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Inclusion: Using Pupil Voice to Explore and Improve the Experience of Pupils with Special Educational Needs in a Mainstream Secondary School.

This thesis is submitted for the Degree of EdD

Institute of Education

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Declaration

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

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December 2016

Abstract

This doctorate is a case study undertaken in an all girls' comprehensive school where the author is the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo). The research set out to use pupil voice to explore the experience of 13 pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in a mainstream secondary school. Although, this is a small scale research project the intention was that by asking the pupils about their experiences, examples of good practice would be identified as well as areas for improvement. Therefore, the aim of this research was to provide another dimension, pupil voice, to improve provision for the pupils currently at the school, as well as for future pupils or for pupils in similar situations at other schools.

The research revealed that although pupils had very personalised experiences there were a number of common themes. Pupils were able to offer insight into the extent that they felt part of the school community as a whole and the reasons behind this. They also commented on the support which they received, both academically and pastorally, as well as giving recommendations for others. Finally, pupils commented on the importance of having ownership of making and maintaining friendships, without adult interventions.

The findings show that the reasons that pupils with SEN felt part of the school, focussed on involvement in wider school life, including extra-curricular activities and relationships with adults and friends. In general, the pupils were happy with their in-class support from TAs and teachers, as well as interventions outside of the classroom with specialist teachers.

The research concludes that by giving pupils with SEN a voice, they can feel more valued and more confident. Similarly, teachers and the school can benefit by being able to identify areas of good practice and areas which require improvement, from a pupil perspective.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Improvement in schools often comes from implementing policies, which are directed at a national level. Recently, there has been an increasing focus on improving the experience of pupils with Special Educational Needs, culminating in the introduction of the 2014 Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice. Although there is merit in standardising and implementing minimum standards of provision, what is less clear is what that looks like for individuals affected by these policies. This thesis will explore the educational experience of pupils with SEN in a mainstream secondary school, from the point of view of the pupils themselves. Specifically, this chapter will introduce the aims of the research, explain the rationale behind the research and provide a brief summary of the school context.

1.1. Research Aims

The aim of this research is to explore and subsequently improve the experience of pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in a mainstream secondary school. I have chosen to only explore the views of pupils with SEN, due to my current role in school and also to time constraints. My argument is that pupils with SEN are entitled to have the same opportunity of inclusion in a mainstream school as their peers, although, this does not imply that SEN pupils are more entitled to be included than anyone else. The research could have investigated the experience of any pupils regarding inclusion but as a Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) my role is primarily to support pupils with SEN. The aim is that by using pupil voice, barriers to learning would be identified, as well as examples of good practice and effective provision, and suggested improvements. It was expected that pupils are likely to comment on a number of areas from accessibility of the school site to the individual

provision, which they receive. As the research questions concern all aspects of inclusion in the school community, it was anticipated that pupils would focus upon issues to do with pastoral care, social interaction and communication, between both pupils and staff. Although every child and every circumstance is different, the hope was that by consulting pupils with SEN, Belmont School¹ will be able to identify good practice, barriers to and solutions for pupils with a range of different special educational needs being fully included in a mainstream secondary school. Therefore, it is the intention that elements of the findings will be useful to the inclusion of pupils with SEN in other mainstream secondary schools and also elements of primary school provision.

1.2. Research Question

What do pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) think about their experiences in a mainstream secondary school?

Part A: What do the participants feel are the factors behind pupils with SEN feeling included in the school community?

Part B: How can provision for pupils with SEN be improved?

1.3. Rationale

I have worked at Belmont School since 2003, as a teacher of English and since 2007, as the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo). Over the years, the range of pupil

¹ Belmont School will be used as a pseudonym for the school in the study.

disabilities has changed significantly, to include pupils with Statements of Educational Need (Statements) for moderate to severe and global learning difficulties, physical and profound sensory impairments and autistic spectrum disorders. An important element of the SENCo role is to ensure that pupils have access to both the site and the curriculum. Over the years, adaptations and modifications of the site have been made to accommodate pupils with differing needs and although slight adjustments need to be made when new pupils start the school, at the moment this is not the main priority. Similarly, there are interventions in place to ensure that pupils receive effective academic support and the SENCo continues to share information on the needs of individual pupils with SEN and suggest ways to help those pupils to access the curriculum. However, a particular area of interest is whether pupils with SEN feel fully included in the school community or whether more could be done to support their social interaction.

Effective communication is a vital part of successful inclusion and there are many people who can offer advice, including parents, primary schools and external agencies. However, in order to find out how the pupils feel about their experiences of school it is necessary to ask the pupils themselves. From past experience of consulting pupils with SEN, it has become apparent that they are often able to problem-solve, especially as they get older and can offer advice, not only on issues relating to themselves but also to younger pupils with conditions similar to their own. There are of course exceptions to this, mainly pupils with exceptional learning needs who have difficulty expressing themselves or their needs. Another observation is the positive effect on pupils when they are consulted about decisions which impact them directly. Pupils who have previously been reluctant to try new interventions, for example, have been more willing to try new things if they think that their concerns will be listened to and acted upon.

In a mainstream school where only a small percentage of pupils have a need which requires a Statement or Education, Health and Care Plan (EHC), there is the possibility that due to a lack of prior experience or knowledge, certain barriers to learning or inclusion may not be identified in advance or possibly even at all. Similarly, there may be barriers that have been identified but an appropriate way to overcome them has not been found. Consulting the pupils provides more opportunities to anticipate problems and to find possible solutions.

1.4. School Context

Belmont School is an all girls' comprehensive in the South East of England and, according to the most recent OFSTED Report, it is a larger than average 11-18 girls' comprehensive, with just under 1200 pupils. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is below the national average. As of February 2014, there were approximately 155 girls on the Special Educational Needs Register of whom 22 pupils have a Statement² and the remainder, the school classes as requiring SEN Support, meaning that they require focussed interventions, in order to access the same curriculum as their peers. Pupils have Statements ranging from 15 hours to 39 hours of support, in most cases, the number of hours on the Statement, relates to the number of hours that there is a TA in the classroom to support the pupil. However, there are exceptions. For example, some pupils have one-to-one sessions with a specialist literacy teacher. In addition, pupils with a visual impairment have support time hours allocated which is used for adapting and modifying written resources. The appropriateness of the provision is assessed at an annual review of the Statement which is

² At the time of writing Statements of Educational Need (Statements) are in the process of transferring to Education, Health and Care Plans (EHC Plans). Therefore the term Statement will be used.

held at least once a year for each pupil, to ensure that any necessary changes are made to the Statement. These reviews are attended by the pupil, parents/carers and relevant outside agencies involved with the pupil.

The level of support differs, depending on the needs of individual pupils but it is important to understand that all Statemented pupils have some in class support from a teaching assistant (TA) to allow them to access the curriculum but also to gain independence. Therefore, in most situations, the TA is also able to support other members of the class, primarily those who are classed as having AEN. At Belmont School, when timetabling the TA hours, curriculum subjects that may pose a health and safety risk are always covered first, followed by core subjects and then other areas where the individual pupil experiences the highest level of difficulty.

Outside agencies offer additional support for some of the pupils with SEN at Belmont School. Support for Visually Impaired (VI) and Hearing Impaired (HI) pupils comes from regular meetings and monitoring from the Sensory Consortium, an agency which supports pupils with a severe or profound visual or hearing impairment. This provides specialist teachers who observe pupils in lessons to monitor progress and give advice to pupils and teachers. Occupational therapists and physiotherapists regularly visit the school to reassess pupils, give advice on exercises, discuss transition issues and test/adjust equipment.

Similarly, the specialist autism service supports pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) as and when required. Therefore, Belmont School is a mainstream secondary school with a diverse group of pupils whose needs are met by members of school staff, as well as specialist teachers.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

This chapter will define the terms and then, focussing on the literature which has a direct impact on the experiences of pupils with SEN attending mainstream schools at present, will briefly explore the history of inclusion in order to provide context for the study. Factors affecting inclusion are then discussed and finally the chapter investigates the notion of ‘pupil voice’. This section begins with a short explanation of the practice of using pupil voice³, followed by a discussion of the benefits of using pupil voice and suggestions of ways to ensure that it is used effectively. The chapter concludes with findings and emergent themes from research drawing on the voices of pupils with SEN to research their inclusion in mainstream settings.

2.1. Definitions

This section will define the three key terms used in the research: Special Educational Needs (SEN), inclusion and pupil voice.

2.1.1. SEN

The first term defined is SEN, which refers to children who have special educational needs or a disability. According to the 1996 Education Act, Section 312:

‘A child has special educational needs if he has a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for him’ and ‘a child has a learning

³ As key authors refer to ‘the pupil voice approach’ as pupil voice, this will be the term used throughout this thesis

difficulty if he has significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age (HMSO, 1996: 177).

Similarly, the SEN Code of Practice's definition, '*A child or young person has SEN if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her*' (DfE & DoH, 2015: 15) states that as well as having a learning difficulty, a pupil with SEN may have a disability, which affects the way that they access the same educational facilities as their peers in the Local Authority (LA) (Lupton, 2010).

Although there are a variety of definitions for this term, the definition used in this thesis will be from the most recent literature, which defines pupils classified as having SEN, if they have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than their peers or have a disability which prevents or hinders them from accessing educational facilities in the same way as their peers (DfE & DoH, 2015).

In January 2016 the number of pupils in England with SEN and a Statement or EHC Plan was approximately 2.8 % (DfE, 2016). As '*the group identified as having SEN is not itself a homogenous group with a common identity*' (Lloyd, 2008: 228), pupils with very diverse forms of SEN often find themselves grouped together in classes and schools. Cassen and Kingdon (2007) suggest that the types of SEN most likely to affect outcomes in education are: specific, moderate and severe learning difficulties; social, emotional and behavioural; autistic spectrum and multi-sensory disorders. Other categories such as speech and language and communication needs, visual impairment, hearing impairment and physical disability are often not associated with low performance as these pupils do not necessarily have learning difficulties (Cassen and Kingdon, 2007).

However, this definition is not the only thing impacting the way we determine whether children have special educational needs. At the time of this research, there have been major changes to UK SEN policy, with the publication of the 2014 Children and Families Act and a new SEN Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015; HMSO, 2014). These changes have meant a reclassification of SEN which will come into effect over a three year period. Up until September 2014, SEN pupils were categorised in one of three ways. Firstly, pupils with the highest level of need had a Statement of Educational Need from the LA. The second category School Action Plus (SAP) referred to those pupils who had been assessed by external agencies but who had not received a Statement. In the third category were those pupils who were identified by their individual schools as lacking in progress in learning or development as compared to their peer group. These pupils were considered to be in need of School Action (SA). Schools differed in their provision and identification of SEN pupils, especially at SA level where there was some variation (Croll, 2002). As of September 2014, pupils with a Statement will be reassessed to see whether they are eligible to receive an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHC Plan). The assessment for a Statement or an EHC Plan is similar, so the expectation is that no pupil with a Statement will lose their existing provision as long as the provision is still relevant and required (DfE & DoH, 2015). It is too early in this transition to know whether this change will have an impact on the number of pupils identified, so during this transitional period, both sets of terminology can be encountered in current literature and therefore in this thesis.

2.1.2. Inclusion

The second term defined is inclusion. Before defining it, it is important to have an understanding and recognition that diversity is important in today's society. As Cairns and McClatchey (2013: 125) point out, '*Inclusive education and the acceptance of difference is*

an issue not just within the UK but across the world'. However, in relation to pupils with SEN, the need for inclusion is particularly acute and can easily be mistaken for the lesser objective of '*integration*' (Cairns and McClatchey, 2013: 124). A mainstream school might demonstrate integration if it includes a specialist unit on site, allowing for pupils with SEN to interact with their non-SEN peers outside classes, for example at break and lunchtime. With integration, minimal contact occurs with mainstream pupils: by contrast, an inclusive school welcomes both pupils with and without SEN into the same classes (Cairns and McClatchey, 2013). This thesis focusses upon the latter principle of inclusion.

According to Booth et al. (2011) and Hornby (2015), inclusion in an educational sense can be defined straightforwardly as valuing all students and staff, ensuring that all pupils are included in the school community, culture and curriculum:

'Inclusive education is generally considered to be a multi-dimensional concept that includes the celebration and valuing of difference and diversity, consideration of human rights, social justice and equity issues, as well as of a social model of disability and a socio-political model of education' (Hornby, 2015: 235).

The term is both subtle and complex, as Miles and Singal (2009) state there is often confusion over the definition of inclusion. They cite Ainscow et al. (2006) who observe that there are six different ways of thinking about inclusion of which the inclusion of pupils with SEN is one type. Hodkinson (2010) also suggests that when discussing inclusion, we should think about all groups that could be excluded and not just pupils with SEN:

'Inclusion from this perspective would relate to special needs as well as to gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, age, culture and social class' (Hodkinson, 2010: 62).

Hodkinson (2010) argues that:

'It would seem apparent that if we are to develop a truly inclusive society, interest groups must not be allowed to seize inclusion as a flag to rally around in the promotion of their individual causes and ideologies' (Hodkinson, 2010: 62).

2.1.3. Pupil Voice

The third term explored is eliciting 'pupil voice' or 'student voice'. Both terms are synonymous but, for the purpose of this research, the term pupil voice will be used, due to the fact that the children at the secondary school in the study are referred to as pupils and not students. Pupil voice means giving children the opportunity to express their views, listening to them and acting accordingly (Riley and Docking, 2010).

Doddington et al. (2000) advocate the importance of having a voice, suggesting that:

'Being listened to, having your views and ideas taken seriously, making decisions on matters affecting your life and well-being: these are fundamental rights in any democratic society' (Doddington et al., 2000: 46).

Therefore creating space and opportunity for the voices of pupils in school enables them to express their opinions and to make decisions which affect their educational experiences (Wright, 2008). There are several dimensions to the term which will be discussed in Section 2.3. in more detail.

According to Fielding (2004) all pupils, both with and without SEN, benefit from being given a say in decisions which concern them and this practice can encompass:

'a range of activities that encourage reflection, discussion, dialogue and action on matters that primarily concern students, but also, by implication, school staff and the community they serve' (Fielding, 2004: 199).

However, Hodkinson (2010) discovered that this practice was variable and often pupils with SEN in particular are not always consulted:

‘Regrettably, though, it is becoming apparent that some children’s voices are being drowned out by inclusion policies dominated by adults’ (Hodkinson, 2010: 63).

This section has defined the key terms of SEN, inclusion and pupil voice, which will be referred to in this thesis. The following section explores key factors, which have had an impact on the educational experience of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools.

2.2. Inclusion: The Policy Context

This section will explore the key themes relating to the inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools. Firstly, the right to have the choice to attend a mainstream school will be explored. This will be followed by an investigation into provision and resources required in order for the needs of a pupil with SEN to be met. There will then be a section on the different ways in which pupils with SEN require additional support so that they can effectively participate in a mainstream classroom. This is followed by a section on issues concerning achievement of pupils with SEN and the final section discusses Self-Determination Theory and the importance of pupils with SEN being accepted as part of the whole school community.

The first point to be explored is the right of pupils with SEN to be educated in mainstream schools. As a result of policy reforms over the last thirty years, pupils with SEN have benefitted from increased entitlements. For example, the pupils in the research attend a school in an LA which, is required to provide mainstream places for all pupils wherever

possible (HMSO, 1981) so they enjoy access to a broad and balanced curriculum. In this section, the national policy context is outlined and illustrated with reference to Belmont School. The focus of this study is upon pupils with a Statement and their experience regarding inclusion in a mainstream secondary school. Therefore, it is useful to consider the background to inclusion in the education system of England and Wales, which will have had an impact on the educational provision of these pupils. The right of pupils with SEN to attend mainstream schools will be explored followed by the necessary provision required to do this, both financially and in the form of resources. Another aspect to be considered is the participation of pupils with SEN regarding the curriculum and also the impact on achievement of both SEN pupils and their peers. As well as academic inclusion, social inclusion and acceptance of pupils with SEN by both other pupils and school staff will also be explored.

2.2.1. Attendance in Mainstream Schools

The first issue considered, stemming directly from the Warnock Report (Warnock et al., 1978) is the right of the pupils in the study to attend a mainstream school. Pupils with SEN are likely to require more help than other pupils when transferring from one school to another. A process of consultation between the schools, parents and the pupil ensure that the secondary school has enough time to prepare to include the pupil with SEN in the same way which all pupils are included (DfE & DoH, 2015). For pupils currently at Belmont School, this process has enabled the school to adapt its buildings, for example with the installation of a disabled toilet and hoist and also to order and purchase specialist equipment to meet specific pupils' requirements.

However, historically it has not always been the case that all pupils with SEN have had the opportunity to be included in mainstream schools. The question of integration and inclusion in education did not emerge until the 1970s, culminating with the Warnock Report of 1978 (Warnock et al., 1978). For the first time it was suggested in print that every child could be educated and in addition, it was recommended that, wherever practical, pupils with SEN should be educated in a mainstream setting (Shah et al., 2004). This requirement foreshadowed the SEN and Disability Act (HMSO, 2001) which allows for parental choice of placement in a mainstream school, as long as the school can meet the needs of the pupil and that it does not negatively affect the provision of other pupils (Shah et al., 2004). This is still currently the case and is the reason that a number of pupils at Belmont School now have the choice to be educated in a mainstream setting whereas previously they may have attended a special school or unit. At the turn of the century, commentators were noting that:

‘there are now more disabled children educated in mainstream schools than was the case in the past, disabled children are sitting public examinations, and moving on into further and higher education’ (Davis and Watson, 2010: 671).

It is important that the pupils and their parents understand that they have the same right as any other child to an education suitable to their needs and that pupils have a voice to express their preferences (Cigman, 2006). The pupils in the study attend a mainstream school and according to Shah et al. (2004), this is appropriate for the majority of pupils with SEN. However, there may still be occasions where even with the additional support of TAs in class or through withdrawal from the classroom for additional interventions it is not possible to make mainstream school appropriate for some pupils with SEN (Evans and Lunt, 2002; Hornby, 2015). Hornby (2015) suggests that in order to provide effective provision for all pupils with SEN a new theory of, *‘inclusive special education’* (Hornby, 2015: 235) needs to be developed, which would integrate elements of special education and inclusive education.

Hornby's (2015) proposed theory is underpinned by Salend's (2011) review of the literature regarding inclusive education, which identifies 4 key principles behind inclusion. These principles state that, firstly, all learners have access to a challenging curriculum, secondly, that the pupils' individual strengths are recognised, thirdly that there is differentiation and that practices are reflected upon and finally that there is collaboration between the pupil, parents and all relevant professionals.

