going to school than their male peers (95%*CI* [0.75, 3.55]), however this was not statistically significant (Table 4.12.1), and the confidence intervals intersected the null. As participants get older, their enjoyment of going to school seemingly decreased, whilst learners attending specialist provisions were more likely to enjoy going to school than their peers in mainstream, but again this was not statistically significant. All analyses of the total cohort are somewhat underpowered due to a small sample being used so the direction of association along with statistical significance is considered.

Table 4.12.1 - Logistic regression: Variables in the equation: Do you enjoy going to school?

Variables in the equation: Do you enjoy going to school?

	Exp(B)	Sig.	95% C.I. for Exp(B) Lower	Upper	Collinearity VIF
Age	0.93	0.46	0.76	1.13	3.23
Biological sex	1.63	1.63	0.75	3.55	1.01
Setting	1.25	0.47	0.68	2.31	1.04
Sector	2.03	0.18	0.72	5.75	3.19

4.12.2 Do you feel happy at school?

The second question, answered by ninety respondents, asked whether they enjoyed going to school. As illustrated in Table 4.12.2 (below), when analysed as part of the wider picture, none of the variables were proven statistically significant.

Biological sex was identified as an area of interest with results implying that autistic females were more likely to be happy at school (*Exp(B)* = 1.79, 95%*CI* [0.80, 3.99]), although the confidence intervals intersect the null and no statistical significance was established. Those attending special schools were considered slightly more likely to be happy at school, and whilst age was found to have little impact, learners were slightly happier as they progressed through the sectors.

Table 4.12.2 - Logistic regression: Variables in the equation: Do you feel happy at school?

Variables in the equation: Do you feel happy at school?

			95% C.I. for Exp(B)		Collinearity
	Exp(B)	Sig.	Lower	Upper	VIF
Age	1.01	0.94	0.82	1.23	3.28
Biological sex	1.79	0.15	0.80	3.99	1.01
Setting	1.27	0.45	0.69	2.33	1.04
Sector	1.29	0.62	0.47	3.58	3.26

4.12.3 Do you enjoy play and break times at school?

When asked if they enjoyed unstructured, play and break times at school, the ninety-one respondents were evenly split, between those that did (52%) and did not (48%). Under logistic regression analysis, when considered in combination, none of the four variables were found to significantly impact learner experience, in this area (Table 4.12.3).

Females were considered as 1.7 times more likely to enjoy play and break time periods during the school day (95%*CI*, [0.77, 3.74]). However, these differences were not statistically significant and with the confidence intervals intersecting the null, it is possible this direction of association is down to chance.

Table 4.12.3 - Logistic regression: Variables in the equation: Do you enjoy play and break times at school?

Variables in the equation: Do you enjoy play and break times at school?

	Exp(B)	Sig.	95% C.I. for Exp(B) Lower	Upper	Collinearity VIF
Age	1.20	0.10	0.97	1.48	3.28
Biological sex	1.70	0.19	0.77	3.74	1.01
Setting	0.51	0.10	0.23	1.15	1.04
Sector	0.46	0.16	0.15	1.37	3.26

4.12.4 Do you have friends at school?

Ninety-one respondents answered the question about their school friendships. This analysis tells us that when considered in combination, none of the four variables were significantly impactful. In this area, the type of setting attended was identified as having the biggest impact, with those in specialist provisions more likely to have friends at school than their peers in mainstream. Although, again, not significant, and with a wide confidence interval range that intersects the null (95%*CI*, [0.83, 2.88]). The biological sex of the learner and the sector attended were also impactful, but neither to a statistically significant degree.

Table 4.12.4 - Logistic regression: Variables in the equation: Do you have friends at school?

Variables in the equation: Do you have friends at school?

	Exp(B)	Sig.	95% C.I. for Exp(B) Lower	Upper	Collinearity VIF
Age	0.94	0.57	0.75	1.17	3.28
Biological sex	1.51	0.32	0.67	3.40	1.01
Setting	1.55	0.17	0.83	2.88	1.04
Sector	1.22	0.72	0.40	3.70	3.26

4.12.5 Reflections across the four questions

This logistic regression analysis did not identify any of the variables as statistically significant when testing against the school-related outcomes chosen in analyses, adjusted for demographic characteristics. This was apparent across the four areas

of: enjoying going to school; happiness whilst at school; whether or not they had school friends; and enjoyment of unstructured times. It is worth acknowledging the breadth of the confidence intervals for all variables, across all questions. Each one intersects the null, suggesting any conclusions drawn on relationships between variables, could be considered a result of chance, rather than true. This could be attributed to a relatively low sample size, as illustrated in Section 4.11. The total of 92 respondents, and their distribution through cohorts and subgroups, may underpower the analysis, especially when looking for differences impacted by various factors. When taking a holistic overview, across the four questions above, the variance inflation factor (VIF), would suggest that there is no correlation between biological sex and type of setting and the other variables, whilst there was moderate correlation for the variables age and sector. This correlation between age and sector is perhaps to be expected, as learners only progress through the sectors (primary, secondary, and post-16, education), as they get older.

4.13 Phase II: What I wish my teacher knew about autism

With the data from the APQ demonstrating just 28% of autistic learners believed their teachers understood autism (section 4.11.7), a secondary follow-up study was undertaken asking the question 'What do you wish your teacher knew about Autism?'. The study, an online form, launched in May 2022 and ran from the spring into early summer, and was open to autistic individuals of all ages, who had experience of being educated in Wales. A total of 178 responses were logged, at a completion rate of 34%. After data cleaning, 69 individual entries had provided sufficient information to be included in the final data set. Twenty-seven (39%) of these were from current learners aged 18 or under, therefore fitting into the demographic criteria of this report (Table 4.13). The majority of the responses came from those educated within mainstream settings, with just two attending specialist provisions, and from across the three provision sectors, the youngest respondent was aged seven.

Table 4.13 - What teachers should know about autism: Sample demographic overview

Variable			Participant age		
	n	% of all responses	Median	Mode	Mean (*SD*)
Participants aged ≤ 18 years	*27*	39.13	14	12	13.30 (*3.09*)
Biological sex		% of cohort			
Male	*14*	51.85	13	14	12.43 (2.71)
Female	*13*	48.15	16	12	14.23 (*3.30*)
School provision					
Mainstream	*23*	85.19	12	12	12.91 (*3.12*)
Sector					
Primary	*7*	25.93	9	9	9.43 (1.40)
Secondary	*13*	48.15	14	12	13.31 (*1.38*)
Post-16	*7*	25.93	17	18	17.14 (*0.90*)

Following thematic analysis of the qualitative response data five key themes were identified, and the words of twenty-one respondents are analysed and presented

below. The demographic details of each participant referenced are available within Appendix 3a, at the end of this thesis.

4.13.1 We are all different

As evidenced within the APQ results above, autistic learners are keenly aware of their differences (section 4.11.3). Qualitative data from this WTSK study, highlights that these differences do not simply relate to their non-autistic peers. Many were keen to point out that not all autistic individuals are the same, they are all different, just like everybody else, they want to be seen as individuals and not just as autistic.

> *'We are all different, don't just believe what is written in textbooks…please see me and not just autism'* (Participant WTSK54)
>
> *'we are all different and individual. We do not all need the same. Treat me as myself don't stick me under a label'* (Participant WTSK1)

It is very common for educators to employ strategies that they are familiar with and have found successful in the past, however assuming a 'one-size-fits-all' strategy is not always appropriate:

> *'…all people with autism are different, especially females and males; you cannot assume similar struggles and needs'* (Participant WTSK6)

As autistic young people, participants' understanding of being different was apparent, they were also aware of having diverse strengths and abilities:

> *'not all of us are super smart and obsessed with trains, but we actually struggle to do 'normal' human things'* (Participant WTSK29)
>
> *'we all are different in the way we behave at school to what we do at home'* (Participant WTSK22)
>
> *'we are wired differently and understand things differently'* (Participant WTSK15)

It is clear that the message these young autistic people wanted to share with educators was that they are all different. They want to be seen as unique individuals, not simply as autistic, each with their own strengths and weaknesses. Participant comments would suggest that teachers should get to know the person, understand their specific qualities, support needs, and areas of difficulty. Whilst general strategies can be an effective starting point, practitioners need to be flexible in their approach, and open to adapting their resources, tailoring solutions which work best for the individual learner.

4.13.2 We often wear a mask

One of the barriers to achieving the desired level of educator understanding required is the use of masking and camouflaging (see Chapter 2).

> *'We mask to try and fit in'* (Participant WTSK22)

Often considered a mainly female strategy, masking or camouflaging amongst autistic individuals is common. As many male respondents (*n = 4*) referred to masking in their responses, as females (*n = 4*). Even the youngest were aware of this and wanted their teachers to understand what this means, one seven-year-old wrote:

> *'When I may seem ok or quiet I'm not, when I struggle to go into school I'm not being naughty, I am not creating nonsense, I am struggling'* (Participant WTSK27)

This hiding of feelings or emotions, and pretending all is good, when inside it is not, is the foundation of masking. Another said:

> *'Just because I seem ok on the outside, it doesn't mean I'm fine on the inside'* (Participant WTSK21)

School is a classic environment for masking, it is full of challenges throughout the day, autistic individuals are known to keep the mask on until they feel safe:

> *'I mask how I feel at school and unmask when I get home, please believe my parents when they tell you how much school affects me'* (Participant WTSK52)
>
> *'I wish they knew that a lot of us with autism mask, therefore it would be good if teachers could be able learn the signs of masking and how to better support us'* (Participant WTSK28)
>
> *'they need to know when you're masking and when you're not, so you get the help that you need'* (Participant WTSK52)

The very nature of what, often subconscious, masking and camouflaging is trying to achieve is to enable an individual to 'blend in' and give the appearance of functioning normally within a stressful environment. In the busy classroom environment. It can be difficult for teachers to detect early warning signs of distress that may well be hidden by the mask. This study has indicated that young autistic learners generally feel their teachers do not understand or pick-up on times when they are masking. It can be difficult to gauge whether or not someone is hiding behind their mask, but if teachers were able to remember not to 'judge a book by its cover' or take things at 'face value' and try to see what was going on behind the mask, this would greatly improve autistic learners' educational experiences.

A point raised by Participant WTSK52, extends this to experiences beyond the classroom. It can be difficult for educators to relate to parental reports of difficult behaviours and increased school related stress and anxiety at home, when the child they encounter in the classroom bears no resemblance to this, mainly because at school they are constantly behind their mask. Awareness of masking should be encouraged, and parental concerns ought to be taken seriously, to help improve educator understanding, in the area, and increase the positive educational experiences of autistic learners.

4.13.3 School can cause sensory overwhelm

As discussed within Chapter 2, some of the core elements of autism centre around difficulties with processing sensory input. Indeed, most respondents to the APQ study indicated their belief that the school environment was often too noisy. In response to this WTSK study, many share their views on how difficult coping with many of the sensory issues around school, can be.

> *'I would like my teachers to better understand sensory sensitivities and how sensory input affects me in many ways - it is a lot more complex than they think it is'* (Participant WTSK52)

Whilst the noise levels at school are already established as being difficult for autistic learners to cope with…

> *'…sometimes I need space, the noise in the classroom is too much'* (Participant WTSK30)
>
> *'the noise makes me sick and feel terrible'* (Participant WTSK4)

…often teachers themselves are the source of the noise, especially when 'shouting' in class:

> *'…the teachers were always shouting in my mainstream class they would never consider my sensory issues shouting hurting my ears'* (Participant WTSK24)
>
> *'my teachers shout all of the time and shout at me a lot, it really scares me, it makes me more nervous and anxious'* (Participant WTSK4)

One participant made a valuable suggestion to help combat the difficulties they had with noise around school:

> *'I would like it if we were allowed headphones to wear because I feel the teachers don't understand that if it's too loud then I get stressed'* (Participant WTSK18)

It is not just the noise that can present sensory difficulties. The school environment can present many challenges in this area, the sheer number of bodies moving around can be hard to cope with:

> *'Break times are not fun, all the children running, and screaming is overwhelming'* (Participant WTSK30)
>
> *'I wish my teacher knew how hard it is for me, the number of people sends me into panic'* (Participant WTSK4)

School uniforms were also referred to as causing sensory distress…

> *'I wish we didn't have to wear uniforms they feel very uncomfortable and are distracting when learning'* (Participant WTSK52)

…whilst one comment highlighted how something, seemingly innocuous to many, can be the source of great discomfort:

> *'when I touch certain things such as paper it makes me angry, and I find it hard to do my work'* (Participant WTSK65)

Participant WTSK 26 provided a succinct summary of some apparently minor occurrences that present challenges for them, at school.

> *'Autistic people have more barriers to learning. Things can affect their learning that other people don't realise such as change of seating plan, uniform, or clothing. A noise that may not bother others can be hard to concentrate. Smells can also have a big effect on my learning and behaviour'* (Participant WTSK26)

Many shared their views on how difficult coping with various sensory issues around school, can be. Unfortunately, just 35% of respondents to the APQ felt their teachers understood their sensory differences (section 4.11.7), this is clearly an area where, provided educators took the time to appreciate how challenging certain aspects of school life can be, they could help improve some of the negative experiences, many autistic learners are currently facing. It is worth acknowledging that sensory challenges do not simply relate to noise, as participants reveal.

Personal space, busy, overcrowded environments, overwhelming sights and smells, and contact, with sometimes seemingly innocuous items, such as uniforms, can all lead to hyperstimulation. In conjunction with improved understanding, the provision of a safe and quiet space to support sensory regulation, for autistic learners, would greatly improve their day-to-day school lives, sadly 46% of mainstream educated APQ respondents said they did not have such a space, available to them.

4.13.4 Following rules and directions can be difficult

The processing of information and other executive functioning tasks can be overwhelming for young autistic learners (see Chapter 2). Trouble processing instructions coupled with information overload can often present autistic learners with many challenges, this was a theme which was repeatedly discussed by respondents:

> *'Don't tell me lots of things all at once because I won't remember them. I might remember one thing but, usually, by the time you stop talking I've forgotten what you said at the beginning'* (Participant WTSK21)

At school, teachers will often reel off a list of tasks to be completed or instructions for how to get the work done, when processing difficulties lead to autistic learners not following the teachers' directions correctly, they are often made to feel inadequate.

> *'I wish my teachers knew that I really do find the work hard, I do not understand what they are telling me to do, I am not being difficult I just do not understand how they explain things'* (Participant WTSK4)
>
> *'I am terrified of making mistakes and cannot bear the embarrassment when I am wrong'* (Participant WTSK59)

Asking for assistance or further explanation can also be difficult for some autistic learners:

> *'if I have not completed a task correctly that does not necessarily mean I haven't been listening, often I haven't understood the instructions and have been too anxious to ask for help'* (Participant WTSK7)

The anxieties caused by either having to ask for extra help, or being made to feel incapable when not completing work were clear in participant responses:

> *'I wish my teachers knew how scared I am to ask for help, they either make me feel stupid or that I am being difficult if I do'*
> (Participant WTSK4)
>
> *'it's difficult for me to complete tasks on time, this doesn't mean that I'm not trying hard enough or being lazy, it means I need assistance'*
> (Participant WTSK7)
>
> *'they don't explain things easily for me, so when I won't do something, I get in trouble'* (Participant WTSK17)

It is clear from the words of respondents included above, that many find following instructions challenging, and most are scared to approach their teacher when they are struggling. The participant quotes highlight the pressure many feel in the classroom, trying to remember all of the information presented to them, together with the instructions for the work that is being set, can be difficult. These issues, in isolation, can be incredibly tough, and many feel acute embarrassment and discomfort at the thought of having to ask for help, or being called out for being wrong or not completing the task as expected. Simple fixes, such as not overloading instructions, or expecting workers to follow overly complex work plans, would not only benefit autistic learners, but every member of the class.

4.13.5 I am not a bad/naughty person

Whilst struggling with some of the sensory and information overloads, highlighted above, many autistic learners can become anxious and stressed, this can be is often

communicated in ways, that can often be misinterpreted. As discussed in Chapter 2, many autistic young people struggling to vocalise their distress, often display what some would consider undesirable behaviour. Whilst all behaviour should be considered a form of communication (RCSLT, 2019), many autistic learners often feel being misunderstood, singles them out as being 'naughty' at school:

> *'I wish my teacher understood that yes I am different to them, but I am not a bad person'* (Participant WTSK4)
>
> *'I am not naughty, rude, manipulative, violent. I am Autistic and the world is not designed for someone like me'* (Participant WTSK59)

Some can feel pressured into changing who they are to fit the system:

> *'I wish my teachers could stop trying to change everything about who I am, it makes me hate myself and makes me feel like a terrible person'* (Participant WTSK4)

Misguided teacher responses can often worsen situations…

> *'I would like for my teachers to not escalate difficult situations into conflict and learn to handle my needs/differences better'* (Participant WTSK8)

…which too often lead to repetition or escalation of the 'behaviours' they are trying to resolve:

> *'making me miss breaktime because of something I can't help will not stop me repeating the offence, it will make me more likely to repeat it as I'm so consumed with anxiety about getting it wrong, I often run out of the mental energy needed to conform to the rule'* (Participant WTSK20)

Through their engagement in this study, autistic young people ask teachers to look beyond what is directly in front of them, especially when it comes to dealing with what is perceived as 'problem' behaviours. As discussed in Chapter 2, all behaviour should be seen as a form of communication, and here autistic learners highlight the significance of this statement. With many autistic individuals struggling to communicate their needs, or feelings, often these are demonstrated through

behaviours, sometimes seen as undesirable. In this area, as with all those raised in this study, a little more understanding from educators would certainly help to increase the positive nature of autistic learners' educational experiences.

4.13.6 Summary of findings

As evidenced in Chapter 2, much literature exists highlighting challenges autistic learners have to contend with on a daily basis, at school. This study aimed to give autistic learners being educated in Wales, an opportunity to share their thoughts on what they would like educators to know about what being in school is like, from their perspective. The 27 respondents, aged 18 and under and currently in education, provided much data for analysis, and the five themes discussed above, were recurring most throughout their responses.

Amongst the most challenging of aspects learners encounter every time they attend school involve sensory stimuli. Respondents refer to various sensory issues, including noise and over-crowding, but also overpowering sights, smells and contact. In the classroom, overly complicated instructions and the requirement to remember large volumes of information can also lead to overwhelm and places the autistic learner under great pressure. Considering a combination of both factors, it is unsurprising autistic young people often find it difficult to cope at school. Educators often prefer to use approaches with which they are familiar, but learners here, wanted to say that using one-size-fits-all strategies, is not always the best method. Respondents want to be seen as individuals and wish for practitioners to try to get to know and understand them, and their personal strengths and weaknesses. This feeling of being misunderstood is apparent in comments relating to masking. Whilst it can be incredibly difficult to identify when or if a learner is hiding behind their mask, if educators took time to listen to the individual learner, many feel this could help them to maybe see through the camouflage. The final point is unfortunately the culmination of professionals not appreciating the difficulties autistic learners have discussed in the four areas, before. When

educators do not comprehend the challenges being encountered and fail to take time to understand the individual learner, often their response to the learners' attempts at communication, or over-stimulation, tends to be labelling them as troublesome or naughty. Sadly, as evidenced, this often leads to a spiral and can quickly escalate, where understanding could, if not avoid the situation, calm things down to a manageable level.

4.14 Phase III: The educational experiences of non-autistic learners

On publication of the preliminary report document, it was suggested by a few policy makers and provision providers that it would be beneficial to have some comparative data to establish any areas where autistic pupils' educational experiences differ most from their non-autistic peers. It was decided to undertake a 'control group study' (CGS), to establish what non-autistic learners' experiences were, in order to draw some comparisons and identify any areas where changes to policy and/or practice might benefit all learners.

4.14.1 The pupil experience survey

As laid out in Chapter 3 the pupil experience survey followed a similar format to the earlier APQ, with an online questionnaire. As with the earlier study, potential participants were given the opportunity to download the questions in advance, however for this cohort there were no ability levels, and all questions were put to all respondents, with a caveat reminding them that they did not have to provide a response to each one. The questionnaire posed the same questions as the APQ, except for those which were autism specific. The control group study was conducted in the summer of 2022 and ran from mid-June through to mid-September. Two hundred and eighty-four responses were registered at a completion rate of 54%, following the data cleaning process 120 participants were entered into the analysis for the purposes of this study.

4.14.2 The CGS sample demographics

Most (98%) opted to take the English language version of the questionnaire, with just four preferring to use the Welsh language. Respondents were predominantly of a White ethnic or cultural background (92%, n = 110), with 6% (n = 4) being mixed race. There were respondents representing each of the 22 local authority regions across Wales. As can be seen in Table 4.14.2, most respondents were discussing

experiences of mainstream education, with just 6% (n = 7) being educated through alternative provisions, including specialist settings and being educated at home.

Table 4.14.2 - Non-autistic CGS sample demographic overview

Variable			Participant age		
	n	%	Median	Mode	Mean (*SD*)
All CGS participants	*120*	100.0	16	16	14.48 (*3.04*)
Biological sex					
Male	*32*	26.67	15	16	14.16 (*3.05*)
Female	*88*	73.33	16	16	14.59 (*3.04*)
Gender identity					
Male	*28*	23.33	15	16	14.07 (*3.18*)
Female	*74*	61.67	16	16	14.35 (*3.24*)
Non-binary	*7*	5.83	15	14/15/16	15.29 (*1.11*)
Any ALN					
No ALN	*97*	80.83	16	16	14.52 (*2.97*)
ALN	*23*	19.17	16	17	14.30 (*3.38*)
School provision					
Mainstream	*113*	94.17	15	16	14.36 (*3.09*)
Sector					
Primary	*18*	15.00	8.5	10	8.17 (*2.28*)
Secondary	*63*	52.50	15	15	14.98 (*1.22*)
Post-16	*37*	30.83	16	16	16.51 (*0.56*)

4.14.3 CGS Results: Going to school

Most respondents said they enjoyed going to school (63%, n = 75*, Mean age* 14.20 years, *SD* = 3.38) (Table 4.14.3), and they were on average, slightly younger that those who did not (*Mean age* 14.93 years, *SD* = 2.33). Males were considerably more likely to enjoy going to school than their female peers (21 p.p. difference), the differences between the sexes being significant (p = <0.05). Analysis indicates that having additional needs did not significantly impact learner's enjoyment of going to school, with minimal differences between cohorts (Table 4.14.3). Despite learners at primary school level being more likely to enjoy going to school than those in secondary or post-16 education, sector differences were not significant, as shown in Table 4.14.3.

Table 4.14.3 - CGS whole sample: Going to school: Data table

Non-autistic learner whole sample: Do you enjoy going to school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				ALN Status				Sector					
			Male		Female		No ALN		ALN		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*75*	62.50	*25*	78.13	*50*	56.82	*61*	62.89	*14*	60.87	*15*	83.33	*37*	58.73	*22*	59.46
No	*45*	37.50	*7*	21.88	*38*	43.18	*36*	37.11	*9*	39.13	*	*	*26*	41.27	*15*	40.54
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(1) = 4.55$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(1) = 0.03$, $p = 0.86$)				($X^2(3) = 4.00$, $p = 0.26$)					

Non-autistic learner whole sample: Does going to school make you feel anxious or worried?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				ALN Status				Sector					
			Male		Female		No ALN		ALN		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*62*	51.67	*9*	28.13	*53*	60.23	*50*	51.55	*12*	52.17	*	*	*35*	55.56	*25*	67.57
No	*58*	48.33	*23*	71.88	*35*	39.77	*47*	48.45	*11*	47.83	*17*	94.44	*28*	44.44	*12*	32.43
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(1) = 9.68$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(1) = 0.00$, $p = 0.96$)				($X^2(3) = 19.46$, $p = <0.05$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Respondents were evenly split, between those who struggled with school-based anxiety (52%, n = 62, *Mean age 15.58 years, SD = 1.30*), and those who did not (48%, n = 58*, Mean age 13.29 years, SD = 3.83*) (Table 4.14.3), although, those reporting increased anxiety or worry were, on average, over two years older. The proportion of females struggling with anxiety (60%) was twice that of the males (28%), these differences between the sexes were statistically significant ($p = <0.05$). Validating the age difference highlighted above, whilst just 6% of primary school learners said they worried about school, 56% of those in secondary, and 68% of post-16 students, indicated they struggled with school-based anxiety. These sector differences were proven significant (Table 4.14.3). Again, there was little difference between those with and without ALN.

4.14.4 CGS Results: At school

Whilst most were happy at school (70%, n = 80), a sizable proportion (30%) were not (Table 4.14.4). Those said to be happy (*Mean age* 14.21 years, *SD* = 3.34), were

generally younger than those who were not (*Mean age* 15.14 years, *SD* = 2.00). Young males report having a more positive experience than females (11 p.p. difference). The sex of respondents, the sector in which they were educated, and their ALN status, were not significantly impactful on their feeling of happiness at school, as shown in Table 4.14.4.

Table 4.14.4 - CGS whole sample: At school: Data table

Non-autistic learner whole sample: Do you feel happy in school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				ALN Status				Sector					
			Male		Female		No ALN		ALN		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*80*	69.57	*24*	77.42	*56*	66.67	*64*	69.57	*16*	69.57	*14*	87.50	*41*	66.13	*24*	68.57
No	*35*	30.43	*7*	22.58	*28*	33.33	*28*	30.43	*7*	30.43	*	*	*21*	33.87	*11*	31.43
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(1) = 1.24$, $p = 0.27$)				($X^2(1) = 0.00$, $p = 1.00$)				($X^2(3) = 3.16$, $p = 0.37$)					

Non-autistic learner whole sample: Do you feel safe in school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				ALN Status				Sector					
			Male		Female		No ALN		ALN		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*90*	79.65	*28*	93.33	*62*	74.70	*69*	76.67	*21*	91.30	*15*	100.0	*49*	77.78	*25*	75.76
No	*23*	20.35	*	*	*21*	25.30	*21*	23.33	*	*	-	-	*14*	22.22	*8*	24.24
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(1) = 4.72$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(1) = 2.42$, $p = 0.12$)				($X^23) = 5.36$, $p = 0.15$)					

Non-autistic learner whole sample: Do you enjoy play and break times at school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				ALN Status				Sector					
			Male		Female		No ALN		ALN		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*95*	84.82	*26*	89.66	*69*	83.13	*75*	83.33	*20*	90.91	*15*	93.75	*54*	85.71	*24*	77.42
No	*17*	15.18	*	*	*14*	16.87	*15*	16.67	*	*	*	*	*9*	14.29	*7*	22.58
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(1) = 0.71$, $p = 0.40$)				($X^2(1) = 0.79$, $p = 0.38$)				($X^2(3) = 2.71$, $p = 0.44$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Most respondents said they felt safe at school (80%, n = 90*, Mean age* 14.21 years, *SD* = 3.26) (Table 4.14.4). However, those who reported feeling unsafe were noticeably older (*Mean age* 15.65 years, *SD* = 1.11). Differences between the sexes were proven to be statistically significant ($p = <0.05$). Males felt considerably safer

than their female peers (19 p.p. difference). As evidenced in Table 4.14.4, the feeling of safety decreased as learners progressed through the sectors, whilst those with ALN felt safer than their peers without additional needs, however, these differences were not significant.

Unstructured play and break times were enjoyed by 85% (n = 95) of the respondents (Table 4.14.4). Those who enjoyed these periods (*Mean age* 14.22 years, *SD* = 3.18), were, on average, older than those who did not (*Mean age* 15.59 years, *SD* = 1.66). In relation to these unstructured times, differences between the sexes, across the sectors, and between those with and without ALN, were not proven significant (Table 4.14.4).

4.14.5 CGS Results: Feeling of inclusion whilst at school

Respondents were evenly split between those who did (51%, n = 57*, Mean age* 15.28 years, *SD* = 1.57), and those who did not (49%, n = 55*, Mean age* 13.58 years, *SD* = 3.87), feel different from their peers (Table 4.14.5). As suggested above, the feeling of difference increased as learners grew older, just 12% of primary aged pupils felt different, whilst 59% of those in post-16 were aware of their differences. These differences, across the sectors, were statistically significant (p = <0.05). Whilst 46% of respondents with no additional needs reported feeling different, 73% of those with ALN said they felt different from their peers, these differences were established as being significant, as demonstrated in Table 4.14.5. Females were more aware of their differences than their male contemporaries, although the differences were not significant.

Whilst most felt included at school (75%, n = 83), 25% (n = 28) did not (Table 4.14.5). Data suggests that those who feel included (*Mean age* 14.10 years, *SD* = 3.35), were younger than those who did not (*Mean age* 15.39 years, *SD* = 1.60). Looking at the different experiences between the sexes, whilst 93% of males felt

positively, just 68% of females felt included. Learners at primary (94%), felt more included than those in secondary (75%), and post-16 education (63%). Response data differences between the sexes, across the sectors, and between learners with or without ALN were not statistically significant (Table 4.14.5).

Table 4.14.5 - CGS whole sample: Feeling of inclusion at school: Data table

Non-autistic learner whole sample: Do you feel different from the other children in school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				ALN Status				Sector					
			Male		Female		No ALN		ALN		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*57*	50.89	*11*	36.67	*46*	56.10	*41*	45.56	*16*	72.73	*	*	*35*	56.45	*19*	59.38
No	*55*	49.11	*19*	63.33	*36*	43.90	*49*	54.44	*6*	27.27	*14*	87.50	*27*	43.55	*13*	40.63
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(1) = 3.31$, $p = 0.07$)				($X^2(1) = 5.22$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(3) = 11.13$, $p = <0.05$)					

Non-autistic learner whole sample: Do you feel included in school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				ALN Status				Sector					
			Male		Female		No ALN		ALN		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*83*	74.77	*27*	93.10	*56*	68.29	*65*	73.03	*18*	81.82	*15*	93.75	*46*	75.41	*20*	62.50
No	*28*	25.23	*	*	*26*	31.71	*24*	26.97	*	*	*	*	*15*	24.59	*12*	37.50
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(1) = 6.99$, $p = 0.08$)				($X^2(1) = 0.72$, $p = 0.40$)				($X^2(3) = 6.30$, $p = 0.10$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

4.14.6 CGS Results: Peer relationships at school

Most respondents said they had friends at school (94%, n = 106) (Table 4.14.6). On average, respondents with friends (*Mean age* 14.40 years, *SD* = 3.10), were slightly younger than those without (*Mean age* 15.29 years, *SD* = 1.38). As illustrated in Table 4.14.6, there were minimal differences between the sexes, across sectors, or between those with and without ALN, none were statistically significant.

When asked if they had ever been bullied at school, 59% (n = 65) said that they had (Table 4.14.6). Learners who experienced being bullied (*Mean age* 15.35 years, *SD* = 1.88), were on average, two years older than those who had not (*Mean age* 13.24

years, *SD* = 3.82. Confirming this age difference, variations between the sectors were statistically significant (*p* = <0.05). As learners progressed through their education, from primary (20%), through secondary (61%), and into post-16 (72%), education, reports of bullying increased. Minimal differences in response data between male and female respondents were not significant. Those with ALN were slightly more at risk of bullying, however this was not seen as significant (Table 4.14.6).

Table 4.14.6 - CGS whole sample: Peer relationships at school: Data table

Non-autistic learner whole sample: Do you have friends at school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				ALN Status				Sector					
			Male		Female		No ALN		ALN		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*106*	93.81	*28*	93.33	*78*	93.98	*84*	92.31	*22*	95.65	*16*	100.0	*57*	90.48	*31*	96.88
No	*7*	6.19	*2*	6.67	*5*	6.02	*7*	7.69	*	*	-	-	*6*	9.52	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(1) = 0.02$, $p = 0.90$)				($X^2(1) = 1.80$, $p = 0.18$)				($X^2(3) = 2.91$, $p = 0.41$)					

Non-autistic learner whole sample: Have you ever been bullied in school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				ALN Status				Sector					
			Male		Female		No ALN		ALN		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*65*	58.56	*17*	56.67	*48*	59.26	*51*	57.30	*14*	63.64	*	*	*38*	61.29	*23*	71.88
No	*46*	41.44	*13*	43.33	*33*	40.74	*38*	42.70	*8*	36.36	*12*	80.00	*24*	38.71	*9*	28.13
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(1) = 0.06$, $p = 0.81$)				($X^2(1) = 0.29$, $p = 0.59$)				($X^2(3) = 11.78$, $p = <0.05$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

4.14.7 CGS Results: School work

Most said they were coping with their work at school (61%, n = 69*, Mean age* 14.17 years*, SD* = 3.20) (Table 4.14.7). Those who felt the work was too much to cope with (*Mean age* 14.89 years, *SD* = 2.71), were on average, slightly older. Differences between male and female respondents, and across the sectors were not statistically significant, as shown in Table 4.14.7. Learners with no additional needs (65%) were

more likely to feel their schoolwork was manageable, than their peers with ALN (45%), however, these differences were not significant as shown in Table 4.14.7.

Table 4.14.7 - CGS whole sample: School work: Data table

Non-autistic learner whole sample: Do you cope well with the work in school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				ALN Status				Sector					
			Male		Female		No ALN		ALN		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*69*	61.06	*19*	63.33	*50*	60.24	*59*	64.84	*10*	45.45	*11*	68.75	*39*	61.90	*18*	56.25
No	*44*	38.94	*11*	36.67	*33*	39.76	*32*	35.16	*12*	54.55	*5*	31.25	*24*	38.10	*14*	43.75
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(1) = 0.09$, $p = 0.77$)				($X^2(1) = 2.80$, $p = 0.09$)				($X^2(3) = 0.83$, $p = 0.84$)					

Non-autistic learner whole sample: Do you feel you get enough help school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				ALN Status				Sector					
			Male		Female		No ALN		ALN		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*N*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*58*	50.00	*19*	61.29	*39*	45.88	*48*	51.61	*10*	43.48	*13*	81.25	*26*	41.27	*18*	51.43
No	*58*	50.00	*12*	38.71	*46*	54.12	*45*	48.39	*13*	56.52	*	*	*37*	58.73	*17*	48.57
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(1) = 2.16$, $p = 0.14$)				($X^2(1) = 0.49$, $p = 0.49$)				($X^2(3) = 8.20$, $p = <0.05$)					

Non-autistic learner whole sample: My teachers know how to support me

Response	All participants		Biological sex				ALN Status				Sector					
			Male		Female		No ALN		ALN		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Agree	*48*	42.86	*12*	40.00	*36*	43.90	*41*	45.56	*7*	31.82	*13*	81.25	*24*	38.71	*10*	31.25
Neither	*48*	42.86	*16*	53.33	*32*	39.02	*35*	38.89	*13*	59.09	*	*	*29*	46.77	*16*	50.00
Disagree	*16*	14.29	*	*	*14*	17.07	*14*	15.56	*	*	-	-	*9*	14.52	*6*	18.75
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 2.79$, $p = 0.25$)				($X^2(2) = 2.98$, $p = 0.23$)				($X^2(6) = 14.93$, $p = <0.05$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Respondents were equally split (50%, n = 58) between those that did (*Mean age* 14.07 years, *SD* = 3.66), and did not (*Mean age* 14.95 years, *SD* = 2.13), feel they were getting enough help at school (Table 4.14.7). Those who felt sufficiently supported were younger than their peers who felt the opposite to be true. Emphasising this, support appears more readily available at primary level (81%), than at secondary (41%), or post-16 (51%), settings. These sector differences proven

statistically significant (p = <0.05). As evidenced in Table 4.14.7, males report feeling better supported compared to their female peers, whilst learners without ALN were more likely to feel the support made available to them was sufficient, when compared to their peers with additional needs. Neither sex nor ALN status differences were proven significant.

Fewer than half (43%, n = 48) felt their teachers knew how to support them (*Mean age* 13.50 years, *SD* = 3.79), whilst only 14% took the opposing view (n = 16*, Mean age* 15.75 years, *SD* = 0.86) (Table 4.14.7). Learners were less likely to feel their teachers understood their support needs as they got older. Reinforcing the impact of age, response data confirmed a considerable drop in learner satisfaction from primary (81%) through secondary (39%), and into post-16 education (31%). These differences between the sectors were proven statistically significant (p = <0.05). Minimal differences were reported between the male and female respondent experience, whilst learners with no ALN felt their teachers had a better understanding of their support needs, than their peers with ALN, however, these differences were not statistically significant (Table 4.14.7).

4.14.8 CGS Results: Sensory differences at school

When asked if they felt school was too noisy, 51% (n = 57) agreed that it was (*Mean age* 14.81 years, *SD* = 2.54) (Table 4.14.8, below). Those who were concerned by excessive environmental noise were, on average, 1.5 years older than those who felt was not an issue (*Mean age* 13.29 years, *SD* = 4.56). Females (63%) were considerably more aware of noise issues at school than their male peers (20%), these differences between the sexes were statistically significant (p = <0.05). Learners were more aware of noise distractions as they progressed from primary (38%), through secondary (48%), and on to post-16 (66%), education, however, this and the differences between learners with, or without ALN, were not proven significant (Table 4.14.8).

Table 4.14.8 - CGS whole sample: Sensory differences at school: Data table

Non-autistic learner whole sample: School is often too noisy

Response	All participants		Biological sex				ALN Status				Sector					
			Male		Female		No ALN		ALN		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Agree	*57*	51.35	*6*	20.00	*51*	62.96	*47*	52.81	*10*	45.45	*6*	37.50	*29*	47.54	*21*	65.63
Neither	*33*	29.73	*12*	40.00	*21*	25.93	*25*	28.09	*8*	36.36	*	*	*23*	37.70	*6*	18.75
Disagree	*21*	18.92	*12*	40.00	*9*	11.11	*17*	19.10	*	*	*6*	37.50	*9*	14.75	*5*	15.63
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 18.99$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(2) = 0.60$, $p = 0.74$)				($X^2(6) = 10.04$, $p = 0.12$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

4.14.9 CGS Results: Educator understanding

Fewer than half felt their teachers understood them as individuals (44%, n = 49), (*Mean age* 13.80 years, *SD* = 3.61), although just 12% (n = 13) indicated their teachers did not understand them (*Mean age* 14.85 years, *SD* = 2.61) (Table 4.14.9). On average, learners who believed their teachers understood them were younger, than those who felt misunderstood. Despite variances between the sexes, across the sectors, and between those with and without ALN , no significance was attributed to either cohort, as demonstrated in Table 4.14.9, below.

Table 4.14.9 - CGS whole sample: Educator understanding: Data table

Non-autistic learner whole sample: My teachers understand me

Response	All participants		Biological sex				ALN Status				Sector					
			Male		Female		No ALN		ALN		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Agree	*49*	43.75	*15*	50.00	*34*	41.46	*42*	46.67	*7*	31.82	*11*	68.75	*27*	43.55	*10*	31.25
Neither	*50*	44.64	*14*	46.67	*36*	43.90	*36*	40.00	*14*	63.64	*	*	*26*	41.94	*19*	59.38
Disagree	*13*	11.61	*	*	*12*	14.63	*12*	13.33	*	*	*	*	*9*	14.52	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 2.82$, $p = 0.24$)				($X^2(2) = 4.28$, $p = 0.12$)				($X^2(6) = 7.72$, $p = 0.26$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

4.14.10 CGS Results: Summary

Similarly to the results emanating from the APQ, non-autistic learners, in general see their educational experiences as positive. Whether a learner was male or female, was found to significantly impact educational life in several areas, with male learners generally having a more positive experience than their female peers. Although having identified ALN was clearly impactful on respondents' education, this was not significantly so. The variable which had the biggest influence on the responses of learners was their age, and therefore the sector they were attending. Across several areas, it was established that the older they got, the less positive their view of their education became. Those of primary age generally had significantly better experiences than those in both secondary and post-16 education.

4.15 Comparing mainstream autistic and non-autistic learner experience

With the majority of both autistic (78%, n = 72), and non-autistic (94%, n = 113), samples being educated within mainstream settings, it is important to consider these cohorts for comparative analysis. It is understood that with the data from the two cohorts being collected at different times (approximately one year apart), no direct comparison can be made. However, the intention of the secondary CGS study was to help identify any specific areas where the educational experiences of autistic learners may potentially differ greatest from their non-autistic peers, to provide a yardstick for policy makers and support provision providers to guide them towards areas of greatest need. Data tables for each question are available in Appendix 3a.

4.15.1 Comparing mainstream autistic and non-autistic learner experience: Demographic overview

Representatives from each of the 22 LAs in Wales were included in the non-autistic group whilst the autistic cohort had no participants from the Merthyr or Wrexham authority areas. As illustrated in Table 4.15.1, the autistic sample consisted of mostly males, whilst the opposite was true of the non-autistic cohort, and on

average, the non-autistic respondents were over a year older than their autistic counterparts.

Table 4.15.1 - Comparing mainstream educational experiences of autistic and non-autistic learners: demographic overview

Variable				Participant age		
		n	%	Median	Mode	Mean (*SD*)
All participants		*185*	100.0	15	16	13.90 (*3.49*)
Autistic		*72*	38.92	13.50	12	13.17 (*3.95*)
			% of autistic sample			
Biological sex						
	Male	*43*	59.72	13	12	12.95 (*3.52*)
	Female	*29*	40.28	15	18	13.48 (*4.56*)
Gender identity						
	Male	*42*	58.33	13	12	12.90 (*3.59*)
	Female	*23*	31.94	13	18	12.57 (*4.57*)
	Non-binary	*5*	6.94	17	17	16.40 (*1.95*)
Sector						
	Primary	*17*	23.61	8	8	7.76 (*1.86*)
	Secondary	*40*	55.56	14	12	14.23 (*1.93*)
	Post-16	*12*	16.67	17.50	18	17.33 (*0.78*)
Non-autistic		*113*	61.08	15.00	16	14.36 (*3.09*)
			% of non-autistic sample			
Biological sex						
	Male	*32*	28.32	15	16	14.16 (*3.05*)
	Female	*81*	71.68	16	16	14.44 (*3.13*)
Gender identity						
	Male	*36*	31.86	16	16	14.42 (*2.97*)
	Female	*68*	60.18	15	16	14.19 (*3.33*)
	Non-binary	*7*	6.19	15	14/15/16	15.29 (*1.11*)
Sector						
	Primary	*20*	17.70	9.50	10	8.95 (*3.25*)
	Secondary	*60*	53.10	15	15	14.93 (*1.22*)
	Post-16	*31*	27.43	17	16/17	16.55 (*0.57*)

4.15.2 Comparing mainstream autistic and non-autistic learner experience: Going to school

Whilst the majority of both autistic (57%, n = 41), and non-autistic (64%, n = 72), respondents said that they enjoyed going to school, a slightly higher proportion of the non-autistic respondents provided positive responses. The biggest variance between subgroups was amongst male participants, with 78% (n = 25) of non-autistic males enjoying going to school, compared to 63% (n = 27) of their autistic counterparts. The differences between autistic and non-autistic learners' enjoyment of going to school were not proven significant ($X^2(1) = 0.99$, $p = 0.32$).

Autistic young people (82%, n = 51) were considerably more likely to struggle with school related anxiety and worry, than their non-autistic peers (50%, n = 57), this was apparent across all subgroups. These marked differences in experience relating to school-based anxiety, were statistically significant ($X^2(1) = 17.15$, $p = <0.05$). Just 10% of non-autistic learners at primary school said they were affected by anxiety, while for 77% of autistic learners, at the same stage, anxiety was an issue. Although 59% of non-autistic females said school-based anxiety was a problem, this was still 29-percentage points below the response data of autistic females.

4.15.3 Comparing mainstream autistic and non-autistic learner experience: At school

Non-autistic learners (70%, n = 76) were happier at school than their autistic peers (56%, n = 40), a difference evident across all subgroups. However, differences between autistic and non-autistic learner experience in this area were not statistically significant ($X^2(1) = 3.27$, $p = 0.07$). Whilst 46% of the autistic females were happy at school, 68% of their non-autistic contemporaries felt the same way. Similar differences were reported amongst secondary school learners (20 p.p. difference).

Analysis of response data found autism to have a significant impact on a learner's feeling of safety at school ($X^2(1) = 3.77$, $p = 0.05$). Just 67% (n = 40) of autistic learners felt safe at school, by comparison, 80% (n = 85) their non-autistic peers considered school to be a safe environment. This disparity was most evident amongst males, whilst 93% of non-autistic males said they felt safe at school, just 69% of autistic males felt similarly.

When it came to unstructured periods during the school day, non-autistic learners (86%, n = 90) were substantially more likely to enjoy play and break times, than their autistic counterparts (46%, n = 33). Again, these differences were proven to be statistically significant ($X^2(1) = 30.98$, $p = <0.05$). The variances were most apparent amongst female respondents, whilst 84% of non-autistic females enjoyed these times, just 38% of the autistic females felt the same way. Amongst those in secondary education, double the proportion of non-autistic respondents enjoyed unstructured times, compared to their autistic peers (45 p.p. difference).

4.15.4 Comparing mainstream autistic and non-autistic learner experience: Feeling of inclusion at school

Perhaps understandably, autistic learners (87%, n = 54) were more keenly aware of their differences, however, it was noticeable that 50% (n = 52) of the non-autistic respondents also felt different from their peers. Chi-square analysis identified these differences as significant ($X^2(1) = 23.74$, $p = <0.05$). The disparity was most apparent amongst females (45 p.p. difference), and those in primary school (74 p.p. difference).

Non-autistic participants were significantly more likely to feel included at school (77%, n = 80), than their autistic contemporaries (48%, n = 29) ($X^2(1) = 13.95$, $p = <0.05$). This inequality was most evident amongst males, whilst 93% of non-autistic males felt included at school, just 54% of autistic males shared this feeling. Again,

there was a considerable difference in experience between autistic (54%) and non-autistic (89%) respondents educated within primary schools.

4.15.5 Comparing mainstream autistic and non-autistic learner experience: Peer relationships at school

When asked if they had friends at school, 74% (n = 53) of autistic learners said they did, compared to 93% (n = 99) of their non-autistic contemporaries, the differences identified as statistically significant ($X^2(1) = 13.46$, $p = <0.05$). The gap between subgroups was similar for both male (19 p.p. difference), and female (21 p.p. difference) participants, however the difference is most pronounced when looking at those in post-16 education, where 96% of non-autistic students said they had friends, compared to 67% of their autistic counterparts.

Bullying appears to be an issue for most learners, highlighted by the 58% (n = 60) of non-autistic respondents who said they had been the victim of school bullies; however, it is even more of an issue for autistic learners (76%, n = 47). Within this sample, the gap between cohorts was widest amongst males (21 p.p. difference), and those in secondary education (26 p.p. difference). The differences between autistic and non-autistic learners' experiences of being bullied at school were proven significant ($X^2(1) = 5.56$, $p = <0.05$).

4.15.6 Comparing mainstream autistic and non-autistic learner experience: School work

Response data suggests non-autistic learners (60%, n = 64) were coping better with their schoolwork, than autistic learners (54%, n = 33), although the differences were not significant ($X^2(1) = 0.63$, $p = 0.43$). There were minimal differences between the sexes, with non-autistic learner experiences more positive in both males and females. Non-autistic respondents attending secondary education (63%) were coping considerably better than their autistic peers (42%).

Non-autistic respondents (51%, n = 56) felt better supported than their autistic peers (44%, n = 27), however, the disparity was not statistically significant ($X^2(1) = 0.97$, $p = 0.33$). Both autistic and non-autistic males were considerably more satisfied with the help available than their female peers. Whilst there were minimal differences in experience between autistic and non-autistic learners in secondary and post-16 education, a 34-percentage point difference at primary level, indicated non-autistic learners felt considerably better supported.

Fewer than half of both autistic (37%, n = 14), and non-autistic (45%, n = 47) learners believed their teachers knew how best to support them, however 42% of autistic respondents said their teachers did not appreciate their support needs, compared to just 12% of those in the non-autistic sample. These differences in learner perceptions of their teachers' understanding of how to support them, were statistically significant ($X^2(2) = 16.15$, $p = <0.05$). The differences were most evident among female participants. Autistic females were more inclined to consider their teachers did not understand their support needs, than their non-autistic peers (41 p.p. difference). The sector which saw the largest difference of experience between autistic and non-autistic learners was primary. At primary level, whilst 78% of non-autistic respondents felt their teachers understood how to support them, just 44% of their autistic peers felt the same way.

4.15.7 Comparing mainstream autistic and non-autistic learner experience: Sensory differences at school

Given that one of the main areas of difficulty for autistic individuals centres around sensory processing, it is not surprising that they (79%, n = 30) reported greater awareness of excessive environmental noise at school, than their non-autistic counterparts (50%, n = 52). The differences proven to be statistically significant ($X^2(2) = 10.93$, $p = <0.05$). Both autistic and non-autistic females were more concerned with noise levels than their male peers, whilst there was a 27-percentage point difference between autistic and non-autistic males. For both cohorts, their

awareness of excessive noise increased as they progressed through the sectors. The difference between autistic and non-autistic experience was most evident amongst those in secondary education (31 p.p. difference).

4.15.8 Comparing mainstream autistic and non-autistic learner experience: Educator understanding

Non-autistic respondents (46%, n = 48) were much more inclined to agree that their teachers understood them, than the autistic cohort (29%, n = 11), whilst a considerably higher proportion of autistic respondents felt their teachers did not understand them as individuals, than their non-autistic peers (26 p.p. difference). These differences were identified as statistically significant ($X^2(2) = 12.33$, $p = <0.05$). The variance in experience was widest amongst the female participants. Just 25% of autistic females felt understood by their teachers, whilst 50% felt misunderstood. For their non-autistic contemporaries, whilst 44% felt understood, just 15% felt their teachers did not understand them. Across the sectors, autistic respondents felt most understood in post-16 education (50%), whilst those in secondary were most likely to feel misunderstood (56%). Their non-autistic counterparts felt most understood at primary school (61%), and teachers in post-16 provisions were thought to be the least understanding (35%).

4.15.10 Comparing mainstream autistic and non-autistic learner experience: Summary of findings

The results presented above combine the data harvested from two independent studies. The initial survey of autistic learners (APQ), conducted in the Spring of 2021, and the pupil experience survey (CGS), which was active in spring and summer 2022. In total, one-hundred and eighty-five respondents were included, seventy-two autistic, and one-hundred and thirteen non-autistic learners, all educated within mainstream education settings.

Clearly illustrated throughout the results, response data from both cohorts imply that non-autistic learners generally have more positive reflections of their educational experiences than their autistic peers. This trend is apparent, with minimal deviation, when biological sex differences and the age of respondents and the sector in which they were educated are taken into consideration. Across all areas and each of the fifteen questions, autism was seen to have a detrimental impact on young peoples' learning experiences, significantly so for the majority.

This comparative study highlights several key areas of concern. School leaders and policy makers might want to consider these findings and develop approaches to help support autistic learners and provide a more inclusive environment that does not act as a barrier to the learning and progress of autistic students.

4.16 Summary of Phase I, II and III

The 92 autistic CYP who took part in the initial pupil survey, represented c1% of the autistic pupil population in Wales, at the time of the survey. With the inclusion of the participants, responding to the WTSK follow-up study, a total of 119 autistic learners shape the findings presented above. In addition, 120 non-autistic respondents to the CGS, help identify where autistic learner experiences differ the most. The first phase APQ, aimed to gather sufficient information to enable an overview of the current lived experiences of autistic learners being educated in Wales. The considerable advanced planning and preparation, and providing potential respondents with information including question previews, ensured participants of all abilities felt able to contribute, ensuring data was demonstrative of many autistic young people from across the spectrum.

Generally, autistic respondents enjoyed going to school and were said to be happy whilst at school, despite the school-day experience increasing anxiety and worry. However, a sizeable proportion of respondents were not so positive about their education, with 28% indicating they did not feel safe at school. The majority reported feeling different from their peers, and as a result felt excluded. Forming

and maintaining friendships was tricky, with many having no friends at school, whilst most had experienced being bullied. Although the majority felt they could manage their schoolwork, many found this challenging, with 53% feeling unsupported. Unstructured times proved difficult for many, with sensory challenges being highlighted. Autistic learners feel educators have a general lack of understanding about how these sensory difficulties can impact their learning experiences, whilst many have no provision of a safe quiet space to help regulate sensory overwhelm. A third of respondents felt misunderstood (33%), with just 28% believing their teachers understood about autism.

Many factors were found to significantly impact pupil responses to each of the questions set, including biological sex, age and sector attended. The most influential factor that shapes the educational experiences of autistic young people is the setting in which they are educated. Mainstream pupils were more likely to have negative experiences across most of the areas discussed. Whilst pupils educated in specialist provisions were more likely to enjoy going to and be happier whilst at school, those in mainstream suffered greater school-based anxiety and felt less safe at school.

With 26% of autistic respondents feeling their teachers did not understand autism, it is interesting to highlight the key themes that autistic young people wish them to know. Respondents, in Phase II, were keen to point out that they are all different, unique individuals, therefore a one-size-fits-all approach is not always the most effective strategy to employ. Again, the issue of sensory overwhelm is raised as a central element that can impact education experiences for autistic young people, many of the sights, sounds, smells, and movements, at school can cause distress. The processing of information can be difficult, and participants wished teachers understood how challenging it can be for them to follow complex series of instructions and rules. Whilst some can react to sensory and processing overloads with what are seen as challenging behaviours, they want teachers to appreciate,

this does not make them 'naughty' and they do not want to be seen as 'bad' people. Paradoxically, some autistic individuals might not outwardly show the distress they are dealing with, many wear a mask, camouflaging their autism, presenting the appearance that they are ok and coping well. These want educators to be aware of this and to take time to understand what might be going on inside, appreciating the difficulties faced and considering opportunities to help them regulate.

Generally, non-autistic CYP enjoy going to school and feel happy, safe, and included whilst there. Most cope with work set for them, with the majority feeling understood and supported, seemingly having quality friendships and enjoying unstructured play/break times. This general data contrasts considerably to that emanating from the study of autistic pupils in several key areas. As identified above, autistic learners generally are less happy, feeling more excluded and less safe at school, suffering increased anxieties as a result. Non-autistic young people find making and maintaining friendships at school noticeably easier than their autistic peers, who are more likely to have experience of being bullied. The sensory difficulties many autistic CYP face mean that unstructured times during the school day are a far less enjoyable experience than for their non-autistic contemporaries, they could also be considered a contributary factor as to why, they feel less understood by their teachers.

The mains focus of this chapter highlights the different educational experiences between learners attending specialist provisions and those educated within mainstream settings, where some of the general differences between autistic and non-autistic learner experiences discussed are magnified. There were marked differences between the cohorts when asked if they enjoyed going to school, with autism proven significant in increasing school-based anxiety, whilst non-Autistic learners felt much safer at school. Autism significantly impacted the feeling of being different from peers, which increased their sense of exclusion. Whilst many non-autistic learners reported a feeling of difference, they felt more included than their

autistic peers. Another area significantly impacted by autism was the ability to form friendships, whilst 26% of autistic respondents said they had no friends at school, just 7% of the non-autistic respondents said they did not have friends. This linked into the significantly increased reports of bullying amongst autistic learners. Autistic learners were significantly less likely to enjoy unstructured times at mainstream school and found the challenge of environmental noise in school much more of an issue than their non-autistic peers. Autism significantly impacted learner perceptions of educator understanding, of them as individuals, with non-autistic respondents less likely to feel misunderstood by their teachers and feel better supported.

This chapter has identified several areas where autistic learner experiences are less positive than their non-autistic peers. Initially highlighting what they feel about their education, and areas where they believe educator understanding could be improved. The introduction of non-autistic participants helps present an overview of where educators could intervene to help improve day-to-day educational experiences of these vulnerable CYP.

The next chapter looks at the parent and carer perspective, reporting the results of the first phase parent/carer survey questionnaire (PCQ).

Chapter 5: Parental perceptions and experiences relating to their autistic child's education

5.1 Introduction

Having considered autistic learners' thoughts and feelings about their educational experiences, it is worth acknowledging the important role their parents play in trying to ensure they can access an education suitable to their individual needs (Blackmore & Hutchison, 2010). Parenting an autistic child can be challenging, and for some, increase parental stress (Tsermentseli, & Kouklari, 2021). Studies reveal one of the key contributory factors to this increase in stress, as the constant battle to ensure sufficient educational support is provided (Cooke, 2018). Parents often face a daily battle to ensure their child receives an appropriate education, needing to form strong working partnerships with practitioners and decision makers (Syriopoulou-Delli & Polychronopoulou, 2019).

5.2 Aims of this chapter

This chapter presents the results emanating from data harvested through parental responses to the survey of parents and carers of autistic learners in Wales (PCQ), as described in Chapter 3. The chapter is seeking to provide answers to the main research question underpinning this thesis (1), through consideration of parental experiences and perceptions, in relation to their autistic child's education, as a response to the second research sub-question (2).

1) Is the current model of inclusive education, whereby the majority of autistic learners attend mainstream settings, with varying levels of support, working for autistic learners in Wales?
2) How do the parents of autistic learners in Wales view their child's education, and what are their personal experiences of dealing with the educators and the education system?

5.3 Overview

An introduction and brief outline of the PCQ is provided in section 5.4, before the sample characteristics of participants' children, including biological sex and gender identity, age, and education status, are provided in 5.5. Section 5.6 provides a guide for how the results, within this chapter, are to be presented, with the results themselves following from sections 5.7 through to 5.15. Finally, section 5.16 will summarise the findings presented, to conclude with an overview of what the data tells us about parental perspectives and experiences in relation to their child's education. Data tables are presented throughout, to provide transparency and clarity, where tables are not included, these are available to view in Appendix 3b.

5.4 The parent/carer questionnaire (PCQ)

As laid out in Chapter 3, the survey of the parents and carers of autistic learners was launched following the full return to school for all learners; this follows the Winter COVID-19 lockdown in May 2021, and it remained active for two months. The online questionnaire comprised of mainly dichotomous (yes/no), and Likert scale questions. The survey attracted 511 responses with a completion rate of 43%. The process of data sorting and cleaning that followed the survey's closure confirmed 371 unique respondents had submitted sufficient information to be considered for analysis, the results of which are reported within this chapter. The ages of the participants' children ranged from three to 18 years (*Mean age* =11.08, *SD* = 3.95). Questions were formulated using a combination of reviews of literature, personal and professional experience, and consultation with other parents of autistic young people, and covered emerging key areas of interest.

As laid out in Chapter 3, parent views are gathered around their child's current placement, the level of educational support accessed, and educator understanding of autism. Parental perceptions relating to practitioner interactions and communication with themselves, and their children are explored, as well as how parents feel schools deal with reports of bullying. Parent/carer thoughts around the

inclusive nature of their child's school are presented as are their experiences of exclusion.

5.5 The PCQ sample demographics

The demographic data collected through the online questionnaire referred to the child of the participant, and not the parent who was responding. Table 5.5 presents the characteristics of this sample. The majority of participants were referring to their male children, whilst 52% were discussing experiences of mainstream education. Most respondents' children were attending either primary (46%) or secondary (35%) sectors.

Table 5.5 - PCQ whole sample demographic overview of participants' children

Variable			Participant age		
	n	%	Median	Mode	Mean (*SD*)
All participants	*371*	100.0	11.00	13	11.08 (*3.95*)
Biological sex					
Male	*269*	72.51	11.00	13	10.85 (*3.91*)
Female	*98*	26.42	12.00	15	11.56 (*3.96*)
Gender identity					
Male	*263*	70.89	11.00	10/13	10.86 (*3.88*)
Female	*92*	24.80	11.00	15	11.38 (*4.00*)
Non-binary	*7*	1.89	13.00	12/13	14.29 (*2.43*)
Learning provision					
Mainstream	*193*	52.02	11.00	11	10.69 (*3.93*)
Specialist	*104*	28.03	12.00	9/16	11.48 (*3.84*)
Flexi/blended	*14*	3.77	11.00	10/11/13	11.21 (*2.81*)
Educated at home	*14*	3.77	14.50	15	13.50 (*2.79*)
Not currently in education	*18*	4.85	14.50	15	11.72 (*5.35*)
Sector					
Pre-school	*14*	3.77	3.00	3	3.57 (*0.76*)
Primary	*169*	45.55	9.00	10	8.36 (*2.00*)
Secondary	*131*	35.31	14.00	13	13.75 (*1.58*)
Post-16	*38*	10.24	17.00	17	17.08 (*0.94*)

Most respondents (98%, n = 362) opted to complete the English language version of the online questionnaire, whilst 5% (n = 18) said their first language, as spoken at home, was Welsh, and three indicated they were bilingual, using both Welsh and English. The majority of respondents identified themselves as being White Welsh (63%, n = 235), whilst in total 96% (n = 357) were of a White ethnic background, with 12 of Mixed ethnicity (3%), whilst two did not declare. There were responses relating to learners being educated in each of the 22 Local Authority regions of Wales. The least were from Powys County (1%, n = 4), whilst 43 participants had children attending schools in the city and county of Swansea (12%).

Three hundred respondents said their child had a formal autism diagnosis (81%), whilst 86% (n = 62) of those without a diagnosis at time of participation said their child was on the diagnosis pathway. The average age at which learners were diagnosed was 7.31 years (*SD* = 3.46), with most diagnoses featuring the term 'autism or autism spectrum disorder' (83%, n = 247). Most considered their child to be verbal (82%, n = 301), with the remainder having communication abilities ranging from pre-verbal to selective verbal.

Autism, as a condition, seldom comes as a solitary diagnosis, within this sample 77% (n = 275) of the young people discussed had at least one other diagnosed condition. Sensory processing disorder (SPD) was the most commonly occurring condition within this cohort (26%, n = 93), whilst eighty-seven had Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) (24%). Autistic boys were more likely to have SPD or ADHD (26%, n = 69 for both), whilst for girls, anxiety disorders were more common (30%, n = 29). From a parental perspective, for 77% (n = 210) of those with multiple diagnoses, autism was considered the primary condition which impacts their child's education.

5.6 Presentation of PCQ results

Results within this chapter are presented in sections covering some of the key areas in which parents often have a key role within their child's education, with data tables for each question made available within Appendix 3b. Throughout the results, whole sample data will be presented, before consideration will be given to the significance of any variances between the following subgroups: biological sex of participant, sector attended (primary, secondary or post-16), and type of setting (mainly focusing on mainstream or specialist provision).

5.7 Parent results: School satisfaction

As evidenced in Table 5.7, less than a third of parents said that they felt supported in finding a suitable placement of their child (31%, n = 106), with only 18% (n = 62) indicating that their LA had discussed the various options available, in their area.

Table 5.7 - Parent results: School satisfaction: Data table

Did you feel supported in finding a suitable school placement, for your child?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*106*	30.55	*86*	33.20	*19*	22.09	*43*	22.87	*51*	49.04	*50*	30.12	*41*	31.78	*10*	26.32
No	*241*	69.45	*173*	66.80	*67*	77.91	*145*	77.13	*53*	50.96	*116*	69.88	*88*	68.22	*28*	73.68
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 4.12$, $p = 0.13$)				($X^2(4) = 28.98$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(3) = 0.60$, $p = 0.90$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

5.7.1 Parental satisfaction with their child's current placement

When asked if they felt their child was currently in the best setting to meet their individual needs, just 48% (n = 170) of parents responded positively (Table 5.7.1). This headline figure, however, is skewed by the considerable differences between parents with children attending mainstream and specialist provisions. Whilst 72% of those with children attending specialist settings felt their child's setting was

meeting their needs, just 37% of those discussing mainstream experiences felt the same way. Parents with children being educated through a flexi/blended learning pathway generally felt this was most suitable for their child (64%), whilst 57% of those with children learning from home considered this approach to be the best for meeting the individual needs of their child. These differences in parental experience between the learning provisions, were proven to be statistically significant (p = <0.05).

Table 5.7.1 - Parental satisfaction with their child's current placement: Data table

Is your child currently in the best setting to suit their individual needs?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*170*	48.30	*133*	50.96	*35*	39.33	*71*	36.79	*75*	72.12	*80*	47.34	*64*	48.85	*22*	57.89
No	*65*	18.47	*66*	25.29	*29*	32.58	*58*	30.05	*15*	14.42	*49*	28.99	*29*	22.14	*9*	23.68
Not sure	*87*	24.72	*62*	23.75	*25*	28.09	*64*	33.16	*14*	13.46	*40*	23.67	*38*	29.01	*7*	18.42
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(4) = 5.83$, $p = 0.21$)				($X^2(8) = 49.07$, $p =$ <0.05)				($X^2(6) = 10.44$, $p =$ <0.12)					

I am happy with the school my child currently attends

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Strongly agree	*68*	29.57	*50*	28.57	*18*	33.33	*22*	15.28	*40*	59.70	*24*	22.22	*34*	38.20	*7*	28.00
Agree	*60*	26.09	*49*	28.00	*11*	20.37	*44*	30.56	*14*	20.90	*33*	33.56	*20*	22.47	*6*	24.00
Neither	*37*	16.09	*27*	15.43	*9*	16.67	*30*	20.83	*	*	*20*	18.52	*14*	15.73	*	*
Disagree	*38*	16.52	*32*	18.29	*6*	11.11	*28*	19.44	*6*	8.96	*16*	14.81	*13*	14.61	*6*	24.00
Strongly disagree	*27*	11.74	*17*	9.71	*10*	18.52	*20*	13.89	*	*	*15*	13.89	*8*	8.99	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(8) = 10.53$, $p = 0.23$)				($X^2(12) = 53.89$, $p =$ <0.05)				($X^2(12) = 12.61$, $p = 0.40$)					

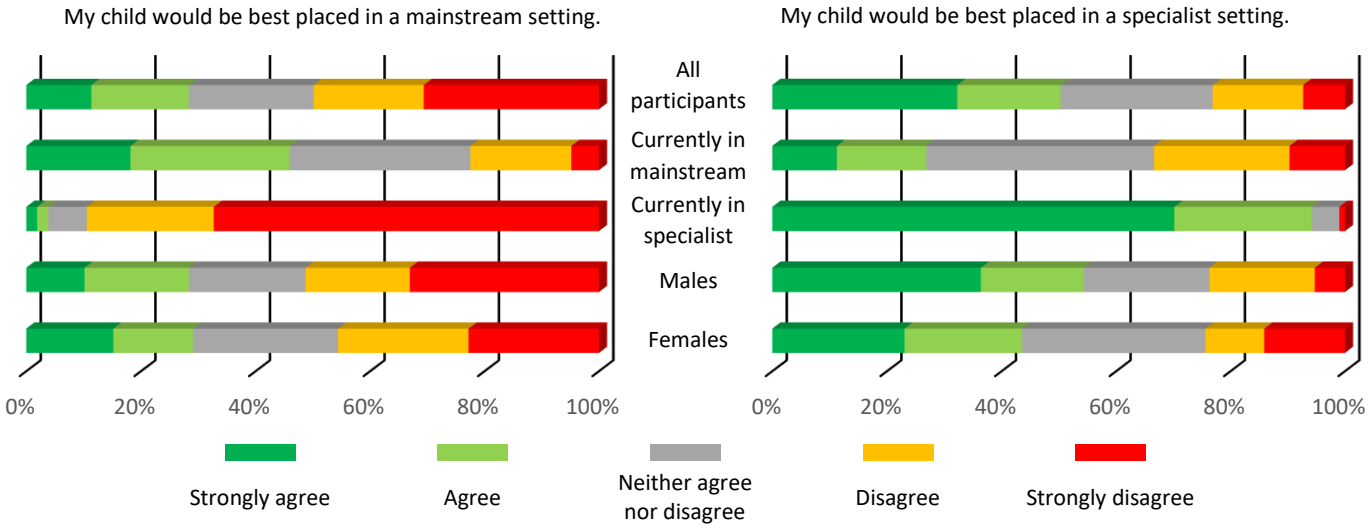
* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Despite less than half of respondents indicating their belief that their child was attending the best setting to meet their needs (48%), 56% were said to be happy with the school their child was attending (Table 5.7.1). Again, the difference in experience between parents discussing mainstream and specialist settings were significant, as shown in Table 5.7.1. Those with children attending specialist settings

were considerably more likely to be happy (35 p.p. difference) and less inclined to be unhappy (20 p.p. difference), than those whose children were attending mainstream schools. Neither the sex of respondents' children nor the sector in which they were educated were significantly impactful (Table 5.7.1).

With clear indications that parents were more satisfied when their child was receiving their education within specialist provision settings, it is unsurprising to find that 50% (n = 159) of all respondents felt their child was better placed within a specialist setting, whilst just 28% (n = 90) considered mainstream to be the most appropriate for their child. Figure 5.7.1 (below) illustrates parental preferences for either mainstream or specialist education provisions for their child, responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. A table presenting response data for this question is available in Appendix 3b.

Figure 5.7.1 - Parent perceptions on whether mainstream or specialist provisions were more suitable for their child



The biological sex of the child was not found to significantly impact parents' preferences for either mainstream ($X^2(8) = 7.25$, $p = 0.51$), or specialist ($X^2(8) = 14.30$, $p = 0.07$), education provisions. There were minimal differences in response data from parents of children attending primary, secondary, or post-16, settings

none of which were statistically significant in relation to mainstream ($X^2(12) = 8.14$, $p = 0.77$) or specialist provision ($X^2(12) = 8.58$, $p = 0.74$) preference.

Of those already attending mainstream, just 46% (n = 85) agreed that mainstream education was most suitable for their child, whilst 27% (n = 50) believed a specialist placement would be more appropriate; these differences were significant ($X^2(12) = 171.86$, $p = <0.05$). When looking at learners currently educated within specialist learning provisions, only 4% (n = 4) of their parents felt a mainstream placement would be better for meeting the needs of their child, whilst 94% (n = 98) considered specialist provision to be most suitable. Again, these differences were proven to be statistically significant ($X^2(12) = 142.92$, $p = <0.05$).

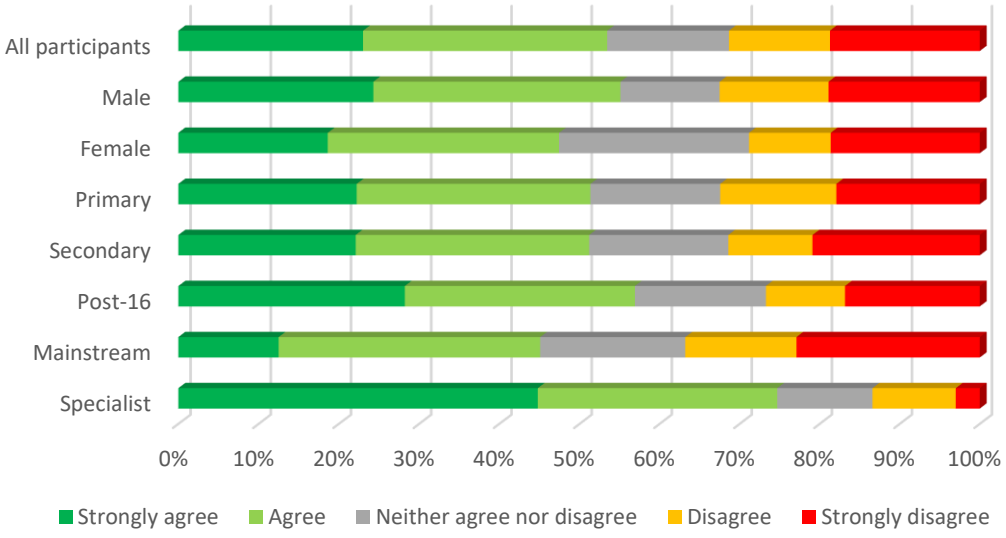
5.7.2 Parental perceptions of their child's enjoyment of school

With the majority of autistic learners telling us that they enjoyed going to school and felt happy when they were there (sections 4.10.1/2), seeking a parental perspective on how they felt their child was enjoying their educational experience adds another layer to help develop understanding. Parent participants were asked three questions to evaluate how they perceived their child was feeling about going to, being at, and returning home from, school. Just over half of parent respondents (53%, n = 123) felt that their child was happy going to school, whilst 31% (n = 72) said they were not. On average, those said to be happy (*Mean age* = 10.89, *SD* = 3.99) were slightly younger than those who were not (*Mean age* = 11.23, *SD* = 3.21) (Figure 5.7.2).

As illustrated in Figure 5.7.2, there were some differences between the subgroups. From a parental perspective, learners educated within specialist provisions (75%) were considerably happier going to school than their peers attending mainstream settings (45%). Chi-square analysis confirmed the type of settings a significantly influential in determining a learners' happiness about going to school ($X^2(12) =$

56.40, p = <0.05). However, difference between the sexes ($X^2(8) = 6.57$, $p = 0.58$) and across sectors ($X^2(12) = 7.39$, $p = 0.83$) were not found to be statistically significant. Response data presented in table form can be viewed in Appendix 3b.