According to Runswick-Cole (2011) there is a difference between what policy suggests should happen regarding the education of pupils with SEN and what actually happens in reality and that:

'although there may have been an inclusive education policy rhetoric, this rhetoric is rooted in conceptual incongruities which, rather than promoting inclusion, undermine an inclusive approach to education' (Runswick-Cole, 2011: 112).

Therefore, it is appropriate that research continues to explore inclusive education in practice from those most affected by this practice. The aim of this study is to explore the views of pupils with SEN at a specific secondary school to discover whether they feel that they are receiving an inclusive education.

This section has explored the rights of pupils with SEN to be able to attend mainstream schools. The next section will discuss the support required for SEN pupils in mainstream education.

2.2.2. Providing Support

The second issue explores the types and kinds of support for pupils with SEN. Being given the right to choose to attend either a mainstream or a special school is a beneficial step towards inclusion and the mainstream schools most successful regarding inclusion tend to be those with appropriate support. Successful schools recognise that such provision allows pupils the opportunity to participate both academically and socially (Booth et al., 2011). Support is identified as central by Shah et al. (2004) who describe the difficulties caused by barriers to education. One of the barriers identified in the literature relates to resources, in the form of both staff hours and equipment (Glazzard, 2011). However, it is not just important to provide support but also to discuss support. If pupils do not agree with the interventions in place for them then, however well-intentioned and suited to the pupil's individual need, they are likely to be ineffective and a waste of time and resources which could be used more effectively elsewhere with the pupil's agreement (De Schauwer et al., 2009).

Effective provision also relies upon adequate and well-directed funding and since 2014 the aim is that children and their families will have a greater level of control over this, although this is a very recent phenomenon. This control stems from Chapter 6 Part 3 of the Children and Families Act (HMSO, 2014) which refers to the provision for children and young people in England with a special educational need or disability. The Act explains the LA's responsibility to seek the views, wishes and feelings of the child and their parent at the assessment stage but also in decisions to ongoing provision.

'Children have a right to be involved in making decisions and exercising choices...Children and young people with SEN have unique knowledge of their particular circumstances... They have views on what might be done to remove any barriers to their learning and participation' (HMSO, 2014: 3).

In addition, the Act places greater emphasis on sharing advice and information amongst all those involved, including the pupil.

Previously and as a result of the 1981 Education Act, the LAs are responsible for ensuring that the needs of the individual child are met (HMSO, 1981). According to Shah et al. (2004), this meant that it was the duty of the LAs to ensure that mainstream schooling was available for all pupils wherever possible. In order for some pupils with SEN to be able to attend and achieve in mainstream schools LAs provide funding in the form of Statements. At present, pupils in the study all have a Statement which means that the school receives an amount of money from the LA to provide for each individual pupil. The amount of money depends on the level of each pupil's need and the number of hours on their Statement, which relates to the support from TAs and or specialist teachers which are needed to ensure that the pupil has full access to the National Curriculum.

Although initially schools received additional funding for pupils with SEN, the suggestions in the individual Statements about how the money should be used often came from officials who had limited knowledge of the pupil and also the school setting (Shah et al., 2004). However, the next step in making practice more inclusive came from the 1993 Education Act with the introduction of the SEN Code of Practice which moved the responsibility of meeting the needs of pupils with SEN to schools and classroom teachers as opposed to the LAs. Giving the schools responsibility improved the situation for pupils with SEN, as the schools had a better idea of what was needed on a day to day basis and a better knowledge of both the individual pupil and also of their own school setting (Shah et al., 2004).

The change from Statements to EHC Plans is likely to impact directly on the provision for pupils in the study, firstly because the process of Annual Reviews will become more pupil centred, giving pupils with SEN more of a say in the support that they need to achieve their individual objectives. Also at age 16 pupils will be able to make their own decisions on provision without their parents' agreement, whether they are still at school or at college (DfE & DoH, 2015). One disadvantage of this could be if parents and professionals do not agree with the pupil's decisions.

Changes introduced by the 2014 Children and Families Act (HMSO, 2014) are already having an impact at Belmont School, Year 11 pupils who are considering moving to a college for Sixth Form are the first to move to EHC Plans. Therefore, the pupils are regularly asked about their needs, how they want to be supported in the next stage of their education and the outcomes that they wish to achieve. This will hopefully enable the school and LA to continue to provide appropriate support, whilst the pupils are at college. Previously, a pupil's Statement would have ceased when they left school but the EHC Plan will go with the pupil to college and depending on need could potentially provide support from the LA until the young person is 25 years old.

Although it is too early to assess, the advantages of the new EHC Plan appear to centre on the fact that they will enable a continuation of provision, with increased involvement of the pupil themselves in what they need and want (DfE & DoH, 2015).

This section has explored how funding to provide support can enable pupils with SEN to attend and achieve in mainstream schools. It shows that there is a change in practice due to

the new Code of Practice but did not establish that this had a direct impact on improving provision.

The next section will explore barriers that SEN pupils may experience in the classroom.

2.2.3. Participation in the Classroom

According to Glazzard (2011) not being able to participate in the same activities as their peers is often seen as a barrier to inclusion of pupils with SEN. Pupils may find it difficult to participate equally in more social activities, such as clubs or trips or even by not having friends to be with during break and lunchtime. Similarly, Avramidis and Norwich (2002) reviewed the literature and found that teachers believed that, although it depended on the nature of the child's SEN, it was particularly difficult for pupils with more complex needs to participate in the mainstream classroom in the same way as their peers.

Even though some pupils with SEN may find it more difficult to participate in the classroom, it is the expectation, through legal statute, that all pupils in mainstream secondary schools follow the National Curriculum. Therefore, schools are required to have the same high expectations for all learners allowing them to be able to reach their full potential. However, this stipulation could be seen as a barrier for some pupils with SEN who may find it difficult to access the National Curriculum in the same way as their peers. According to Norwich and Lewis (2007) inappropriate curricular provision may be one reason that pupils with SEN may find it difficult to take part in the mainstream classroom. On the other hand, pupils with SEN are expected to receive individual targets which are assessed regularly and which are drawn from the short and long term objectives on their Statement. Similarly, with the introduction of EHC Plans, these targets will complement the required outcomes of each pupil (DfE & DoH,

2015). Florian (2008) also stresses that, if necessary, teaching and learning can be differentiated by teachers so that it is possible to support all pupils to participate in the lesson, whilst adhering to the National Curriculum. However, Paliokosta and Blandford (2010) state that if teachers do not differentiate or are unable to differentiate then it can be a barrier to inclusion. Similarly, in her study of TA voices, Lehane (2016) found that some TAs felt that teachers did not meet the required standard of inclusive practices, which meant that the TAs, who had a good knowledge of the pupil and their needs, had to differentiate '*on the hoof*' (Lehane, 2016: 11). This can be problematic in two ways, firstly, that the pupils with the most complex needs may end up being instructed by the least qualified and secondly, that if pupils with SEN have less access to the teacher then they may become more dependent on the TA (Lehane, 2016; Blatchford et al., 2013).

If pupils are not able to access the curriculum then they could feel differently from their peers. Interventions put in place may enable pupils to learn more effectively at their own pace but if this means that they are educated outside of the classroom then they may feel that they are not part of the class in another way. According to Webster and Blatchford (2013) pupils with SEN are often taught away from the mainstream classroom by TAs. During these interventions pupils are taught specific skills and strategies but it means that they are not embedded in the mainstream classroom and curriculum and additionally they do not have the same level of access to the teacher as their peers. One of the fundamental principles of The SEN Code (DfES, 2001; DfE & DoH, 2015), is that the education of pupils with SEN will normally be in mainstream settings, where teachers are teachers of all pupils. According to Devecchi and Rouse (2010) collaboration between teachers and TAs can provide effective support for pupils with SEN. However, that collaboration also depends on the relationship with the teacher and time constraints (Lehane, 2016).

Recent studies, such as the Deployment of Impact of Support Staff (DISS) and the Making a Statement (MAST) studies into support for pupils with SEN in mainstream schools, are concerned about interventions which are TA led and outside of the main classroom away from other pupils and the main classroom teacher (Webster and Blatchford, 2013; Blatchford et al., 2013). However, practice varies, not only between schools but also within schools (Glazzard, 2011). At Belmont School it is not usual practice for TAs to work outside the classroom with pupils on one-to-one or small group interventions, however, some pupils work with specialist teachers outside of the classroom on individualised curricula. Wright (2008) suggests that pupils with the most complex needs benefit from individualised and specialist teaching away from the mainstream classroom.

Thus the meaning of inclusion has changed over time and it no longer simply means that all pupils are together in a mainstream environment but it also allows for pupils to be given appropriate opportunities, which are both challenging and relevant and that will prepare them for life. In order to achieve this, relevant support either inside or outside the main classroom may be necessary. Similarly, there are occasions when pupils at Belmont School are educated away from the mainstream classroom, for example when pupils with learning difficulties have weekly one-to-one lessons with a specialist literacy teacher or when pupils are visited by outside agency workers who work with them for a number of hours a term, either within the classroom or on a one-to-one. These interventions are with specialist professionals and are very carefully planned with the aim that pupils do not constantly miss out on subject content or activities which they particularly enjoy. According to Croll (2002) and Wright (2008) withdrawal from the classroom for individual or small group tuition with a specialist teacher either from the school or the LA is the most common form of intervention. Pupils can be withdrawn from lessons in order to meet with professionals such as: speech therapists,

physiotherapists, teachers of the hearing impaired (HI) or the visually impaired (VI) or medical personnel. These interventions do not mean that the pupils are not able to participate in the mainstream classroom and when interviewed it was apparent that the pupils who had one-to-one sessions with specialists, found these very beneficial and they did not comment negatively about being away from their mainstream classes or peers.

Interventions both inside and outside of the classroom are usually more successful when the pupil is consulted and agrees (De Schauwer et al., 2009; Mortier et al., 2011). For example, adults involved may think that sitting in a particular place in the classroom may be in the best interest of the pupil but it may make the pupil feel different from others in the class and therefore they may choose not to engage. By discussing interventions with the pupil they may understand the reasoning behind the situation or the adult may realise that a compromise is required (Norwich and Kelly, 2004). Pupils at Belmont School have opportunities to express their views on their education and how they are able to participate in lessons. Officially the views of pupils with SEN are collected at initial assessment and then at least annually as part of the annual review of their Statement (DfES, 2001; DfE & DoH, 2015). At Belmont School, in accordance with LA guidelines, pupils are required to complete a form, with help if required, where they are questioned about their: strengths, weaknesses, progress and concerns. It is important to note that objectives do not only refer to academic progress and participation in lessons but also to interactions with adults and peers and developing self-esteem and life skills. However, the form is only one-side and does not allow for the same level of detailed response which the pupils will be able to give when being interviewed. Similarly, many of the pupils struggle with the written word so it is hoped that being able to express themselves orally will encourage them to be more open with their views. It is also

hoped that by asking pupils about their experience it will open up a dialogue, between the pupil and adults who arrange their support.

This section has discussed barriers which may affect pupils with SEN being able to participate in a mainstream classroom. However, the literature shows that consulting pupils and with effective support from TAs, teachers and other professionals, pupils with SEN are able to access the curriculum and have a similar educational experience to their peers. With the aim that in an inclusive school all pupils are able to achieve and are prepared for their future lives. The following section will discuss issues around achievement of pupils with SEN.

2.2.4. Achievement

Although not all pupils with SEN are the same, pupils are likely to benefit from support regarding achievement which is tailored to their specific needs. Removing barriers to achievement is divided into four areas: early intervention; removing barriers to learning; raising expectations and achievement and delivering improvements in partnership (Lloyd, 2008). Removing these barriers for an individual pupil is the school's concern but another barrier to inclusion is the way that achievement of pupils with SEN is measured nationally. According to Carrington and Robinson (2006) the education system is based on the 'norms' of society and therefore the question is whether or not pupils with SEN are being included in a system which they may find difficult to succeed in. Lloyd (2008) suggests that in order to be really inclusive the system needs to change its success criteria so that it accounts for all pupils and their abilities. The introduction of provision for pupils from 0-25 through the new EHC Plans, with greater emphasis on the future aspirations of the child will hopefully allow pupils to achieve their goals by following a more flexible approach (DfE & DoH, 2015).

Year on year, mainstream secondary schools have to produce higher academic standards whilst still being encouraged to include more pupils with SEN. This has:

‘enormous implications for school organisation, leadership, teaching styles, curriculum assessment, attitudes and staff deployment’ (Florian et al., 2010: 400).

Booth et al. (2011) state that having high expectations of all staff and pupils is an indicator of establishing inclusive values in a school. However, the pressure that academic accountability places on schools from league tables and reputation may mean that they try not to accept pupils with SEN whose ability or behaviour may affect examination results.

‘This system of accountability should be perceived as one of the most serious challenges that inclusive education is facing’ (Hodkinson, 2010: 64).

Pupils with SEN, *‘understandably comprise a considerable proportion of low achievers’* (Cassen and Kingdon, 2007: Xi). Therefore, it would be expected that schools with higher numbers of pupils with SEN would have lower levels at the General Certificate of Secondary Education examinations (GCSE). Farrell et al. (2007) used the national database from all state schools to investigate whether this was in fact the case. The findings suggested that there was no evidence of schools with a higher number of pupils with SEN achieving a lower level than other schools in their LA.

On the other hand, the Deployment of Impact of Support Staff (DISS) and the Making a Statement (MAST) studies into support for pupils with SEN in mainstream schools, are concerned that pupils with SEN who are supported by interventions from TAs do not necessarily make the academic progress that other pupils who are not supported make (Webster and Blatchford, 2013). Webster and Blatchford (2013) interviewed TAs, SENCOs and parents regarding pupils with SEN. They found that pupils spent a lot of time out of class

on interventions and that although the support was well intentioned it was not closing the attainment gap. The DISS research showed that there were two reasons attributed to this lack of progress, firstly, the lack of appropriate SEN training available and furthermore the fact that TAs were planning and teaching a lot of the interventions as opposed to the teachers. However, progress was only measured regarding academic progress and not behaviour, social interaction or life skills. Similarly, the studies did not question the pupils about the effectiveness of the interventions. Therefore, it is an important focus of this study to ask the views of the participants on the actual interventions and support they receive.

This section has discussed issues surrounding the achievement of pupils with SEN. Pupils who work closely on interventions with TAs are not closing the gap between themselves and their peers. Recent studies suggest that TAs are not always being deployed effectively and that further training for both TAs and teachers is required to improve the situation for pupils with SEN (Lehane, 2016). Therefore, an important focus of this research will look at the views of the participants on their support to see how helpful, or otherwise, they feel it is.

The next section will discuss the importance of pupils with SEN feeling part of the school community.

2.2.6. Being Part of the School Community

School is not merely about academic achievement and engaging in lessons, it is also about the benefits of being part of the whole school community. By exploring issues around acceptance of pupils with SEN by their peers and members of staff, this section will consider the impact of social environments on a pupil's attitudes, values, motivations and behaviours.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a psychological macro-theory which focuses on the impact of social context on a person's motivation and personality (Ryan & Deci, 2000). SDT developed from research into the effects of extrinsic rewards on intrinsic motivation (Van Lange et al., 2011). However, Ryan & Deci (2000) found that what was more important than the actual reward was the interaction with the person giving the reward. They suggest that people have inner focus which develops over time through integrative processes: '*social contexts and communication styles affect motivation, performance, and well-being ...*' (Van Lange et al. 2011: 430). There are 3 main intrinsic needs in SDT: being able to control the outcome, '*competence*', being able to take control, '*autonomy*' and being able to interact and feel cared for, '*psychological relatedness*' (Van Lange et al., 2011: 419). Ryan & Deci (2000) suggest that the '*interpersonal ambience*' of any situation can be '*autonomy, supportive or controlling*', although greater intrinsic motivation comes from an autonomous situation where the person feels freer to develop their own sense of competence (Van Lange et al., 2011: 419). According to SDT, pupils need positive help from their social environment to develop their intrinsic motivation and to actualise their potential, which places more of an onus on pupils with SEN having positive relationships and feeling part of the whole school community.

Tutt (2007) suggests that acceptance of pupils with SEN in mainstream education is dependent on the attitude of society towards inclusion of adults with disabilities in the work place. Similarly, educational reforms have been affected by changing attitudes within society towards disability. The 1995 Disability Discrimination Act upheld the rights of people with disabilities to have a normal life (Disability Discrimination Act, 1995) and The SEN and Disability Act (Special Education Needs and Disability Act, 2001) specifically referred to the

rights of children with a disability, stating that it is the right of all pupils to a mainstream education (Hayward, 2006; Tutt, 2007).

According to Griffiths (2007) inclusion is about the equality of opportunity for all pupils, socially as well as academically:

‘Recent educational debate relating to inclusive practices in the UK reflect a consensus that genuine inclusive education extends way beyond the physical placement of pupils into the mainstream of education’ (Griffiths, 2007: 78).

Inclusion is not just within the classroom but within the school community as a whole (Babbage, 2013). Kluth (2003) identifies a successful inclusive school as one that has a supportive school community and culture for all pupils. All pupils should be able to feel safe and part of the school community (López et al., 2016). However, Booth et al. (2011) suggest that inclusive cultures do not automatically exist in schools but that they need to be built and developed. A way of building a community in which everyone is made to feel welcome is by breaking down barriers to participation in all aspects of school life and for the school to strive to minimise discriminatory practices (Booth et al., 2011). Katz et al. (2012) believe that in an inclusive environment pupils help one another and there is respect among staff and pupils as they treat one another as human beings as well as occupants of a role.

‘Social awareness and respect allow students to appreciate diversity, develop respect and empathy for others, and gain an understanding of diverse learning profiles and the advantages to this diversity within a community’ (Katz et al., 2012: 4).

However, Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) are concerned that pupils with SEN are not always accepted as equal members of the school community.

‘Students who have been identified as having special educational needs are especially vulnerable to exclusion from the culture, curriculum and community of mainstream schools’ (Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011: 826).

According to Broomhead (2013: 4), *'Decades of evidence have indicated that those with disabilities and special educational needs (SEN) often experience stigma'*. A lack of understanding of the needs of pupils with SEN may influence the extent to which they are accepted as part of the school community. Stakes and Hornby (2012) found that there was a lack of awareness of disability and its impact in education. However, when Cairns and McClatchey (2013) investigated attitudes towards disability they found that:

'children from an inclusive environment had more experience, more positive attitudes towards disabilities and a better understanding of the needs of an individual with disabilities in comparison to children who are in a less inclusive environment' (Cairns and McClatchey, 2013: 128).

This suggests that by including pupils with SEN in mainstream schools there is an improvement in disability awareness.

Furthermore, Stakes and Hornby (2012) recommend that as well as a positive attitude towards inclusion and experience, teachers require additional training on how to include pupils with SEN in all aspects of school life. As well as being educators, teachers are role models for their pupils on how to care for one another, including pupils with SEN (Katz et al., 2012). If they have positive values regarding inclusion and a knowledge of how to support pupils with SEN then teachers and TAs can also help pupils to be part of the school community (Webster and Blatchford, 2013). Similarly, López et al. (2016) suggest that a positive school ethos towards inclusion is one of the most important ways to promote positive relationships between, pupils, teachers, outside agency staff and parents.

Pupils may learn how to treat their peers by watching adult role models but Reynolds (2001) suggests that pupils also need to be educated and trained to value everyone in the school community. As there is also research that shows that pupils with SEN are often bullied and

ostracised from peers (Curtin and Clarke, 2005; López et al., 2016). Frederickson (2010) also suggests that:

‘Children with special educational needs are generally less accepted, more rejected and more likely to be victims of bullying than their typically developing classmates. However, they are sometimes treated more favourably than classmates, more like friends than acquaintances’ (Frederickson, 2010: 4).

Cairns & McClatchey (2013) suggest that pupils tend to accept their peers with the most obvious SEN or when the teacher or the pupil with SEN explained the situation to them. With a better understanding of the needs of all pupils, the peer group is likely to have a more positive attitude towards pupils with SEN (Shah et al., 2004). However, the social dimension of inclusion in education can still be a barrier (Koster et al., 2009). Acceptance of pupils with SEN means respecting them and their views but it does not necessarily guarantee that pupils with SEN will form friendships (Koster et al., 2009).

Nakken and Pijl (2002) point out that one of the reasons that parents of pupils with SEN choose a specific school for their children is because of social relationships. Similarly, Skårbrevik (2005) reports that teachers are often concerned about the social interaction of pupils with SEN. However, the conclusion that Cairns & McClatchey (2013) came to from their research into attitudes towards pupils with SEN was that the most important thing for pupils is that they have positive relationships, that pupils work together and are supportive without being friends. They also suggested that there were potential benefits to pupils without SEN of helping their peers, either within the classroom or as part of a buddying or mentoring scheme.

On the other hand, young people report that friendships are one of the most important aspects of school life and this also includes pupils with SEN. Friendships with peers help pupils to

feel accepted and to build self-esteem. Mainstream schools with a diverse range of children allow pupils to mix and form friendships in a way which is more similar to the real world and helps them to be more socially competent (Curtin and Clarke, 2005).

'Friendship and social interaction with peers are important to secure personal growth in any child and should not be neglected for students with special needs' (Skårbrevik, 2005: 399).

Although, pupils with SEN often find it difficult to make and keep friends there is evidence that they are able to have friendships with their peers but they may benefit from adult help to establish and maintain friendships (De Schauwer et al., 2009). There are certain times when pupils may require additional help, for example transition between schools can be particularly difficult regarding friendships, as can transfer between years (Demetriou et al., 2000).

Booth et al. (2011) state that a sign of everyone being valued equally, is pupils' participation in cultures as well as curricular. According to Adderley et al. (2014) school effectiveness is linked to the effectiveness of interpersonal relationships which are not just within the classroom. However, there is little written in the literature about pupils with SEN and extra-curricular activities. What is written focuses on the problems which pupils with SEN have in participating in extra-curricular sports' activities. Haycock and Smith (2011) suggest that although during lessons PE is often differentiated to include pupils with SEN that afterschool clubs still: *'continues to be heavily dominated by competitive team sports that retain a strong emphasis on performance, excellence and skills'* (Haycock and Smith, 2011: 507). Smith (2004) states that team games are particularly difficult for some pupils to engage in, depending on their disability, which means that pupils with SEN often do not have the same access as their peers to such a wide range of sports (Maher, 2013). In her research into the experiences of five physically disabled pupils in school sports, Fitzgerald (2005) found that

the pupils often experienced social isolation as they were not able to participate in the same activities as their peers. Similarly, having TA support could also mean that pupils with severe needs could miss out on the social aspect of sport. Fitzgerald (2005) found that some pupils felt physically inferior to their peers and dreaded having to get into teams. They also said that when the teacher introduced boccia, a sport designed for athletes with severe impairments, as a sport others did not take it seriously which affected their self-esteem. Although when Smith & Green (2004) interviewed teachers about the inclusion of pupils with SEN in PE lessons, they found that teachers thought that over the previous five years there had been an increase in pupils with SEN being included in mainstream PE, they also thought that lack of training was a barrier to including pupils with severe needs.

The literature shows a clear link between peer friendships and extra-curricular activities with an increased feeling of inclusiveness. Therefore, a key focus of this study will be to ask pupils about their participation in extra-curricular activities, their experience of making friends, whether they would have liked more support with this and whether they feel part of the school community.

2.3. Pupil Voice

This section will provide a brief historical explanation of the right of pupils to have an opinion in decisions which concern them, by giving them a voice. It will then explore the benefits of pupil voice, not only for individual pupils but for teachers and the wider school community. Different ways in which pupils can be given a voice will be discussed, taking any concerns into consideration and offering solutions. The section will conclude with

findings and emergent themes from research into inclusion of pupils with SEN, using pupil voice.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) published in 1989 recommends that the views of children be sought regarding decisions that concern them. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Unicef, 1989) Article 12 is particularly significant as it sees the child as a full human being with similar rights (Lundy, 2007). In addition, Article 23 relates specifically to the rights of disabled children, stating that they should be socially integrated and able to actively participate in the community (Sargeant, 2012). Following on from this, the Children's Act of 1989, implemented in 1991 reiterates that it is a legal requirement for children to be consulted and involved in decisions that affect them (DfE, 1989). The importance of consulting children on decisions that affect them is also stressed in The Human Rights Act of 1998 and the 2004 Children's Act. Relating specifically to education, The Education Act of 2002, the 2003 Green Paper, and 'Every Child Matters' all emphasise the importance of listening to the voice of the child (Hopkins, 2008).

'Every Child Matters places a moral obligation on schools and other educational settings to acknowledge the rights, voice and choice of its pupils' (Cheminais, 2008: 1).

The importance of hearing the voice of the child relates to all children including those with SEN (Feiler and Watson, 2011). Furthermore, the first SEN Code of Practice (1994) advises that pupils should be involved in the decision making process regarding their needs and provision, and that they should have their views recorded (Shevlin and Rose, 2010).

Similarly, the 2001 SEN Code of Practice includes a whole chapter on pupil participation, stating the benefits of consulting pupils and enabling pupils with SEN to be active in decision making processes as a normal way of working in schools (DfES, 2001). In addition, the most

recent SEN Code of Practice places even more emphasis on pupils participating in the writing of their EHC Plans and also discussions involving their continuing support (DfE & DoH, 2015). Therefore, the concept of getting the views of those involved, the pupils, is well embedded in the research literature and government guidance.

Although embedded in the literature and government guidance, encouraging the participation of pupils with SEN, until recently was only in certain areas, such as the identification and assessment stages of SEN and not in all areas of education (May, 2004). However, throughout the 2014 Children and Families Act the wording, '*parent or young person*', is used thus giving the young person greater autonomy (HMSO, 2014). This most recent legislation realises the benefits of consulting pupils about decisions which affect them and that:

'Children have a right to be involved in making decisions and exercising choices. Children and young people with SEN have unique knowledge of their particular circumstances' (HMSO, 2014: 3).

Similarly, the 2015 SEN Code of Practice places a clearer focus on the views of children and young people and on their role in the decision-making process (DfE & DoH, 2015).

Effectively, including pupils in the decision making process means that they are able to express their opinions but more importantly that their opinions are listened to (Flutter, 2007). Riley and Docking (2010) also suggest the adults involved should be prepared to take the matters which are raised by pupils seriously and to act upon them.

'Children should be involved in, but more importantly central to, dialogue that involves decisions which will ultimately affect them and their recommendations upon which action should be taken' (Adderley et al., 2014: 108).

According to Cheminais (2008) there are a number of different types of pupil voice, but the principles behind them are the same. Firstly, pupil voice works on the basis that the opinions of everyone involved are valued and treated equally. Secondly, the communication which arises from pupil voice is open and honest and provides meaningful information. Finally, giving pupils a say can encourage an investment in the future but also enables evaluation and review of current or past practice.

In this section, different kinds of pupil voice have been introduced. Pupil voice shows that the school values the opinions of their pupils, thus creating a stronger feeling of community. By using critical voice or authoritative voice pupils can improve their own situation or that of their peer group and by using therapeutic voice they can support their peers. This thesis will primarily be using what Cheminais (2008) refers to as critical voice, where pupils are asked for their views in order to help to inform a service or provision. In this case, the research will explore the pupils' views at one mainstream secondary school in order to elicit good practice or areas for improvement regarding the inclusion of pupils with SEN. The intention is that the findings will inform individual pupil provision as well as having a broader impact. Therefore:

'In the drive to enhance the educational experiences of young people, children's voices have been utilised in research as a means to both explore and further develop inclusive practices in schools' (Adderley et al., 2014: 106).

2.3.1. Benefits of Pupil Voice

Perhaps the most important consequence of the practice of using pupil voice is the anticipated benefit to pupils themselves. Cheng (2012) argues that pupils who are allowed to express their views are likely to feel more valued and have a sense that they are making a contribution to school life. Deuchar (2009) for example, suggests that having a greater sense

of belonging makes pupils feel as if they have more of an investment in their own learning.

Listening to the pupil perspective has:

‘the opportunity to empower children to become more self-reliant and resilient learners; therefore, its intrinsic relationship to learning must be promoted’ (Fisher, 2014: 406).

If pupils feel that they are involved in decisions which affect them then this can lead some pupils to have a more positive attitude towards school and their own learning (Wall, 2012). Fitzgerald (2005) also suggests that, *‘young people should be listened to and encouraged to participate in research activities’* (Fitzgerald, 2005: 42). She states that pupils can provide valuable insights into their experience of school, which is beneficial to both the adults and the pupils themselves. For example, if pupils are consulted about teaching and learning then they have a sense of ownership and are more likely to engage more positively in activities (Leren, 2006). Whereas, Maher (2016) suggests that including pupils in the decision making process means that they are less likely to resist the support. Another advantage noted by Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) is that having a voice motivates pupils and that motivation can be linked to achievement. Furthermore, they suggest that enabling pupils to be involved in decisions can encourage new skills (such as creative thinking) and encourages pupils to be citizens in a democratic society (McIntyre et al., 2005; Toshalis and Nakkula, 2012).

Another way in which pupils can benefit from having a voice is in learning more about themselves, the ways in which they learn, and how their actions affect others. According to MacBeath (2006) if pupils find their voice then they can find themselves, for example, in their research working with pupils with social and emotional and behavioural difficulties Cefai and Cooper (2010: 184) found that enabling pupils to express their opinion also gave

them an opportunity: *'to gain an insight into their behaviour and its influence on their own and others' learning and relationships'*.

According to Flutter and Rudduck (2004) and Pomar and Pinya (2015) as well as benefits for the individual pupil, providing an insight into what pupils think helps to strengthen partnerships between pupils and their teachers. Pomar and Pinya (2015) suggest that asking pupils about their experiences, can mean changing the forms of interaction between teachers and pupils, making the relationships more democratic. Garth and Aroni (2003) propose that this communication could be beneficial in a similar way to incidences of communication and shared partnership between doctors and patients. Cook-Sather (2003) says that sometimes adults can underestimate how observant and knowledgeable pupils are about their own educational experiences. However, if teachers are open to change then they could benefit from listening to young people who have unique perspectives on their school experiences (Cook-Sather, 2006). By undertaking this research the assumption is that pupils are able to offer opinions on all aspects of school life (Sargeant, 2012). The aim is that by involving pupils their responses could inform educational change in a number of areas including teaching and learning (Keddie, 2015). Similarly, in their research, Ferguson et al. (2011) gave pupils a voice in order to improve teacher practice. They consulted pupils about the classroom climate, the methods of teaching and the subject content. However, they did not consult pupils about their experiences of feeling part of the whole school community. They found that making pupils part of the decision-making process allowed for beneficial changes to be made. During the study, they also found that, over time, trust was established and power relations between the stakeholders were re-examined, allowing for more effective communication.

‘Consultation offers a way for teachers and pupils to engage with each other in dialogue and develop dynamic partnerships which pave the way for effective teaching and learning’ (Morgan, 2011: 464).

By opening a dialogue using pupil voice it is not only individuals who benefit but the whole school community. As well as influencing changes to provide better services, the practice can create a more inclusive environment, promoting citizenship and a sense of community (Flutter and Rudduck, 2004; Mannion, 2007). In another way, collaborating with pupils can further aid inclusion by suggesting factors that could help or hinder it (Messiou, 2011). Schools can learn unique lessons by listening to their pupils (Ryan, 2009) and making improvements creates an inclusive environment in a wider sense where everyone is valued and treated equally and pupils are empowered (Messiou, 2013; Keddle, 2015).

The aim of the research is to enable pupils to have a voice about their educational experiences so that teachers and the school will be able to respond appropriately to constructive criticism or observations from the pupils in order to make positive changes regarding inclusion (Pedder and McIntyre, 2006; Cook-Sather, 2006). By using pupil voice the aim is to involve the pupils in the decision-making with the intention that their insight into their experiences may benefit, not only the pupils but also staff and the school (Keddle, 2015).

This section focusses on the benefits of using pupil voice in schools. Pupils feel included in decisions which affect them, which can be motivational. In addition they learn new skills and are able to find out more about themselves. Relationships between pupils and teachers can improve and the school environment is likely to become more inclusive. Pupils are able to offer opinions on a number of issues, including teaching and learning and changes that they suggest can be implemented to improve situations.

The next section will discuss the critiques of pupil voice.

2.3.2. Addressing the Critiques of Pupil Voice

In order to give pupils a voice there are a number of issues to consider. This section will anticipate any possible drawbacks to using pupil voice and suggest solutions to ensure that the process is safe, effective and beneficial for all involved.

Firstly, Rudduck and Fielding (2006: 219) warn that things that are popular can often become overused, this is what they term '*surface compliance*'. They are concerned that pupil voice could be used for the wrong reasons. A way to ensure that pupil voice is not just being used because it is fashionable is to introduce the use of pupil voice and consulting pupils overtime so that it is able to become part of the school ethos (Flutter, 2007). In addition, if pupil voice is used regularly then it could alleviate concerns that teachers, school leaders and policy makers do not always agree on the use of pupil voice, as they would have more experience and systems in place (Morgan, 2011). Also if using pupil voice were the norm in school, then measures would need to be put in place to monitor the use of pupil voice so that necessary changes could be identified (Hopkins, 2008).

Secondly, there is concern that pupil voice could be too adult led. For example, there may be a hidden agenda behind asking pupils about something, where adults wish pupils to give a certain opinion. Rudduck and Fielding (2006) are concerned that pupils are often consulted about a practice which is either new or seen to be lacking at that time and are not able to just give their opinion in general.

So, if there is careful consideration of the reason for using pupil voice and if pupils are able to have a view on everything which concerns them and not just to be consulted on elements that the adults in charge are concerned about then the process will be less adult led (Taylor and Robinson, 2009; O'Connor et al., 2011).

'It is about students and teachers working and learning together in partnership, rather than one party using the other for often covert ends'(Fielding, 2004: 211).

A further way that the adult view can come through in pupil voice is unintentionally. Mannion (2007) suggests that sometimes although well intentioned, pupil voice and participation may actually be the views and opinions of adults as pupils try to please the adults by saying what they think they want to hear. Similarly, pupils may be influenced by the views of the adults around them. This could happen particularly in an interview situation. However, it is not just teachers and parents but also the peer group who can influence the views of pupils with SEN. Graham (2012) stresses that when collecting opinions from pupils in a group you have to be careful that the more confident members of the group do not dominate.

Furthermore, there are concerns about the methods used to facilitate pupil voice (Leren, 2006). Taylor and Robinson (2009) suggest that the ways that pupils are involved in the UK, are firstly at the level of the institution, so via school councils or as a pupil governor. Overtime it can be argued that pupils have also been involved at the second level, which has to do with using pupils as researchers to see what is happening in the classroom and engaging them about their educational experiences (Lewis et al., 2007). However, McCluskey et al. (2013) are still unsure about practices regarding the use of pupil voice in schools. They question a number of methods used to gain pupils' opinions, for instance, from their research:

‘Students suggested that student councils were still tokenistic, and that student council representatives did not accurately represent the majority of opinions in school’ (McCluskey et al., 2013: 295).

They are also unsure about circle time and peer mediation which they do not think happens often enough. They suggest the use of a range of methods of collecting pupil opinions, for example that having a suggestion box, assemblies and greater use of circle time would be more beneficial. Again if using pupil voice becomes part of the school ethos then using a wider range of methods to collect information could be investigated (Hopkins, 2008).

Another concern is the level of inclusivity around which pupils are chosen to participate in activities using pupil voice. Billington (2006) and Cook-Sather (2006) state that all pupils have the right to express their own opinions and that they also have the right to be listened to. However, there are still concerns that only certain pupils’ views, those who are confident and articulate, are taken into consideration instead of including all members of the school community (McIntyre et al., 2005; Flutter, 2007). Gibson (2006) is concerned that although on paper pupils with SEN should have a voice in the classroom, in reality they remain silenced, either because the dominant inadvertently speak over them or because pupils with SEN are afraid of speaking out and being labelled as a trouble maker.

‘The dominant may not be conscious of their complicity in this silencing procedure, the dominated may not be conscious of their complicity by acquiescing’ (Gibson, 2006: 321).