Figure 5.7.2 - Parental response across subgroups: My child is happy going to school

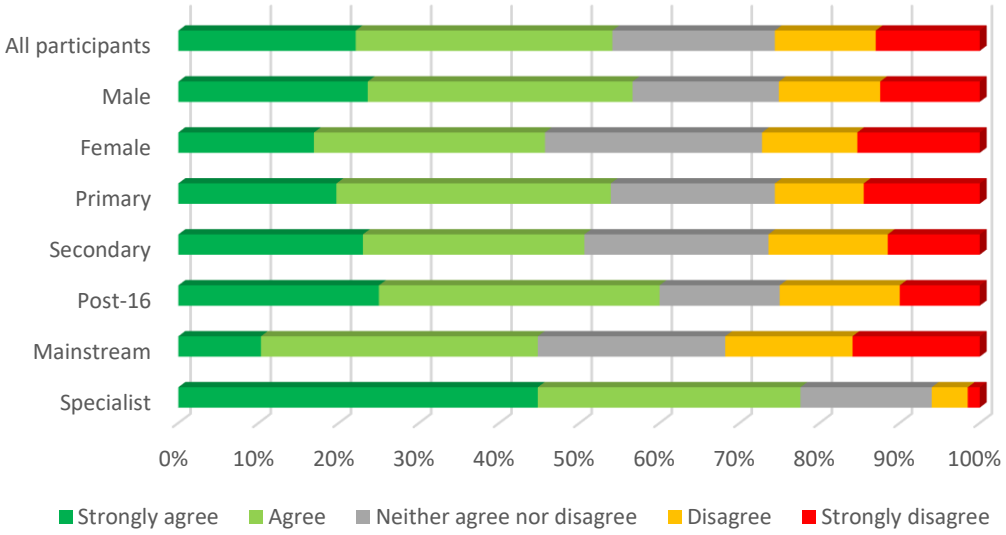


Although a quarter of parents (26%, n = 59) felt their child was not happy whilst at school, 57% (n = 96) indicated their belief that their child was happy during the school day. Again, on average, those said to be happy (*Mean age* = 10.75, *SD* = 3.94) were slightly younger than those who were not (*Mean age* = 11.46, *SD* = 3.24) (Figure 5.7.2a).

Figure 5.7.2a illustrates the response data across the subgroups, this can be found in table form within Appendix 3b. There were significant differences in the experiences of those discussing mainstream and specialist education provisions ($X^2(12) = 68.96$, p = <0.05), with those whose children attended specialist settings indicating a considerably higher level of learner happiness, whilst at school (33 p.p. difference). From a parent perspective, the differences between the sexes ($X^2(8)$ =

4.96, p = 0.76), and across sectors ($X^2(12) = 6.89$, p = 0.87) were not statistically significant.

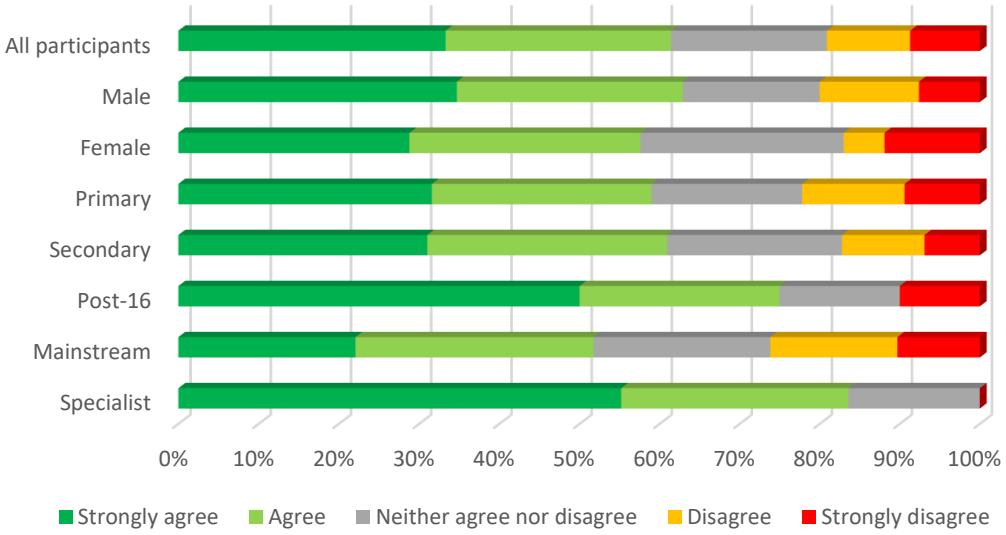
Figure 5.7.2a - Parental response across subgroups: My child is happy whilst at school



Participants' children were happiest when coming home from school, 62% (n = 142) of respondents said their child was happy arriving home, at the end of the school day, however 19% (n = 44) indicated the opposite to be the case. Those said to be happy getting home from school (*Mean age* = 11.21, *SD* = 3.79) were, on average, a little older than those who were not (*Mean age* = 10.59, *SD* = 3.26) (Figure 5.7.2b).

Learners attending specialist provisions (84%) were thought to be considerably happier coming home from school than their counterparts attending mainstream (52%). Given this difference, it is unsurprising to find that the type of setting attended had a significant impact in this area ($X^2(12) = 53.39$, p = <0.05). Although Figure 5.7.2b demonstrates some variances between subgroups, differences between the sexes ($X^2(8) = 7.25$, p = 0.51) and across sectors ($X^2(12) = 7.02$, p = 0.86) were not significant. Tabular presentation of response data for this question can be accessed in Appendix 3b.

Figure 5.7.2b - Parental response across subgroups: My child is happy coming home from school



5.8 Parental reports regarding their child's Statement of Educational Need and Individual Education Plan (IEP)

At the time of the survey, before the initial roll out of the new ALN Code, through the graduated response approach, learners with the most need requiring substantial support for their education were provided with a Statement, whilst all other learners identified has having SEN, should be issued with an IEP (Chapter 2).

5.8.1 Statement of Educational Need

More than half of respondents said that their child had a Statement of Educational Need (59%, n = 190). Autistic males (61%) were more likely to have a Statement, than their female peers (52%) (Table 5.8.1). Within this sample, Statements were common amongst those attending pre-school settings (55%), primary (53%), and post-16 provisions (57%), whilst according to parental reports, 66% of those in secondary school had a Statement. More than double the proportion of learners attending mainstream (42%), who were educated in specialist settings (90%), or through a flexi/blended learning pathway (90%) had a Statement.

For the majority (76%), autism was the primary type of need as recorded within their child's Statement. Despite variances across subgroups, none were considered statistically significant, as shown in Table 5.8.1.

Table 5.8.1 - Parent results: Statement of educational need: Data table

Does your child have a Statement of Educational Need?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*190*	58.64	*147*	61.00	*42*	51.85	*79*	42.25	*90*	90.00	*84*	52.83	*80*	65.57	*20*	57.14
No	*134*	41.36	*94*	39.00	*39*	48.15	*108*	57.75	*10*	10.00	*72*	45.28	*42*	34.43	*15*	42.86

Is autism the primary need recorded within your child's Statement of Educational Need?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*141*	76.22	*114*	78.62	*26*	66.67	*55*	72.37	*71*	80.68	*63*	75.90	*56*	72.73	*17*	85.00
No	*44*	23.78	*31*	21.38	*13*	33.33	*21*	27.63	*17*	19.32	*20*	24.10	*21*	27.27	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 2.74$, $p = 0.26$)				($X^2(4) = 4.12$, $p = 0.39$)				($X^2(3)$ 2.93, $p = 0.40$)					

Does your child receive all the support detailed within their Statement of Educational Need?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*120*	64.86	*100*	68.97	*19*	48.72	*41*	53.95	*68*	77.27	*60*	72.29	*47*	61.04	*9*	45.00
No	*65*	35.14	*45*	31.03	*20*	51.28	*35*	46.05	*20*	22.73	*23*	27.10	*30*	38.96	*11*	55.00
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 6.07$, $p = 0.05$)				($X^2(4) = 12.95$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(3) = 6.47$, $p = 0.09$)					

Have you been informed of the upcoming changes to the provision of Statements of Educational Need?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*59*	31.89	*47*	32.41	*11*	28.21	*28*	36.84	*24*	27.27	*23*	27.10	*28*	36.36	*7*	35.00
No	*126*	68.11	*98*	67.59	*28*	71.75	*48*	63.16	*64*	72.73	*60*	72.29	*49*	63.64	*13*	65.00
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 2.58$, $p = 0.28$)				($X^2(4) = 9.84$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(3) = 4.07$, $p = 0.25$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Although the Statement is a legally binding document (see Chapter 2), 35% (n = 65) of parents suggest that their child was not in receipt of all the support prescribed

(Table 5.8.1). Males (69%) were more likely than females (49%), to be accessing all the support required; these differences were statistically significant (p = 0.05). Differences in experience, depending on the type of learning provision accessed, were proven statistically significant (p = <0.05). A little over half of those attending mainstream (54%), and 77% in specialist provisions, were said to have access to all prescribed support. Response data suggests support provision decreases as learners progress along their educational journey, however, these differences between the sectors were not statistically significant, as shown in Table 5.8.1.

With the survey having been undertaken just a few months before the initial stages of the planned roll out of the new ALN Code (WG, 2021a), parents whose children had a Statement were asked if their LA, or child's school, had informed them of the upcoming changes that would impact support provision, for their child (Table 5.8.1). In most cases (68%), participants said that they had received no information. Mainstream schools (37%) were better at passing on the relevant information, when compared to specialist settings (27%). Chi-square analysis identified these differences, between setting type, as statistically significant (p = <0.05).

5.8.2 Individual Education Plan

Parental reports indicate that 65% (n = 195) of learners within this sample, had an IEP in place, whilst 24% (n = 72) did not (Table 5.8.2). Males were more likely to have an IEP than females (18 p.p. difference). Higher proportions of learners in primary (68%), and secondary (67%), schools had IEPs compared to those in pre-school and post-16 education, where just 50% of learners had one in place. The majority of those attending specialist provisions (89%), and 57% of mainstream educated learners were supported by an IEP.

Many parents (67%, n = 127) said their child's school included them in the setting and reviewing of their child's IEP (Table 5.8.2). Specialist settings (77%) were more

Table 5.8.2 - Parent results: Individual Education Plans: Data table

Does your child have an Individual Education Plan?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*195*	65.00	*154*	68.75	*38*	51.35	*100*	56.82	*79*	88.76	*98*	68.06	*76*	66.67	*16*	50.00
No	*72*	24.00	*46*	20.54	*25*	33.78	*49*	27.84	*6*	6.74	*34*	23.61	*22*	19.30	*11*	34.38
Not sure	*33*	11.00	*22*	9.82	*11*	14.86	*27*	15.34	*	*	*12*	8.33	*16*	14.04	*5*	15.63

Are you, as parents, involved in the setting/reviewing of your child's IEP targets?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*127*	66.84	*101*	66.45	*25*	67.57	*59*	59.60	*60*	76.92	*65*	67.01	*49*	66.22	*9*	64.29
No	*63*	33.16	*51*	33.55	*12*	32.43	*40*	40.40	*18*	23.08	*32*	32.99	*25*	33.78	*5*	35.71
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 0.52$, $p = 0.77$)				($X^2(1) = 5.945$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(3) = 0.45$, $p = 0.93$)					

Is your child involved in the setting/reviewing of their IEP targets?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*107*	55.15	*81*	52.60	*25*	65.79	*47*	47.00	*49*	62.82	*47*	48.45	*45*	59.21	*12*	75.00
No	*50*	25.77	*42*	27.27	*8*	21.05	*31*	31.00	*15*	19.23	*32*	32.99	*13*	17.11	*	*
Not sure	*37*	19.07	*31*	20.13	*5*	13.16	*22*	22.00	*14*	17.95	*18*	18.56	*18*	23.68	-	-
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(4) = 3.16$, $p = 0.53$)				($X^2(8) = 7.21$, $p = 0.51$)				($X^2(6) = 10.34$, $p = 0.11$)					

Is your child's IEP reviewed regularly?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*117*	60.62	*92*	59.74	*24*	63.16	*47*	47.47	*63*	80.77	*56*	57.73	*46*	60.53	*10*	66.67
No	*42*	21.76	*33*	21.43	*9*	23.68	*33*	33.33	*5*	6.41	*23*	23.71	*15*	19.74	*	*
Not sure	*34*	17.62	*29*	18.83	*5*	13.16	*19*	19.19	*10*	12.82	*18*	18.56	*15*	19.74	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(4) = 1.34$, $p = 0.86$)				($X^2(8) = 26.59$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(4) = 1.34$, $p = 0.86$)					

Do you feel your child's IEP targets are realistic and achievable?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*105*	54.40	*83*	53.90	*21*	55.26	*41*	41.41	*58*	74.36	*53*	54.64	*39*	51.32	*8*	53.33
No	*36*	18.65	*27*	17.53	*9*	23.68	*27*	27.27	*	*	*23*	23.71	*11*	14.47	*	*
Not sure	*52*	26.94	*44*	28.57	*8*	21.05	*31*	31.31	*17*	21.79	*21*	21.65	*26*	34.21	*5*	33.33
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(4) = 2.11$, $p = 0.72$)				($X^2(8) = 32.88$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(6) = 9.32$, $p = 0.16$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

inclusive of parental input than their counterparts in mainstream (60%), these differences were proven to be statistically significant (p = <0.05). As shown in Table 5.8.2, the biological sex of the learner, nor the sector in which they were educated, were proven to significantly impact parental involvement in IEP reviews.

When asked if they thought their child was actively involved in setting and reviewing their own IEP targets, whilst 55% (n = 107) said they were, 26% (n = 50) suggested they were not (Table 5.8.2). There was no discernible age difference between learners who were involved (*Mean age* 11.00, *SD* = 3.74) and those who played no part in the review process (*Mean age* 11.21, *SD* = 4.23). As demonstrated in Table 5.8.2, despite variations in response data, neither biological sex, sector, nor setting, differences were statistically significant in this area.

Regular reviews of IEPs are mandatory, however 22% (n = 42) of respondents believed their child's IEP was not reviewed on a regular basis (Table 5.8.2). Whilst 81% of parents referring to specialist provisions believed regular reviews were taking place, just 47% of those whose children attend mainstream settings felt the same. These differences in parental experience between mainstream and special education provisions were identified as being statistically significant (Table 5.8.2). Parental reported differences between the sexes, and across sectors, were not statistically significant.

Just over half of parent participants felt that their child's IEP targets were realistic and achievable (54%, n = 105), whilst 19% (n = 36) thought they were not (Table 5.8.2). There were minimal differences between the average age of those whose parents responded positively (*Mean age* 10.77, *SD* = 4.13), or negatively (*Mean age* 10.53, *SD* = 3.08). Three quarters of parents with children educated in specialist provisions (74%) considered their child's IEP targets to be realistic and achievable, compared to just 41% of those with experience of mainstream education. The

difference in experience between mainstream and specialist settings was proven significant (Table 5.8.2). Minimal variances between sexes and across sectors were not significant, as shown in Table 5.8.2.

5.9 Parental perceptions of educational support

When asked if their child received any support in addition to that available to all their peers, a 34% (n = 103) said they did not (Table 5.9). Perhaps understandably, given the nature of the learning environment, and the general levels of support available to all learners, parents indicated their children attending specialist settings (51%) were less likely to receive additional support, than those in mainstream (75%). These setting differences were proven statistically significant, whilst differences between the sexes and across sectors were not, as shown in Table 5.9.

Table 5.9 - Parental perceptions of educational support: Data table

Does your child receive any additional support at school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*197*	65.67	*149*	66.22	*46*	63.01	*136*	74.73	*49*	50.52	*94*	62.25	*74*	67.89	*20*	66.67
No	*103*	34.33	*76*	37.78	*27*	36.99	*46*	25.27	*48*	49.48	*57*	37.75	*35*	32.11	*10*	33.33
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 1.30$, $p = 0.52$)				($X^2(3) = 21.60$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(3) = 3.66$, $p = 0.30$)					

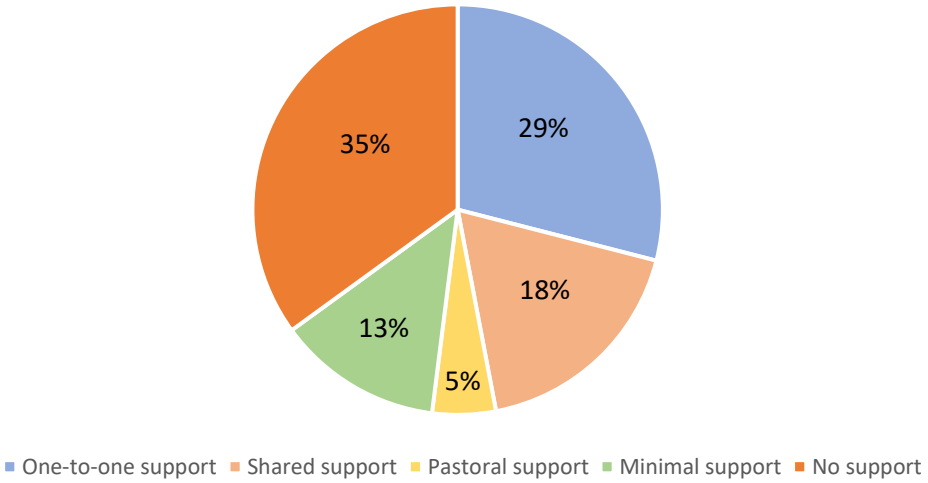
5.9.1 Level of additional support

A third of respondents said their child was receiving no additional support at school (35%, n = 103) (Figure 5.9.1). A large proportion of those with children who were receiving additional support, said their child benefitted from one-to-one support at school (44%, n = 86), whilst the others were supported to varying levels.

The difference in support provision between setting type were proven significant ($X^2(12) = 49.03$, $p = <0.05$). Whilst 94% of those in receipt of additional support, attending specialist settings, were either receiving one-to-one or shared support, just 68% of those educated in mainstream accessed similar levels of support.

Although, autistic males (76%) were more likely to receive higher levels of support, than their female peers (61%), the differences between the sexes were not identified as being significant ($X^2(8) = 14.48$, $p = 0.70$). The proportion of learners receiving either one-to-one or shared support decreased as learners progressed through the sectors, though the differences were not statistically significant ($X^2(12) = 19.37$, $p = 0.08$).

Figure 5.9.1 - Parental response: What level of additional support does your child receive at school?



5.9.2 The right level of support?

Whilst 41% (n = 127) of all respondents felt their child was receiving the right level of support at school, 45% (n = 142) believed they were not (Table 5.9.2). Response data differences between the sexes and across sectors were not significant.

Parents of learners attending specialist provisions (72%) were considerably happier with the level of support available to their child, than those whose children attend mainstream settings (24%). Chi-square analysis indicating the type of setting attended to be a significant factor (Table 5.9.2). Whether or not a learner was receiving additional support at school, was not significantly linked to parental satisfaction with the level of support provided ($X^2(2) = 3.52$, $p = 0.17$). Of those

whose children were not supported, 34% were satisfied, however, 53% believed their child required some support. For parents with children already receiving support, whilst 43% felt the support provision was sufficient, 42%, did not.

Table 5.9.2 - Parent perceptions of level of support afforded their child: Data table

Do you think your child receive the right level of support at school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*127*	40.58	*100*	43.10	*25*	31.65	*43*	23.76	*68*	71.58	*59*	38.82	*48*	40.68	*15*	45.45
No	*142*	45.37	*99*	42.67	*43*	54.43	*105*	58.01	*19*	20.00	*78*	51.32	*46*	38.98	*14*	42.42
Not sure	*44*	14.06	*33*	14.22	*11*	13.92	*33*	18.23	*8*	8.42	*15*	9.87	*24*	20.34	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(4) = 6.65$, $p = 0.16$)				($X^2(8) = 68.43$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(6) = 8.32$, $p = 0.22$)					

Figure 5.9.2 - Parental response of those whose children were already receiving some level of support: Do you think your child receives the right level of support?

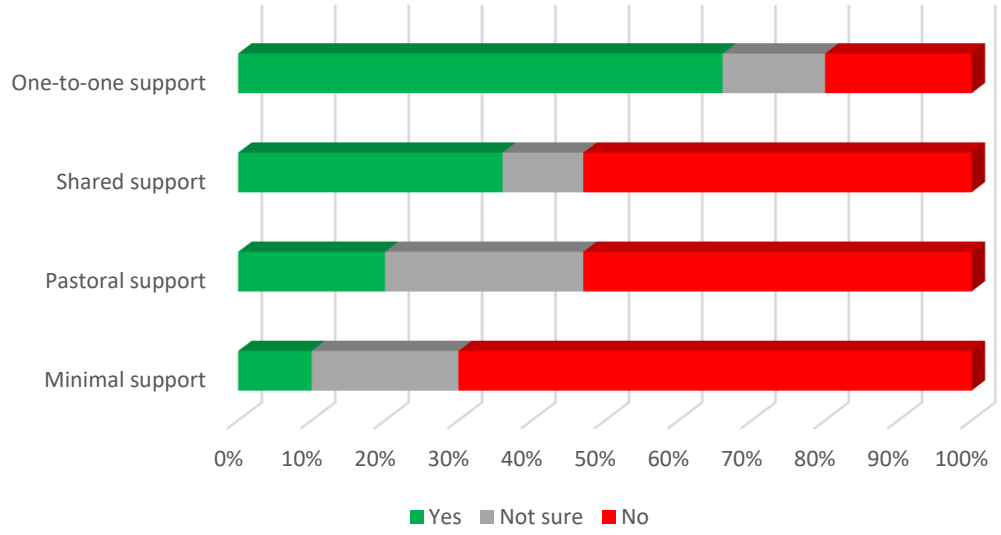


Figure 5.9.2 illustrates that amongst those whose children were already receiving support at school, as the level of support decreased, so did parental satisfaction. Satisfaction was highest here a learner was supported one-to-one (66%), and lowest where minimal support was provided (10%). Conversely, whilst 70% of parents who said their child was accessing minimal support were dissatisfied, 20% of those with

children supported one-to-one still considered the level of support to be insufficient.

5.9.3 My child needs more support to help them reach their full potential

Of 243 respondents to this question, 71% (n = 173) agreed that, for their child to reach their full potential, they required more support at school (Table 5.9.3). As learners progressed along their educational journeys from primary, through to secondary, and onto post-16 education, the proportion of parents who felt more support was necessary decreased. Analysis identified these sector differences as being statistically significant (Table 5.9.3). Differences in response data relating to male and female learners, and between those educated in mainstream and specialist provision settings were not considered significantly impactful on parental perspectives, as shown in Table 5.9.3. Whether or not a participant's child was receiving additional support as school, did not significantly impact parental views, in this area ($X^2(4) = 1.60$, $p = 0.81$), with the majority of both cohorts believing their child needed more support to help them achieve to their potential.

Table 5.9.3 - My child needs more support to help them reach their full potential: Data table

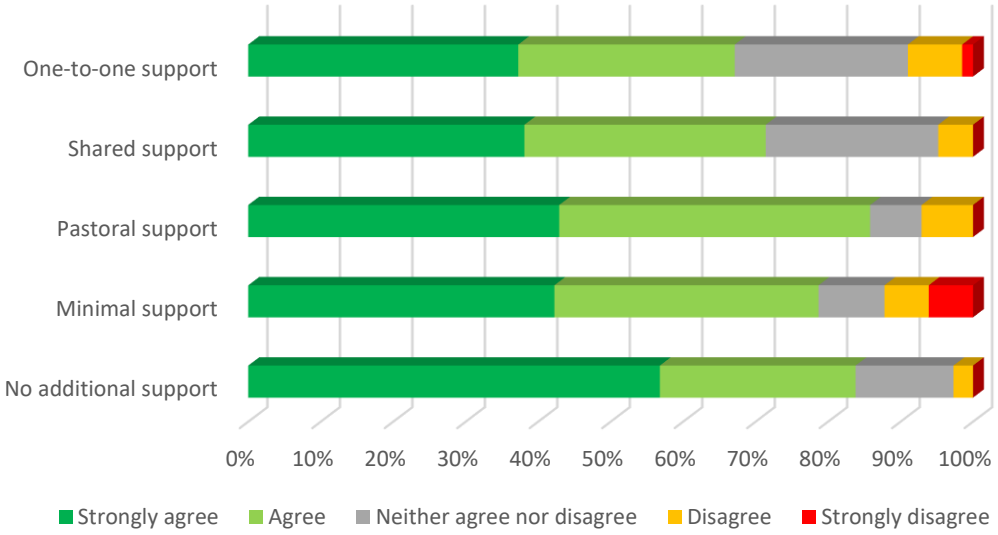
My child needs more support if they are to reach their full potential.

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Strongly agree	*95*	39.09	*70*	39.77	*25*	38.46	*67*	46.21	*16*	23.88	*59*	49.17	*28*	29.79	*5*	22.73
Agree	*78*	32.10	*55*	31.25	*22*	33.85	*48*	33.10	*22*	32.84	*32*	26.67	*39*	41.49	*6*	27.27
Neither	*51*	20.99	*36*	20.45	*14*	21.54	*21*	14.48	*23*	34.33	*22*	18.33	*16*	17.02	*10*	45.45
Disagree	*14*	5.76	*11*	6.25	*	*	*7*	4.83	*	*	*7*	5.83	*6*	6.38	*	*
Strongly disagree	*5*	2.06	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	-	-	*5*	5.32	-	-
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(8) = 2.45$, $p = 0.96$)				($X^2(16) = 25.48$, $p = 0.06$)				($X^2(12) = 28.69$, $p = <0.05$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Figure 5.9.3 (below) illustrates how parental opinion varies depending on the level of support their child already accesses. Interestingly, even with their child being supported one-to-one, 67% of parents felt their child needed more support to reach their potential.

Figure 5.9.3 - Parental response: My child needs more support to help them reach their full potential



5.10 Parent perceptions of communication between school and home

Whilst 66% (n = 194) of respondents indicated that there was regular communication between themselves and their child's school regarding their child's education, the remainder said this wasn't the case (Table 5.10). Most parents whose children attend specialist provisions (85%) said they were in regular communication with their child's school, in contrast just 60% of parents referring to mainstream settings said regular communication was maintained. These differences in experience between education provisions were identified as being significant (p = <0.05). Sex and sector differences were not significantly impactful in this area, as shown in Table 5.10.

Table 5.10 - Parent perceptions of communication between school and home: Data table

Is there regular communication between you and the school/LA about your child's education?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*194*	65.99	*150*	68.49	*43*	58.90	*105*	60.34	*74*	85.06	*98*	68.53	*70*	63.06	*16*	53.33
No	*99*	33.67	*69*	31.51	*29*	39.73	*69*	39.66	*13*	14.94	*45*	31.47	*40*	36.04	*14*	46.67
Not sure	*	*	-	-	*	*	-	-	-	-	-	-	*	*	-	-
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(4) = 5.13$, $p = 0.28$)				($X^2(8) = 46.75$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(6) = 9.68$, $p = 0.14$)					

Do you feel there is enough communication between you and the school/LA about to your child's education?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*133*	45.86	*104*	48.15	*28*	38.89	*57*	32.95	*63*	73.26	*58*	41.73	*54*	48.65	*13*	43.33
No	*135*	46.55	*95*	43.98	*39*	54.17	*99*	57.23	*21*	24.42	*67*	48.20	*50*	45.05	*16*	53.33
Not sure	*22*	7.59	*17*	7.87	*5*	6.94	*17*	9.83	*	*	*14*	10.07	*7*	6.31	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(4) = 2.44$, $p = 0.66$)				($X^2(8) = 39.22$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(6) = 8.08$, $p = 0.23$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

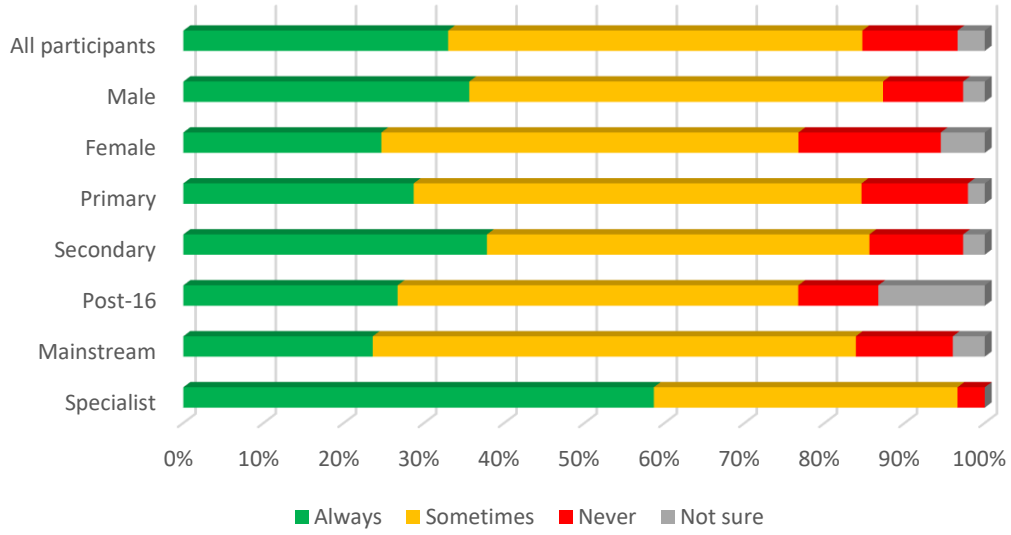
Despite data suggesting communication was regular, just 46% of respondents believed there was sufficient communication from their child's educators (Table 5.10). Again, differences in response data between the sexes and across sectors were not significant. Overall response data in this area is skewed by the differences in experience between those with children attending mainstream and specialist provision settings. Whilst 73% of those discussing specialist provisions felt the level of communication to be sufficient, just 33% of parents referring to mainstream settings felt the same way. As demonstrated in Table 5.10, Chi-square analysis established these differences between provisions as statistically significant.

5.10.1 Do parents feel listened to?

When asked if they felt listened to, when discussing their child's education with the school, just 33% (n = 97) of respondents said they always did, whilst 12% (n = 35)

believed their voices were never listened to (Figure 5.10.1). A table presenting response data for this question is accessible in Appendix 3b.

Figure 5.10.1 - Parental response across subgroups: When discussing your child's education, do you feel the school listen to your point-of-view?

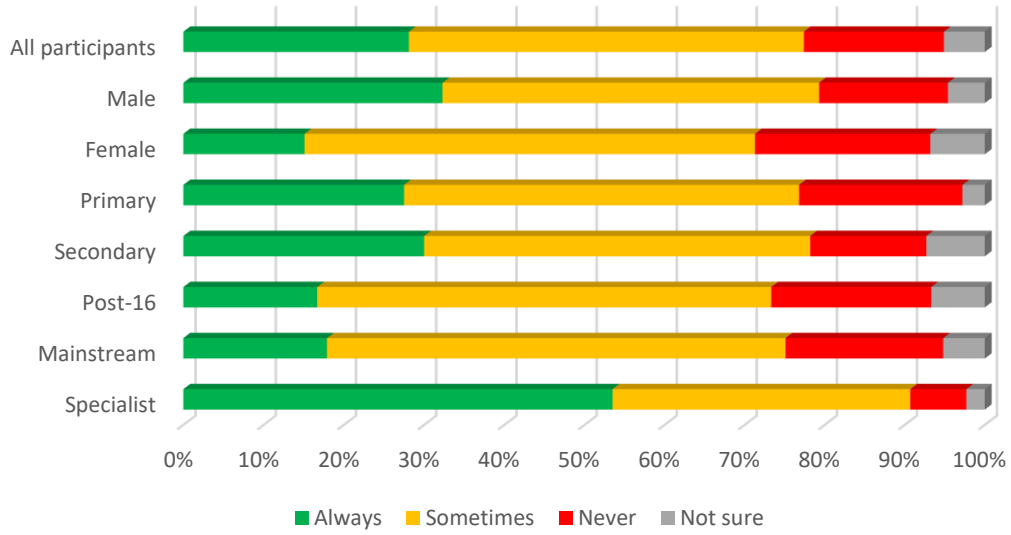


Parents sharing their experiences of secondary education were more likely to always feel listened to than those with children at primary or post-16 level. Analysis highlighted these differences between the sectors, as statistically significant ($X^2(9) = 16.72$, $p = <0.05$). Clear differences in experience between learning provisions were statistically significant ($X^2(12) = 77.57$, $p = <0.05$). Whilst 59% of parents discussing their child's specialist settings felt listened to all of the time, just 24% of the parents of children attending a mainstream setting felt the same way. As illustrated in Figure 5.10.1, parents of males felt more listened to than females, however these differences between the sexes were not identified as being significant ($X^2(6) = 6.46$, $p = 0.37$).

5.10.2 Do parents feel understood?

Most respondents indicated that their belief that their child's educators understood their point of view, at least some of the time (77%, n = 226), whilst 18% (n = 51) always felt misunderstood (Figure 5.10.2).

Figure 5.10.2 - Parental response across subgroups: When discussing your child's education, do you feel the school understand your point-of-view?

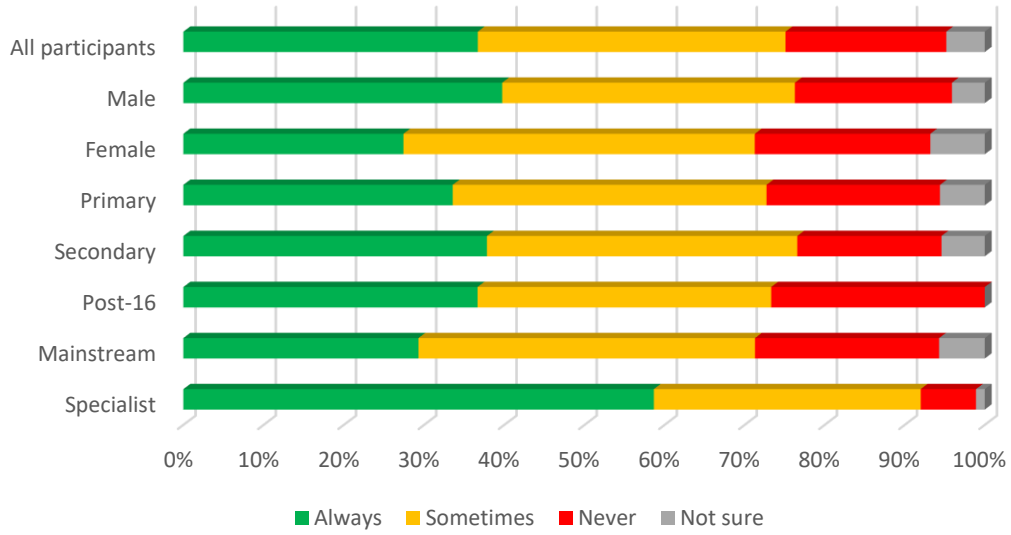


Whilst Figure 5.10.2 clearly illustrates some differences in parental responses across sub-groups, these were not proven significant for either biological sex (p = 0.17), or sector (p = 0.35). However, the marked difference in experience between those whose children attend mainstream and specialist provisions was proven statistically significant ($X^2(12) = 71.24$, p = <0.05). Although 75% of those discussing mainstream felt understood at least some of the time, 91% of their counterparts with children attending specialist provision settings reported similar levels of understanding. For this question, response data presented in tabular form is presented in Appendix 3b.

5.10.3 Do parents feel respected?

A fifth of parent participants said that they never feel their child's educators respect their point-of-view (20%, n = 59), however, 75% (n = 221) indicated that they feel respected, at least some of the time (Figure 5.10.3).

Figure 5.10.3 - Parental response across subgroups: When discussing your child's education, do you feel the school respect your point-of-view?



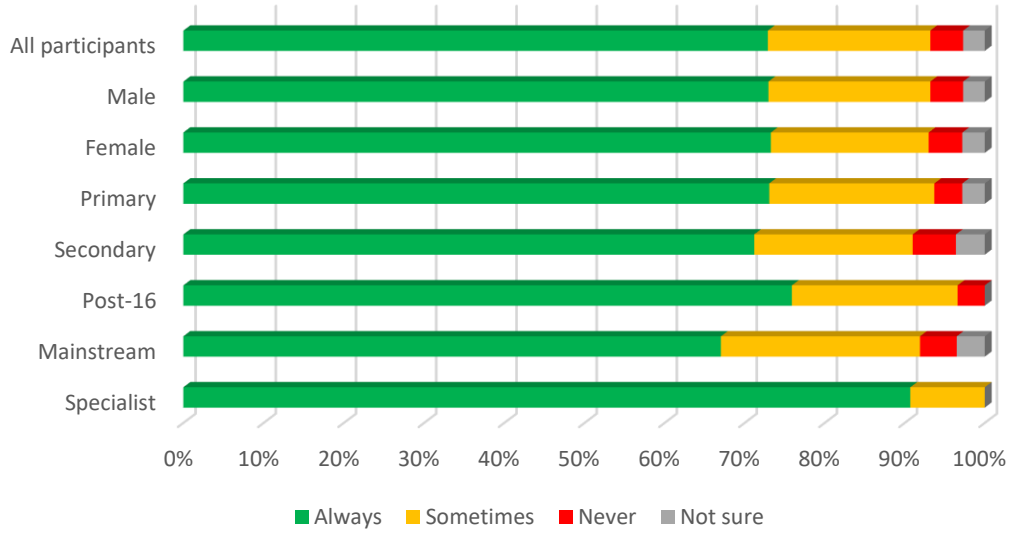
Staff based in specialist provisions (59%) were thought to be more respectful of parental views than those working in mainstream (29%). These differences in parental experience between the type of provision in which their child was educated were proven significant ($X^2(12) = 57.72$, $p = <0.05$). Despite evident variances between sexes and across sectors, as illustrated in Figure 5.10.3, neither were proven significant (sex differences: $p = 0.58$, sector differences: $p = 0.44$). Appendix 3b, presents the data table of parental responses to this question.

5.10.4 Do educators make themselves understood?

Approaching three quarters of parent participants said that their child's educators always communicated using language and vocabulary that they understood (73%, n

= 212), whilst just 4% (n = 12) said in their experience this was never the case (Figure 5.10.4).

Figure 5.10.4 - Parental response across subgroups: When discussing your child's education, do the teachers communicate with you using language and vocabulary you understand?



As can be seen in Figure 5.10.4, there were no discernible differences in experience between parents of male or female learners, and little between those educated across the sectors. Not one parent shared a negative response when considering their experiences of communicating with staff based within specialist provisions, with all respondents suggesting staff language was understandable most of the time. Whilst 92% of parents discussing mainstream shared this opinion, 5% said staff never used language and vocabulary that they understood. Chi-square analysis identified these setting differences as being statistically significant ($X^2(12) = 47.13$, $p = <0.05$). Neither the biological sex of the learner ($p = 0.98$), nor the sector attended ($p = 0.98$) were significant in this area (see data table in Appendix 3b).

5.11 Parental thoughts about inclusion and perceptions of the inclusive nature of their child's school placement

Most parents either strongly agreed, or agreed (92%, n = 264), with the statement 'I consider inclusion to be an important part of my child's education', not one participant disagreed (Table 5.11). Parents with children attending mainstream settings (95%) voiced a greater interest in the importance of inclusion than those whose children were attending specialist provisions (88%), the setting differences were proven statistically significant (p = <0.05). As evidenced in Table 5.11, neither the biological sex of their child, nor the sector they attended, significantly impactful on parental thoughts regarding the importance on inclusion.

Table 5.11 - Parental thoughts about inclusion: Data table

I consider inclusion to be an important part of my child's education

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Strongly agree	*194*	67.36	*147*	69.01	*47*	64.38	*115*	66.86	*59*	71.08	*104*	73.76	*65*	60.19	*19*	65.52
Agree	*70*	24.31	*47*	22.07	*21*	28.77	*49*	28.49	*14*	16.87	*30*	21.28	*32*	29.63	*6*	20.69
Neither	*24*	8.33	*19*	8.92	*5*	6.85	*8*	4.65	*10*	12.05	*7*	4.96	*11*	10.19	*	*
Disagree	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Strongly disagree	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(4) = 7.73$, $p = 0.10$)				($X^2(8) = 15.46$, p = <0.05)				($X^2(6) = 8.84$, $p = 0.18$)					

Do you feel your child agrees with your view on the importance of inclusion?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*149*	54.98	*106*	52.48	*42*	62.69	*101*	59.41	*39*	47.56	*75*	54.74	*53*	54.08	*18*	69.23
No	*33*	12.18	*27*	13.37	*6*	8.96	*18*	10.59	*12*	14.63	*13*	9.49	*14*	14.29	*	*
Not sure	*89*	32.84	*69*	34.16	*19*	28.36	*51*	30.00	*31*	37.80	*49*	35.77	*31*	31.63	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(4) = 2.71$, $p = 0.61$)				($X^2(6) = 4.35$, $p = 0.63$)				($X^2(6) = 7.71$, $p = 0.26$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Of the parents who valued the importance of inclusion in their child's education, 58% (n = 145) indicated their belief that their child shared similar views (Table 5.11).

Parental reports suggest that, on average, young people who felt inclusion was important to their education (*Mean age = 11.32* years*, SD =* 3.71) were slightly older than those who did not (*Mean age = 11.06* years*, SD =* 3.63). Despite differences revealed across all subgroups, neither biological sex, sector, nor setting, were proven to be a significant influence, as shown in Table 5.11.

5.11.1 How inclusive do parents feel their child's school is?

Whilst 54% (n = 154) of respondents suggest their child's current placement offered an inclusive environment, 28% (n = 78) felt it did not (Table 5.11.1). Specialist provision settings (78%) were seen as considerably more inclusive than mainstream (48%). Chi-square analysis identified these differences between setting type as statistically significant (p = <0.05). Response data differences between the sex of the child being discussed, and the sector in which they were educated were not statistically significant, as demonstrated in Table 5.11.1.

Table 5.11.1 - How inclusive do parents feel their child's school is?: Data table

Do you feel your child's school offers an inclusive environment?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*154*	54.23	*118*	56.46	*34*	46.58	*82*	47.67	*65*	78.31	*77*	55.40	*56*	52.83	*17*	58.62
No	*78*	27.46	*50*	23.92	*28*	38.36	*51*	29.65	*10*	12.05	*44*	31.65	*24*	22.64	*8*	27.59
Not sure	*52*	18.31	*41*	19.62	*11*	15.07	*39*	22.67	*8*	9.64	*18*	12.95	*26*	24.53	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(4) = 7.39$, $p = 0.12$)				($X^2(8) = 56.61$, p = <0.05)				($X^2(6) = 9.85$, $p = 0.13$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Table 5.11.1a (below) identifies the most inclusive learning environments, from a parental perspective. Parents of those attending specialist pre-schools, primary and secondary settings, were most positive regarding the inclusive nature of their child's school. Conversely, fewer than half of the parents with children attending

mainstream secondary (39%) and pre-school (25%) settings considered these placements to be inclusive.

Table 5.11.1a - Parental perceptions of the most inclusive learning environments

Do you feel your child's school offers an inclusive environment?	Yes	
	n	%
Specialist pre-school	*2*	100.0
Specialist secondary	*32*	88.89
Specialist primary	*26*	72.22
Mainstream post-16	*10*	62.50
Specialist post-16	*5*	55.56
Mainstream primary	*48*	52.17
Mainstream secondary	*22*	39.29
Mainstream pre-school	*2*	25.00

5.11.2 Parental perspective on whether their child is included in school life

With autism known to impact an individual's social abilities and preferences (see Chapter 2), it is true that not all autistic young people want to be included. Parental responses highlight this point, whilst 69% (n = 182) said their child wished to be included in day-to-day school life, 18% (n = 47) felt they did not (Table 5.11.2). Differences in the response data across the three sub-groups were not found to be significant.

Just 52% of the respondents to the pupil survey said they felt included at school (Section 4.11.3). From a parental perspective, whilst 61% (n = 160) said they thought their child was included in day-to-day school life, 24% (n = 62) felt they were not (Table 5.11.2). Again, no statistically significant differences were evident between the sexes, the sectors, or the setting type.

Table 5.11.2 - Parental perspective on whether their child is included in school life: Data table

Do you think your child wants to be included in school life?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*182*	68.94	*132*	67.01	*48*	73.85	*114*	65.90	*64*	77.11	*96*	72.73	*62*	64.58	*17*	65.38
No	*47*	17.80	*37*	18.78	*10*	15.39	*32*	18.50	*12*	14.46	*17*	12.88	*20*	20.83	*8*	30.77
Not sure	*35*	13.26	*28*	14.21	*7*	10.77	*27*	15.60	*7*	8.43	*19*	14.39	*14*	14.58	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(4) = 1.99$, $p = 0.74$)				($X^2(4) = 5.95$, $p = 0.20$)				($X^2(6) = 7.44$, $p = 0.28$)					

Do you feel your child is included in school life?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*160*	60.61	*122*	61.93	*36*	55.38	*101*	58.38	*54*	65.06	*87*	65.91	*56*	58.33	*14*	53.85
No	*62*	23.48	*44*	22.34	*18*	27.69	*42*	24.28	*18*	21.69	*29*	21.97	*22*	22.92	*8*	30.77
Not sure	*42*	15.91	*31*	15.74	*11*	16.92	*30*	17.34	*11*	13.25	*16*	12.12	*18*	18.75	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(4) = 2.30$, $p = 0.68$)				($X^2(4) = 1.24$, $p = 0.87$)				($X^2(6) = 8.68$, $p = 0.19$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Whilst 65% (n = 118) of parents who said their child wanted to be included in school life felt they were, 21% (n = 39) thought their child was not being included. Whether or not the learner wished to be included was not proven significantly impactful on the level to which parents believed they were included ($X^2(4) = 5.60$, $p = 0.23$).

5.12 Parent perceptions of school responses to reports of bullying

With 76% of autistic learners claiming to have been the victim of school bullies (see section 4.11.4), their parents play a vital role in reporting such incidents to the school and trying to ensure appropriate action is taken to address their concerns.

Whilst, compared to the learner data, a slightly lower proportion of parents said that their child had been bullied at school (59%, n = 145), 16% (n = 39) said they were unsure whether or not their child had been the victim of bullying (Table 5.12). Supporting the results from the pupil survey, older learners were considerably more

likely to have experienced being bullied at school, than the younger learners attending primary school. The differences between the sectors were significant, as shown in Table 5.12. The type of setting in which a young person is educated was proven to significantly impact their risk of being bullied (p = <0.05). Regardless of where their child was being educated at the time of the survey, 88% (n = 128) of parents said their child's experience of bullying happened within mainstream, whilst just 8 (6%) parents revealed the bullying occurred in a specialist setting, and 9 (6%) said their child had been bullied in both mainstream and specialist schools. Based on parental reports, there was no significant difference between the sexes.

Table 5.12 - Parent perceptions of school responses to reports of bullying: Data table

Has your child ever been bullied at school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*145*	58.70	*104*	57.46	*40*	62.50	*94*	63.09	*27*	39.13	*63*	50.81	*67*	72.04	*14*	63.64
No	*63*	25.51	*45*	24.86	*17*	26.56	*28*	18.79	*32*	46.38	*37*	29.84	*15*	16.13	*7*	31.82
Not sure	*39*	15.79	*32*	17.67	*7*	10.94	*27*	18.12	*10*	14.49	*24*	19.35	*11*	11.83	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(4) = 2.44$, $p = 0.66$)				($X^2(8) = 28.37$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(6) = 19.55$, $p = <0.05$)					

My child is seen as an easy target for school bullies

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Strongly agree	*63*	25.82	*44*	24.72	*19*	29.69	*47*	32.19	*8*	11.59	*30*	24.59	*28*	30.11	*	*
Agree	*63*	25.82	*42*	23.60	*21*	32.81	*41*	28.08	*14*	20.29	*34*	27.87	*21*	22.58	*8*	36.36
Neither	*70*	28.69	*57*	32.02	*13*	20.31	*37*	25.34	*25*	36.23	*30*	24.59	*30*	32.26	*6*	27.27
Disagree	*38*	15.57	*27*	15.17	*9*	14.06	*17*	11.64	*17*	24.64	*22*	18.03	*10*	10.75	*5*	22.73
Strongly disagree	*10*	4.10	*8*	4.49	*2*	3.13	*	*	*5*	7.25	*6*	4.92	*	*	-	-
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(8) = 15.43$, $p = 0.05$)				($X^2(4) = 18.09$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(12) = 12.46$, $p = 0.41$)					

Where your child has been bullied at school, do you think they were targeted for being autistic?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*90*	62.07	*64*	61.54	*25*	62.50	*83*	64.84	*	*	*36*	57.14	*45*	67.16	*8*	57.14
No	*23*	15.86	*20*	19.23	*	*	*17*	13.28	*	*	*13*	20.63	*7*	10.44	*	*
Not sure	*32*	22.07	*20*	19.23	*12*	30.00	*28*	21.88	*	*	*14*	22.22	*15*	22.39	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(4) = 4.64$, $p = 0.33$)				($X^2(2) = 1.42$, $p = 0.49$)				($X^2(6) = 3.62$, $p = 0.73$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Over half of the respondents felt that their child was seen as an easy target for school bullies (52%, n = 126). The differences between the sexes were identified as significant (p = 0.05), with females more likely to be seen as an easy target for bullies than males, as shown in Table 5.12. Respondents with children attending mainstream (60%) were more likely to feel their child was an easy target, than parents whose children were educated in specialist provision settings (32%). The considerable differences between the two types of settings were also proven significant (p = <0.05).

In most instances, parent respondents felt that their child was being targeted by bullies as a result of their autism (62%, n = 90) (Table 5.12). In this area, differences between the sexes, the sector, and the setting type, were not statistically significant.

Of the 145 parents who said their child had been bullied, 99% (n = 143) indicated that they had raised their concerns with the school. These participants were asked a further four follow-up questions, to get an insight into how they perceived the school reacted to their reports.

5.12.1 Did the school listen and take parental concerns seriously?

When asked if they felt the school listened to their concerns and took them seriously, just 32% indicated they did, whilst 57% suggested they did not feel they were taken seriously (Table 5.12.1). Participants discussing secondary education reported the most positive experiences. Most of those with children attending post-16 education felt they were not taken seriously (93%), this was considerably higher than those with children at primary (60%), or secondary (48%), school. These reported differences between the sectors were proven significant (Table 5.12.1). More than half of those referring to mainstream experiences felt they were not taken seriously when raising concerns about bullying (54%), whilst just 34% reported positively. Only one parent felt their child's specialist setting had listened to them, by contrast 86% (n = 6) felt the opposite. The differences between the type

of setting attended were found to be significant (p = <0.05). As demonstrated in Table 5.12.1, there were no significant differences reported between the sexes.

Table 5.12.1 - Did the school listen and take parental concerns seriously?: Data table

Where you reported bullying issues, do you think the school listened and took your concerns seriously?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*45*	31.69	*34*	33.33	*11*	28.21	*43*	34.13	*	*	*17*	27.42	*27*	41.54	-	-
No	*81*	57.04	*59*	57.84	*22*	56.41	*68*	53.97	*6*	85.71	*37*	59.68	*31*	47.69	*13*	92.86
Not sure	*16*	11.27	*9*	8.82	*6*	15.38	*15*	11.90	-	-	*8*	12.90	*7*	10.77	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(4) = 9.25$, p = 0.06)				($X^2(8) = 22.16$, p = <0.05)				($X^2(6) = 13.53$, p = <0.05)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

5.12.2 Did the school respond appropriately to parental concerns?

Participants generally felt that schools were not acting appropriately in response to their concerns (59%), however, for 24% of parents their child's school's response was satisfactory (Table 5.12.2).

Table 5.12.2 - Did the school respond appropriately to parental concerns?: Data table

Do you think the school acted appropriately in response to your concerns about your child being bullied?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*34*	23.94	*30*	29.13	*	*	*31*	24.60	*	*	*15*	24.19	*19*	29.23	-	-
No	*84*	59.15	*62*	60.19	*22*	56.41	*71*	56.35	*6*	85.71	*34*	54.84	*37*	56.92	*13*	92.86
Not sure	*24*	16.90	*11*	10.67	*12*	30.77	*24*	19.05	-	-	*13*	20.97	*9*	13.85	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(4) = 16.16$, p = <0.05)				($X^2(8) = 19.07$, p = <0.05)				($X^2(6) = 13.72$, p = <0.05)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Within this sample, parents of males were more satisfied with the school response than those with daughters, however 60% of males', and 56% of females', parents were dissatisfied. These differences between the sexes were identified as significant

(Table 5.12.2). Not one of those referring to post-16 education felt the setting acted appropriately when responding to reports of bullying, whilst a higher proportion of parents discussing their experiences with secondary settings felt appropriate action was taken, compared to reports relating to primary schools. These differences between the sectors were proven to be statistically significant (p = <0.05). Although parental perceptions of mainstream school responses to reports of bullying were largely negative (25% felt appropriate action was taken, 56% felt the opposite), the experiences of those discussing specialist settings were worse (14% felt appropriate action was taken, 86% felt the opposite). The differences indicate that the setting significantly impacts parent perceptions in this area, as shown in Table 5.12.2.

5.12.3 Did the bullying stop, as a result of parents raising their concerns?

In 61% of cases, participants report that the bullying of their child did not stop, despite them raising their concerns with the school. Despite the response data differences reported in Table 5.12.3, neither biological sex, sector, nor setting, were found to be significant factors.

Table 5.12.3 - Did the bullying stop, as a result of parents raising their concerns?: Data table

Did the bullying stop, as a result of you asking the school to deal with it?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*37*	25.87	*27*	26.21	*9*	23.08	*36*	28.35	-	-	*16*	25.81	*20*	30.30	*	*
No	*87*	60.84	*66*	64.08	*21*	53.85	*74*	58.27	*5*	71.43	*36*	58.06	*39*	59.09	*11*	78.57
Not sure	*19*	13.29	*10*	9.71	*9*	23.08	*17*	13.39	*	*	*10*	16.13	*7*	10.61	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 5.25$, $p = 0.72$)				($X^2(2) = 3.89$, $p = 0.14$)				($X^2(6) = 3.68$, $p = 0.72$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

5.13 Parent perceptions of educator understanding about autism

Just 28% of the autistic learner participants agreed that their teachers had a good understanding of autism, 26% disagreed, whilst 47% neither agreed nor disagreed

(see Chapter 4, section 4.11.7). Parents however, generally had a slightly more positive perception of educator understanding. Half of the parent respondents (50%, n = 116) felt their child's teachers had a good understanding, compared to 28% (n = 64) who felt they did not (Table 5.13). Given the nature of the provision available, it is unsurprising that parents of learners attending specialist settings (84%) were considerably more likely to believe their child's teachers understood autism, than those with children attending mainstream schools (35%). These differences between mainstream and specialist setting experiences were proven to be significant, as shown in Table 5.13. No significant differences were reported between the sexes or across the sectors.

Table 5.13 - Parent perceptions of educator understanding about autism: Data table

Agree/Disagree: My child's teachers have a good understanding of autism

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Strongly agree	*57*	24.78	*45*	26.63	*12*	20.34	*13*	9.03	*39*	58.21	*27*	23.08	*24*	27.91	*5*	25.00
Agree	*59*	25.65	*40*	23.67	*17*	28.81	*38*	26.39	*17*	25.37	*34*	29.06	*15*	17.44	*8*	40.00
Neither	*50*	21.74	*36*	21.30	*14*	23.73	*42*	29.17	*5*	7.46	*21*	17.95	*24*	27.91	*	*
Disagree	*38*	16.52	*27*	15.98	*11*	18.64	*30*	20.83	*6*	8.96	*18*	15.38	*17*	19.77	*	*
Strongly disagree	*26*	11.30	*21*	12.43	*5*	8.47	*21*	14.58	-	-	*17*	14.53	*6*	6.98	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(8) = 7.91$, $p = 0.44$)				($X^2(12) = 88.67$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(12) = 14.45$, $p = 0.27$)					

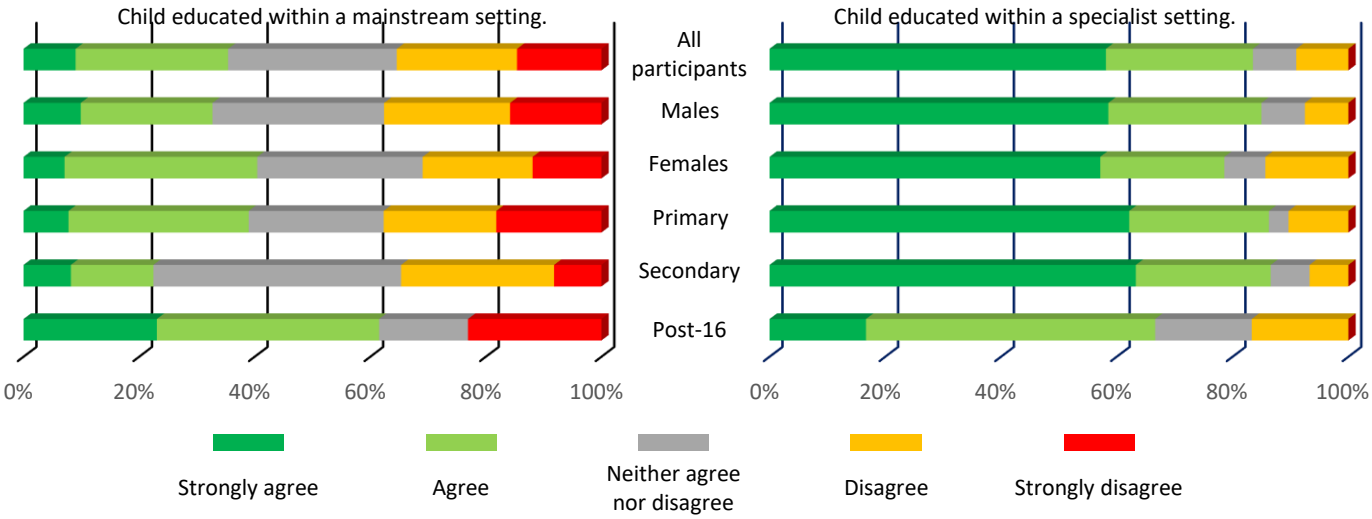
* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Looking closer at the reported differences in experience between mainstream and specialist provision settings (see Figure 5.13 below), it is clear that across all subgroups parents were more satisfied with educator understanding about autism when their child was attending a specialist provision.

Although, as discussed above, there are clear differences between the two setting types, the differences within settings were not proven significant for either the sex

of the learner (mainstream: $p = 0.78$, specialist: $p = 0.88$), or the sector in which they were educated (mainstream: $p = 0.53$, specialist: $p = 0.28$). Tables presenting the parental response data for this section can be found in Appendix 3b.

Figure 5.13 - Parent perceptions on whether mainstream or specialist educators understand autism



5.13.1 The impact of perceived levels of educator understanding about autism on child's enjoyment of school

Where parents felt teachers had a good understanding of autism, their children were more likely to enjoy going to school (75%), conversely, where understanding was lacking 52% said their child was not happy going to school. Chi-square analysis identified a significant link between parental perception of educator understanding of autism and their child's happiness going to school ($X^2(16) = 111.27$, $p = <0.05$). Similarly, 78% of parents with a positive view of educator understanding said their child was happy in school, whilst 45% of parents who felt their child's teachers did not fully understand about autism said their child was unhappy. Again, these differences indicate a significant relationship between perceived educator understanding and an autistic learner's happiness whilst at school ($X^2(16) = 127.73$, $p = <0.05$). How parents perceive educator understanding about autism was also significantly linked to a child's happiness when coming home from school ($X^2(16) =$

82.91, p = <0.05). When parents felt understanding was good, 77% said their child was happy when they got home, after school, however, when parents perceived educator understanding to be lacking, 36% reported their child to be unhappy after a day at school.

5.14 Parent perceptions of educator interactions with themselves and their children

Participants were asked how satisfied they were with school staff interactions with both themselves and their children, focusing on three cohorts of staff: teachers, support staff, and senior management, such as head teachers and ALNCos. Tables presenting the response data for this section can be accessed within Appendix 3b.

5.14.1 Educator interaction with parents

Figure 5.14.1 (below) illustrates parental responses for the three educator groups, across the various cohorts. The majority of respondents (69%, n = 159) had a positive view of their interactions with teaching staff, however, (15%, n = 35) indicated they were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. For those discussing experience of interactions with teachers working in mainstream, 63% of parents reported satisfactory interactions, in contrast 91% of those with children attending specialist provisions felt their interactions with their child's teachers to be satisfactory. These differences were proven to be statistically significant ($X^2(12)$ = 90.78, p = <0.05). Differences between the sexes of respondents' children (p = 0.78), and the sectors attended (p = 0.60), were not significant.

Interactions with support staff were seen as satisfactory by 73% (n = 166) of parents, although 12% (n = 28) felt the opposite was true. Whilst 68% of parents with children in mainstream were satisfied with how support staff interacted with them, 93% of those discussing specialist setting support staff felt positively about these interactions. The differences in parental experience between provision types

were proven significant ($X^2(12) = 41.62$, $p = <0.05$). Again, sex differences ($p = 0.99$) and those evident across sectors ($p = 0.67$) were not significant.

Figure 5.14.1 - Parental response across subgroups: School staff interactions with parents

Just under a quarter of parent respondents said they were dissatisfied with their interactions with senior management at their child's school (24%, n = 55), however, 60% (n = 140) said they were satisfied. Parental satisfaction was higher (22 p.p. difference) and dissatisfaction lower (12 p.p. difference) amongst those with children attending specialist settings, when compared to their counterparts with children in mainstream. Setting type was again identified as being a significant factor in determining parental satisfaction with their interactions with senior management at their child's school ($X^2(12) = 42.72$, $p = <0.05$). No significance was

proven in differences reported between the sex of participants' children (p = 0.69), nor the sector they were attending (p = 0.55).

Figure 5.14.1 (above) presents a visual of the response data from across the subgroups. Parents were most satisfied with their interactions with school support staff, working with their child, in each cohort. Conversely, interactions with senior management, such as head teachers and ALNCos, were perceived as the least satisfying, again, this is the case across all subgroups. Parents were most satisfied with their interactions with support staff in specialist provisions (93%), but least satisfied in their interactions with management at post-16 provisions (40%). Across all categories, the type of setting attended was proven to significantly impact parental perspectives of their interactions with school staff.

5.14.2 Educator interactions with learners

Figure 5.14.2 (below) presents an overview of parental response data for all three practitioner groups across the various cohorts. Generally, parents were satisfied with how their children's teachers were interacting with them (72%, n = 163), however, 14% (n = 33) indicated that they were not happy with how teachers interacted with their child. Again, parents referring to specialist provision teaching staff, had a more positive (22 p.p. difference), and less negative (14 p.p. difference), view of teacher interactions with their child, than those whose children were attending mainstream. These differences in parental perceptions between mainstream and specialist provisions were proven statistically significant ($X^2(12)$ = 61.50*,* p = <0.05). Differences reported between the sexes (p = 0.73) and across the sectors (p = 0.56), were not significant.

When considering how support staff interact with their children, 73% (n = 167) of the respondents said they were satisfied, whilst 12% (n = 28) provided a negative response. Significant differences were evident between parent experience of

mainstream and specialist education learners ($X^2(12) = 62.45$, $p = <0.05$). Where 91% of parents discussing their child's interactions with specialist settings support staff said they were satisfied, just 69% of those referring to mainstream experiences felt the same way. Sex ($p = 0.95$) and sector differences ($p = 0.52$) in reported parental perspectives were not proven significant.

Figure 5.14.2 - Parental response across subgroups: School staff interactions with learners

Whilst the majority (61%, n = 140) of parents said they were satisfied with how management staff, at their child's school, interacted with their children, a sizeable proportion (18%, n = 42), were dissatisfied. Just 52% of the respondents whose children attend mainstream settings were said to be satisfied with management/learner interactions, in contrast, 86% of those with children attending

specialist provisions had a positive view of how setting management were interacting with their child. These considerable differences in parental experience, between mainstream and specialist settings were proven significant ($X^2(12) = 51.30$, $p = <0.05$). Reported differences in parental experience between those discussing their sons and daughters ($p = 0.76$), and across primary, secondary and post-16 sectors ($p = 0.52$) were not significant.

Figure 5.14.2 presents a visual of the response data from across the subgroups, with an accompanying data table provided in Appendix 3b. Parents were most satisfied with how school support staff, were interacting with their child, in each group. Conversely, interactions with senior management, such as head teachers and ALNCos, were perceived as the least satisfying, again, this is the case across all subgroups. Parents were most satisfied with their interactions with support staff in specialist provisions (93%), but least satisfied in their interactions with management at post-16 provisions (40%). Across all categories, the type of setting attended was proven to significantly impact parental perspectives of their interactions with school staff.

5.14.3 The impact of perceived levels of educator understanding about autism on parental perceptions of educator interactions with themselves and their children.

Here, we will consider if parental perceptions relating to educator understanding of autism are linked to their views relating to how school staff interact with them, and their children. Table 5.14.3 (below) presents data from parents who either agreed or disagreed that their child's teachers had a good understanding about autism, cross-tabulated with their satisfaction relating to their interactions with school staff. As can be seen across the three staff groups discussed, parents were more satisfied with their interactions when they considered the practitioner to have a good understanding about autism. Where parents believed educator understanding was lacking, their dissatisfaction when interacting with staff was pronounced. When looking at parent perceptions of their own interactions with teaching staff, support

staff, and school management, satisfaction for all three were significantly linked to perceived levels of educator understanding (Table 5.14.3).

Table 5.14.3 - Crosstabulation: Parental perception of educator understanding about autism and educator/parent interactions

		Teacher/parent interactions				
		Satisfied		Dissatisfied		
		n	%	*n*	%	*Totals*
My child's teachers have a good understanding of autism	Agree	*105*	91.30	*4*	3.48	*115*
	Disagree	*20*	31.25	*25*	39.06	*64*
Pearson Chi-Square: $X^2(16) = 158.31$, $p = <0.05$						
		Support staff/parent interactions				
		Satisfied		Dissatisfied		
		n	%	*n*	%	*Totals*
My child's teachers have a good understanding of autism	Agree	*107*	94.69	*3*	2.65	*113*
	Disagree	*25*	39.68	*36*	57.14	*63*
Pearson Chi-Square: $X^2(16) = 119.99$, $p = <0.05$						
		Management staff/parent interactions				
		Satisfied		Dissatisfied		
		n	%	*n*	%	*Totals*
My child's teachers have a good understanding of autism	Agree	*88*	76.52	*13*	11.30	*115*
	Disagree	*20*	31.25	*31*	48.44	*64*
Pearson Chi-Square: $X^2(16) = 118.46$, $p = <0.05$						

Looking at parents' interpretations of interactions between educators and their children, Table 5.14.3a (below) displays that when parents believe staff have a reasonable understanding about autism, they are more satisfied with their interactions with their child. Again, analysis suggests significant links between perceived levels of understanding amongst professionals, and parental satisfaction with teaching staff, support staff, and school management, interactions with their children (Table 5.14.3a).

Table 5.14.3a – Crosstabulation: Parental perception of educator understanding about autism and educator/learner interactions

		Teacher/pupil interactions				
		Satisfied		Dissatisfied		
		n	%	*n*	%	*Totals*
My child's teachers have a good understanding of autism	Agree	*106*	92.98	*3*	2.63	*114*
	Disagree	*24*	38.10	*23*	36.51	*63*
Pearson Chi-Square: $X^2(16) = 159.78$, $p = <0.05$						

		Support staff/pupil interactions				
		Satisfied		Dissatisfied		
		n	%	*n*	%	*Totals*
My child's teachers have a good understanding of autism	Agree	*105*	91.30	*2*	1.74	*115*
	Disagree	*28*	44.44	*18*	28.57	*63*
Pearson Chi-Square: $X^2(16) = 123.96$, $p = <0.05$						

		Management staff/pupil interactions				
		Satisfied		Dissatisfied		
		n	%	*n*	%	*Totals*
My child's teachers have a good understanding of autism	Agree	*91*	79.13	*10*	8.70	*115*
	Disagree	*22*	34.92	*23*	36.51	*63*
Pearson Chi-Square: $X^2(16) = 128.84$, $p = <0.05$						

5.15 Parental experience and perceptions of school exclusions involving their child

When asked whether their child had ever been excluded at or from school, either internally, externally, temporarily, or permanently, 23% (n = 59) of respondents said that they had (Table 5.15). Based on parental reports, autistic learners who have experienced exclusion (*Mean age* = 12.76 years, *SD* = 3.03), were on average two years older than those who had not (*Mean age* = 10.64 years, *SD* = 3.72). The youngest participant's child to have faced exclusion was 6 years of age, at time of participation.

Within this sample, males were more likely to have faced exclusion at or from school, than females, however, this difference was not proven significant (Table 5.15). The chances of a learners having experienced exclusion, at some point during their education, were higher amongst post-16 students (38%), than secondary

(33%), or primary (14%), school pupils. Whilst the differences reported between the sectors were significant (p = <0.05), they are perhaps unsurprising, as parents whose children were in post-16 education have a longer educational lifetime to consider. A higher proportion of parents with children attending specialist provisions (27%) indicated their child had faced exclusion at or from school, when compared those discussing mainstream (19%), however the differences were not significant. Regardless of the setting their child attended at the time of participation, parents indicate that 86% of the reported exclusions were said to have happened at mainstream settings.

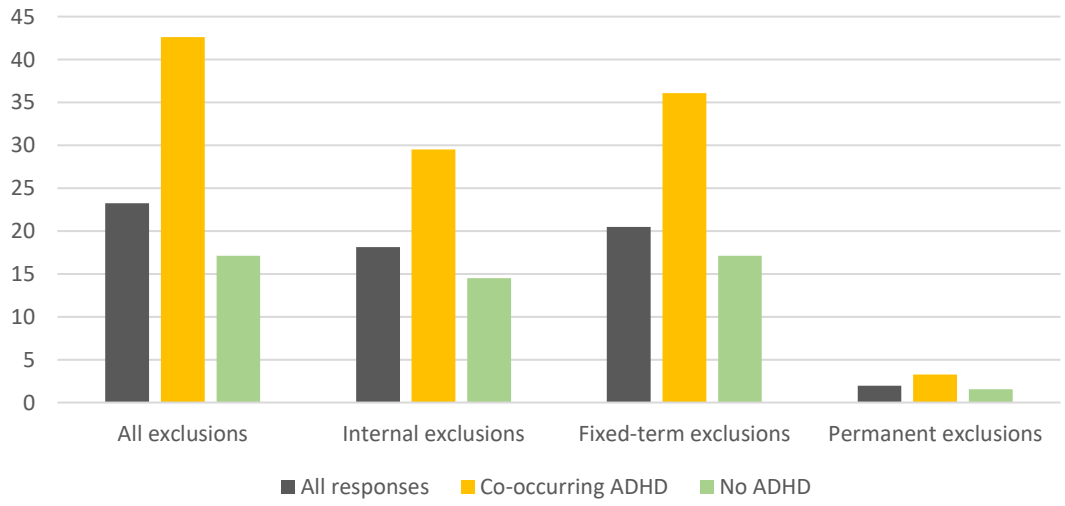
Table 5.15 - Parental experience of school exclusions involving their child: Data table

Has your child ever been suspended or excluded from school either internally or externally, temporarily or permanently?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*59*	23.23	*46*	24.60	*12*	18.46	*29*	19.21	*19*	27.14	*18*	14.29	*32*	33.33	*9*	37.50
No	*195*	76.77	*141*	75.40	*53*	81.54	*122*	80.79	*51*	72.86	*108*	85.71	*64*	66.67	*15*	62.50
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 1.83$, $p = 0.40$)				($X^2(4) = 4.18$, $p = 0.38$)				($X^2(3) = 16.31$, $p = <0.05$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Figure 5.15 – Reported exclusions involving autistic learners both with and without ADHD (*%*)



One-in-four (24%, n = 61) of the parents responding to the survey questions relating to school exclusion said their child had a co-occurring diagnosis of ADHD. Of those with both autism and ADHD diagnoses, 43% (n = 26) had been sanctioned with an exclusion at or from school, accounting for 44% of all cases of exclusion discussed (Figure 5.15).