Similarly, Herz and Haertel (2016) state that in the field of research into inclusion the viewpoint of pupils with SEN is only occasionally incorporated, even though the pupils are knowledgeable and able to form conclusions about their own educational lives (Byrnes and Rickards, 2011). In addition, Cefai and Cooper (2010), Kennedy (2015) and Herz and Haertel (2016) suggest that pupils with social and emotional difficulties are a group of children who

are rarely given a voice. According to Sellman (2009) this is because projects involving pupil voice are more difficult to manage if the pupils have social, emotional and behavioural issues. Another group of pupils who are rarely asked about their educational experience are pupils with learning disabilities (López et al., 2016). However, Herz and Haertel (2016) declare that if the aim is to find out about the experience of pupils with SEN then the viewpoint of all pupils has to be included as part of the research. In order to affect school reform all pupils, especially those classed as disengaged, need to have the opportunity to be heard and have involvement in real school decisions (Smyth, 2006).

‘The voices of young people from marginalised groups within society have tended to be ignored and patronised in educational decision-making processes’ (Rose and Shevlin, 2004: 155).

Another reason that some children are rarely listened to, is that they may find it difficult to express their views (Duffield et al., 2010). Therefore it is important to use a variety of approaches depending on the pupils’ different needs to help them to develop an identity and an individual voice (McIntyre et al., 2005). Ferguson et al. (2011) suggest that questions can be simplified and responses can be collected using a variety of tools, such as: drawing, taking photographs, playing and the ‘*Mosaic Approach*’ (Tangen, 2009). Therefore, if the adults involved are aware of the needs of the pupils and are flexible in their approach then all pupils can be consulted (Paige-Smith and Rix, 2011). In their research into professionals’ perspectives of giving pupils a voice, Feiler and Watson (2011) found that after training on useful methods of obtaining pupil voice, teachers and professionals, felt that they were then able to support pupils with SEN to communicate and provide their point of view.

However, sometimes the ability to obtain the views of all pupils with SEN can be difficult. For example, in meetings to discuss pupil progress or provision, such as the annual review of

a pupils Statement, parents have traditionally been used to giving their children's views. However, if the voice of pupils with SEN is not heard then it is against the objectives of inclusive education (Rose and Shevlin, 2004; Mortier et al., 2011).

According to Flutter and Rudduck (2004) and Black (2011) the process of pupil voice can create tensions, especially between members of staff or between pupils and staff. Therefore, Cheminais (2008) recommends that pupil voice be reframed to prevent possible conflict of power relations, as adults are used to evaluating pupils but not vice versa. Adults may not understand the reason for giving pupils a voice or they may feel undermined, anxious about criticism or threatened (Lundy, 2007).

'Another part of the explanation may lie in the tendency of educational professionals to view the pupil perspective as likely to be critical and threatening' (Howieson and Semple, 2000: 373).

McKay (2014) suggests that sometimes pupils can be critical in their responses. However, the power relationship between pupils and teachers can change if the process of using pupil voice becomes invitational rather than directive, as a school community where everyone is willingly involved in the process is likely to be established (Bragg, 2007). If teachers realise the benefits of pupil voice they are likely to change their teaching to include pupils' perspectives more, which could make pupils feel more valued (Hopkins, 2014). Similarly, tensions from the teachers' viewpoints can be relieved by someone discussing with pupils ways to give constructive criticism by thinking about how adults may feel about their comments (Cheng, 2012). Training on pupil voice, could help pupils to understand the process and it may also help them to feel less anxious about participating (Flutter and Rudduck, 2004). If it becomes a collaborative process of everyone working together then

teachers are less likely to feel threatened and pupils are likely to feel that they are being involved in decisions that affect them personally (Cefai and Cooper, 2010).

When interviewing pupils individually, it cannot be assumed that all pupils with similar needs would have the same views, so generalisations cannot necessarily be made and researchers should be careful not to stereotype (Cook et al., 2010; Tangen, 2008).

'Pupils with SEN are not a homogenous group and include pupils of all ages and cognitive abilities' (Bergin and Logan, 2013: 87).

Also the pupil voice is not 'fixed and absolute', pupils can change their opinion on the same issue at different times or under different conditions (Fielding, 2004; Tangen, 2008).

Another source of tension can occur when teachers are sceptical about the capabilities of pupils, who they do not believe are in a position to offer comment on certain issues, due to lack of knowledge, understanding or life experience (Bragg, 2007). Teachers can particularly feel that pupils with SEN do not have the cognitive ability to participate in pupil voice (Feiler and Watson, 2011). This can be addressed by using a number of different strategies to obtain the pupils' comments (Tangen, 2009). According to (Flutter, 2007) schools can put systems in place to listen to pupil voice, for instance: a school council, working groups or participation in annual reviews that enable pupils to articulate their views about their targets and needs and to see through appropriate change (Quicke, 2003). Hart (1992) in Cheminais (2008) refers to a ladder of pupil participation, the higher up the ladder, the greater the meaningfulness of pupil involvement. At the top of the ladder the pupils initiate activities and are part of the decision making process with adults, going down to pupils consulted and informed in the middle followed by tokenism right down to manipulation at the bottom (Cook-Sather, 2006). Fletcher (2004) in Cheminais (2008) suggested a 5 step continuous

cycle for meaningful pupil involvement: listen, validate, authorise, act, reflect and then back to listen.

In her research into the voices of vulnerable voices in higher education Batchelor (2006) also realises the importance of the listener.

'Having a voice partly depends on someone hearing that voice with understanding, and coaching it forth. Certain qualities in listening, and listeners, increase the chances of recovering vulnerable student voices' (Batchelor, 2006: 799).

For pupil voice to be effective pupils need to know what they are being consulted about and what the benefits of being involved in the decision-making process are. Everyone involved needs to understand the decision making process and the feedback needs to be shared with everyone, including the pupils (Cheminais, 2008). If pupil comments are not acted upon then enabling them to have a voice can be pointless (McIntyre et al., 2005). Also pupils are more likely to take the research and interviews more seriously if they think that their opinions are valued and that they will be acted upon (Rose and Shevlin, 2004; Thompson, 2009).

However, there is concern that teachers will not be able to act on the views of the pupils either because it is out of their control, or the requests are too complex (Bragg, 2007).

'Teachers may find that pupil consultation brings to light issues which are not simple and straightforward to address' (Flutter and Rudduck, 2004: 23).

Teachers may also be concerned that the requests are too difficult to fulfil and that the practice of gaining pupil voice is too time consuming and that it would be better spent on education itself (Lundy, 2007). Thompson (2009) realises that it is easier for pupils to offer suggestions for improvements than it is for teachers to implement the suggestions.

This section has explored concerns of the use of pupil voice. The main critiques are around when pupil voice should be used, the role of the adult in the process, which pupils are

consulted and the way in which pupils' ideas are collected and then used. The following section will consider emergent themes from the literature using the pupil voice of pupils with SEN.

2.3.3. Emergent Themes on Inclusion Using Pupil Voice

Although the majority of the literature about inclusion is not from the point of view of pupils with SEN, there are some instances where pupil voice has been used, according to Herz and Haertel (2016). This section will list some of the themes which have emerged from research into what pupils with SEN feel about inclusion in mainstream schools. The main categories that emerge relate to: support; peer and teacher relationships; friendship; curriculum and accessibility to the school environment (Saggers et al., 2011). All of these themes were also addressed by participants in the study and they will be identified and explored in the findings, results and discussion chapters (see Chapters 4, 5 & 6).

Support in the classroom is a recurrent theme when pupils are asked about their experiences in school and whether they feel included or excluded. Similarly, pupils express the benefits of being included in the decision making process regarding support, as they suggest that, depending on individual needs, reasonable adjustments can make them feel either included or excluded in the classroom and school as a whole (Ryan, 2009).

Another main theme which emerges when discussing inclusion is the importance of positive relationships for pupils, especially with teachers and TAs. These relationships can help pupils to feel a sense of belonging within the school community (Flynn et al., 2011; Bland and Sleightholme, 2012). In the same way, findings also often refer to the impact of social issues and relationships with peers, on pupils with SEN (Tetler and Baltzer, 2011). In their research,

Prunty et al. (2012) established that the ability to form and maintain friendships, and peer support affected pupils' enjoyment of school. Similarly, Bearne (2002) found that the pupils talked about groupings and who they worked best with in the classroom as well as discussing friendships. The pupils expressed perceptive views on the social elements of learning and made insightful comments. For example, they were able to link their learning to who they worked best with and to express that they preferred to work alone if they were not able to work with friends. However, Rose and Shevlin (2004) found that some pupils had negative relationships regarding their peers due to other pupils having a lack of knowledge about disability, which can lead to pity, sympathy and sometimes bullying. In their study into the experience of pupils with disabilities in the Basque country, López et al. (2016) found that some pupils had experienced bullying but that they also knew how to access support to manage this.

As well as commenting on social issues, pupils also commented about the physical aspects of feeling included, regarding accessibility to the schools and also in the community as a whole. Other pupils discussed accessibility to the curriculum and the difficulty of work in a mainstream setting as opposed to a special school or unit (Lewis et al., 2007; Prunty et al., 2012).

This section has discussed the themes which emerged from pupils with SEN in the literature but also from the pupil responses in the study. The main themes were: support, being consulted, positive relationships with staff and peers and the importance of feeling included in the school community. The following section lists the key issues arising from the literature.

2.4. Key Issues from the Literature Review

This review of the literature has explored the following key ideas:

- Pupils with SEN are entitled to attend mainstream schools with access to a broad and balanced curriculum
- Successful inclusive schools provide appropriate support, in consultation with pupils
- Inclusion is about removing barriers, both academic and social
- Self-Determination Theory
- Feeling part of the school community and having friendships is important for pupils with SEN
- Changes in SEN provision from the 2014 SEND Code of Practice, puts further emphasis on listening to the views of pupils with SEN
- Pupil voice is used in a number of different ways in schools: critical voice; authoritative voice and therapeutic
- Benefits of using pupil voice are: pupils feeling included, improving relationships, wider knowledge and the possibility to make changes
- It is important to listen to pupils but also to act on suggestions
- The literature shows that pupils with SEN can give opinions about inclusion but there are only a few studies

Key issues which emerge from pupil voice on inclusion are: support; peer and teacher relationships; friendships; accessibility to the curriculum and the school environment.

Chapter 3. Methodology and Research Methods

This chapter will provide an overview of the methodological approaches employed for the purposes of the research. It will detail the rationale for adopting the particular paradigm, which frames the research as a whole, as well as the rationale for particular research methods. The chapter will also describe the selection of the participants, the data collection techniques and the methods of analysis employed. The final section will consider ethical issues.

3.1. Introduction

The aim of this research was to explore the views of pupils with a Statement of SEN in a mainstream secondary school. It addresses the main research question: What do pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) think about their experiences in a mainstream secondary school? As the research concerned the experiences of a specific group of pupils, the intention was to examine their collective experience within a situation, in this case the educational provision made by attending a mainstream secondary school, to make sense of it and to inform a future course of action. An interpretative paradigm with elements of constructivism was adopted and in order to obtain subjective accounts from pupils about their experiences of school within a specific SEN context, qualitative methods and techniques were used to gather data for analysis.

Truth in qualitative research appears to come under more scrutiny than in quantitative research, possibly because truth is conventionally understood, in positivistic terms, as something which is universal and objective. According to Carr (2000) data collection is subject to human influence in any research, as is the interpretation of the data. Therefore

there has to be an element of trust in the researcher, who similarly has to be able to justify their research methodology and their chosen method. Therefore, this chapter firstly describes the rationale behind the research methodology and the chosen approach. It then goes on to explain how and why the participants were chosen, followed by the justification and description of the data collection method, including the design of the interview questions and the interview process. It then explains the method of data analysis, followed by a discussion of the ethical issues and finally the limitations of the research methods.

3.2. Paradigm Rationale

Cohen et al (2011) explain that ontological and epistemological assumptions about the nature of social science research lead to assumptions about methodologies and data collection. There are competing views of social science research, namely that it is either the same as research into the natural sciences, as it attempts to find rules or that it is different from natural science research because it is trying to describe and explain what is happening: my research adopts the latter perspective.

The interpretive research paradigm sees the importance of social interaction as the source of meaning (Bassegy, 1999). One advantage therefore of using an interpretative paradigm in educational research is that it allows more insight into the educational process (Cohen, 2011). In this case the research aim was not only to learn about the pupils' experiences of secondary school but also to highlight areas where practice could be improved. As Edwards (2002) states:

‘Responsible interpretative research is therefore not necessarily problem-solving research. But it can be very good at shedding light on the problem, teasing out the complexities and pointing towards how it might be tackled by practitioners in policy and pedagogy’ (Edwards, 2002: 161).

Therefore by using an interpretative research methodology it was possible to describe and explain the experiences of pupils with SEN in an exploratory qualitative case study (Hoge and Rubinstein-Avila, 2014). Similarly, there were also elements of the relativist or constructivist paradigm, which believes that the presence of the researcher influences the outcomes of the research. Young people in particular are seen as subjective, contextual and socially self-determining, with relationships that are dynamic across context and time. The constructivist researcher attempts to understand how worlds operate by entering those worlds and describing and analysing the contextualised social phenomena found there (Starks and Brown Trinidad, 2007). Society is constructed by individual subjectivities which are in a state of constant change. As the researcher, the focus was on understanding the situation and explaining it in my own words, whilst accepting that there was subjectivity and multiple interpretations of the same data. Being part of the interaction made it difficult to be value-free but care was taken that the pupil voice was not swayed by the researcher’s interpretation (May, 2011).

3.3. Case Study Rationale

‘The value of qualitative research lies in its exploratory and explanatory power’ (Attride-Stirling, 2001: 403).

Often the point of qualitative research, *‘is to look at something holistically and comprehensively, to study it, in its complexity, and to understand its context’* (Punch, 2009: 161). As the main aim of the research was to give a clearer picture of the situation from the

pupils' perspective, qualitative data was considered to be more useful than numerical data. Similarly, as the research is underpinned by Theory of Self-Determination it was important to be able to explore qualitative data relating to relationships and the pupils feeling part of the whole school community (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The secondary aim was to improve the experience for pupils with SEN and, according to Hammersley (2000), qualitative research can be used in educational research to bring about change. The hope was that, by looking at the data collected from each individual pupil, it would be possible to combine the findings to form an evaluative case study identifying barriers, good practice and strategies for future improvement for pupils with SEN at Belmont School.

Initially the use of ethnography was considered but after careful consideration it was decided that case studies were more appropriate as many of the questions to be addressed were 'how' or 'why' and as case studies can be explanatory, exploratory and descriptive and allow for deep exploration, this approach seemed the most appropriate (Yin, 1984: 13). Bassey (1999) suggests a number of further different types of case study: 'theory-seeking', 'theory-testing,' 'story-telling', 'picture-drawing' and the one chosen here, 'evaluative'. Hamilton (2013) adds further definitions of reflective, longitudinal, cumulative, collective and collaborative case studies. It is possible to use case study in educational research, to collect rich data '*to enhance our understanding of contexts, communities and individuals*' (Hamilton, 2013: 3). The aim was for the research to be both attitudinal and evaluative, allowing for pupil attitudes at a certain period in time, and evaluating experiences of pupils with a Statement in a mainstream secondary school.

In this instance, one of the key strengths of the research was the researcher's position of SENCo, at the school where the research was carried out. This meant that the researcher had

easy access to the subjects to carry out the case studies. Similarly, prior knowledge of the pupils was beneficial, as it allowed the interviewer to approach the pupils more easily and also to ask 'good' questions by knowing the pupils' abilities and personalities. On one hand, regular contact between the subjects and the researcher allowed for flexibility when planning the interview schedule. On the other hand, the ease of accessibility meant that it could have been possible to overlook important issues, which may have seemed obvious to the interviewer due to their prior knowledge of the subjects and the school. Therefore extra care was taken to ensure that the research was rigorous by putting in an appropriate amount of time and effort, and that as far as possible the research process was reflective avoiding a lengthy narrative (Yin, 1984).

As the researcher had an understanding of the school system, the daily running of the school in question and the needs and personalities of the interviewed pupils there were clear expectations of the themes that the pupils were likely to raise in their responses to the questions. However, it is unlikely that the researcher is able to develop a case study just from the research expectations, more that the case study evolves, depending on the responses of the individual participants. *'Some would describe the researcher as an interpreter whose interpretations cannot be separated from the data that will emerge from the research'* (Hamilton, 2013: 53). The aim was for the researcher to be surprised and find out things which were previously unknown, even if it meant changing the current way of working and made the SENCo job difficult.

3.4. Selecting the Participants

Keeping the sample size small meant that it was manageable, both for collecting data but more importantly when giving close attention to any of the findings. As of September 2014, when the data collection commenced, there were 22 pupils with a Statement on roll. There were a number of factors behind the decision to concentrate on the pupils with a Statement. Firstly, due to the researcher's role as SENCo in the school, there is a stronger working relationship with pupils with a Statement as they are the first priority both on a daily basis and in the long term. Similarly, it is the responsibility of the SENCo to monitor pupils with a Statement more closely than those pupils who do not have a Statement. In addition, the SENCo organises support for Statemented pupils in school so is more easily able to bring about change and to affect the outcomes for these pupils than others. Pupils with a Statement are the first priority on the SEN Department Development Plans and also the first target on the SENCo's own Performance Management targets. Therefore, the aim of the research, which is to highlight good practice but also to suggest ways of improving the school experience of pupils with a Statement, will support the work of the SENCo and the SEN Department.

Although there were 22 pupils with a Statement, which would have been a manageable number to interview, the decision was made not to include those in Year 7 and 8. The reasoning behind this decision was firstly, because they were only 11 - 13 years of age at the time but, more importantly, because they had only been at the school for a relatively short time, so it was considered that they would not necessarily have strong opinions yet about their experience at secondary school.

3.5. Data Collection

3.5.1. Justification of Using Interviews

The original intention was to use focus groups however, when attempting to form the groups it became apparent that this was a very diverse group, taking into account chronological ages of the pupils, their cognitive ability and the nature of their difficulties. The only clear cut group concerned pupils with sensory impairments, as by chance they were all around the same age and level of cognitive ability. However, from past experience, there was evidence that these girls did not like to be grouped together and in doing so it was considered that at least one pupil would refuse to participate or possibly become upset. Therefore, individual semi-structured interviews were employed to collect the data.

Although interviews can take time to carry out and to analyse they can provide rich data (Hamilton, 2013). Advantages of semi-structured interviews are that the research is replicable, the data is reasonably reliable, and that there is the ability to ask some spontaneous questions. By contrast, one disadvantage of asking spontaneous questions is that it can make it difficult to compare the findings (Cook et al., 2010). In this instance, however, as the sample size was small it was possible to consider individual responses as opposed to grouping the responses together.

Another benefit of using semi-structured interviews is that the researcher can be flexible in their approach when both asking questions and obtaining responses, in order to suit the needs of the participants (Paige-Smith and Rix, 2011). Ferguson et al. (2011) state that questions can be simplified and if necessary responses can be collected using a variety of methods. In this case, it was therefore beneficial that the interviewer was the SENCo and had prior

knowledge of the participants, thus making it is easier to phrase questions which the participants were able to answer. Another benefit of the researcher working in the school was that she would be able to act on the pupils' responses. This is important as Thompson (2009) states that participants take interviews more seriously if they think that their opinions are valued and that they will be acted upon.

3.5.2. The Interview Questions and Pilot Study

According to Yin (1984) '*one insight into asking good questions is to understand that research is about questions and not necessarily about answers*' (Yin, 1984: 63). Therefore, particular attention was given to composing the interview questions and also to the order in which they were asked. The intention was that all pupils would be able to understand the questions with limited assistance. Similarly, the objective was to ask more open, general questions at the beginning, leading to more specific questions later on (Drever, 2006). The hope was that the more general questions at the beginning would help pupils to relax and to begin to give their opinions and that by the time they reached the more specific questions they would be able to give more detailed responses.

Possible question areas were elicited from the literature and also from pupil comments from Annual Review meetings during the previous year. Areas arising related to the following: accommodation, resources, curriculum, assessment, pastoral care and relationships (Booth et al., 2011). In order to hone the questions, a pilot study was carried out in July 2015, involving 5 pupils in Year 11 who were about to finish school and move on to college. With the exception of one pupil with ASD, the other pupils were pupils with a lower cognitive ability who had very similar profiles. Even though the ability level of this group was different to the intended group to be researched, it was considered to be a beneficial exercise as the pupils

were likely to have had similar experiences at the school. Additionally, if the pupils in the pilot study were able to understand the questions, then it was assumed that the questions would be appropriate for those in the main study, who were either of similar cognitive ability or higher.

From the pilot study, it became apparent that the wording of some of the original questions was not easily understood by the pupils. For example, they did not understand the question, 'Give me an example of when you felt valued by someone at the school'. They misunderstood the word 'valued' thinking that it had something to do with money. Therefore it was important to make sure that all pupils were able to access the questions, both in wording and concept. Other questions were also changed, as the pupil responses in the pilot study were occasionally less detailed than hoped for. For instance, when asked, 'Have you achieved a target at school that you did not think you would be able to?' it became apparent that responses only related to academic achievement but the aim was also to find out about personal achievements that the pupils were proud of. Therefore, the questions used for the research study were revised to take on board the pilot study findings.

3.5.3. The Interview Process

Having taken time to design the questions the next consideration was how to conduct the interviews. According to Birbeck and Drummond (2009), if children are interviewed in a supportive and encouraging environment then they are able to report their feelings and opinions accurately. Therefore, the researcher attempted to see the research environment through the pupils' eyes and in order to make the pupils feel at ease, the interview room chosen was an office, familiar to the pupils as a place for receiving support as opposed to an office where pupils in trouble would have been sent. The room was small enough not to be

imposing but big enough that both the interviewer and the participant had their own personal space. This was particularly important when interviewing the pupil with ASD, so that she did not feel that her personal space was being invaded. There was a round table in the room to enable the interviewer to take notes but also to provide room for the cassette recorder and for the pupils to place their consent and information forms in front of them if they wished. There were three identical chairs in the room, so that the pupils could choose where to sit without being anxious that the interviewer had a specific seat. The door to the room was closed during the interviews so that there was privacy. In addition to this, the door was not on the main corridor but opened onto another office which was not in use during the interviews. However, the door did have a window in it so that the room did not feel claustrophobic and the blinds were up so that the room had sufficient natural light. As the room was not overlooked there were no distractions from other pupils or staff walking past, again hopefully adding to the feeling of security. Although, there were other pupils in the block at the same time so that the pupils being interviewed did not feel secluded.

The pilot study also highlighted the importance of the way in which the questions were asked. For example, the researcher had to ask the questions carefully avoiding stressing particular words or giving non-verbal cues such as smiles, so as not to influence pupil responses. It was also evident from the pilot that individual pupils reacted differently from one another to being interviewed. Danby et al. (2011) stress the importance of engaging children who are being interviewed and modifying the approach for individuals. Some pupils needed extra help to understand the questions whereas others understood the questions but needed more reassurance to answer. This variability highlighted the importance of the interviewer adapting the interview style according to the different pupils and their needs but more importantly their personalities. Thus, knowing the pupils and their strengths and weaknesses well enabled 'fine

tuning' of the ways that the questions were asked, either by stressing the important words in the question or, where necessary, using simplified or more complex expressions. However, the researcher remained aware that simplifying may affect the data (Lewis and Porter, 2004). It was particularly important to take care that the concept of suggestibility was not a concern (Birbeck and Drummond, 2009). In order to guarantee this, the questions were discussed with the researcher's supervisors and the researcher also practised asking the questions before the interviews.

Even though all of the pupils knew the researcher, it was still important to develop appropriate interviewing skills. The interviewer needed to be objective but also to have the ability to understand. An initial concern was that the position of the researcher as SENCo in the school could restrict what the pupils were prepared to say, the challenge being the disparity of power and status between the interviewer and the pupil (Messiou, 2006). On a day to day basis, in most cases when the pupils and the researcher met it would be as a teacher and pupil, where the teacher would be leading the conversation and would hold the majority of the power. According to Nunkoosing (2005) although power is always a concern when interviewing, it takes many forms and shifts backwards and forwards between interviewer and interviewee. Although every interview is different, the power of the interviewer is that they are asking the questions and leading the line of discussion and the power of the interviewee is that they can choose to answer the questions or not. Therefore, to avoid any problems in this case, it was important to remember that, '*the interviewee is the focus and the researcher should be facilitating but not leading the interview*' (Hamilton, 2013: 105). The researcher was careful to keep the amount that they spoke to a minimum, instead using non-verbal cues, such as nodding and smiling to facilitate the responses and put the participants at ease.

Even with careful consideration, interviews often do not go as planned so there was also a need to be flexible and to be responsive to the pupils. For example, in some instances, a pupil misunderstood the question and gave unexpected answers (Roulston, 2010). Therefore when questions were misunderstood or construed in an unexpected way, further clarification of pupils' points was asked for making sure that the pupil did not assume that their previous answer was wrong (Birbeck and Drummond, 2009). There were also some interactional issues: a participant chose not to answer a certain question, another pupil asked the interviewer questions and there were some minimal responses (Roulston, 2014). Although, on the whole, the interviews went well, there were instances when pupils were silent or gave limited responses, particularly when answering the questions regarding making friends and how things could be changed. Nairn et al. (2005) suggest that silence or limited response to questions could be for a number of reasons. It may be a form of politeness or that the participants do not know what to say or are resistant. In this case, the latter did not appear to be true but a number of the pupils needed time to process the question and also to formulate their answers. This was particularly true of the pupils with moderate learning difficulties rather than any other group. Pupils were given time to think before questions were simplified and time to construct their answers. In addition, one of the pupils chose to write her answers down in advance and consult a piece of paper.

The interviewer not only listened carefully to what was being said but also *how* it was said (Hamilton, 2013). In particular, one pupil had a very dry sense of humour and without knowing this she could have appeared as very negative: having a knowledge of the pupils helped the researcher in this aspect. Often when one particular pupil answered there was a glint in her eye or a smile on her face which prompted the researcher to ask for further clarification.

Clark (2010) states that when interviewing children they are often given rewards or incentives. In this case, the researcher initially considered giving the pupils something as a thank you but decided against it as the hope was that asking pupils for their opinions in this manner would become part of normal practice. Similarly, Lewis and Porter (2004) consider that there needs to be some form of reciprocal activity in participatory research. Therefore the therapeutic nature of qualitative interviews was explained to the pupils, that their responses could benefit both themselves and similar pupils in the future and they were told that they would be able to ask about the findings and recommendations (Wolgemuth et al., 2015).

With the pupils' permission, the interviews were recorded using an old-fashioned cassette recorder. The main reason for using this device was that it was able to distinguish the tone of the hearing impaired pupils' speech, more effectively than the recording software on a laptop. Basic notes were also taken during the interview in case of technical failure or lapses in sound quality but also so that the researcher could keep track of the responses for further questioning. Additionally, it was thought that the pupils would feel more secure and that their responses were being valued if notes were being taken.

According to Bassey (1999) either everything from interviews can be transcribed or otherwise the content can be paraphrased. The issue with the former is that it is time consuming and can provide redundant text, however with the latter you can save time but some of the nuances may be lost. However, the decision was made to transcribe all that was said in order to have a written record of the interviews and to allow the researcher to have closer contact with the data.

3.5.4. Background Information

In order to provide context and a knowledge of the pupil's individual needs and provision, the findings include a short background of each pupil. The reason for this is so that other professionals reading the findings may be able to identify similarities with pupils whom they work with. This may enable professionals to gain an insight into how pupils with similar needs, personalities and provision feel about their experience and ways in which their support could be improved.

The background information was collected by the researcher from a range of documents, available to all staff at Belmont School to assist in the planning of teaching of pupils in the study. The main document used was the Special Educational Needs Register, which acts as a provision map for each pupil with SEN and includes: an explanation of their needs, their strengths and weaknesses, including their interests and what they enjoy or dislike, ways in which to help them to access the curriculum, their targets and achievement, and their provision. Other documents used were teacher, parent and pupil comments written as evidence of need and progress, for the annual review of pupils' Statements and the minutes of those meetings. As the researcher was the SENCo and the author of many of the aforementioned documents, she was able to use the information to paint a picture of the pupil and their needs in a concise manner.

3.6. Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis *'is not fundamentally a mechanical or technical process; it is a process of inductive reasoning, thinking and theorizing'* (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998: 140).

There is no single or correct way of qualitative data analysis and there are often multiple interpretations of the same data (Punch, 2009). When trying to choose the best method to analyse the data, literature from the field of medical research was consulted as well as from the field of education. The reason for referring to medical research was that it has a similar aim to use qualitative research to explore institutional practices, identify barriers and the effectiveness of interventions (Starks and Brown Trinidad, 2007).

According to Cohen et al. (2011) the two main forms of qualitative analysis are content analysis and grounded theory. Content analysis originally focussed on individual words and the frequency in which they occurred (Hamilton, 2013).

‘However, a gradual shift in the approach to content analysis led to a more sophisticated consideration of concepts and relationships between concepts rather than a focus on individual words’ (Hamilton, 2013: 139).

The benefits of qualitative content analysis are that it is systematic, verifiable and replicable (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). In cases where there are large amounts of data the reductionist approach, where the data is reduced by using coding and thematic analysis techniques is widely used. Even though there was a relatively small amount of data collected in this research as there were only 13 participants, coding was used. It is important to remember when coding that data can fit into several categories and that frequency does not equate to importance, similarly what is not said can be equally as significant (Cohen et al., 2011).

According to Starks and Brown Trinidad (2007) there are three stages in coding and analysing data: open coding (examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data); axial coding (reassembling data into groupings based on relationships and patterns within and among the categories identified in the data); and selective coding (identifying and describing the central phenomenon).

Content analysis can either use an inductive approach where the researcher has few preconceptions in mind regarding coding or as in this case a deductive approach where there is a coding template in mind (Finfgeld-Connett, 2014). There was an element of pre-coding in this case as the questions were used to form the initial codes (Cohen et al., 2011). Although there were some overlaps in the data the participants mostly answered the questions asked which made the data much easier to sort. Although most of the codes were pre-defined based on the research literature, some of the categorisation was responsive (Cohen et al, 2007). In order to make the codes the researcher needs to be familiar with the data and to keep referring back to the research questions. As the researcher was also the interviewer it was easier to engage with the written transcripts (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998). This was a factor in the decision to code manually instead of using a software package, such as Nvivo. According to Finfgeld-Connett (2014) using computer software can have disadvantages. *'computer software can result in the loss of flexibility and oversimplification of the data analysis process'* (Finfgeld-Connett, 2014: 349). The aim was for the data to remain contextualized and for the researcher to be able to start the process of analysis whilst coding, making notes of any questions or ideas that arose (Cohen, 2011). In the absence of another coder, the decision to code manually and the codes chosen were discussed with the thesis supervisors.

In larger scale research it is almost impossible to keep the individual voice, however, in this case as there were only 13 pupils it was possible to analyse the data as a whole in a narrative form (Lichtman, 2010). An argument against describing the data in a narrative form is that it is difficult to make generalisations, however the main aim of this research was to explore the views of pupils with SEN on their provision and secondly to use this information to improve the school's provision. On the other hand there was the hope that the outcomes of the research could be beneficial to future pupils at the school and also pupils in similar situations

at other secondary schools. There is an argument that although the pupils and their experiences are all likely to be unique there may also be some points which may relate to other pupils as there may be instances of '*fuzzy generalisation*' (Bassegy, 1999).

'... the kind of prediction, arising from empirical enquiry, that says that something may happen, but without any measure of its probability. It is a generalization, carrying the idea of possibility but no certainty' (Bassegy, 1999: 46).

Often the point of qualitative research is to study something holistically (Punch, 2009).

Therefore, as well as individual case studies a more holistic approach was taken in the discussion section. The coding enabled the researcher to analyse the data of more than one pupil at a time and from this it was possible to suggest some generalisations.

The decision was made only to code data from the respondents and not to include any of the interviewer's responses. The reason for this was that the interviewer kept the phrasing of the questions as similar as possible depending on the needs of the individual pupils, however, by coding manually if deemed necessary it was possible that interviewer data could have been included at a later date (Payne, 2004).

3.6.1. The Case Studies

Each individual interview was written up as a narrative style case study, including direct quotations from the pupils. The reason for presenting the data individually was so that the case studies were able to present the individual voices of the pupils (Cohen et al., 2011). In order for the findings to be more relevant for the reader additional contextual information about each pupil was given before the case study, in the form of background. This background information, about the needs and provision of the pupil and also about their personalities and interests was gathered from their Statements of Educational Need, the

school's Special Educational Needs' Register, advice and comments from specialists, parents and pupils, collected during Annual Review meetings, school and Annual Review reports and assessment data. As the intended audience of the research is primarily teachers of pupils with SEN the hope was that by building a clearer picture of the pupil the reader may be able to recognise similarities between the participants and pupils who they themselves may work with. In this way the audience influences the writing style (Hamilton, 2013).

3.6.2. The Discussion Section

The findings were presented individually in Chapter 4 and then generalised in the Results Chapter. The reason for this was that after investigation it was clear that pupils gave similar responses making it more sensible to discuss the findings holistically, using the themes from the interviews and findings from the literature. In this way, it was possible to make some generalisations about the experiences of all pupils with SEN attending mainstream secondary schools. The Discussion Chapter then explored the emerging themes of: the social aspects of inclusion, including social issues and extra-curricular activities; followed by effective provision, including TA support and interventions outside of the classroom and concluding with the implications of listening to pupil voice.

3.7. Ethical Issues

'All research undertaken in situations which involve people interacting with each other will have an ethical dimension; educational research is no exception and the ethical issues are often complex' (Stutchbury and Fox, 2009: 489).

Sikes (2004) suggests that the first thing to consider is the reason for the research and whether the correct person is conducting it. It could be argued that even though this research

took place as part of a doctorate, it is also an integral element of the researcher's job as the SENCo to regularly evaluate SEN provision in order to suggest improvements. Therefore as long as the findings of this research are used appropriately to inform the teaching and learning and inclusion of SEN pupils then there is a valid reason for the research. This also links to the research topic and its relevance and safety, the findings of this research will not be controversial or be able to be used inappropriately by a third party.

Similarly, Eikelboom et al. (2012) identify four ethical principles to follow when undertaking educational research. The first is that the research will generate valuable knowledge, the second is that the participants are respected, thirdly that the participants will benefit and finally that vulnerable persons are protected. The aim of the research was that by using the pupil voice, new and valuable knowledge would emerge about the experiences of pupils with SEN at Belmont School. Similarly, by asking the pupils directly for their opinions as opposed to asking teachers or carers about them, showed that the pupils and their views were respected and by participating in the research and having an opportunity to address any issues with and suggest possible changes to practice, meant that there was a potential benefit for the participants. Finally, the researcher was careful to ensure that all participants were protected during the entire research process, starting with the interviews and continuing into the write up of the findings. Names of the participants were changed, as was the name of the school. As informed consent is required in educational research in a school setting (see Appendix 3. and Appendix 4. for the documents used) consent was obtained from both the participants and the headteacher of the school (Felzmann, 2009; Hamilton, 2013). Goredema-Braid (2010) suggests that pupils under the age of 16 are able to give informed consent if they have 'sufficient understanding'. Due to their age and cognitive ability the pupils were therefore deemed able to give both assent that they were willing to take part and informed consent.

Even though consent may not be needed from parents and carers many researchers do include them so that there are no negative feelings. However, as the researcher is the SENCo at the school, she is used to acting as a gatekeeper for these pupils and has their parents' permission to do so.

'Within such settings, adult gatekeepers are frequently charged with the responsibility for making decisions on behalf of the young people in their care, including whether or not to grant access to researchers' (Goredema-Braid, 2010: 51).

An exception to this would have been if the pupil with global learning difficulties had agreed to be interviewed. In this eventuality the researcher had intended to ask the parents of the aforementioned pupil to give informed consent on her behalf, due to her cognitive ability and to ensure that she had not felt pressured into giving assent due to the position of the researcher (Felzmann, 2009).

Confidentiality is also an issue when interviewing children in schools as some adults may think it is their responsibility to be told what the pupils have said (Messiou, 2006). Therefore, in the future if the researcher is approached by any teacher and asked about any of the responses from the interviews then information will be shared generically so that there will be no disclosure as to which participant said what. The only exception to this would have been if any safeguarding issue had arisen during the interview process. The participants were aware of this condition, as it was stated both on the information sheet for the pupils and headteacher and also reiterated to the pupils at the beginning of each interview (Furey et al., 2010).

Similarly, the pupils and staff at Belmont School are regularly reminded of the school's Safeguarding Policy which stresses that anything which is potentially a safeguarding issue has to be passed to the nominated safeguarding officer.