Analysis indicates that where autistic learners also have an ADHD diagnosis, they are significantly more likely to face exclusion ($X^2(2) = 15.10$, $p = <0.05$). As illustrated, this was the case across the three forms of exclusion explored. For internal exclusions, 39% of reported cases involved autistic learners with ADHD, indicating 43% of those with dual diagnoses had been internally excluded, compared to just 17% of learners without ADHD. These differences were significant ($X^2(3) = 30.29$, $p = <0.05$). Parental reports suggest that 42% of the fixed-term exclusions discussed were experienced by learners with dual diagnoses, indicating that 36% of those with both diagnoses, have experienced being temporarily excluded from school. Autistic learners with ADHD were significantly more likely to face fixed-term exclusions ($X^2(2) = 12.87$, $p = <0.05$). Whilst 2% of the whole sample were said to have been permanently excluded from school, 3% (n = 2) of those with dual diagnoses had faced similar sanctions. Again, ADHD was found to significantly increase the likelihood of being permanently excluded ($X^2(2) = 13.52$, $p = <0.05$).

Most parents whose children had experience of being excluded said that their child had been internally excluded, by being isolated from their peers (79%, n = 46), accounting for 18% of all respondents. Approaching two thirds of learners that have been internally excluded, had faced isolation on five or more occasions (65%), whilst 37% had periods of exclusion lasting two school days, or more. Parental reports indicate the most commonly given reason, for the use of internal exclusion, provided by schools was ‘disruptive behaviour’ (57%), whilst in 20% of cases, ‘staff shortages or lack of available support’ was referenced. Reported differences between the sexes ($X^2(4) = 0.54$, $p = 0.97$) and across the sectors ($X^2(4) = 6.05$, $p = 0.20$), were not statistically significant. Although the majority of such exclusions

were said to have occurred within mainstream (85%), differences between setting type were not proven significant ($X^2(8) = 8.71$, $p = 0.37$).

Response data implies that 20% of autistic learners within this sample have experienced being externally excluded temporarily, by being sent home, or asked to stay away, from school for a set period. Parental reports suggest that schools are using repeated fixed-term exclusions as a way of sanctioning what they perceive as 'unwanted behaviour', 43% of parents who said their child had been temporarily excluded, indicated this has happened on five or more occasions. Within this sample, 33% of learners who had experienced this form of exclusion, were asked to stay away from school for periods of a week or more. The most often given reason for exclusion, provided by their child's school, was 'staff being unable to manage the child's behaviours' (52%). According to respondents, 'staff shortages or lack of available support' were behind 23% of the referenced exclusions. Differences evident in response data between the sexes ($X^2(2) = 3.55$, $p = 0.17$), across the sectors ($X^2(2) = 2.60$, $p = 0.27$), and between mainstream and specialist provision settings ($X^2(4) = 6.69$, $p = 0.15$), were not significant. When using fixed-term exclusions, schools are obliged to provide formal notification to parents (WG, 2019). Within this sample, 53% of the parents who said their child had been sanctioned with a fixed-term exclusion, said that they had not received formal written notification, this rose to 55% where the exclusion had happened whilst the child was attending a mainstream school.

Five respondents said that their child had been permanently excluded from school, equating to 2% of the sample. Of the five permanent exclusions referenced, three involved males (2% of all males), and the other two female (3% of all females). Four out of the five permanent exclusions referred to occurred at mainstream settings, Chi-square analysis highlighting the significance of this imbalance ($X^2(4) = 371.00$, $p = <0.05$). Not one of the learners to have experienced permanent exclusion were attending mainstream at the time of their parents' participation, in this study. Of

the four excluded from mainstream, three were now attending specialist provisions, one of which had been permanently excluded from two mainstream settings, whilst the fourth was educated from home. Most parents whose child had been permanently excluded from school said that their LA had provided support to help find an alternative provision (80%), the one respondent who felt unsupported chose to educate their child from home, as a result of their exclusion from a mainstream setting. It is advisable to view these findings with an element of caution, due to the small sample size of just five parents referring to their experiences of permanent exclusion.

5.16 Summary conclusion

The parent/carer questionnaire posed questions covering a wide range of topics, relating to participants' experiences in supporting their autistic child through their education. Parent participation was not sought to advocate for their children, as their experiences were heard through their own survey (Chapter 4). This survey aimed to gain an overview of how parents felt schools/teachers were managing their child's education, and their experiences of some of the administrative tasks, parents of children with ALN must contend with on a daily basis, to ensure their child received the best educational opportunities possible. The 371 parent participants, included within the study, represented 4% of the autistic pupil population, at the time of the study.

For autistic CYP the educational setting they attend can be critical in shaping their overall educational experience and academic outcomes. Sadly, it would seem many parents do not consider their child's current school to be the best place to meet their individual needs. Parents report feeling unsupported by their LA in deciding the best possible placement for their child, which leads to a general feeling of discontent with the setting their child was attending.

From the parent perspective many schools and teachers lack an understanding about autism, and the challenges being autistic can present within the sensory overloaded school environment. This lack of understanding often leads to mismanagement of what are seen as challenging behaviours, leading to an increased risk of exclusion. A perceived lack of educator understanding was found to significantly impact participants' children's overall enjoyment of school and was linked to parental dissatisfaction with how educators interacted with them and their children.

Parental reports suggest support for their children's needs can be inconsistent. Even for those with IEPs or Statements, where support is set out in a formal and legal document, much of the prescribed support is not being provided. Evidence suggests that even the most academically able autistic learners will require some level of additional support whilst at school, yet a sizeable proportion of participants indicated their child was not even receiving minimal levels of assistance.

Whilst parents were generally satisfied with how school staff interact with both them and their children, there were clearly some areas where this was not the case with senior school management apparently often failing to meet the expectations of parents. This is most apparent in relation to how schools respond to parental reports of bullying. Participants report that schools largely fail to take their concerns seriously, or respond in an appropriate manner, to address such incidents.

Overall, it would appear that parents generally have negative view of their involvement in, and their child's educational experiences. There are various factors that influence the data across many of the areas discussed. Often the experiences of those with autistic sons, differ from those with daughters, especially in areas such as the child's happiness at school, access to educational support, bullying and risk of exclusion. However, the most significant factor, which was proven to

influence parental satisfaction, across multiple areas was the type of setting in which the child was educated. Parents with children educated in specialist provisions were more likely to have had support in finding suitable placement, which led to greater satisfaction with the school, with parents more satisfied that their child's needs were being met. Parental reports suggest that their children were significantly happier about going to, being at, and coming home from, school, when they were attending specialist settings. Perhaps understandably, given the nature of the learning environment, parents felt specialist settings were significantly better at meeting the support needs of their child, as they were in their communication with parents. Specialist settings were found to be more inclusive, with significantly fewer reports of bullying and school exclusion.

Having presented the results from three phases of learner engagement activities within chapter four, and the perspectives of parents and carers in this chapter, the next chapter will report on the resulting data of the survey of education professionals (ESQ).

Chapter 6: Educator perceptions and experiences relating to the education of autistic learners

6.1 Introduction

It is said that, after parents, educators have the second most influential role in the lives of CYP (Woolfson & Brady, 2009). Whilst practitioners can often feel anxious about working with autistic learners (Barnard et al., 2002; 2000), it is thought that previous experience, especially that from out with their professional role, improves educator understanding (Unigwe et al., 2017), enhancing the inclusive nature of their approach (Park & Chitiyo, 2011), and improving educational outcomes for autistic learners (Sciutto et al., 2012). Educators play a critical role in the early identification of young learners potentially displaying autism related behaviours (Whitlock et al., 2020), with suitable training seen as a key tool to empower practitioners to feel confident in their abilities (Vincent & Ralston, 2020).

6.2 Aims of this chapter

In presenting the response data and results gathered from the 378 respondents to the survey of education professionals this chapter aims to add a further layer to our understanding relating to the education of autistic learners in Wales. As with both the learner and parent results chapters previously, the objective of this chapter is to gain an insight into educator experiences in response to research question (1), and how they can impact the overarching research question, that underpins the thesis (2).

1) Do educators in Wales really understand autism, and are they confident in their abilities to support autistic learners in a range of educational settings?
2) Is the current model of inclusive education, whereby the majority of autistic learners attend mainstream settings, with varying levels of support, working for autistic learners in Wales?

6.3 Overview

The structure of this chapter follows a similar pattern to chapters four and five. Section 6.4 provides a brief introduction to, and synopsis of, the ESQ study, from which the data presented within the results originated, with the whole sample characteristics outlined within Section 6.5. A guide to how the results are presented is offered in Section 6.6, before the results, themselves are introduced in Sections 6.7. - 6.12. The chapter is concluded with a summary of the results presented, in Section 6.13.

6.4 The educator survey questionnaire (ESQ)

Details of the planning and construction of the educator survey are explained in detail, within the methodology (Chapter 3). The ESQ was the first of the three 'first phase' surveys, to be active, seeking the input of education professionals, working in any role supporting the learning of CYP, aged eighteen and under, in Wales. The survey was active during the months of April and May 2021, and recorded a total of 549 responses, with a 54% completion rate. Following the initial data cleaning process 378 (69%) participants were found to have completed enough of the survey to be entered into the analysis process. The online questionnaire comprised of mainly dichotomous (yes/no) questions, with some additional Likert scale questions, formulated from personal experience and extensive literature reviews. Questions focused on six areas of interest, information sharing, support, training, access to resources, knowledge and understanding, and confidence, as described in Chapter 3.

6.5 The ESQ sample demographics

Whilst 90% (n = 341) of the participants chose to complete the English language version of the online survey, slightly fewer (85%, n = 323) said that they taught through in English language settings, with the remaining 15% (n = 55) working in Welsh medium provisions. Participants were employed across all 22 Local Authority

regions, with most based in Neath Port Talbot (9%, n = 35), whilst just three worked on the Isle of Anglesey.

Table 6.5 - ESQ whole sample demographic overview

Variable			Participant age range		
	n	%	Lowest	Highest	Mode
All participants	*378*	100.0	18-24	65-70	45-54
Biological sex					
Male	*38*	10.05	25-34	55-64	45-54
Female	*339*	89.68	18-24	65-70	45-54
Professional role					
Teacher	*207*	54.76	18-24	65-70	45-54
Support staff	*132*	34.92	18-24	65-70	45-54
Student/ Newly qualified teacher	*13*	3.44	18-24	45-54	25-34
Agency/supply staff	*12*	3.17	25-34	55-64	55-64
Other role	*14*	3.70	25-34	55-64	35-44
Provision sector					
Mainstream	*248*	65.61	18-24	65-70	45-54
Specialist	*92*	24.34	18-24	55-64	35-44
Local authority	*27*	7.14	18-24	55-64	45-54
Other	*11*	2.91	18-24	65-70	55-64
Sector					
Pre-school	*6*	1.59	25-34	65-70	35-44
Primary	*245*	64.81	18-24	55-64	45-54
Secondary	*88*	23.28	18-24	65-70	35-44
Post-16	*33*	8.73	25-34	65-70	55-64
Across all age groups	*6*	1.59	25-34	55-64	45-54

Just over 2% (n = 7) identified themselves as autistic, closely mirroring the proportion of the pupil population reported to be autistic, in Welsh Government data, at the time of the study (Chapter 2 section 2.2.7). Participants were employed in various roles, working across the sectors, in mainstream settings, specialist provisions, and for their Local Authority. With practitioners working from the age of 16 through to retirement age, and beyond, it was decided to ask participants to indicate the age range into which they fell. The youngest respondents were aged

between 18 and 24 (4%, n = 16), whilst the oldest were within 65-70 range (1%, n = 5), whilst most were aged 45 to 54 years (32%, n = 122). Table 6.5 presents the characteristics of this sample.

6.6 Presentation of ESQ results

Each section presents quantitative response data from the various cohorts, starting with the whole sample, before responses from teachers, support staff, one-to-one support staff, agency and supply workers, are all presented. Results are presented for each area of questioning, as described above (Section 6.4). Throughout the results, data for the cohort sample are presented first, then broken down to consider any differences between sectors or settings, with the significance of any variances tested through Chi-square analysis. Finally, student and newly qualified teacher responses relating to their autism experiences during ITT are presented. For most questions, data tables are included for clarity, where not, the relevant data table is available within Appendix 3c.

6.7 Educator results: Whole sample overview

When considering the sample, as a whole, participating education professionals were fairly evenly split between those with (49%, n = 183), and without (51%, n = 190) experience of autism outside of their professional roles. However, the majority (92%, n = 307) said that they had worked with an autistic learner, at some point in their career, with 68% (n = 207) of them working with autistic learners, at the time of their participation in this study.

6.7.1 Whole sample: Information sharing

Four areas were considered when trying to gauge the standard of information sharing amongst professionals when educating autistic learners. Firstly, advanced opportunity for learner and practitioner to meet and get to know each other, then

sharing of general information, proven effective strategies, and known triggers. Response data is presented in Table 6.7.1 below.

Table 6.7.1 - Whole sample: Information sharing: Data Table

Did you have an opportunity to meet and get to know the autistic pupil before they attended your class?

Response	All participants		Professional role				Setting				Sector					
			Teaching		Support		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*169*	59.09	*98*	63.64	*61*	52.14	*113*	57.07	*37*	66.07	*118*	65.19	*32*	47.06	*12*	44.44
No	*117*	40.91	*56*	36.36	*56*	47.86	*85*	42.93	*19*	33.93	*63*	34.81	*36*	52.94	*15*	55.56
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(3) = 5.74$, $p = 0.13$)				($X^2(6) = 3.26$, $p = 0.78$)				($X^2(4) = 9.82$, $p = <0.05$)					

Do you feel you were given enough information about the autistic pupil you would be working with before they attended your class?

Response	All participants		Professional role				Setting				Sector					
			Teaching		Support		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*164*	57.34	*99*	64.29	*53*	45.69	*112*	56.85	*32*	57.14	*113*	62.09	*34*	50.75	*9*	33.33
No	*88*	30.77	*47*	30.52	*39*	33.62	*66*	33.50	*13*	23.21	*55*	30.22	*22*	32.84	*9*	33.33
Not sure	*34*	11.89	*8*	5.19	*24*	20.69	*19*	9.64	*11*	19.64	*14*	7.69	*11*	16.42	*9*	33.33
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(6) = 30.74$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(12) = 17.38$, $p = 0.14$)				($X^2(8) = 20.95$, $p = <0.05$)					

Were appropriate strategies known to be effective with the particular child shared with you before they attended your class?

Response	All participants		Professional role				Setting				Sector					
			Teaching		Support		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*209*	70.61	*116*	75.82	*72*	61.54	*140*	67.31	*44*	78.57	*135*	71.43	*50*	71.43	*16*	59.26
No	*87*	29.39	*37*	24.18	*45*	38.46	*68*	32.69	*12*	21.43	*54*	28.57	*20*	28.57	*11*	40.74
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(4) = 8.26$, $p = 0.08$)				($X^2(6) = 5.27$, $p = 0.51$)				($X^2(4) = 3.47$, $p = 0.48$)					

Were you made aware of any specific triggers that were known to upset the child before they attended your class?

Response	All participants		Professional role				Setting				Sector					
			Teaching		Support		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*216*	72.97	*113*	73.38	*79*	68.10	*149*	71.63	*42*	75.00	*143*	75.26	*50*	72.46	*14*	51.85
No	*80*	20.03	*41*	26.62	*37*	31.90	*59*	28.37	*14*	25.00	*47*	24.74	*19*	27.54	*13*	48.15
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(4) = 7.67$, $p = 0.11$)				($X^2(6) = 2.82$, $p = 0.83$)				($X^2(4) = 8.43$, $p = 0.08$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Whilst most practitioners said they had been given the opportunity to meet and acquaint themselves with the autistic learner before working with them (59%), for 41% of participants this had not been the case. Significant differences were reported between the sectors, as shown in Table 6.7.1. Where 66% of those working in primary settings indicated they had met autistic learners in advance of working with them, fewer than half of practitioners in secondary (47%), and post-16 (44%), provisions said the same. No significant differences were found when considering data relating to the professional role of participants, nor the type of setting in which they worked (Table 6.7.1).

Although 57% of respondents felt information provided to them before working with an autistic learner was sufficient, a sizeable proportion (31%) were not so satisfied. Teachers (64%) were more likely to receive adequate practical information relating to the child than support staff (46%), with the differences between the professional roles being statistically significant, as shown in Table 6.7.1. Again, it appears more advance information is shared at primary (62%), level, than is the case in secondary (51%), and post-16 (33%), provisions, with the differences between sectors proven significant (Table 6.7.1). There were no significant differences evident in data from across different settings.

Response data suggest that the sharing of strategies known to be effective is commonplace (71%), although 29% of respondents felt they hadn't been provided with this vital information. Despite some differences in experience between professional roles, setting, and across sectors, none were proven to be statistically significant (Table 6.7.1). Similarly, while 73% of respondents indicated that information relating to triggers that were known to upset the individual learner had been shared with them prior to working with the child. As demonstrated in Table 6.7.1, no subgroup variables were proved statistically significant in relation to the outcome.

6.7.2 Whole sample: Support whilst working with autistic learners

The survey of educators sought to understand how supported practitioners felt, when working with autistic learners. Respondents were asked about the levels of support offered by their school, their LA, and outside agencies, their responses are presented in Table 6.7.2 below.

Most considered the 'in house' support, provided by their employers, to be satisfactory (79%), however 11% felt unsupported by their school when working with an autistic learner. Teachers (85%) were more likely to feel supported by their employers than support staff (70%), with the differences between professional roles being statistically significant (p = <0.05). Despite differences in response data, analysis could not prove differences between the setting, nor the sector to be significant (Table 6.7.2).

Just 35% of education professionals believed the support provided by their LA to be sufficient, whilst a higher proportion (39%) felt LA support was lacking. General levels of satisfaction with LA support were low, regardless of the professional role, work placement, or sector. Again, teachers (39%) felt more supported by their LA, than support staff (28%) with the differences between the professional role of participants proven significant (p = <0.05). However, neither setting, nor sector differences were established as statistically significant, as shown in Table 6.7.2

Accessing support provided by outside agencies when working with autistic learners was considered problematic for 39%, although 42% felt external support to be reasonably accessible. Teaching staff felt better supported by outside agencies than support staff, with the role of the practitioner found to be a significant factor (Table 6.7.2). Whilst those working in specialist provisions and early years sectors felt better supported than their colleagues across other settings and sectors, the differences were not proven significant.

Table 6.7.2 - Whole sample: Support whilst working with autistic learners: Data Table

Do you feel you are/were getting enough support from your school, whilst working with an autistic pupil?

Response	All participants		Professional role				Setting				Sector					
			Teaching		Support		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*N*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*250*	79.11	*150*	84.75	*79*	69.91	*158*	78.61	*43*	78.18	*160*	82.90	*60*	75.00	*21*	67.74
No	*36*	11.39	*14*	7.91	*18*	15.93	*22*	10.95	*5*	9.09	*18*	9.33	*13*	16.25	*	*
Not sure	*30*	9.49	*13*	7.34	*16*	14.16	*21*	10.45	*7*	12.73	*15*	7.77	*7*	8.75	*7*	22.58
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(8) = 16.51$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(16) = 16.34$, $p = 0.43$)				($X^2(8) = 13.97$, $p = 0.08$)					

Do you feel you are/were getting enough support from your Local Authority, whilst working with an autistic pupil?

Response	All participants		Professional role				Setting				Sector					
			Teaching		Support		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*101*	35.19	*64*	39.02	*31*	27.68	*63*	33.69	*18*	33.33	*66*	37.50	*25*	34.25	*6*	20.00
No	*112*	39.02	*70*	42.68	*38*	33.93	*76*	40.64	*17*	31.48	*71*	40.34	*27*	36.99	*10*	33.33
Not sure	*74*	25.78	*30*	18.29	*43*	38.39	*48*	25.67	*19*	35.19	*39*	22.16	*21*	28.77	*14*	46.67
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(6) = 18.12$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(14) = 22.07$, $p = 0.77$)				($X^2(8) = 12.41$, $p = 0.13$)					

Do you feel you are/were getting enough support from outside agencies whilst working with an autistic pupil?

Response	All participants		Professional role				Setting				Sector					
			Teaching		Support		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*125*	41.67	*81*	46.02	*37*	33.04	*70*	37.43	*27*	49.09	*77*	42.08	*32*	42.67	*9*	29.03
No	*117*	39.00	*71*	40.34	*41*	36.61	*75*	40.11	*19*	34.55	*71*	38.80	*29*	38.67	*14*	45.16
Not sure	*58*	19.33	*24*	13.64	*34*	30.36	*42*	22.46	*9*	16.36	*35*	19.13	*14*	18.67	*8*	25.81
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(6)$ 16.32, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(16) = 23.73$, $p = 0.96$)				($X^2(8) = 5.27$, $p = 0.73$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

6.7.3 Whole sample: Autism related training

Educators were asked about autism related training opportunities provided for them, by their employers (Table 6.7.3). Most respondents indicated that they had received some level of training (77%), however, 23% said none had been provided. Educators working within specialist provisions (84%) were more likely to have been afforded autism related training than their colleagues based in mainstream (76%). These differences in experience between work placement were proven statistically

significant (p = <0.05). There were no statistically significant differences reported between professional roles, or across the sectors, as shown in Table 6.7.3.

Table 6.7.3 - Whole sample: Autism related training: Data Table

Have you had any autism related training provided by your employer?

Response	All participants		Professional role				Setting				Sector					
			Teaching		Support		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*N*	%
Yes	*259*	76.85	*147*	78.19	*92*	77.31	*166*	75.80	*46*	83.64	*162*	76.06	*61*	74.39	*26*	86.67
No	*78*	23.15	*41*	21.81	*27*	22.69	*53*	24.20	*9*	16.36	*51*	23.94	*21*	25.61	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(4) = 5.17$, $p = 0.27$)				($X^2(8) = 15.38$, p = <0.05)				($X^2(4) = 4.14$, $p = 0.39$)					

Do you feel your employer provides you with enough autism related training?

Response	All participants		Professional role				Setting				Sector					
			Teaching		Support		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*190*	64.85	*110*	71.90	*66*	48.15	*118*	63.78	*36*	72.00	*121*	65.76	*41*	56.94	*21*	75.00
No	*65*	22.18	*22*	14.38	*36*	30.77	*39*	21.08	*9*	18.00	*41*	22.28	*19*	26.39	*	*
Not sure	*38*	12.97	*21*	13.73	*15*	12.82	*28*	15.13	*5*	10.00	*22*	11.96	*12*	16.67	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(8)$ 16.75, p = <0.05)				($X^2(16) = 18.01$, $p = 0.32$)				($X^2(8) = 5.61$, $p = 0.69$)					

Have you independently undertaken your own training to improve your understanding and knowledge of autism?

Response	All participants		Professional role				Setting				Sector					
			Teaching		Support		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*189*	57.62	*103*	56.91	*68*	57.14	*112*	51.85	*40*	74.07	*114*	54.03	*47*	61.84	*20*	66.67
No	*139*	42.38	*78*	43.09	*51*	42.86	*104*	48.15	*14*	25.93	*97*	45.97	*29*	38.16	*10*	33.33
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(4) = 3.41$, $p = 0.49$)				($X^2(8) = 13.69$, $p = 0.09$)				($X^2(4) = 3.90$, $p = 0.42$)					

* The cell count/ is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Of those who had accessed employer provided training, 85% said that this had been within the past five years. Many educators believed the training provided for them, by employers, was sufficient (65%), however, 22% felt more was necessary. Whilst 72% of teaching staff were satisfied with the training provided, just 56% of support staff, and 55% of agency staff were equally positive. However, these differences between the various professional roles of participants were proven to be

statistically significant (Table 6.7.3). Setting and sector differences were not statistically significant. Over half of the respondents (58%, n = 189) said that they had independently undertaken their own training to help improve their knowledge and understanding about autism. As demonstrated in Table 6.7.3, differences reported between professional roles, setting type, and across sectors, were not statistically significant, in this area.

6.7.4 Whole sample: Knowledge and understanding of autism

Table 6.7.4 - Whole sample: Knowledge and understanding of autism: Data Table

Do you feel you have enough general knowledge about autism?

Response	All participants		Professional role				Setting				Sector					
			Teaching		Support		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*238*	70.00	*129*	70.49	*84*	70.59	*143*	63.56	*45*	83.33	*147*	66.82	*58*	73.42	*24*	80.00
No	*55*	16.18	*34*	18.58	*17*	14.29	*43*	19.11	*6*	11.11	*40*	18.18	*12*	15.19	*	*
Not sure	*47*	13.82	*20*	10.93	*18*	15.13	*39*	17.33	*	*	*33*	15.00	*9*	11.39	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(10) = 9.51$, $p = 0.49$)				($X^2(8) = 32.89$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(8) = 5.90$, $p = 0.66$)					

Do you feel you have enough general understanding about autism?

Response	All participants		Professional role				Setting				Sector					
			Teaching		Support		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*262*	77.29	*139*	76.37	*93*	78.15	*161*	71.88	*48*	88.89	*165*	75.34	*60*	75.95	*28*	93.33
No	*43*	12.68	*27*	14.84	*12*	10.08	*36*	16.07	*	*	*31*	14.16	*10*	12.66	*	*
Not sure	*34*	10.03	*16*	8.79	*14*	11.76	*27*	12.05	*	*	*23*	10.50	*9*	11.39	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(10) = 6.15$, $p = 0.80$)				($X^2(16) = 30.74$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(8) = 7.00$, $p = 0.54$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Whilst most respondents (70%) believed their knowledge of autism was sufficient to support them in their professional role, 16% thought it could be better. However, 77% of participants felt that they had a good understanding of autism, with just 13% considering their understanding could be improved (Table 6.7.4). Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the nature of their roles and the environment in which they worked, educators working in specialist provision sectors reported higher levels of

knowledge (+22 p.p.), and understanding (+18 p.p.), than their colleagues working within mainstream. In both understanding and knowledge, the differences were proven to be significant (Table 6.7.4). Despite some variances within the response data, neither the professional role of respondents, nor the sector in which they worked, were proven a significant factor in the levels of self-reported knowledge or understanding about autism, as shown in Table 6.7.4.

6.7.5 Whole sample: Access to resources

When questioned about the resources available to them, to support their role when working with autistic learners, 59% of respondents felt what was available was sufficient, although 27% indicated this wasn't the case in their experience (Table 6.7.5). Whilst similar proportions of both teachers (61%), and support staff (58%), said they had access to sufficient resources, for NQTs (25%), and agency staff (9%), suitable resources were not readily available. The differences in experience reported between professional roles were identified as being significant (p = <0.05). Practitioners working in mainstream were considerably less likely to have suitable resources readily available to them, than their colleagues working within specialist provisions (20 p.p. difference). These differences between work placement were found to be statistically significant as shown in Table 6.7.5.

Interestingly, 90% of participating education professionals said that they would like to have access to more suitable resources, however 41% said they did not know, or were unsure of, where to access additional materials to support them, in their role. Whilst professional role and work placement, were found to have no significant impact on practitioners' desire to access more resources, differences between the sectors were proven statistically significant (Table 6.7.5). When considering where to access additional resources, none of the subgroup variables has a statistically significant impact on outcome, as demonstrated in Table 6.7.5.

Table 6.7.5 - Whole sample: Access to resources: Data Table

Do you feel you have enough access to resources to improve your knowledge and understanding of autism and support you in your role?

Response	All participants		Professional role				Setting				Sector					
			Teaching		Support		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*199*	58.53	*112*	61.20	*69*	57.98	*119*	53.13	*39*	72.22	*121*	55.25	*51*	63.75	*20*	66.67
No	*93*	27.35	*51*	27.87	*30*	25.21	*70*	31.25	*8*	14.81	*62*	28.31	*22*	27.50	*5*	16.67
Not sure	*48*	14.12	*20*	10.93	*20*	16.81	*35*	15.63	*7*	12.96	*36*	16.44	*7*	8.75	*5*	16.67
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(10) = 20.29$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(16) = 33.46$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(8) = 13.48$, $p = 0.10$)					

Would you like to have access to more resources to improve your knowledge and understanding of autism?

Response	All participants		Professional role				Setting				Sector					
			Teaching		Support		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*305*	89.71	*162*	88.04	*107*	90.68	*204*	91.07	*48*	88.89	*202*	92.24	*69*	86.25	*25*	83.33
No	*35*	10.29	*22*	11.96	*11*	9.32	*20*	8.93	*6*	11.11	*17*	7.76	*11*	13.75	*5*	16.67
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(5) = 2.55$, $p = 0.77$)				($X^2(8) = 10.81$, $p = 0.21$)				($X^2(4) = 9.34$, $p = <0.05$)					

Do you know where to access resources to improve your knowledge and understanding of autism and support you in your current role?

Response	All participants		Professional role				Setting				Sector					
			Teaching		Support		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*201*	58.94	*117*	63.59	*65*	54.62	*124*	55.11	*39*	72.22	*122*	55.45	*50*	62.50	*22*	73.33
No	*68*	19.94	*35*	19.02	*26*	21.85	*50*	22.22	*9*	16.67	*50*	22.73	*15*	18.75	*	*
Not sure	*72*	21.11	*32*	17.39	*28*	23.53	*51*	22.67	*6*	11.11	*48*	21.82	*15*	18.75	*6*	20.00
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(10)$ 16.79, $p = 0.08$)				($X^2(16) = 19.65$, $p = 0.24$)				($X^2(8) = 12.08$, $p = 0.15$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

6.7.6 Whole sample: Educator confidence

Generally, respondents to this survey reported moderate to high confidence in their ability to identify when a learner might be displaying autistic related behaviours at school (81%). Confidence levels were just as high, when considering their own ability to support an autistic learner, in the classroom (81%). Table 6.7.6 presents the response data in this area.

Table 6.7.6 - Whole sample: Educator confidence: Data Table

How confident are you that you would be able to identify if a pupil was displaying autistic related traits and behaviours?

Response	All participants		Professional role				Setting				Sector					
			Teaching		Support		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
Level of confidence	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
None	*6*	1.91	*4*	2.55	*	*	*	*	*	*	*5*	2.39	*	*	-	-
Slight	*55*	17.52	*31*	19.75	*19*	15.97	*48*	21.33	*	*	*42*	20.10	*10*	14.29	*	*
Moderate	*147*	46.82	*56*	35.67	*68*	57.14	*100*	44.44	*29*	53.70	*101*	48.33	*28*	40.00	*17*	65.38
High	*106*	33.76	*66*	42.04	*31*	26.05	*73*	32.44	*21*	38.89	*61*	29.19	*31*	44.29	*8*	30.77
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(15) = 29.07$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(18) = 18.99$, $p = 0.39$)				($X^2(12) = 18.56$, $p = 0.10$)					

How confident are you that you would have the knowledge and understanding to support an autistic pupil?

Response	All participants		Professional role				Setting				Sector					
			Teaching		Support		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
Level of confidence	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
None	*	*	*	*	-	-	*	*	-	-	*	*	-	-	-	-
Slight	*61*	17.94	*28*	15.30	*22*	18.49	*54*	24.00	*	*	*44*	20.00	*14*	17.72	*	*
Moderate	*157*	46.18	*85*	46.45	*60*	50.42	*107*	47.56	*26*	48.15	*110*	50.00	*29*	36.71	*16*	53.33
High	*118*	34.71	*67*	36.61	*37*	31.09	*61*	27.11	*26*	48.15	*63*	28.64	*36*	45.57	*12*	40.00
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(15) = 18.71$, $p = 0.23$)				($X^2(24) = 57.08$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(12) = 33.69$, $p = <0.05$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

When it comes to being able to identify possible signs of autism in the classroom, differences between the professional role of respondents were statistically significant (Table 6.7.6). Despite staff working in specialist settings reporting higher levels of self-confidence than those based in mainstream (23 p.p. difference), the differences between work placements were not significant. Similarly, sector differences were not statistically significant, as shown in Table 6.7.6.

Thinking about ability to support autistic learners in the classroom, the professional role of respondents was not significantly linked to their reported level of confidence (Table 6.7.6). Those working within specialist provisions (97%) reported considerably higher levels of confidence in their abilities to support autistic learners,

than their colleagues based in mainstream settings (75%). Analysis identified the differences between work placement as being significant (p = <0.05). Again, practitioners felt more confident as the age of the learner increased, from pre-school (67%), into primary (79%), through secondary (82%), and on to post-16 (93%), education. In this area, the sector differences were proven to be statistically significant (Table 6.7.6).

6.7.7 Whole sample summary

Across the sample of 378 education professionals, response data suggests most already have experienced working with autistic learners, generally reporting appropriate information sharing practices. When working with autistic students, many report in-house support to be adequate, however respondents were generally less satisfied with support being provided by their local authority, and outside agencies. The majority had received some form of autism-related training, provided by their employers, however, many had independently undertaken training to improve their knowledge and understanding. Although most indicated they had sufficient access to a variety of resources, many said they would like more, however a substantial proportion were unsure, or did not know, where to access the resources, they required.

Generally, educators within this sample felt they had good levels of knowledge and understanding about autism, most reporting confidence in their ability to identify possible signs of autism being displayed in their students, and to support an autistic learner in their education. Across many of the areas investigated, significant differences were identified between the experiences of those working in mainstream and specialist provision settings, across the sectors, and between teaching and support staff. Taking these into consideration, the results below focus on the cohorts from the various professional roles represented within the sample.

6.8 Educator results: Teaching staff

The majority of participants in this educator sample were teaching staff (55%, n = 207), this section focuses on data relating to teacher experience of autism and working with autistic learners. Table 6.8 (below) presents the characteristics of teaching staff respondents considered within this section. Whilst most were based in either mainstream or specialist provisions, 9% (n = 18) worked in LA roles.

Table 6.8 - Teaching staff sample demographic overview

Variable			Participant age range		
	n	%	Lowest	Highest	Mode
All teaching staff	*207*	54.76	18-24	65-70	45-54
Biological sex	% of all teaching staff				
Male	*25*	12.01	25-34	55-64	45-54
Female	*182*	87.92	18-24	65-70	45-54
Sector					
Primary	*145*	70.05	18-24	55-64	45-54
Secondary	*45*	21.74	25-34	55-64	35-44
Post-16	*10*	4.83	25-34	55-64	45-54
Across all age groups	*6*	2.90	25-34	55-64	45-54
Provision and sector					
Mainstream	*131*	63.29	18-24	65-70	45-54
Mainstream primary	*104*	50.24	18-24	55-64	45-54
Mainstream secondary	*22*	10.63	25-34	55-64	35-44
Specialist	*55*	26.57	25-34	55-64	35-44
Specialist primary	*28*	13.53	25-34	55-64	45-54
Specialist secondary	*18*	8.70	25-34	55-64	35-44

Half of the teachers indicated that they had personal experience of autism, outside of their professional roles (51%, n = 104), whilst 94% (n = 163) said that they had worked with an autistic learner, at some point in their career, 69% (n = 108) of them, at time of participation. While those based in specialist settings were more likely to have experience of working with autistic learners ($X^2(1) = 2.04$, $p = 0.15$), and be working with them at time of participation ($X^2(1) = 1.92$, $p = 0.17$), than those in mainstream the differences were not significant.

6.8.1 Teaching staff: Information sharing

Although most teachers said they were given the opportunity to meet and get to know an autistic learner they would be working with in advance, 36% said this wasn't the case (Table 6.8.1). Response data suggests that the practice of having introductory meetings between learner and teacher are mostly used at primary level (72%), with teachers working in secondary (40%), and post-16 (33%), levels, less likely to be afforded this opportunity. These differences between the sectors were proven statistically significant (p = <0.05). Teachers working in specialist provisions (82%), were considerably more likely to have spent time with the learner, before they started working with them, than their colleagues based in mainstream (60%), these differences being significant (Table 6.8.1). Within mainstream settings, again, primary school teachers (69%), were considerably more likely to have a '*get to know*' session with a learner, before working with them, than those working in secondary (29%), or post-16 (25%), settings. Sector differences were significant in mainstream ($X^2(3) = 15.32$, p = <0.05), however this was not the case in specialist provisions ($X^2(3) = 2.52$, $p = 0.47$).

Many respondents indicated that sufficient information relating to the learner was provided prior to working with them (64%), however, 31%, said this was not their experience. As shown in Table 6.8.1, the sector and setting in which teachers were based, were not significantly impactful. Within the settings, sector differences were not found to be significant in either mainstream ($X^2(6) = 7.72$, $p = 0.26$), or specialist ($X^2(6) = 4.54$, $p = 0.60$), provisions.

Generally, teachers were satisfied that necessary details relating to appropriate strategies known to be effective with the individual learner, were provided before they started working together (76%), yet in 24% of cases, this was not the case. Differences between the sectors and settings were not significant, as shown in Table 6.8.1. Mainstream primary and post-16 practitioners were more likely to have been offered details of effective strategies than those in secondary, although this

was not significant ($X^2(3) = 3.87$, $p = 0.28$). For those based in specialist provisions, teachers working with older learners, shared a more positive view, in this area, with the differences being significant ($X^2(3) = 10.63$, $p = <0.05$).

Table 6.8.1 - Teacher sample: Information sharing: Data Table

Did you have an opportunity to meet and get to know the autistic pupil before they attended your class?

	All teaching participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*98*	63.64	*68*	59.65	*22*	81.48	*81*	71.68	*12*	40.00	*	*
No	*56*	36.36	*46*	40.35	*5*	18.52	*32*	28.32	*18*	60.00	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(1) = 4.51$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(4) = 14.76$, $p = <0.05$)					

Do you feel you were given enough information about the autistic pupil you would be working with before they attended your class?

	All teaching participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*99*	64.29	*70*	61.40	*20*	74.07	*75*	66.37	*18*	60.00	*	*
No	*47*	30.52	*38*	33.33	*6*	22.22	*34*	30.09	*8*	26.67	*	*
Not sure	*8*	5.19	*6*	5.26	*	*	*	*	*	*	-	-
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 1.52$, $p = 0.47$)				($X^2(8) = 8.58$, $p = 0.38$)					

Were appropriate strategies known to be effective with the particular child shared with you before they attended your class?

	All teaching participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*116*	75.82	*84*	74.34	*22*	81.48	*86*	76.79	*23*	76.67	*	*
No	*37*	24.19	*29*	25.66	*5*	18.52	*26*	23.21	*7*	23.33	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(1) = 0.61$, $p = 0.43$)				($X^2(4) = 6.66$, $p = 0.16$)					

Were you made aware of any specific triggers that were known to upset the child before they attended your class?

	All teaching participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*113*	73.38	*84*	73.68	*19*	70.37	*84*	74.34	*23*	76.67	*	*
No	*41*	26.62	*30*	26.32	*8*	29.63	*29*	25.66	*7*	23.33	*5*	83.33
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(1) = 0.12$, $p = 0.73$)				($X^2(4) = 11.91$, $p = <0.05$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

In most cases, information regarding specific triggers known to upset an individual learner was shared, yet, for a sizeable proportion of respondents, such information had not been shared (27%) (Table 6.8.1). Sector differences were proven significant, with only one teacher based in post-16 (17%) saying that they had been provided details of specific triggers, by comparison 74% of primary, and 77% of secondary, teachers said this information had been shared with them, in advance (Table 6.8.1). As shown in Table 6.8.1, variances in response data between setting types were not significant. Within settings, differences across the sectors in mainstream were not significant ($X^2(3) = 6.36$, $p = 0.10$), whereas those reported in specialist provisions were statistically significant ($X^2(3) = 8.38$, $p = <0.05$).

6.8.2 Teaching staff: Support whilst working with autistic learners

Tables presenting an overview of response data for these questions can be accessed in Appendix 3c. Teaching staff (85%, n = 150) largely feel supported by their school when working with autistic learners, with just 14 (7%) indicating their belief that the support provided was not sufficient (Figure 6.8.2 below). Differences reported across the sectors ($p = 0.10$), and between settings ($p = 0.18$) were not significant. Within the settings, differences in sector specific experiences in mainstream were significant ($X^2(6) = 21.12$, $p = <0.05$), whilst those in specialist settings were not ($X^2(6) = 3.63$, $p = 0.73$).

When it comes to considering how supportive teachers feel their LAs have been, just 39% (n = 64) felt supported, in contrast 43% (n = 70) said they didn't feel their LA had provided the support required (Figure 6.8.2 below). Again, the variances in response data between setting type ($p = 0.32$) and across sectors ($p = 0.31$) were not proven statistically significant. Looking across the sectors at both mainstream ($X^2(6) = 4.96$, $p = 0.55$), and specialist ($X^2(6) = 8.59$, $p = 0.20$), settings, differences reported were not statistically significant.

Whilst 46% (n = 81) of teachers indicated the support available to them from outside agencies was satisfactory, 40% (n = 71) considered the opposite to be the case (Figure 6.8.2). Based on response data, access to support from outside agencies was considerably better at specialist provisions (62%), than it appears to be in mainstream (39%), with the differences between the two settings proven statistically significant ($X^2(2) = 9.30$, $p = <0.05$). No significant differences were apparent when considering teacher responses across the sectors ($p = 0.74$). No significance was found in the differences reported across the sectors within both mainstream ($X^2(6) = 5.43$, $p = 0.49$), and specialist provisions ($X^2(6) = 6.27$, $p = 0.39$).

Figure 6.8.2 - Support available to teaching staff when working with autistic learners

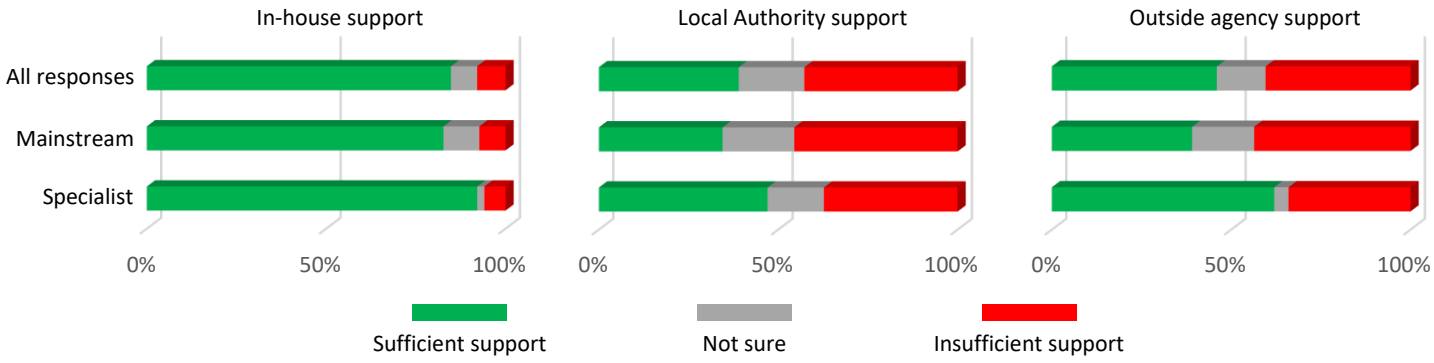


Figure 6.8.2 presents an illustrated overview of the response data discussed above, it clearly demonstrates that larger proportions of teachers based in specialist provisions feel better supported across the three measures, than their colleagues working within mainstream settings. Whilst data highlights a considerable gap in experience, analysis only prove this to be significant when considering support accessed through outside agencies.

6.8.3 Teaching staff: Autism related training

Most teaching staff respondents indicated they had received some form of autism related training, provided by their employers (78%), with 85% of those saying this

training had happened within the last five years. Whilst 72% felt the training provided for them was sufficient, 57% indicated that they had independently taken some additional training to improve their knowledge and understanding of autism (Table 6.8.3).

Table 6.8.3 - Teacher sample: Autism related training: Data Table

Have you had any autism related training provided by your employer?

	All teaching participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*147*	78.19	*92*	77.31	*43*	84.31	*104*	80.00	*30*	73.17	*7*	70.00
No	*41*	21.81	*27*	22.69	*8*	15.69	*26*	20.00	*11*	26.83	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(1) = 1.07$, $p = 0.30$)				($X^2(4) = 6.51$, $p = 0.16$)					

Do you feel your employer provides you with enough autism related training?

	All teaching participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*110*	71.90	*67*	72.83	*33*	71.74	*81*	75.70	*21*	63.64	*	*
No	*22*	14.38	*10*	10.87	*9*	19.57	*13*	12.15	*7*	21.21	*	*
Not sure	*21*	13.73	*15*	16.30	*	*	*13*	12.15	*5*	15.15	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 2.98$, $p = 0.23$)				($X^2(6) = 5.02$, $p = 0.54$)					

Have you independently undertaken your own training to improve your understanding and knowledge of autism?

	All teaching participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*103*	56.91	*57*	48.31	*35*	76.09	*70*	53.85	*21*	60.00	*8*	80.00
No	*78*	43.09	*61*	51.69	*11*	23.91	*60*	46.15	*14*	40.00	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(1) = 10.37$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(4) = 5.22$, $p = 0.27$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

As shown in Table 6.8.3, sector and setting differences were not statistically significant in relation to teachers accessing autism related training. Minimal differences across the sectors within both mainstream ($X^2(3) = 3.51$, $p = 0.32$), and specialist ($X^2(3) = 2.42$, $p = 0.49$) provision settings were not significant. When considering when autism related training had last been delivered, neither the age

group worked with nor the work placement, were significantly linked to participant responses (Table 6.8.3).

The evident differences in the response data across sectors and between settings, when considering if the autism training provided was sufficient, were not statistically significant, as demonstrated in Table 6.8.3. Respondents working in specialist provisions (76%) were considerably more likely to have undertaken some independent training, than those in mainstream (48%), these differences were proven statistically significant (p = <0.05). Differences in the data relating to the sector in which participants worked were not significant, neither generally (Table 6.8.3), nor in mainstream ($X^2(3) = 2.16$, $p = 0.54$), or specialist ($X^2(3) = 1.40$, $p = 0.71$), provision settings.

6.8.4 Teaching staff: Knowledge and understanding of autism

In general terms, teachers felt they had a good knowledge (71%, n = 129), and understanding (77%, n = 139), of autism. Tables presenting the response data breakdown across subgroups can be found in Appendix 3c. Setting differences were statistically significant for both the levels of knowledge ($X^2(2) = 8.70$, p = <0.05) and understanding ($X^2(2) = 5.97$, p = <0.05), amongst teaching staff. Teachers working in specialist provisions, perhaps unsurprisingly, given the nature of the learning environment, reported higher levels of understanding (18 p.p. difference), and knowledge (23 p.p. difference), than their counterparts working within mainstream. Sector differences were not significant in relation to teachers' knowledge ($p = 0.52$), or understanding ($p = 0.35$), of autism.

Whilst most teachers had conviction in their own knowledge and understanding of autism, 19% considered their knowledge to be lacking, whilst 15% felt their understanding could be improved. Table 6.8.4 (below) presents data identifying the importance of autism related training in maintaining and developing teacher

confidence in these areas. Teachers who indicated that such training had been provided for them, considered themselves more knowledgeable and to have a better understanding, with the differences proven to be statistically significant.

Table 6.8.4 - Crosstabulation: Employer provided autism related training and teacher perception of their knowledge and understanding about autism

		Do you have enough knowledge about autism?						
		Yes		Not sure		No		
		n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*Totals*
Have you had any autism related training provided by your employer?	Yes	*115*	79.31	*15*	10.34	*15*	10.34	145
	No	*14*	36.84	*5*	13.16	*19*	50.00	38

Pearson Chi-Square: $X^2(2) = 33.41$, $p = <0.05$

		Do you have enough understanding about autism?						
		Yes		Not sure		No		
		n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*Totals*
Have you had any autism related training provided by your employer?	Yes	*120*	83.33	*13*	9.03	*11*	7.64	144
	No	*19*	50.00	*3*	7.89	*16*	42.11	38

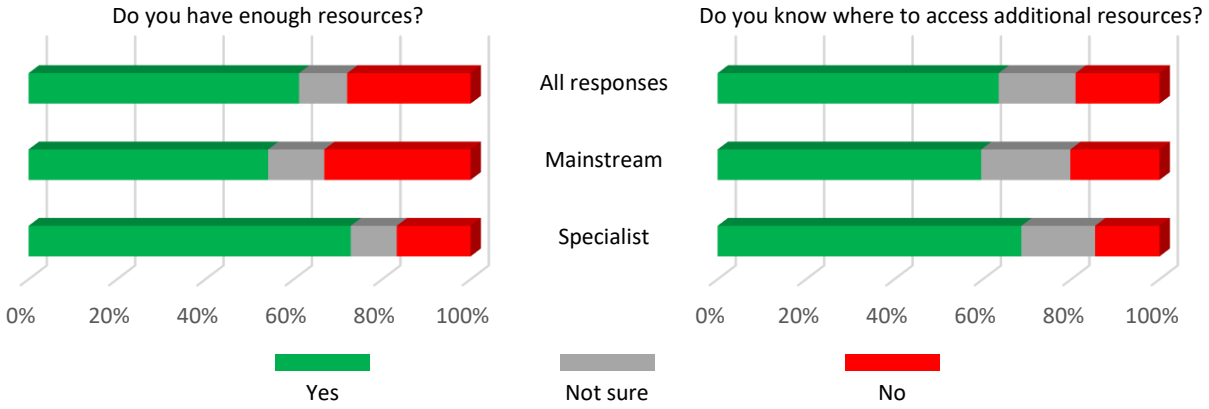
Pearson Chi-Square: $X^2(2) = 28.49$, $p = <0.05$

6.8.5 Teaching staff: Access to resources

Despite most teachers saying they had sufficient access to resources to support them in the classroom (61%, n = 112), 28% (n = 51) said they did not. Most respondents indicated that they would like to access more resources (88%, n = 162), however, 36% (n = 67) said they did not know, or were unsure of, where to find them. There were minimal differences in response data across the sectors, regarding resources currently available to teachers ($p = 0.41$), or their knowledge of where additional resources could be accessed ($p = 0.28$). As evidenced in Figure 6.8.5 (below), when compared to mainstream teachers, teaching staff working within specialist provisions seemingly had better access to the resources needed to help support autistic learners and were more confident in their ability to find alternative material, if needed. Despite these visible differences between work

placement responses, no significance was proven in either current access (p = 0.07), or knowledge of where to access more (p = 0.54).

Figure 6.8.5 - Teacher access to suitable resources when working with autistic learners



6.8.6 Teaching staff: Teacher confidence

The majority of the teacher respondents (78%) indicated they had moderate (36%) to high (42%) confidence in their ability to identify if a learner was displaying possible autism related behaviours in the classroom (Table 6.8.6). Reported differences between the sectors were not proven significant. However, those teaching in specialist provisions had significantly higher levels of confidence than their colleagues working within mainstream (Table 6.8.6). Whilst 96% of teachers based in specialist settings had moderate (46%), to high confidence (50%) in their abilities, for those referring to mainstream (73%), 32% had moderate confidence, and 41% reported high confidence levels, in this area. No significant differences were found across the sectors in either mainstream (p = 0.23), or specialist provision (p = 0.54), settings.

Table 6.8.6 - Teacher sample: Teacher confidence: Data Table

How confident are you that you would be able to identify if a pupil was displaying autistic related traits and behaviours?

	All teaching participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
Level of confidence	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
None	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	-	-
Slight	*31*	19.75	*30*	27.47	-	-	*25*	21.19	*5*	17.24	-	-
Moderate	*56*	35.67	*38*	31.93	*11*	45.83	*46*	38.98	*6*	20.69	*	*
High	*66*	42.04	*49*	41.18	*12*	50.00	*44*	37.29	*17*	58.62	*	*
	Pearson Chi-Square		($X^2(3) = 8.13$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(12) = 11.97$, $p = 0.45$)					

How confident are you that you would have the knowledge and understanding to support an autistic pupil?

	All teaching participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
Level of confidence	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
None	*	*	*	*	-	-	*	*	-	-	-	-
Slight	*28*	15.30	*25*	21.01	-	-	*22*	17.05	*6*	15.79	-	-
Moderate	*85*	46.45	*62*	52.10	*18*	37.50	*65*	50.39	*15*	39.47	*5*	50.00
High	*67*	36.61	*30*	27.47	*30*	62.50	*40*	31.01	*17*	44.74	*5*	50.00
	Pearson Chi-Square		($X^2(3) = 25.65$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(12) = 74.38$, $p = <0.05$)					

How confident are you that you would have the knowledge and understanding to support the family of an autistic pupil?

	All teaching participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
Level of confidence	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
None	*16*	8.79	*12*	10.08	-	-	*10*	7.75	*5*	13.16	-	-
Slight	*44*	24.18	*39*	32.77	*	*	*35*	27.13	*7*	18.42	*	*
Moderate	*72*	39.56	*43*	36.13	*24*	51.06	*54*	41.86	*13*	34.21	*	*
High	*50*	27.47	*25*	21.01	*20*	42.55	*30*	23.26	*13*	34.21	*	*
	Pearson Chi-Square		($X^2(3) = 21.64$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(12) = 20.60$, $p = 0.06$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

A higher proportion of participants (83%) felt moderate (46%) to high confidence (37%) that they had the knowledge and understanding to support an autistic learner, in the classroom (Table 6.8.6). Again, confidence levels increased with the age group being taught, from primary through to post-16, these differences between the sectors were found to be statistically significant, as shown in Table 6.8.6. Although 77% of mainstream teachers reported moderate (52%), to high

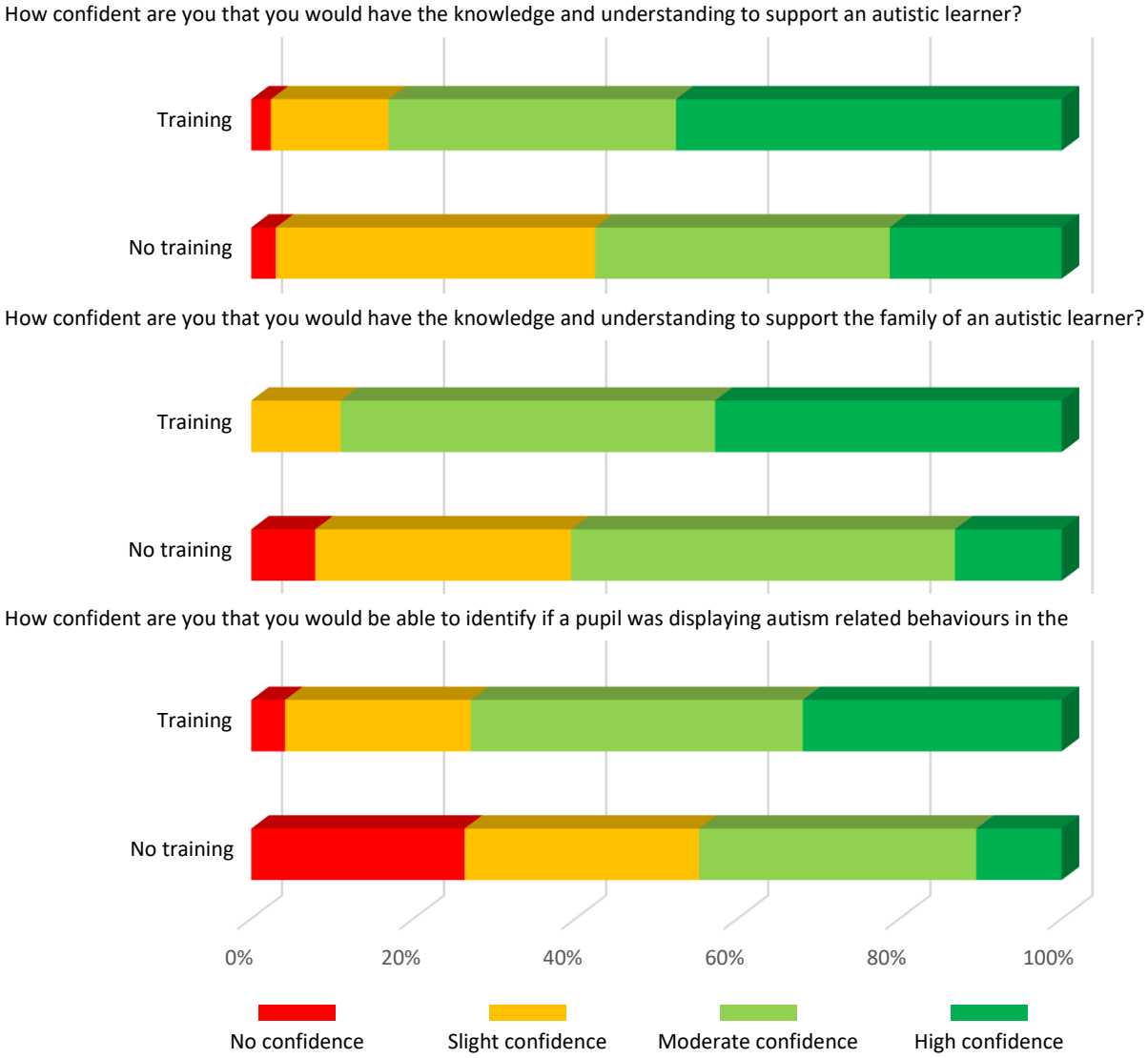
(25%), levels of confidence in this area, all 48 specialist setting teachers were either moderately (38%), or highly (62%), confident. Analysis identified the differences between placement as significant (Table 6.8.6). Whilst no significant differences were established between the sectors at specialist provisions ($X^2(3) = 2.80$, $p = 0.42$), in mainstream the increase in confidence reported between teachers working at primary level and those in post-16 education was significant ($X^2(9) = 63.73$, $p = <0.05$).

Often, a teacher's role goes beyond just supporting the learner in the classroom, especially for those with identified ALN, whose families are frequently needing support and guidance (Table 6.8.6). Most teachers within this sample (67%), reported moderate (40%), to high (27%), levels of confidence in their ability to provide families of autistic learners with some support. Whilst 94% of those employed within specialist provisions were moderately or highly, confident that they could support the family of an autistic learner, just 57% of their counterparts teaching in mainstream shared similar levels of confidence, the differences were proven statistically significant (Table 6.8.6). Differences reported between the sectors, in this area, were not significant (Table 6.8.6), with no significant differences identified between the sectors in either mainstream ($p = 0.14$), or specialist provision settings ($p = 0.65$).

The importance of autism related training to develop teacher confidence is illustrated in Figure 6.8.6 (below). Teachers who had received training were considerably more confident in their ability to identify where a learner might be displaying autism related behaviours in the classroom and provide support to both the learner, and their family. Meanwhile, high proportions of teachers with no training reported having no, or just slight, confidence in their abilities across the three measures. The differences in confidence between teachers with and without training were proven to be statistically significant across the three areas (identifying

signs of autism $X^2(3) = 12.52$, $p = <0.05$; supporting autistic learners $X^2(3) = 26.97$, $p = <0.05$; supporting the family of autistic learners $X^2(3) = 22.60$, $p = <0.05$).

Figure 6.8.6 - The impact of employer provided autism related training on teacher confidence in their ability to identify, and support autism in the classroom



6.9 Educator results: Support staff

A little over a third of responding education professionals were support staff (35%, n = 132), the following sections present their responses, to understand their experiences of supporting autistic learners, through their education. Participants

were working in twenty of the twenty-two LA regions across Wales, with only the Isle of Anglesey and Blaenau Gwent, not represented. At the time of the survey, 8% (n = 11) were supporting learners on a one-to-one basis, 26% (n = 34) were higher level teaching assistants (HLTAs), 30% (n = 40) held the role of learning support assistant (LSA), whilst 36% (n = 47) were classed as teaching assistants (TAs). Table 6.9 presents the sample characteristics.

Table 6.9 - Support staff sample demographic overview

Variable			Participant age range		
	n	%	Lowest	Highest	Mode
All support staff	*132*	34.92	18-24	65-70	45-54
Biological sex	% of all support staff				
Male	*9*	6.82	25-34	55-64	45-54
Female	*122*	92.42	18-24	65-70	45-54
Sector					
Primary	*72*	54.55	18-24	55-64	35-44
Secondary	*38*	28.79	18-24	65-70	45-54
Post-16	*21*	15.91	25-34	65-70	55-64
Provision and sector					
Mainstream	*86*	65.15	18-24	65-70	45-54
Mainstream primary	*56*	42.42	18-24	55-64	45-54
Mainstream secondary	*21*	15.91	18-24	65-70	45-54
Mainstream Post-16	*9*	6.82	25-34	65-70	55-64
Specialist	*33*	25.00	18-24	55-64	35-44
Specialist primary	*13*	9.85	18-24	55-64	35-44
Specialist secondary	*13*	9.85	18-24	55-64	45-54
Specialist Post-16	*7*	5.30	35-44	55-64	55-64

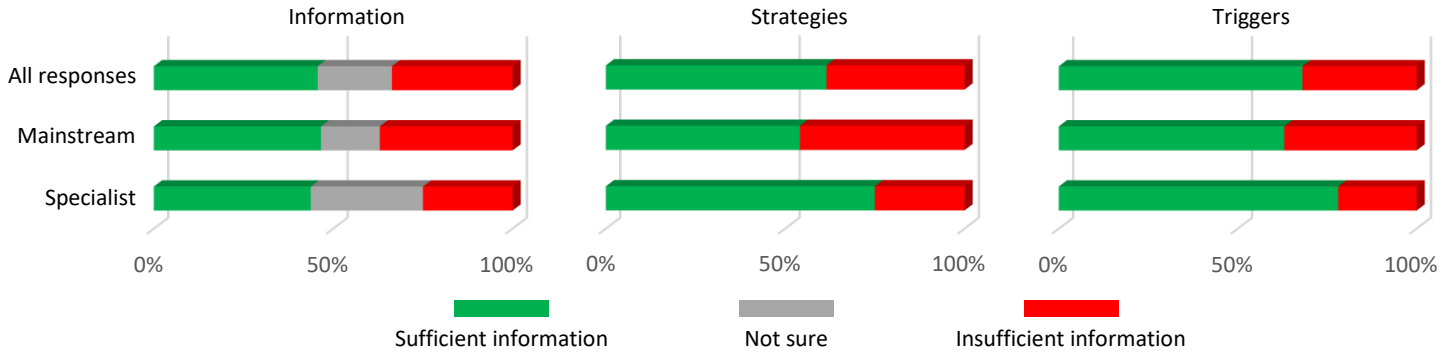
Just 46% (n = 59) of the support staff respondents said that they had experience of autism outside of their professional roles. While 92% (n = 118) indicated they had supported an autistic learner, at some point in their career, 69% (n = 82) of those were, at the time of participation.

6.9.1 Support staff: Information sharing

Data tables for this section are available in Appendix 3c. Just over half of the support workers with experience of working with autistic learners said they were given an opportunity to meet and get to know the individual, before they started to work with them (52%, n = 61). Neither sector (p = 0.51), nor setting (p = 0.64), differences were statistically significant.

Just 46% (n = 53) of the participating support staff felt they had been given sufficient information relating to the learner, before they started working with them, whilst 34% (n = 39) considered the information provided to be insufficient (Figure 6.9.1). Those working in primary settings (55%), were more likely to have information shared, than their colleagues at secondary (41%), and post-16 (21%), provisions. These differences between sectors were proven significant ($X^2(6)$ = 13.63, p = <0.05). Differences between those working in mainstream and specialist provision settings, as illustrated in Figure 6.9.1, were not significant (p = 0.19).

Figure 6.9.1 – Support staff reports relating to information sharing when working with autistic learners



In most cases (62%, n = 72), effective strategies known to be effective with the individual learner were shared with support staff in advance of them working with autistic learners, however, 39% (n = 45) suggested such information was not passed

on to them (Figure 6.9.1). As evidenced in Figure 6.9.1, those employed at specialist settings were considerably more likely to have information relating to successful strategies, shared with them, than their counterparts based in mainstream (21 p.p. difference). These reported differences between the type of setting were proven statistically significant ($X^2(1) = 4.10$, $p = <0.05$). Sector differences were not significant ($p = 0.75$).

A higher proportion of respondents indicate that they were made aware of any specific triggers, known to upset the individual learner, in advance of working with them (68%, n = 79), whilst 32% (n = 37) suggest no such information was made available to them. Despite marked differences in experience reported between mainstream (63%), and specialist setting (78%), support staff, as illustrated in Figure 6.9.1, no significance was identified, in this area ($p = 0.13$). Differences across the sectors were also not significant ($p = 0.55$).

6.9.2 Support staff: Support whilst working with autistic learners

Whilst most support staff felt supported by their school, when working with autistic learners (70%), 16% suggested that they did not feel their employer to be supportive enough (Table 6.9.2). Neither sector, nor setting subgroup variables were statistically significant in relation of the outcome, as illustrated in Table 6.9.2.

Just 28% of participants felt the support provided by their LA, was sufficient, with a larger proportion feeling unsupported (34%). Again, as shown in Table 6.9.2, neither sector nor setting differences were proven significant in this area.

Just 33% of this sample felt adequate support was provided from outside agencies, when they were working with autistic learners, whilst 37% said the support

provided was lacking (Table 6.9.2). Limited differences reported between support staff working across the sectors, or settings, were not statistically significant.

Table 6.9.2 - Support Staff: Support whilst working with autistic learners: Data Table

Do you feel you are/were getting enough support from your school, whilst working with an autistic pupil?

	All support staff participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*79*	69.91	*50*	71.43	*22*	68.75	*46*	77.97	*21*	61.76	*11*	57.89
No	*18*	15.93	*11*	15.71	*	*	*7*	11.86	*9*	26.47	*	*
Not sure	*16*	14.16	*9*	12.86	*6*	18.75	*6*	10.17	*	*	*6*	31.58
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 0.70$, $p = 0.71$)				($X^2(6) = 9.90$, $p = 0.13$)					

Do you feel you are/were getting enough support from your Local Authority, whilst working with an autistic pupil?

	All support staff participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*31*	27.68	*20*	28.57	*9*	29.03	*18*	30.51	*8*	24.24	*	*
No	*38*	33.93	*24*	34.29	*10*	32.26	*21*	35.59	*14*	42.42	*	*
Not sure	*43*	38.39	*26*	37.14	*12*	38.71	*20*	33.90	*11*	33.33	*12*	63.16
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 0.04$, $p = 0.98$)				($X^2(6) = 9.38$, $p = 0.15$)					

Do you feel you are/were getting enough support from outside agencies whilst working with an autistic pupil?

	All support staff participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*37*	33.04	*22*	31.88	*13*	14.63	*19*	32.20	*12*	36.36	*5*	26.32
No	*41*	36.61	*24*	34.78	*11*	34.38	*20*	33.90	*14*	42.42	*7*	36.84
Not sure	*34*	30.36	*23*	33.33	*8*	25.00	*20*	33.90	*7*	21.21	*7*	36.84
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 0.98$, $p = 0.61$)				($X^2(6) = 4.25$, $p = 0.64$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

6.9.3 Support staff: Autism related training

Most of the support staff within this sample (77%), indicated that they have been provided with some form of autism related training by their employers, with 91% of them saying the training had taken place within the last five years (Table 6.9.3). Whilst 56% of respondents felt their employer provided sufficient training, 31%,

believed there needed to be more. Many (57%) said they had independently undertaken their own training to help improve their knowledge and understanding of autism. Differences in support staff experiences involving to autism related trainng, across sectors, and between settings, were not statistically significant across all measures, as shown in Table 6.9.3.

Table 6.9.3 - Support Staff: Autism related training: Data Table

Have you had any autism related training provided by your employer?

	All support staff participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*92*	77.31	*58*	76.32	*26*	81.25	*46*	71.88	*28*	77.78	*17*	89.47
No	*27*	22.69	*18*	23.68	*6*	18.75	*18*	28.13	*8*	22.22	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(1) = 0.32$, $p = 0.57$)				($X^2(3) = 4.39$, $p = 0.22$)					

Do you feel your employer provides you with enough autism related training?

	All support staff participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*66*	56.41	*39*	52.70	*21*	65.63	*32*	50.79	*18*	51.43	*15*	83.33
No	*36*	30.77	*23*	31.08	*8*	25.00	*23*	36.51	*11*	31.43	*	*
Not sure	*15*	12.82	*12*	16.22	*	*	*8*	12.70	*6*	17.14	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 1.68$, $p = 0.43$)				($X^2(6) = 7.78$, $p = 0.25$)					

Have you independently undertaken your own training to improve your understanding and knowledge of autism?

	All support staff participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*68*	57.14	*40*	52.63	*23*	71.88	*32*	50.00	*25*	69.44	*10*	55.56
No	*51*	42.86	*36*	47.37	*9*	28.13	*32*	50.00	*11*	30.56	*8*	44.44
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(1) = 3.43$, $p = 0.06$)				($X^2(3) = 4.33$, $p = 0.23$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

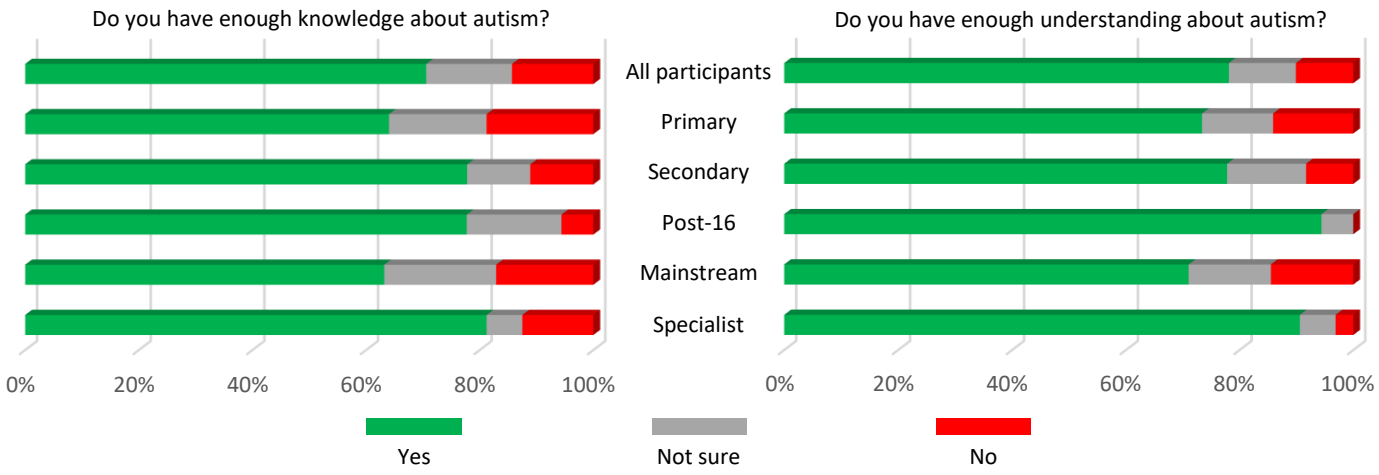
6.9.4 Support staff: Knowledge and understanding of autism

Most support staff considered themselves to have a good knowledge (71%, n = 84) and understanding of autism (78%, n = 93), however, as illustrated in Figure 6.9.4,

staff working in different sectors and settings reported varying levels of self-belief in these areas. The response data presented in tabular form for this section can be viewed in Appendix 3c.

As evident in Figure 6.9.4 below, support staff, across all sub-groups, felt more confident in their understanding of autism, than in their knowledge. Focusing on their knowledge, the differences reported between the sectors (p = 0.69), and settings (p = 0.13), were not statistically significant. Similarly, the differences in self-reported levels of understanding, across the sectors (p = 0.58), and between settings (p = 0.08), were not statistically significant.

Figure 6.9.4 – Support staff perceptions of their own knowledge and understanding about autism



6.9.5 Support staff: Access to resources

For many of the support staff surveyed, suitable resources were readily available (58%), however, 25% of respondents felt they did not have sufficient resources to support their role (Table 6.9.5). Whilst most indicated they would like to have access to more resources (91%), 22% said they did not know, or were unsure, where to look for them. As shown in Table 6.9.5, no significant differences were reported between sectors or settings, in relation to participant perceptions of the number of

resources available, or their knowledge of where additional resources could be accessed.

Table 6.9.5 - Support Staff: Access to resources: Data Table

Do you feel you have enough access to resources to improve your knowledge and understanding of autism and support you in your role?

	All support staff participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*69*	57.98	*43*	56.58	*22*	68.75	*34*	53.13	*24*	66.67	*11*	61.11
No	*30*	25.21	*20*	26.32	*5*	15.63	*18*	28.13	*9*	25.00	*	*
Not sure	*20*	16.81	*13*	17.11	*5*	15.63	*12*	18.75	*	*	*5*	27.78
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 1.70$, $p = 0.43$)				($X^2(6) = 8.33$, $p = 0.22$)					

Would you like to have access to more resources to improve your knowledge and understanding of autism?

	All support staff participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*107*	90.68	*68*	90.67	*29*	90.63	*60*	95.24	*33*	91.67	*13*	72.22
No	*11*	9.32	*7*	9.33	*	*	*	*	*	*	*5*	27.78
Pearson Chi-Square			(X2(1) = 0.00, p = 1.00)				(X2(3) = 8.95, p = <0.05)					

Do you know where to access resources to improve your knowledge and understanding of autism and support you in your current role?