As the aim was to explore what pupils thought about their experience of the school, it was important that all pupils, but especially those with learning difficulties, were able to agree to take part and to understand that they could withdraw at any point without any consequences (Edwards, 2000). All pupils involved also had to be able to understand the purpose of the research and what was involved in the interview process (Lewis and Porter, 2004). Therefore, the language used to ask the pupils to participate was very carefully chosen depending on the individual pupil and followed ethical guidelines. Similarly, the wording of the information sheet was simplified, attempting to make it accessible for all. Where necessary, the information sheet was read aloud and explained in more detail to a number of pupils. Only one Year 10 pupil with global learning difficulties chose not to participate and her decision was respected and she was asked no further questions. This had also occurred in the pilot study where another pupil with exceptional needs refused to take part. At that time, the student thought that it was a test and that it would be too difficult. Therefore, before approaching pupils in the main study, the specialist literacy teacher who works most closely with the weakest pupils was consulted on how to approach a number of pupils in order for them to understand the purpose of the study. However, one pupil still withdrew. In hindsight, it was fortunate that only one pupil refused to take part.

Furthermore, in research it is not only the individual pupils who need to be protected. Measures need to be put in place to safeguard all parties: those taking part in the research, the researcher and in the case of educational research; the wider school community (Sikes, 2004). As Sikes (2004) states the researcher also has to be mindful that: '*Work that challenges dominant notions and orthodoxies can be risky, career and identity wise, for those who engage in it*' (Sikes, 2004: 110). In order to protect the researcher and the wider school community, neither the research participants nor the school is identifiable, in the write up.

The participants and the school were given fictitious names and the researcher is the only person to have access to the real names of the participants. However, in order for Belmont School to react to any of the findings, the Senior Leadership Team will be given a summary of the findings and any suggested improvements. However, the researcher will ensure that any issues to be addressed will not be written or be able to be read as criticisms.

This project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University of Reading Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct. In addition, all chapters were discussed with the thesis supervisors during the planning and writing process.

This chapter has explained the methodological approaches employed for the purposes of the research. It has detailed the rationale for adopting the particular paradigm, which frames the research as a whole, as well as the rationale for particular research methods. The chapter has described the selection of the participants, the data collection techniques and the methods of analysis employed. It has also considered ethical issues. The following chapter will present the findings from the individual interviews.

Chapter 4. Findings

This chapter will present the findings from the 13 individual interviews of pupils with SEN at Belmont School.

The aim of the research was to use pupil voice, to examine the experiences of pupils with SEN in a mainstream secondary school. By giving pupils with SEN a voice, the aim is that Belmont School would be able to improve provision for current pupils, as well as learn lessons to be used in the future. Although every child and every circumstance is different, the aim of the research is to identify good practice, barriers to and solutions for pupils with a range of different special educational needs being fully included in a mainstream secondary school. Therefore, elements of the findings should be useful to the inclusion of pupils with SEN in other mainstream schools.

As the focus of the research was on using pupil voice, individual case studies, using examples of the pupils' actual words, are the most appropriate way to present the findings, in order to improve the provision for these pupils. By using quotations from the interviews, each identified pupil had an opportunity to speak and have their voice heard, within the research. In order to provide context and make the findings more useful for practitioners both inside and outside of the school setting, each case study contains a short background section giving information collected from the pupil's Statement of Educational Need, the school SEN Register, Annual Review meeting minutes and teacher reports. The background section is then followed by the individual findings from each pupil. The main themes which emerged from the interviews relate to the extent and reasons behind feeling part of the school

community, the pupils' views on the way in which they are supported and how they feel about forging and sustaining friendships.

For confidentiality reasons the pupils will be given pseudonyms, which they chose. The case studies are presented in the following order: the HI pupils, followed by the VI pupils, then the pupil with a physical disability and finally those pupils with a learning difficulty. The first set of findings presented is from the interview with a pupil who will be referred to as Alison.

4.1. Case Study 1: Alison

4.1.1. Background

When interviewed (see Section 3.7 for additional details on ethical considerations), Alison was in Year 12, studying for A levels. Alison's special educational needs relate to a hearing impairment. After obtaining consent, the interview took place in the SENCo office on an afternoon which was chosen by Alison, as she had two hours without scheduled lessons.

4.1.2. Findings

There are three key findings from the interview with Alison which will be explained in this section. The first one concerns Alison's views about feeling included, due to her involvement in music and receiving praise from adults. The second finding arises from her views on how she is supported. The third finding concerns her friendships.

The thread that ran through all of Alison's comments was the central part that music played in her life. She explained that it was mostly because of participating in music that she felt part of the school:

‘when we take part in things like concerts and they really encourage you to join in and they build confidence when you are performing’.

Performing in the school concert was also something that Alison said she felt proud of, in addition to her exam results:

‘Well the obvious one is my GCSEs and I got lots of help with that which really helped me and also being given the chance for example I didn’t expect it but I got the chance to perform a solo’.

Again, it was her music that Alison said that she was praised the most for and in turn this was what she stated made her feel good about herself:

‘Well I think if they give the opportunities for you to do things then it makes you feel good about yourself and selecting me to be part of leadership for example music prefect or deputy head builds your confidence’.

The impact of interests and extra-curricular activities on feeling included and having self-worth will be addressed in the discussion section.

Alison explained the way that support helped her. She described how beneficial it was for someone to take notes for her:

‘Help from my TAs in case I have missed anything they always take notes and sometimes I get pick up more information from reading those notes and that’s really helpful’.

Alison clarified that she was consulted by both teachers and TAs about ways to support her and she also referred to the pastoral support from the specialist teacher for the deaf who visits her in school:

'It's not just to do with my hearing but in a general way. She is very supportive she tries to make it easier'.

Alison explained that she is in the process of applying for apprenticeships and has done a lot of research to find something suitable to apply for. She said that she appreciated the help from the Sixth Form mentor and also speakers from external agencies who had been invited into school to talk to her year group about various career paths. Even though Alison stated she was happy with the provision that she receives and could not suggest areas for improvement, she did add that help with building confidence may be beneficial to pupils in a similar situation to herself. Alison's views on her support will be addressed in the discussion section.

Regarding friendships, Alison explained that she had had difficulties establishing friendships in the past. She thought that one of the reasons for this was that, lower down the school she was not always in classes with pupils who shared similar interests to herself. However, she said that over time she had made friends:

'One of my friends. She was in my form in Year 7 but I didn't know her that well then but we sort of became friends throughout school. We've had quite a lot of classes together and we have grown quite close during lessons. Yes really good friends'.

Alison also said that she had made friends more easily recently, being in lessons with peers who had similar interests, adding that it was taking part in musical activities which had helped the most. The way in which pupils make friends without adult interventions is another theme which emerges from the findings which will be discussed in more detail in the discussion section.

The three themes emerging from Alison's interview are: the importance of participating in extra-curricular activities, having a sense of pride in achievements and receiving praise, to enable pupils to feel part of the school, the way in which pupils are consulted regarding support and the ways which pupils forge friendships without adult interventions. The next case study will focus on Helen.

4.2. Case Study 2: Helen

4.2.1. Background

When Helen was interviewed, she was in Year 12 studying for A levels. According to her Statement of Educational Need, Helen's area of need relates to her hearing impairment. After obtaining consent, the interview took place in the SENCo office at a time arranged with Helen when she had 2 consecutive free lessons.

4.2.2. Findings

There are three key findings from the interview with Helen, which will be explained in this section. The first finding is the extent to which Helen states she feels included in the school because of the way in which she is treated by teachers. The second finding relates to her views on how she is supported and the third finding concerns her friendships.

Helen stated that she felt more valued now in the Sixth Form than she had lower down the school. She said that the reason for this was possibly because her classes now had fewer pupils and that teachers knew the pupils better and had more time to talk to them. She also suggested that it was to do with the fact that, as you get older, you are able to be part of the school by taking on responsibilities, whereas:

‘... in lower school you are part of the school in terms that you are included but you don’t feel like you are treated like a special person or that you are favoured’.

Helen stressed that in the Sixth Form, teachers help with academic support but: *‘sometimes they are just there for a chat’*. Helen also explained that she trusted the advice and praise from the specialist teacher for the deaf, as she is experienced at working with pupils with hearing impairments: *‘She knows what to say’*. The value of positive relationships between Helen and her teachers will be addressed in the discussion section.

Helen explained that she had been able to give her view about how she wanted to be supported in most areas. She mentioned the support of TAs in lessons and also the help that she has received from regular meetings with a specialist teacher for the deaf and from speech and language professionals, both in the past and more recently from a representative from the LA who discussed university choices and her future aspirations. Helen also acknowledged the benefits of support from the pastoral team, in the form of Head of Year and form tutors. By contrast, Helen explained that sometimes she had been assisted by teachers and TAs even though she had not always wanted the support, for example during French lessons. Helen felt proud of all her GCSE results, but especially in French, a subject which she explained was made more difficult because of her hearing impairment. She said she was *‘chuffed’* with her result, as she had found it difficult due to her deteriorating levels of hearing and then became demotivated:

‘I really struggled with the French as my hearing was really very bad. I didn’t really concentrate much in lessons. I just didn’t see the point in it’.

She stressed that in retrospect she was *‘grateful’* for the support and the way that TAs had not let her give up and had made sure that she had all the work.

Helen expressed a clear idea of what she intends to do in the future, explaining that she plans to go to university to study physiotherapy. She felt that school has helped her to prepare for the future by helping her with her subject knowledge, by giving her a contact to get some relevant work experience and by assisting her to complete the university paperwork.

Helen responded that she had been happy with the provision which she received, especially the flexibility, and she said that she could not think of anything that she would have changed:

‘(TAs) Not just doing what they have been told to do by government or whoever if it’s not working they ask shall we do this shall we do that. That helps that they are not doing what they have been told to do but that they are working with you to find a solution. It is flexible’.

Even though Helen explained that it was very different coming from a small primary school where she worked with two TAs that she knew well, compared to secondary school where she has worked with numerous TAs: *‘Coming here you can have a different one for every subject’*. She explained that, at first, it was *‘overwhelming’* and initially: *‘you don’t always feel that you have someone to trust and talk to’*. She also recognised that the effectiveness of the TA support was in part down to the individual TA and also the relationship between the TA and the pupil. She explained that there was a difference in the support that she received as she progressed through the school. By the GCSE years, the support was more *‘specific’* to her and less of a support for the whole class. She pointed out the benefits of flexibility in the way that TAs were: *‘working with you to find a solution’*, if provision needed addressing. Helen’s concluding remarks were that she thought that she had made the right decision to attend a mainstream school:

‘You know deafness is not one of the driving factors of life it is an invisible disability.... Even if it is difficult at times in the long run being in school throughout life it’s going to make it so much easier because you know how the real world is and you can cope with it’.

Helen's views on support will be followed up in the discussion chapter.

Helen stated that she made friends on her own but that she was not sure how those friendships had started. She described a Year 7 trip where she said that the Head of Year was trying to help her fit in but that she did not get along with the pupils that she was roomed with:

'I think my Head of Year did it because she wanted to make people bond but it didn't work and I don't think the school can help you to make friends because that person has to do it themselves'.

Wanting to make personal decisions about friendships is another theme which will be discussed in more detail in the discussion section.

The three themes emerging from Helen's interview are: the importance of positive relationships with staff, both teachers and TAs, the significance of adults consulting pupils to provide flexible support and pupils wanting to make their own decisions around making friends. The next case study will focus on Sam.

4.3. Case Study 3: Sam

4.3.1. Background

When interviewed, Sam was in Year 12 studying for A levels. Sam's special educational needs relate to a visual impairment. After obtaining consent, the interview took place in the SENCo office on a morning when Sam had 2 hours without scheduled lessons.

4.3.2. Findings

The three key findings from the interview with Sam will be explained in this section. The first finding concerns the link between Sam's interest in sport and feeling part of the school. The second finding arises from her views on how she is supported in school and the third finding concerns her friendships.

Sam stated her strong sense of belonging:

'I always feel part of the school. I always feel like I am involved in school life'.

One of the reasons she stated for feeling part of the school was linked to her sporting accomplishments: *'I suppose especially when I have competed for the school and taken part in big days to do with sport'*. Her sporting achievements were also something that she said that she felt proud of, in addition to her GCSE results. When questioned about her future plans, Sam responded that her main goal was to study hard and get to a university which also has good sports facilities. The impact of interests and extra-curricular activities on feeling included and proud will be addressed in the discussion section.

Sam explained that she was consulted about her support during examinations: *'When I am doing my exams they asked me how the best way is to have a reader or type or stuff'*. Sam also described the support which she receives:

'Well I have a TA in every lesson. I have been given a laptop to use for all my studies. All my work is enlarged for me and typed out'.

Sam reported being happy with her provision, stressing the benefits, in particular, of meeting with a TA mentor weekly, a new provision introduced to support her A level studies. Sam

also referred to the academic support provided by the teachers which she is receiving to achieve her goal for the future:

‘Well science has always been quite good here (at Belmont School) so I have always enjoyed that. It is the reason that I want to do chemistry’.

Towards the end of the interview when discussing a career in science, Sam said: *‘I have never felt that I would not be able to do it’*. Sam’s views on her support will be discussed further in the next section.

Sam stated that she had not experienced difficulties in forging friendships whilst at school, as she found it: *‘quite easy to make friends’*. She recognised that as part of transition from primary school, there had been an effort by staff to help pupils make friends: *‘But they are quite good on your first few days you do stuff. Cool activities’*. Sam considered that enough had been done to help all new pupils, explaining that she had been friends with a girl ever since the induction day in Year 6. Sam’s views on making friendships will be addressed in the discussion section.

The three themes emerging from Sam’s interview are: the importance of extra-curricular activities to enable pupils to feel part of the school, the way in which pupils are supported both inside and outside of the class and opportunities to help pupils to make friends at transition from primary to secondary school. The next case study will focus on Zoe.

4.4. Case Study 4: Zoe

4.4.1. Background

When interviewed, Zoe was in Year 10, studying for GCSEs. Zoe's special educational needs refer to her visual impairment. After obtaining consent, the interview took place in the SENCo office at a time arranged with Zoe when she usually has a one-to-one session with a TA.

4.4.2. Findings

There are three key findings from the interview with Zoe, which will be explained in this section. The first finding concerns the role of participation in sporting activities and receiving praise in helping Zoe to feel included in the school. The second finding arises out of her views on how she is supported and the third finding concerns her friendships.

Zoe's initial response to the question about how much she felt included in school was to laugh and answer that she: '*probably like never*' felt part of the school. Despite this comment, she then reconsidered and decided that, due to participating in sport, she felt part of the school a little of the time. She gave an example of feeling included: '*like if you are doing like a cricket match or something then it feels like you are doing it for the school*'. Her sporting achievements were also something that she said that she was proud of and that made her feel good about herself, as were recent results in mock examinations: '*most of the grades are like pretty much on target, or over target*'. Zoe also mentioned that teachers, in particular PE teachers gave her praise, which made her feel good about herself and she thought that this was probably because she tried very hard in PE, as she explained that it was her favourite subject. The way that Zoe's enjoyment of sport is linked to her feelings about school will be addressed in the discussion section.

Zoe was able to explain the way in which both teachers and TAs supported her in lessons and in the preparation of resources. Zoe explained that she was consulted about support, especially about resources and she described the advantages of having both modified paper and electronic copies of text. When talking about TAs in lessons Zoe explained that:

'they are in pretty much all the lessons. Obviously there are some that you get on with better than others. They all do the same thing'.

As well as help with classwork, Zoe described her provision in tests and examinations, having the use of a laptop or a reader and scribe, as well as 50% extra time. When questioned about assistance on school trips, Zoe answered: *'no, I am just cool'*.

Zoe said that she has a clear plan for the future, which includes staying on at school to do A levels in PE, Psychology and Food Technology. She said that good teaching would help her most in preparation for her future plans and she considered that: *'the quality of teaching is really good ... There's not much else you lot (teachers) could do I don't think'*. Overall, Zoe stated that she was pleased with the support from the learning support department and said: *'actually I wouldn't like to change anything'*. Similarly, when questioned about suggestions to help similar pupils in the future Zoe stated: *'You (SEN team) are doing everything that you should do so not much you could do any better'*. Zoe's views on her support will be discussed in the next section.

Regarding friendships, Zoe clarified that her best friend at school was in some of her classes:

'we met through science I think. We are in the same class for science and maths and then we started helping each other out'.

Zoe said that she thought that it was up to individual pupils to make friends and that adults could not help. Whether adults need to help with friendships will be discussed in the following section.

The three themes emerging from Zoe's interview are: the importance of participating in sporting activities and receiving praise to enable pupils to feel part of the school and good about themselves, the way in which pupils are supported in class, during examinations and with resources, and pupils wanting to take ownership of making their own friends. The next case study will focus on Nicola.

4.5. Case Study 5: Nicola

4.5.1. Background

Nicola was in Year 13 studying for A levels when interviewed. Nicola has a physical disability. After obtaining consent, the interview took place in the SENCo office on an afternoon when Nicola had 2 hours without scheduled lessons.

4.5.2. Findings

There are three key findings from the interview with Nicola, which will be explained in this section. The first finding relates to reasons for feeling part of the school: participating in extra-curricular activities, positive relationships with staff, having a sense of pride in achievements and being praised. The second finding concerns her feelings about the way in which she is supported and the third finding relates to her friendships.

Nicola responded that she felt part of the school most of the time, due to participation in extra-curricular activities and the way in which she has been made to feel by staff:

‘I would say taking part in concerts and stuff as part of the choirs. And being part of the gym and dance show on certain occasions and another instance was when we got the lift for the stage, it was great it felt great’.

Nicola also explained that teachers made her feel good about herself by praising her work or by using it as an example to show others:

‘if I get a good mark in something and a get a note or someone says well done that was a good piece of work. Or if they copy the work and give it to others as a good example’.

Similarly, Nicola said that she was proud of her academic achievements, especially her GCSE results, picking out the A* which she achieved in history, one of the subjects which she has continued to study at A level. Nicola also stressed the importance of being able to participate in school trips: *‘Great experiences not sure I would have gone to some of the places if it had not been for the school’*. The importance of participation in extra-curricular activities, having positive relationships with staff, having a sense of pride in achievements and receiving praise will be addressed in the discussion section.

Nicola identified the support that she received over the years very clearly, saying that, although she still has TA support in every lesson, she now needs less help as she is older: *‘They used to do more for me than they do now’*. Nicola explained that TAs help with tasks relating to both fine and gross motor skills, especially in PE and she said that she was happy with the provision and could not suggest any changes: *‘I don’t think so I am getting more independent as I get older’*. Nicola also explained that she is regularly consulted by both teachers and TAs about her support. She gave the example of being sent powerpoints of the lessons by some teachers, which she thought helped so that she could listen to the teachers instead of having to worry about taking notes. Nicola had very clear plans for the future and she thought that school was definitely helping her to prepare for this:

‘Yes definitely. Yeah the whole application to uni system and seeing what other options are out there and what careers you might want to do’.

The theme of consultation about support will be discussed in the following section.

Nicola chose to describe a friendship that started at primary school and continued into the secondary phase but she felt that it was *‘more complicated’* to make friends at secondary school. Nicola said that she did not need help making friends, because there were lots of opportunities to meet different peers: *‘with form groups and teaching groups I think that helps’*. However, Nicola suggested that a way to help pupils in the future would be to have more opportunities to meet other pupils in the year group, not just those in your classes. Providing opportunities to build friendships is a theme which will be addressed in the discussion section.

The three themes emerging from Nicola’s interview are: the importance of extra-curricular activities, having positive relationships with adults, feeling a sense of pride about achievements and receiving praise, to enable pupils to feel part of the school, the way in which, after consultation, support changes over the years, and being given opportunities to make friends. The next case study will focus on Iwona.

4.6. Case Study 6: Iwona

4.6.1. Background

When interviewed, Iwona was at the end of Year 9. Iwona’s specific learning difficulties relate to autism but her Statement of Educational Need also identifies that she has weak numeracy and literacy. After obtaining consent, the interview took place in the SENCo office

during a PE lesson: this was agreed with both Iwona and her teacher. Iwona had written her responses to the interview questions down in advance and asked to be able to read them during the interview, although during the interview she also added additional comments to her written responses.

4.6.2. Findings

There are three key findings from the interview with Iwona, which will be explained in this section. The first one relates to the importance of participation at afterschool clubs, the second centres on views about how she is supported and the third finding concerns friendships.

Iwona paused before answering the question about whether she felt part of the school. However, after consideration and looking at the notes which she had made before the interview, she stated that she felt part of the school: *'most of the time'*. She said that the reason for this was mostly linked to participation in the school gardening club, which was also something that she said made her proud and she explained that recently the team had won an award at a garden show. The importance of participation in extra-curricular activities will be addressed in the discussion section.

When explaining her support, Iwona reported that there are TAs in most of her lessons, who usually consult her about support: *'if they can sit down next to me and help me with the work'*. Iwona also said that she was encouraged by adults to try harder and also to be more confident: *'Like they encourage me to do like higher tests because they think I can do it'*.

Talking about her future, Iwona explained that she was interested in: *'going to an art college and taking art for A levels'*. However, she stated that she was unsure of how school was helping her with future plans, apart from helping her choose her options for GCSE. Iwona

said that she was happy with the support that she received and she was unable to suggest any ways that it could be improved. Iwona's views on her support will be discussed further in the next section.

Iwona identified a good friend and knew exactly when and how the friendship had started: *'we were on activity week and we had to be in a group and we started talking and then we just became friends'*. She said that she thought that pupils should be able to make friends without adult assistance. Friendships will be examined further in the discussion section.

The three themes emerging from Iwona's interview are: the importance of extra-curricular activities to enable pupils to part of the school, the way in which pupils are supported emotionally as well as physically and pupils wanting ownership of making friends. The next case study will focus on Kia.

4.7. Case Study 7: Kia

4.7.1. Background

When interviewed, Kia was at the end of Year 9. According to her Statement of Educational Need, Kia is classed as having moderate learning difficulties with weak numeracy and literacy. After obtaining consent, the interview took place in the SENCo office during a Personal Social Health and Economic Education (PSHE) lesson, which was agreed with Kia and her form tutor. This lesson was chosen as there would be no notes or homework to catch up on, another option could have been during a PE lesson but Kia chose the PSHE option.

4.7.2. Findings

There are three key findings from the interview with Kia, which will be explained in this section. The first finding concerns the way that achieving goals, feeling proud of achievements and having positive relationships with adults make Kia feel included, the second finding arises from her views on how she is supported and the third finding concerns her friendships.

Kia found it difficult to understand the initial question on feeling part of the school but when the wording was changed to: 'being included', she was able to respond that she felt included some of the time, giving the example of when she was taking part in sports or helping teachers. Kia said that she was proud that she was near her target grade in history and that she had improved in English. Outside of the classroom she stated that she was proud of running at Sports Day: *'I came in third in 1500 meters'*. Kia also said that she felt that TAs and teachers encouraged her and made her feel good about herself:

'when they like talk about like if you've got something like a low level or something, they kind of boast you up and say it's alright'.

The importance of feeling a sense of pride in achievements and having positive relationships with staff will be addressed in the discussion section.

Kia was quick to respond that the specialist literacy teacher and one of the Assistant SENCOs had asked about how to support her best but she found it difficult to give examples. Except for explaining that the specialist teacher showed an interest in how she was doing in her other subjects, whether she was struggling and whether she received help from TAs or teachers.

Kia stated that she was supported in all lessons by a TA and that she had extra time in examinations and that sometimes TAs read and scribed for her. She said that she was pleased with the support and thought people helped, especially: *'If you're stuck'*. Kia said that she

thought that school would be able to help with her future plans by offering advice. In general Kia stated that she was happy with her support and she said that she could not think of any improvements that would help her. Support will be addressed in the discussion section. Kia was quick to answer that she had ‘loads’ of friends and she explained that she became friends with two people at once:

‘We like. It’s a bit weird we talked about what’s our favourite food and all that and we kind of made good friends’.

She also explained that she and her friend often help one another with work. Kia said that she did not think that school could help pupils to build friendships. Friendships will be discussed in the following section.

The three themes emerging from Kia’s interview are: the importance of having a sense of pride in achievements and positive relationships with staff to enable pupils to feel part of the school, the different ways in which pupils are supported and the pupils’ ability to make friends without adult assistance. The next case study will focus on Matilda.

4.8. Case Study 8: Matilda

4.8.1. Background

When interviewed, Matilda was in Year 11. Matilda’s special needs relate to moderate learning difficulties and social and emotional difficulties. After obtaining consent, the interview took place in the SENCo office on a prearranged morning when Matilda was on study leave but revising in school for the day.

4.8.2. Findings

There are three key findings from the interview with Matilda, which will be explained in this section. The first finding concerns the impact, of participation in extra-curricular activities, feeling a sense of pride in achievements and relationships with staff, on the extent to which she feels part of the school. The second finding concerns her views on how she is supported and the final focus is on friendships.

Matilda stated that she only felt part of the school a little of the time and explained that the thing which did make her feel included was participating in the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme. Similarly, achieving the Duke of Edinburgh Award was one of the things that Matilda said that she was proud of, along with her work experience week at British Airways. One of the reasons that Matilda said that she did not feel part of the school all of the time was that in some of her lessons she thought that the teachers had favourite pupils. However, Matilda said that the specialist teacher had helped her to feel good about herself and she had not only helped with school issues but also: *‘a lot of home related stuff’*. Matilda also explained that a particular teacher had helped with her future plans to go to college to study Information Technology:

‘my old teacher helped me to decide what I wanted to do and believed in me and motivated me in what I want to do and not what other people want me to do basically’.

The importance of participation in extra-curricular activities, feeling a sense of pride and positive relationships with staff will be addressed in the discussion section.

Regarding support Matilda reported that she was asked about support: *‘the TAs I have do ask me if I need help and what I want them to do’*. She also gave the example, when:

‘one of the TAs I had in one subject probably science she asked me if I was Ok with the work and if she could sit next to me or go around or stuff’.

Matilda also explained: *‘I have TAs in the subjects that I mostly need it I also have one-to-one with a specialist teacher’*. Although Matilda said that she was happy with the help from the specialist teacher, she said that she thought that sometimes having TA support in lessons could be distracting to other pupils. However, Matilda said that her attitude to the TAs had changed over time and that she was more willing to accept help from TAs in Year 11 than in the lower years. Matilda suggested that it would have been more useful if she were able to choose the TAs who worked with her from Year 7 and that she would have liked to get to know them more so that she felt ‘more comfortable’ working with them. Matilda’s views on her support will be discussed further in the next section.

Matilda explained that she had: *‘one good very close friend’* and that they met:

‘in our history lesson when my teacher put us together in the seating plan. And she has helped me get to what I want to do and to accept the help that I get given’.

Matilda explained that she did not think that school could have helped her to make friends, as she thought that it was up to the individual pupil:

‘to be you and then you will make friends eventually and how to deal with issues that you might come across’.

The three themes emerging from Matilda’s interview are: the importance of extra-curricular activities, feeling a sense of pride in achievements and positive relationships with teachers to enable pupils to feel included, pupils being able to have a say about which TAs support them and pupils having ownership of making friends. The next case study will focus on Monika.

4.9. Case Study 9: Monika

4.9.1. Background

At the time of being interviewed Monika was in Year 9. According to her Statement of Educational Need, Monika's special needs refer to moderate learning difficulties; she has very weak numeracy and literacy. After obtaining consent, the interview took place in the SENCo office during a PE lesson.

4.9.2. Findings

There are three key findings from the interview with Monika, which will be explained in this section. The first finding concerns feeling part of the school due to her friendships, support from TAs and feeling a sense of pride due to achievement, the second finding arises from her views on how she is supported and the final finding concerns making friends.

Monika expressed that she felt part of the school most of the time giving friends and the support that she received from TAs as the reasons for this. Monika said that she thought that adults made her feel good about herself as she explained that they support her to be more independent and give her praise. She also stated that she felt proud about her academic achievement, giving the example of a recent science test: '*When we had mocks I achieved a C for one of the sciences*'. The importance of feeling a sense of achievement and positive relationships with peers and staff will be addressed in the discussion section.

Initially Monika responded that she was not consulted about support but later during the discussion she said that the literacy specialist often asked her how she was managing in her subjects and whether she needed help with any homework. Monika appeared to misunderstand the question about support but once it was rephrased she explained that she

had a TA in every lesson and also a reader and scribe during exams and tests. Monika said that she was happy with the support she receives and when asked whether there was anything that could be changed she responded: 'no'. In the future Monika said that she would like: '*to do something with cooking or like someone in the shops*'. However, she said that she was unsure how school could help her to prepare for this. Monika's views on her support will be discussed further in the next section.

Regarding friendships, Monika explained how she had made friends: '*We were in a maths lesson and helped each other*'. She stated that in her opinion pupils do not need help making friends: '*Because you can make your friends yourself. You can talk to them first rather than school do it for you*'.

There are three themes emerging from Monika's interview. Firstly, that pupils can feel part of the school due to positive relationships with friends and staff, but also that academic achievement promotes a sense of pride and belonging. Secondly, that the literacy specialist consults Monika about her support and that she is happy with her provision. Thirdly, Monika feels that pupils do not need help making friends. The next case study will focus on Nina.

4.10. Case Study 10: Nina.

4.10.1. Background

When interviewed, Nina was at the end of Year 11. According to her Statement of Educational Need, Nina is classed as having moderate learning difficulties, with weak numeracy and literacy. After obtaining consent, the interview took place in the SENCo office on a prearranged afternoon when Nina was on study leave but revising in school for the day.

4.10.2. Findings

There are three key findings from the interview with Nina, which will be explained in this section. The first finding concerns the reasons that she feels included in the school community, such as participation in pastoral events, a sense of pride in academic achievement and positive relationships with staff, the second finding arises from her views on how she is supported and the third finding concerns her friendships.

Nina answered that she felt part of the school most of the time and the reasons she stated were: *'when we do the inter-form dance and when our whole year and classes do things all together'*. One of the things that Nina was proud of was her improvement in English, she explained that: *'English was really bad I didn't get good marks ... my English got better and I'm starting to get Cs a lot'*. Nina considered that pupils were encouraged to enjoy learning and she said: *'I enjoy my learning'*. She said that she *'definitely'* thought that adults in school had made her feel good about herself and she gave an example of when she had panic attacks and was helped by going to speak to the staff in the Student Focus Centre. The importance of participation in pastoral events, achievement and positive relationships with staff will be addressed in the discussion section.

Nina stated that she was consulted about support at Annual Review meetings. She explained that teachers: *'normally give me different papers from others to make it easier for me to make it so that I understand the work what I am given'*. She said that having extra time and a TA to read and scribe for her during examinations had really helped. Nina also explained that she had received support planning for the future:

'School has helped me a lot by getting my application and giving it in they helped me plan to fill in my application and they sent it so I didn't have to do it myself. They've

helped me do a lot of things they also helped me think about what I can do in the future cos I wasn't too sure'.

Nina said that she was happy with the provision that she received and could not think of anything that she would like to change. Although she did say that it would be useful for pupils with similar needs to herself, to realise that sometimes it might be difficult at school and there may be issues with friends but that the focus needs to be on examinations. She thought that the things that helped her and would also help others were the extra English and Maths: *'Just like you did with me'*. Nina's views on her support will be discussed further in the next section.

Nina talked about a friend, who had been supportive when she found maths difficult, explaining that the friendship had grown overtime: *'first we didn't really like each other. That's the funny thing'*. However, Nina did not feel that school could have helped her to make friends as she thought that she needed to do it for herself.

The three themes emerging from Nina's interview are: the importance of pastoral events, positive relationships with staff and feeling proud about academic achievement, to enable pupils to feel part of the school, the way in which pupils are supported and that pupils can make friends on their own. The next case study will focus on Rachel.

4.11. Case Study 11: Rachel

4.11.1. Background

When interviewed, Rachel was in Year 11. According to her Statement of Educational Need, Rachel has severe learning difficulties and medical issues. After obtaining consent, the

interview took place in the SENCo office on a prearranged morning when Rachel was on study leave but revising in school for the day.

4.11.2. Findings

There are three key findings from the interview with Rachel, which will be explained in this section. The first finding concerns feeling part of the school community, the second finding arises from Rachel's views on how she is supported and the third finding concerns friendships.

Rachel required a number of the interview questions to be rephrased. Initially, she was unsure of whether she felt part of the school but once the question was rephrased she was able to explain that she felt part of the school community some of the time: *'Because I am very quiet and I do not talk to people'*. However, Rachel said that she was very proud of a recent assessment: *'I got a D in my English which I was really happy about'*. The importance relationships and having a sense of pride in achievement in order to feel part of the school will be addressed in the discussion section.

When asked about support Rachel was unable to give an example of a time when she had been asked about her support but she described the support which she receives:

'I have a TA in every lesson except PE. Exams as well. They scribe. They read and write. Someone goes to college with me as well'.

Rachel said that she had been happy with the provision she had received. Views on support will be discussed in the following section.

The only change which Rachel said that she would have made to her experience at school was: *‘Making better friends but that is my own decision’*. After further questioning she explained that she did have friends but that it had taken her time to establish friendships: *‘The only thing I remember is talking to other people in my form and one was friends of another and now we are besties’*.

Friendships will be addressed in the discussion section.

The three themes emerging from Rachel’s interview are: the importance of relationships and feeling a sense of pride about achievements, in order to feel part of the school, the way in which pupils are supported by TAs and that sometimes pupils find it difficult to make friends. The next case study will focus on Robyn.

4.12. Case Study 12: Robyn

4.12.1. Background

Robyn was in Year 9 when she was interviewed. Robyn’s Statement of Educational Need refers to social and emotional needs, as well as moderate learning difficulties. After obtaining consent, the interview took place in the SENCo office during a PSHE lesson, which was agreed with Robyn and her form tutor.

4.12.2. Findings

There are three key findings from the interview with Robyn, which will be explained in this section. The first finding concerns Robyn’s participation in pastoral events and extra-curricular activities and receiving rewards, which make her feel part of the school, the second

finding arises from her views on how she is supported and the third finding concerns her friendships.

Robyn stated that she felt part of the school most of the time. The reasons that she gave for this were participating in: *'sports day'* and *'taking part in inter-house things like inter-house hockey'*. Robyn also mentioned clubs that she attends, such as, hockey, athletics and gardening club. She explained that she was proud of gardening club, stating: *'Oh yea we went to Wisley and we won green prize and gold prize'*. Robyn said that she thought that school encouraged all pupils to enjoy learning by telling them: *'to work hard and try your best'*. She explained that she had been given commendations, termly certificates for academic effort or achievement and: *'in Year 7 I got an award for outstanding effort in design tech'*. Robyn then explained that she would be collecting three further awards at a forthcoming presentation evening: *'for Maths, Science and ICT'*. The importance of participation in pastoral events and extra-curricular activities, and being rewarded for doing well will be addressed in the discussion section.

Robyn appeared unsure about the meaning of whether she had been asked about support but when the question was rephrased to: *'have people asked how they can help you'*, she replied that she had been asked but that she was unable to give any examples. Robyn explained her provision by stating: *'I get help in lessons'* from the TAs who *'help explain the task if I don't understand it'*. She also explained that she receives extra time in tests. Robyn said that she unsure about what she would like to do in the future. However, she said that she would like to remain at Belmont for Sixth Form, possibly to study History as she that is a subject which she enjoys. Robyn said that she was uncertain of how school would help with her future plans but she stated that a recent career's day organised by the school had been helpful. Robyn said that

she was happy with the support which she receives: *'Yes it's really helped me'* and said that she could not think of any changes that she would make to her provision. Robyn's views on her support will be discussed in the next section.

When discussing friendships Robyn explained that she had recently become very friendly with a girl who she had known since Year 7: *'we weren't friends then but we became good friends in year 9'*. Robyn said that she thought that adults at school were not able to help pupils to make friends but pupils had to make friends on their own: *'I don't think they (adults) can. You have to get friends'*. However, Robyn explained that lower down the school there had been interventions in place to help her to improve her self-esteem and also: *'helping make new friends sessions and they helped me'*. Friendships will be discussed in the following section.

The three themes emerging from Robyn's interview are: the importance of extra-curricular activities and receiving recognition for doing well, to enable pupils to feel part of the school, the way in which pupils are happy with their support and ownership of making friends but also the recognition that there have been interventions to assist with this. The next case study will focus on Sally.

4.13. Case Study 13: Sally

4.13.1. Background

When interviewed, Sally was in Year 10. According to her Statement of Educational Need, Sally has moderate learning difficulties and social and emotional difficulties. After obtaining

consent, the interview took place in the SENCo office during a PE lesson, which was prearranged with the pupil and her PE teacher.