	All support staff participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*65*	54.62	*39*	51.32	*23*	71.88	*31*	48.44	*21*	58.33	*13*	72.22
No	*26*	21.85	*19*	25.00	*6*	18.75	*19*	29.69	*6*	16.67	*	*
Not sure	*28*	23.53	*18*	23.68	*	*	*14*	21.88	*9*	25.00	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 4.41$, $p = 0.11$)				($X^2(6) = 9.36$, $p = 0.15$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

6.9.6 Support staff: Confidence

Most support staff (83%, n = 99) reported moderate (57%), to high (26%), levels of confidence in their ability to identify if a learner was displaying autism related behaviours in the classroom. Similar proportions (81%, n = 97) felt moderately

(50%), or highly (31%), confident that they were able to support an autistic learner, at school.

Figure 6.9.6 – Support staff confidence in their ability to identify, and support autism in the classroom

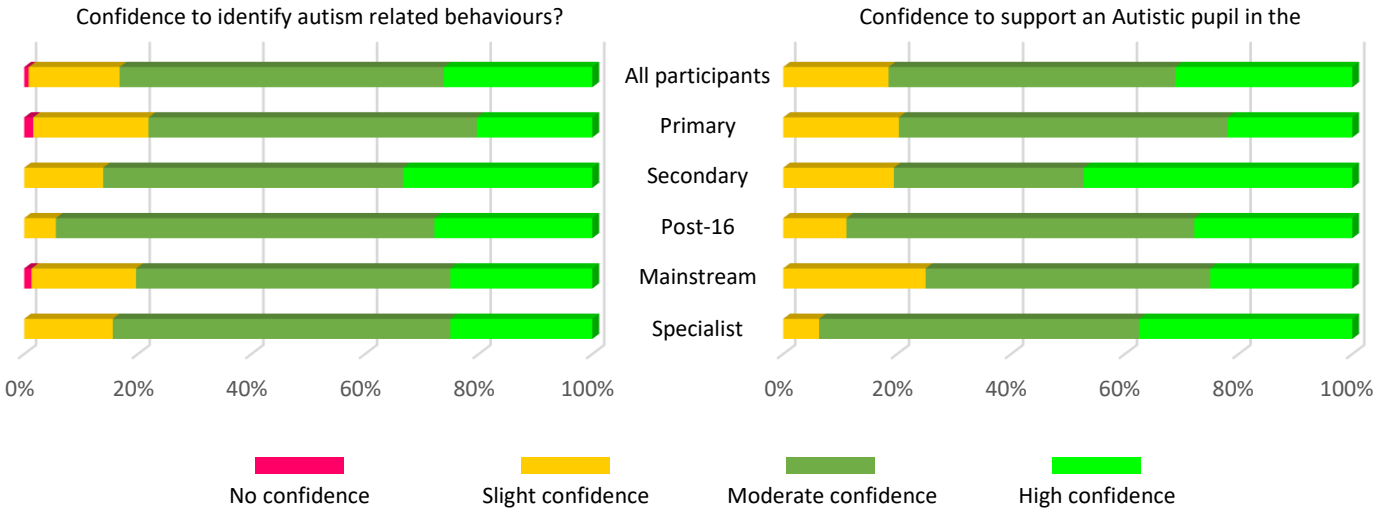


Figure 6.9.6 illustrates the response data across subgroups for both questions relating to educator confidence, the relevant data tables are accessible within Appendix 3c. Whilst support staff confidence in their ability to identify possible signs of autism increases through the sectors, the differences were not significant (p = 0.56). There was little difference between practitioner confidence amongst those working in either mainstream or specialist provisions, with setting differences not statistically significant (p = 0.90). When considering their confidence in supporting autistic learners in their education, variances between the sectors (p = 0.09), and settings (p = 0.07), in which respondents worked were not significant. Trends emerging suggest that support staff are more confident in their ability to identify possible autism related behaviours, than they are to support autistic learners in the classroom, however in both areas, confidence levels were generally elevated.

6.10 Support staff working one-to-one with autistic learners

Whilst, at the time of participation, just 8% (n = 11) of support staff respondents were employed as one-to-one support, 70% (n = 93) indicated they had undertaken this role, at some point in their career. Participants worked within 19 of the 22 LA regions, with Isle of Anglesey, Blaenau Gwent and Pembrokeshire the only authorities not represented.

Table 6.10 presents the sample characteristics for all support staff who have worked as a one-to-one, supporting autistic learners. Within this sample, there was an equal split between participants with (n = 46), and without (n = 47), experience of autism outside of their professional role, while 56% (n = 52) indicated they had some knowledge of autism, before undertaking the role of supporting an autistic learner on a one-to-one basis.

Table 6.10 – One-to-one support staff sample demographic overview

Variable			Participant age range		
	n	%	Lowest	Highest	Mode
All one-to-one support staff	*93*	24.60	18-24	65-70	45-54
Biological sex	% of all one-to-one support staff				
Male	*5*	5.38	25-34	55-64	55-64
Female	*87*	93.55	18-24	65-70	45-54
Sector					
Primary	*46*	49.46	18-24	55-64	35-44
Secondary	*30*	32.26	18-24	65-70	45-54
Post-16	*16*	17.20	25-34	65-70	55-64
Provision and sector					
Mainstream	*54*	58.06	18-24	65-70	45-54
Mainstream primary	*34*	36.56	18-24	55-64	45-54
Mainstream secondary	*13*	13.98	25-34	65-70	45-54
Mainstream Post-16	*7*	7.53	25-34	65-70	55-64
Specialist	*30*	32.26	18-24	35-44	55-64
Specialist primary	*11*	11.83	18-24	55-64	35-44
Specialist secondary	*13*	13.98	18-24	55-64	45-54
Specialist Post-16	*6*	6.45	35-44	55-64	55-64

6.10.1 One-to-one support staff: Information sharing

As shown in Table 6.10.1, 51% of those with experience of supporting autistic learners one-to-one indicated that they had been given an opportunity to meet and get to know the individual learner, in advance.

Table 6.10.1 - One-to-one support staff: Information sharing: Data table

Did you have an opportunity to meet and get to know the autistic pupil before you started working with them one-to-one?

	All one-to-one support staff participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*47*	50.54	*27*	49.09	*16*	53.33	*23*	50.00	*16*	53.33	*7*	41.18
No	*46*	49.46	*28*	50.91	*14*	46.67	*23*	50.00	*14*	46.67	*10*	58.82
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(1) = 0.14$, $p = 0.71$)				($X^2(6) = 4.00$, $p = 0.68$)					

Do you feel you were given enough information about the autistic pupil before you started working with them one-to-one?

	All one-to-one support staff participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*41*	44.57	*24*	44.44	*14*	46.67	*34*	54.84	*14*	41.18	*	*
No	*31*	33.70	*20*	37.04	*7*	23.33	*20*	32.26	*13*	38.24	*6*	31.58
Not sure	*20*	21.74	*10*	18.52	*9*	30.00	*8*	12.90	*7*	20.59	*9*	47.37
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 2.27$, $p = 0.32$)				($X^2(9) = 12.77$, $p = 0.17$)					

Were appropriate strategies known to be effective with the particular child shared with you before you started working with them?

	All one-to-one support staff participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*58*	62.37	*30*	54.55	*23*	76.67	*27*	58.70	*21*	70.00	*10*	58.82
No	*35*	37.63	*25*	45.45	*7*	23.33	*19*	41.30	*9*	30.00	*7*	41.18
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(1) = 4.05$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(6) = 4.46$, $p = 0.61$)					

Were you made aware of any specific triggers that were known to upset the child before you started working with them one-to-one?

	All one-to-one support staff participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*62*	67.39	*32*	59.26	*24*	80.00	*32*	69.57	*20*	68.97	*9*	52.94
No	*30*	32.61	*22*	40.74	*6*	20.00	*14*	30.43	*9*	31.03	*8*	47.06
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(1) = 3.73$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(6) = 3.77$, $p = 0.71$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Response data suggests generally good information sharing practices with these vital staff. Most reported that they had been provided necessary details relating to successful strategies (62%) and known triggers 67%. Although 45% felt they had been given sufficient information about the learner before starting to work with them, 34% said this was not the case, in their experience.

One-to-one staff in specialist settings were more likely to have information relating to triggers (21 p.p. difference), and strategies (23 p.p. difference), than their colleagues in mainstream, with the differences in both areas being identified as statistically significant as shown in Table 6.10.1. The sector in which support staff were working was not found to play a significant role in the differences reported across all four of the questions within this section, of the survey (Table 6.10.1). Minimal differences between those working in mainstream and specialist provisions were reported for meeting the learner in advance and general information sharing practices.

6.10.2 One-to-one support staff: Support whilst working with autistic learners

Generally, participants with experience of working one-to-one with autistic learners felt their school to be supportive (69%), however for 17%, this was not the case. Just 28% believed their LA to have provided them with sufficient support, whilst 34% considered their LA to be unsupportive. When asked about support provided from outside agencies, similar proportions had positive (39%), and negative (36%), experiences. Neither differences reported between setting type, nor sector, were proven statistically significant, across the three questions, as shown in Table 6.10.2, below.

Table 6.10.2 - One-to-one support staff: Support whilst working with autistic learners: Data Table

Do you feel you are/were getting enough support from your school, whilst working one-to-one with an autistic pupil?

	All one-to-one support staff participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*62*	68.89	*36*	70.59	*21*	70.00	*33*	75.00	*18*	62.07	*10*	62.50
No	*15*	16.67	*8*	15.69	*	*	*6*	13.64	*7*	24.14	*	*
Not sure	*13*	14.44	*7*	13.73	*5*	16.67	*5*	11.36	*	*	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 0.18$, $p = 0.91$)				($X^2(6) = 3.89$, $p = 0.69$)					

Do you feel you are/were getting enough support from your Local Authority, whilst working one-to-one with an autistic pupil?

	All one-to-one support staff participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*25*	28.09	*15*	29.41	*9*	31.03	*14*	31.82	*7*	25.00	*	*
No	*30*	33.71	*17*	33.33	*9*	31.03	*16*	36.36	*12*	42.86	*	*
Not sure	*34*	38.20	*19*	37.25	*11*	37.93	*14*	31.82	*9*	32.14	*11*	68.75
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 0.49$, $p = 0.98$)				($X^2(6) = 10.94$, $p = 0.09$)					

Do you feel you are/were getting enough support from outside agencies whilst working one-to-one with an autistic pupil?

	All one-to-one support staff participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*35*	39.33	*20*	40.00	*13*	43.33	*17*	38.64	*12*	42.86	*5*	31.25
No	*32*	35.96	*16*	32.00	*10*	33.33	*14*	31.82	*12*	42.86	*6*	37.50
Not sure	*22*	24.72	*14*	28.00	*7*	23.33	*13*	29.55	*	*	*5*	31.25
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 0.22$, $p = 0.90$)				($X^2(6) = 4.42$, $p = 0.62$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

6.10.3 One-to-one support staff: Autism related training

Most respondents (61%) indicated that they had not received any autism related training before undertaking the role of supporting autistic learners one-to-one at school, although 72% said that some training had been provided whilst in the role (Table 6.10.3). Support staff based in post-16 provisions were considerably more likely to have had training before undertaking the role of supporting an autistic learner one-to-one, than those based in primary, or secondary, settings. These

sector differences were proven to be statistically significant (p = <0.05). Differences between mainstream and specialist setting staff were not significant for training received either before, or whilst, working one-to-one with autistic learners, as shown in Table 6.10.3.

Table 6.10.3 - One-to-one support staff: Autism related training: Data Table

Did you have any autism related training provided by your employer, before working as a one-to-one support with an autistic pupil?

	All one-to-one support staff participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*34*	39.08	*15*	30.61	*15*	50.00	*12*	21.05	*17*	51.52	*14*	82.35
No	*53*	60.92	*34*	69.39	*15*	50.00	*45*	78.95	*16*	48.48	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(1) = 3.52$, p = 0.06)				($X^2(3) = 24.39$, p = <0.05)					

Did you have any autism related training provided by your employer, whilst working as a one-to-one support with an autistic pupil?

	All one-to-one support staff participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*62*	72.09	*33*	68.75	*23*	76.67	*37*	64.91	*24*	75.00	*15*	88.24
No	*24*	27.91	*15*	31.25	*7*	23.33	*20*	35.09	*8*	25.00	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(1) = 0.84$, p = 0.36)				($X^2(3) = 4.17$, p = 0.24)					

Do you feel your employer provides you with enough autism related training?

	All one-to-one support staff participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*49*	55.68	*26*	52.00	*20*	66.67	*20*	46.51	*16*	53.33	*12*	85.71
No	*28*	31.82	*15*	30.00	*8*	26.67	*17*	39.53	*9*	30.00	*	*
Not sure	*11*	12.50	*9*	18.00	*	*	*6*	13.95	*5*	16.67	-	-
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(15) = 22.67$, p = 0.09)				($X^2(9) = 12.49$, p = 0.19)					

Have you independently undertaken your own training to improve your understanding and knowledge of autism?

	All one-to-one support staff participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*55*	62.50	*28*	56.00	*22*	73.33	*24*	55.81	*21*	70.00	*9*	64.29
No	*33*	37.50	*22*	44.00	*8*	26.67	*19*	44.19	*9*	30.00	*5*	35.71
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(10) = 11.94$, p = 0.29)				($X^2(6) = 4.51$, p = 0.61)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Whilst 56% of support staff with one-to-one experience considered the amount of training provided to them to be sufficient, 32%, believed more would have been advantageous. In this area, no significant differences were seen in response data from those working across the sectors, or in the different setting types. Most indicated that they had undertaken independent training, to improve their knowledge and understanding of autism (63%), whilst again, sector and setting differences were not proven significant (Table 6.10.3).

Of the 41 participants who previously said that they had no knowledge of autism before being asked to undertake the role of supporting an autistic learner on a one-to-one basis, 31 also indicated that no training had been provided to them, before commencing in the role. This suggests that 33% of participating one-to-one support staff had no knowledge or training relating to autism, prior to embarking on the crucial role of supporting autistic learners.

6.10.4 One-to-one support staff: Knowledge and understanding of autism

At time of participation, 73% of the sample considered themselves to have a good knowledge of about autism, whilst 82% were also confident that they had a decent understanding of autism (Table 6.10.4). Setting and sector differences in response data relating to participants' knowledge and understanding of autism were not identified as being significant, as demonstrated in Table 6.10.4.

Of those who said they had no prior knowledge of autism, when they first took on the role of supporting an autistic learner, on a one-to-one basis, 64% said they now felt they had a good knowledge, and 72% felt their understanding to be of an acceptable level (Table 6.10.4). Those who received training before taking on one-to-one responsibilities generally felt they had better knowledge (9 p.p. difference) and understanding (4 p.p. difference). Response data suggests that the provision of

training, whilst working as one-to-one support with an autistic learner, increased knowledge (21 p.p. difference), and understanding (16 p.p. difference).

Table 6.10.4 - One-to-one support staff: Knowledge and understanding of autism: Data Table

Do you feel you have enough general knowledge about autism?

	All one-to-one support staff participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*64*	72.73	*33*	66.00	*24*	80.00	*29*	67.44	*24*	80.00	*10*	71.43
No	*14*	15.91	*10*	20.00	*	*	*10*	23.26	*	*	*	*
Not sure	*10*	11.36	*7*	14.00	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
	Pearson Chi-Square		($X^2(2) = 1.89$, $p = 0.39$)				($X^2(6) = 5.01$, $p = 0.54$)					

Do you feel you have enough general understanding about autism?

	All one-to-one support staff participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*72*	81.82	*37*	74.00	*27*	90.00	*33*	76.74	*25*	83.33	*13*	92.86
No	*8*	9.09	*7*	14.00	*	*	*6*	13.95	*	*	-	-
Not sure	*8*	9.09	*6*	12.00	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
	Pearson Chi-Square		($X^2(2) = 3.27$, $p = 0.20$)				($X^2(6) = 3.25$, $p = 0.78$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

6.10.5 One-to-one support staff: Access to resources

Having access to suitable resources is key for those working as one-to-one support for autistic learners. Within this sample, 58% said that sufficient resources were available to them, however, 23% indicated that this was not the case, in their experience (Table 6.10.5). Whilst 92% of respondents said that they would like to access more resources, 42% did not know, or were unsure, where to find additional material to support them. Neither the sector, nor the setting, in which one-to-one support staff were based, were found to significantly impact participant responses, in regard to the resources available to them, or their understanding of where to access additional resources, when needed as seen in Table 6.10.5.

Table 6.10.5 - One-to-one support staff: Access to resources: Data Table

Do you feel you have enough access to resources to improve your knowledge and understanding of autism and support you in your role?

	All one-to-one support staff participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*51*	57.95	*30*	60.00	*20*	66.67	*24*	55.81	*20*	66.67	*7*	50.00
No	*20*	22.73	*10*	15.00	*5*	16.67	*10*	23.26	*7*	23.33	*	*
Not sure	*17*	19.32	*10*	15.00	*5*	16.67	*9*	20.93	*	*	*5*	35.71
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 0.36$, $p = 0.84$)				($X^2(6) = 7.78$, $p = 0.25$)					

Do you know where to access resources to improve your knowledge and understanding of autism and support you in your current role?

	All one-to-one support staff participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*51*	57.95	*28*	56.00	*21*	70.00	*22*	51.16	*19*	63.33	*10*	71.43
No	*18*	20.45	*11*	22.00	*6*	20.00	*13*	30.23	*	*	*	*
Not sure	*19*	21.59	*11*	22.00	*	*	*8*	18.60	*7*	23.33	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 2.18$, $p = 0.34$)				($X^2(6) = 8.75$, $p = 0.19$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

6.10.6 One-to-one support staff: Confidence

Within this cohort, 89% reported moderate (63%), to high (26%), levels of confidence in their ability to identify if a learner was displaying possible autism related behaviours, at school. Similarly elevated proportions (86%) were moderately (51%), or highly (35%), confident in their ability to support autistic learners, in the classroom. Differences within response data, across sectors, and between provision settings, were not proven to be statistically significant, for either identifying or supporting (Table 6.10.6).

Table 6.10.6 - One-to-one support staff: Educator confidence: Data Table

How confident are you that you would be able to identify if a pupil was displaying autistic related traits and behaviours?

	All one-to-one support staff participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
Level of confidence	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
None	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Slight	*10*	11.36	*5*	10.00	*5*	16.67	*7*	16.28	*	*	*	*
Moderate	*55*	62.50	*33*	66.00	*17*	56.67	*27*	62.79	*18*	60.00	*10*	71.43
High	*23*	26.14	*12*	24.00	*8*	26.67	*9*	20.93	*10*	33.33	*	*
	Pearson Chi-Square		($X^2(2) = 0.36$, $p = 0.84$)				($X^2(6) = 5.91$, $p = 0.43$)					

How confident are you that you would have the knowledge and understanding to support an autistic pupil?

	All one-to-one support staff participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
Level of confidence	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
None	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Slight	*12*	13.64	*9*	18.00	*	*	*7*	16.28	*	*	*	*
Moderate	*45*	51.14	*27*	54.00	*16*	53.33	*25*	58.14	*12*	40.00	*8*	57.14
High	*31*	35.23	*14*	28.00	*12*	40.00	*11*	25.58	*15*	50.00	*	*
	Pearson Chi-Square		($X^2(2) = 2.58$, $p = 0.28$)				($X^2(6) = 6.76$, $p = 0.34$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

6.11 Educator results: Agency and supply staff

The role of agency and supply staff, and the impact they can have on an autistic learner's educational experience cannot be underestimated (Chapter 2 section 2.6.1). Whilst only twelve of the educators to respond to the ESQ were agency and supply staff, it is worth considering their responses in isolation, although caution should be advised, due to the small sample size. Of the twelve, eleven were female, whilst all participants worked within mainstream provisions. Table 6.11 presents the sample characteristics.

Table 6.11 - Agency and supply staff sample demographic overview

Variable				Participant age range		
		n	%	Lowest	Highest	Mode
All agency and supply staff		*12*	3.17	25-34	55-64	55-64
Professional role		% of all agency/supply staff				
	Teaching staff	*6*	50.00	45-54	55-64	55-64
	Support staff	*6*	50.00	25-34	45-54	25-34
Sector						
	Primary	*10*	83.33	25-34	55-64	55-64
	Secondary	*2*	16.67	45-54	55-64	-

Three of the agency/supply staff represented within the study said they had experience of autism, outside of their careers (25%). Most (92%) indicated they had worked with an autistic learner in their role as an agency professional, 73% of them were doing so, at the time of participation. Whilst all eleven reported occasions where they were informed that they would be working with an autistic learner, before accepting the job, six (55%) said there were times when no such information was offered to them. Just one (9%) felt they were provided with sufficient information relating to an autistic learner, before arriving at a school, with just 46% satisfied with the information provided upon arrival at the school. Most respondents said that they had, on occasions, been given necessary information relating to an individual learner's known triggers (100%), and strategies proven to be successful (82%).

The majority of those working as supply staff felt their employers to be supportive, when they were working with autistic learners (73%), with four of both the teaching staff (67%) and support staff (80%), feeling supported. The differences not significant ($X^2(1) = 0.24$, = $p = 0.62$), acknowledging a small sample size. Most respondents indicated they had benefitted from autism related training, provided for them by their employers (83%), all within the preceding five-year period. Whilst six (55%) considered the training provided to be sufficient, four (36%), would have

preferred more. The majority (82%, n = 9) had undertaken training independently, to help improve their knowledge and understanding of autism.

Generally, the agency staff within the sample were more confident in their understanding of autism (91%, n = 10), than their knowledge about the condition (64%). Whilst teaching staff (83%), were more positive about their knowledge, than support staff (40%), the differences were not statistically significant ($X^2(1) = 2.21$, $p = 0.14$). Minimal differences between the roles, in relation to their perceived understanding were also not significant. Just one of the respondents (9%) said they had access to sufficient resources to help them support an autistic learner's education, whilst 55% suggested the opposite to be true. Although all said they would like to access more resources, 73% said they did not know, or were unsure, where to find any additional resources, they might need.

Agency and supply staff responding to the survey reported moderate (82%), to high (18%), levels of confidence in their ability to identify possible signs of autism being displayed by learners. Not one of the teaching staff respondents felt highly confident, in this area, whilst two of the support staff did (40%), the differences were not significant ($X^2(1) = 2.93$, $p = 0.09$). When considering their ability to support an autistic learner, in the classroom, 73% reported moderate (27%), to high (46%), levels of confidence. Whilst all five of the agency support staff were highly confident, three of the six teaching staff were only slightly confident in this area. These differences, between the professional roles were proven statistically significant ($X^2(2) = 11.00$, $p = <0.05$); note, these analyses have small numbers, so interpretation should be exercised with caution.

6.12 Educator results: Student and newly qualified teachers

Making the ESQ available to education professionals with a broad range of experiences encouraged the participation of both newly qualified (n = 4) and

student (n = 9) teachers. These 13 respondents accounted for (3%) of the whole sample, 77% (n = 10) were female, with just three male participants. The characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 6.12 (below). Whilst just one of the respondents indicated that they themselves were autistic (an NQT), 62% (n = 8) said they had experience of autism, outside of their professional role. The results presented in this section focus on these participants' experiences during their time at university.

Table 6.12 - Student and newly qualified teacher sample demographic overview

Variable			Participant age range		
	n	%	Lowest	Highest	Mode
All student & newly qualified teacher participants	*13*	3.44	18-24	45-54	25-34
Professional role	% of all student/NQ teachers				
Newly qualified teachers	*4*	50.00	18-24	25-34	25-34
Student teachers	*9*	50.00	18-24	45-54	35-44

Just one of the NQTs indicated that their qualification was achieved at a provider outside of Wales, whilst for the other 12 participants, studied at various institutions across Wales. Most of the student teachers were studying their post-graduate certificate in education (PGCE) (n = 7), whilst one was in their first year of undergraduate study, and the other in their third year.

At the time of their participation, 33% (n = 4) of this cohort said that the topic of autism had been covered during their studies at Welsh based institutions. Two of the three NQTs indicated that autism had formed part of their teacher training, whilst just two of the nine students reported the topic of autism had featured in their studies, at time of participation. Not one of the NQTs felt that the topic of autism was given sufficient attention during their training, whilst just one of the students felt it was.

Practical placements offer prospective teachers hands on experience of working in the classroom, with eight of the student teacher participants undertaking at least one placement as part of their studies. Of the twelve respondents to have completed work-based placements, 6 said they had encountered working with autistic learners. Just 2 of those who said they had worked with autistic learners during their practical placements felt their university tutors had been supportive (33%), whilst all six indicated that the schools in which they were based, provided sufficient support.

It would appear from the data, albeit a small sample, that more could be done to ensure new teachers entering the profession are given sufficient support and training around autism and working with autistic learners.

6.13 Educator results: Summary conclusion

In general terms the educators who responded to this study were experienced in supporting the learning of autistic CYP, with 49% also having personal familiarity of autism, outside of their professional roles. Response data suggests that the general sharing of information relating to autistic learners is commonplace. Whilst most educators consider their school to be supportive when they are working with autistic learners, support from LAs and outside agencies was thought to be insufficient. Despite 77% of participants having received some form of autism-related training, many felt that more training was necessary. Generally, educators were satisfied with their own levels of understanding and knowledge about autism, with most participants indicating moderate to high levels of confidence in areas relating to supporting autistic learners. Although most indicated they had sufficient access to suitable resources, many were keen to have more. However, two-in-five felt unsure where to look to acquire new material, suggesting a barrier in training requirements. Whilst differences were evident between professional roles, work placements, and sectors, significant variances were identified suggesting teaching

staff are better supported, receive more training, and have better information sharing practices, than support staff.

There was a marked difference in the response data from teachers working in either mainstream or special school settings, most noticeably around information sharing practices and the support made available through outside agencies. Whilst teachers working in special schools also felt better supported by their LA, still just 47% believed that support to be sufficient. Perhaps understandably, those working in special schools were more likely to have received autism related training, consider themselves to have better knowledge and understanding, and greater confidence, than their colleagues working in mainstream. Similarly, teachers in special schools had better access to suitable resources and felt more assured of where to look, should they require more. The differences in experience, between those working in mainstream and specialist provisions were proven significant across most areas covered.

Support staff play a significant role in the education of all CYP and can be highly influential in shaping the educational experiences of autistic learners. A third of the respondents to the survey, identified themselves as education support staff working in various roles, with most having supported autistic learners, at some point in their career. Despite the nature of their role, support staff were considerably less informed than teachers, about autistic learners' needs across the four information sharing measures within the survey. Support staff responses also report feeling less supported by their school, LA and outside agencies, when working with autistic learners. Most had received some form of autism related training provided by their employers, which participants believed enhanced their confidence and their general knowledge and understanding about autism. Whilst there were noticeable differences between responses of those working in mainstream and specialist provision settings, and across the sectors, most were not proven significant. For those undertaking the crucial role of supporting autistic young people on a one-to-

one basis, there was a lack of training made available before taking the role. This meant that 33% of support staff who worked one-to-one with an autistic learner had no previous knowledge of the condition and received no autism related training, in advance of undertaking the role.

In terms of agency and supply staff, most had experienced working with autistic young people, however, 55% said that they had arrived at a school to find they were working with an autistic learner without any advanced notice. Just 46% felt sufficient information was available when they arrived at the school. Whilst 55% felt autism related training provided by their employers was sufficient, most had undertaken independent training to improve their knowledge and understanding. Generally, agency and supply staff considered the resources available to them insufficient, with many not knowing where to access the resources they required. In terms of student teachers and NQTs, most were dissatisfied with the level of autism training provided as part of their ITT, and those who had experienced working with autistic learners during teacher practice placements, generally felt their university lecturers had been unsupportive.

Overall, this chapter identified that educators generally feel unsupported by their local authorities, this is evident amongst those working in various roles, both within mainstream and specialist provisions. Support staff who work one-to-one supporting the learning of autistic students are often expected to undertake the role with no formal training and little understanding about autism. Staff working within specialist provisions seemingly have more positive experiences across the range of areas considered.

The next chapter discusses the results as reported across chapters four, five, and six, providing a brief overview of findings before considering how they relate to the literature as referenced within chapter two. The chapter will conclude with an

integration of multi-level perspectives, seeking to identify any similarities, or differences, between the perspectives of the autistic learners, their parents and their educators.

Chapter 7: Discussion

7.1 Introduction

The preceding three chapters have presented the results of five separate participant engagement activities, involving 378 educators, 371 parents and carers, 120 non-autistic learners and most importantly 119 autistic learners aged 18 and under. These 988 respondents' views have presented a snapshot of experiences, from a multi-level perspective, of the current situation relating to the education of the 10,000 reported autistic learners being educated across Wales (Stats Wales, 2022f).

This chapter will present a brief overview of these results (section 7.2), before discussing them chapter-by-chapter (sections 7.3-7.6), seeking to establish any association with, or disparity from, the literature as discussed in Chapter 2. Finally, Section 7.7 presents an integration of multi-level perspectives, to understand how experiences reported across the various studies and cohorts combine.

7.2 General overview of results

Having presented the results of each individual study in Chapters 4 - 6, this section provides a brief summary. Section 7.2.1 combines the findings from both parent and learner studies, whilst section 7.2.2 considers what the educators told us and how this links into what parents and learners were saying. Bringing these findings together, presents a general overview of the education of autistic learners in Wales, from the viewpoint of the participating cohorts.

7.2.1 General overview of results combining learner and parent perspectives

Generally, the autistic learners who took part in this study enjoyed going to, and were happy while at, school, and whilst the majority say they feel safe at school most suffer from increased school related anxieties and worries. However, a

substantial proportion of participants demonstrate that this is simply not the case for all. Most parent participants said they felt unsupported in trying to secure an appropriate placement for their child and were largely dissatisfied with their child's school placement, with many feeling the current setting was not meeting their individual needs.

When considering inclusion, autistic learners appear to be more keenly aware of their differences, than their non-autistic peers, data suggests that this feeling intensifies with age. Despite this, parental reports suggest autistic learners generally sought a feeling of inclusion at school, however 48% of respondents to the APQ said they felt excluded, considerably higher proportions than seen in the non-autistic learner responses. Parents put great significance on the importance of inclusion, however, 27% felt their child's school was not offering an inclusive learning environment. Results indicate that 23% of learners being discussed in the PCQ had faced a school exclusion, either internally or externally, temporarily or permanently, with those who also have ADHD found to be significantly more at risk. Overall, responses to both the APQ and PCQ suggest that generally, schools are not providing the level of inclusion both parents and their autistic children were seeking.

With considerable proportions of autistic learners feeling excluded at school, it is noticeable that they also report difficulties with their peer relationships. Over a quarter of the autistic young people to respond said they did not have friends at school (29%), whilst 76% said they have been the victim of bullying at school. Non-autistic learners were noticeably more likely to report that they have friends and less likely to have been bullied. Parents of autistic learners believed that in most bullying incidents their child was targeted for being autistic, and when reporting incidents of bullying, parents feel schools were not prepared to listen, or take their complaints seriously, ensuring the bullying continued. Again, results suggest that schools are not nurturing or supporting the formation of positive peer relationships

for their autistic students, whilst failing to react appropriately when incidents of bullying are brought to their attention.

Whilst a small majority of autistic learners felt able to cope with their work at school, many felt the opposite. More than half felt they were not getting enough support at school (53%); however, response data suggests that support improves as learners progress through the sectors. From the parents' perspective, most felt that their child needed more support if they were to reach their full potential, at school. A third of parent participants (34%) indicated that their child received no additional support, other than what was available to all other students. While many autistic learners with a Statement were not accessing all the support the document prescribed, many parents believed that their child's IEP targets were unrealistic and unachievable. Generally, both autistic learners and their parents feel the support provided at school was insufficient, whilst from a parental perspective, statutory documents which are designed to formalise support, were not being adhered to.

There was an even split between those autistic learners who do, or do not, enjoy play, break and unstructured times at school, whilst the majority of their non-autistic peers enjoyed these periods. Most of the young autistic respondents felt the school environment was often too noisy, with many indicating they did not have a safe, quiet space, where they could go to help regulate during times of sensory overwhelm. Over 40% felt that their teachers were not appreciative of how sensory differences can make some situations, at school, challenging. Just 50% of parents felt their child's teachers understanding was adequate. Moreover, just 28% of autistic young people believed that their teachers understood autism, whilst 33% felt their teachers understood them as individuals. Autistic learners identified five key areas that they felt their teachers should take into consideration, to improve their understanding.

Most parents indicated they were in regular communication with their child's school and teachers, although many believed schools could be more communicative. Parental reports suggest they do not always feel listened to, and often feel misunderstood, when raising concerns about their child's education, believing practitioners do not always respect their point of view. Generally, parents were most satisfied with their interactions with support staff and least satisfied with how senior management interacted with them. Parents felt similarly when considering how school staff were interacting with their children, with satisfaction greatest in relation to support staff, and lowest when discussing senior management.

Across many areas, biological sex was found to be an influencing factor, shaping parental perspectives of their autistic child's education. Within the general measures of educational experience, autistic males were more likely to enjoy going to, be happier, and feel safer, at, school than their female contemporaries, who were considerably more likely to suffer with school-based anxieties. Autistic females were more acutely aware of their differences, and as a result felt far less included at school. The most influential factor in shaping an autistic learner's educational experiences was proven to be the setting in which they were taught. Generally, those educated in specialist provisions were more likely to report positive experiences than their peers in mainstream education, whilst those in mainstream were considerably more likely to suffer from increased school-based anxieties. Parental satisfaction was also far greater amongst those whose children were educated in specialist provisions. Parents with children in specialist education were significantly more likely to have been supported in finding a suitable placement and thus considered the school to be better meeting their child's individual needs, fostering greater parental satisfaction with the school their child was attending. Whilst the biological sex, and the age (sector attended) of the learner impacted experiences of both the autistic learner and their parents, the most influential factor proved to be the setting attended.

7.2.2 General overview educator perspectives

Educator responses demonstrate a wealth of experience working with autistic students, across numerous roles, sectors and settings. Whilst 49% said they were familiar with autism from their private lives, 92% indicated they had worked with an autistic learner.

Generally, information sharing practices, were perceived to be good, with most having an opportunity to meet and get to know the autistic learner before working with them. The majority felt they were given sufficient information about the learner in advance, whilst the sharing of successful strategies and knowledge of triggers, was also commonplace. Educators generally considered their employers to be supportive, however, support from outside agencies was not so forthcoming. The least supportive organisation in the eyes of many education professionals was their local authority.

Educators within this sample demonstrated a willingness to develop their knowledge and understanding of autism by independently undertaking training. Most professionals said that their employer had provided them with some form of autism-related training, however many felt the training provided was insufficient. Support staff, working in the critical role as one-to-one supporting autistic learners were largely starting in the role with no training, although most received some training whilst in position. Many were expected to support an autistic student one-to-one with no training, and no prior knowledge or understanding of autism.

Most teacher respondents considered themselves to have a good knowledge and understanding of autism. As previously discussed, parents and most importantly pupils, have a considerably different view. When asked what they wished their teacher knew about autism, autistic youngsters were keen to emphasise that they were all different, and that no ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach, works for everyone. The

sensory challenges within the school environment can create many difficulties for autistic learners, and they wanted teachers to know this. Many talked about the camouflaging they do, just to navigate their way through each school day, improving educator understanding of this, and what it may look like was seen as crucial. Another area autistic respondents felt teachers did not understand was the challenges they face with processing the instructions and rules at school. Most importantly, the message that they wanted to get across was that they are not just 'naughty' or 'bad people', sometimes their only way of communicating distress is through behaviours which are often misinterpreted.

In terms of resources they had access to, most practitioners indicated their willingness to find more, although many suggest they did not know where to look, for what they required. Generally, practitioners reported high levels of confidence in their abilities. Most felt they would be able to identify if a pupil in their class was displaying possibly autism-related behaviours, aiding early identification. Levels of confidence were also high when considering their ability to support an autistic learner in the classroom and provide some support to their family.

Not surprisingly, given the nature of the environment in which they work, educators working in specialist settings were better trained, considered themselves to have better knowledge and understanding, and had more confidence, than their colleagues working in mainstream. There was better access to resources and better information sharing processes in specialist education, where they were also considerably better supported by both LA and outside agencies.

7.3 Discussion

The above overview summarises how the results from across the studies portray the current situation for autistic learners, their parents and their educators, across Wales. To understand how these results relate to what is already understood, the

following discussion seeks to establish any correlation with, or disparity from, the literature as discussed in Chapter 2. The main point of reference used throughout will be the previously discussed education reports published by the NAS (Brayford, 2021; Moore, 2016; Reid, 2011). Their 2017 report provided the addition of some responses from educators, as they worked together with the APPGA (2017). In compiling their reports, the surveys undertaken by the NAS, employ processes similar to those used to engage participants within this study. Promoting their online surveys through their website and social media presence, the NAS reports employ volunteer sampling, to engage as many respondents as possible. These reports offer a valuable yardstick to help understand how educational experiences in Wales, may differ from those in England. Brayford's (2021) NAS report is the most comparable to the first phase studies reported within this thesis, with their participant engagement activities taking place in the summer of 2021. This NAS report is referenced heavily in the discussions below, especially when considering the results from the survey of autistic learners, and that of their parents and carers. Whilst throughout England, the NAS have a larger pool of potential participants, with over autistic 190,000 learners having been registered as receiving educational support (UK Government, 2021), the proportional participation was higher within this study, when compared to that of Brayford (2021) (Table 7.3).

Table 7.3 - Proportion of autistic learner population represented, comparing Brayford (2021) to this study

NAS School report 2021 (Brayford, 2021)			This study		
Number of autistic learners receiving support in England 2021 (UK Government, 2021)		193,940	Number of autistic learners receiving support in Wales 2021 (Stats Wales, 2022f)		9,818
	n	% of autistic learner population represented		*n*	% of autistic learner population represented
Learner participants	*605*	0.31	Learner participants	*92*	0.94
Parent participants	*3,470*	1.79	Parent participants	*371*	3.79

7.4 Considering what the autistic learners told us

7.4.1 Going to school

Generally, the autistic participants of this study reported an enjoyment going to school, however this was more apparent amongst learners attending specialist provisions, when compared to their peers educated in mainstream. Those in secondary education were less likely to enjoy their educational experiences than those in primary or post-16 sectors, and males were found to enjoy school more than females. The response from autistic learners was not greatly different from their non-autistic peers. Anxiety and worry troubles have been associated with autism from Kanner's (1943) original paper. Disorders related to anxiety are amongst autism's most common co-occurring conditions (van Steensel et al., 2011), whilst autistic individuals were found to be more susceptible to anxiety and depression than their non-autistic peers (Sedgewick et al., 2020). Research has proven anxiety to negatively impact all learners' ability to engage with their studies, achieve academic outcomes in line with their ability, and engage fully in both learning and social elements of school life (Weissman et al., 2009; Langley et al., 2004). However, for autistic students the impact of school related anxieties often leaves them struggling to cope with the expectations placed upon them at school (Fujii et al., 2013; Ashburner et al., 2010). White et al. (2014) suggest that whilst anxiety often adds to an autistic student's struggles at school, it is frequently worsened by the individual's difficulties managing the educational and social expectations. It is unsurprising then, that this study found that 77% of autistic participants said going to school made them feel anxious or worried, markedly higher than their non-autistic peers (52%). Autistic learners in mainstream, where girls were noticeably more prone to anxiety than boys, were considerably more likely to suffer school related anxiety than those educated within specialist provisions. In the comparative study autistic students were three times more susceptible to anxiety or worry going to school than their non-autistic peers. Having considered what the results indicate about how autistic young people feel about going to school, the following sections reflect upon their time at school.

7.4.2 At school

NAS studies from England reported that in 2017 less than half of autistic learners indicated they were happy at school (APPGA, 2017), five years later this decreased dramatically to just 26% (Brayford, 2021). The findings presented within this report suggest that autistic learners were happier in their education, in Wales, with most telling us they were happy in school. Autistic females were less likely to be happy at school than their male peers, whilst primary aged learners were found to be the happiest. Those attending specialist provisions were considerably happier than those educated in mainstream, whilst overall, non-autistic learners were much happier than their autistic peers. The feeling of safety at school is considered one of the key elements in promoting and ensuring pupil well-being (Dankeret al., 2019), and whilst autistic learners should be made to feel safe whilst at school, research suggest many do not (Carrington et al., 2017). Many autistic students experience great challenges in their education and consider a school environment that promotes safety as vital to ensuring their academic success (Miles et al., 2019). Over a quarter of the autistic young people represented in this study reported not feeling safe at school (28%), dropping to 33% of secondary school pupils. Autistic learners in specialist settings reported feeling significantly safer than their peers in mainstream, where 33% felt unsafe. Non-autistic learners felt substantially safer at school than their autistic counterparts, especially those educated in mainstream, where twice as many non-autistic pupils felt safe when compared to their autistic peers. In addition, unstructured periods in the school day, such as play and break times, and transitions between classes, pose considerable risk of sensory overload for autistic students (NAS, 2020). Many autistic participants in this study indicated their dislike of these periods during the school day, considerably more than amongst the non-autistic participants.

7.4.3 Feeling of inclusion at school

As a hidden disability, autism presents the challenge of having a sense of difference from peers, whilst not appearing different on the outside (Portway & Johnson,

2005), there is often reference to how the autistic brain is 'wired differently' (Murdock, 2020; Ortega & Choudhury, 2011). Whilst most of the autistic participants indicated that they felt different from the other pupils at school, interestingly, 49% of the non-autistic participants shared similar feelings. Autistic females appear more keenly aware of their differences than their male peers, whilst the feeling of being different became more apparent with age. Feeling, or indeed being different, should not always be considered negatively, many identify these differences as having both positive and negative implications, from heightened focus and superior academic abilities, to isolation, anxiety, and depression (Berkovits et al., 2020).

Whilst just 24% of autistic learners in England were reported to feel included at school (Brayford, 2021), data from the APQ study, reported here, suggests autistic students in Wales were far more inclined to feel included at their place of learning. This may be an area where the representative sample size could impact the results, with fewer than half of one percent of England's autistic learner population responding to Brayford's 2021 study (Table 7.3), although sampling procedure may mitigate this. However, while just 52% of the respondents to the APQ felt included, this still means that many felt excluded. There was a clear difference between the views of male and female participants, in this area, whilst the majority of males felt included (57%), just 47% of the females felt the same sense of inclusion. This study reports the feeling of inclusion diminished with age, as learners progressed through their educational journeys, they felt less included. The sense of inclusion was most evident amongst participants educated in specialist provisions (78%), whilst just 48% of those attending mainstream settings saying they felt included. Non-autistic learners reported a far greater sense of inclusion at school, and it was proven that being autistic significantly reduces a pupil's overall feeling of inclusion. These findings would seem to support the literature which suggest mainstream teachers' apprehension when trying to include autistic learners, in the classroom (Barnard et al., 2002; 2000; Humphrey & Symes, 2013; Jordan, 2005).

7.4.4 Peer relationships at school

As discussed earlier, one of the core elements of autism involves difficulties in communicating and understanding social situations and interactions with others (NAS, 2016; NICE, 2011). Differences in the severity of this and its impact on the individuals' ability to form and maintain friendships have been identified between the sexes (Sedgewick et al., 2019). Autistic males are thought to be less driven to establish social interaction, and as a result the friendships they form are often not maintained (Sedgewick et al., 2016). Conversely, females are believed to relish the communal side of school life (Sproston et al., 2017) and are considered to have similar motivations to seek and form friendships as their non-autistic contemporaries. Autistic girls are often able to manager and maintain these friendships fairly well, they do however, struggle to cope with situations of dispute and can frequently be targeted by bullies because of this (Cook et al., 2018; Sedgewick et al., 2016).

A large proportion of autistic learners in England believe that their peers do not understand them (APPAG, 2017), with many wanting their schools to provide support to help develop the requisite social skills required to help form and maintain friendships (Brayford, 2021). Over a quarter of respondents to the APQ study said they did not have any friends at school (29%). There was little difference between the sexes, with boys marginally more likely to have friends that girls, not supporting the results of the above studies, however there was no measure applied to establish the quality of friendships formed. Overall non-autistic contributors were far more likely to have friends at school then their autistic peers, with the gap between the cohorts widest when considering mainstream educated girls.

Milton's (2012) theory of '*double empathy*' discusses the difficulties individuals with vastly different life experiences have in empathising with each other. When focusing on an autistic perspective, research suggests that non-autistic individuals can struggle to empathise with their autistic peers, just as much as autistic people

find empathising with non-autistic individuals challenging (Heasman & Gillespie, 2018; Sheppard et al., 2016). Sasson et al. (2017) found that this can often lead to non-autistic individuals making instant negative decisions about forming relationships with autistic people they encounter. Taking Milton's theory (2012) into consideration, may give some context to the reported findings from the APQ, with autistic learners here were less likely to form and maintain friendships at school, compared to their non-autistic contemporaries. However, further investigation as to the nature and quality of the friendships reported by both cohorts, would be required to establish any connections.

Autistic young people consistently suggest being picked on to be amongst the most unpleasant aspects of school life (Reid, 2011), whilst those without a supportive network of friends are most often targeted by bullies at school (Cook et al., 2016). For many, an inability to read and manage difficult social situations, leads to bullying which has detrimental impacts on the mental health and well-being of autistic learners (Sedgewick et al., 2018). This study emphasises the significant increased risk of bullying autistic pupils face compared to their non-autistic peers. Supporting the findings discussed above, autistic females were more likely to fall victim to bullying at school.

7.4.5 School work

Most autistic participants, in this study, said they were able to cope with the work set for them at school, fairly similar to the response rate for the non-autistic respondents. There was little to differentiate between the response received from the male and female autistic young people. Perhaps understandably, learners in specialist provisions were more able to cope with schoolwork than their peers in mainstream. When it came to the question of participant perception relating to the support they were getting at school, autistic participants were evenly split on the issue. Autistic boys felt better supported than their female peers, whilst general responses suggest support is more readily available as learners progress through

the sectors. Again, pupils in specialist education indicated greater satisfaction with the support received than those in mainstream. Just 41% of autistic learners in educated in England, felt that their teachers knew how to support them (APPGA, 2017), considerably more within this study. Autistic males were much more inclined to believe their teachers understood how best to support them at school, than their female peers. Autistic learners were less likely to have faith in their educators' ability to provide the required support, as they moved through the sectors. Non-autistic learners were considerably more likely to believe their teachers knew and understood their support needs, than their autistic peers.

7.4.6 Sensory differences at school

Many autistic individuals have sensory processing difficulties, including hyper and hypo sensitivities to various stimuli (Schaaf, et al., 2014), recognised as a core element of autism within the DSM 5 diagnostic category relating to '*Restricted, Repetitive Patterns of Behaviour, Interests, or Activities*' (APA, 2013). These difficulties can present significant challenges within the sensory overloaded school environment (Gentil-Gutiérrez et al., 2021), with many bodies moving around, lots of noises and smells, sights and sounds. Participants here point to several sensory stimuli which they find hard to manage during the school day, including noisy classrooms, overpowering smells, and uncomfortable uniforms. Autistic learners at both primary and secondary level often refer to the need for a safe and quiet space to aid with regulation, especially during unstructured times (Cunningham, 2022; Dedridge, 2007). The NAS report 52% of autistic pupils in England do not have such a space available to them at school (Brayford, 2021). Whilst the majority of autistic participants in this study told us they did have access to a safe, quiet space at school, a significant proportion did not. Response data suggests such spaces are more readily available as participants progress through the sectors. It is thought that provision of these safe, quiet spaces for autistic learners helps nurture their feeling of safety within the learning environment (Danker et al., 2019) and can help reduce school related anxieties (Cunningham, 2022). Although most indicated they felt safe at school, a substantial proportion of the respondents to the APQ reported

increased school-related anxiety. If more were afforded safe regulation spaces, the severity of these anxieties might decrease.

7.4.7 Educator understanding

Studies in England suggest 60% of autistic young people believe the key element that would make their time at school better was to have teachers who understood about autism (APPGA, 2017), whilst 70% feel their current teachers did not have such understanding (Brayford, 2021). Just 28% of the autistic participants in this study felt their teachers understood autism, a similar proportion felt they did not, whilst 47% were unsure to what degree their teachers understood the condition. Here, more autistic girls considered their teachers to lack sufficient understanding, than boys. The youngest learners, at primary school, were far more inclined to feel their teachers understood than those attending secondary, whilst educators working in post-16 education were thought to be the least understanding.

Possibly of greater importance is how learners perceive educators' understanding of them, as individuals. This is also another area that can be impacted by the theory of double empathy (Milton, 2012). How non-autistic individuals, be they practitioners or peers, perceive the autistic people they encounter, and vice versa, can greatly impact perceptions of understanding, from both parties. Autistic participants in the APQ were divided with equal proportions feeling understood and misunderstood. Again, autistic girls were more likely to feel misinterpreted than their male peers, whilst the setting attended was significant in shaping respondents' belief that teachers understand their pupils. Those in specialist settings felt considerably better understood than their contemporaries in mainstream. When comparing autistic and non-autistic learner responses in this area, autistic participants were less assured of educator understanding than their non-autistic peers. In this thesis we report that autistic learners are less likely to have friends and feel less understood than their non-autistic peers, this could indicate the presence of the '*double empathy*' phenomenon. As alluded to above (Section 7.4.4), further, more detailed

investigation would be required to ascertain the degree to which Milton's theory influences both areas.

Within the WTSK study, one of the key topics autistic students were wanting their teachers to know about autism, was the masking being used to help them navigate through the school day. Masking or camouflaging is a relatively recently explored phenomenon, especially in terms of research, and has been described as a tool used for '*stigma management*' (Miller et al., 2021). Wearing the mask can be very draining and is linked to increased anxiety (Sedgewick et al., 2021). The strategy is most often employed in stressful or uncomfortable situations, making school a prime location. Autistic individuals are more likely to slip on their mask when confronted by strangers (Howard & Sedgewick, 2021), however it is understood that using the strategy can have repercussions on social capabilities and activities (Cook et al., 2018). Within the results in this thesis, many autistic young people reported feeling their teachers did not fully appreciate their sensory difficulties and were unaware of the distress and discomfort sensory overwhelm can cause. Most indicate their belief that the school environment was often too noisy, significantly more than the non-autistic participants.

7.5 Interpreting what the parents told us

7.5.1 School satisfaction

The challenges of identifying and securing a place at a school which best suits the child is an arduous task for every parent, however when your child is autistic the difficulties are greatly increased. Nesbitt (2000) acknowledges that many obstacles hinder parents of autistic young people in their quest to find what they deem to be suitable education for their child, with parents believing some placements are not offered, because their child has an autism diagnosis (Lilley, 2014). Many studies conclude that insufficient information and support is available to help guide parents in their decision making (McNerney et al., 2015; Batten et al., 2006).

Barnard (2000) indicated that parents in Wales were found to be less satisfied with the options made available to them, when considering how and where to educate their child, than those in the rest of the UK. Just 31% of respondents to the parent survey say they felt supported when trying to find a school place suitable for their child, sadly this shows no progress has been made since a NAS Cymru study conducted ten years earlier (Evans, 2011). Reid (2011) reported that 58% of parents would prefer an autism specific school placement for their child, yet just a fraction have access to such provision. Just 48% of the responses we received were from parents who felt the school their child currently attends was meeting their individual needs. Whilst this is not a resounding endorsement of the education system in Wales, it is substantially better than the 74% of parents in England who believe their child's school was not fully meeting their needs (Brayford, 2021).

Whilst Barnard (2000) reported that parental satisfaction appeared to decrease the older the child became, stating satisfaction was higher when referring to primary school than secondary, the findings of this study contradict that. Parents of secondary school pupils were said to be considerably happier with their child's school than those with primary aged children, this was replicated across both mainstream and specialist provision settings. NAS reports suggest that, in England, autistic children's reported happiness at school has decreased dramatically in recent times. Whilst fewer than half were said to be happy at school in 2017 (APPGA, 2017), only 26% reported being happy just four years later (Brayford, 2021). Taking this into consideration, it is somewhat reassuring to see 54% of participating parents informing this study believed that their child was happy at school, although 26% indicated that their child was not happy whilst at school. Boys were said to be happier than girls whilst those in specialist provisions were found to be the happiest of all.

7.5.2 Statements of Educational Need and Individual Education Plans

Many participating parents' children were said to have a Statement of Educational Need, although 35% indicated their child was not accessing all the support prescribed within this document. This is a considerable improvement from an earlier study which suggested just 49% of autistic learners in Wales with a Statement were accessing all the support they were legally entitled to (Evans, 2011). There does, however, still appear to be considerable shortcoming in the provision of support, as laid out within these legally binding Statements. Whilst drawing comparison with Evans (2011), it should be acknowledged that both the 2011 study, and the APQ, reported here, used volunteer sampling, therefore neither can claim to be fully representative of the wider population. Prior to the introduction of the new ALN Code in Wales (WG, 2021a), learners identified as having SEN were issued with an IEP. This document formally identified their needs, recorded their support requirements and the strategies to be employed to assist their development. Within this sample 65% of participants said their child had an IEP. Welsh Government guidance (WAG, 2004) indicates an IEP should be reviewed on a regular basis (minimum twice yearly), involving consultation with parents and where possible include the views of the child. However, many of our contributors indicate regular reviews of their child's IEP were not being carried out, and where they were, only 67% of schools involved parents in the review, and just 55% included the child. Whilst 54% of parents felt the targets set out within their child's IEP were realistic and achievable, 19% considered the opposite to be true. A recent NAS report (Brayford, 2021) suggests that in England, just 33% of parents were happy with the outcomes identified in their child's EHCP.

7.5.3 Educational support

Studies considering the academic achievements of autistic young people have thrown up a wide range of results, mirroring the heterogenous nature of autism itself, however most report that generally, academic achievement often falls below the intellectual ability of the individual (Keen et al., 2016; Levy & Perry, 2011). Reid

(2011) reported than in England just 52% of parents with autistic children were satisfied that their child was making good educational progress, whilst more recently, Brayford (2021) suggests that many consider their child to be falling behind with their work in school. Whilst 34% of participants' children were not receiving any additional support in school, 40% felt the level of support for their child was satisfactory. Many felt support provision was insufficient, especially amongst those whose children were educated in mainstream settings. This data compares favourably to that from the NAS study in England (Brayford, 2021) which indicated 44% of parents believed that their child's support needs were not being met.

7.5.4 Home/school communication

A good relationship between educator and parent is key for every child, but for the parents of autistic young people this collaboration is vital for ensuring their child receives the most appropriate support at school (Syriopoulou-Delli & Polychronopoulou, 2019). Positive parent-teacher cooperation is known to reduce parental stress (Krakovich et al., 2016), improve academic outcomes for the child (Goldrich Eskow et al., 2018; Garbacz et al., 2016) and increase parental satisfaction with the setting (Zablotsky et al., 2012). Generally, within this study, parents report regular communication with the school relating to their child's education, however for those with children in mainstream the feeling is that there needs to be more. Participants mostly felt reassured by the language used in their communication with teachers and report a feeling of being listened to, respected, and understood at least some of the time. Whilst the majority report a broad level of positivity in these communications, for parents whose children were attending specialist settings they were significantly more positive than those with children in mainstream. As this thesis reports, parental perceptions of educator understanding greatly impact their interactions, with many feeling the understanding was not sufficient, and not being satisfied with their child's placement.

7.5.5 Parental perceptions of inclusion

Most parent participants indicated their belief that inclusion should be an integral part of their child's education. Whilst many felt their child's school to be inclusive, 27% suggest otherwise. Specialist provisions, perhaps understandably, were thought to offer a significantly more inclusive learning environment, than mainstream settings. Judge (2003) proposed that inclusive education should encourage opportunities for all learners to be actively involved within the school community, an ideal that is central to the Welsh Government's inclusion guidance (WG, 2016), however this study found that many parents believed their child was not being included in school life. Data suggests that inclusion decreases with age, as learners progress through their educational journey, whilst autistic girls were seemingly less likely to be included than their male peers. Generally, parents believed many autistic learners seek a sense of inclusion at school, however simply wanting to be included, was not necessarily an indicator of actually being included.

7.5.6 Bullying at school

Hebron et al. (2015) highlighted the vulnerability of autistic learners to bullying at school as a result of social and behavioural difficulties. This increased risk is thought to be more pronounced in mainstream settings where staff expertise and available resources often fall short of what is required to protect autistic students (Cook et al., 2016). Autistic learners consider their peers' knowledge and understanding about autism is instrumental in shaping how they are perceived (APPGA, 2017), whilst 34% said they are 'picked on' at school (Reid, 2011). Data on parental reports of school bullying of autistic young people is difficult to access, however Batten et al. (2006) reported 40% of parents in England said their autistic child had experienced being bullied at school, she also found in 44% of cases parents were dissatisfied with how the school dealt with the issue. This thesis reports 59% of parents told us their child had been bullied at school, with girls more likely to be targeted than boys. This high proportion to have experience of bullying is concerning, but the headline figure might be considered with caution. The

volunteering sample process may encourage participation from parents who have particular experiences, and as discussed previously cannot be interpreted as representative of the wider population.

The older the young person, the more likely they were to have a negative experience of being bullied, this was the case regardless of setting type, mainstream or specialist provision. There was much dissatisfaction amongst participants with their perception of how schools reacted when reporting bullying. Generally, parents did not feel listened to and considered the school response to be wholly inadequate. Interestingly, parents of young people attending specialist settings were more dissatisfied than those whose children were educated in mainstream.

7.5.7 Educator understanding of autism

It is thought that experience more than training helps to develop the knowledge and understanding teachers require to support autistic learners in the classroom (McGillicuddy & O'Donnell, 2014; Young et al., 2017). Most parents consider educator knowledge and understanding of autism to be critical if a school is to meet the needs of their child (Moore, 2016). Only 50% of parent respondents to our survey believed their child's teachers had a good understanding of autism, whilst 28% stated the opposite. Moore (2016) identified a link between parental perceptions of educator understanding and their satisfaction with the setting. This study highlights how opinions regarding teacher understanding of autism, impacts the learner's happiness at school, from a parental perspective.

7.5.8 Educator interactions

Evans (2011) found that parents of autistic students were most satisfied with classroom assistants in their children's school and least satisfied with secondary school teachers, this was also the case when looking at parental responses within this study. Whilst most respondents were satisfied with their interactions with

support staff at their child's school, many parents of secondary school pupils said they found their interactions with teachers unsatisfactory. Generally, across most areas, the educators with whom parents were least satisfied were members of senior management teams, such as headteachers and ALNCos. Parental perceptions of practitioners' understanding of autism was found to significantly impact their feelings around their interactions with all school staff. This was also the case when looking at how parents felt educators were interacting with their children.

7.5.9 Parental experiences of exclusion

Gill et al. (2017) describe school exclusion as a physical removal from the situation as a sanction for difficult behaviour. At school, these exclusions can take many forms; fixed-term, also known as a suspension, or permanent, sometimes referred to as expulsion (Brede et al., 2017). These exclusions involve a school sending the child home, either for a temporary 'fixed' period, or permanently, by removing them from the register. In addition, schools have regularly employed internal exclusion practices, such as placing a child in isolation, or preventing them from joining any activity with their classmates. Despite Welsh Government guidelines protecting vulnerable groups from exclusionary practices (WG, 2019), learners with additional needs, especially autistic students, are disproportionately impacted by exclusion, either at or from school (Graham, et al., 2019; Lloyd et al., 2003). A sizable proportion of parents in this study report their child has faced exclusion at school (18% internally, 20% temporarily, 2% permanently). Autistic boys faced a considerably higher risk of such exclusions than girls, whilst a significant factor to increase exclusion risk was proven to be a co-occurring ADHD diagnosis. In 53% of the referenced fixed-term exclusions, parents received no formal notification, something which is required under the guidelines (WG, 2019). These 'informal' exclusion practices are widespread (Parsons, 2018) and illegal (Atkinson, 2013), and lead to an under-reporting of exclusion data (Gazeley et al., 2015).

7.6 Discussing the educator perspective

7.6.1 Experience of autism

With latest data suggesting over 1-in-50 learners educated in maintained schools across Wales is autistic (Stats Wales 2022f), it is perhaps easy to recognise Archer et al.'s (2016) report suggesting that, at some point in their career, every teacher will experience working with an autistic student. This theory is backed up by 92% of educator respondents, in this study, who indicated they had experienced working with young autistic learners. Most support staff participants told us they had worked as a one-to-one, supporting autistic learners (70%). Below we look at participating educator responses across the six areas of interest, as highlighted previously.

7.6.2 Information sharing

Working with autistic learners in the classroom can present many challenges for educators. The heterogeneous nature of autism means that every autistic student presents differently, each will have their own strengths and weaknesses, across a wide and varied spectrum (Morrier et al., 2011). Whilst each will contend with learning struggles in some capacity, it is critical that professionals share relevant information to enable positive outcomes (Jones, 2013). There is no one size fits all strategy that can be employed across the board when supporting autistic learners, what may be successful with one, may not work with another (Morrier et al, 2011), and professionals must be open to employing strategies they are unfamiliar with (Leach & Duffy, 2009). Within this study, educators were generally satisfied with the information shared across the four areas discussed. At times of educational transition, the sharing of relevant information between practitioners becomes vital.

When working with autistic students, planning any transition is important, and communication between professionals essential (Lee et al., 2014; Stoner et al., 2007). The importance of preparing practitioners ahead of any transition is as equally important as efforts made preparing the learner (Wong, 2019). Most respondents to this study said they had been given the opportunity to meet and get

to know the learner and believed they had been given sufficient information relating to the student, in advance of transition to their class. The majority indicated that they were given details of successful strategies and known triggers before starting to work with an autistic young person. Information sharing practices were reportedly better within specialist provisions, when compared to educator experiences within mainstream.

Support staff reported less positive information sharing practices, with 34% of those who had worked as a one-to-one support for an autistic learner feeling they were not given sufficient information prior to commencing in that role. Well prepared staff who understand successfully employed strategies are more likely to have success in helping the pupil achieve to the best of their abilities (Rous et al., 1994). The sharing of information with temporary workers is essential, autistic learners are known to find the change of routine and unexpected appearance of unfamiliar staff members challenging (Jones, 2012; Wire, 2005). Within this study, 55% of agency staff said they had experienced arriving at a school with no prior knowledge that they would be working with an autistic learner, whilst just 46% felt they were given sufficient information relating to the child on arrival.

7.6.3 Support whilst working with autistic learners

Farmer et al. (2003) identified several avenues from where educators could seek support when working with autistic children and young people, including 1) from within the organisation, 2) from the wider education network, 3) from outside agencies. This study questioned the degree to which each of these three options were providing educators in Wales with the support they felt was necessary. Generally, respondents felt the in-house support received from the schools in which they worked was adequate, however greater levels of dissatisfaction were reported in the support made available from their LAs and outside agencies. Teachers working in specialist provisions were the more satisfied with the support provided by their school than their colleagues working in mainstream. Whilst over 40% of

teachers felt unsupported by their LA, those in specialist provisions felt considerably more supported than those working in mainstream. A third of support staff who had provided one-to-one support to autistic students felt their LA had been unsupportive (33%).

Reports highlight the increasing level of pressure on support services, in line with the ever-increasing number of autistic learners in schools, leading to increased waiting times when accessing services (AAA, 2013; NEU, 2019) Just 46% of teacher participants felt support provision from outside agencies was adequate, whilst again, those in specialist settings were significantly more likely to feel sufficiently supported by external services. Just 33% of support staff considered the support provided by agencies such as speech and language to be satisfactory.

7.6.4 Autism-related training

Head teachers report concerns that initial teacher training does not provide the next generation of teachers with sufficient training to meet the needs of children and young people with ALN (Archer et al., 2016). Highlighted by just 8% of respondents to this study, a small sample to generalise from, currently undertaking teacher training or working under the NQT status, who felt the autism-related training they had received was sufficient to support them in the classroom. Large proportions of teachers suggest the provision of autism-related training is often insufficient (AAA, 2013; Segall & Campbell, 2012). A report considering teachers' confidence found that whilst autism awareness training was offered to most, generic courses did not deliver the specific targeted guidance required to support individual autistic learners within the classroom (NASUWT, 2018). Within this study, most respondents told us that they had received some form of autism-related training (77%), however 22% felt the training received was insufficient. Unfortunately, the survey did not probe further to gain some context and understanding of the reasoning behind participants' dissatisfaction with the training provided, this could be an area for further research. Teachers working within

specialist settings were more likely to have received autism training, however their colleagues working in mainstream were reportedly more satisfied that training provided was sufficient. Most support staff who have undertaken the critical role of supporting autistic learners on a one-to-one basis, reportedly received no autism-related training prior to starting in that role. Responses suggest a willingness to improve knowledge and understanding of autism amongst educators, with the majority of participants disclosing that they had undertaken independent training.

7.6.5 Knowledge and understanding

For educators to provide effective teaching and positive educational outcomes for autistic students, it is critical that they understand the challenges the individual student faces every day (Bailey & Baker, 2020). Without understanding, educators cannot ascertain an individual's support needs, why support is necessary, and how to implement appropriate strategies (Bennie, 2019). Studies have proven that autistic young people consider educator understanding as influential in their learning (Zilli et al., 2020; Hummerstone & Parsons, 2021). Symes and Humphrey (2010) suggest autistic young people wish for their teachers to comprehend how they experience the school day. Evidence suggests autistic students feel misunderstood by their teachers (Brayford, 2021; APPGA, 2017), leading to frustration, distress, and feelings of unhappiness at school (Hummerstone & Parsons, 2020). There is an association between educator knowledge and understanding of autism, and their attitudes towards including autistic learners (Lu et al., 2020). Aligning with some key areas where they would like educators to improve their understanding, including around difficulties with processing and following complex instructions.

From Kanner's early work narrow attention has been considered a key element of autism. Murray et al. (2005) explored this in more detail, employing the phrase 'monotropism', based on earlier research considering what she found to be 'attention tunnelling' (Murray, 1992, as cited in Lawson, 2012). Monotropic

individuals tend to hyper focus on a relatively narrow field; in doing so, they can miss crucial elements of instruction processes or forget something whilst fully focusing on another. Parents consider understanding and knowledge of autism as crucial when considering whether a placement is right for their child (Renty & Roeyers, 2006). Educators play a key role in aiding early identification and undertaking assessments, and often are the gatekeepers to diagnostic pathways, however many consider themselves to have a limited knowledge and understanding of autism (Posserud et al., 2006). Educators responding to this study generally felt confident in their knowledge and understanding about autism. Again, teachers based in specialist provision settings considered themselves to have better knowledge and understanding in comparison to their colleagues in mainstream. Interestingly a higher proportion of support staff participants believed themselves to have satisfactory levels of knowledge and understanding than teacher respondents.

7.6.6 Access to resources

Supporting autistic learners in their education presents practitioners with numerous challenges, therefore access to, and the efficient use of, available resources is essential. The new ALN Code (WG, 2021a) highlights the significant role of the IDP in identifying and utilising suitable targeted resources to provide the most valuable assistance for the individual learner, placing responsibility on schools and LAs to share their resources. Research suggests open access to resources is required to offer a truly inclusive education system (Goldan & Schwab, 2020). Educators believe a lack of resources adversely impacts what inclusive education can achieve (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Supporting the learning of autistic students and offering them an inclusive education is often impeded by a lack of suitable resources (Russell et al., 2022). Due to the heterogenous nature of autism and the considerable differences presented by each autistic student, what works for one, will not necessarily work for another. Resources suitable for learner A will not always be transferable to learner B, such differences are often seen as barriers to

educators' abilities to fully include autistic students (Busby et al., 2012; Ruel et al., 2015).

Within this thesis, most educator respondents told us they had access to sufficient resources to enrich their teaching of autistic students, although 27% felt they did not. There was considerable difference reported between practitioners working in mainstream and specialist settings. Where 73% of teachers working within specialist provisions reported having sufficient access to the resources they required, just 54% of mainstream teachers reported the same. In this digital age, educators today are fortunate to have access to a world of resources, planning tools and ideas, just a few clicks of the mouse away. In Wales there are specific resources made available bilingually through the Welsh Government backed National Autism Team. The organisation, a partnership between the Welsh Local Government Association and Public Health Wales, provides support across all areas to all ages, including training and certification processes alongside links to suitable educational resources (Autism Wales, 2021). Although most participants were agreed that they would like to have access to more resources, substantial numbers told us they were unsure or did not know where they could access the additional resources. This suggests that the National Autism Team are not promoting their services amongst practitioners, on the ground.

7.6.7 Confidence

Several studies report low educator confidence in teaching and supporting autistic children and young people in the classroom. Whilst a 2006 National Union of Teachers report found 44% of teachers were uncomfortable when working with autistic students (NUT, 2006), it would appear the situation has not improved, in the years since. The APPGA (2017) reported that many teachers lacked confidence when teaching autistic pupils, whilst most primary teachers report being apprehensive when autistic learners were in their class (Anglim et al., 2018). A perceived lack of educator confidence is seen as a barrier towards achieving full

inclusion within schools (Corbett, 2001), however Humphrey and Symes (2013) report confidence levels are higher amongst school leaders, including SENCos/ALNCos, who strive to employ fully inclusive policies. Educators who report lower levels of self-belief often experience tension when encountering autistic students (Emam & Farrell, 2009), this lack of faith in their capability means encounters with autistic learners are challenging to both student and teacher (Simpson et al., 2003).

When considering the educator sample within this study, participants reported general confidence levels as moderate to high across supporting autistic learners, especially amongst those already experienced in educating autistic students. Again, a marked difference in confidence levels was evident between teachers working in mainstream and specialist settings. Support staff have the benefit of working closer with the individual pupils on a daily basis and are frequently seen as a constant presence (Falkmer et al., 2015), and as the person who will often give time to listen to and understand the pupils' challenges (Dillon et al., 2016). In this study, support staff reported high confidence in their ability to support to an autistic learner, in the classroom. As discussed earlier, educators play a key role in the early identification of students who possibly display autistic related behaviours. Whilst not expected to be experts in the field, the ability to have confidence in identifying early indicators is crucial to ensuring young people access the support services available to help them succeed in their education (Whitlock et al., 2020).

In this study, teaching and support staff reported high confidence in their ability to identify if a student might be displaying signs of autism, in the classroom. Where teachers can provide support to the families of autistic learners through effective channels of communication, fostering positive relationships, the students' academic outcomes are enhanced (Goldrich Eskow et al., 2018; Babbedge et al., 2005), increasing parental satisfaction (Zablotsky et al., 2012; Whitaker, 2007). Participating mainstream teachers were considerably less confident in their abilities

to support the family of autistic students than their colleagues in specialist settings. Whilst around 93% of teachers in specialist provisions reported moderate to high levels of confidence, just 57% of their counterparts in mainstream reported having the same levels of confidence.

7.7 Integration of multi-level perspectives

One of the key strengths of this work is the inclusion of the perspectives of the three key stakeholder groups, learners, parents, and educators. Having presented the discussion of the reported results from each, individually, it is worth considering how perspectives interact on a multi-level basis. Below looks how the learner experiences, parental perspectives, and educator perceptions, as discussed above, come together across five areas. Across all areas presented below, the experiences of all three cohorts were found to be considerably better amongst those discussing experiences of specialist education placements, when compared to their counterparts referring to mainstream education settings.

7.7.1 Understanding

Within the original studies reported here, 70% of education professionals felt that they had a good knowledge of autism, whilst 77% considered themselves to have a good understanding of the condition. Similar results were reported across teaching and support staff. Whilst parent responses suggest that in their dealings with educators, practitioners generally understood their point of view, only 50% believed their child's teachers understood about autism. However, just 28% of autistic learner respondents felt their teachers understood autism, and just 33% indicated a feeling of being understood, as an individual. There is clearly a discrepancy between what the three stakeholders consider to be a good understanding.

Some of this may be explained by Milton's double empathy theory (Milton, 2012), as discussed previously. With not only the educators failing to understand the

learners, but the learners not fully appreciating the level of understanding demonstrated by their teachers. The follow-up WTSK study revealed some of the key areas where autistic young people consider practitioners could improve their knowledge and understanding about autism and how it can impact their learning experiences. There is also a space for additional, more targeted, training of education professionals, around some of these areas. Whilst most educators to respond indicated they had received some form of autism-related training, 22% felt the training provided was insufficient. This could be explored further to try to ascertain practitioner feelings around the training currently being provided and appreciate what it is educators would like training to include.

7.7.2 Exclusions

One of the key outcomes from the WTSK study was the suggestion that autistic learners often feel as though they are seen as being 'naughty' and can be left feeling like a 'bad person' due to a lack of understanding by educators. With 77% of autistic learners reporting an increased level of anxiety at school, sometimes their communicative behaviours can be misunderstood by teachers. As reported by the APPGA (2017), many autistic young people find themselves getting into trouble at school as a result of their difficulties in expressing their anxieties. Approaching a quarter of parent respondents said that their child had been sanctioned with some form of school exclusion (23%). Parental reports suggest, autistic learners who had a co-occurring ADHD diagnosis were considerably more likely to have experience of being excluded. Response data from the PCQ seemingly supports the APPGA (2017) findings that many autistic learners face repeated exclusions from mainstream, before finding a suitable placement at a specialist setting.

7.7.3 Inclusion and peer relationships

Just 54% of parents felt their child's current placement offered a fully inclusive environment, and whilst 69% said their child wished to be included in school life,

just 52% of the autistic learners to respond to the APQ indicated they felt included at school.

Although most autistic learners told us they had school friends, 29% did not, however these were not questioned as to whether they wanted to form friendships at school. Again, Milton's theory (2012), suggests the bi-directional lack of understanding between autistic and non-autistic peers, might provide some explanation for this. However, with a core symptomology of autism being lower social understanding (NAS, 2016), Brayford (2021) reports many would like in-school support to develop social skills to help build and maintain positive peer relationships. Literature suggests autistic learners' lack of social skills and understanding can increase the likelihood of being bullied (Sedgewick et al., 2018). Most autistic respondents to the APQ said they had experience of being bullied at school (76%), with response data suggesting that incidents of bullying increased as learners progressed from primary to secondary school. From a parental perspective, many here felt their child was seen as an easy target for school bullies, with 62% believing their child had been bullied for being autistic. When reporting bullying incidents to their child's school, most parents felt their concerns were not taken seriously, whilst just 24% considered the schools' responses were appropriate. In most cases, bullying continued, even after parents had reported their concerns to the school.

7.7.4 Support

Although many autistic learners told us they were coping with their work at school, a considerable proportion were not. Just 47% of the respondents to the APQ felt sufficiently supported at school, with 42% believing their teachers did not know how best to support them. According to parental reports, 34% of their children were not receiving any additional support with their education. Although these parents were not questioned about whether their child was actually in need of support, just 41% considered the support available to their child was sufficient.

Most parents responding to the PCQ believed their child needed more support, if they were to reach their full potential. Whilst 81% of educators reported confidence in supporting the learning of autistic students, many practitioners felt unsupported by their Local Authority and external agencies, such as speech and language therapists. Literature points towards the ever-increasing demand on these external services, and lengthening waiting lists as a reason why such support is lacking (AAA, 2013; NEU, 2019). Accessing suitable resources are essential for educators to provide the best possible support (Goldan & Schwab, 2020; Russell et al., 2022), and whilst generally respondents to the ESQ said they had sufficient access to the resources required, 41% told us they were unsure, or did not know, where to find additional resources to support them. More needs to be done to signpost tried and tested resources so that practitioners can access a wider variety. As stated throughout the thesis and raised by young autistic participants in the WTSK study, all autistic learners are different and have varying learning needs. Resources that can be successfully employed with one autistic learner, may prove ineffective with another, so a wider variety of options is essential.

7.7.5 Communication and interactions

Responses to the ESQ suggest that whilst teacher confidence was high in their ability to support the learning of an autistic student, it was markedly lower when considering their ability to support the learner's family. Literature indicates that positive communication between home and school is beneficial for improving a learner's outcomes and strengthening parental satisfaction (Goldrich Eskow et al., 2018; Garbacz et al., 2016; Zablotsky et al., 2012). Most parents here, indicated that they were in regular communication with their child's school, about their education, however just 46% considered this to be sufficient. Generally, this thesis reports parents felt listened to and respected, at least some of the time, in their communications with their child's school. Parental satisfaction was greatest when discussing their interactions with support staff, and whilst 69% were satisfied with their interactions with their child's teachers, senior management interactions were seen as satisfactory by just 60% of parent respondents. This pattern was mirrored in

parent's views of how school staff were interacting with their child. Parents perceptions of educator understanding of autism was found to significantly impact their judgement and satisfaction levels with staff/parent and staff/learner interactions.

Overall, this chapter has considered the results emanating from the original studies which form the core of this thesis, linking findings with relevant literature, contemplating and similarities or differences from data relating to experiences in England, reported by the National Autistic Society. Chapter 8 draws this thesis to a conclusion, considering how the results answer the research questions, and reflecting on the early impact of the project. Some of the limitations of the project are discussed, and possible future implications and research potential are highlighted.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with a reminder of the overarching research questions that underly this thesis (Section 8.2). Section 8.3 considers the what the original research elements of the thesis have taught us about the current situation regarding the education of autistic learners in Wales. There is a discussion about what the researcher wishes to achieve with this work in Section 8.4, before the impact the work has already attained is presented. In Section 8.5 the researcher acknowledges some of the limitations of the work, before consideration is given to any future implications for policy and practice (Section 8.6), as well as the opportunities for future research that may arise (Section 8.7). Section 8.8 closes the thesis, by presenting an overall conclusion.

8.2 The research questions

As this thesis reaches its conclusion, it is worth taking a moment to remember the research questions the work aims to address. Having presented an extensive review of literature regarding the education of autistic young people, in Chapter 2, it was identified that there is a lack of published material relating specifically to educational experiences in Wales. This work set out with the aim of addressing this imbalance, and focuses on responding to the overarching research question:

- Is the current model of inclusive education, whereby the majority of autistic learners attend mainstream settings, with varying levels of support, working for autistic learners in Wales?

To gain as full a picture of the current situation as possible, it was decided to seek the input of the three main stakeholder cohorts through the implementation of the following three sub-questions:

- What are the views of the young autistic community in Wales, on their educational experiences?
- How do the parents of autistic school children in Wales view their child's education and what are their personal experiences of dealing with the educators and the education system?
- Do educators in Wales really understand autism and are they confident in their abilities to support autistic pupils and their families in a range of educational settings?

8.3 What has been learnt through this research?

Ninety-two autistic learners, 371 of their parents, and 378 educators responded to a series of online survey questionnaires, during the first participant engagement phase of this project. In addition, 27 autistic young people shared their views on what they wanted their teachers to know about autism, and 120 non-autistic learners responded to the learner experience survey. These respondents provided the data that has shaped the results as reported and then discussed, across Chapters 4-7. Below, we give a brief overview of the results, responding to each of the three sub-questions.

8.3.1 What are the views of the young autistic community in Wales, on their educational experiences?

Whilst many of the young autistic respondents enjoyed going to school and felt happy and safe whilst there, a sizeable proportion felt otherwise, and school-based anxieties were reported by most. Most indicated they felt different from their peers, with many feeling a sense of exclusion at school. It is clear that forming and maintaining friendships is difficult, increasing the risk of being bullied, making unstructured times challenging. With evidence of sensory overwhelm at school, whilst most had access to a safe and quiet space to aid with regulation, many said such a space was not available to them. Just 35% indicated their belief that teachers understood the sensory challenges school could present. Although most felt able to cope with the work set, the majority felt unsupported. Only 28% considered their

teachers understood autism, whilst just 33% felt their teachers understood them, as individuals.

The biological sex of the young person was found to greatly impact educational experience across many areas, especially in educator understanding. This suggests that many teachers, may still see autism as a male condition, not appreciating the often-subtle differences in presentation often witnessed in autistic females. However, the most influential factor in shaping the overall educational experience, was the type of setting attended. Significant differences were reported in the experiences of those attending specialist provisions, when compared with their contemporaries taught in mainstream. For those registered in mainstream schools, this study shines a light on the challenges faced, in comparison to their non-autistic peers. In general, autistic mainstream students suffer more school-based anxieties, feel less understood and less supported than non-autistic learners, they also feel more excluded and have fewer friends.

8.3.2 How do the parents of autistic school children in Wales view their child's education and what are their personal experiences of dealing with the educators and the education system?

In the general view of the participating parents and carers, there appears to be a broad dissatisfaction with their autistic child's education. Most felt unsupported in trying to find a suitable placement, believing their child was not in a school that met their individual needs. Parents were generally satisfied with their communication with school staff, and how staff interact with their children. Parental reports suggest, when raising concerns relating to their child being bullied at school, schools were not taking the issue seriously and were failing to respond appropriately. With 34% of parents suggesting their child was not receiving any support at school, many of those whose children had a Statement indicated the prescribed support was not being provided.

Whilst parents overwhelmingly believed inclusion to be a critical element of their child's educational experience, many believed that their child's school was not offering an inclusive learning environment. Most felt that their child sought a sense of inclusion at school, although many indicated their child was not being included in school life. Twenty three percent said their child had faced exclusion, either internally or externally, temporarily, or permanently, with many suggesting their child had been excluded as a result of staff shortage or lack of support. Parents were unconvinced in the level of autism understanding demonstrated by teachers, especially those whose children attend mainstream. Overall, parent perception and experience were considerably more positive when their child was educated within a specialist provision, where additional support, better understanding, and more inclusive practice, were commonplace.

8.3.3 Do educators in Wales really understand autism and are they confident in their abilities to support autistic pupils and their families in a range of educational settings?

The teachers and education support staff who took part demonstrated a wealth of experience in working with autistic learners. Most educator participants believed they had a good knowledge and understanding of autism, and general levels of confidence in the ability to aid with early identification and the provision of support for autistic learners were high. Whilst the delivery of autism-related training appears to be common, there were clearly some gaps in provision. Support staff, who work one-to-one, supporting autistic learners generally receive no training before starting in this critical role, whilst NQTs and student teachers point to inadequate autism-related training during their ITT programmes. The sharing of information, particularly in advance of working with autistic students was said to be reasonable, however some report this could be improved. When working with autistic learners, educators generally felt well supported by their schools, employers and colleagues, however Local Authority support and the involvement of outside agencies, such as speech and language therapists, was not meeting their needs.

Across most areas educators working within specialist provisions reported more positive results. They would appear to have more robust information sharing practices, are better trained, have better access to resources, and receive more external support. A consideration of closer links between mainstream and specialist settings, to help support mainstream teachers and support staff working with autistic students, might help improve mainstream practice.

8.4 What is the impact of this project?

At the conception of this project the researcher set out to address the lack of research presenting data relating to the educational experiences of autistic learners in Wales. As discussed within Chapter 2, data from National Autistic Society research of learner experiences in England consistently highlight several areas of concern, but with no comparative studies from Wales, it is impossible to understand if similar issues are replicated here. The aims of the research were to present an overview of how autistic learners feel about their education, considering their parents' views on key areas, whilst also trying to understand something of the practitioners' perspective. Should areas of interest or concern be identified, it was hoped that this research would start a conversation amongst policy makers and practitioners, from local school level, through to government departmental level.

Upon completion of the first phase participant engagement and data collection activities, and following early basic analysis, it was clear that in many areas, all three stakeholders, autistic learners, their parents, and educators were experiencing difficulties. It was decided to publish a preliminary report, sharing some of the key findings from this early analysis (Appendix 4). In January 2022, this document was released, with the aim of starting a conversation, and inspire discussions which may garner interest from policy makers, at all levels. Although just a preliminary report, the impact this has had has been encouraging, with many key figures showing an interest, including within the Senedd, the National Autistic Society Cymru, and Estyn. To date the report has been downloaded over 500 times from the official

online platform, whilst the NAS uploaded it to their own server and shared links for this. On publication, the NAS Cymru publicised the report widely through its social media platforms, labelling the study as 'ground-breaking', adopting its findings to support their own campaigns, including their evidence sessions to the Senedd's Children, Young People and Education Committee (CYPEC), referenced below. Unsuccessful efforts had been made to engage with NAS Cymru in the early stages of the project, so to have them supporting the preliminary findings was significant in helping to reach a wider audience.

The preliminary report was sent, via email, to all members of the Senedd (Welsh Parliament), upon release. Within a week Mark Isherwood MS, chair of the Senedd's Cross-Party Autism Group (CPAG), raised a question in the Senedd, calling for a statement from the Minister for Education, in response to the report. Responding, for the government, Lesley Griffiths MS stated:

> *'…the Minister for education and his officials will look very closely at the report. It's important that a child receives the correct and appropriate education, and it's very important that, as Ministers, we listen to such experts.'*

Mr Isherwood again referenced the report in a Senedd statement marking World Autism Acceptance Week, in March 2022, and requested the report be presented to the CPAG at their May 2022 meeting. The virtual meeting, attended by members of the autism community, practitioners from diverse professions including education, members of the Senedd and local government officers, received the presentation enthusiastically. The discussions that followed, were the nucleus for the 'What teachers should know' and 'non-autistic learner experience' follow-up studies. Following the presentation, it was agreed that the CPAG would write to the Welsh Government Minister for Education and Welsh language, Jeremy Miles MS, and ESTYN Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales, Mr Owen Evans, to raise

the concerns identified within the report. In response, Jeremy Miles MS, acknowledged and welcomed the findings of the report, stating:

> *'The research will be helpful in informing policy development and practice aimed at ensuring a more inclusive education system…'*

Similarly, Mr Evans responded by stating that the report findings:

> *'…represents an important contribution to the evidence that we have concerning the educational experiences of this group of young people.'*

Within the Estyn chief inspector's annual report 2021-22, Mr Evans made reference to some of the findings, highlighting the difference in parental satisfaction between mainstream and specialist provision settings. The ESTYN report suggesting that:

> '*These results broadly align with those provided by parents in our pre-inspection questionnaires.'*

In May 2021, Hefin David MS, himself a parent of an autistic child held a short debate on the topic of autism, during which he made numerous detailed references to the preliminary report. The key topics of bullying and school exclusion were acknowledged by Government Minister Julie Morgan MS, who responded:

> *'I really feel that we have to address this issue. The role of education in supporting neurodiverse children and young people is absolutely crucial. We're working closely with education colleagues, who are delivering improvements through the additional learning needs reform, to ensure the needs of neurodiverse children and young people are recognised, and that staff have knowledge and skills to support them.'*

On 27th June 2022, S4C aired an edition of their current affairs programme 'Y Byd ar Bedwar' discussing the challenges faced by parents of autistic children and young people in trying to secure a Welsh language education for their children. The findings of the preliminary report featured heavily throughout the programme. In

September, a presentation of the findings discussed within the preliminary report was made at the Autistic Minds Live conference in Cardiff's City Stadium.

On 7th June 2023, at a meeting of the Senedd's CYPEC, Chris Haines, representing NAS Cymru, was called to give evidence relating to the committee's enquiry asking, 'Do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare?'. Within his evidence Chris referenced findings, as presented within the Preliminary Report, relating to educator understanding and training and school exclusion. Responding, Ken Skates MS stated: '*It's quite incredible. That data is just remarkable*'. The Committee published their report in July 2024 (Senedd, 2024), making several references to Mr Haines' evidence citing the findings of this study.

Transcripts from relevant Senedd references, and copies of all documentation discussed above are provided within Appendix 5.

The above interactions clearly illustrate the interest the findings of the preliminary report have generated at the highest level of governance, in Wales. They highlight the significance of the project, and how the findings are achieving the initial aims of starting conversations. There was clearly an appetite for the overarching aims of the project, to fill the gap in literature and understanding, about the educational experiences of autistic learners in Wales. It is hoped that these discussions can start to bring about some real change to help improve the experiences of these learners. To further support and facilitate such discussions it is the intention to produce a final report document, summarising the results as reported within this thesis, to expand on the original 'preliminary report' document released previously. Upon submission of the thesis, talks are planned to develop some of the key findings by writing up some articles for submission to suitable publications. To ensure the

concerns identified within this thesis remain in focus, the potential for further research projects is discussed within section 8.6.

8.5 Limitations

Education in Wales is at the beginning of one of the most transformative periods ever know, with both the introductions of the Curriculum for Wales and the new ALN reforms. It has been debated that the findings of this study are undermined somewhat by the change in provision for pupils with additional needs in Wales, the first phase of which was introduced at the start of the academic year following the data collection element of this study. However, I would argue that this study presents a small-scale baseline, from which possibly larger scale follow-up studies, in the future, can ascertain if the new ALN Code or indeed the new curriculum has made any difference to the educational experiences of autistic young people.

It cannot be ignored that the data collection reported within this study was undertaken at a critical point in history. The COVID-19 pandemic, as shown within Chapter 1, had a devastating impact on the educational lives of all learners, from March 2020 through until April 2021, and beyond. Although most pupils had returned to the classroom, in April 2021, there was still severe disruption to learning and many restrictions remained in place to ensure as safe a learning environment as possible throughout the period of this study and the remainder of 2021. As highlighted in Chapter 3, first phase of participant engagement coincided with the education system emerging from the winter and early spring shutdown, in 2021. As a result, the initial plans of engaging parents and learners before educators had to change. It is difficult to ascertain the general impact of the pandemic on participation, within these early questionnaires, or to understand its effect on individual responses. However, the fact that in the year immediately prior to the study schools had been closed, for most learners for at least five months, should not be overlooked. It may be that contributor responses were affected by this lack of regular schooling during the period immediately prior to participation, although if

this was the case, I do not see this reflecting adversely on the data, as many of the findings correlate with similar studies in England in the years before the pandemic.

The use of volunteer sampling, whilst enabling access to a wide population of potential participants, does present with a few limiting factors. As stated in Chapter 3, a sample of volunteers means results cannot be claimed as representative of the wider population (Cohen, et al., 2018; Taherdoost, 2016). There is little control over the sample, from the researcher's perspective, whilst it is possible that results may be skewed large proportions of volunteers who are motivated by a pre-existing agenda. As all component studies were self-reporting, similar limitations are to be considered.

The next sections identify limitations in each of the learner, parent and educator surveys, and are discussed in full.

8.5.1 Limitations within the learner experiences studies

Chapter 4, presenting the autistic learners' educational experiences combines data from three separate studies (APQ, WTSK & CGS).

The timing of the initial autistic learner survey (APQ) coincided with the first full school term pupils were back in education full-time following the COVID-19 interruptions, although lessons were still being disrupted at the time, due to large staff and pupil absences. The follow-up study, exploring what autistic individuals wished their teachers knew about autism (WTSK), added additional insight into why many participants felt misunderstood by their teachers. This study was active nine months after the APQ had been closed. Similarly, the non-autistic pupil experience survey (CGS) was conducted exactly one year after the initial APQ.

Whilst the WTSK was conducted a school year later than the APQ, it is more generalised and not reliant on time specific contributions, therefore can be included within this report with confidence, as the viewpoints of autistic learners indicating what they wish their teachers knew about autism. There are clearly barriers to placing too much emphasis on the comparative study, between autistic and non-autistic learner experience, due to the passage of time between the two. It is also acknowledged that circumstances involving the pandemic were vastly different when the CGS took place. It is however, still believed to be a worthwhile exercise, establishing some key differences which can be explored further in future studies. With hindsight, it would have been beneficial to undertake a wider, pupil experience survey, to mitigate for these time differences, however, the focus of the thesis remains firmly on autistic learner experiences.

Within the initial APQ study, there is scope to have included some additional questions within the higher ability level sections. Some follow-up questions which would have added an extra layer of understanding and provided some context to participant responses may have been of benefit. When questioned about whether they felt included at school, having a follow-up to enquire if they wanted to be included would have been useful, similarly, a question asking if they wanted friends at school, could have followed the question asking if they had school friends. Indeed, many of the questions could have included some level of further investigation. During the planning process, much consideration was given to the included questions and the desire to not overwhelm potential participants, therefore a balance needed to be struck. It is felt that the basic dichotomous questioning which made up the majority of the APQ questionnaire, was the best approach to give a general outline of autistic learner experience. The need for follow-up studies, to expand on data harvested within the first phase, was always part of the planning process.

8.5.2 Limitations within the parent experience study

The survey of parents and carers, reported in Chapter 5, was delayed until all pupils had made a full return to school, following the second shutdown of education provision, during the winter of 2021.

Upon reflection, a major limitation of the parent study was the decision not to collect the demographic data of the participating parent or carer. As explained in Chapter 3, this was considered the best option to maintain a focus on the learner and reduce the question burden on the participant. Whilst for many areas of questioning this approach was sufficient, it would have been beneficial to have some idea of who was providing the responses. In areas such as home/school communication, parent/educator interactions, school responses to reports of bullying and parental satisfaction, there was scope to have an additional layer of analysis based on parental demographics, which was not possible.

The parent questionnaire was the most in depth of all the component studies which make up this thesis. Throughout the planning and preparation, I was mindful of its length and the time commitment expected of potential participants. Whilst there was provision of 'free text response' options, enabling participants to add additional comments and information, within each section of the survey, very little qualitative data was submitted, to add context of value to the quantitative results. With the benefit of hindsight, some areas of questioning could have been thinned out, reducing the overall length of the survey, without impacting too heavily on the results output.

8.5.3 Limitations within the educator experience study

As explained in Chapter 3, the original plan was for the survey of education professionals (ESQ) to be the third of the first phase studies. The idea being that early response data from the surveys of autistic learners and their parents, might

signpost some areas of interest that could add some focused questions to the educator questionnaire. As the COVID-19 education lockdowns were still ongoing, beginning with the ESQ was considered the best way to proceed, as this cohort had remained active throughout the pandemic.

The ESQ was open to all educators, working in any role supporting the learning of young people aged 18 and under in Wales, and participants were encouraged to take part regardless of their previous experience of autism within their professional roles. The survey was promoted as a study considering the education of autistic pupils therefore it could be possible that the sample is disproportionately weighted with participants who already had an interest in autism. Nevertheless, the researcher considers this need not detract from the importance of the outcomes as presented in Chapter 6, and it should be noted that 8% of participants indicated they had no experience of autism, within their professional capacities.

Taking this into consideration, the educator survey which went 'live' was designed to be brief, ensuring the time commitment on practitioners was kept to a minimum. Whilst as with the other surveys, respondents were afforded the opportunity to expand on their quantitative responses with free-text response options, there were insufficient entries to add value to the results, as reported.

Upon reflection, there are several areas within the ESQ survey which might have been expanded, to add some context and greater depth to the understanding of educator experiences.

- Information sharing: follow-up questions asking about the quality of information shared, and whether it was beneficial.
- Support: some additional rating scale questions enquiring about the quality of the support provided alongside a query about what support participants would find most beneficial.

- Training: this is one area where further questioning would be most beneficial. An enquiry about the value of training provided by employers, and whether it had been appropriate for their needs.
- Knowledge and understanding: these questions could have been expanded to include known areas of interest such as sensory difficulties.

Given the findings of the learner and parent surveys, some additional areas of questioning, over and above those highlighted above, that might have been incorporated include behaviour management and viewpoint on inclusion. If the study was to be repeated, it would be advisable to present these questions within a general survey of teaching experiences, to ascertain if this ESQ data was weighted in favour of those with prior interest in autism and its impact on education. Also including some of the additional questions discussed and targeting questions to respond to the concerns of autistic learners and their parents, would add considerable value.

8.6 Future Implications

As highlighted above, the preliminary findings from the studies reported within this thesis have already received considerable attention from policy makers, at the highest level. The question is, will any of this interest and the discussions surrounding the work have any lasting impact on the educational experiences of the ever-increasing autistic learner population across Wales.

As previously discussed, the first phase participant engagement activities took place at an important period in the history of the education system in Wales. The country was emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic, which severely disrupted the education of all learners over two academic years. Thereafter, the most significant period of educational reform since devolution, heralded not only the introduction of a new curriculum for Wales, but a complete overhaul of the system for supporting learners requiring additional support with their education. Whilst the

new national curriculum programme undoubtedly will have an impact, the most meaningful legislation relating to this project is the new ALN Code.

From the outset, the aims of the project were to address the lack of knowledge considering the education of autistic learners in Wales and start a conversation around any areas of concern that might emerge. Section 8.4 provides evidence that these conversations have already begun, so it is time to consider the future implications which may emerge based on the findings of this project. It has been argued, that recent ALN reforms, will help improve educational experiences and outcomes for learners with additional needs, addressing some of the concerns the research within this thesis have highlighted. It is important that any progress resulting from the new ALN system is measured, in order that we can understand its true impact on autistic learners. Whilst this need to review any positive or negative impacts of the new ALN Code presents opportunities for further research (see Section 8.7), there are some areas of concern highlighted within this thesis for which action could be initiated more rapidly.

8.6.1 Autism related training

In Chapter 1, the continued developments in the understanding of autism were discussed. As more in known about the condition, and literature presents a greater appreciation of how it can impact everyday life, it is important that practitioners are given the latest information, to help inform their practices. With learners and their parents, participating in this project, largely believing educators generally lack knowledge and understanding, ensuring professionals have access to regular up-to-date training is a key outcome that needs to be considered.

Within Chapter 6, the majority of newly qualified and student teacher respondents to the ESQ indicated their dissatisfaction at the autism related training provided during their teacher training programmes. Many also felt their university lecturers

to be unsupportive on occasions where they encountered working with autistic learners during their in-training practical work placements. More needs to be done to develop autism awareness amongst the next generation of teaching staff. The Senedd's CYPEC report (2024), highlights this issue, with calls for autism training to be a mandatory element of initial teacher education programmes.

8.6.2 School exclusions

Data from participating parents, reported in Chapter 5, suggest that 23% autistic learners have been sanctioned with either an internal or external exclusion. Young autistic learners themselves alluded to the feeling of being seen as 'naughty' by teachers, in Chapter 4. In response to evidence referencing the preliminary findings of the PCQ regarding exclusions, the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) told the CYPEC (Senedd, 2024) that educators strive to minimise exclusions, suggesting improved training practices could help decrease the rate of exclusions. Within the same report, the National Education Union (NEU) felt some exclusions were the result of learners being placed within mainstream education, when alternative provisions might be more appropriate. At the time of writing, the Welsh Government was undertaking a review of its wider education exclusion policy.

8.6.3 Listening to the experts

As highlighted in Chapter 1, the heterogeneity of autism, means that every autistic individual presents with a different array of symptomologies and differences, across a wide range of severity. This was something raised by the young people themselves and reported with Chapter 4. This unpredictable pattern of presentation presents educators with unique challenges when considering how best to support the learning of each autistic student who enters their classroom. For teachers, when trying to understand how best to support an individual autistic learner, the best people to talk to, are the learners themselves, alongside their primary carers.

The new ALN Code (WG, 2021a) emphasises the importance of encouraging the participation of learners and listening to their perspectives, whilst acknowledging the unique perspective parents and carers can offer. However, when discussing their child's IEP (Chapter 5), 33% of parents said they were not involved in reviews of the document, whilst 26% believed their child had no input in the review process. More than 10% of parents felt their views were never listened to, when discussing their child's education, with around 20% never felt their views were respected or understood. More could be done to improve the inclusion of learner and parent views, as they are the experts regarding the individual child's strengths and difficulties.

8.6.4 Dealing with incidents of bullying

As reported in Chapter 4, 76% of autistic learner participants said they had been the victim of bullying at school. Fifty two percent of the parent respondents felt their autistic child was considered an easy target for school bullies, with most believing their child had been bullied because they were autistic (Chapter 5). Generally, parents felt schools were not taking their concerns about incidents of bullying involving their child seriously. Many considered the school's response to be unsatisfactory, and in the majority of instances the bullying continued, even after concerns had been reported. The Welsh Government (2019d p16) refer to bullying as '*Behaviour by an individual or group, usually repeated over time, that intentionally hurts others either physically or emotionally*'. Bullying which is focused on an individual's additional needs is considered as prejudice related bullying. The responsibility for tackling bullying is placed firmly on the individual setting, with each expected to have their own bullying strategy in place. Whilst within their guidance (WG, 2019a) the Welsh Government emphasise the responsibility of schools to ensure the safeguarding the welfare of all learners, there is clearly a lot of work that needs to be done to reassure parents and learners that reported incidents will be dealt with in a timely and appropriate manner.

8.6.5 Closer working relationships between mainstream and specialist settings

Across all three first phase studies it is clear that the experiences of learners, their parents, and the practitioners, are significantly better when referring to specialist provisions, in comparison to mainstream settings. There is enough evidence to suggest that closer working relationships between the two provision sectors, would be beneficial. Professionals working in specialist provisions, were found to have better training opportunities, received better levels of support from their LAs and outside agencies, whilst having better access to a range of suitable resources. If practitioners based within mainstream settings were able to connect with their colleagues working in specialist provisions, there could be improved information sharing practices, helping to support autistic learners who might be struggling with their mainstream education.

8.7 Future research potential

As highlighted above, significant educational reforms have been introduced in the years following the initial studies reported within this thesis. Whilst these do not detract from the findings reported here, they do present future research opportunities. As with NAS school reports, published every four years, the surveys of autistic learners, parents, and educators, included within this thesis, if replicated on a regular basis, will provide an informative overview of how experiences change, over time. Using the first phase APQ, PCQ, and ESQ, studies as a baseline, this work presents an excellent opportunity to measure any impact the ALN reforms have had on the educational experiences of autistic learners across Wales. I would consider it beneficial to repeat the studies during the 2025/26 academic year, thus ensuring the full roll out of the ALN Code has been completed. Doing so, could initiate an ongoing research project measuring changes in attitude and experience at regular intervals, as part of an ongoing process. There is potential to replicate the studies further afield too, there are currently no comparable works relating to experiences of autistic learners in either Scotland or Northern Ireland. For me this is an exciting

prospect, offering an opportunity to generate data from across the constituent countries of the UK, for a nationwide comparative study.

The findings here, also provide scope for more targeted research, to develop a better understanding of specific areas of interest raised within this thesis. The high proportion of reported school exclusions is certainly something that could be investigated. Similarly, the data relating to experiences of bullying are quite revealing, and there would be value in exploring this in greater detail. Educator responses in areas such as training and confidence offer further research potential, to understand more about the type and quality of training offered, and how this training impacts practitioner confidence when working with autistic students.

8.8 Conclusion

Having engaged the involvement of approaching 1,000 participants central to the educational experiences of autistic learners across Wales, it would appear that a blanket approach to inclusive education, involving placing as many autistic CYP as possible into mainstream education is not serving their best interests. Data from educators would suggest that professionals working in specialist provisions are better trained, and more knowledgeable and confident, in supporting the learning of autistic students. Educator responses indicate that learners attending specialist settings benefit from their teachers' access to a wider variety of resources and more readily available support from outside agencies. Parents of these learners are considerably more satisfied with their child's specialist education, than those whose children attend mainstream schools, across a range of areas. The most telling perspective is that of the autistic young people themselves. Data suggests those who receive their education in specialist provisions feel happier and significantly safer at school, they are also more likely to enjoy their educational journey and suffer a lot less school related worry and anxiety, than their peers in mainstream education. For those attending mainstream, general educational experiences do not

compare favourably to those of their non-autistic peers, significantly so, in some key areas.

What this study has achieved, is presenting an insight into where enhancements could be considered to help improve mainstream education, fostering a more inclusive learning environment for autistic learners. Whilst many of the autistic participants generally reported favourable educational experiences, some key areas which significantly impact these experiences were identified through the data. Possibly the most important was improving educator knowledge and understanding of autism, which consequentially will improve their understanding of the individual. Autistic participants themselves have identified some areas of knowledge they would like their teachers to consider, to help them develop a more understanding approach. As discussed in Chapter 4, autistic participants were keen to point out that they are all different, and that what works for one, will not necessarily work for another. They also highlight how the school environment presents many sensory challenges which can often overwhelm, whilst processing complex series of instructions and rules can be difficult. Autistic young people commented on how they often hide behind a mask, meaning what teachers can see, is not always a true reflection of how the individual is coping. Crucially, being autistic does not make anyone a 'bad person', what is often perceived as 'naughty' behaviour can stem from numerous complex emotions or overwhelms, which an autistic individual is struggling to process and communicate.

It is hoped that the findings of this study will, in some way, help to guide future educator training to help nurture a more understanding and inclusive approach to supporting autistic learners.

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Appendix 1

Participant Information Literature

It was crucial to ensure potential participants were able to make an informed decision as to whether they agreed to take part in any of the surveys which formed part of this study. Therefore, an extensive library of participant information documents was produced, both in Welsh and English language formats. Examples of the English language documents, that were made available for participants to download, are presented in Appendix 1

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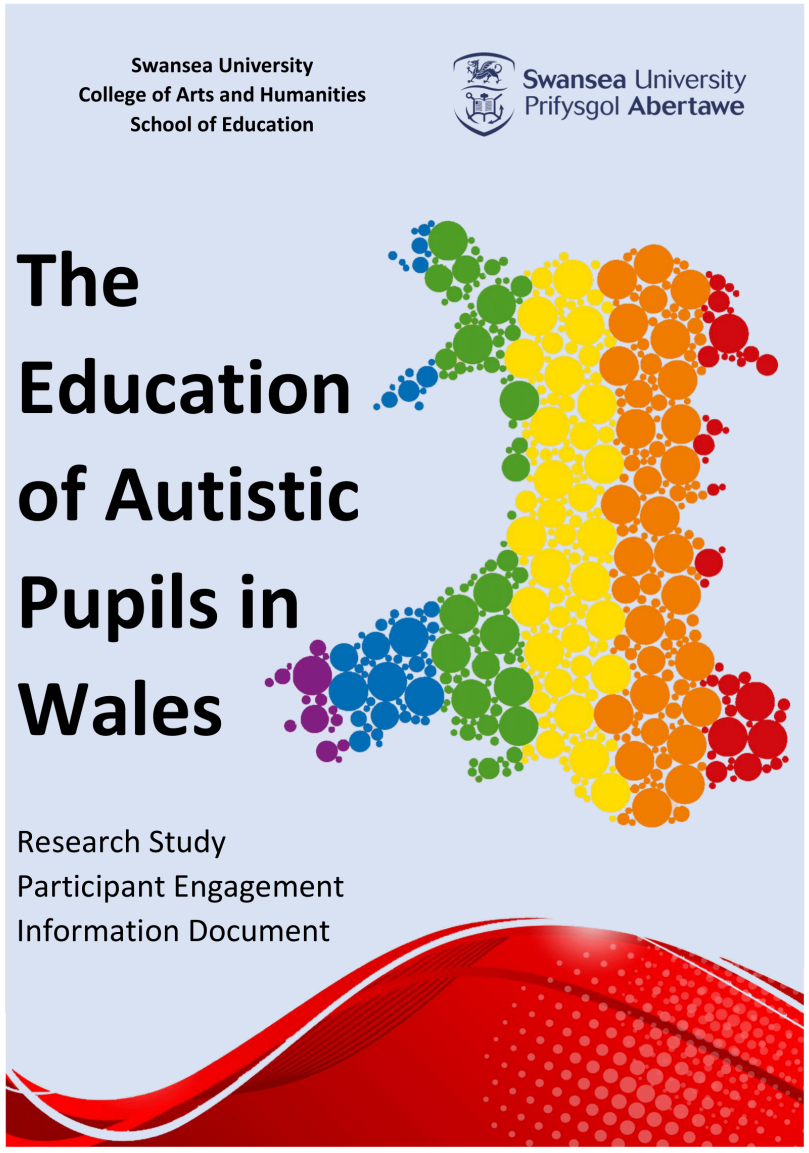
Appendix 1a

Participant Engagement Information Document

In advance of the project commencing participant engagement activities a general information document was produced and shared widely, explaining the rationale for undertaking the project and how data would be collected.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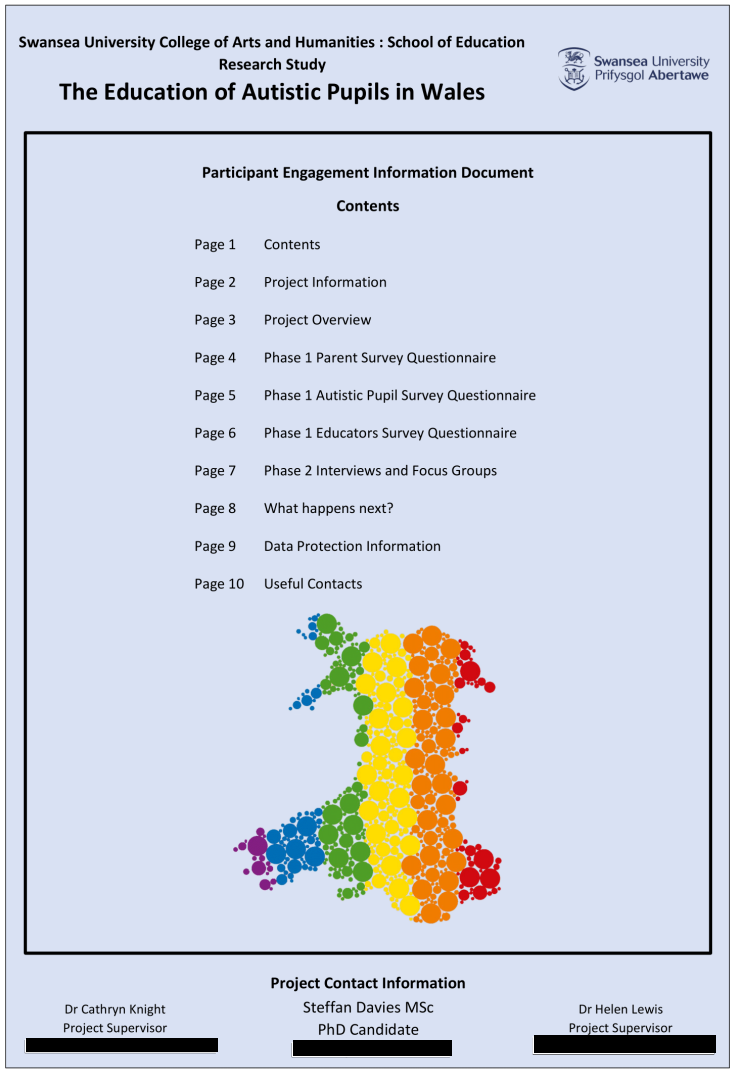
Information Document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Project Contact Information
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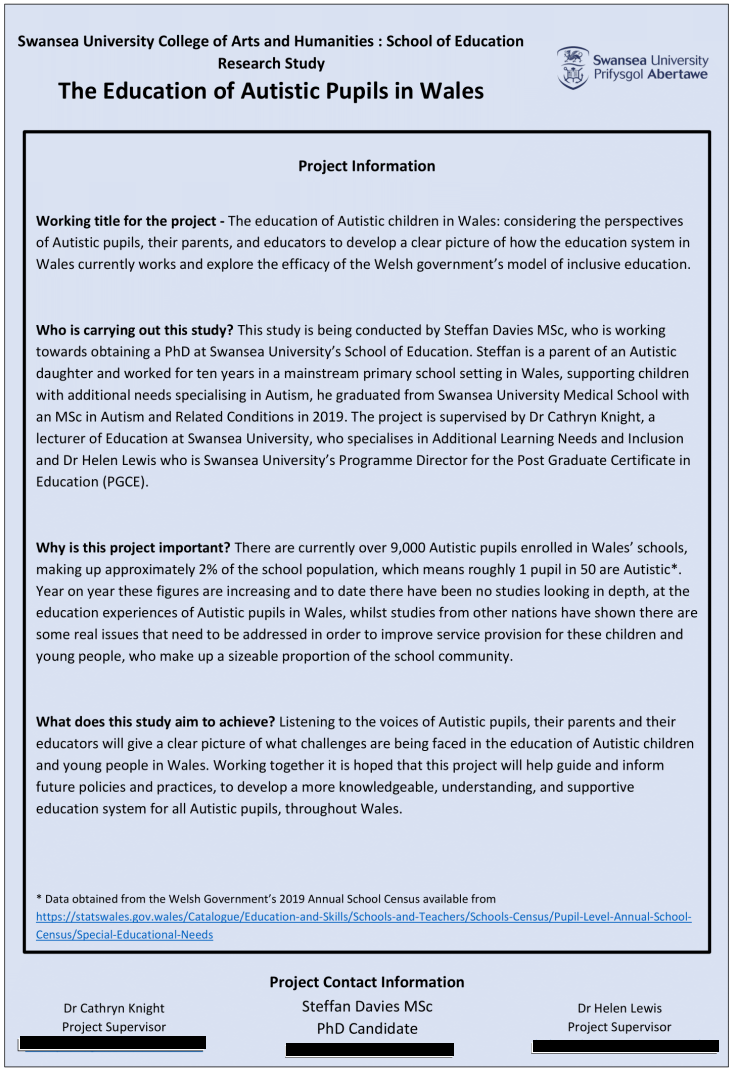

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The Education of Autistic Pupils in Wales

Swansea University
Prifysgol Abertawe

Project Information

Working title for the project - The education of Autistic children in Wales: considering the perspectives of Autistic pupils, their parents, and educators to develop a clear picture of how the education system in Wales currently works and explore the efficacy of the Welsh government's model of inclusive education.

Who is carrying out this study? This study is being conducted by Steffan Davies MSc, who is working towards obtaining a PhD at Swansea University's School of Education. Steffan is a parent of an Autistic daughter and worked for ten years in a mainstream primary school setting in Wales, supporting children with additional needs specialising in Autism, he graduated from Swansea University Medical School with an MSc in Autism and Related Conditions in 2019. The project is supervised by Dr Cathryn Knight, a lecturer of Education at Swansea University, who specialises in Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion and Dr Helen Lewis who is Swansea University's Programme Director for the Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE).

Why is this project important? There are currently over 9,000 Autistic pupils enrolled in Wales' schools, making up approximately 2% of the school population, which means roughly 1 pupil in 50 are Autistic*. Year on year these figures are increasing and to date there have been no studies looking in depth, at the education experiences of Autistic pupils in Wales, whilst studies from other nations have shown there are some real issues that need to be addressed in order to improve service provision for these children and young people, who make up a sizeable proportion of the school community.

What does this study aim to achieve? Listening to the voices of Autistic pupils, their parents and their educators will give a clear picture of what challenges are being faced in the education of Autistic children and young people in Wales. Working together it is hoped that this project will help guide and inform future policies and practices, to develop a more knowledgeable, understanding, and supportive education system for all Autistic pupils, throughout Wales.

* Data obtained from the Welsh Government's 2019 Annual School Census available from https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Schools-and-Teachers/Schools-Census/Pupil-Level-Annual-School-Census/Special-Educational-Needs

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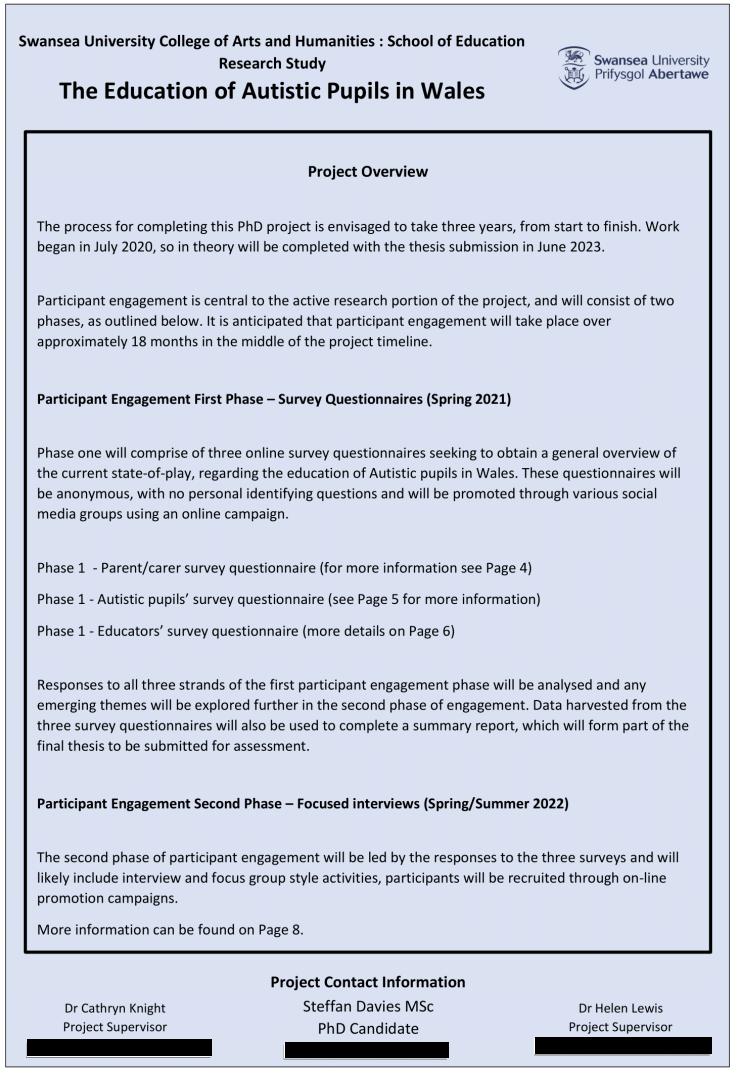

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The Education of Autistic Pupils in Wales

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Project Overview

The process for completing this PhD project is envisaged to take three years, from start to finish. Work began in July 2020, so in theory will be completed with the thesis submission in June 2023.

Participant engagement is central to the active research portion of the project, and will consist of two phases, as outlined below. It is anticipated that participant engagement will take place over approximately 18 months in the middle of the project timeline.

Participant Engagement First Phase – Survey Questionnaires (Spring 2021)

Phase one will comprise of three online survey questionnaires seeking to obtain a general overview of the current state-of-play, regarding the education of Autistic pupils in Wales. These questionnaires will be anonymous, with no personal identifying questions and will be promoted through various social media groups using an online campaign.

Phase 1 - Parent/carer survey questionnaire (for more information see Page 4)

Phase 1 - Autistic pupils' survey questionnaire (see Page 5 for more information)

Phase 1 - Educators' survey questionnaire (more details on Page 6)

Responses to all three strands of the first participant engagement phase will be analysed and any emerging themes will be explored further in the second phase of engagement. Data harvested from the three survey questionnaires will also be used to complete a summary report, which will form part of the final thesis to be submitted for assessment.

Participant Engagement Second Phase – Focused interviews (Spring/Summer 2022)

The second phase of participant engagement will be led by the responses to the three surveys and will likely include interview and focus group style activities, participants will be recruited through on-line promotion campaigns.

More information can be found on Page 8.

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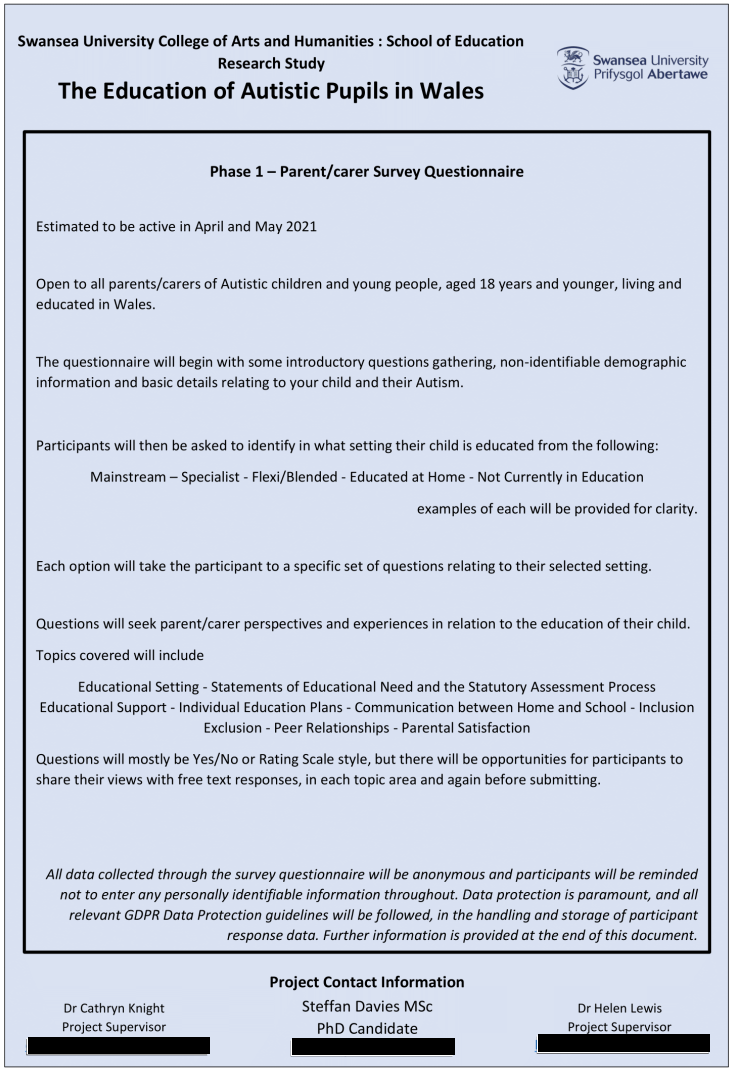

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Phase 1 – Parent/carer Survey Questionnaire

Estimated to be active in April and May 2021

Open to all parents/carers of Autistic children and young people, aged 18 years and younger, living and educated in Wales.

The questionnaire will begin with some introductory questions gathering, non-identifiable demographic information and basic details relating to your child and their Autism.

Participants will then be asked to identify in what setting their child is educated from the following:

Mainstream – Specialist - Flexi/Blended - Educated at Home - Not Currently in Education

examples of each will be provided for clarity.

Each option will take the participant to a specific set of questions relating to their selected setting.

Questions will seek parent/carer perspectives and experiences in relation to the education of their child.

Topics covered will include

Educational Setting - Statements of Educational Need and the Statutory Assessment Process
Educational Support - Individual Education Plans - Communication between Home and School - Inclusion
Exclusion - Peer Relationships - Parental Satisfaction

Questions will mostly be Yes/No or Rating Scale style, but there will be opportunities for participants to share their views with free text responses, in each topic area and again before submitting.

All data collected through the survey questionnaire will be anonymous and participants will be reminded not to enter any personally identifiable information throughout. Data protection is paramount, and all relevant GDPR Data Protection guidelines will be followed, in the handling and storage of participant response data. Further information is provided at the end of this document.

Project Contact Information

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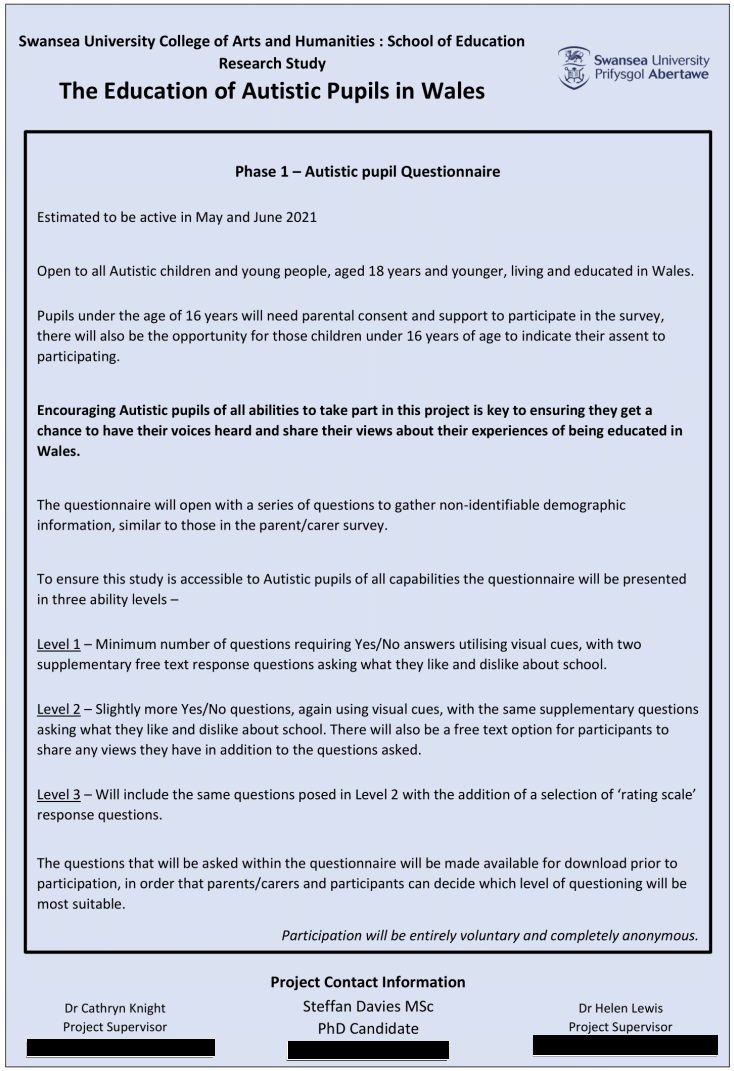

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Phase 1 – Autistic pupil Questionnaire

Estimated to be active in May and June 2021

Open to all Autistic children and young people, aged 18 years and younger, living and educated in Wales.

Pupils under the age of 16 years will need parental consent and support to participate in the survey, there will also be the opportunity for those children under 16 years of age to indicate their assent to participating.

Encouraging Autistic pupils of all abilities to take part in this project is key to ensuring they get a chance to have their voices heard and share their views about their experiences of being educated in Wales.

The questionnaire will open with a series of questions to gather non-identifiable demographic information, similar to those in the parent/carer survey.

To ensure this study is accessible to Autistic pupils of all capabilities the questionnaire will be presented in three ability levels –

Level 1 – Minimum number of questions requiring Yes/No answers utilising visual cues, with two supplementary free text response questions asking what they like and dislike about school.

Level 2 – Slightly more Yes/No questions, again using visual cues, with the same supplementary questions asking what they like and dislike about school. There will also be a free text option for participants to share any views they have in addition to the questions asked.

Level 3 – Will include the same questions posed in Level 2 with the addition of a selection of 'rating scale' response questions.

The questions that will be asked within the questionnaire will be made available for download prior to participation, in order that parents/carers and participants can decide which level of questioning will be most suitable.

Participation will be entirely voluntary and completely anonymous.

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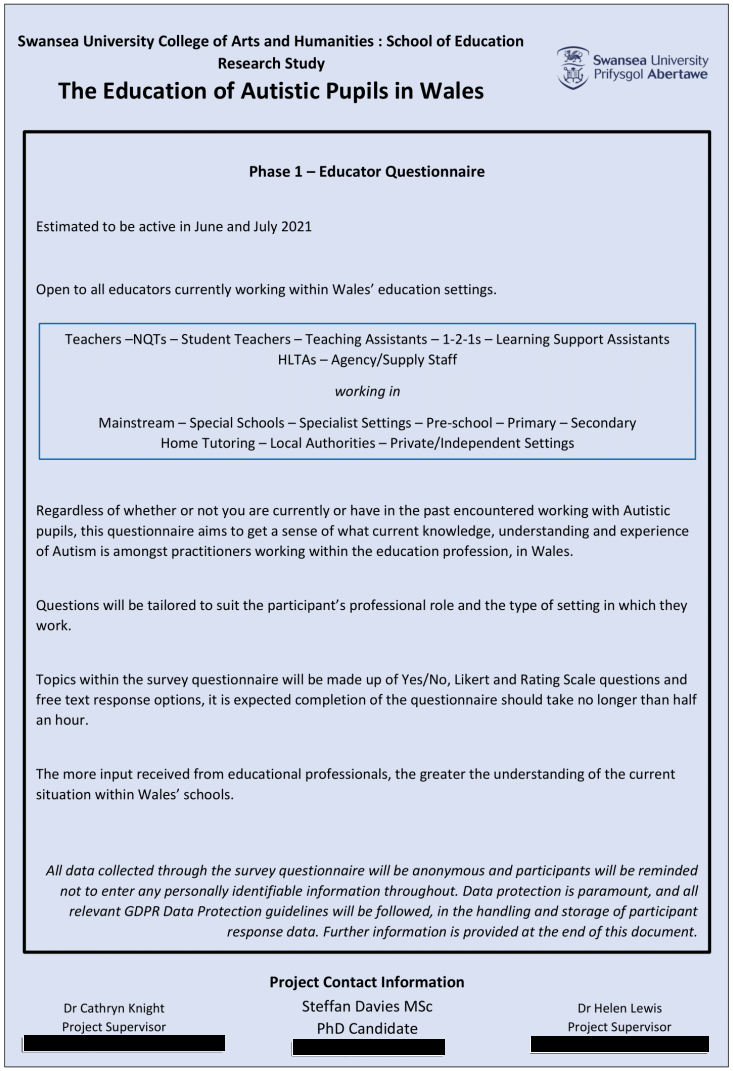

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Phase 1 – Educator Questionnaire

Estimated to be active in June and July 2021

Open to all educators currently working within Wales' education settings.

Teachers –NQTs – Student Teachers – Teaching Assistants – 1-2-1s – Learning Support Assistants
HLTAs – Agency/Supply Staff

working in

Mainstream – Special Schools – Specialist Settings – Pre-school – Primary – Secondary
Home Tutoring – Local Authorities – Private/Independent Settings

Regardless of whether or not you are currently or have in the past encountered working with Autistic pupils, this questionnaire aims to get a sense of what current knowledge, understanding and experience of Autism is amongst practitioners working within the education profession, in Wales.

Questions will be tailored to suit the participant's professional role and the type of setting in which they work.

Topics within the survey questionnaire will be made up of Yes/No, Likert and Rating Scale questions and free text response options, it is expected completion of the questionnaire should take no longer than half an hour.

The more input received from educational professionals, the greater the understanding of the current situation within Wales' schools.

All data collected through the survey questionnaire will be anonymous and participants will be reminded not to enter any personally identifiable information throughout. Data protection is paramount, and all relevant GDPR Data Protection guidelines will be followed, in the handling and storage of participant response data. Further information is provided at the end of this document.

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Phase 2 – Focused Participant Engagement Activities

Following analysis of participant responses from the Phase 1 questionnaires, key themes that emerge will be considered and a series of focused engagement activities will be organised, to gather a more detailed picture of what those areas are and what, if anything can be done to address them.

How will participants be recruited for this phase?

Upon completion of the phase one questionnaires there will be an opportunity for participants who are interested in taking part in further research to email researchers and register that interest. When analysis of phase one data is complete and the sub-groups required for further participation become clearer, there will, as for the first phase, be a promotional campaign seeking volunteers, launched across various social media platforms.

As this second phase is entirely based on reacting to themes emerging from phase one, it would be difficult to predict what exactly the engagement activities will look like and which groups will be approached, but whatever route the project takes, researchers will endeavour to make the activities accessible, for all.

Every activity will be scrutinised by the relevant Swansea University research ethics committee, and protection of participants data will be paramount throughout the process, in line with GDPR regulations. Where phase one was completely anonymous, with no personally identifiable information being gathered through the survey questionnaires, the nature of the second phase would entail gathering of limited personal data, to enable activities such a interviews and focus groups to take place. Bearing this in mind however, there will not be a need for any of the identifiable information to appear within the final thesis, summary reports or published articles emerging from the process.

Covid-19 – any activities undertaken for the second phase will of course follow the Welsh Government guidelines in place at the time, should the Covid-19 situation be ongoing.

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What Happens Next?

When all active participation elements of the project are complete, the researcher will analyse all the data and produce a thesis for submission to Swansea University in pursuit of the award of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). It is envisaged that submission will be completed by the summer of 2023.

The critical component of the final thesis will be a summary report, combining the findings from all participant engagement activities undertaken in the first phase surveys and the second phase focused interviews.

It is intended that this report will, upon completion of the project, also be made available as a stand-alone document in which the current 'state of the nation' relating to the education of Autistic pupils in Wales, as reported by Autistic pupils, their parents and educators will be presented, hopefully providing policy makers with an opportunity to evaluate their current strategies, policies and practices.

Taking the input of participants into consideration, the summary report will also endeavour to develop proposals for future consideration, aiding the advancement of a more knowledgeable, understanding, and supportive education system for all Autistic pupils in Wales.

If you would like to receive a copy of the summary report findings, when they are published, please email the contacts below to register your interest.

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Data Protection Information

All elements of participant engagement, survey questionnaires in the first phase, and interviews or focus groups in the second will be scrutinised by the Swansea University College of Arts and Humanities Research Ethics and Governance Committee, to ensure the University's Policy on Research Data Protection and Research Integrity guidelines are fully adhered to.

The data you submit through the survey questionnaire element of the project is anonymous, and will be kept confidential at all times, only the researcher Steffan Davies and the research supervisors Dr Cathryn Knight and Dr Helen Lewis will have access to the submitted information.

The platforms used in the delivery of Phase 1 survey questionnaires are fully compliant with current GDPR regulations and provide assurances as to the security processes employed to protect user data, with all data being encrypted during transmission and storage.

The second phase, focused participant engagement activities would entail the gathering of limited identifiable personal data, to enable activities such a interviews and focus groups to be organised, again the data will be kept confidential with only the research team, as named above, having access. Any reporting from the second phase data will be anonymised, and participant identities will be protected at all times.

Data protection is paramount, and all gathered data will be stored securely in password protected files, within the Swansea University secure data servers with access limited to only the researcher and the project supervisors.

Following the completion of the project, data collected will be stored securely on the Swansea University password protected server, for a period of five years, before being erased. Any hard copies of data printed off, during the analysis and report writing process, will also be retained, locked in a secure environment, for the same period, before being destroyed.

If you have any concerns relating to data protection issues, you can contact the research team direct using the contact emails at the foot of this page. You can also contact the Swansea University Compliance Officer - dataprotection@swansea.ac.uk quoting 'The Education of Autistic Pupils in Wales'.

Project Contact Information

Dr Cathryn Knight
Project Supervisor
[redacted]

Steffan Davies MSc
PhD Candidate
[redacted]

Dr Helen Lewis
Project Supervisor
[redacted]

Swansea University College of Arts and Humanities : School of Education
Research Study

The Education of Autistic Pupils in Wales

Swansea University
Prifysgol Abertawe

Useful Contacts

If you have any questions relating to this specific project please contact the researcher direct, using the contact email at the bottom of every page, if you do not receive a response or are unhappy with the response you get, you can also email the project supervisors, whose email details are also included at the bottom of every page in this document.

If you have any general questions relating to Autism or the education of your child, the researcher has identified some key organisations you may wish to contact directly.

SNAP Cymru
Information, advice and support for parents, children and young people who have, or may have, additional learning needs
0808 801 0608
www.snapcymru.org

NAS Cymru
Co-ordinates all National Autistic Society services and activities in Wales, including the support of local NAS branches
029 2062 9301
email: cymru@nas.org.uk

AutismWales.org
Information about Autism, training opportunities and downloadable resources
029 2046 8675
www.autismwales.org

These organisations are independent of this research project.

Project Contact Information

Dr Cathryn Knight
Project Supervisor
[redacted]

Steffan Davies MSc
PhD Candidate
[redacted]

Dr Helen Lewis
Project Supervisor
[redacted]

Appendix 1b

APQ Parent Information Document

Each study had its own variations on the participant information document, with the pupil studies having both a parent and participant (16-18) version. All were produced in both Welsh and English language versions and were made available to download before participants logged into the online surveys. The same information was included within the opening 'information and consent' pages of the survey, which participants had to confirm they had read, before entering the main questionnaire, there were also links to download the information at the beginning and end of each survey.

For reference Appendix 1b presents the parent/carer information document which was made available to parents of all potential participants to the survey of autistic learners.

Swansea University College of Arts and Humanities
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The Education of Autistic Pupils in Wales

Pupil Survey Questionnaire – Participant Information Sheet

Information for Parents/Carers

This questionnaire has been developed to gather the views of Autistic pupils, relating to their educational experiences, and should take no longer than 20 minutes to complete.

Pupils aged between 16 and 18 years are able to take part in this survey independently, however some may need parental support to complete the questionnaire.

Pupils aged 15 and younger need parental consent to take part, once parental consent is given, they may complete the survey independently if they are able, however having parental support would be a good idea and we would recommend that the adult completes the opening demographic questions.

This Participant Information Sheet has been designed to give parents/carers supporting their Autistic children to complete the survey questionnaire some information about the project, that they can share with their children.

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Swansea University College of Arts and Humanities
School of Education Research Study
The Education of Autistic Pupils in Wales

Pupil Survey Questionnaire – Participant Information Sheet

Information for Parents/Carers

Project Information

Your child is invited to participate in this project that is exploring the educational experiences of Autistic pupils in Wales. The project is being conducted and supported by the Swansea University School of Education as part of a PhD research project. If your child is under 16 years of age, they require your consent to participate. Please take the time to carefully read through the information within this document before giving your consent for your child to participate.

What is the purpose of this study?

This questionnaire is part of the first phase of research into this area being undertaken by Steffan Davies. Separate studies will be carried out seeking the input of Autistic pupils, their parents and carers and educators from across all sectors. Data gathered from this series of survey questionnaires form an integral part of the final thesis submission and will guide researchers in identifying areas for further investigation, in the second phase of the project. This study forms part of the ongoing mission to develop a better understanding of Autism and how it impacts Autistic individuals' educational experiences in Wales.

Who can take part?

To take part in this study participating children and young people must be Autistic aged 18 years and under, living and currently or until recently educated in Wales.

What will happen if I agree for my child to take part?

If you agree to your child taking part, you will be asked to electronically provide your consent. Standard ethical procedures involve you providing parental consent for children aged 15 years and under to participate in this study by clicking to confirm you understand and agree with the statements provided following this information.

What if I choose to withdraw my child's participation?

Your child's participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and all information submitted is completely anonymous you are also free to withdraw your child's participation, at any time, prior to submitting the completed questionnaire. Your child can choose to answer as many or as few of the questions as they like. Once submitted both you and your child's data is completely unidentifiable due to the anonymous nature of this project, so at that stage could not be retracted.

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The Education of Autistic Pupils in Wales

Pupil Survey Questionnaire – Participant Information Sheet

Information for Parents/Carers

What happens to the information my child provides?

The data you and your child submit through this survey questionnaire is anonymous, and will be kept confidential at all times, only the researcher Steffan Davies and the research supervisors, Dr Cathryn Knight and Dr Helen Lewis will have access to the submitted information.

Data protection is paramount, and all gathered data will be stored securely in password protected files, within the Swansea University data servers with access limited to only the researcher and the project supervisors.

Responses to the questions posed within this questionnaire, will be aggregated, and presented in a report, considering the Education of Autistic Pupils in Wales, whilst also being used to identify key areas of interest for further consideration, later in the project. Response data will also be central to the final thesis submission towards the award of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) at Swansea University's School of Education.

This report may also be put forward for publication, at a later date. You will be able to access the details of the report, if you desire, by emailing the researcher or the project supervisor through the contact details provided below.

How long will my information be held?

Following the completion of the project, data collected will be stored securely on the Swansea University password protected server, for a period of five years, before being erased. Any hard copies of data printed off, during the analysis and report writing process, will also be retained, locked in a secure environment, for the same period, before being destroyed.

Are there any risks associated with taking part?

The research has been approved by Swansea University College of Arts and Humanities Research Ethics Subcommittee (reference 290421/3788). There are no significant risks associated with taking part.

How do I make a complaint?

If you are unhappy with the way in which your personal data has been processed, you can contact the University Data Protection Officer at: University Compliance Officer (FOI/DP), Vice-Chancellor's Office, Swansea University, Singleton Park, Swansea, SA2 8PP; Email: dataprotection@swansea.ac.uk.

Cookies Notice

The data collection within this survey is facilitated by SurveyMonkey, further information on their Cookies Policy can be found be following this link

https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/mp/legal/cookies/

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Swansea University College of Arts and Humanities
School of Education Research Study

The Education of Autistic Pupils in Wales

Pupil Survey Questionnaire – Participant Information Sheet

Information for Parents/Carers

Further Information

To ensure this study is accessible to Autistic pupils of all capabilities the questionnaire will be presented in three ability levels and if you have not already done so, the questions within this survey are available to download, by using the QR Code below, in order that both you and your child can decide which level will suit them best.

The questionnaire begins with a series of non-identifiable demographic questions and basic questions relating to your child and their Autism to provide some background detail. Whilst your child, where able can complete the survey independently once you have given consent for them do so, it is recommended that you as their parent/carer complete these initial questions.

The questions can be downloaded by following this QR Code.

https://swanseauniversity-my.sharepoint.com/:f:/g/personal/856614_swansea_ac_uk/EmDtgON66xBNr5oH5UryHrQBwtG_K73rt9SVxGmLGNiRlw?e=0CEhVO

Pupil Assent

We ask that you as parents/carers talk through this information with your child, to help them understand what they are being asked to take part in and explain why their participation is important. Pupil participants will be asked if they are happy to answer the questions before beginning.

The information on the following page is for the child/young person.

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School of Education Research Study
The Education of Autistic Pupils in Wales

Pupil Survey Questionnaire – Participant Information Sheet

Information for the child/young person

My name is Steff and I work at Swansea University, I am trying to understand how Autistic children feel about school.

I think it is important to ask you to tell me how school is for you, because nobody understands this better than you do.

I have prepared the questions for you to see what will be asked before you start the survey and have asked the person helping you to look at them with you to decide which ones you want to answer.

I will not be asking for your name or anything that will tell me exactly who you are.

You do not have to answer all the questions, but the more you answer the better I will be able to understand how you feel about going to school.

If you want to ask me any questions, ask the person helping you to email me and I will do my best to answer them for you.

Steffan Davies

[redacted]

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School of Education Research Study
The Education of Autistic Pupils in Wales

Pupil Survey Questionnaire – Participant Information Sheet

Information for Parents/Carers

Contact Details

If you have any questions or queries relating to this research project or the survey questionnaire, you can contact the research student or the project supervisors, please include 'Autism EduWales' in the subject line.

PhD Candidate
Steffan Davies MSc
Email: [redacted]

Project Supervisors for Swansea University
Dr Cathryn Knight: [redacted]
Dr Helen Lewis: [redacted]

If taking part in this questionnaire raises any concerns about your child's education, or you feel in need of some guidance or support, here are a few specialist organisations you may wish to contact.

National Autistic Society Cymru
Co-ordinates all National Autistic Society services and activities in Wales, including the support of local National Autistic Society branches
029 2062 9301 - email: cymru@nas.org.uk

AutismWales.org
Information about Autism, training opportunities and downloadable resources
029 2046 8675 - www.autismwales.org

SNAP Cymru
Information, advice and support for parents, children and young people who have, or may have, additional learning needs
0808 801 0608 - www.snapcymru.org

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Appendix 1c

APQ Participant Information Document (for participants aged 16-18 years)

Swansea University College of Arts and Humanities
School of Education Research Study
The Education of Autistic Pupils in Wales

Pupil Survey Questionnaire – Participant Information Sheet

Information for independently participating pupils aged 16 to 18 years

This questionnaire has been developed to gather the views of Autistic pupils, relating to their educational experiences, and should take no longer than 20 minutes to complete.

Pupils aged 16 to 18 years are able to take part in this survey independently, however some may need parental support to complete the questionnaire.

Pupils aged 15 and younger need parental consent to take part, once parental consent is given, they may complete the survey independently, if they are able, however having parental support would be a good idea and we would recommend that the adult completes the opening demographic questions.

This Participant Information Sheet has been designed to give independently participating Autistic young people aged 16 to 18 years some information about the project.

Swansea University College of Arts and Humanities
School of Education Research Study
The Education of Autistic Pupils in Wales

Pupil Survey Questionnaire – Participant Information Sheet

Information for independently participating pupils aged 16 to 18 years

Project Information

You are invited to participate in this project that is exploring the educational experiences of Autistic pupils in Wales. The project is being conducted and supported by the Swansea University School of Education as part of a PhD research project. Please take the time to carefully read through the information within this document before giving your consent to participate.

What is the purpose of this study?

This questionnaire is part of the first phase of research into this area being undertaken by Steffan Davies. Separate studies will be carried out seeking the input of Autistic pupils, their parents and carers and educators from across all sectors. Data gathered from this series of survey questionnaires form an integral part of the final thesis submission and will guide researchers in identifying areas for further investigation, in the second phase of the project. This study forms part of the ongoing mission to develop a better understanding of Autism and how it impacts Autistic individuals' educational experiences in Wales.

Who can take part?

To take part in this study participating children and young people must be Autistic aged 18 years and under, living and currently or until recently educated in Wales.

What will happen if I agree to take part?

If you agree to take part, you will be asked to electronically provide your consent. Standard ethical procedures involve you providing your consent to participate in this study by clicking to confirm you understand and agree with the statements provided following this information.

What if I choose to withdraw?

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and all information submitted is completely anonymous you are also free to withdraw your participation at any time, prior to submitting the completed questionnaire. Once submitted your data is completely unidentifiable due to the anonymous nature of this project, so at that stage could not be retracted.

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Pupil Survey Questionnaire – Participant Information Sheet

Information for independently participating pupils aged 16 to 18 years

What happens to the information I provide?

The data you submit through this survey questionnaire is anonymous, and will be kept confidential at all times, only the researcher Steffan Davies and the research supervisors Dr Cathryn Knight and Dr Helen Lewis will have access to the submitted information.

Data protection is paramount, and all gathered data will be stored securely in password protected files, within the Swansea University data servers with access limited to only the researcher and the project supervisor.

Responses to the questions posed within this questionnaire, will be aggregated, and presented in a report, considering the Education of Autistic Pupils in Wales, whilst also being used to identify key areas of interest for further consideration, later in the project. Response data will also be central to the final thesis submission towards the award of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) at Swansea University's School of Education. This report may also be put forward for publication, at a later date. You will be able to access the details of the report, if you desire, by emailing the researcher or the project supervisors through the contact details provided within the downloadable Participant Information Sheet, the details are also included at the end of this survey.

How long will my information be held?

Following the completion of the project, data collected will be stored securely on the Swansea University password protected server, for a period of five years, before being erased. Any hard copies of data printed off, during the analysis and report writing process, will also be retained, locked in a secure environment, for the same period, before being destroyed.

Are there any risks associated with taking part?

The research has been approved by Swansea University College of Arts and Humanities Research Ethics Subcommittee (reference 290421/3788). There are no significant risks associated with taking part.

How do I make a complaint?

If you are unhappy with the way in which your personal data has been processed, you can contact the University Data Protection Officer at: University Compliance Officer (FOI/DP), Vice-Chancellor's Office, Swansea University, Singleton Park, Swansea, SA2 8PP; Email: dataprotection@swansea.ac.uk.

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Pupil Survey Questionnaire – Participant Information Sheet

Information for independently participating pupils aged 16 to 18 years

Cookies Notice

The data collection within this survey is facilitated by SurveyMonkey, further information on their Cookies Policy can be found be following this link

https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/mp/legal/cookies/

To ensure this study is accessible to Autistic pupils of all capabilities the questionnaire will be presented in three ability levels and if you have not already done so, the questions within this survey are available to download (using the QR Code below), in order that you can decide which level will suit you best.

The questions can be downloaded by following this QR Code.

https://swanseauniversity-my.sharepoint.com/:f:/g/personal/856614_swansea_ac_uk/EmDtgON66xBNr5oH5UryHrQBwtG_K73rt9SVxGmLGNiRlw?e=0CEhVO

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Pupil Survey Questionnaire – Participant Information Sheet

Information for independently participating pupils aged 16 to 18 years

Contact Details

If you have any questions or queries relating to this research project or the survey questionnaire, you can contact the research student or the project supervisors, please include 'Autism EduWales' in the subject line.

PhD Candidate
Steffan Davies MSc
Email: [redacted]

Project Supervisors for Swansea University
Dr Cathryn Knight: [redacted]
Dr Helen Lewis: [redacted]

If taking part in this questionnaire raises any concerns about your education, or you feel in need of some guidance or support, here are a few specialist organisations you may wish to contact.

National Autistic Society Cymru
Co-ordinates all National Autistic Society services and activities in Wales, including the support of local National Autistic Society branches
029 2062 9301 - email: cymru@nas.org.uk

AutismWales.org
Information about Autism, training opportunities and downloadable resources
029 2046 8675 - www.autismwales.org

SNAP Cymru
Information, advice and support for parents, children and young people who have, or may have, additional learning needs
0808 801 0608 - www.snapcymru.org

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Appendix 1d

CGS Participant& Parental Consent Information

Although participant consent for all studies was collected through a series of 'tick boxes' within the opening pages of the online survey questionnaire forms, additional downloadable consent forms were produced to provide a hard copy of the information, for those who wished to download one.

Below are the forms made available for both parents and young people participating within the learner experience survey (CGS).

Swansea University School of Education Research Study

Pupil Experience of Being Educated in Wales

Pupil Experience Survey

Participation Criteria and Parental Consent

(Participating young people aged 15 years and younger)

The criteria for participation in this research project are that:

- The person completing the survey questionnaire, must be aged 18 years or under and living in Wales.
- The person completing the survey questionnaire, must currently be or until recently have been, educated in Wales.

If you agree to your child taking part in this study, you will be asked to electronically provide your consent.

Standard ethical procedures involve you providing parental consent for children aged 15 years and under to participate in this study by clicking to confirm you understand and agree with the statements provided, having read the provided project information.

You will have electronically consented if you have ticked the following statements within the online questionnaire.

- I am aged 18 years or over and am the parent/carer of the participating child. My child is aged 15 years or under, living in Wales and is currently, or has until recently been, educated in Wales.
- I understand that both I and my child have the right withdraw from this study at any stage prior to submitting the completed questionnaire and that once submitted, due to the anonymous nature of the project, it is impossible to retract my submission.
- I understand all data is provided anonymously and the research findings may be published.
- I confirm I agree to my child's participate in this study.

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Swansea University School of Education Research Study

Pupil Experience of Being Educated in Wales

Pupil Experience Survey

Participation Criteria and Consent

(Participants aged 16 and over)

The criteria for participation in this research project are that:

- The person completing the survey questionnaire, must be aged 18 years or under and living in Wales.
- The person completing the survey questionnaire, must currently be or until recently have been, educated in Wales.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to electronically provide your consent.

Standard ethical procedures involve you providing consent to participate in this study by clicking to confirm you understand and agree with the statements, having read the provided project information.

You will have electronically consented if you have ticked the following statements within the online questionnaire.

- I am 18 years or under, living in Wales and am currently, or was until recently, educated in Wales.
- I understand that I have the right withdraw from this study at any stage prior to submitting the completed questionnaire and that once submitted, due to the anonymous nature of the project, it is impossible to retract my submission.
- I understand all data is provided anonymously and the research findings may be published.
- I confirm I agree to my participation in this study.

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Appendix 1e

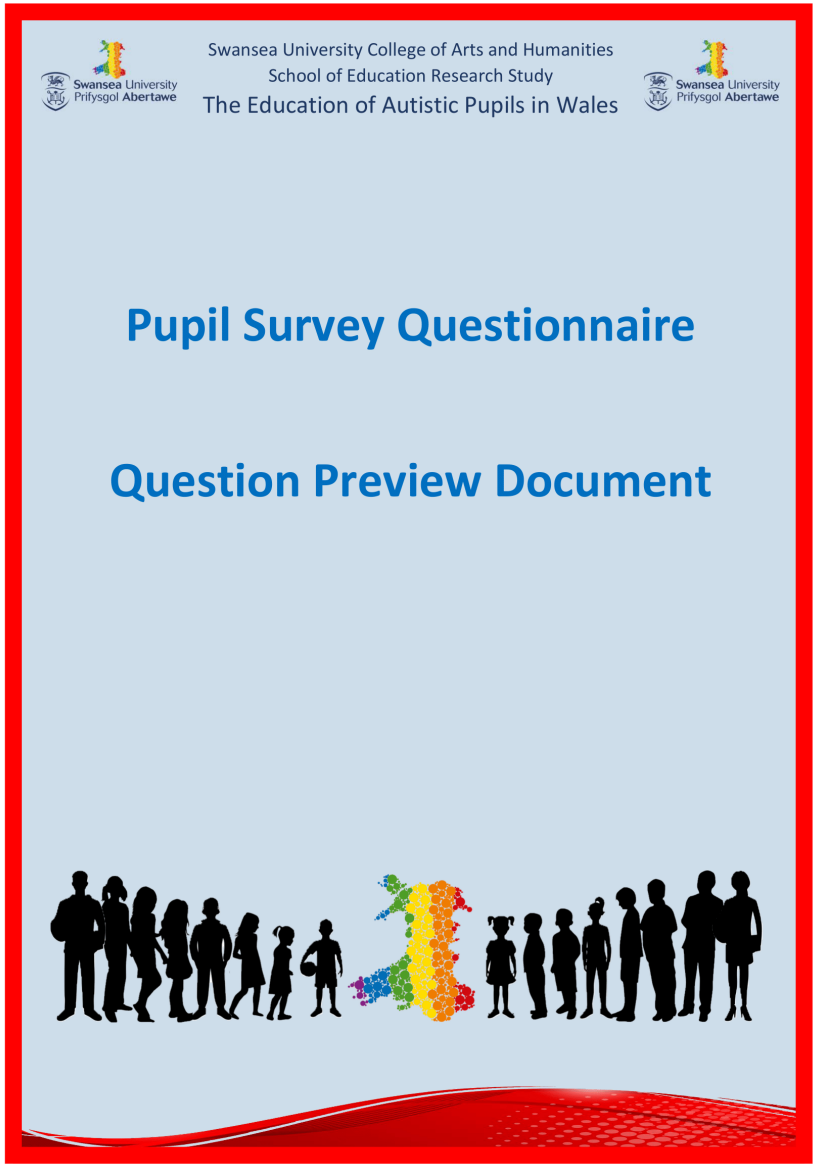
APQ Question Preview Document

Engaging young autistic participants in research can be challenging, both for researcher and potential participants.

It is beneficial to provide sufficient information, in advance to enable potential participants to make an informed choice regarding their participation in the study.

For the autistic pupil questionnaire, in the first phase of engagement, this advanced information was provided as a downloadable question preview document. Presented in both Welsh and English languages, the document, viewed over 350 times, gave some general detail, together with question list and a preview of how the online survey would look, should participants choose to engage. The English language version is included within the following pages.

A similar document was prepared to accompany the secondary follow-up study, seeking the input of non-autistic learners.



Swansea University College of Arts and Humanities
School of Education Research Study
The Education of Autistic Pupils in Wales

Pupil Survey Questionnaire - Question Preview Document

Thank you for showing your interest in participating in this research project to try and understand the educational experiences of Autistic pupils in Wales.

I have prepared this document to help familiarise participants with the questions asked within the Pupil Survey.

Participants aged 16 and above can take part in this survey independently, however some may need support to complete the questionnaire.

Participants aged 15 and younger need parent/carer consent to take part, once consent is given, they may complete the survey independently, if they are able, however having parental support would be a good idea and we would recommend that the adult completes the opening demographic questions.

The survey is available in three levels, to try and encourage the participation of as many Autistic pupils as possible, across a range of abilities.

It is hoped that by giving you the opportunity to preview the questions in advance, you will be able to identify which level of questions is most suited to you.

If you have any questions you would like to ask before completing the survey, please email myself, or the project supervisors, using the email addresses below.

Steffan Davies MSc
PhD Candidate
[redacted]

Project Supervisors for Swansea University
Dr Cathryn Knight: [redacted]
Dr Helen Lewis: [redacted]

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Pupil Survey Questionnaire - Question Preview Document

A brief outline of what you can expect in this question preview document.

Demographic Questions

A page giving a guide to the initial demographic questions which begin the questionnaire, to give a foundation for the data analysis of the final results.

Question Lists

Three pages listing the questions that appear in each of the three levels.

Questionnaire Preview

Re-creating the appearance of the online survey.

Starting with the Level Selection page, then covering all three levels to give participants an idea of what will be on screen should they wish to take part.

If you have any questions or wish to discuss anything you see within this document with the research team, you can email using the details below.

Steffan Davies MSc
PhD Candidate
[redacted]

Project Supervisors for Swansea University
Dr Cathryn Knight: [redacted]
Dr Helen Lewis: [redacted]

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Pupil Survey Questionnaire - Question Preview Document

Demographic Questions

The survey begins with a series of questions that will provide the researcher with some background information, with which they can analyse responses.

There are no questions which ask for information which will identify the participant.

We would ask that even where the child (under 16) may be capable of completing the survey independently, that the parents/carers who provide consent complete the opening demographic questions.

Young people aged 16 to 18 years, who are able to complete the survey independently can answer these questions themselves.

Questions within this section include:

In which local Authority area, participants live and whether they are or were educated within the same Local Authority area.

Questions about the participant, including gender, age, ethnicity and first language as spoken at home.

Questions about the participant's Autism, including whether they have a diagnosis, verbal abilities and if Autism is the primary condition that impacts their education.

Basic questions about participants' education status, including what sector they attend (e.g., primary, secondary etc), the setting in which they are educated (e.g., mainstream, specialist etc) and the primary language used in the setting they attend.

Participants aged 16 to 18 years have some additional questions enquiring whether they are still in education.

After completing these basic demographic questions, participants will be asked to select which level of questions they and the child would prefer to answer, based on their choice they will be directed accordingly.

If the child (under 16 years) can complete the remainder of the survey independently then they will be free to do so.

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Pupil Survey Questionnaire - Question Preview Document

Question Lists

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Pupil Survey Questionnaire - Question Preview Document

Level One Question List

Level One consists of just 4 yes/no questions and two text boxes for participants to add their likes and dislikes about school.

Participants do not need to answer every question and can stop at any time.

Question 1
Do you enjoy going to school?

Question 2
Do you feel happy in school?

Question 3
Do you have friends at school?

Question 4
Do you enjoy play and break times in school?

Question 5
What things do you like about school?

Question 6
What things do you dislike about school?

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Pupil Survey Questionnaire - Question Preview Document

Level Two Question List

Level Two consists of 12 yes/no questions, with optional spaces for participants to add any additional thoughts they have about their answers. There are two text boxes for participants to add their likes and dislikes about school, a question asking for three words to describe their feelings about school and space for any additional comments.

Participants do not need to answer every question and can stop at any time.

Question 1 Do you enjoy going to school?

Question 2 Does going to school make you feel anxious or worried?

There is an opportunity given here to add any comments about the answers given to questions 1 & 2

Question 4 Do you feel happy in school?

Question 5 Do you feel safe in school?

Question 6 Do you feel you get enough help in school?

There is an opportunity given here to add any comments about the answers given to questions 4, 5 & 6

Question 8 Do you have friends at school?

Question 9 Do you enjoy play and break times in school?

Question 10 Have you ever been bullied in school?

There is an opportunity given here to add any comments about the answers given to questions 8, 9 & 10

Question 12 Do you feel included in school?

Question 13 Do you feel different from the other children in school?

Question 14 Do you have a quiet space where you can go and relax in school?

Question 15 Do you cope well with the work in school?

There is an opportunity given here to add any comments about the answers given to questions 12, 13, 14 & 15

Question 17 What things do you like about school?

Question 18 What things do you dislike about school?

Question 19 Can you think of three words that describe how being in school makes you feel?

There is an opportunity given here to add any additional comments about the participant's time in school.

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The Education of Autistic Pupils in Wales

Pupil Survey Questionnaire - Question Preview Document

Level Three Question List

Level Three consists of the same questions that appear in Level 2 - 12 yes/no questions, with optional spaces for participants to add any additional thoughts they have about their answers. There are two text boxes for participants to add their likes and dislikes about school, a question asking for three words to describe their feelings about school and space for any additional comments. With an additional 9 questions after the yes/no section asking participants to consider to what level they agree with the given statements.

Participants do not need to answer every question and can stop at any time.

The 9 additional questions are:

Please read the following statements and indicate to what level you agree with each.

Response options are

Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree

1 My teachers understand about Autism.

2 My teachers understand me.

3 My teachers know how to support me.

4 I get enough support in school.

5 My teachers understand that sensory differences can make some situations in school hard to cope with.

6 School is often too noisy.

7 I wish I were in a different school.

8 I wish I were in a smaller school with less pupils

9 I wish I were in a school especially for Autistic pupils.

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Swansea University College of Arts and Humanities
School of Education Research Study
The Education of Autistic Pupils in Wales

Pupil Survey Questionnaire - Question Preview Document

Questionnaire Preview

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The Education of Autistic Pupils in Wales
Addysg Disgyblion Awtistig yng Nghymru

Pupil Survey – Arolwg Disgyblion

Ability level selection

To ensure this study is accessible to Autistic children/young people of all capabilities the questionnaire is available in three ability levels.

Please remember that participation is entirely voluntary and completely anonymous.

Participants do not have to answer all questions and can stop at any time.

*Please select the level you wish to respond to.

- ○ 1 **Level 1 -** Minimum number of questions requiring Yes/No answers utilising visual cues, with two supplementary free text response questions asking what they like and dislike about school.
- ○ 2 **Level 2** - A higher number of Yes/No questions, again using visual cues, with the same supplementary questions asking what they like and dislike about school. There will also be free text options for participants to share any views they have in addition to the questions asked.
- ○ 3 **Level 3** - Will include the same questions posed in Level 2 with the addition of a selection of 'rating scale' response questions.

After making the selection participants will be directed to the chosen set of questions.

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Level One Questions

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Level One Pupil Survey

Answer the questions by clicking on the picture.

Do you enjoy going to school?

Yes No

Do you feel happy in school?

Yes No

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Pupil Survey – Arolwg Disgyblion

Level One Pupil Survey

Answer the questions by clicking on the picture.

Do you have friends in school?

Yes

No

Do you enjoy play and break times in school?

Yes

No

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Pupil Survey – Arolwg Disgyblion

Level One Pupil Survey

Have a think about things you really like and dislike about being in school, enter any thoughts in the spaces below.

(Note for the parent/carer)

This can be a simple list or whatever your child wishes to share.

What things do you really like about school?

(Please remember not to enter and names or information that may identify you)

What things do you really dislike about school?

(Please remember not to enter and names or information that may identify you)

You have now finished the questions.

*If you are happy with your answers, please click on the arrow to take you to the final pages, where you can send them to me.

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Level Two Questions

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Pupil Survey – Arolwg Disgyblion

Level Two Pupil Survey

Answer the questions by clicking on the picture.

Do you enjoy going to school?

Yes No

Does going to school make you feel anxious or worried?

Yes No

If you want to say anything about your answers you can do so here.

(Please remember not to enter any names)

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Addysg Disgyblion Awtistig yng Nghymru

Pupil Survey – Arolwg Disgyblion

Level Two Pupil Survey

Answer the questions by clicking on the picture.

Do you feel happy in school?

Yes No

Do you feel safe in school?

Yes No

Do you feel you get enough help in school?

Yes No

If you want to say anything about your answers you can do so here.

(Please remember not to enter any names)

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Pupil Survey – Arolwg Disgyblion

Level Two Pupil Survey

Answer the questions by clicking on the picture.

Do you have friends in school?

Yes No

Do you enjoy play and break times in school?

Yes No

Have you ever been bullied in school?

Yes No

If you want to say anything about your answers you can do so here.

(Please remember not to enter any names)

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Addysg Disgyblion Awtistig yng Nghymru

Pupil Survey – Arolwg Disgyblion

Level Two Pupil Survey

Answer the questions by clicking on the picture.

Do you feel included in school?

Yes No

Do you feel different from the other children in school?

Yes

No

Do you have a quiet space where you can relax in school?

Yes No

Do you cope well with the work in school?

Yes No

If you want to say anything about your answers you can do so here.

(Please remember not to enter any names)

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Addysg Disgyblion Awtistig yng Nghymru

Pupil Survey – Arolwg Disgyblion

Level Two Pupil Survey

Have a think about things you really like and dislike about being in school, enter any thoughts in the spaces below.

(Note for the parent/carer)

This can be a simple list or whatever your child wishes to share.

What things do you really like about school?

(Please remember not to enter and names or information that may identify you)

What things do you really dislike about school?

(Please remember not to enter and names or information that may identify you)

Can you think of three words that describe how being in school makes you feel?
(Type the words in the spaces below)

Word 1
Word 2
Word 3

If you have anything else to say about your time in school, you can use this space
(Please remember not to enter any names)

You have now finished the questions.

*If you are happy with your answers, please click on the arrow to take you to the final pages, where you can send them to me.

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Level Three Questions

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Addysg Disgyblion Awtistig yng Nghymru

Pupil Survey – Arolwg Disgyblion

Level Three Pupil Survey

These questions are in groups and you can answer as many of them as you want to and leave any you do not want to answer.

Answer the questions by clicking on the picture.

Going to school

Do you enjoy going to school?

Yes No

Does going to school make you feel anxious or worried?

Yes No

If you want to say anything about your answers you can do so here.

(Please remember not to enter any names)

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Addysg Disgyblion Awtistig yng Nghymru

Pupil Survey – Arolwg Disgyblion

Level Three Pupil Survey

Answer the questions by clicking on the picture.

At school

Do you feel happy in school?

Yes No

Do you feel safe in school?

Yes No

Do you feel you get enough help in school?

Yes No

If you want to say anything about your answers you can do so here.

(Please remember not to enter any names)

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Pupil Survey – Arolwg Disgyblion

Level Three Pupil Survey

Answer the questions by clicking on the picture.

Do you have friends in school?

Yes No

Do you enjoy play and break times in school?

Yes No

Have you ever been bullied in school?

Yes No

If you want to say anything about your answers you can do so here.

(Please remember not to enter any names)

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Level Three Pupil Survey

Answer the questions by clicking on the picture.

When you are in school…

Do you feel included in school?

Yes

No

Do you feel different from the other children in school?

Yes

No

Do you have a quiet space where you can relax in school?

Yes

No

Do you cope well with the work in school?

Yes

No

If you want to say anything about your answers you can do so here.

(Please remember not to enter any names)

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Pupil Survey – Arolwg Disgyblion

Level Three Pupil Survey

Please read the following statements and indicate to what level you agree with each by clicking on the picture.

My teachers understand about Autism.

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

My teachers understand me.

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

My teachers know how to support me.

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

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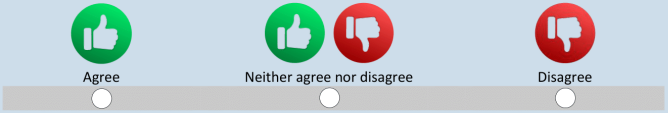
Pupil Survey – Arolwg Disgyblion

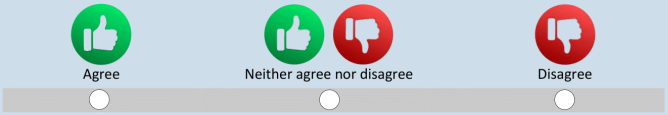
Level Three Pupil Survey

Please read the following statements and indicate to what level you agree with each by clicking on the picture.

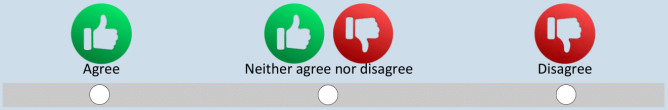
I get enough support in school.



My teachers understand that sensory differences can make some situations in school hard to cope with.



School is often too noisy.



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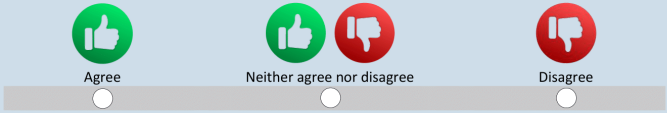
Pupil Survey – Arolwg Disgyblion

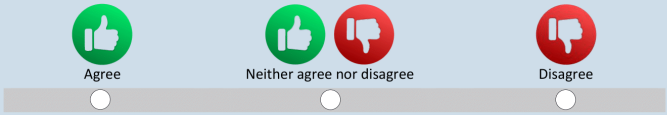
Level Three Pupil Survey

Please read the following statements and indicate to what level you agree with each by clicking on the picture.

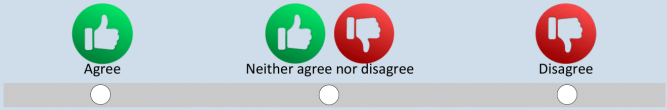
I wish I were in a different school.

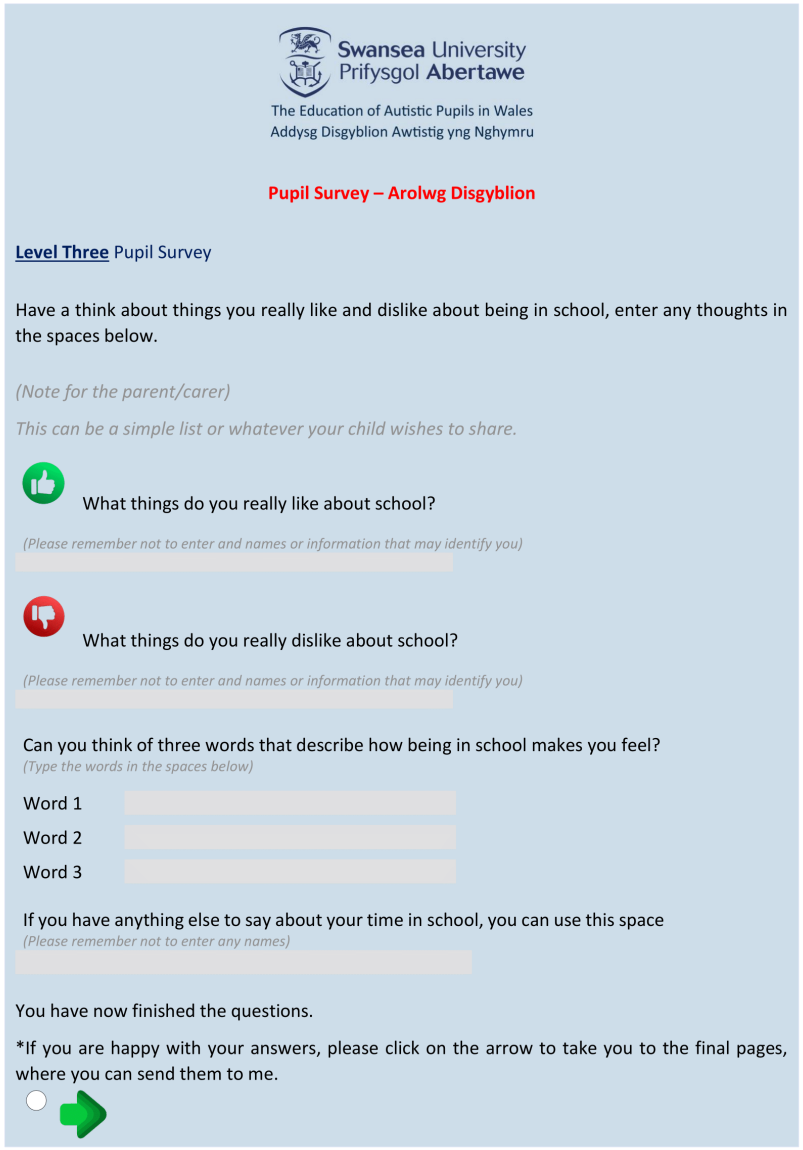


I wish I were in a smaller school with less pupils.



I wish I were in a school especially for Autistic pupils.





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Pupil Survey – Arolwg Disgyblion

Level Three Pupil Survey

Have a think about things you really like and dislike about being in school, enter any thoughts in the spaces below.

(Note for the parent/carer)

This can be a simple list or whatever your child wishes to share.

What things do you really like about school?

(Please remember not to enter and names or information that may identify you)

What things do you really dislike about school?

(Please remember not to enter and names or information that may identify you)

Can you think of three words that describe how being in school makes you feel?
(Type the words in the spaces below)

Word 1
Word 2
Word 3

If you have anything else to say about your time in school, you can use this space
(Please remember not to enter any names)

You have now finished the questions.

*If you are happy with your answers, please click on the arrow to take you to the final pages, where you can send them to me.

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Pupil Survey Questionnaire - Question Preview Document

End of Preview

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Appendix 2

Question schedules

Appendix 2 presents the question schedules, as employed through the participant engagement activities undertaken through this research. As stated in Chapter 3, the make-up of each questionnaire was tailored to the responses provided by individual participants, with subtle language changes relating to their professional role, or type of setting attended. What follows, is a general overview of the questions for each of the four main survey questionnaires, in the chronological order in which they were active.

Index	Content	Code	Reported in:
Appendix 2a	Educator survey questionnaire	ESQ	Chapter 6
Appendix 2b	Parent/carer survey questionnaire	PCQ	Chapter 5
Appendix 2c	Autistic learner survey questionnaire	APQ	Chapter 4
Appendix 2d	Non-autistic learner survey questionnaire	CGS	Chapter 4

Appendix 2a

The Educator Survey Questionnaire Question Schedule

Educator Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Demographic questions

1 Please select which language you wish to use
Dewiswch pa iaith rydych chi am ei defnyddio

Cymraeg - Welsh ○ English - Saesneg ○

2 What is your gender identity?

○ Male ○ Female
○ Other ○ Do not wish to declare

3 What is your age?

○ Under 18 ○ 18-24 ○ 25-34 ○ 35-44
○ 45-54 ○ 55-64 ○ 65-70 ○ Over 70

4 Are you autistic?

○ Yes (Diagnosed) ○ Yes (Undiagnosed)
○ No ○ Do not wish to declare

5 What is the primary language used in your professional role?

○ Welsh ○ English

6 What is your professional role in education?

○ Teacher (including Local Authority role) ○ Higher level teaching assistant (HLTA)
○ Newly qualified teacher ○ Teaching assistant
○ Student teacher ○ Learning support assistant

Educator Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Demographic questions (continued)

7 In which Welsh Local Authority area do you work?

➢

8 With which age group do you work?

○ Pre-school ○ Primary
○ Secondary ○ Post-16
○ Other (please specify)

9 In which provision sector do you work?

○ Mainstream ○ Specialist setting
○ Local Authority ○ Private sector
○ Home tutoring
○ Other (please specify)

Experience of autism

10 Do you have any experience of autism outside of your professional role?

○ Yes ○ No

11 Have you ever worked with an autistic pupil?

○ Yes ○ No

12 Have you ever worked as a 1-2-1 supporting an autistic pupil?

○ Yes ○ No

13 Are you currently working with an autistic pupil?

○ Yes ○ No

Educator Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Experience of working with an autistic pupil

These questions ask about those times where you have worked with an autistic pupil.

14 Do you feel you were given enough information about the autistic pupil you would be working with before they attended your class?

○ Yes ○ No ○ Not sure

15 Did you have an opportunity to meet and get to know the autistic pupil before they attended your class?

○ Yes ○ No

16 Were appropriate strategies known to be effective with the particular child shared with you before they attended your class?

○ Yes ○ No

17 Were you made aware of any specific triggers that were known to upset the child before they attended your class?

○ Yes ○ No

18 If you have any brief comments or observations relating to your experiences of working with Autistic pupils, you wish to share with the researcher, please do so here. Please remember not to enter any personally identifying information.

Educator Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Support whilst working with an autistic pupil

These questions ask about the support you may, or may not, have received whilst working with an autistic pupil.

19 Do you feel you are/were getting enough support from your school, whilst working with an autistic pupil?

○ Yes ○ No

20 Do you feel you are/were getting enough support from your Local Authority, whilst working with an autistic pupil?

○ Yes ○ No

21 Do you feel you are/were getting enough support from outside agencies (such as Speech and Language Therapy), whilst working with an autistic pupil?

○ Yes ○ No

22 If you have any brief comments or observations relating to support you have received whilst working with Autistic pupils, that you wish to share with the researcher, please do so here. Please remember not to enter any personally identifying information.

Educator Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Autism related training

These questions ask about any autism related training you may, or may not, have received.

23 Have you had any autism related training provided by your employer?

○ Yes ○ No

24 How long ago did you last have any autism related training provided by your employer?

○ Within the last five years ○ Over five years ago

○ Can not remember how long ago

25 Have you independently undertaken your own training to improve your understanding and knowledge of autism?

○ Yes ○ No

26 Where you have independently undertaken autism training, please share any qualifications or training achievements you have gained.

Knowledge and understanding of autism

These questions ask about your knowledge and understanding of autism

27 Do you feel you have enough general knowledge about autism?

○ Yes ○ No ○ Not sure

28 Do you feel you have enough general understanding about autism?

○ Yes ○ No ○ Not sure

Educator Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Access to resources

These questions ask about your access to appropriate resources

29 Do you feel you have enough access to resources to improve your knowledge and understanding of autism and support you in your current role?

○ Yes ○ No ○ Not sure

30 Would you like to have access to more resources to improve your knowledge and understanding of autism?

○ Yes ○ No

31 Do you know where to access resources to improve your knowledge and understanding of autism and support you in your current role?

○ Yes ○ No ○ Not sure

Educator confidence about autism

These questions ask you to consider how confident you are relating to autism.

32 How confident are you that you would have the knowledge and understanding to support an autistic pupil?

No confidence	Slight confidence	Moderate confidence	High confidence
○	○	○	○

33 How confident are you that you would have the knowledge and understanding to support the family of an autistic pupil?

No confidence	Slight confidence	Moderate confidence	High confidence
○	○	○	○

34 How confident are you that you would be able to identify if a pupil was displaying autistic related traits and behaviours?

No confidence	Slight confidence	Moderate confidence	High confidence
○	○	○	○

Appendix 2b

The Parent/Carer Survey Questionnaire Question Schedule

Parent/carer Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Demographic questions

1 Please select which language you wish to use
Dewiswch pa iaith rydych chi am ei defnyddio

Cymraeg - Welsh ○ English - Saesneg ○

About your child

These first questions relate to your child, in order to provide some foundation information for the basis of the research. If you have more than one autistic child in your household you are invited to complete a questionnaire for each one, individually.

2 In which Welsh local authority area do you live?

➢

3 Is your child educated in the same local authority area?

○ Yes ○ No

4 Please indicate in which Local Authority area your child is educated

➢

5 Whit is the biological sex of your child?

○ Male ○ Female

6 What gender does your child identify as?

○ Male ○ Female ○ Other
○ Non-binary ○ Gender neutral ○ Do not wish to declare

7 How old is the child/young person?

➢

8 Which of the following best describes your child's cultural background?

➢

9 What is the child's first language, as spoken at home?

○ Welsh ○ English
○ Other (please specify)

Parent/carer Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

About your child's autism

These questions relate to your child's autism.

10 Does your child have a formal autism diagnosis?

○ Yes ○ No

11 At what age did your child receive their formal autism diagnosis?

➢

12 What term/phrase appears on their official diagnosis?

○ Autism/ Autism Spectrum Disorder
○ Asperger Syndrome
○ Autism Spectrum Disorder Level 1
○ Autism Spectrum Disorder Level 2
○ Autism Spectrum Disorder Level 3
○ Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA)
○ Other (please specify)

13 If you have any brief comments about the role of the teachers/school in your child's diagnostic journey you would like to share with the researcher, you may do so in the space below.

(Please remember not to include any personally identifiable information)

14 How would you describe your child's verbal communication ability?

○ Pre-verbal ○ Verbal ○ Non-verbal
o Other (please specify)

15 Does your child have any other conditions diagnosed?

➢

16 Is autism the primary condition that significantly impacts your child's education?

○ Yes ○ No ○ Rather not say

Parent/carer Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

About your child's education

The following questions are asked to gain a general insight into your child's education.

17 Which sector does your child attend?

- ○ Pre-school
- ○ Primary
- ○ Secondary
- ○ Post-16

18 What is the primary language used at the school your child attends?

- ○ Welsh
- ○ English
- ○ Does not apply

19 Is your child's education placement residential?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

20 Has the local authority discussed with you the different school placements available for your child?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

21 Do you feel you were supported in finding a suitable school placement for your child?

- Yes
- ○ No

22 Do you think your child is currently in the best setting to suit their individual needs?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Not sure

23 Have your child's school or Local Authority informed you of the upcoming changes to provision for children with additional learning needs?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

24 Which best describes the educational setting your child currently attends?

- ○ Mainstream setting
- ○ Specialist setting
- ○ Flexi/blended learning pathway
- ○ Educated at home
- ○ Not currently in education

Parent/carer Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

More about your child's education

25 Which best describes the status of the educational setting your child attends?

- ○ State maintained
- ○ Independent/private
- ○ Combination of both
- ○ Not sure

Please consider the following statements and indicate to what level you agree with each.

26 My child is best placed in a mainstream education setting.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

27 My child is best placed in a specialist education setting.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

28 If you have any brief comments or observations relating to the educational setting your child attends, you wish to share with the researcher, please do so here.

(Please remember not to enter any personally identifying information)

Parent/carer Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Statement of educational need

These questions ask about whether or not your child has a Statement of educational need.

29 Does your child have a Statement of Educational Need?

○ Yes ○ No

30 Is autism the primary need recorded within your child's Statement of Educational Need?

○ Yes ○ No

31 Does your child receive all the support detailed within their Statement?

○ Yes ○ No

32 Have your child's school or Local Authority informed you of the upcoming changes to the provision of Statements of educational need?

○ Yes ○ No

33 Do you have any comments you wish to share about your child's Statement of educational need?

(Please remember not to enter any personally identifying information)

Parent/carer Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Educational support

The following questions ask about the support your child may or may not receive in school.

34 What level of additional support does your child have in school?

○ No additional support ○ 1-2-1 support ○ Shared support

○ Pastoral support ○ Minimal support

○ Other (please specify)

35 Do you think your child receives the right level of support in school?

○ Yes ○ No ○ Not sure

Think about the following areas of support your child may receive in school and whether or not they get enough, or support you think they should have access to but currently do not.

36 Specialist Support Staff

No access currently, but it is needed	Limited Access but more is needed	Sufficient Access	No access needed
○	○	○	○

37 Support during unstructured times

No access currently, but it is needed	Limited Access but more is needed	Sufficient Access	No access needed
○	○	○	○

38 Social Skills Interventions

No access currently, but it is needed	Limited Access but more is needed	Sufficient Access	No access needed
○	○	○	○

Parent/carer Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

39 Peer Mentoring/Buddying

No access currently, but it is needed	Limited Access but more is needed	Sufficient Access	No access needed
○	○	○	○

40 Speech and Language Therapy

No access currently, but it is needed	Limited Access but more is needed	Sufficient Access	No access needed
○	○	○	○

41 Occupational Therapy

No access currently, but it is needed	Limited Access but more is needed	Sufficient Access	No access needed
○	○	○	○

42 Physiotherapy

No access currently, but it is needed	Limited Access but more is needed	Sufficient Access	No access needed
○	○	○	○

43 Music Therapy

No access currently, but it is needed	Limited Access but more is needed	Sufficient Access	No access needed
○	○	○	○

44 Positive Play/Play Therapy

No access currently, but it is needed	Limited Access but more is needed	Sufficient Access	No access needed
○	○	○	○

Parent/carer Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

45 Counselling

No access currently, but it is needed	Limited Access but more is needed	Sufficient Access	No access needed
○	○	○	○

46 Mental Health Support

No access currently, but it is needed	Limited Access but more is needed	Sufficient Access	No access needed
○	○	○	○

47 Access to Quiet Room/Safe Space

No access currently, but it is needed	Limited Access but more is needed	Sufficient Access	No access needed
○	○	○	○

48 Access to Sensory Room

No access currently, but it is needed	Limited Access but more is needed	Sufficient Access	No access needed
○	○	○	○

49 General Life Skill Development

No access currently, but it is needed	Limited Access but more is needed	Sufficient Access	No access needed
○	○	○	○

50 Road Safety Guidance

No access currently, but it is needed	Limited Access but more is needed	Sufficient Access	No access needed
○	○	○	○

Parent/carer Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

51 Travel Training

No access currently, but it is needed	Limited Access but more is needed	Sufficient Access	No access needed
○	○	○	○

52 Are there any other areas of support, which are not listed above that you would like your child to have access to, during the school day?

53 Do you have any brief comments or observations you would like to share with the researcher about the support your child receives in school?

(Please remember not to enter any personally identifying information)

Individual education plans

The following questions are about your child's Individual Education Plan (IEP).

54 Does your child have an Individual Education Plan (IEP)?

○ Yes ○ No ○ Not sure

55 Does the school involve your child in the setting/reviewing of targets on their IEP?

○ Yes ○ No ○ Not sure

56 Does the school involve you in the setting/reviewing of your child's targets on their IEP?

○ Yes ○ No

57 Do you feel the targets set in your child's IEP are realistic and achievable?

○ Yes ○ No ○ Not sure

58 Is your child's IEP reviewed on a regular basis?

○ Yes ○ No ○ Not sure

59 Do you have any brief comments or observations you would like to share with the researcher about your child's Individual Education Plan?

(Please remember not to enter any personally identifying information)

Parent/carer Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Communication between home and school

These questions ask about contact between yourself and your child's school, regarding their education

60 Is there regular communication between you and the school about your child's education?

○ Yes ○ No

61 Do you feel there is enough communication between you and the school about to your child's education?

○ Yes ○ No ○ Not sure

62 When discussing your child's education with the school, do you feel the school **listen** to your point-of-view?

○ Always ○ Sometimes ○ Never ○ Not sure

63 When discussing your child's education with the school, do you feel the school **understand** your point-of-view?

○ Always ○ Sometimes ○ Never ○ Not sure

64 When discussing your child's education with the school, do you feel the school **respect** your point-of-view?

○ Always ○ Sometimes ○ Never ○ Not sure

65 When discussing your child's education, do the teachers/school communicate with you using language and vocabulary you understand?

○ Always ○ Sometimes ○ Never ○ Not sure

66 When discussing your child, how positive do you feel the school's communication is?

Always positive	Mostly positive	Sometimes positive	A fair mix	Sometimes negative	Mostly negative	Always negative
○	○	○	○	○	○	○

67 If you have any brief comments or observations relating to the communication between your child's school/teachers and home, you wish to share with the researcher, please do so here.

(Please remember not to enter any personally identifying information)

Parent/carer Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Inclusion

The following questions ask about how inclusive you consider your child's school to be, and how important inclusion is to you and your child.

68 Do you feel your child's current school offers an inclusive environment?

○ Yes ○ No ○ Not sure

69 Do you feel your child is included in school life (e.g. going on trips, taking part in concerts)?

○ Yes ○ No ○ Not sure

70 Do you think your child wants to be included in school life?

○ Yes ○ No ○ Not sure

71 Please indicate how strongly you agree with the following statement

I consider inclusion to be an important part of my child's education.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

72 Do you feel your child agrees with your view on the importance of inclusion?

○ Yes ○ No ○ Not sure

73 How inclusive do you think the school your child currently attends is?

Fully inclusive	Partially inclusive	Minimally inclusive	Non inclusive
○	○	○	○

Parent/carer Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Please read the following statements and indicate to what level you agree each one to be in providing an inclusive education for your child.

74 For my child to be given opportunities to take an active part in school life

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

75 For my child to be given opportunities to take part in as many school activities as possible

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

76 For my child to be given opportunities to use and develop non-academic skills

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

77 For my child to have access to the same opportunities as everyone else

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

78 Do you think your child's views differ from yours in relation to the opportunities available in school?

○ Yes ○ No ○ Not sure

If answered 'yes', please explain

Parent/carer Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Please read the following statements and indicate to what level you agree each one to be in providing an inclusive education for your child.

79 For my child to be accepted by school staff

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

80 For my child to be accepted by other pupils

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

81 For my child to be respected by school staff

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

82 For my child to be respected by other pupils

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

83 Do you think your child's views differ from yours in relation to how others perceive them in school?

○ Yes ○ No ○ Not sure

If answered 'yes', please explain

Parent/carer Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Please read the following statements and indicate to what level you agree each one to be in providing an inclusive education for your child.

84 School staff understanding my child's individual needs

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

85 Other pupils understanding my child's individual needs

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

86 Support being made available for my child where and when it is needed

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

87 For my child to be treated as an equal

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

88 Do you think your child's views differ from yours in relation to how others understand them in school?

○ Yes ○ No ○ Not sure

If answered 'yes', please explain

Parent/carer Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Please read the following statements and indicate to what level you agree each one to be in providing an inclusive education for your child.

89 For my child to be able to lead as 'independent' and 'normal' a school life as possible

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

90 My child being encouraged to reach their full academic potential

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

91 My child being encouraged to be the best that they can be

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

92 My child to have access to education appropriate to their abilities

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

93 Do you think your child's views differ from yours in relation to their academic attainment in school?

○ Yes ○ No ○ Not sure

If answered 'yes', please explain

Parent/carer Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Please read the following statements and indicate to what level you agree each one to be in providing an inclusive education for your child.

94 My child going to a mainstream school

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

95 My child going to a school where they feel valued

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

96 For my child to be integrated in the school community

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

97 Do you think your child's views differ from yours in relation to the type of school they attend?

○ Yes ○ No ○ Not sure

If answered 'yes', please explain

Parent/carer Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Please read the following statements and indicate to what level you agree each one to be in providing an inclusive education for your child.

98 Including the family in decisions relating to my child's education

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

99 Listening to, respecting, and acting upon the wishes of the family

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

100 Including the family in everyday school life

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

101 Is there anything else you would say makes an educational setting inclusive?

Parent/carer Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Exclusion

The following questions in this section ask whether or not your child has been excluded or suspended from school.

102 Has your child ever been suspended or excluded from school either internally or externally, temporarily or permanently?

○ Yes ○ No

Internal exclusions

103 Has your child ever been internally excluded by being placed in isolation?

○ Yes ○ No ○ Not sure

104 How many times has your child been placed in isolation?

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 or more

105 What is the longest period your child has spent in isolation at school?

Less than half a day	Half a school day	A whole school day	Two school days	More than two school days
○	○	○	○	○

106 What reasons have schools used when explaining why your child was placed in isolation? (*Please tick all that apply*)

- ○ Violent behaviour towards school staff
- ○ Violent behaviour towards other pupils
- ○ Aggressive behaviours towards school staff
- ○ Aggressive behaviours towards other pupils
- ○ Endangering themselves
- ○ Endangering others
- ○ Use of bad language directed at staff
- ○ Use of bad language directed at other pupils
- ○ Damaging school property
- ○ Other (please give details)
- ○ Damaging other pupils' property
- ○ Unacceptable behaviour
- ○ Inappropriate behaviour
- ○ Disruptive behaviour
- ○ Disobeying school rules
- ○ Not listening to the school staff
- ○ Staff shortage/no support available
- ○ Staff unable to manage child's behaviours

Parent/carer Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Temporary external exclusion

107 Has your child ever been temporarily, externally excluded from school by being sent home, or asked to stay at home?

○ Yes ○ No

108 How many times has your child been temporarily externally excluded by being sent home or asked to stay at home?

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 or more

109 What is the longest period your child has spent in isolation at school?

Less than half a day	Half a school day	A whole school day	Two school days	More than two school days	A week	Longer than a week
○	○	○	○	○	○	○

110 What reasons have schools used when explaining why your child was being sent home and temporarily excluded? (*Please tick all that apply*)

- ○ Violent behaviour towards school staff
- ○ Violent behaviour towards other pupils
- ○ Aggressive behaviours towards school staff
- ○ Aggressive behaviours towards other pupils
- ○ Endangering themselves
- ○ Endangering others
- ○ Use of bad language directed at staff
- ○ Use of bad language directed at other pupils
- ○ Damaging school property
- ○ Other (please give details)
- ○ Damaging other pupils' property
- ○ Unacceptable behaviour
- ○ Inappropriate behaviour
- ○ Disruptive behaviour
- ○ Disobeying school rules
- ○ Not listening to the school staff
- ○ Staff shortage/no support available
- ○ Staff unable to manage child's behaviours

111 Did the school provide you with a written account of the exclusion/s?

○ Yes ○ No

Parent/carer Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Permanent exclusion

112 Has your child ever been permanently excluded from a school?

○ Yes ○ No

113 How many schools has your child been permanently excluded from?

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 or more

114 What reasons have schools used when explaining why your child was being permanently excluded? (*Please tick all that apply*)

- ○ Violent behaviour towards school staff
- ○ Violent behaviour towards other pupils
- ○ Aggressive behaviours towards school staff
- ○ Aggressive behaviours towards other pupils
- ○ Endangering themselves
- ○ Endangering others
- ○ Use of bad language directed at staff
- ○ Use of bad language directed at other pupils
- ○ Other (please give details)
- ○ Damaging school property
- ○ Damaging other pupils' property
- ○ Unacceptable behaviour
- ○ Inappropriate behaviour
- ○ Disruptive behaviour
- ○ Staff unable to manage child's behaviours
- ○ Disobeying school rules
- ○ Not listening to the school staff

115 Were you supported by the local authority in finding another school for your child to attend?

○ Yes ○ No

116 Do you have any comments or observations you would like to share with the researcher relating the exclusion (internally or externally, temporary, or permanent) of your child?

(Please remember not to enter any personally identifying information)

Parent/carer Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Bullying in school

The following questions ask about any experiences of bullying your child may have encountered at school.

117 Has your child ever been bullied at school?

○ Yes ○ No ○ Not sure

118 Where your child has been bullied at school, do you think they were targeted for being autistic?

○ Yes ○ No ○ Not sure

119 Where you have been aware that your child is being bullied at school, have you raised your concerns with the school directly?

○ Yes ○ No

120 Where you reported bullying issues to the school, do you think the school listened and took your concerns seriously?

○ Yes ○ No ○ Not sure

121 Did the school let you know what they would do to tackle the problem?

○ Yes ○ No

122 Do you think the school acted appropriately in response to your concerns about your child being bullied?

○ Yes ○ No ○ Not sure

123 Did the bullying stop, as a result of you asking the school to deal with it?

○ Yes ○ No ○ Not sure

124 Do you have any comments or observations you would like to share with the researcher relating to your experiences of your child being bullied at school?

(Please remember not to enter any personally identifying information)

Parent/carer Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Peer relationships at school

Please read the following statements relating to your child's peer relationships and indicate to what level you agree with each.

125 My child has a good group of friends in school

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

126 My child has one close friend who they prefer to spend their time with

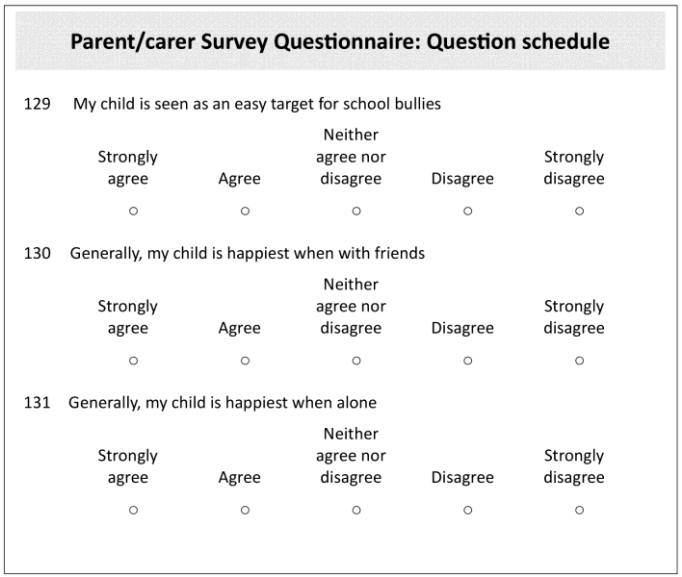
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

127 My child has no friends at school

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

128 My child really wants to make friends, but struggles to connect with peers

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○



Parent/carer Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

129 My child is seen as an easy target for school bullies

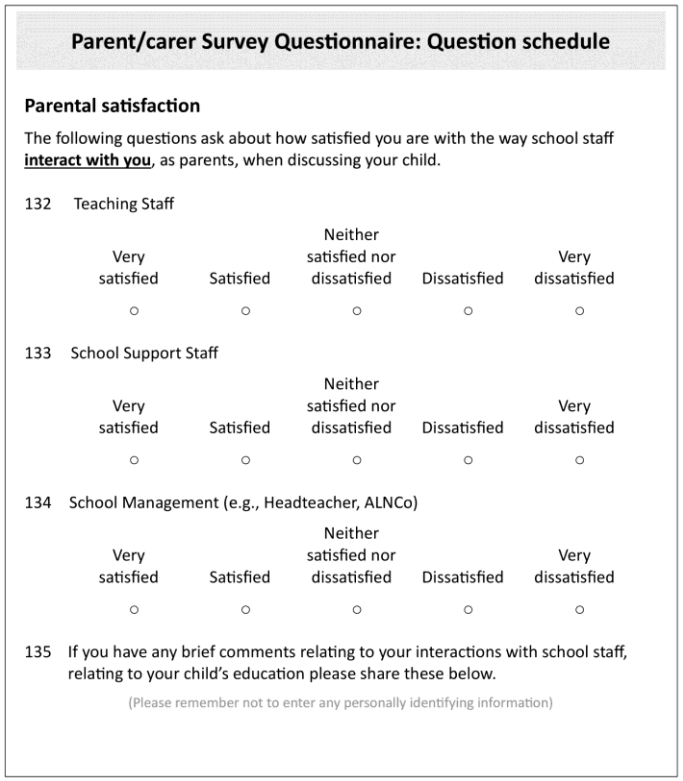
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

130 Generally, my child is happiest when with friends

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

131 Generally, my child is happiest when alone

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○



Parent/carer Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Parental satisfaction

The following questions ask about how satisfied you are with the way school staff **interact with you**, as parents, when discussing your child.

132 Teaching Staff

Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
○	○	○	○	○

133 School Support Staff

Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
○	○	○	○	○

134 School Management (e.g., Headteacher, ALNCo)

Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
○	○	○	○	○

135 If you have any brief comments relating to your interactions with school staff, relating to your child's education please share these below.

(Please remember not to enter any personally identifying information)

Parent/carer Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

The following questions ask about how satisfied you are with the way school staff **interact with your child**, during the school day.

136 Teaching Staff

Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
○	○	○	○	○

137 School Support Staff

Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
○	○	○	○	○

138 School Management (e.g., Headteacher, ALNCo)

Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
○	○	○	○	○

139 If you have any brief comments relating to how school staff interact with your child, please share them below.

(Please remember not to enter any personally identifying information)

Parent/carer Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Closing statements

Please read the following statements and select to which level you agree or disagree with each

140 Autism has a positive effect on my child's education

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

141 My child is currently in the right school to meet their needs

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

142 I am happy with the school my child currently attends

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

143 My child is happy going to school

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

144 My child is happy in school

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

Parent/carer Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

145 My child is happy coming home from school

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

146 My child's school/teachers have a good understanding of autism

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

147 Unstructured times are effectively managed for my child in school

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

148 My child copes well with the work they are given

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

149 My child is making academic progress in line with their ability level

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

150 My child needs more support to reach their potential

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

Parent/carer Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

151 I do not think academic achievement is the most important outcome for my child

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

Coronavirus

152 Has your child's school/teachers' handling of the events relating to the Coronavirus pandemic changed your or your child's feelings or outlook on their education?

If you have any comments relating to how the pandemic has impacted your child's education, please share them in the space below.

(Please remember not to include any personally identifiable information)

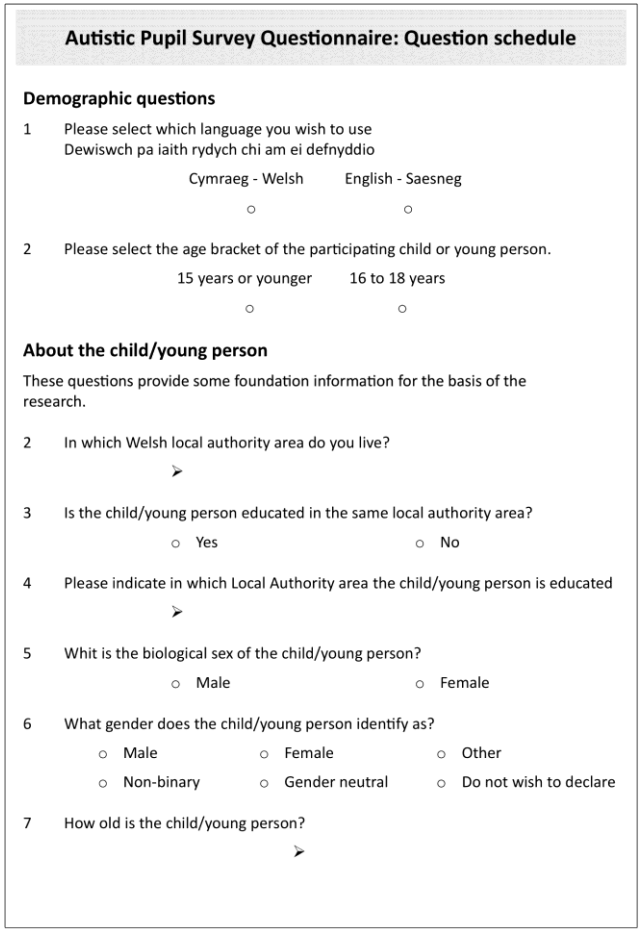
Any other comments

153 If you have anything else you would like to share with the researcher relating to the education of your child, that has not been discussed throughout this questionnaire please share in the space provided here.

(Please remember not to enter any personally identifying information)

Appendix 2c

The Autistic Learner Survey Questionnaire Question Schedule



Autistic Pupil Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Demographic questions

1 Please select which language you wish to use
Dewiswch pa iaith rydych chi am ei defnyddio

Cymraeg - Welsh ○ English - Saesneg ○

2 Please select the age bracket of the participating child or young person.

15 years or younger ○ 16 to 18 years ○

About the child/young person

These questions provide some foundation information for the basis of the research.

2 In which Welsh local authority area do you live?

➢

3 Is the child/young person educated in the same local authority area?

○ Yes ○ No

4 Please indicate in which Local Authority area the child/young person is educated

➢

5 Whit is the biological sex of the child/young person?

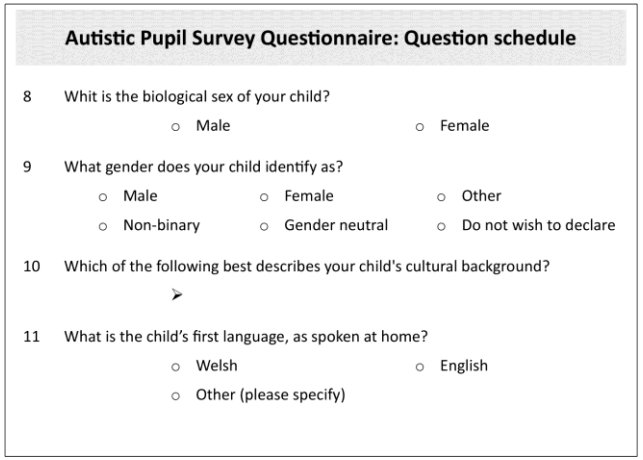
○ Male ○ Female

6 What gender does the child/young person identify as?

○ Male ○ Female ○ Other
○ Non-binary ○ Gender neutral ○ Do not wish to declare

7 How old is the child/young person?

➢



Autistic Pupil Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

8 Whit is the biological sex of your child?

○ Male ○ Female

9 What gender does your child identify as?

○ Male ○ Female ○ Other
○ Non-binary ○ Gender neutral ○ Do not wish to declare

10 Which of the following best describes your child's cultural background?

➢

11 What is the child's first language, as spoken at home?

○ Welsh ○ English
○ Other (please specify)

Autistic Pupil Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

About the child/young person's autism

These questions relate to the child/young person's autism.

12 Does the child/young person have a formal autism diagnosis?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

13 At what age did the child/young person receive their formal autism diagnosis?

➢

14 What term/phrase appears on their official diagnosis?

- ○ Autism/ Autism Spectrum Disorder
- ○ Asperger's Syndrome
- ○ Autism Spectrum Disorder Level 1
- ○ Autism Spectrum Disorder Level 2
- ○ Autism Spectrum Disorder Level 3
- ○ Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA)
- ○ Other (please specify)

15 How would you describe the child/young person's verbal communication ability?

- ○ Pre-verbal
- ○ Verbal
- ○ Non-verbal
- ○ Other (please specify)

16 Is autism the primary condition that significantly impacts the child/young person's education?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Rather not say

Autistic Pupil Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

About the child/young person's education

The following questions are asked to gain a general insight into the child/young person's education.

17 Which sector does the child/young person attend?

- ○ Pre-school
- ○ Primary
- ○ Secondary
- ○ Post-16

18 Which best describes the setting where the child/young person is educated?

- ○ Mainstream setting
- ○ Specialist setting
- ○ Flexi/blended provision
- ○ Not currently in education
- ○ Other (please specify)

19 What is the primary language used in the child/young person's education?

- ○ Welsh
- ○ English

20 Has the child/young person been able to obtain any formal qualifications?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

21 Please list any qualifications obtained

A Level

GCSE

Other qualification

22 Is the child/young person still in education?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Autistic Pupil Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Level selection

To ensure this study is accessible to Autistic children/young people of all capabilities the questionnaire is available in three ability levels.

Please remember that participation is entirely voluntary, and completely anonymous.

Participants do not have to answer all questions and can stop at any time.

23 Please select the level you wish to respond to.

- ○ Level 1 — Minimum number of questions requiring Yes/No answers utilising visual cues, with two supplementary free text response questions asking what they like and dislike about school.
- ○ Level 2 — A higher number of Yes/No questions, again using visual cues, with the same supplementary questions asking what they like and dislike about school. There will also be free text options for participants to share any views they have in addition to the questions asked.
- ○ Level 3 — Will include the same questions posed in Level 2 with the addition of a selection of 'rating scale' response questions.

Autistic Pupil Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Level 1 questions

Answer the questions by clicking on the picture.

24 Do you enjoy going to school?

○ Yes ○ No

25 Do you feel happy in school?

○ Yes ○ No

26 Do you have friends at school?

○ Yes ○ No

27 Do you enjoy play and break times at school?

○ Yes ○ No

Have a think about things you really like and dislike about being in school, enter any thoughts in the spaces below.

28 What things do you like about school?

(Please remember not to enter any names or information that may identify you)

29 What things do you dislike about school?

(Please remember not to enter any names or information that may identify you)

Autistic Pupil Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Level 2 questions

Answer the questions by clicking on the picture.

30 Do you enjoy going to school?

○ Yes ○ No

31 Does going to school make you feel anxious or worried?

○ Yes ○ No

32 If you want to say anything about your answers you can do so here.

(Please remember not to enter any names)

33 Do you feel happy in school?

○ Yes ○ No

34 Do you feel safe in school?

○ Yes ○ No

35 Do you feel you get enough help school?

○ Yes ○ No

36 If you want to say anything about your answers you can do so here.

(Please remember not to enter any names)

37 Do you have friends at school?

○ Yes ○ No

38 Do you enjoy play and break times at school?

○ Yes ○ No

39 Have you ever been bullied in school?

○ Yes ○ No

40 If you want to say anything about your answers you can do so here.

(Please remember not to enter any names)

Autistic Pupil Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

41 Do you feel included in school?

○ Yes ○ No

42 Do you feel different from the other children in school?

○ Yes ○ No

43 Do you have a quiet space where you can go and relax in school?

○ Yes ○ No

44 Do you cope well with the work in school?

○ Yes ○ No

45 If you want to say anything about your answers you can do so here.

(Please remember not to enter any names)

Have a think about things you really like and dislike about being in school, enter any thoughts in the spaces below.

46 What things do you like about school?

(Please remember not to enter any names or information that may identify you)

47 What things do you dislike about school?

(Please remember not to enter any names or information that may identify you)

48 Can you think of three words that describe how being in school makes you feel?

(Type the words in the spaces below)

Word 1

Word 2

Word 3

Autistic Pupil Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Level 3 questions

Answer the questions by clicking on the picture.

49 Do you enjoy going to school?

○ Yes ○ No

50 Does going to school make you feel anxious or worried?

○ Yes ○ No

51 If you want to say anything about your answers you can do so here.

(Please remember not to enter any names)

52 Do you feel happy in school?

○ Yes ○ No

53 Do you feel safe in school?

○ Yes ○ No

54 Do you feel you get enough help school?

○ Yes ○ No

55 If you want to say anything about your answers you can do so here.

(Please remember not to enter any names)

56 Do you have friends at school?

○ Yes ○ No

57 Do you enjoy play and break times at school?

○ Yes ○ No

58 Have you ever been bullied in school?

○ Yes ○ No

59 If you want to say anything about your answers you can do so here.

(Please remember not to enter any names)

Autistic Pupil Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

60 Do you feel included in school?

○ Yes ○ No

61 Do you feel different from the other children in school?

○ Yes ○ No

62 Do you have a quiet space where you can go and relax in school?

○ Yes ○ No

63 Do you cope well with the work in school?

○ Yes ○ No

64 If you want to say anything about your answers you can do so here.

(Please remember not to enter any names)

Please read the following statements and indicate to what level you agree with each by clicking on the picture.

65 My teachers understand about autism.

Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
○	○	○

66 My teachers understand me.

Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
○	○	○

67 My teachers know how to support me.

Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
○	○	○

Autistic Pupil Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

68 I get enough support in school.

Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
○	○	○

69 My teachers understand that sensory differences can make some situations in school hard to cope with.

Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
○	○	○

70 School is often too noisy.

Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
○	○	○

71 I wish I were in a different school.

Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
○	○	○

72 I wish I were in a smaller school, with less pupils.

Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
○	○	○

73 I wish I were in a school especially for Autistic pupils.

Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
○	○	○

Autistic Pupil Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Have a think about things you really like and dislike about being in school, enter any thoughts in the spaces below.

74 What things do you like about school?

(Please remember not to enter any names or information that may identify you)

75 What things do you dislike about school?

(Please remember not to enter any names or information that may identify you)

76 Can you think of three words that describe how being in school makes you feel?

(Type the words in the spaces below)

Word 1

Word 2

Word 3

Appendix 2d

The Non-autistic Learner Survey Questionnaire Question Schedule

Pupil Experience Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Demographic questions

1 Please select which language you wish to use
Dewiswch pa iaith rydych chi am ei defnyddio

Cymraeg - Welsh ○ English - Saesneg ○

2 Please select the age bracket of the participating child or young person.

15 years or younger ○ 16 to 18 years ○

About the child/young person

These questions provide some foundation information for the basis of the research.

3 Please indicate in which Local Authority area the child/young person is educated

➢

4 Whit is the biological sex of the child/young person?

○ Male ○ Female

5 What gender does the child/young person identify as?

○ Male ○ Female ○ Other
○ Non-binary ○ Gender neutral ○ Do not wish to declare

6 How old is the child/young person?

➢

7 Which of the following best describes your cultural background?

➢

8 What is your first language as spoken at home?

○ Welsh ○ English

Pupil Experience Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Additional educational needs

These questions relate to any Additional Learning Needs you may have.

9 Do you have any Additional Learning Needs?

○ Yes ○ No

10 Please select the additional learning needs the participant has below, by ticking the boxes.

Tick all that apply

- ○ ADHD
- ○ Autism
- ○ Behavioural, social, and emotional difficulties
- ○ Dyscalculia
- ○ Dyslexia
- ○ Dyspraxia
- ○ Moderate Learning Difficulties
- ○ General Learning Difficulties
- ○ Severe Learning Difficulties
- ○ Profound Learning Difficulties
- ○ Physical Disability
- ○ Medical Conditions
- ○ Medical and Physical Difficulties
- ○ Hearing Impairment
- ○ Visual Impairment
- ○ Multi-Sensory Impairment
- ○ Sensory Processing Disorder
- ○ Speech, Language, and communication difficulties
- ○ Other (please specify)

Pupil Experience Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

About your education

The following questions are asked to gain a general insight into your education.

11 Which sector does the child/young person attend?

- ○ Primary
- ○ Secondary
- ○ Post-16
- ○ No longer in education

12 Which best describes the setting where the child/young person is educated?

- ○ Mainstream setting
- ○ Specialist setting
- ○ Flexi/blended provision
- ○ Not currently in education
- ○ Other (please specify)

13 What is the primary language used in the child/young person's education?

- ○ Welsh
- ○ English

Pupil Experience Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Section 1: Going to school

Answer the questions by clicking on the picture.

Remember you don't have to answer every question.

14 Do you enjoy going to school?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

15 Does going to school make you feel anxious or worried?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

16 If you want to say anything about your answers you can do so here.

(Please remember not to enter any names)

Section 2: At school

Answer the questions by clicking on the picture.

Remember you don't have to answer every question.

17 Do you feel happy in school?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

18 Do you feel safe in school?

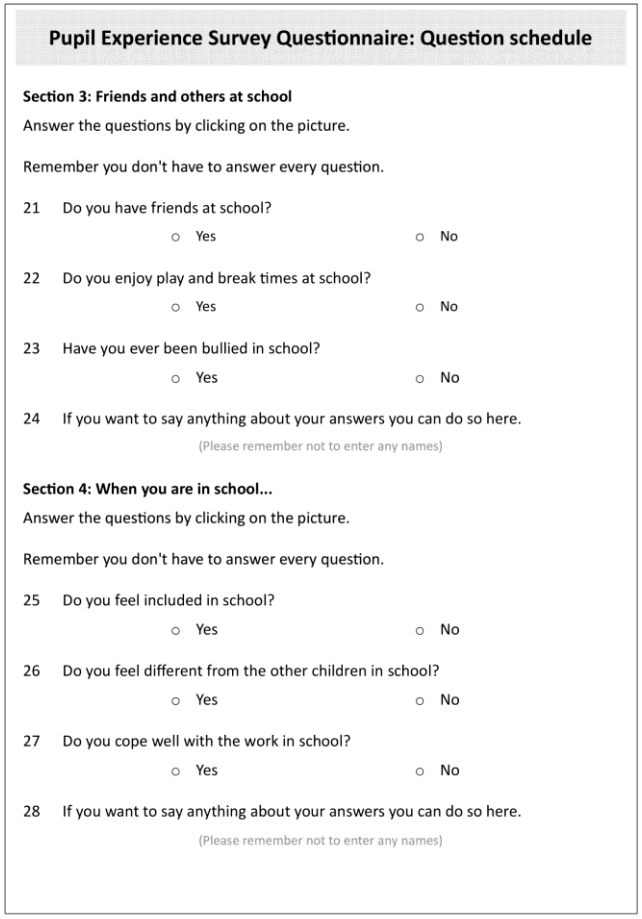
- ○ Yes
- ○ No

19 Do you feel you get enough help school?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

20 If you want to say anything about your answers you can do so here.

(Please remember not to enter any names)



Pupil Experience Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Section 3: Friends and others at school

Answer the questions by clicking on the picture.

Remember you don't have to answer every question.

21 Do you have friends at school?

○ Yes ○ No

22 Do you enjoy play and break times at school?

○ Yes ○ No

23 Have you ever been bullied in school?

○ Yes ○ No

24 If you want to say anything about your answers you can do so here.

(Please remember not to enter any names)

Section 4: When you are in school...

Answer the questions by clicking on the picture.

Remember you don't have to answer every question.

25 Do you feel included in school?

○ Yes ○ No

26 Do you feel different from the other children in school?

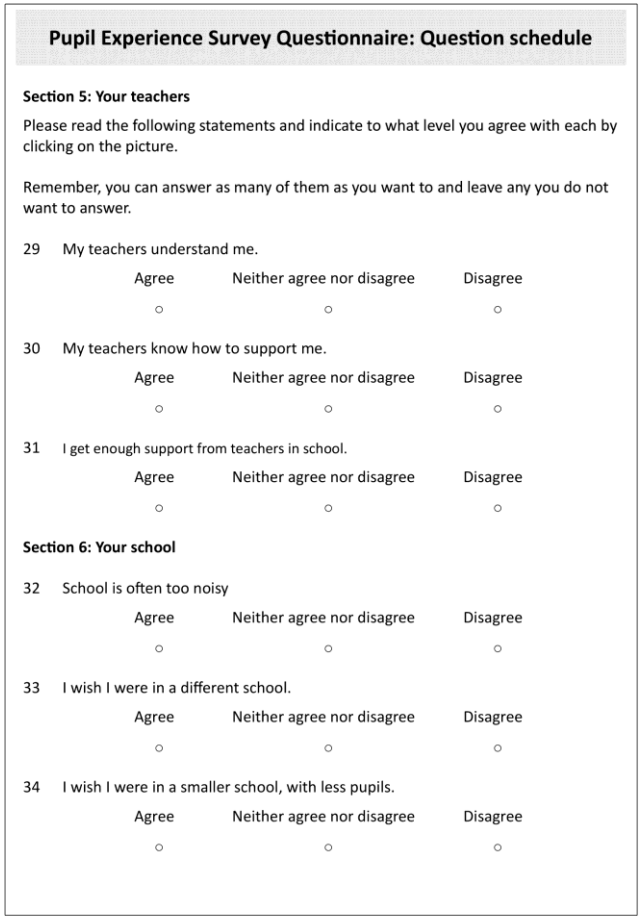
○ Yes ○ No

27 Do you cope well with the work in school?

○ Yes ○ No

28 If you want to say anything about your answers you can do so here.

(Please remember not to enter any names)



Pupil Experience Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Section 5: Your teachers

Please read the following statements and indicate to what level you agree with each by clicking on the picture.

Remember, you can answer as many of them as you want to and leave any you do not want to answer.

29 My teachers understand me.

Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○

30 My teachers know how to support me.

Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○

31 I get enough support from teachers in school.

Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○

Section 6: Your school

32 School is often too noisy

Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○

33 I wish I were in a different school.

Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○

34 I wish I were in a smaller school, with less pupils.

Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○

Pupil Experience Survey Questionnaire: Question schedule

Section 7: Closing questions

Remember you do not have to any questions you do not want to.

35 Can you think of three words that describe how being in school makes you feel?

(Type the words in the spaces below)

Word 1

Word 2

Word 3

36 If you have anything else you want to say about your time in school, you can use this space.

(Please remember not to enter any names)

Appendix 3

Data Tables

Appendix 3 presents the data tables illustrating participant response breakdowns across subgroups, not included within the main thesis, across the three results chapters.

Index	Content	Component studies
Appendix 3a	Chapter 4 data tables	APQ - WTSK - CGS
Appendix 3b	Chapter 5 data tables	PCQ
Appendix 3c	Chapter 6 data tables	ESQ

Appendix 3a

Chapter 4: Data Tables

Autistic Learner Survey Questionnaire

What Teachers Should Know Study

Survey of Non-autistic Learners

Section 4.11 APQ Results: Whole sample

Demographic data for quoted APQ participants

Section 4.8.7: Level 2: Three words

Participant APQ 30 L2 12-year-old male in mainstream secondary education

Section 4.11.1: Whole sample: Going to school

Participant APQ 23 L2 14-year-old male in mainstream secondary education
Participant APQ 28 L2 15-year-old of undeclared biological sex in specialist secondary education
Participant APQ 69 L2 16-year-old female in mainstream secondary education
Participant APQ 61 L2 16-year-old male in specialist secondary education

Section 4.11.2: Whole sample: At school

Participant APQ 71 L2 16-year-old male in mainstream secondary education
Participant APQ 69 L2 16-year-old female in mainstream secondary education
Participant APQ 61 L2 16-year-old male in specialist secondary education

Section 4.11.3: Whole sample: Feeling of inclusion whilst at school

Participant APQ 61 L2 16-year-old male in specialist secondary education
Participant APQ 21 L2 14-year-old male in mainstream secondary education
Participant APQ 27 L2 6-year-old female in mainstream primary
Participant APQ 19 L2 15-year-old male in mainstream secondary education
Participant APQ 69 L2 16-year-old female in mainstream secondary education
Participant APQ 46 L3 15-year-old male in mainstream secondary education

Section 4.11.4: Whole sample: Peer relationships at school

Participant APQ 61 L2 16-year-old male in specialist secondary education
Participant APQ 28 L2 15-year-old of undeclared biological sex in specialist secondary education
Participant APQ 82 L3 18-year-old female in mainstream secondary education
Participant APQ 73 L2 17-year-old male in mainstream secondary education
Participant APQ 77 L2 16-year-old male in mainstream post-16 education
Participant APQ 70 L2 17-year-old male in mainstream secondary education

Section 4.11.5: Whole sample: School work

Participant APQ 46 L3 15-year-old male in mainstream secondary education
Participant APQ 70 L2 17-year-old male in mainstream secondary education
Participant APQ 86 L3 17-year-old female in specialist post-16 education
Participant APQ 61 L2 16-year-old male in specialist secondary education

Section 4.11.6: Whole sample: Sensory differences at school

Participant APQ 70 L2 17-year-old male in mainstream secondary education
Participant APQ 21 L2 14-year-old male in mainstream secondary education
Participant APQ 91 L3 17-year-old male no longer in education
Participant APQ 61 L2 16-year-old male in specialist secondary education
Participant APQ 86 L3 17-year-old female in specialist post-16 education
Participant APQ 73 L2 17-year-old male in mainstream secondary education
Participant APQ 46 L3 15-year-old male in mainstream secondary education

Section 4.13 Phase II: What I wish my teacher knew about autism

Demographic data for quoted WTSK participants

Section 4.13.1: We are all different

Participant WTSK 54	18-year-old male in mainstream post-16 education
Participant WTSK 1	17-year-old female in mainstream post-16 education
Participant WTSK 6	16-year-old female in mainstream post-16
Participant WTSK 29	18-year-old female in mainstream post-16 education
Participant WTSK 22	12-year-old female in mainstream secondary
Participant WTSK 15	14-year-old male in mainstream secondary

Section 4.13.2: We often wear a mask

Participant WTSK 22	12-year-old female in mainstream secondary
Participant WTSK 27	7-year-old female mainstream primary
Participant WTSK 21	11-year-old male in mainstream primary
Participant WTSK 52	14-year-old male secondary other
Participant WTSK 28	18-year-old female in specialist post-16

Section 4.13.3: School can cause sensory overwhelm

Participant WTSK 52	14-year-old male secondary other
Participant WTSK 30	9-year-old male in mainstream primary
Participant WTSK 4	12-year-old female in mainstream secondary
Participant WTSK 24	14-year-old male specialist secondary
Participant WTSK 18	12-year-old female in mainstream secondary
Participant WTSK 65	12-year-old female in mainstream secondary
Participant WTSK 26	14-year-old male in mainstream secondary

Section 4.13.4: Following rules and directions can be difficult

Participant WTSK 21	11-year-old male in mainstream primary
Participant WTSK 4	12-year-old female in mainstream secondary
Participant WTSK 59	16-year-old female in post-16 other
Participant WTSK 7	16-year-old female in mainstream secondary
Participant WTSK 17	9-year-old male in mainstream primary

Section 4.13.5: I am not a bad/naughty person

Participant WTSK 4	12-year-old female in mainstream secondary
Participant WTSK 59	16-year-old female in post-16 other
Participant WTSK 8	11-year-old male in mainstream primary
Participant WTSK 20	10-year-old male in mainstream primary

Section 4.15.2 Comparing mainstream autistic and non-autistic learner experience: Going to school

Table 4.15.2 - Comparing autistic and non-autistic learner mainstream experiences

Do you enjoy going to school?

Response	Valid Responses		Biological sex				Sector					
			Male		Female		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Autistic												
Yes	*41*	56.94	*27*	62.79	*14*	48.28	*12*	70.59	*20*	50.00	*8*	66.67
No	*31*	43.06	*16*	37.21	*15*	51.72	*5*	29.41	*20*	50.00	*	*
Non-autistic												
Yes	*72*	63.72	*25*	78.13	*47*	57.02	*15*	75.00	*37*	61.67	*19*	61.29
No	*41*	36.28	*7*	21.88	*34*	41.98	*5*	25.00	*23*	38.33	*12*	38.71
Difference between autistic and non-autistic experience Pearson Chi-Square												($X^2(1) = 0.99$, $p = 0.32$)

Does going to school make you feel anxious or worried?

Response	Valid Responses		Biological sex				Sector					
			Male		Female		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Autistic												
Yes	*51*	82.26	*28*	77.78	*23*	88.46	*10*	76.92	*31*	86.11	*8*	72.73
No	*11*	17.74	*8*	22.22	*	*	*	*	*5*	13.89	*	*
Non-autistic												
Yes	*57*	50.44	*9*	28.13	*48*	59.26	*	*	*33*	55.00	*21*	67.74
No	*56*	49.56	*23*	71.87	*33*	40.74	*18*	90.00	*27*	45.00	*10*	32.26
Difference between autistic and non-autistic experience Pearson Chi-Square												($X^2(1) = 17.15$, $p = <0.05$)

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Section 4.15.3 Comparing mainstream autistic and non-autistic learner experience: At school

Table 4.15.3 - Comparing autistic and non-autistic learner mainstream experiences

Do you feel happy in school?

Response	Valid Responses		Biological sex				Sector					
			Male		Female		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Autistic												
Yes	*40*	56.34	*27*	62.79	*13*	46.43	*13*	76.47	*19*	48.72	*8*	66.67
No	*31*	43.66	*16*	37.21	*15*	53.57	*	*	*20*	51.28	*	*
Non-autistic												
Yes	*76*	70.37	*24*	77.42	*52*	67.53	*15*	83.33	*40*	67.80	*20*	68.97
No	*32*	29.63	*7*	22.58	*25*	32.47	*	*	*19*	32.20	*9*	31.03

Difference between autistic and non-autistic experience Pearson Chi-Square ($X^2(1) = 3.27$, $p = 0.07$)

Do you feel safe in school?

Response	Valid Responses		Biological sex				Sector					
			Male		Female		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Autistic												
Yes	*40*	66.67	*25*	69.44	*15*	62.50	*10*	83.33	*21*	60.00	*8*	72.73
No	*20*	33.33	*11*	30.56	*9*	37.50	*	*	*14*	40.00	*	*
Non-autistic												
Yes	*85*	80.19	*28*	93.33	*57*	75.00	*16*	94.12	*48*	80.00	*20*	74.07
No	*21*	19.81	*	*	*19*	25.00	*	*	*12*	20.00	*7*	25.93

Difference between autistic and non-autistic experience Pearson Chi-Square ($X^2(1) = 3.77$, $p = 0.05$)

Do you enjoy play and break times at school?

Response	Valid Responses		Biological sex				Sector					
			Male		Female		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Autistic												
Yes	*33*	45.83	*22*	51.16	*11*	37.93	*10*	58.82	*17*	42.50	*5*	41.67
No	*39*	54.17	*21*	48.84	*18*	62.07	*7*	41.18	*23*	57.50	*7*	58.33
Non-autistic												
Yes	*90*	85.71	*26*	89.66	*64*	84.21	*16*	88.89	*53*	88.33	*19*	76.00
No	*15*	14.29	*	*	*12*	15.79	*	*	*7*	11.67	*6*	24.00

Difference between autistic and non-autistic experience Pearson Chi-Square ($X^2(1) = 30.98$, $p = <0.05$)

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Section 4.15.4 Comparing mainstream autistic and non-autistic learner experience: Feeling of inclusion at school

Table 4.15.4 - Comparing mainstream autistic and non-autistic learner experience

Do you feel different from the other children in school?

Response	Valid Responses		Biological sex				Sector					
			Male		Female		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Autistic												
Yes	*54*	87.10	*28*	77.78	*26*	100.0	*11*	84.62	*30*	83.33	*11*	100.0
No	*8*	12.90	*8*	22.22	-	-	*	*	*6*	16.67	-	-
Non-autistic												
Yes	*52*	49.52	*11*	36.67	*41*	54.67	*	*	*34*	57.63	*15*	57.69
No	*53*	50.48	*19*	63.33	*34*	45.33	*16*	88.89	*25*	42.37	*11*	42.31
Difference between autistic and non-autistic experience Pearson Chi-Square												
($X^2(1) = 23.74$, $p = <0.05$)												

Do you feel included in school?

Response	Valid Responses		Biological sex				Sector					
			Male		Female		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Autistic												
Yes	*29*	48.33	*19*	54.29	*10*	40.00	*7*	53.85	*18*	51.43	*	*
No	*31*	51.67	*16*	45.71	*15*	60.00	*6*	46.15	*17*	48.57	*6*	60.00
Non-autistic												
Yes	*80*	76.92	*27*	93.10	*53*	70.67	*16*	88.89	*45*	77.59	*17*	65.38
No	*24*	23.08	*	*	*22*	29.33	*	*	*13*	22.41	*9*	34.62
Difference between autistic and non-autistic experience Pearson Chi-Square												
($X^2(1) = 13.95$, $p = <0.05$)												

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Section 4.15.5 Comparing mainstream autistic and non-autistic learner experience: Peer relationships at school

Table 4.15.5 - Comparing mainstream autistic and non-autistic learner experience

Do you have friends at school?

Response	Valid Responses		Biological sex				Sector					
			Male		Female		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Autistic												
Yes	*53*	73.61	*32*	74.42	*21*	72.41	*13*	76.47	*30*	75.00	*8*	66.67
No	*19*	26.39	*11*	25.58	*8*	27.59	*	*	*10*	25.00	*	*
Non-autistic												
Yes	*99*	93.40	*28*	93.33	*71*	93.42	*18*	100.0	*54*	90.00	*25*	96.15
No	*7*	6.60	*	*	*5*	6.58	-	-	*6*	10.00	*	*

Difference between autistic and non-autistic experience Pearson Chi-Square ($X^2(1) = 12.32$, $p = <0.05$)

Have you ever been bullied in school?

Response	Valid Responses		Biological sex				Sector					
			Male		Female		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Autistic												
Yes	*47*	75.81	*28*	77.78	*19*	73.08	*5*	38.46	*32*	88.89	*9*	81.82
No	*15*	24.19	*8*	22.22	*7*	26.92	*8*	61.54	*	*	*	*
Non-autistic												
Yes	*60*	57.69	*17*	56.67	*43*	58.11	*	*	*37*	62.71	*19*	73.08
No	*44*	42.31	*13*	43.33	*31*	41.89	*14*	82.35	*22*	37.29	*7*	26.92

Difference between autistic and non-autistic experience Pearson Chi-Square ($X^2(1) = 5.56$, $p = <0.05$)

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Section 4.15.6 Comparing mainstream autistic and non-autistic learner experience: School work

Table 4.15.6 - Comparing mainstream autistic and non-autistic learner experience

Do you cope well with the work in school?

Response	Valid Responses		Biological sex				Sector					
			Male		Female		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Autistic												
Yes	*33*	54.10	*19*	54.29	*14*	53.85	*8*	66.67	*15*	41.67	*8*	72.73
No	*28*	45.90	*16*	45.71	*12*	46.15	*	*	*21*	58.33	*	*
Non-autistic												
Yes	*64*	60.38	*19*	63.33	*45*	59.21	*12*	66.67	*38*	63.33	*13*	50.00
No	*42*	39.62	*11*	36.67	*31*	40.79	*6*	33.33	*22*	36.67	*13*	50.00

Difference between autistic and non-autistic experience Pearson Chi-Square ($X^2(1) = 0.63$, $p = 0.43$)

Do you feel you get enough help school?

Response	Valid Responses		Biological sex				Sector					
			Male		Female		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Autistic												
Yes	*27*	43.55	*19*	52.78	*8*	30.77	*5*	38.46	*15*	41.67	*6*	54.55
No	*35*	56.45	*17*	47.22	*18*	69.23	*8*	61.54	*21*	58.33	*5*	45.45
Non-autistic												
Yes	*56*	51.38	*19*	61.29	*37*	47.44	*13*	72.22	*26*	43.33	*16*	55.17
No	*53*	48.62	*12*	38.71	*41*	52.56	*5*	27.78	*34*	56.67	*13*	44.83

Difference between autistic and non-autistic experience Pearson Chi-Square ($X^2(1) = 0.97$, $p = 0.33$)

My teachers know how to support me

Response	Valid Responses		Biological sex				Sector					
			Male		Female		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Autistic												
Agree	*14*	36.84	*10*	45.45	*	*	*	*	*5*	27.78	*5*	50.00
Neither	*8*	21.05	*5*	22.73	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Disagree	*16*	42.11	*7*	31.82	*9*	56.25	*	*	*9*	50.00	*	*
Non-autistic												
Agree	*47*	44.76	*12*	40.00	*35*	46.67	*14*	77.78	*23*	38.98	*9*	34.62
Neither	*45*	42.86	*16*	53.33	*29*	38.67	*	*	*28*	47.46	*13*	50.00
Disagree	*13*	12.38	*	*	*11*	14.67	-	-	*8*	13.56	*	*

Difference between autistic and non-autistic experience Pearson Chi-Square ($X^2(2) = 16.15$, $p = <0.05$)

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Section 4.15.7 Comparing mainstream autistic and non-autistic learner experience: Sensory differences at school

Table 4.15.7 - Comparing mainstream autistic and non-autistic learner experience

School is often too noisy

Response	Valid Responses		Biological sex				Sector					
			Male		Female		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Autistic												
Agree	*30*	78.95	*17*	77.27	*13*	81.25	*6*	66.67	*14*	77.78	*9*	90.00
Neither	*7*	18.42	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Disagree	*	*	*	*	-	-	*	*	-	-	-	-
Non-autistic												
Agree	*52*	50.00	*6*	50.00	*46*	62.16	*7*	38.89	*27*	46.55	*17*	65.38
Neither	*31*	29.81	*12*	40.00	*19*	25.68	*5*	27.78	*22*	37.93	*	*
Disagree	*21*	20.19	*12*	40.00	*9*	12.16	*6*	33.33	*9*	15.52	*5*	19.23
Difference between autistic and non-autistic experience Pearson Chi-Square	($X^2(2) = 10.93$, $p = <0.05$)											

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Section 4.15.8 Comparing mainstream autistic and non-autistic learner experience: Educator understanding

Table 4.15.8 - Comparing mainstream autistic and non-autistic learner experience

My teachers understand me

Response	Valid Responses		Biological sex				Sector					
			Male		Female		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Autistic												
Agree	*11*	28.95	*7*	31.82	*	*	*	*	*	*	*5*	50.00
Neither	*13*	34.21	*9*	40.91	*	*	*	*	*5*	27.78	*	*
Disagree	*14*	36.84	*6*	27.27	*8*	50.00	*	*	*10*	55.56	*	*
Non-autistic												
Agree	*48*	45.71	*15*	50.00	*33*	44.00	*11*	61.11	*27*	45.76	*9*	34.62
Neither	*45*	42.86	*14*	46.67	*31*	41.33	*5*	27.78	*25*	42.37	*14*	53.85
Disagree	*12*	11.43	*	*	*11*	14.67	*	*	*7*	11.86	*	*

Difference between autistic and non-autistic experience Pearson Chi-Square ($X^2(2) = 12.33$, $p = <0.05$)

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Appendix 3b

Chapter 5: Data Tables

Parent/Carer Survey Questionnaire

Section 5.7.1 Parental satisfaction with their child's current placement

Table 5.7.1a - Parental satisfaction with their child's current placement: Data table

My child is best placed in Mainstream

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Strongly agree	*36*	11.36	*24*	10.17	*12*	15.19	*34*	18.18	*	*	*19*	12.58	*11*	9.17	*5*	14.29
Agree	*54*	17.03	*43*	18.22	*11*	13.92	*52*	27.81	*	*	*24*	15.89	*25*	20.83	*	*
Neither	*69*	21.77	*48*	20.34	*20*	25.32	*59*	31.55	*7*	6.73	*36*	23.84	*21*	17.50	*8*	22.86
Disagree	*61*	19.24	*43*	18.22	*18*	22.78	*33*	17.65	*23*	22.16	*31*	20.53	*20*	16.67	*8*	22.86
Strongly disagree	*97*	30.60	*78*	33.05	*18*	22.78	*9*	4.81	*70*	67.31	*41*	27.15	*43*	35.83	*10*	28.57
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(8) = 7.25$, $p = 0.51$)				($X^2(12) = 171.86$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(12) = 8.14$, $p = 0.77$)					

My child is best placed in a Specialist setting

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Strongly agree	*102*	32.28	*83*	35.17	*18*	23.08	*21*	11.29	*73*	70.19	*51*	34.00	*38*	31.67	*9*	25.71
Agree	*57*	18.04	*41*	17.37	*16*	20.51	*29*	15.59	*25*	24.04	*22*	14.67	*26*	21.67	*7*	20.00
Neither	*84*	26.58	*50*	21.19	*25*	32.05	*74*	39.78	*5*	4.81	*44*	29.33	*27*	22.50	*10*	28.57
Disagree	*50*	15.82	*42*	17.80	*8*	10.26	*44*	23.66	-	-	*26*	17.33	*17*	14.17	*5*	14.29
Strongly disagree	*23*	7.28	*12*	5.08	*11*	14.10	*18*	9.68	*	*	*7*	4.67	*12*	10.00	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(8) = 14.30$, $p = 0.07$)				($X^2(12) = 142.92$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(12) = 8.58$, $p = 0.74$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Section 5.7.2 Parental perceptions of their child's enjoyment of school

Table 5.7.2 - Parental perception of their child's enjoyment of school: Data table

My child is happy going to school

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Strongly agree	*53*	23.04	*41*	24.26	*11*	18.64	*18*	12.50	*30*	44.78	*26*	22.22	*19*	22.09	*6*	30.00
Agree	*70*	30.43	*52*	30.77	*17*	28.81	*47*	32.64	*20*	29.85	*34*	29.06	*25*	29.07	*7*	35.00
Neither	*35*	15.22	*21*	12.43	*14*	23.73	*26*	18.06	*8*	11.94	*19*	16.24	*15*	17.44	*	*
Disagree	*29*	12.61	*23*	13.61	*6*	10.17	*20*	13.89	*7*	10.45	*17*	14.53	*9*	10.47	*	*
Strongly disagree	*43*	18.70	*32*	18.93	*11*	18.64	*33*	22.92	*	*	*21*	17.95	*18*	20.93	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(8) = 6.57$, $p = 0.58$)				($X^2(12) = 56.40$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(12) = 7.39$, $p = 0.83$)					

My child is happy in school

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Strongly agree	*51*	22.01	*40*	23.53	*10*	16.95	*15*	10.34	*30*	44.78	*23*	19.66	*20*	22.99	*5*	25.00
Agree	*74*	32.03	*56*	32.94	*17*	28.81	*50*	34.48	*22*	32.84	*40*	34.19	*24*	27.59	*7*	35.00
Neither	*47*	20.35	*31*	18.24	*16*	27.12	*34*	23.45	*11*	16.42	*24*	20.51	*20*	22.99	*	*
Disagree	*29*	12.55	*22*	12.94	*7*	11.86	*23*	15.86	*	*	*13*	11.11	*13*	14.94	*	*
Strongly disagree	*30*	12.99	*21*	12.35	*9*	15.25	*23*	15.86	*	*	*17*	14.53	*10*	11.49	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(8) = 4.96$, $p = 0.76$)				($X^2(12) = 68.96$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(12) = 6.89$, $p = 0.87$)					

My child is happy coming home from school

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Strongly agree	*77*	33.33	*59*	34.71	*17*	28.81	*32*	22.07	*37*	55.22	*37*	31.62	*27*	31.03	*10*	50.00
Agree	*65*	28.14	*48*	28.24	*17*	28.81	*43*	29.66	*19*	28.36	*32*	27.35	*26*	29.89	*5*	25.00
Neither	*45*	19.48	*29*	17.06	*15*	25.42	*32*	22.07	*11*	16.42	*22*	18.80	*19*	21.84	*	*
Disagree	*24*	10.39	*21*	12.35	*	*	*23*	15.86	-	-	*15*	12.82	*9*	10.34	-	-
Strongly disagree	*20*	8.66	*13*	7.65	*7*	11.86	*15*	10.34	-	-	*11*	9.40	*6*	6.90	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(8) = 7.25$, $p = 0.51$)				($X^2(12) = 53.39$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(12) = 7.02$, $p = 0.86$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Section 5.9.1 Level of additional support

Table 5.9.1 - Level of additional support: Data table

Parents of children who were receiving additional support: What level of additional support does your child receive at school?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
One-to-one	*86*	44.10	*66*	44.90	*20*	43.48	*55*	44.44	*26*	54.17	*43*	46.74	*27*	36.49	*8*	40.00
Shared	*54*	27.69	*45*	30.61	*8*	17.39	*32*	23.53	*19*	39.58	*25*	27.17	*25*	33.78	*	*
Pastoral	*15*	7.69	*9*	6.12	*5*	10.87	*12*	8.82	*	*	*5*	5.43	*8*	10.81	*	*
Minimal	*40*	20.51	*27*	18.37	*13*	28.26	*37*	27.21	*	*	*19*	20.65	*14*	18.92	*6*	30.00
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(8) = 14.48$, $p = 0.70$)				($X^2(12) = 49.03$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(12) = 19.37$, $p = 0.08$)					

Section 5.10.1 Do parents feel listened to?

Table 5.10.1 - Do parents feel listened to?: Data table

When discussing your child's education, do you feel the school/LA listen to your point-of-view?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Always	*97*	32.99	*78*	35.62	*18*	24.66	*41*	23.56	*51*	58.62	*41*	28.67	*42*	37.84	*8*	26.67
Sometimes	*152*	51.70	*113*	51.60	*38*	52.05	*105*	60.34	*33*	37.93	*80*	55.94	*53*	47.75	*15*	50.00
Never	*35*	11.90	*22*	10.05	*13*	17.81	*21*	12.07	*	*	*19*	13.29	*13*	11.71	*	*
Not sure	*10*	3.40	*6*	2.74	*	*	*7*	4.02	-	-	*	*	*	*	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(6) = 6.46$, $p = 0.37$)				($X^2(12) = 77.57$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(9) = 16.72$, $p = <0.05$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Section 5.10.2 Do parents feel understood?

Table 5.10.2 - Do parents feel understood?: Data table

When discussing your child's education, do you feel the school/LA understand your point-of-view?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Always	*82*	28.08	*70*	32.26	*11*	15.07	*31*	17.92	*46*	53.49	*39*	27.46	*33*	30.00	*5*	16.67
Sometimes	*144*	49.32	*102*	47.00	*41*	56.16	*99*	57.23	*32*	37.21	*70*	49.30	*53*	48.18	*17*	56.67
Never	*51*	17.47	*35*	16.13	*16*	21.92	*34*	19.65	*6*	6.98	*29*	20.42	*16*	14.55	*6*	20.00
Not sure	*15*	5.14	*10*	4.61	*5*	6.85	*9*	5.20	*	*	*	*	*8*	7.27	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(6) = 9.06$, $p = 0.17$)				($X^2(12) = 71.24$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(9) = 9.97$, $p = 0.35$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Section 5.10.3 Do parents feel respected?

Table 5.10.3 - Do parents feel respected?: Data table

When discussing your child's education, do you feel the school/LA respect your point-of-view?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Always	*108*	36.73	*87*	39.73	*20*	27.40	*51*	29.31	*51*	58.62	*48*	33.57	*42*	37.84	*11*	36.67
Sometimes	*113*	38.44	*80*	36.53	*32*	43.84	*73*	41.95	*29*	33.33	*56*	39.16	*43*	38.74	*11*	36.67
Never	*59*	20.07	*43*	19.63	*16*	21.92	*40*	22.99	*6*	6.90	*31*	21.68	*20*	18.02	*8*	26.67
Not sure	*14*	4.76	*9*	4.11	*5*	6.85	*10*	5.75	*	*	*8*	5.59	*6*	5.41	-	-
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(6) = 4.70$, $p = 0.58$)				($X^2(12) = 57.72$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(9) = 8.96$, $p = 0.44$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Section 5.10.4 Do educators make themselves understood?

Table 5.10.3 - Do educators make themselves understood?: Data table

When discussing your child's education, do the teachers/LA communicate with you using language and vocabulary you understand?

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Always	*212*	72.85	*159*	72.94	*52*	73.24	*116*	67.05	*78*	90.70	*103*	73.05	*79*	71.17	*22*	75.86
Sometimes	*59*	20.27	*44*	20.18	*14*	19.72	*43*	24.86	*8*	9.30	*29*	20.57	*22*	19.82	*6*	20.69
Never	*12*	4.12	*9*	4.13	*	*	*8*	4.62	-	-	*5*	3.55	*6*	5.41	*	*
Not sure	*8*	2.75	*6*	2.75	*	*	*6*	3.47	-	-	*	*	*	*	-	-
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(6) = 1.17$, $p = 0.98$)				($X^2(12) = 47.13$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(9) = 2.54$, $p = 0.98$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
\- The cell count is zero

Section 5.14.1 Educator interaction with parents

Table 5.14.1 - Parent perceptions of educator interactions with themselves: Data table

Teaching staff: parent interactions

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Very satisfied	*82*	35.34	*64*	37.43	*17*	28.81	*35*	23.97	*46*	67.65	*43*	36.44	*29*	33.33	*6*	30.00
Satisfied	*77*	33.19	*54*	31.58	*22*	37.29	*57*	39.04	*16*	23.53	*42*	35.59	*25*	28.74	*7*	35.00
Neither	*38*	16.38	*25*	14.62	*13*	22.03	*29*	19.86	*	*	*19*	16.10	*16*	18.39	*	*
Dissatisfied	*21*	9.05	*16*	9.36	*5*	8.47	*18*	12.33	*	*	*10*	8.47	*10*	11.49	*	*
Very dissatisfied	*14*	6.03	*12*	7.02	*	*	*7*	4.79	*	*	*	*	*7*	8.05	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(8) = 4.75$, $p = 0.78$)				($X^2(12) = 90.78$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(12) = 10.23$, $p = 0.60$)					

Support staff: parent interactions

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Very satisfied	*91*	39.91	*68*	40.48	*22*	37.93	*45*	31.03	*42*	62.69	*46*	40.00	*35*	40.70	*7*	35.00
Satisfied	*75*	32.89	*55*	32.74	*19*	32.76	*53*	36.55	*20*	29.85	*41*	35.65	*23*	26.74	*7*	35.00
Neither	*34*	14.91	*24*	14.29	*10*	17.24	*28*	19.31	*	*	*17*	14.78	*14*	16.28	*	*
Dissatisfied	*18*	7.89	*13*	7.74	*5*	8.62	*13*	8.97	*	*	*9*	7.83	*7*	8.14	*	*
Very dissatisfied	*10*	4.39	*8*	4.76	*	*	*6*	4.14	*	*	*	*	*7*	8.14	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(8) = 1.31$, $p = 0.99$)				($X^2(12) = 41.62$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(12) = 9.43$, $p = 0.67$)					

School management: parent interactions

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Very satisfied	*81*	34.91	*61*	35.67	*19*	32.20	*38*	26.03	*40*	58.82	*40*	33.90	*32*	36.78	*5*	25.00
Satisfied	*59*	25.43	*42*	24.56	*17*	28.81	*40*	27.40	*16*	23.53	*28*	23.73	*26*	29.89	*	*
Neither	*37*	15.95	*24*	14.04	*12*	20.34	*26*	17.81	*7*	10.29	*18*	15.25	*13*	14.94	*6*	30.00
Dissatisfied	*24*	10.34	*18*	10.53	*6*	10.17	*20*	13.70	*	*	*15*	12.71	*6*	6.90	*	*
Very dissatisfied	*31*	13.36	*26*	15.20	*5*	8.47	*22*	15.07	*	*	*17*	14.41	*10*	11.49	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(8) = 5.64$, $p = 0.69$)				($X^2(12) = 42.72$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(12) = 10.72$, $p = 0.55$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
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Section 5.14.2 Educator interactions with learners

Table 5.14.2 - Parent perceptions of educator interactions with their children: Data table

Teaching staff: pupil interactions

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Very satisfied	*84*	36.84	*68*	40.48	*15*	25.86	*36*	25.00	*46*	67.65	*47*	40.87	*28*	32.56	*7*	35.00
Satisfied	*79*	34.65	*55*	32.74	*23*	39.66	*59*	40.97	*14*	20.59	*40*	34.78	*30*	34.88	*5*	25.00
Neither	*32*	14.04	*22*	13.10	*10*	17.24	*25*	17.36	*	*	*18*	15.65	*10*	11.63	*	*
Dissatisfied	*24*	10.53	*16*	9.52	*8*	13.79	*18*	12.50	*	*	*7*	6.09	*13*	15.12	*	*
Very dissatisfied	*9*	3.95	*7*	4.17	*	*	*6*	4.17	-	-	*	*	*5*	5.81	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(8) = 5.23$, $p = 0.73$)				($X^2(12) = 61.50$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(12) = 10.67$, $p = 0.56$)					

Support staff: pupil interactions

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Very satisfied	*99*	43.42	*76*	45.24	*22*	37.93	*47*	32.64	*46*	69.70	*51*	44.35	*36*	41.86	*10*	50.00
Satisfied	*68*	29.82	*50*	29.76	*17*	29.31	*53*	36.81	*14*	21.21	*34*	29.57	*26*	30.23	*	*
Neither	*33*	14.47	*22*	13.10	*11*	18.97	*25*	17.36	*	*	*20*	17.39	*10*	11.63	*	*
Dissatisfied	*19*	8.33	*14*	8.33	*5*	8.62	*14*	9.72	*	*	*5*	4.35	*10*	11.63	*	*
Very dissatisfied	*9*	3.95	*6*	3.57	*	*	*5*	3.47	-	-	*5*	4.35	*	*	-	-
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(8) = 2.68$, $p = 0.95$)				($X^2(12) = 62.45$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(12) = 11.10$, $p = 0.52$)					

School management: pupil interactions

Response	All participants		Biological sex				Setting				Sector					
			Male		Female		Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Very satisfied	*70*	30.57	*55*	32.54	*14*	24.14	*27*	18.75	*39*	59.09	*36*	31.03	*27*	31.40	*5*	25.00
Satisfied	*70*	30.57	*50*	29.59	*20*	34.48	*48*	33.33	*18*	27.27	*28*	24.14	*32*	37.21	*6*	30.00
Neither	*47*	20.52	*31*	18.34	*15*	25.86	*38*	26.39	*6*	9.09	*30*	25.86	*12*	13.95	*5*	
Dissatisfied	*23*	10.04	*18*	10.65	*5*	8.62	*17*	11.81	*	*	*13*	11.21	*7*	8.14	*	*
Very dissatisfied	*19*	8.30	*15*	8.88	*	*	*14*	9.72	-	-	*9*	7.76	*8*	9.30	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(8) = 5.00$, $p = 0.76$)				($X^2(12) = 51.30$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(12) = 11.11$, $p = 0.52$)					

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Appendix 3c

Chapter 6: Data Tables

Educator Survey Questionnaire

6.8.2 Teaching staff: Support whilst working with autistic learners

Table 6.8.2 - Teaching staff: Support whilst working with autistic learners: Data table

Do you feel you are/were getting enough support from your school, whilst working with an autistic pupil?

	All teaching participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*150*	84.75	*91*	82.73	*47*	92.16	*103*	86.55	*34*	82.93	*8*	80.00
No	*14*	7.91	*8*	7.27	*	*	*8*	6.72	*	*	*	*
Not sure	*13*	7.34	*11*	10.00	*	*	*8*	6.72	*	*	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 3.48$, $p = 0.18$)				($X^2(8) = 13.52$, $p = 0.10$)					

Do you feel you are/were getting enough support from your Local Authority, whilst working with an autistic pupil?

	All teaching participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*64*	39.02	*38*	34.55	*24*	47.59	*45*	40.18	*16*	42.11	*	*
No	*70*	42.68	*50*	45.45	*19*	37.25	*49*	43.75	*12*	31.58	*7*	70.00
Not sure	*30*	18.29	*22*	20.00	*8*	15.69	*18*	16.07	*10*	26.32	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 2.31$, $p = 0.32$)				($X^2(8) = 9.36$, $p = 0.31$)					

Do you feel you are/were getting enough support from outside agencies whilst working with an autistic pupil?

	All teaching participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*81*	46.02	*43*	39.09	*31*	62.00	*54*	43.38	*19*	47.50	*	*
No	*71*	40.34	*48*	43.64	*17*	34.00	*50*	42.02	*14*	35.00	*6*	60.00
Not sure	*24*	13.64	*19*	17.27	*	*	*15*	12.61	*7*	17.50	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 9.30$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(8) = 5.14$, $p = 0.74$)					

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6.8.4 Teaching staff: Knowledge and understanding of autism

Table 6.8.4 - Teaching staff: Knowledge and understanding of autism: Data table

Do you feel you have enough general knowledge about autism?

	All teaching participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*129*	70.49	*77*	64.71	*42*	87.50	*89*	68.99	*27*	71.05	*8*	80.00
No	*34*	18.58	*26*	21.85	*	*	*25*	19.38	*7*	18.42	*	*
Not sure	*20*	10.93	*16*	13.45	*	*	*15*	11.63	*	*	*	*
	Pearson Chi-Square		($X^2(2) = 8.70$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(8) = 7.16$, $p = 0.52$)					

Do you feel you have enough general understanding about autism?

	All teaching participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*139*	76.37	*85*	72.03	*43*	89.58	*96*	75.00	*29*	76.32	*9*	90.00
No	*27*	14.84	*21*	17.80	*	*	*19*	14.84	*6*	15.79	*	*
Not sure	*16*	8.79	*12*	10.17	*	*	*13*	10.16	*	*	-	-
	Pearson Chi-Square		($X^2(2) = 5.97$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(8) = 8.93$, $p = 0.35$)					

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6.8.5 Teaching staff: Access to resources

Table 6.8.5 - Teaching staff: Access to resources: Data table

Do you feel you have enough access to resources to improve your knowledge and understanding of autism and support you in your role?

	All teaching participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*112*	61.20	*64*	54.24	*35*	72.92	*76*	59.38	*24*	61.54	*7*	70.00
No	*51*	27.87	*39*	33.05	*8*	16.67	*35*	27.34	*12*	30.77	*	*
Not sure	*20*	10.93	*15*	12.71	*5*	10.42	*17*	13.28	*	*	-	-
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 5.38$, $p = 0.07$)				($X^2(8) = 8.22$, $p = 0.41$)					

Would you like to have access to more resources to improve your knowledge and understanding of autism?

	All teaching participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*162*	88.04	*108*	90.76	*42*	87.50	*117*	90.70	*31*	79.49	*10*	100.0
No	*22*	11.96	*11*	9.24	*6*	12.50	*12*	9.30	*8*	20.51	-	-
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(1) = 0.40$, $p = 0.53$)				($X^2(4) = 8.81$, $p = 0.07$)					

Do you know where to access resources to improve your knowledge and understanding of autism and support you in your current role?

	All teaching participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*117*	63.59	*71*	59.66	*33*	68.75	*78*	60.47	*27*	69.23	*7*	70.00
No	*35*	19.02	*24*	20.17	*7*	14.58	*25*	19.38	*8*	20.51	*	*
Not sure	*32*	17.39	*24*	20.17	*8*	16.67	*26*	20.16	*	*	*	*
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(2) = 1.25$, $p = 0.54$)				($X^2(8) = 9.81$, $p = 0.28$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
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6.9.1 Support staff: Information sharing

Table 6.9.1 - Support staff: Information sharing: Data table

Did you have an opportunity to meet and get to know the autistic pupil before they attended your class?

	All support staff participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*61*	52.14	*38*	51.35	*18*	56.25	*35*	56.45	*17*	48.57	*8*	42.11
No	*56*	47.86	*36*	48.65	*14*	43.75	*27*	43.55	*18*	51.43	*11*	57.89
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(1) = 0.22$, $p = 0.64$)				($X^2(3) = 2.33$, $p = 0.51$)					

Do you feel you were given enough information about the autistic pupil you would be working with before they attended your class?

	All support staff participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*53*	45.69	*34*	46.58	*14*	43.75	*34*	54.84	*14*	41.18	*	*
No	*39*	33.62	*27*	36.99	*8*	25.00	*20*	32.26	*13*	38.24	*6*	31.58
Not sure	*24*	20.69	*12*	16.44	*10*	31.25	*8*	12.90	*7*	20.59	*9*	47.37
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(8) = 3.33$, $p = 0.19$)				($X^2(6) = 13.63$, $p = <0.05$)					

Were appropriate strategies known to be effective with the particular child shared with you before they attended your class?

	All support staff participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*72*	61.54	*40*	54.05	*24*	75.00	*36*	58.06	*23*	65.71	*12*	63.16
No	*45*	38.46	*34*	45.95	*8*	25.00	*26*	41.94	*12*	34.29	*7*	36.84
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(1) = 4.10$, $p = <0.05$)				($X^2(3) = 1.22$, $p = 0.75$)					

Were you made aware of any specific triggers that were known to upset the child before they attended your class?

	All support staff participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*N*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*79*	68.10	*46*	63.01	*25*	78.13	*45*	72.58	*22*	64.71	*11*	57.89
No	*37*	31.90	*27*	36.99	*7*	21.87	*17*	27.42	*12*	35.29	*8*	42.11
Pearson Chi-Square			($X^2(1) = 2.32$, $p = 0.13$)				($X^2(3) = 2.13$, $p = 0.55$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
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6.9.4 Support staff: Knowledge and understanding of autism

Table 6.9.4 - Support staff: Knowledge and understanding of autism: Data table

Do you feel you have enough general knowledge about autism?

	All support staff participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*84*	70.59	*48*	63.16	*26*	81.25	*41*	64.06	*24*	66.67	*14*	77.78
No	*17*	14.29	*13*	17.11	*	*	*12*	18.75	*	*	*	*
Not sure	*18*	15.13	*15*	19.74	*	*	*11*	17.19	*	*	*	*
	Pearson Chi-Square		($X^2(2) = 3.98$, $p = 0.13$)				($X^2(6) = 3.90$, $p = 0.69$)					

Do you feel you have enough general understanding about autism?

	All support staff participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Yes	*93*	78.15	*54*	71.05	*29*	90.63	*47*	73.44	*28*	77.78	*17*	94.44
No	*12*	10.08	*11*	14.47	*	*	*9*	14.06	*	*	-	-
Not sure	*14*	11.76	*11*	14.47	*	*	*8*	12.50	*5*	13.89	*	*
	Pearson Chi-Square		$X^2(2)$ 5.00, $p = 0.08$)				($X^2(6) = 4.76$, $p = 0.58$)					

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6.9.6 Support staff: Confidence

Table 6.9.6 - Support staff: Confidence: Data table

How confident are you that you would be able to identify if a pupil was displaying autistic related traits and behaviours?

	All support staff participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
Level of confidence	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
None	*	*	*	*	-	-	*	*	-	-	-	-
Slight	*19*	15.97	*14*	18.42	*5*	15.63	*13*	20.31	*5*	13.89	*	*
Moderate	*68*	57.14	*42*	55.26	*19*	59.38	*37*	57.81	*19*	52.78	*12*	66.67
High	*31*	26.05	*19*	25.00	*8*	25.00	*13*	20.31	*12*	33.33	*5*	27.78
	Pearson Chi-Square		($X^2(3) = 0.59$, $p = 0.90$)				($X^2(9) = 7.74$, $p = 0.56$)					

How confident are you that you would have the knowledge and understanding to support an autistic pupil?

	All support staff participants		Setting				Sector					
			Mainstream		Specialist		Primary		Secondary		Post-16	
Level of confidence	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
None	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Slight	*22*	18.49	*19*	25.00	*	*	*13*	20.31	*7*	19.44	*	*
Moderate	*60*	50.42	*38*	50.00	*18*	56.25	*37*	57.81	*12*	33.33	*11*	61.11
High	*37*	31.09	*19*	25.00	*12*	37.50	*14*	21.88	*17*	47.22	*5*	27.78
	Pearson Chi-Square		($X^2(2) = 5.47$, $p = 0.07$)				($X^2(6) = 10.89$, $p = 0.09$)					

* The cell count is greater than zero, but less than five.
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Appendix 4

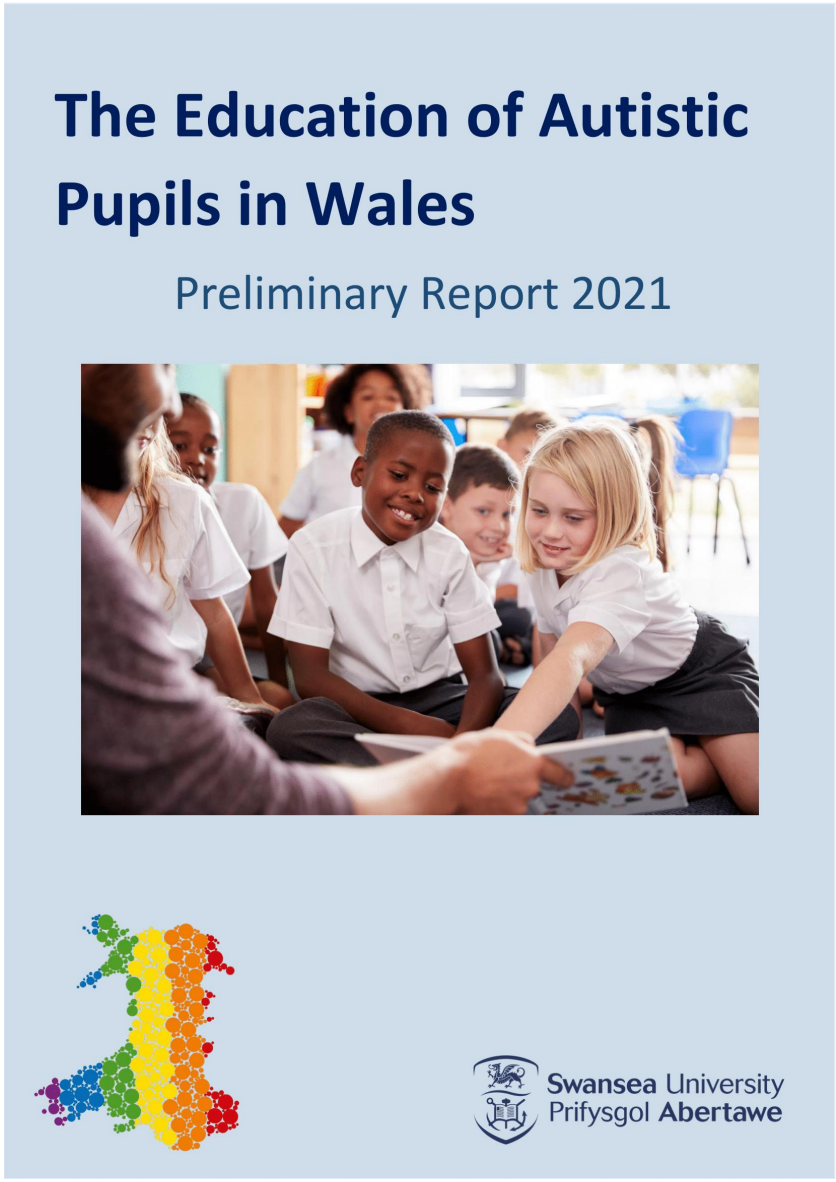
The education of autistic pupils in Wales

Preliminary Report Document

On January 30th, 2022, the preliminary report document was made available to download on-line.

Three versions were produced, Welsh and English language editions, together with an English language text only copy, formatted to suit screen reading technology, to ensure accessibility for all.

The full English language report, which appears on the following pages, has been downloaded from the direct link in the region of 400 times, and as discussed within the thesis, has been well received, generating much discussion.



The Education of Autistic Pupils in Wales
Preliminary Report 2021

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Swansea University School of Education
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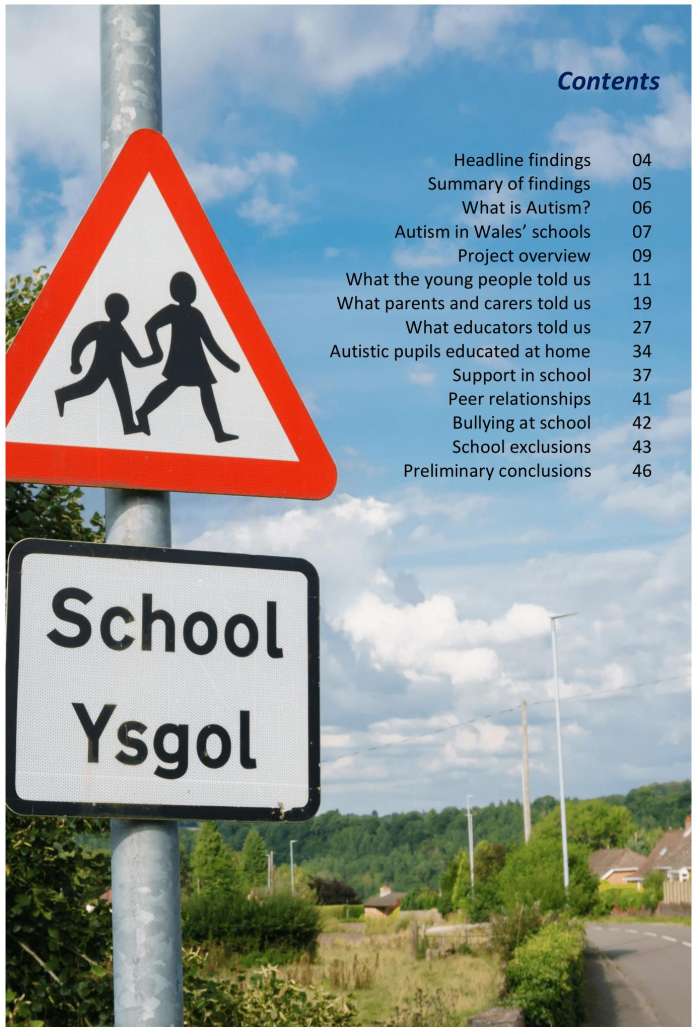

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This report is part of a study being conducted by Steffan Davies MSc, who is working towards obtaining a PhD at Swansea University's School of Education, considering the education of Autistic pupils in Wales.

Steffan is a parent of an Autistic daughter and worked for ten years in a mainstream primary school setting in west Wales, supporting children with additional needs, specialising in Autism. He was also seconded to the Local Authority for two years working as part of their communication support service, setting up and rolling out a unique programme enabling schools to screen and assess communication and language development in the early years, promoting early intervention and access to specialist and diagnostic services.

Steffan has a keen interest in inclusion within education and achieved a First-Class BA Honours in Social Inclusion (Inclusive Education) at University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Carmarthen. He then graduated from Swansea University Medical School with an MSc distinction in Autism and Related Conditions in 2019, taking the award for best dissertation.

The project is supervised by Dr Cathryn Knight, a lecturer of Education at Swansea University, who specialises in Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion and Dr Helen Lewis who is Swansea University's Programme Director for the Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE).

This preliminary report shares the results of the first phase of the project and reflects upon the perspectives of educators, parents, and most importantly Autistic pupils themselves.

If you would like more information, or to discuss the project, please contact:

Steffan Davies MSc
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Project Supervisors
Dr Cathryn Knight: [redacted]
Dr Helen Lewis: [redacted]

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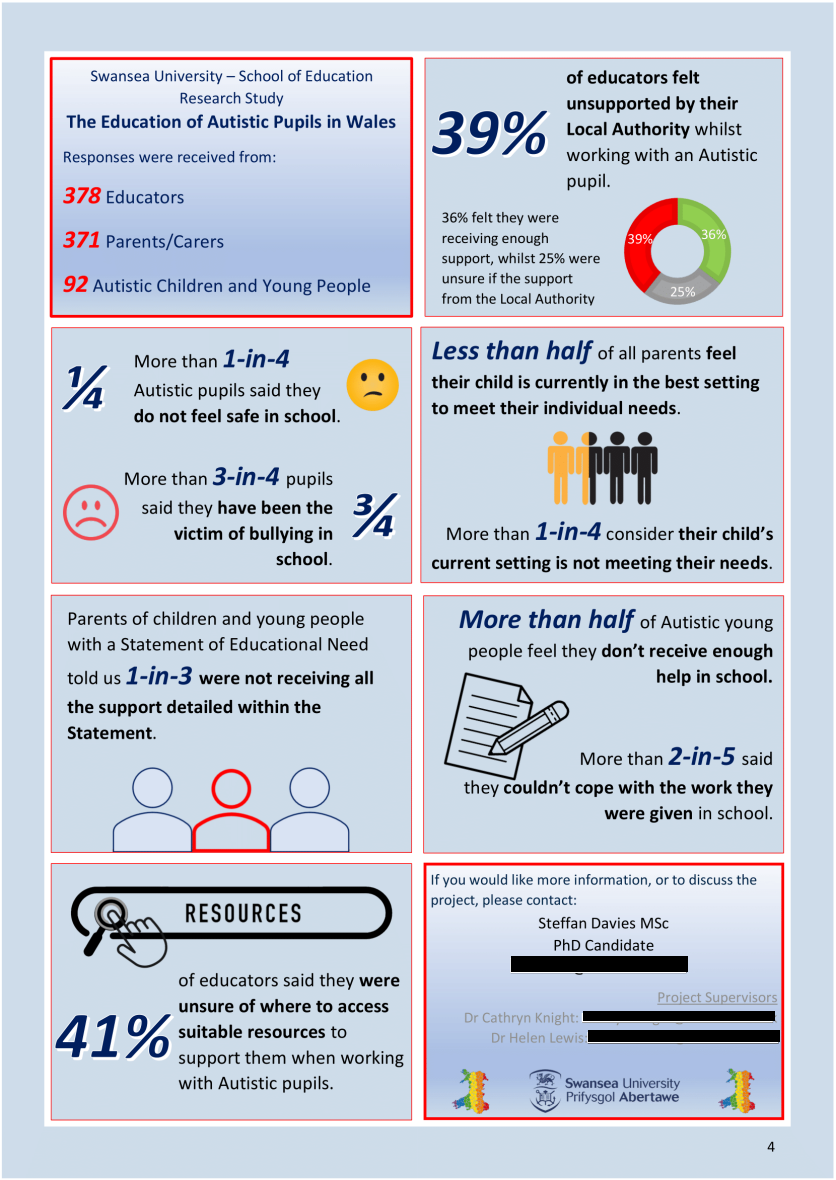


Summary of preliminary findings

- In general, Autistic pupils told us they were happy in and enjoyed going to school, however a significant proportion said they did not feel safe in school and over three quarters feel heightened anxiety and worries when attending school.
- Autistic girls tell us they feel a lot less understood than their male peers in school, this led to comparable gender differences in how supported they felt.
- Three quarters of Autistic pupils reported being the victim of bullying in school, with their parents feeling that schools were not taking sufficient steps in response to their reports of such incidents.
- Both pupils and their parents report a significantly greater level of satisfaction when attending specialist provisions compared to mainstream in several key areas.
- Parents and carers feel unsupported by their Local Authority when searching for a suitable education placement for their child.
- A small majority of parents were unsure whether their child's current school was the best placement to meet their individual needs.
- Parents reported that despite having a Statement of Educational Need in place, many Autistic pupils are not receiving all of the support that they are legally entitled to.
- Despite educators' confidence in their knowledge and understanding of Autism, pupils told us that in general, they do not feel their teachers understand about Autism or how best to support them.
- Educators felt supported by their school when working with Autistic pupils, however generally they feel unsupported by outside agencies and their Local Authority.
- Whilst many educators felt their employers provided them with sufficient Autism related training, a quarter told us they had not received any.
- A third of education staff who have worked as a 1-2-1 support with Autistic pupils have no prior experience of Autism and received no training before taking on the role.

What is Autism?

Autism is a lifelong neurological developmental condition, recognised in the UK as a disability under the terms of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005.The condition is known for its wide-ranging variance of presentation and severity of symptoms, meaning that whilst all Autistic individuals may have difficulties in the same core areas, the level to which each person is affected can vary significantly. The *National Autistic Society suggest that approximately 1 in every 100 people are Autistic, with around 700,000 Autistic adults, children, and young people in the UK.

At its core Autism impacts the way a person communicates and interacts with the environment that surrounds them, affecting their processing of sensory and social information. Many Autistic people also have a range of restricted interests and repetitive behaviour patterns.

With these key difficulties in processing and understanding social situations and sensory input from their surrounding environment, it is unsurprising that many Autistic children and young people struggle in their education and find navigating the education system and school environment overwhelming.

A brief note about terminology within this report.

For the purposes of this report the authors will use the umbrella term Autism to encompass all diagnostic terms relating to Autism Spectrum Disorder, unless more specific terminology is required, or participant specified data dictates otherwise.

The Autism community has regularly made clear their preference for identity first language, therefore throughout this report the author will endeavour to employ such terms unless data presented by participants is directly quoted using person first terminology.

*www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/what-is-autism

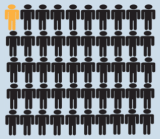
Autistic pupils in maintained education settings in Wales

Analysis on Welsh Government Pupil Level Annual School Census data for the school year 2020-21 available from Stats Wales.

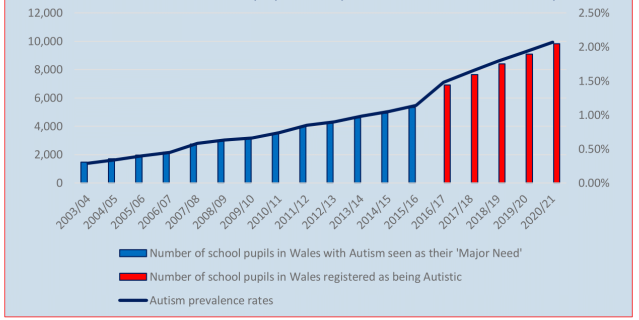
https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Schools-and-Teachers/Schools-Census/Pupil-Level-Annual-School-Census

1-in-50

pupils educated in maintained schools in Wales is Autistic

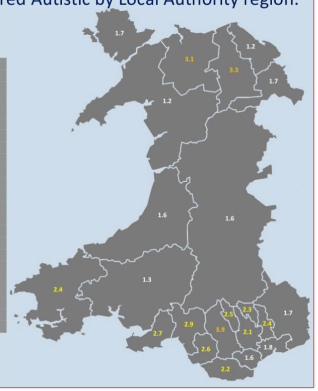


Combined number of Autistic pupils and prevalence rate 2003/4 to present.



Percentage of pupil population registered Autistic by Local Authority region.

Authority	Pupil population	Autistic pupils	Percentage
Rhondda Cynon Taf	39,161	910	3.87
Denbighshire	15,994	520	3.25
Conwy	15,857	490	3.09
Neath Port Talbot	21,585	625	2.90
Swansea	36,154	975	2.70
Bridgend	23,368	600	2.57
Merthyr Tydfil	9,172	230	2.51
Pembrokeshire	17,504	420	2.40
Torfaen	14,415	345	2.39
Blaenau Gwent	9,499	220	2.31
Vale of Glamorgan	23,497	510	2.17
Caerphilly	28,226	580	2.05
Newport	27,170	495	1.82
Isle of Anglesey	9,804	170	1.73
Wrexham	19,398	330	1.70
Monmouthshire	11,586	195	1.68
Cardiff	56,943	910	1.60
Powys	17,255	275	1.59
Ceredigion	9,700	150	1.55
Carmarthenshire	27,999	375	1.34
Flintshire	23,378	285	1.22
Gwynedd	17,059	205	1.20



Autism in Wales' schools

Data from the Welsh Government's 2021 school census* shows there are currently ***9,818*** Autistic pupils enrolled in maintained schools in Wales, who make up ***2%*** of the pupil population. There were ***723*** more Autistic pupils being educated in Wales in 2020/21 than the previous year. This increase of almost ***8%*** comes after a year where diagnostic services were virtually non-existent for many months due to the pandemic. In the four years since current reporting methods were introduced in 2017, there has been a ***42%*** increase in the number of Autistic pupils.

Autistic pupils account for:

- ***1.4%*** of primary school pupils
- ***1.9%*** of middle school pupils
- ***2%*** of secondary school pupils
- ***1.6%*** of all mainstream pupils
- ***43%*** of special school pupils

54% of Autistic pupils have a Statement of Educational Need, accounting for ***22%*** of all Statements in circulation. Autism is the most common type of need recorded in issued Statements for the fourth consecutive year.

Rhondda Cynon Taf has the highest prevalence rate, almost ***1-in-25*** pupils educated within the authority registered as Autistic. Swansea has the highest incidence with ***975*** Autistic children and young people educated in their schools. Carmarthenshire recorded a ***17%*** increase (+55), whilst Flintshire (-2%) and Wrexham (-7%) saw a decrease. Cardiff reported ***105*** additional Autistic pupils (+13%), whilst Denbighshire which had the highest prevalence in 2020 recorded the same number of Autistic pupils in 2021.

86% are educated in English medium settings ***14%*** in Welsh medium settings.

Education in Wales

Education in Wales is going through a significant period of change with the introduction of a new 'Curriculum for Wales', replacing the old National Curriculum, which was first introduced in 1988, more than ten years before the formation of the Welsh Assembly following devolution. This new way of teaching and learning is being introduced from September 2022.

Provision for learners with Additional Needs

The way children with additional needs are supported is also being overhauled, through the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Bill 2018 and introduction of the new ALN Code 2021. The new approach replaces the Special Educational Needs Code, which has been in use since 2004, and separate guidance for post-16 education to create a unified system of support for learners up to the age of 25.

The most significant changes include the replacing of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and Statements of Educational Need with one statutory document known as an Individual Development Plan (IDP). The idea being that the document will be easier to create and revise when necessary and give the children and young people a greater say on the provision made available to them.

The implementation of the new code was delayed by the Coronavirus pandemic; however, the first phase of the roll out began in September 2021, with selected year groups being transferred onto the new IDP system along with all learners newly identified as having additional needs.

Responses to our Parent Survey showed that ***82%*** of parents said their child's school or the Local Authority had not informed them of the upcoming changes in provision for learners with additional needs.

Whilst ***73%*** of parents whose children currently have a Statement of Educational Need said their child's school or the Local Authority had not informed them of the upcoming changes in the provision of Statements.

*https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Schools-and-Teachers/Schools-Census/Pupil-Level-Annual-School-Census

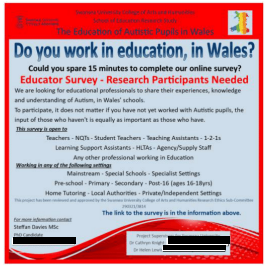
Project overview

There are approaching 10,000 Autistic pupils enrolled in maintained schools across Wales making up 2% of the school population, meaning roughly 1 pupil in 50 are Autistic*. However, to date there have been no specific studies looking in depth, at the education experiences of Autistic pupils in Wales, whilst studies from other nations have shown there are some real issues that need to be addressed in order to improve service provision for these children and young people, who make up a sizeable proportion of the school community.

This study set out to listen to the voices of Autistic pupils, their parents, and their educators to try and build a clear picture of what challenges are being faced in the education of Autistic children and young people in Wales. Working together it is hoped that this project will help guide and inform future policies and practices, to develop a more knowledgeable, understanding, and supportive education system for all Autistic pupils, throughout Wales.

Bilingual online survey questionnaires were developed to gain insights from the three key stakeholders which were all reviewed and approved by the Swansea University School of Arts and Humanities Research Ethics Sub-Committee. The timings and release of the surveys was slightly delayed and adjusted due to the new year Coronavirus lockdown which again saw schools across the UK closed to most pupils throughout January, February and March, with not all pupils making a full return to in school learning until mid-April 2021.

The first questionnaire to go 'live' was the educator's survey which was launched in April, with details of the project together with links to the survey emailed to all maintained education settings in Wales, including post-16 provisions and further and higher education institutions. Questions within the survey were focused on gaining an overview of education professionals' experiences, knowledge and understanding of Autism; access to training and resources; support; and confidence. The educator survey was active through April and May and attracted 549 responses at a completion rate of 52%, with 378 unique responses (89% in English & 11% completed in Welsh) having entered sufficient information to be taken forward for analysis.



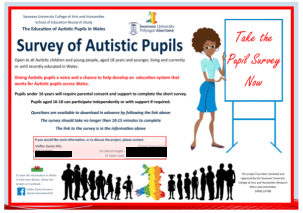
* See information on pages 4 and 5 (data from Welsh Government Pupil Level Annual School Census – Stats Wales)

The parent/carer survey sought parental perspectives on many areas of interest relating to the education of their Autistic children and young people, including Statements of Educational Need; educational support, inclusion, exclusions, peer relationships, bullying and parental satisfaction. The survey was released in May and remained active until mid-June. 511 responses were recorded with a 43% completion rate. 371 individual participants were entered into the analysis having completed appropriate number of critical questions, 98% chose to complete the survey in English with 2% using the Welsh language.

The final and most critical element, the survey of Autistic pupils was launched in mid-June, allowing participants the time to have settled back into the day-to-day school routines. The questions were made available in advance through a downloadable question preview document. This gave the children and young people and their parents an opportunity to know what to expect and prepare themselves before entering the online questionnaire and was viewed over 280 times. To try and ensure the survey was accessible to Autistic pupils of all abilities, three ability levels of questions were devised, with each level expanding on the questions posed in the level before. Questions in the first two levels were mainly of a straightforward Yes/No response variety using visual cues to aid understanding for all, with Level 3 having the addition of a selection of multiple choice questions offering agree, neither agree nor disagree or disagree answer options. The pupil survey remained active until early August and attracted 163 responses with a 43% completion rate, 92 unique responses were entered into analysis which included 1 Welsh language participant.

These survey responses translate into almost ***4%*** of Autistic pupils currently educated in Wales being represented by the input of 371 of their parents and carers in the parent survey.

Just short of ***1%*** of the Autistic pupil population in Wales are having their voices heard through participation in the pupil survey.



This preliminary report brings together the findings resulting from the input of all participants in the three surveys and has been produced to present the results of the study to date.

It is the culmination of the first phase of this PhD project and will guide further research and analysis as the project progresses through to completion in summer 2023.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss anything within the report with the author, the contact information appears throughout the document.

Autistic children and young people taking part in the pupil survey were asked if they could think of three words to describe how being in school made them feel, their responses produced this word cloud.

What the young people told us…

58% of Autistic young people told us they enjoy going to school.

43% of Autistic pupils said they were not happy in school.

28% say they did not feel safe in school.

77% told us that being in school makes them feel anxious or worried.

28% of Autistic children and young people told us they had no friends in school.

48% of pupils said they did not enjoy play, break and unstructured times at school.

76% of respondents say they have been the victim of bullying at school.

83% of Autistic students say they feel different from the other children and young people at school.

49% told us that they feel excluded at school.

41% said that there was no quiet space available for them to go and relax in their setting.

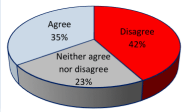
58% feel they are coping well with the schoolwork.

53% felt they were not getting enough help in school.

My teachers understand about Autism.

My teachers understand me.

My teachers know how to support me.



74% said school was often too noisy.

40% say they wish they were in a smaller school with less pupils.

Gender differences in what the young people told us.

There were many areas where gender can be clearly identified as having a role to play in shaping the educational experiences of Autistic students in Wales.

62% of male pupils told us they enjoyed going to school compared to just over half of the female participants (53%). 38% of boys and exactly half of Autistic girls said they were unhappy in school whilst 80% of those identifying as non-binary told us they were happy at school.

27% of Autistic boys, 31% of girls and 40% of non-binary pupils said they felt unsafe in school and 73% of males, 81% of females and 83% of non-binary students said being in school made them feel anxious and worried.

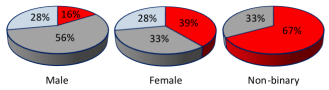
Across all three groups around 3-in-5 say they cope well with the work in school, although girls (61%) and those identifying as non-binary (60%) felt they didn't get enough help, whereas 55% of boys say they were getting enough help in class.

Non-binary pupils (60%) and boys (57%) were more likely to feel included than girls, with more than half (53%) of female responses saying they felt excluded at school. All non-binary participants told us they felt different to their peers whilst girls (93%) and 3-in-4 boys were also highly aware of their differences.

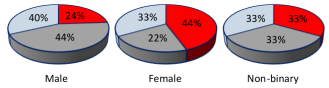
28% of male responses agreed that their teachers understood about Autism, whilst 16% disagreed. The same percentage of girls agreed, however 39% disagreed. None of the non-binary respondents agreed and ⅔ disagreed.

As a group it is clear from responses that females feel they are less understood and supported than both other gender cohorts.

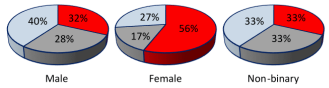
My teachers understand about Autism.



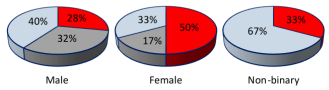
My teachers understand me.



My teachers know how to support me.



I get enough support in school.



44% of female participants felt their teachers did not understand them, compared to a third of those identifying as non-binary and less than a quarter of boys. Half the girls thought they were not getting enough support in school with 56% feeling their teachers did not know how to support them. 28% of boys say they don't get enough support in school and 32% suggested their teachers did not know how best to support them. A third of non-binary pupils told us that their teachers didn't know how to support them and that they considered they were not getting enough support in school.

40% of the males, 28% of females and none of the non-binary participants thought that their teachers understood how sensory difficulties made certain situations in school difficult to cope with. Over half of the girls and 67% of non-binary pupils told us they thought their teachers didn't understand these difficulties.

76% of boys, 72% of girls and all non-binary respondents said that the school environment was often too noisy.

A third of those who identify as non-binary said they wished they were in a different school compared to 20% of males and 17% of females. However, 45% of female participants, 36% of males and a third of non-binary young people felt that they would prefer to be in a smaller school, with less pupils.

The final question asked within Level 3 of the pupil survey asked whether participants would prefer to be in a school specifically for Autistic pupils, none of the non-binary cohort said they would whilst 16% of males and 17% of the female participants told us they would prefer to attend a school specifically for Autistic pupils.

Setting differences in what the young people told us.

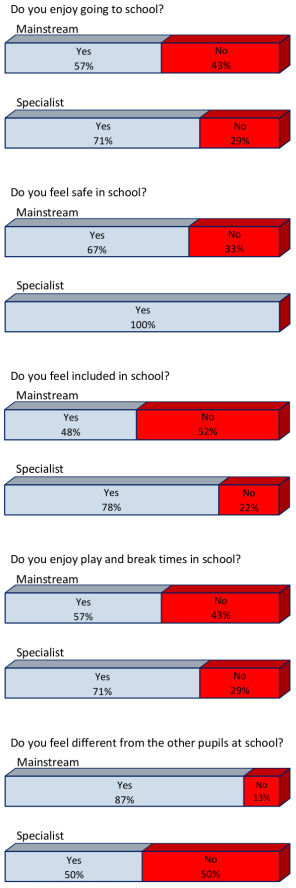
78% of the children and young people who responded to the pupil survey were educated in mainstream settings, whilst 15% received their educations in specialist provision.

71% of pupils educated in specialist settings told us they enjoyed going to school, compared to 57% of those in mainstream, whilst 56% of mainstream Autistic pupils and 69% of pupils attending specialist provision told us they were happy in school.

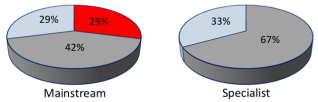
All participants from specialist education said they felt safe in school, but a third of those in mainstream say they do not feel safe. 82% of mainstream students felt anxious or worried going to school, in comparison to 45% of those in specialist settings.

Less than half (48%) of Autistic pupils educated in mainstream feel included in school, whilst 78% of pupils in specialist settings felt included. A similar number in each setting told us they had friends in school, although whilst 77% of pupils from specialist provisions said they enjoyed play and break times, 54% of mainstream pupils told us they did not enjoy those unstructured times.

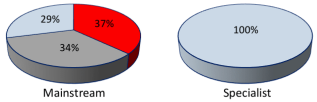
87% of those educated in mainstream say they feel different from their peers compared to 50% of those in special education.



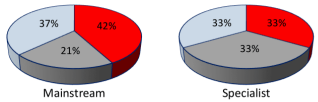
My teachers understand about Autism.



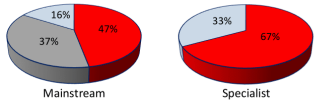
My teachers understand me.



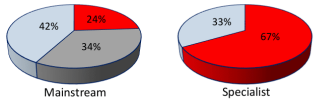
My teachers know how to support me.



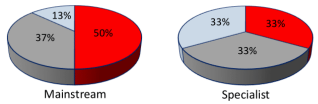
I wish I were in a different school.



I wish I were in a smaller school with less pupils.



I wish I were in a school specifically for Autistic pupils.



90% of children and young people attending specialist provisions told us they had a safe and quiet space available to them, whereas 45% of mainstream pupils said there was no safe space for them at their school.

When asked if they coped well with the work in school 46% of those in mainstream told us they didn't in comparison to 80% of those in specialist education who said they did cope well. 44% of mainstream pupils felt they were getting enough help in school in contrast to 70% of those in specialist settings.

29% of mainstream students felt their teachers had a good understanding about Autism and the same percentage thought their teachers understood them whilst 37% say teachers knew how to support them. A third of young people educated in specialist settings felt their teachers understood Autism whilst all felt their teachers understood them and a third said their teachers knew how to support them.

Two thirds of young people attending specialist provision and 41% of those enrolled in mainstream schools felt that their teachers understood how sensory differences made some situations hard to cope with at school. Whilst 79% of mainstream pupils told us that they often found school too noisy, none of the participants receiving their education in specialist settings felt this way with 67% disagreeing with the statement.

16% of mainstream pupils wished they were in a different school, 42% wished to be in a smaller school with fewer pupils and 13% wanted to be in a school specifically for Autistic pupils, whilst a third of those educated in specialist settings agreed to all three of these statements.

Age and sector differences in what the young people told us.

22% of participants in the pupil survey were of primary school age (4-11 years), 58% attend secondary school (aged 12-18 years) and 16% were aged 16-18 years in post-16 education. 58% were 15 years or younger, needing parental consent to partake and 42% were aged 16-18 (74% partaking independently, 26% with support).

70% of Autistic primary pupils, 53% of those in secondary and two thirds of students in post-16 education told us they enjoyed going to school. Three quarters of those in primary school said they were happy in school compared to 51% of secondary school pupils and a third of those in post-16 provision.

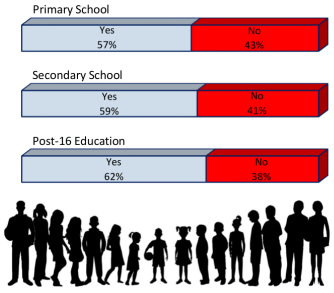
Pupils attending primary settings reported feeling safe in school (85%) as did 77% of those in post-16 education, whilst a third of secondary school learners told us they didn't feel safe in school. More than three quarters of students in secondary and post-16 settings and 71% of those in primary told us going to school makes them feel anxious or worried.

69% of those in primary school told us they are coping with their schoolwork as did 75% of those in post-16 education, however just half of Autistic pupils in secondary education said they could cope with the work. When asked whether they receive enough help in school 57% of primary pupils and 52% of secondary pupils felt they didn't whilst 54% of those in post-16 education say they were.

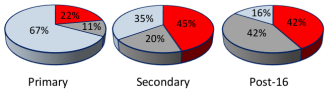
57% of primary school children, 55% of secondary pupils and just 50% of those educated in post-16 settings told us they felt included in school. Those in post-16 education were more aware of feeling different to their peers (92%) than Autistic pupils in secondary settings (80%) and primary aged pupils (79%).

Unstructured times, including play and break times were enjoyed by 60% of pupils in primary school, although 52% of secondary pupils told us they did not enjoy these times of day and they were slightly less problematic for those in post-16 education with 53% telling us they were ok. The majority of young people educated across the sectors told us they had access to a safe and quiet space during the school day although roughly two in five say they do not.

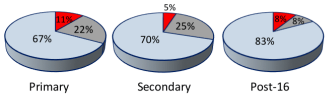
Do you have a safe, quiet space where you can go and relax at school?



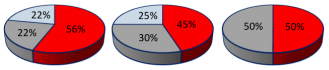
My teachers understand that sensory differences can make some situations in school difficult to cope with.



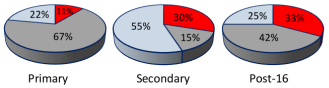
School is often too noisy.



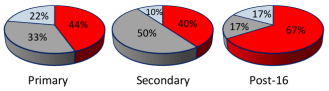
I wish I were in a different school.



I wish I were in a smaller school with less pupils.



I wish I were in a school specifically for Autistic pupils.



Two thirds of Autistic primary school pupils and a quarter of those in secondary felt that their teachers had a good understanding of Autism, whereas just 8% of students in post-16 education say their teachers understood about Autism.

Half of those in post-16 education and a third of primary children feel their teachers understood them, whilst 50% of participants educated in secondary settings tell us their teachers did not understand them.

A third of primary aged pupils feel they get enough support whilst in school, with 44% saying that their teachers knew how best to support them. 45% of Autistic young people at secondary school say they don't get enough support and only 30% suggest their teachers knew how to support them. For those students in post-16 provision, half felt they were getting sufficient support and whilst 42% felt their teachers understood how to support them the same though that they didn't.

Participants in primary schools felt their teachers had a good grasp of how sensory differences could make some situations difficult for them to cope with (67%) this appreciation of sensory difficulties was not so recognised in secondary schools (35%) or post-16 settings (17%). 83% of those attending post-16 settings were most disturbed by the noisy environment compared to 70% of pupils in secondary and 67% in primary schools.

22% of primary school children and a quarter of those in secondary schools told us they wished they were in a different school, whilst none of the students in post-16 education wished to change placement.

When asked if they would rather attend a smaller school with less pupils, half of all participants from secondary schools, 22% of primary school pupils, and a quarter of those in post-16 education said they would. 22% of children in primary settings told us they would like to attend a school specifically for Autistic pupils, 40% of those in secondary schools told us they wouldn't and whilst 17% of young people in post-16 education said they would, three quarters say they would not.

Parents and carers of Autistic children and young people had many opportunities to enter comments within the survey, responses relating to the settings their child was attending produced this Word Cloud.

What parents and carers told us…

80%
of parents say that Autism was the primary condition that impacts their child's education

48% feel that their child is currently attending the best setting to meet their individual needs.

1-in-3 with children attending mainstream told us they were unhappy with the setting their child currently attends.

81% of parents with children being educated in specialist settings said they were happy with the school.

70% said they felt unsupported in finding a suitable school placement for their child.

18% told us their Local Authority had discussed suitable placements available in the area.

35% say their child was receiving no additional support in school.

34% of parents whose children had a Statement of Educational Need say their child did not receive all the support detailed in the document.

71% felt their child needed more support if they were to reach their full potential.

26% thought their child had no friends at school.

71% of parents say their child really wants to make friends but struggles to connect with their peers.

23% told us their child had faced exclusion at school.

63% of parents were happy with how educators interact with their children.

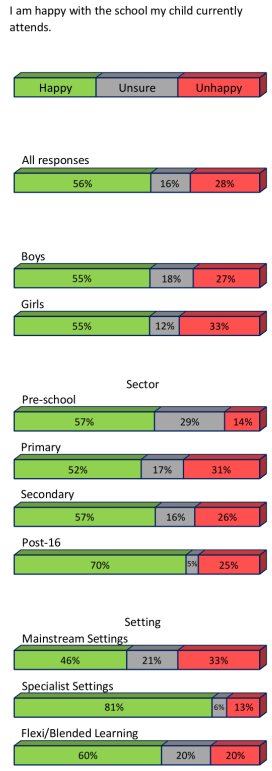
31% of parents were unhappy with their interactions with school management.

What parents told us about their satisfaction with their child's current placement.

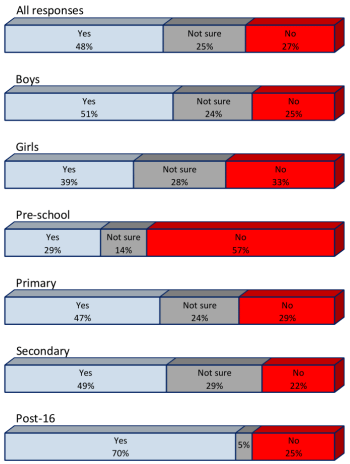
56% of parents told us they were happy with the school their child currently attends, however 28% said they were not, and 1-in-10 reported being very unhappy. Whilst parents of boys were equally as happy as those with daughters (55%) a higher proportion of girls' parents reported being unhappy (33%:27%).

For the youngest Autistic learners, 57% of their parents were happy with the pre-school provision they were attending, with only 14% reporting they were unhappy. 52% of parents of primary school pupils were happy, however 31% told us they were not. For those with children attending secondary education 57% were happy but 26% were unhappy, the sector parents were most happy with was post-16 provision with 70% telling us they were happy, however a quarter said they were unhappy.

Less than half (46%) of parents with children in mainstream education reported being happy with their school and a third said they were unhappy. 81% of those with children educated in specialist settings were happy, with 60% being very happy, just 13% reported being unhappy. Parents whose children were being educated through a flexi/blended pathway were generally happy with the provision (60%), whilst 20% say they were not happy with the provision for their children.



Do you think your child is currently in the best setting to suit their individual needs?



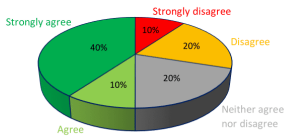
48% of parents felt that the school their child currently attends was the best placement to suit their individual needs, with more than 1-in-4 telling us that their child's current school was not the best setting to meet their needs. 28% strongly agreed that their child's school was meeting their needs, yet 13% strongly disagreed.

Parents of Autistic boys were almost twice as likely to be satisfied that their child's needs were being met than those with daughters. 51% of boys' parents felt their current placement was suitably meeting their needs however 39% of Autistic girls' parents feel the current school was meeting their daughters' needs and 1-in-3 telling us that their needs were not being met satisfactorily.

57% of parents with Autistic infants attending pre-school settings told us they were not satisfied that the settings were meeting their children's needs. Whilst 47% of those with children in primary settings and 49% with secondary school children felt the current placement was suitable for their child's individual needs. 70% of parents whose children were attending post-16 education provision agreed that their child was in the best setting to meet their needs.

64% of participants with children currently being educated through a flexi/blended learning pathway generally felt this approach was the most appropriate way to meet their child's individual needs. 40% were strongly in favour of the mixed methods style of education, however 30% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that this educational delivery was the most suitable approach for their child.

My child's current flexi/blended learning pathway is the best approach to meet their needs.



69% of all parents said they did not feel they received enough support in finding a suitable placement for their child, 77% of those with children in mainstream education and 51% whose children were in specialist provision.

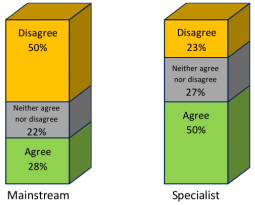
82% say their Local Authority did not discuss the different school placements available, this was as high as 89% for those with children in mainstream but was as low as 65% when children attend specialist settings.

Mainstream or Special Education?

Just over 1-in-4 (28%) of all the participating parents and carers felt mainstream was the best place for their child's education, whilst just under a half disagreed that their child would be best placed in mainstream settings.

By comparison a half of all parents of Autistic learners felt education within a specialist setting would be the most suitable provision for their child, with just 23% disagreeing that their child would be better placed in a specialist education setting.

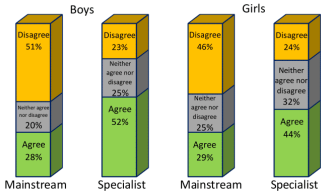
I think that mainstream education/specialist provision is best for my child.



Only 18% of parents with young children attending pre-school settings felt mainstream was the best place for their child, whilst 55% preferred the idea of a specialist placement. For those whose children were in primary school 62% felt specialist provision was preferrable to mainstream (28%). 30% of secondary pupils' parents considered mainstream more suitable and 53% favoured specialist provision. 46% of participants with children in post-16 provision feel specialist settings would suit their child best, whilst 1-in-4 considered mainstream more appropriate.

52% of the parents of Autistic boys feel that specialist education provision would be best for their sons, whilst 28% shared a preference towards a mainstream education.

I think that mainstream education/specialist provision is best for my child.



29% of girls' parents agreed that mainstream education was best for their daughter, whereas 44% told us that they felt specialist education would be a better option.

Children currently in mainstream education.

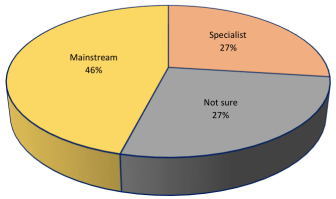
56% of participating parents and carers were representing Autistic children and young people being educated in mainstream settings. 37% of these parents told us that they felt the mainstream school their child was currently attending was the best setting to meet their individual needs, however 30% considered that current placement was not best meeting the individual needs of their child.

Less than half (46%) of all parents with children attending mainstream schools considered mainstream to be the best suitable setting for their child whilst more than 1-in-4 (27%) felt that specialist settings would offer their child a more appropriate environment for learning.

52% of the parents were satisfied with their interactions with mainstream setting staff, yet 32% told us they were dissatisfied. Participants were slightly more satisfied with staff's interactions with their children (54%), however 28% still reported being dissatisfied with how mainstream staff interacted with their children.

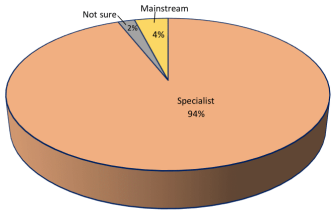
Which type of education provision do you think would best suit your child and their individual needs?

Children currently educated in mainstream settings



Which type of education provision do you think would best suit your child and their individual needs?

Children currently attending specialist provisions



Children currently attending specialist provisions.

30% of all participants in the parent survey told us their children were receiving their education in specialist provision settings. Nearly three quarters (72%) of these parents felt that the current specialist setting was the best place to ensure their child's individual needs were being met and just 14% feel their children's needs were not being best met in their present school placement.

94% of parents and carers of Autistic children and young people currently being educated within specialist provisions felt a specialist setting was the most suitable placement for their children, with only 4% telling us they thought their child would be more suited to a mainstream education.

Overall, 86% of the parents of pupils attending specialist settings were satisfied with their contact with the staff, just 6% told us they were not satisfied with these interactions. 88% say they were content with how the staff at their child's specialist setting interacted with their child, 4% of respondents felt dissatisfied with how setting staff interacted with their children.

What parents told us about educators' role in early identification and supporting access to diagnostic pathways.

17% of the pupils represented by parents and carers who took part in the parent survey did not have a formal Autism diagnosis but were currently on the diagnostic pathway. Their parents were asked about how initial concerns were raised and how supportive their child's school had been in opening the gateway to access diagnostic services.

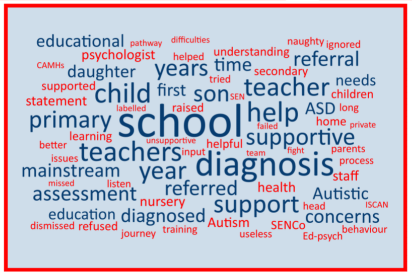
Identification of concerns

16% told us that their child's school were the first to identify and raise concerns about their child. 64% said that they had been the ones to take their concerns to the school, 44% told us that the school had listened to their concerns and acted upon them, however 56% felt their child's school did not listen when they first approached them.

Schools were more likely to identify possible signs of Autism in male pupils than females (19%:13%). 39% of boys' parents reported schools listened to their concerns, yet 61% feel the school did not take their concerns seriously. Half of girls' parents said they felt listened to, whilst the other half did not.

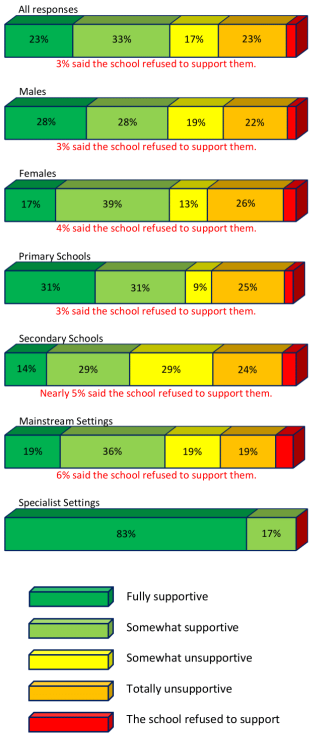
Primary schools initially identified 22% and took the concerns of parents seriously in 36% of cases, although parental reports suggest in 44% of cases primary schools did not follow up on their concerns. In secondary schools the school was the first to raise concerns in 14% of cases, however in situations led by parent concern 47% felt the schools did not listen compared to 26% that did.

Unsurprisingly, specialist settings were more adept at identifying possible Autism indicators than mainstream (29%:17%). In cases where parents were first to raise concerns 100% felt listened to by staff at specialist settings, whereas in mainstream 27% told us the school took their concerns seriously, however 50% of parents felt they were not listened to.



Word cloud created from parental responses relating to their child's school's involvement in identification of concerns and accessing diagnostic services.

How supportive do you feel your child's school has been in opening the gateway to access diagnostic services?



Accessing diagnostic pathways

Parents who told us that their child was currently on the diagnostic pathway were asked how supportive their child's school had been in initiating diagnostic processes and opening the gateway to the diagnostic pathways.

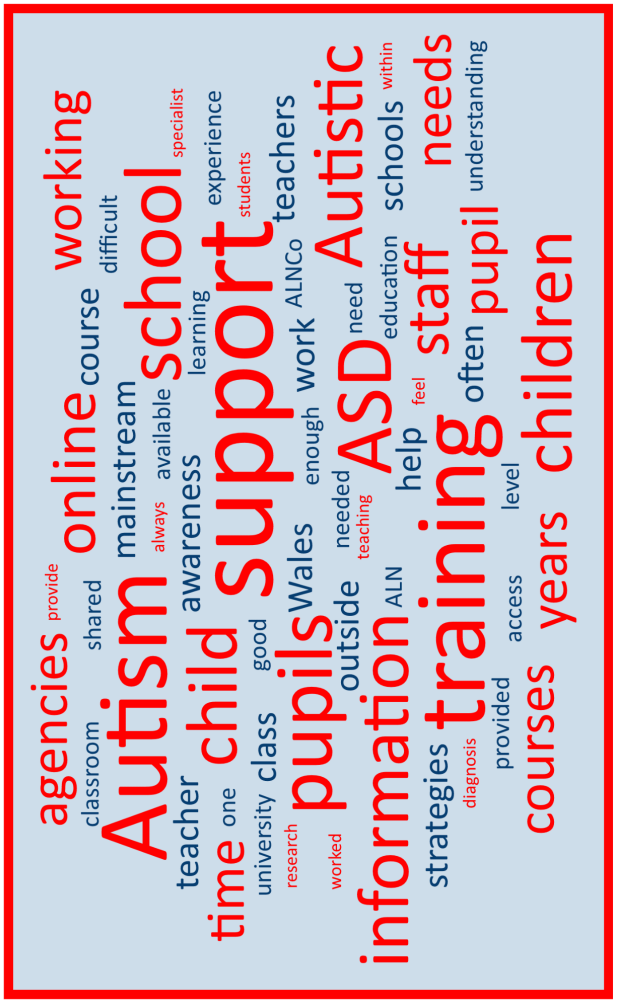
98% of the parents responded with 57% suggesting their child's school had been supportive of the referral onto the diagnostic pathway, however 43% felt unsupported with 3% saying the school refused to support a referral.

Parents of boys found schools more willing to fully support the initiation of the diagnostic process (28%) than those with daughters (17%), although overall support was more aligned (56%:57%) however just over 4% of girls' parents told us the school had refused their support compared to slightly under 3% in parents of boys.

Parental reports suggest there are significant differences in the likelihood of gaining support depending on the age of the child, especially in which sector they are educated. Pupils in primary schools whose parents wish to embark on the diagnostic journey are twice as likely to gain the support of the school than those who start the process whilst in secondary school. For those in primary settings 57% had the support of the school whilst 3% were refused any support, meanwhile 57% of the parents of secondary school pupils felt the school to be unsupportive and almost 5% were refused support.

All parents with children already attending specialist settings said their schools had been supportive, with 83% saying they felt the school was fully supportive of their child being entered onto the Autism diagnostic pathway. Mainstream settings were generally supporting of the process, 19% of parents saying they had the full support of their child's school. However, 44% felt the school had not supported them with nearly 6% telling us that they had been refused support from their child's school.

Participating educators had many opportunities to enter comments within the survey, their responses produced this Word Cloud.



What educators told us…

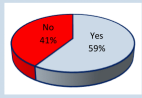
51% of educators told us they have experience of Autism outside of their professional role.

92% of education professionals have experienced working with Autistic children and young people.

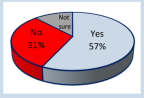
68% told us they were currently working with Autistic pupils.

Information sharing

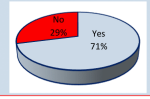
Did you have the opportunity to meet the pupil before working with them?



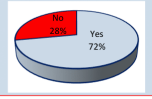
Do you feel you were given enough information about the pupil?



Were appropriate strategies known to be effective with the pupil shared in advance?



Were you made aware of specific triggers known to upset the pupil, in advance?



79% of education professionals told us they felt well supported by their school/employer, whilst working with Autistic pupils.

11% felt unsupported

39% of educators said they felt unsupported by their Local Authority whilst working with Autistic children and young people.

35% felt supported

42% told us they were satisfied with the support received from outside agencies when they were working with Autistic pupils.

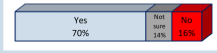
39% were not satisfied

Autism related training

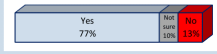
1-in-4 educators say they have not received any Autism related training provided by their employers. **65%** said they feel their employer provides enough Autism related training. **57%** told us they have independently undertaken their own Autism related training.

Knowledge and understanding

Do you feel you have enough knowledge about Autism?



Do you feel you have enough understanding about Autism?



Access to resources

59% told us they have enough access to resources to support them whilst working with Autistic pupils, but **41%** said they were not sure or did not know where to access resources.

Teachers

Almost 2% of teachers who took part in the educator survey told us they were Autistic, closely mirroring the percentage of pupils reported as being Autistic across Wales.

51% say they have experience of Autism outside their professional role and 94% said they have taught an Autistic pupil, with 68% of those currently working with an Autistic student.

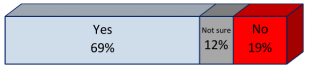
64% said they had been given an opportunity to meet and get to know the pupil before they started working with them, 31% felt they hadn't received enough information about the student in advance. Three quarters told us that they were informed of appropriate strategies known to be effective with the Autistic young person whilst just over a quarter say they weren't made aware of specific triggers known to upset the child.

85% of teachers felt supported by their school, when working with Autistic students, 43% feel they were not supported sufficiently by their Local Authority and 46% thought they had been adequately supported by outside agencies.

More than 20% told us they had not received any Autism related training provided by their employer, however 85% of those who had said their training had occurred within the past 5 years. 72% feel their employer provided sufficient training and 57% had independently undertaken training to improve their knowledge and understanding of Autism.

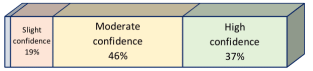
28% suggested they didn't have enough resources available to them to support Autistic pupils effectively. 88% said they would like to access more resources however 36% said they were unsure or did not know where they could access more resources to support them in their current role, whilst teaching Autistic students.

Do you feel you have enough general knowledge about Autism?



Do you feel you have enough general understanding about Autism?

How confident are you that you would have the knowledge and understanding to support an Autistic pupil?

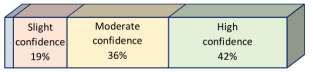


2% of respondents indicated they have NO confidence

How confident are you that you would have the knowledge and understanding to support the family of an Autistic pupil?

9% of respondents indicated they have NO confidence

How confident are you that you would be able to identify if a pupil was displaying Autistic related traits and behaviours?

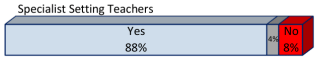


3% of respondents indicated they have NO confidence

Do you feel you have enough general knowledge about Autism?

Mainstream Teachers

Specialist Setting Teachers

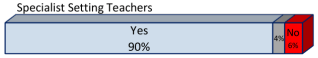


8% of teachers working in specialist Autism education settings felt they didn't have enough detailed knowledge of Autism

Do you feel you have enough general understanding about Autism?

Mainstream Teachers

Specialist Setting Teachers



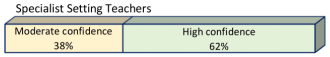
4% of teachers working in specialist Autism education settings felt they didn't have enough detailed understanding of Autism

How confident are you that you would have the knowledge and understanding to support an Autistic pupil?

Mainstream Teachers

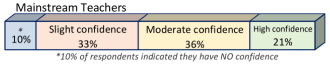
2% of respondents indicated they have NO confidence

Specialist Setting Teachers



How confident are you that you would have the knowledge and understanding to support the family of an Autistic pupil?

Mainstream Teachers



10% of respondents indicated they have NO confidence

Specialist Setting Teachers

How confident are you that you would be able to identify if a pupil was displaying Autistic related traits and behaviours?

Mainstream Teachers

2% of respondents indicated they have NO confidence

Specialist Setting Teachers

4% of respondents indicated they have NO confidence

Teachers in mainstream and specialist settings

63% of teachers who responded to the survey worked in mainstream settings, 33% were working in specialist settings.

83% of mainstream teachers told us they felt supported by their school when they were working with Autistic pupils compared to 94% of teachers in specialist settings.

49% of teachers in specialist settings feel their Local Authority provided enough support, whilst 36% felt unsupported by the Authority.

In mainstream schools 45% of teachers felt unsupported by the Local Authority compared to 35% that said their Authority provided sufficient support.

Outside agencies were thought to provide enough support by 39% of mainstream teachers and 62% of teachers employed in specialist settings.

74% of teachers working in specialist Autism settings told us they received no Autism related training from their employers before starting in the role, however, 74% also said their employers provided them with regular updated Autism related training.

85% of teachers working in specialist settings and 77% of those in mainstream said their employers had provided them Autism related training.

73% of mainstream teachers felt their schools provided them with enough Autism related training, whilst 19% of teachers in specialist settings thought their employers could provide them with more Autism related training.

76% of teaching staff from specialist settings and 48% in mainstream have independently undertaken training to help improve their knowledge and understanding of Autism.

Support staff

46% of education support staff told us they have experience of Autism outside of their professional role, and 91% say they have worked with Autistic children and young people.

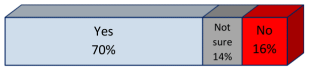
52% of those who have worked with Autistic learners say they had an opportunity to meet and get to know the individual before starting to work with them. Less than half felt they were given enough information about the pupil in advance, 61% said effective strategies were shared and two thirds were informed of triggers that were known to upset the child.

77% told us they have received Autism related training, with 85% saying this training was within the last five years. 31% felt their schools were not offering enough Autism related training and 57% said they have independently taken courses to improve their knowledge and understanding of Autism.

71% of school support staff feel they have enough general knowledge about Autism, whilst 78% think they have sufficient understanding of Autism.

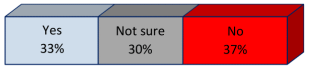
1-in-4 respondents suggest they don't have enough resources available to them, 91% would like to access more resources and 45% did not know or were unsure where they could access additional resources to support them, whilst working with Autistic pupils.

Do you feel you are/were getting enough support from your school whilst working with Autistic pupils?

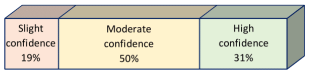


Do you feel you are/were getting enough support from the Local Authority whilst working with Autistic pupils?

Do you feel you are/were getting enough support from outside agencies whilst working with Autistic pupils?

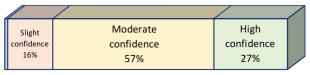


How confident are you that you would have the knowledge and understanding to support an Autistic pupil?



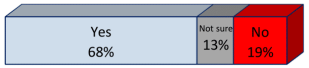
None of the respondents indicated they have NO confidence

How confident are you that you would be able to identify if a pupil was displaying Autistic related traits and behaviours?



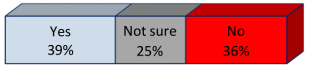
One respondent indicated they have NO confidence

Do you feel you are/were getting enough support from your school whilst working with Autistic pupils?



Do you feel you are/were getting enough support from the Local Authority whilst working with Autistic pupils?

Do you feel you are/were getting enough support from outside agencies whilst working with Autistic pupils?



1-2-1 support staff

78% of education support staff say they have at some point in their career provided 1-2-1 support to an Autistic pupil.

44% of those who have said they had no detailed knowledge of Autism before they took on the role of supporting an Autistic pupil 1-2-1.

61% told us they did not receive any Autism related training in advance of them working 1-2-1 with an Autistic child or young person.

1-in-3 support staff who have worked as a 1-2-1 support for an Autistic pupil had no prior knowledge of Autism and received no Autism related training before starting in the role.

72% said they did have some form of Autism related training whilst they were working 1-2-1 with an Autistic student.

56% felt their employer provided them with sufficient training although 32% feel their employer could provide them with more Autism related training.

63% of staff who have provided 1-2-1 support to Autistic pupils told us that they have independently undertaken their own training to improve their knowledge and understanding of Autism.

Agency and supply staff

92% of education agency and supply staff have experience of working with Autistic pupils, and 67% told us they have worked as a 1-2-1 support with an Autistic pupil whilst on supply.

50% say they have had times where they were not made aware that they would be working with Autistic pupils before arriving at a school, although all participating agency and supply staff said they have experienced occasions where they were given this information in advance.

1-in-3 felt they were not given enough information about the young person they would be working with in advance, however, 42% suggested that they were given sufficient information upon arrival at the setting.

75% told us that they were made aware of appropriate strategies known to be effective with the individual pupil and all had been given information relating to specific triggers known to upset the young person.

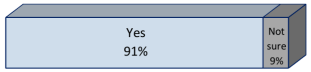
1-in-4 said there were occasions where they felt unsupported by the school in which they were working, whilst working with Autistic pupils.

83% of agency education staff said they had received Autism related training provided by their employers within the last 5 years. Half felt their employer provided them with sufficient Autism related training, whilst ¾ say they have independently undertaken their own training to improve their knowledge and understanding of Autism.

Do you feel you have enough general knowledge about Autism?

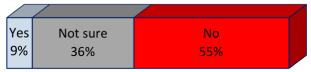
None of the respondents selected the NO option

Do you feel you have enough general understanding about Autism?

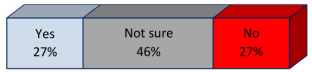


None of the respondents selected the NO option

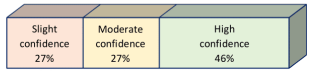
Do you feel you have enough access to resources to improve your knowledge and understanding about Autism, and support you in your current role?



Do you know where to access resources to improve your knowledge and understanding about Autism, and support you in your current role?



How confident are you that you have the knowledge and understanding to support an Autistic pupil?



None of the respondents indicated they have NO confidence

One education agency supply staff member said...

"I wish to share that all school staff should have compulsory ASD awareness training. It is very difficult treading the line of doing the very best I can for the autistic child in a mainstream class when other staff in the class do not get provided with appropriate Autism understanding training."

EDUCATED AT HOME

Parental responses relating to their choice to educate their children at home were analysed and used to develop this Word Cloud.

4% of the respondents to the parent/carer survey said that their Autistic children were currently being educated at home. 64% of those were male and 36% female. Children and young people educated at home were aged between 8 and 18 years. 79% had a formal Autism diagnosis, and for 64% their parents considered Autism to be the primary condition impacting their education. 43% have anxiety disorders and 36% had comorbid ADHD.

86% said their child had previously attended a mainstream school, with 43% having tried two or more. 36% told us they had earlier been educated in a specialist provision.

Half considered their child would remain educated at home, for the remainder of their time in education.

Educated at home – what parents told us…

4% of parents who took part in the survey say their children were being educated at home.

86% felt educating their child at home was the best approach to meet their individual needs.

79% told us the decision to educate their child at home was their preference.

86% of young people educated at home had previously been educated in a mainstream setting, ***36%*** had attended a specialist setting.

36% of parents whose children are educated at home felt their child might be better placed in a specialist setting.

50% told us they expected their child to continue being educated at home for the remainder of their education.

93% said their Local Authority had not discussed the different placements available to their children.

79% of parents who decided to educate their children at home felt unsupported in making the decision by their Local Authority.

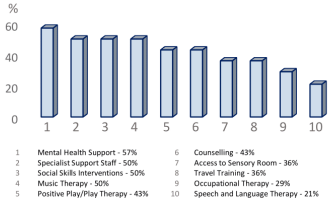
50% told us their Local Authority had supported the transition from setting to education at home.

57% of young people educated at home have a Statement of Educational Need.

38% have provision within their Statement for being educated at home.

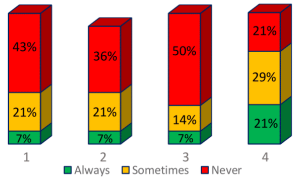
63% do not receive all the support prescribed within their Statement.

Areas of support that parents feel their child needs but does not currently have access to.



1 Mental Health Support - 57%
2 Specialist Support Staff - 50%
3 Social Skills Interventions - 50%
4 Music Therapy - 50%
5 Positive Play/Play Therapy - 43%
6 Counselling - 43%
7 Access to Sensory Room - 36%
8 Travel Training - 36%
9 Occupational Therapy - 29%
10 Speech and Language Therapy - 21%

Communication between home and Local Authority



1 When discussing your child's education with the Local Authority, do you feel they listen to your point-of-view?
2 When discussing your child's education with the Local Authority, do you feel they understand your point-of-view?
3 When discussing your child's education with the Local Authority, do you feel they respect your point-of-view?
4 When discussing your child's education with the Local Authority, do you they communicate using language and vocabulary that you understand?

Educated at home

71% of parents said their child was happy being educated at home.

50% of parents whose children are educated at home feel their child receives the right level of support to help them succeed, however 71% told us that they felt they didn't get enough support to help their child.
58% said their child needed some form of mental health support that they were not currently accessing.

36% told us they are in regular communication with the Local Authority regarding their child's education, yet 93% felt there was not enough communication with their LA.

36% of children being educated at home have experienced school exclusion through internal 'isolation' and fixed term external exclusion. 7% have been permanently excluded from an education setting.

90% of those who attended a school prior to being educated at home had been the victim of bullying, with 66% of parents considering their child was bullied for being Autistic.

What led you to make the decision to educate your child at home?

"He spent more time suspended because of his behaviour, so wasn't having an education"

"The placement 'broke down', the school did not implement any of the strategies needed for my child to thrive"

"Child heard teachers laughing about her exclusion and since then has refused to attend school"

"Unhappiness, mental wellbeing and bullying"

"My child was bullied, and the school isolated him, not the bullies. They told us there was nowhere in the school for him"

"His anxiety was at a level where he was close to breakdown, nobody in the school listened to me because he sat under his desk all day and didn't cause any trouble. He was having panic attacks and started talking about killing himself when he was only 7"

Statement of Educational Need

51% of the participants in the survey of parents and carers said their child has a Statement issued by the Local Authority, closely matching the 54% of Autistic pupils with a Statement across Wales.

Parental reports suggest Statements were issued to 41% of Autistic pupils in mainstream education, 87% of pupils attending specialist provisions, 64% of those accessing a flexi/blended learning pathway and 57% of those being educated at home. 56% of young people educated through a flexi/blended pathway and 38% of children educated at home have these approaches prescribed within their Statement.

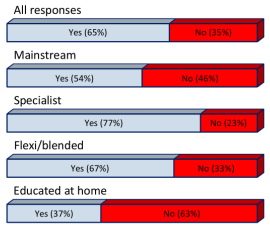
74% of respondents told us that Autism was the primary need recorded in their child's Statement.

A Statement of Educational Need is a document issued by a Local Authority, following a Statutory Assessment process. The 'Statement' is legally binding, setting out the individual needs of a child and how they should be met within their education. The document will set out long-term targets and indicate appropriate strategies for achieving short-term incremented steps towards reaching them. An annual review involving a multi-agency approach is held to assess the effectiveness of the document and identify where any changes are required. In Wales, under the implementation of the new ALN code, Stetements are gradually being phased out, to be replaced by Individual Development Plans (IDPs).

More than a third (35%) of parents told us that their child was not receiving all of the support detailed within their Statement.

In mainstream settings 54% reported their child to be receiving all the specified support. 20% of parents with Autistic children in pre-school settings, 37% in primary, 59% in secondary and 57% in post-16 reported their child was not in receipt of all the support as detailed within their Statement. Data suggests that mainstream primary school pupils are 2½ times more likely to get all the support they are entitled to than those in mainstream secondary education. Two thirds of pupils attending specialist provisions are reportedly receiving all the support as set out within their Statement. Parents of pupils attending both specialist primary (80%) and secondary (81%) report a high percentage of pupils accessing the prescribed support, however there was a 50-50 split for those young people attending specialist post-16 provisions.

Does your child receive all the support detailed within their Statement of Educational Need.



***73%** of parents with children who currently have a Statement of Educational Need said they have not yet been informed of the upcoming changes in the provision of ALN support.*

Individual Education Plans

An Individual Education Plan (IEP) is a formal, structured document to help teaching staff plan and prepare a child's education. The IEP should be unique to the child, reflecting their individual needs and must help guide what is taught, exactly how it should be delivered and how often. It should set out short-term achievable targets and strategies for reaching them particular to the child, over and above what may be available to the whole class, which are kept under regular review. In Wales, under the implementation of the new ALN code, IEPs are gradually being phased out, to be replaced by Individual Development Plans (IDPs).

65% of respondents to the parent survey told us their child had an IEP, just under a quarter said they didn't and 11% were not sure if they had an IEP or not.

36% of Autistic children attending pre-school settings, 58% in primary and secondary schools, and 42% of young people in post-16 education settings have an IEP.

In mainstream education settings 52% had an IEP whilst a quarter did not. 76% of Autistic pupils in specialist provisions were said to have an IEP, with only 6% being without. Parents of 64% of those currently on a flexi/blended learning pathway told us their child had an IEP, a third said the document covers the various settings they attend. 21% of young people being educated at home have an IEP, two thirds of them say the Local Authority help them to maintain the document.

60% of parents said they thought their child's IEP was reviewed on a regular basis, however 1-in-5 felt that it was not. Less than half (47%) of parents with children attending mainstream education compared to 80% of those in specialist provisions say there is a regular review of the document, whilst 22% of those educated through a flexi/blended approach and a third of those educated at home felt the IEP is not reviewed regularly enough.

55% told us that their child is involved in the reviewing of their IEP, less than half of those in primary settings (48%), nearly 60% of those in secondary and three quarters of those attending post-16 placements.

65% said that they were often involved in the review of their child's IEP, 59% in mainstream in comparison to 76% in specialist education.

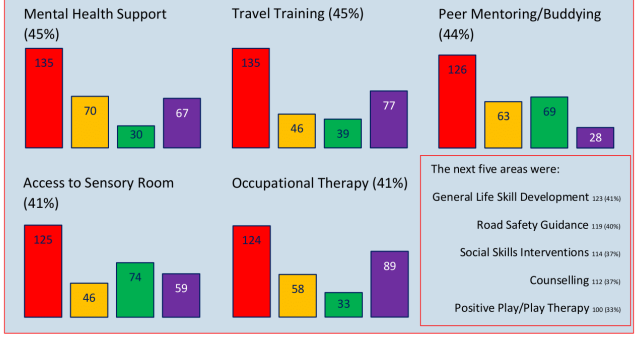
54% of parents felt the targets set within their child's IEP were realistic and achievable, whilst 18% disagreed. The level to which parents agreed reduced slightly as their child moved through the sectors, 100% in pre-school, 54% in primary, 51% in secondary and 50% of those with children educated in post-16 settings. Nearly three quarters of those with children in specialist settings feel their IEP targets were achievable compared to 41% of those whose children were in mainstream.

Areas of support

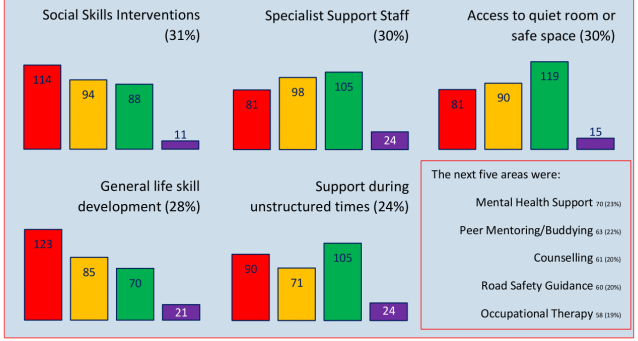
Parents were asked about different types of support to find out what their children were currently receiving or what they thought their children should be receiving, whilst in school.
Participants were given 4 response options:

No access currently, but it is needed - Limited Access but more is needed - Sufficient Access - No access needed

No access currently, but it is needed - The five areas where most parents felt their child needed support that currently was not made available to them were:



Limited Access but more is needed - The five most common areas where parents felt their child needed more support than they were currently receiving were:



Educational Support

52% of children and young people felt they did not get enough help in school.
56% for those educated in mainstream compared to 30% of those in specialist settings.

42% suggested they were unable to cope with the work given to them in school.
45% of pupils in mainstream, and just 20% of those in specialist settings.

42% of Autistic pupils felt their teachers did not know how to support them.

35% of parents told us their child received no additional support in school, girls (61% access additional support) are less likely to have support than boys (66%).

Almost 2-in-5 primary school pupils and a third of those in secondary and post-16 education receive no additional support.

According to parental reports 27% of pupils attending mainstream settings currently do not have any additional provision in place.

"I don't like asking for help I'm quiet, so they leave me to it"

"I felt like I sometimes got a lot of help but sometimes I didn't"

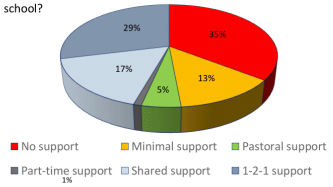
"My helper is great he knows me well and can see when I need help"

"It's hard, my teachers don't see I am struggling"

My teachers know how to support me.

"Work can be a struggle to get my head around I find it hard to concentrate, some subjects were ok, but in others I struggled and wasn't really getting the help I needed"

What level of additional support does your child receive in school?



"There is a huge lack of support for children who are academically able and non-disruptive, like girls with ASD"

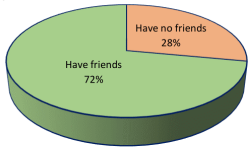
"...he gets forgotten, just because my child has no learning difficulties, it doesn't mean he doesn't struggle"

"I was told that secondary schools don't get funding for support staff"

"Neurodiverse children deserve input from trained support staff...there should be a minimal level of training"

"It is heart-breaking to be told there isn't enough funding to implement all the support identified in your child's IDP"

Do you have friends in school?



"I found it hard to make friends"

"I have one close friend, sometimes when they are not in school it is lonely"

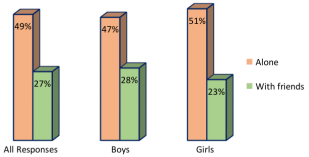
"I only had friends for the last two years of my school life"

"I have a very small group of friends but am often side-lined by them so they can talk to their other friends instead of me"

"I only felt happy with my friends in school...I constantly felt threatened by other pupils"

"I wish I had more friends"

Generally, my child is happiest when alone/with friends.



Peer Relationships in School

28% of young people who responded to the survey told us they have no friends in school.

Parent responses indicate that boys are marginally less likely to have friends than girls with 68% of boys compared to 64% of girls having either no friends or just one close friend.

Age also played a role in determining whether their children made friends with ¼ of primary school aged children having no friends compared to 2-in-5 of those in post-16 education.

Parents told us that 1-in3 children and young people educated in specialist settings had a good group of friends, slightly higher than the 31% of those attending mainstream settings.

71% of parents felt their child wanted to make friends but struggled to connect with their peers, with girls (78%) being more inclined to yearn for positive relationships with their peers than boys (69%).

Just over a quarter of parents said their child was happiest when with friends, and just below half said their child was happiest when alone.

Bullying

76% of Autistic children and young people told us that they have been bullied in school.

36% of Autistic pupils currently in primary school settings told us they have experienced being bullied, by the time they are educated in secondary settings 87% report being the victim of bullying at school.

Gender differences appear to have little impact on the possibility of encountering bullying with 77% of boys and 74% of girls reporting being bullied at school, whilst 80% of participants who identify as non-binary said they had been bullied.

The type of setting in which a child is educated plays a role on the chances of experiencing bullying, 76% of pupils in mainstream education compared to 70% in specialist settings reported being bullied.

Half of the parents think their child was considered an easy target for bullies, whilst 62% felt their child was targeted by bullies for being Autistic.

98% of parents who were aware of their child being bullied reported this to the school.

56% felt the school did not take their concerns seriously, 60% felt the school did not take appropriate action in response and 62% said the bullying continued despite the school being made aware.

Responses suggest that parents consider schools do not take complaints of bullying seriously or act accordingly in response to concerns, with specialist settings performing worse than mainstream.

"I was told my child needed to be more resilient and ignore or stay away from the bullies"

"The school blamed my son; said he was too sensitive and literal to take jokes and rough play"

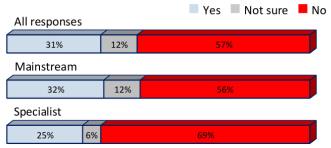
"...concerns get ignored so a school can look good on paper without considering the effect on a child's mental health"

"Other children don't want to talk to me, sometimes they say I am fat and call me names"

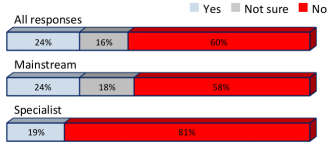
"Me and another Autistic student I knew faced a lot of ableism in school from both teachers and students"

"I was bullied in primary school and most of secondary. I didn't enjoy playing because kids never accommodated for me"

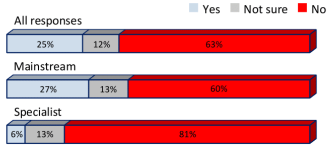
Where you reported bullying issues to the school, do you think the school listened and took your concerns seriously?



Do you think the school acted appropriately in response to your concerns about your child being bullied?



Did the bullying stop, as a result of you asking the school to deal with it?



School exclusions

23% of parents told us that their child had faced a school exclusion, either internally by isolation or through external fixed-term or permanent exclusions.

98% of those represented children who were excluded at mainstream settings, 14% from specialist settings, with 12% having experienced exclusion in both.

78% of those excluded were male (1-in-4 of all boys) and 20% female (18% of all girls). 24% of Autistic pupils who have been suspended or excluded from school, either internally or externally, temporarily, or permanently were aged 10 or younger, with the youngest being 6 years old. 31% were of primary school age (14% of all primary pupil parent responses).

According to parental reports Autistic pupils with comorbid ADHD are 2½ times more likely to be excluded than those without.

Internal exclusions

78% of parents who told us their child had been excluded reported their child being internally excluded by being placed in isolation (18% of all respondents).

95% of the pupils isolated faced this in mainstream schools and 19% in specialist provision (11% were isolated in both type of setting). 65% reported their child had been placed in isolation on more than 5 occasions and 37% said their child endured isolation periods of two whole school days, or longer.

The youngest participant's child placed in isolation was 6 years, with 20% of those having experienced isolation being aged 10 or younger (7% of all pupils aged 6-10 years). 24% of the pupils were isolated in primary school (9% of all Autistic primary pupils). 64% of primary pupils experienced isolation on more than 5 occasions and 27% for periods of two days or longer. The most common reason given by schools for placing primary pupils in isolation was staff being unable to manage the child's behaviours.

78% of those placed in isolation were male (61% of all represented males). 36% experienced periods of isolation lasting two days or longer and 61% had been isolated on 5 or more occasions. Disruptive behaviour and staff being unable to manage behaviour were the reasons most used by school by way of explanation.

Female participants accounted for 20% of those who had experienced being placed in isolation (14% of all girls). 78% were isolated five or more times and 36% had endured isolation periods lasting two whole school days or longer. 89% of parents told us that their daughter's school had used isolation as a result of them not listening to school staff, whilst unacceptable and disruptive behaviours were also commonly given explanations.

Most common reasons schools have given parents for exclusion of their children.

Internal exclusions

Internal exclusions (All cases)
Disruptive behaviour - 57%
Aggressive behaviour towards school staff - 50%
Staff unable to manage child's behaviours - 50%
Unacceptable behaviour - 48%
Not listening to the school staff - 48%
20% of all Autistic pupils' internal exclusions were blamed on staff shortage or lack of available support.

Internal exclusions (Boys)
Disruptive behaviour - 50%
Staff unable to manage child's behaviour - 50%
Aggressive behaviour towards school staff - 44%
Unacceptable behaviour - 39%
Not listening to the school staff - 39%
19% of Autistic boys' internal exclusions were blamed on staff shortage or lack of available support.

Internal exclusions (Primary school)
Staff unable to manage child's behaviours - 73%
Violent behaviour towards school staff - 55%
Aggressive behaviours towards school staff - 55%
Disruptive behaviour - 55%
Violent behaviour towards other pupils - 46%
36% of Autistic primary school pupils' internal exclusions were blamed on staff shortage or lack of available support.

Internal exclusions (Girls)
Not listening to the school staff - 89%
Unacceptable behaviour - 78%
Disruptive behaviour - 78%
Disobeying school rules - 78%
Aggressive behaviours towards school staff - 67%
11% of Autistic girls' internal exclusions were blamed on staff shortage or lack of available support.

Fixed term external exclusions

Fixed term exclusions (All cases)
Staff unable to manage child's behaviours - 52%
Aggressive behaviours towards school staff - 46%
Unacceptable behaviour - 46%
Disruptive behaviour - 42%
Violent behaviour towards other pupils - 38%
23% of all reported fixed term exclusions were blamed on staff shortage or lack of available support.

Fixed term exclusions (Boys)
Staff unable to manage child's behaviours - 50%
Disruptive behaviour - 45%
Aggressive behaviours towards school staff - 43%
Unacceptable behaviour - 40%
Violent behaviour towards other pupils - 38%
26% of boys' fixed term exclusions were blamed on staff shortage or lack of available support.

Fixed term exclusions (Primary school)
Aggressive behaviours towards school staff - 65%
Staff unable to manage child's behaviours - 65%
Violent behaviour towards school staff - 53%
Violent behaviour towards other pupils - 53%
Aggressive behaviours towards other pupils - 47%
47% of Autistic primary school pupils' fixed term exclusions were blamed on staff shortage or lack of available support.

Fixed term exclusions (Girls)
Unacceptable behaviour - 78%
Aggressive behaviours towards school staff - 67%
Staff unable to manage child's behaviours - 67%
Aggressive behaviours towards other pupils - 56%
Not listening to the school staff - 56%
11% of Autistic girls' fixed term exclusions were blamed on staff shortage or lack of available support.

Permanent exclusions

Permanent exclusions (All cases)
Violent behaviour towards school staff
Violent behaviour towards other pupils
Aggressive behaviours towards school staff
Aggressive behaviours towards other pupils
Use of bad language directed at staff
Unacceptable behaviour
Not listening to the school staff
Staff unable to manage child's behaviours

Were all referenced as reasons in 60% of permanent exclusions

Permanent exclusions (Boys and girls)
Violent behaviour towards school staff
Violent behaviour towards other pupils
Aggressive behaviours towards school staff
Aggressive behaviours towards other pupils
Use of bad language directed at staff

The 5 most common reasons given by school for the permanent exclusion of Autistic boys and girls were the same, with each referenced in 67% of boys' and 50% of girls' exclusions.

Permanent exclusions (Primary school)
Violent and aggressive behaviour towards school staff and other pupils was the most common reason for the permanent exclusion of Autistic primary school children, being cited as explanation in 100% of the reported exclusions.

Fixed term/temporary external exclusions

20% of parents told us their child had been temporarily externally excluded by being sent home or asked to stay at home, known as a fixed term exclusion.

15% of those pupils had been given a fixed term exclusion from both mainstream and specialist settings, 98% from mainstream and 19% at specialist provision. 42% of pupils temporarily excluded faced fixed term exclusions on five or more occasions, whilst a third had been excluded for periods of a whole school week or longer. 4% of them were aged just 6 years old, and a quarter were aged 10 years or younger (10% of all participants' children aged between 6 and 10 years). 13% of all respondents whose children were in primary education said their child had been temporarily excluded, 41% on more than five occasions and 35% for periods of a week or more.

81% were boys (22% of all males) with 43% temporarily excluded on five or more occasions and a third for a week or longer. Half of the parents of boys who had experienced fixed term exclusions say the school had given the reason that they were unable to manage their child's behaviours with disruptive behaviour being the second most common reason.14% of all females represented in this study had been temporarily excluded. A third were removed from school for a week or more, whilst 42% had faced fixed term exclusions five or more times. Schools referenced unacceptable behaviour in 78% of cases whilst 2-in-3 were for aggressive behaviours towards school staff.

52% of parents said they did not receive a written account of the exclusion from the school.

Permanent exclusion

10% of parents who reported that their child had been excluded at school told us they had been permanently excluded (2% of all parental responses).

80% of those were permanently excluded from mainstream schools (2% of those participants educated in mainstream) with 20% being permanently excluded from specialist settings (1% of those educated in specialist provision). The youngest child of a participant to be permanently excluded was 9 years old, with 40% of permanent exclusions happening in primary settings, due to violent and aggressive behaviour towards staff and other pupils.

80% were permanently excluded from one setting, whilst 20% were excluded from two.

2% of all parents of boys said their son had been permanently excluded, two thirds from one school and a third from two. 40% of all those who had faced permanent exclusion were female (3% of all girls who were represented).

80% of parents whose children had been permanently excluded told us they felt supported by their Local Authority in finding suitable alternative provision for their child.

About this report

This report presents the first phase of findings from a study conducted by Swansea University School of Education. The data was collected between April and August 2021 through three online survey questionnaires. In total, responses from 841 individuals were entered into the analysis, 92 Autistic children and young people, 371 of their parents and carers and 378 education professionals, all resident and learning or working in Wales. Both quantitative data (responses to yes/no and multiple-choice questions) and qualitative data (responses to the optional free-text requests for further information) were included within this initial analysis.

Following publication of this preliminary report, further, more detailed analysis will continue and the conclusions of this will direct the remainder of the project, which is scheduled for completion in the summer of 2023.

Preliminary conclusions

For many Autistic children and young people in Wales, negotiating the day-to-day challenges of the education system is an overwhelming experience. Both the students themselves, and their parents have shared their frustrations about many areas that present significant issues in their responses to the surveys.

Whilst educators who took part in the study, largely considered themselves to have a good knowledge and understanding of Autism and the particular difficulties Autistic pupils face, it is clear that parents and pupils share a different viewpoint and feel there to be room for improvement in these areas.

Whilst the majority of Autistic young people told us they enjoyed going to, and were happy when at school, a large proportion told of the heightened anxiety a school day can generate. Those attending specialist settings were notably more content than those in mainstream, and there were also clear gender differences to be found in the experiences discussed. Parental reports also pointed to a significant difference in the experiences of those attending mainstream and specialist settings, with most indicating a greater overall satisfaction with the specialist provision experience.

The author of this report will continue detailed analysis of all responses and endeavour to set out a comprehensive set of conclusions to support any recommendations for moving forward upon completion of this project.

Swansea University
Prifysgol Abertawe

The Swansea University School of Education (SUSE) is determined to be an internationally recognised, but also Welsh, centre for high quality educational research. SUSE is already engaged in a wide range of research activities, including collaborative projects at national and international level.

SUSE aspires to be a leading research centre with a strong focus on policy and practice. It is internationally connected and is establishing itself to be a centre of excellence nationally and internationally.

All SUSE academic staff hold doctorates and are research active. The research profile of the department represents both a breadth and depth of interests within the field of education and those holding more senior posts have an international research profile.

Acknowledgements and thanks

The author would like to acknowledge the fantastic support of Ms Delyth Williams and her ongoing efforts in ensuring translations of all materials relating to this project are available in the Welsh language.

The author would also like to thank the following:

Dr Gareth Noble and Ms Rachel Church for the encouragement to embark upon this project and the conviction in its validity.

Drs Cathryn Knight and Helen Lewis, the project supervisors for their continued support and invaluable advice to get the project to this stage.

The parents and their children who tried out the layout and questions within the surveys and gave valuable feedback.

All the participants who took part in the surveys, your responses have been truly amazing, and those who took the time to share the details of each survey to ensure the project attracted responses from every Local Authority area in Wales.

The Education of Autistic Pupils in Wales
Preliminary Report 2021

Steffan Davies MSc
Swansea University School of Education
[redacted]

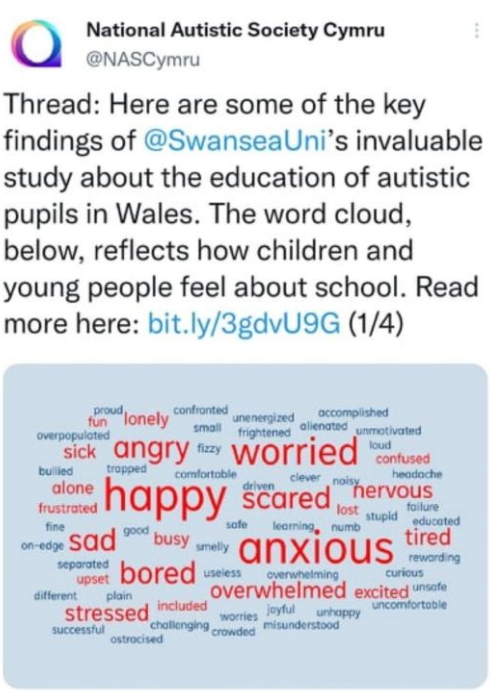
School of Education. Keir Hardie Building, Swansea University, Singleton Park, Swansea, SA2 8PP

Appendix 5

Early impact of the study following the publication of the Preliminary Report Document

As discussed in Chapter 8, following publication of the preliminary report there was much interest and discussion around the findings. Here, you can find further detail and links to some of the key reflections and reactions, outlined within the conclusion.

On publication of the preliminary report on 31st January 2022, the National Autistic Society Cymru tweeted a thread promoting the document.



On the 8th of February 2022, Mark Isherwood MS made a Business Statement in the Senedd, asking for a government response to the findings as published within the Preliminary report.

Link to Senedd TV video of Mark Isherwood's call for a statement in response to the preliminary report:

http://www.senedd.tv/Meeting/Clip/1e943451-daa7-4e5c-93bb-a86505d23e1d?inPoint=01:14:35&outPoint=01:16:51

Full transcript:

08/02/2022 14:44:48 / Mark Isherwood MS

I call for a statement on the education of autistic pupils in Wales. Two weeks ago, Swansea University's school of education issued a statement regarding its preliminary report on the education of autistic pupils in Wales. Its findings include that over three quarters of autistic pupils said that being in school causes increased anxiety, three in four said they had been the victim of bullying, over half thought they were not getting enough help during the school day, and a third felt their teacher did not understand them. One in three parents whose children attend mainstream settings said they were unhappy with the school, in comparison to four in five of those in specialist provision being happy with their child's setting. Parents told them that one in three children with a statement of educational need was not given all support or provision detailed within the document. Ninety per cent of educators have experience of working with autistic pupils, and they felt their local authority had been generally unsupportive. And four out of five parents and nearly three quarters of parents whose children currently have a statement said neither their local authority nor their child's school had given them any information about the introduction of the new additional learning needs code and what it means for their child. This reflects my own high case load in this area, with those officers who have previously refused to understand autism continuing to do so, causing pain and blaming the parents. I call for a statement accordingly.

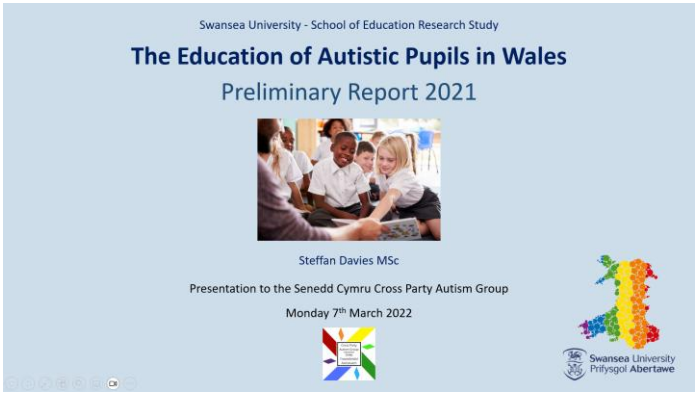
(https://record.senedd.wales/Plenary/12616#C407537)

08/02/2022 14:46:26 / Lesley Griffiths MS – Ministerial response

Thank you. I know the Member does take a very close interest in this topic, and the Minister for education and his officials will look very closely at the report. It's important that a child receives the correct and appropriate education, and it's very important that, as Ministers, we listen to such experts. And the Minister and his officials will obviously consider the next steps from the report.

(https://record.senedd.wales/Plenary/12616#C407497)

On the 8th of March 2022, I gave a presentation to the Senedd Cross-Party Autism Group, summarising the findings of the Preliminary Report, and discussing the possible next steps in the research.



The PDF file of the presentation slides can be accessed at the following link:

https://swanseauniversity-my.sharepoint.com/:b:/g/personal/856614_swansea_ac_uk/EXREDDOCILBJo6jgnanCKxQBSpeBSxolpoFCU0q2vmy0Og?e=btc1uH

In his '90 second statement' to the Senedd, on the 30th of March 2022, marking World Autism Acceptance Week, Mark Isherwood MS again makes reference to the Preliminary Report

Link to Senedd TV video of Mark Isherwood's statement to mark Autism Acceptance Week:

http://www.senedd.tv/Meeting/Clip/ad4e7a2c-35cb-4a9e-882f-8ef517b2ebc6?inPoint=02:00:50&outPoint=02:02:54

Full transcript:

30/03/2022 15:31:22 / Mark Isherwood MS

This week marks World Autism Acceptance Week, which aims to help change attitudes towards autistic people. The National Autistic Society, which is marking its sixtieth year, wants everyone to understand autism better, and highlights the top five things that autistic people and families themselves want the public to know: that autistic people may feel anxiety about changes or unexpected events; experience sensory sensitivity, being either under or over sensitive to sounds, smells, light, taste and touch; they may need extra time to process information such as questions or instructions; face high levels of anxiety in social situations and have difficulties communicating and interacting with other people.

There are an estimated 30,000 or more autistic people in Wales, and although almost everyone has heard of autism, too few people understand what it's actually like to be autistic and how hard life can be if autistic people don't have the right support. Although diagnosis can be life-changing, helping explain who you are, thousands of children and adults in Wales are waiting many months or even years for assessment. A recent study found that only 28 per cent of autistic pupils in Wales felt their teachers understood autism, and new Office for National Statistics data suggests that just 29 per cent of autistic people are in any form of work. Without support, many autistic people develop mental health problems, sometimes to the point of crisis. This is why World Autism Acceptance Week is so important. Diolch.

(https://record.senedd.wales/Plenary/12802#C419278)

In an email dated 4th of May 2022, Huw Davies, an Estyn inspector requests a meeting to discuss the Preliminary Report, as part of his fact-finding investigation for a thematic report on the preparedness of local authorities and schools for the implementation of the ALN reform.

DAVIES S. (856614)

From: Huw Davies <[redacted]>
Sent: 04 May 2022 12:04
To: DAVIES S. [redacted]
Subject: The education of autistic children in Wales

Importance: High
Sensitivity: Confidential

Bore da Steffan

I trust that this email finds you well?

I recently read your report with interest. Would it be possible to arrange a meeting to discuss your findings in a little more detail. The Minister for Education and Welsh Language has asked Estyn to report on how well prepared local authorities and schools are in implementing ALN reform. Whilst I am at the very early stages of planning this there are aspects of your report that could be useful in informing our approach and lines of enquiry.

Cofion cynnes / Kind regards

[redacted]

Huw Davies

Arolygydd Ei Mawrhydi Dros Addysg A Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru / Her Majesty's Inspector of Education and Training in Wales
Arolygydd cyswllt: consortiwm rhanbarthol ac awdurdod lleol / Link Inspector: regional consortium and local authority

Estyn
Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi Dros Addysg A Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
Her Majesty's Inspectorate For Education and Training in Wales

Cyfeiriad: Llys Angor, Heol Keen, Caerdydd, CF24 5JW
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Ebost/Email: [redacted]

huwdaviesestyn
@EstynAEM / @EstynHMI
Estyn AEM / Estyn HMI

Mae Estyn yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg a Saesneg. Bydd gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn y naill iaith neu'r llall yn cael yr un flaenoriaeth.
Estyn welcomes correspondence in both English and Welsh. Correspondence received in either language will be given equal priority.

*"Pwyllwch cyn argraffu" - **Ystyriwch yr amgylchedd cyn i chi argraffu'r neges e-bost hon.***
*"Think before you Print" - **Please consider the environment before printing this email.***

In a 'Senedd Short Debate' considering 'Pathways from referrals to diagnosis and beyond: the challenges of living with autism and other neurodivergent conditions', Caerphilly MS Hefin David, makes specific reference to some of the data reported within the Preliminary Report.

11th May 2022

Link to Senedd TV video of Hefin David's Short Debate referencing the preliminary report:

http://www.senedd.tv/Meeting/Clip/b0c18a9b-0204-44aa-ac83-e430406ab60e?inPoint=04:35:26&outPoint=04:36:39

Partial transcript

11/05/2022 17:27:32 / Hefin David MS

…One thing I want to say about many of the cases that are coming across my desk and people I'm meeting at the surgeries, people I'm meeting at Sparrows, is schools, and how their children experience schools. Exclusion is a huge thing. I was sent by Steffan Davies, who's a PhD student at Swansea University, this report that many of you may have been sent, which is 'The Education of Autistic Pupils in Wales'. It's well worth a read because it's the preliminary findings of his PhD study, and in it there's a stark statistic that I think we need to be aware of, and that is that 76 per cent of autistic children and young people in the survey told them they'd been bullied in school. And not only that, 20 per cent of parents told the survey that their child had been temporarily externally excluded. And half of the parents of boys who had experienced fixed-term exclusions say that schools had given the reason that they were unable to manage their child's behaviours, with disruptive behaviour being the second most common reason…

11/05/2022 17:44:05 / Julie Morgan MS Deputy Minister for Social Services

… Another key area of feedback from parents is support in schools, and that has been mentioned and Hefin mentioned that very powerfully today. I was very struck by the figures: 76 per cent of autistic children bullied in school; 20 per cent exclusions. I really feel that we have to address this issue. The role of education in supporting neurodiverse children and young people is absolutely crucial. We're working closely with education colleagues, who are delivering improvements through the additional learning needs reform, to ensure the needs of neurodiverse children and young people are recognised, and that staff have knowledge and skills to support them…

(https://record.assembly.wales/Plenary/12840#C424136)

Following my presentation to the Senedd's CPAG, Mark Isherwood MS wrote to the Minister for Education and the Welsh Language, Jeremy Miles MS, asking for a response. The following letter, dated 26th of May 2022, was received, in reply.

Jeremy Miles AS/MS
Gweinidog y Gymraeg ac Addysg
Minister for Education and Welsh Language

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref JMEWL/00912/22

Mark Isherwood MS
Member of the Senedd for North Wales
Senedd Cymru
Ty Hywel
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1SN
Mark.isherwood@senedd.wales

26 May 2022

Dear Mark,

Thank you for your letter of 25 April drawing the Welsh Government's attention to research undertaken by the University of Swansea into the education of autistic pupils in Wales.

We welcome the preliminary report from Swansea University which contains a considerable amount of information about the experiences of autistic learners, parents and educators in Wales. The research will be helpful in informing policy development and practice aimed at ensuring a more inclusive education system, and we look forward to reading the final report.

We are aware of the many challenges faced by learners with autism and their families every day and are committed to creating an inclusive education system where all children and young people are able to access a high standard of education and reach their full potential.

As part of our education reforms we are introducing a new additional learning needs (ALN) system which came in to force in September 2021 and is gradually being implemented over the next three years. This will replace the current special educational needs system.

Through a unified legislative framework each child or young person with ALN, regardless of their level of need, will have their views, wishes and feelings identified early and placed at the heart of the process to identify and meet their needs. The new system also ensures that learners aged 0-25, who require additional support to meet an ALN, have that support properly planned for and protected in a single statutory plan called an Individual Development Plan (IDP). We have also strengthened children's rights with clear routes to take if there are disputes. The ALN and Education Tribunal Act 2018, which underpins the new system, is accompanied by statutory guidance in the ALN Code for Wales. A factsheet has been published for children, young people, parents and carers which provides further information about the new system, together with a frequently asked questions document.

By putting the learner at the centre of the process to identify and meet their needs, the ALN system aims to ensure early identification of needs and early intervention. The introduction of the ALN system and improved professional development for all teaching staff is intended to lead to greater awareness and understanding of ALN in the classroom. We recognise that good quality teaching will ensure that a range of teaching approaches are deployed to meet the diverse range of pupils' needs.

Much of our work on the new ALN system has focused on developing the skills of the education workforce, as we know how important this is to ensuring learners get the support they need whilst in school and college. As well as developing training on the new ALN system for all interested parties and those in statutory and senior leadership roles, we have developed a national ALN professional learning programme. This online programme is aimed at ALN Co-ordinators who provide a strategic leadership role under the new system and are the first port of call for professional advice and guidance in schools and colleges. The ALN professional learning programme is also open to other interested teachers and lecturers so they too can develop their ability to support learners with ALN. In addition, practitioners can opt to take their studies to a higher level by pursuing an ALN pathway on the National Masters in Education (Wales).

In addition to our work to support all learners with ALN, the Welsh Government funds the National Autism Team (NAT) to provide support to improve the lives of autistic people in Wales. The NAT website contains a number of resources, developed in partnership with autistic people, parents and carers and professionals, aimed at key stages of education. I have embedded a link to the education page of the NAT website here.

These resources are aimed at increasing the knowledge, skills, and understanding of autism of those working in early years settings, primary and secondary schools, further education establishments, and work based learning provision. They also help address many of the barriers that an autistic learner may face. The Welsh Government have also published a guide to effective interventions for learners with autism in education settings.

The NAT are committed to increasing the awareness of the resources that they have made available and have also published this information on the Hwb website. Hwb is an online learning platform for teachers and pupils. It has free apps and software, virtual classrooms, and a bank of materials for use in the classroom or online with pupils. For example, the NAT resource - "Learning with Autism (3 to 11-years-old)" is a package of resources for primary schools including Foundation Phase settings that can be used together to make the whole school autism aware. It includes training films for teachers and downloadable information for pupils.

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

Jeremy Miles AS/MS

Similar contact was made with Owen Evans, ESTYN Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales, his response was received in a letter dated the 13th of June 2022.

Estyn

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

Mark Isherwood MS
Chair, Cross Party Autism Group
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

13 June 2022

Dear Mark

Many thanks for drawing our attention to the research by Steffan Davies about the education of autistic children and young people in Wales. We are aware of his report, but I am grateful to you for raising this matter. I agree with you that it represents an important contribution to the evidence that we have concerning the educational experiences of this group of young people.

As you indicate, the report raises a number of issues relevant to our work as an inspectorate. While we routinely consider the experience of children and young people with autism in our inspections of schools and post-16 sectors, we generally report on this within the broad context of additional learning needs, rather than through a specific focus on autism. This is also the case for other groups of pupils with additional needs or requirements, for example, those with sensory impairments, physical disabilities or social, emotional and mental health difficulties. The exception to this is in our reports of maintained and independent special schools, pupil referral units, and independent specialist colleges where the specific context of these settings may promote a more differentiated approach.

In this light, your suggestion of a thematic review seems a sensible one if we wished to gather a more comprehensive evidence base in this area. As you are doubtless aware, the subject of these reviews is agreed in advance with the Minister and his team to reflect and inform the development of national policy. However, I would certainly be willing to raise your proposal with the Minister for future consideration. You may be aware that we will be looking at progress in implementation of the ALN reforms over the coming year. Although, that work will not focus specifically on how the reforms are impacting for children and young people with autism, I will ensure that this research informs the work of the review team.

Thank you once again for raising this important research with me.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]

Owen Evans
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of
Education and Training in Wales

Estyn, Llys Angor/Anchor Court, Heol Keen/Keen Road, Caerdydd/Cardiff, CF24 5JW
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Mae Estyn yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg a Saesneg. Bydd gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn y naill iaith neu'r llall yn cael yr un flaenoriaeth.

Estyn welcomes correspondence in both English and Welsh. Correspondence received in either language will be given equal priority.

On the 27th of June 2022, Welsh language current affairs programme 'Y Byd Ar Bedwar' featured the challenges faced by parents of Autistic children and young people in trying to secure a Welsh language education for their children. The findings of the preliminary report featured heavily throughout the programme, broadcast on S4C.

https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0cdrzs8

Mae 10K o blant awtistig yn mynychu ein hysgolion, ond oes digon o adnoddau Cymraeg ac ati ar gael i ddysgu plant gyda'r cyflwr? Edrychwn ar y ddarpariaeth ar gyfer awtistiaeth mewn addysg cyfrwng Cymraeg.

10K autistic children attend our schools, but are there enough Welsh resources etc. available to teach children with the condition? We look at provision for autism in Welsh-medium education.

On the 23rd of September 2022, I was invited to present the findings of the Preliminary Report at the Autistic Minds Live Show in Cardiff, the largest Autism conference in Wales.

12.45		**Steffan Davies** (research graduate)	**Education of autistic pupils in Wales**	A PhD student at Swansea University School of Education researching the education of Autistic pupils in Wales, a key finding of which was that around 1/4 of autistic pupils in Wales have experienced exclusion at school by the time they reach 18. Steffan presents an overview of his findings published in the Swansea University Preliminary Report into the Education of Autistic Pupils in Wales.

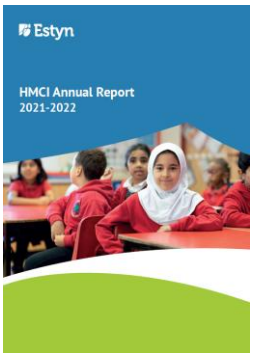
The presentation slides can be downloaded from the following link:

https://swanseauniversity-my.sharepoint.com/:b:/g/personal/856614_swansea_ac_uk/EXGKZHTeq2FFnHA8AUv-LC8BaBwfSdy1J4RolWJw1GYB6g?e=fIKoOT

A recording of the presentation is available through the Autistic Minds Website:

https://autisticminds.org.uk/how-we-can-help/autistic-minds-live/autistic-minds-live-cardiff-2022-seminars-and-talks/?fbclid=IwAR3zqzVt8ykPQWpmyh2DhVxVbKbKEPXh2egZ5H-Yj-DCpA8IEnYsTPRn10w#Steffan

Estyn Chief Inspector's Annual Report 2021-22



Within his annual report, Estyn Chief Inspector Owen Evans references the findings of the study, highlighting the contrast between parent and pupil satisfaction amongst those attending mainstream or specialist provisions.

Extract from page 58 of the report:

> In a preliminary report titled 'The Education of Autistic Pupils in Wales', Davies noted that many parents of pupils with autism that attended specialist settings, including special schools, were happy with the school (Davies, 2021). This contrasts starkly with the 46% of parents that were happy with mainstream schools. These results broadly align with those provided by parents in our pre-inspection questionnaires.

The full Estyn report can be downloaded from the following link:

https://annual-report.estyn.gov.wales/