4.13.2. Findings

There are three key findings from the interview with Sally, which will be explained in this section. The first finding concerns the reasons that Sally feels part of the school, namely, taking part in sports day, being a member of the school council and feeling a sense of pride in her achievements, the second finding arises from her views on how she is supported and the third finding concerns her friendships.

Sally said that she felt part of the school some of the time, giving examples of when she participated in sports day and when she: *'got voted for school council'*. Sally stated that she was proud of achieving her target grades in ICT and English and that she was also proud of volunteering as part of work experience week. Sally said that she thought that adults at school had made her feel good about herself by helping her to: *'think about my future'* and in the way that they had given her extra support. The importance of participation in pastoral events, having a sense of pride and positive relationships with staff will be addressed in the discussion section.

Sally responded that she was sometimes consulted about support, for example she said that she had been asked about attending revision classes and help for the Year 11 examinations. She also explained that the specialist literacy teacher asked how she could support her in the different subject areas, as well as helping her with English. Sally explained: *'I have TAs that help me and smaller groups'*. Sally also said that she receives extra time in examinations and tests and that she has Annual Review Meetings. Sally said that she was studying GCSE Child Development as she wanted to work with children in the future. Sally stated that she was

happy with the support that she receives and that she would not change anything. However, regarding other pupils Sally stated that if pupils were finding something difficult in the future then they should be given extra support in lessons. Sally's views on her support will be discussed in the next section.

Sally described her friendship with a pupil whom she had been at primary school with and she explained that they had been friends since Year 2. She said that she thought that they were better friends now than they used to be as they: '*know more about each other*'. Sally initially said that she was unsure whether school could have helped her with friendships but she then decided: '*I don't know. I probably needed to do it on my own*'. Friendships will be discussed in the next section.

The three themes emerging from Sally's interview are: the importance of participating in events outside of the classroom and having a sense of pride in achievements, to enable pupils to feel part of the school, the way in which pupils are consulted regarding support and ownership of making friends.

This chapter has focussed on the findings from the 13 individual pupils interviewed. Each write up includes a short section giving background about the pupil, in order to give context. This is followed by the findings from the interview, using direct quotations from the pupils, in order to keep the original pupil voice. Although, the individual pupils gave a variety of responses, there were a number of common themes which emerged from the interviews. Therefore, the following chapter will present the findings from all of the interviews thematically.

Chapter 5. Results

The previous chapter presented the findings of the individual pupils, using their own words, which will be particularly beneficial in helping to improve their provision. However, there were a number of common themes which emerged from the interviews and this chapter will bring together the findings of all of the participants, thematically. The main themes which were raised are as follows: feeling part of the school, support and friendships. By concentrating on the group as a whole, the intention is to be able to identify common issues for the majority of pupils with SEN, as well as picking out individual concerns. Hopefully, this information will enable the research findings to be more useful for other professionals, besides staff at Belmont School, interested in improving provision for a wide range of pupils with SEN in mainstream settings. The following sub-section will discuss the extent to which pupils with SEN said that they felt part of the school.

5.1. Feeling Part of the School Community

This section explores the pupils' responses to the semi structured question about the extent to which they felt part of the school and the reasons behind this.

The rationale behind the research was that part of the SENCo role is to ensure that pupils with SEN feel included in the school community. Similarly, Self-Determination Theory suggests the importance of the social environment on a person's intrinsic motivation and ability to reach their full potential (Van Lange, 2011). By contrast, there is evidence from the literature to suggest that pupils with SEN can find it difficult to fit into the school community (Broomhead, 2013; Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011; Koster et al., 2009). Therefore, during

the interview the pupils were asked whether they felt included, ‘*a little*’, ‘*some*’ or ‘*most*’ of the time. The majority of the pupils interviewed at Belmont said that they felt part of the school, with all but five of the pupils responding, ‘*always*’ or ‘*most of the time*’. For example, one responded that: ‘*Most of the time I feel part of the school*’. Whereas, three pupils responded that they felt part of the school: ‘*Some of the time*’ and two said that they felt part of the school, ‘*a little of the time*’. In spite of this, the two pupils were still able to give examples of some ways in which they did feel included. For example, one said that she felt part of the school: ‘*When I completed my Duke of Edinburgh Bronze*’ and the other said that she felt included:

‘Kind of like when you compete in sports day ... kind of like part of sport and like if you are doing like a cricket match or something then it feels like you are doing it for the school’.

There are a number of factors which may contribute to the extent to which pupils said that they felt included. Firstly, although this is a small sample from one school, some interesting patterns emerge. The research findings show a difference in responses from those pupils with a sensory or physical disability, as opposed to those with a learning difficulty. The former, with the exception of a VI pupil, all said that they felt part of the school, ‘*always*’ or ‘*most of the time*’ whereas the latter, with the exception of a pupil with learning difficulties, were most likely to respond that they felt part of the school, ‘*some of the time*’. The subtle difference in the strength of responses suggests that pupils with learning difficulties, in contrast to those with physical or sensory disabilities, have less of a sense of belonging at the school. Another factor which could influence the perception of feeling included may be age, since an older pupil expressed feeling more valued in Sixth Form. Similarly, the pupils with physical sensory disabilities were also older than those with learning difficulties. However, as regards pupils in general, the strongest indicator of the extent to which they feel part of the school

appears to be whether or not they participate in extra-curricular activities, for example a pupil who said that she felt included: '*nearly all of the time*', also explained the reasons:

'Well usually during particular events when we take part in things like concerts and they really encourage you to join in and they build confidence when you are performing. They want you to contribute to as many extra-curricular activities that you can. And the trips as well'.

This introduction shows that when interviewed most pupils said that they felt part of the school, '*most*' or '*some*' of the time. However, there appears to be a correlation between the level of response depending on type of SEN or age, with the older pupils who all had sensory or physical disabilities saying that they felt part of the school more often than those with learning difficulties. The pupils' responses raised a number of other factors which impact on whether they feel part of the school or not. The first factor to be explored is participation in extra-curricular activities.

5.1.1. Extra-Curricular Activities

This section explores the first factor behind the pupils interviewed feeling part of the school: participation in activities outside of the classroom. Pupil responses suggest that extra-curricular activities act as a personal bridge to inclusion.

An interesting pattern emerges from the data, it was evident that pupils who attend clubs, did so in a number of different interest areas. For example, one stated that she took part in various clubs and activities, connected to music. Whereas, two pupils stressed the importance of participating in sporting activities outside of lessons, one said: '*being part of the hockey team and athletics. And gardening club*', helped her to feel part of the school and one said that taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme helped her to feel included.

Although, the pupils who did not attend extra-curricular clubs did not give reasons why not, the data appears to show a relationship between the different areas of need and the pupils' likelihood to attend extra-curricular activities, with all of those with sensory or physical disabilities attending clubs, whereas only three out of the eight pupils with learning difficulties said that they participated in clubs or non-compulsory trips. Even though, three pupils showed an interest in activities which form clubs, they still did not attend. For example, one stated that she felt part of the school: '*When I did sports day*'. Similarly, another pupil also said that she enjoyed: '*When I take part in sports*'. This raises the question of whether all pupils have the same access to extra-curricular activities.

As well as attendance at clubs there are other activities mentioned, such as participating in school trips and although, not technically a club, one pupil also said that being a member of the School Council, was something which made her feel part of the school.

Attending extra-curricular activities was only one of the reasons given by pupils for feeling included in the school. The following section will consider another reason given: the importance of feeling a sense of pride in achievement.

5.1.2. Pride in Achievement

This section will consider the second factor behind the pupils feeling part of the school: having a sense of pride in achievements, whether relating to activities, inside or outside of the classroom.

The post-GCSE pupils with physical and sensory impairments were keen to stress their pride in recent examination results. For example, one pupil said: '*I am proud of my GCSE results*'

and another responded: *'The thing that I am most proud of is my GCSEs. Yeah. In particular history where I got an A*'*.

Similarly, a number of pupils with learning difficulties were focussed on target grades and achieving or even exceeding their own targets, which they said made them feel proud. For instance, one pupil explained:

'my English was really bad I didn't get good marks and stuff since I did more English and started to work harder with the teachers my English got better and I'm starting to get Cs a lot.'

Although, the comments from pupils with learning difficulties suggest that the pupils wanted to do well and were proud of doing so, it is interesting to note that there was no indication that they felt negatively about achieving lower grades than some of their more able peers.

For some pupils, pride came from both academic achievement and success in extra-curricular activities. For example, one pupil said that she was proud of both her GCSE results and her musical accomplishments. Similarly, another said that she was proud of:

'most of the grades that I got in my mocks because they are like pretty much on target. Or over target. Like stuff in sport I have managed to go to a football club and like improve my times and that in athletics and stuff'.

For some of the pupils interviewed, reaching academic targets can be difficult but pupils often have other areas where they can excel and which can be equally celebrated. For example, for one pupil pride came from being involved in: *'The Duke of Ed, my work experience at BA'*, whilst for another it was the success of the gardening club.

It was not only a sense of pride which pupils said made them feel good about themselves but also the praise and encouragement from adults, which they received for both effort and achievement. For example, one pupil explained: *'Yeah I get praise for like doing harder work'* and another said: *'Often get praise when do good things'*. For another pupil, it was a teacher who helped her to decide about her future career, she said: *My IT, my old teacher helped me to decide what I wanted to do and believed in me and motivated me'*.

As well as, verbal praise and encouragement pupils also said that receiving rewards made them feel good about themselves, for instance one pupil explained: *'I do get commendations and in Year 7 I got an award for outstanding effort in design tech'* and another said: *'From having commendations. Pizza for attendance in Year 9'*.

This section has considered how having a sense of pride in achievements is a factor behind pupils feeling part of the school. Pupils' achievements, both inside and outside of the classroom can have an impact on how they feel about school in general. As well as the pupils feeling proud, they also said that they appreciated adult recognition of their achievements, in the form of praise and encouragement. The role which adults have in helping pupils to feel part of the school will be explored in the following section.

5.1.3. Positive Relationships with Adults

This section will explore the third factor that pupils stated made them feel part of the school: having positive relationships with adults: teachers, TAs or staff from outside agencies supporting pupils in school.

Pupils commented that having positive relationships with adults, contributed to the sense of feeling part of the school. All four pupils who were in the Sixth Form reported feeling more valued now that they were older. One pupil, in particular, responded in detail about the importance which she placed on interactions with adults. She explained that she came from a small village primary school where all members of staff knew her and she may have been treated more positively than her peers, which Frederickson (2010) states can happen in the case of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools. The pupil explained that transition to a large secondary school was a big change:

‘At first in Year 7 it was quite overwhelming as in primary school I had two TAs for everything and I knew them very well. Coming here you can have a different one for every subject. You can see five different people a day sometimes it just difficult to take it all in it’s too much. Too many members of staff and you don’t always feel that you have someone to trust and talk to. But as I have gone up the school the people who support me have gone up with me’.

Although all of the teachers and TAs in school were informed about the pupil and her needs, from staff briefings and training sessions, they did not all know her personally, as it is a large school. Now that she is in Sixth Form, her teachers know her very well: she has been in school for six years, class sizes are much smaller for A level and in most cases pupils have the same teacher and if applicable the same TAs for the two years. The pupil said that she benefits from having a more adult relationship with staff. It was apparent from her responses that there is a slight contradiction, that on one hand she wants to be treated like every other pupil but on the other hand she wants everyone to know who she is and to treat her differently, in her own words:

‘I think in lower school you are part of the school in terms that you are included but you don’t feel like you are treated like a special person or that you are favoured’.

The pupil's comments lead to the conclusion that what was important to her was having a positive relationship with her teachers. Having another adult in the room to support her may have made her feel that she did not have the same access to the teacher as other pupils. Feeling different from other pupils because of the extra adult support was also mentioned by another pupil who said that she found it difficult to accept help in the early years of secondary school. She hinted that one of the reasons that she did not feel as included was because she thought that she did not have such a positive relationship with her teachers as her peers. She stated:

'Well it depends with the teachers with some subjects you do feel involved but some have a liking to other students and then you might not feel involved'.

Having a positive relationship with teachers was also mentioned as being important to some of the younger pupils. For example, one pupil said that she did not expect to be treated any differently than any other pupils and the onus was on her behaviour towards the teacher as opposed to vice versa. She said: *'helping teachers and that I feel part of the school'*.

Other pupils felt that a positive relationship with staff, in general, was more about being encouraged and praised for doing well, which made them feel included. One pupil agreed that TAs said, *'well done'* and another said that staff encouraged her: *'they have helped me think about my future and given me extra support'*. On the other hand, another pupil explained that support staff had encouraged her when she was finding things difficult: *'she tried to make me feel better'*. In general, it was pupils with learning difficulties who referred to positive relationships with members of the learning support department. For instance, comments from the pupils, who work with the school specialist literacy teacher, were very positive about the way in which she made them feel. A possible reason that these pupils mentioned the SEN department more than the other pupils is perhaps because they spend more time with the

specialist teacher and the SENCo than the other pupils with SEN, either during lessons or at break and lunch time. This may also explain why a VI pupil who also spends a lot of time in the SEN department, as well as having positive relationships with teachers, stated the importance of the positive relationship which she has with adults in the learning support department, who she said could help her if there was an issue and she said that this enabled her to feel included in the school as a whole.

Not all pupils thought that positive relationships with TAs were important. One pupil, for example, said that it was obvious that she got on with some TAs better than others but what was important was that they all helped her in a similar way.

As well as TA support the pupils with physical and sensory impairments are all visited regularly by outside agencies. All four pupils have been visited in school by the same people since primary school, so it was surprising that it was only the pupils with HI that mentioned their relationship with the specialist teacher for the deaf. Both HI pupils agreed that the specialist teacher was very supportive. However, one pupil explained that she wanted the same kind of a relationship with all of her teachers. Support from external agencies will be further discussed in Section 5.2.4.

Section 5.1. has looked at the first theme to arise from the data: the extent to which the pupils with SEN feel part of the school and the reasons behind this. The findings show that the majority of the pupils interviewed felt included, '*some*' or '*most*' of the time and the reasons behind this were: participating in extra-curricular activities, having pride in their achievements and having positive relationships with adults.

Another theme arising from the data was the pupils' views on the support which they receive and this will be explored in Section 5.2.

5.2. Support

This section will explore the pupils' views on their individual support. The interviews showed that most of the pupils were able to express very clear opinions about the support that they had received and its benefits, even though, some of the pupils with learning difficulties needed questions rephrasing and were not as clear in their responses as those with sensory or physical disabilities. Therefore, it helped that the interviewer was the SENCo and had a good working knowledge of the pupils, their needs and personalities, so that she was able to elicit the pupil voice whilst hopefully not affecting their responses.

The areas of support which pupils commented on are as follows: resources, consultation about support, in class support, interventions outside of the classroom, support for offsite activities, tests and examinations, support with future plans and recommendations for others. The following section will consider pupils' views on resources.

5.2.1. Resources

As the main research question was to find out about the pupils' views on their experience of school, it was expected that they would discuss resources, which is one of the barriers identified in the literature. Glazzard (2011) questions whether there are sufficient resources to meet the needs of specific individual pupils in mainstream settings. The only pupils to mention anything about equipment were the VI pupils who said that they used laptops and the

physically disabled pupil, who explained the benefit she gained from the school having a stage lift installed and the way which it made her feel part of the school, as she was able to access the stage in the same way as other pupils.

This section has shown that only a few pupils commented on resources. The following section will explore pupils' views on being consulted about their support.

5.2.2. Consultation

This section explores the right of pupils to be consulted about their provision, whether this is happening effectively and the way that consultation makes pupils with SEN feel.

Although, Self-Determination Theory states that there is greater intrinsic motivation when a person is able to be involved in decisions affecting them (Van Lange, 2011), the literature suggests that pupils with SEN often do not have their voices heard (Hodkinson, 2010).

However, this does not seem to be the experience of pupils at Belmont, who all said that they had been consulted and given a voice regarding their own support. For instance, one pupil said that both TAs and teachers had asked:

'During classes and things if I thought it was a good idea for a teacher to give me a powerpoint or something ahead of the task then I can pay attention to what the teacher is saying more easily'.

A VI pupil also said that she was asked about preparing resources, she explained:

'Most teachers are like because I have the work like made bigger so they ask like if it is easier if they like have it printed out or sent. The powerpoints and I think both ways work good'.

On the other hand, two pupils referred to TAs asking them about support. Even though, one of them was the only pupil who said that she would have liked to be consulted more.

Referring to when she started at the school, she said:

‘I would have liked to have more options of how TAs were placed around and more intro to which TAs I would get’.

Other pupils, such as a VI pupil explained that they had been asked about examination support. This point will be further discussed in Section 5.2.6.

Although, most pupils said that they were consulted by teachers and TAs, pupils with learning difficulties also said that they were consulted about support by the specialist literacy teacher. One pupil also stated: *‘When we do the Annual Review they ask if there is anything I find hard and then they give more support in the subject’.*

It is important not only to listen to the views of pupils regarding provision but also to value their views and take them into consideration in a practical sense (Riley and Docking, 2010). During the interviews, pupils explained that their suggestions were taken into account but that sometimes teachers and TAs made decisions which went against their wishes. For example, one pupil described an incident where she had wanted to give up on GCSE French but interventions were put in place to support her continuing. She explained how *‘grateful’* she was that the support had been left in place and also how happy she was with the final result.

This section highlights that the pupils interviewed are consulted about their provision but that they all have different experiences, sometimes teachers, TAs or the specialist teacher ask them how they wish to be supported in the classroom or in exams and one pupil mentioned her involvement at Annual Review. On the whole pupils felt that their requests regarding

support were listened to but in one instance the pupil explained that teachers and TAs had gone against her wishes, which was a risk because she could have reacted against the decision, but in the end she said that she was pleased about the result.

The next section will explore the pupils' views about the support which they receive in the classroom.

5.2.3. In Class Support

This section will explore pupils' views on support in the classroom.

Pupils responded positively about the way in which they were supported. For example, one pupil explained that she had: '*extra English and maths*', and suggested that this would be something that would help others in the future. Many of the pupils mentioned the additional adult support which they received from either TAs or specialist teachers. When asked about support a VI pupil's first response was about the support received in examinations, which will be further discussed in Section 5.2.6. Although, both VI pupils mentioned TA support as well as the modified resources and laptops which they use in class, neither pupil commented that the support they received made them feel any differently from their peers. This is in contrast from adult concerns at Annual Review meetings, where it was assumed that if the VI pupils were not able to sit next to their peers, either because of the amount of equipment or the fact that a TA was sitting next to them, then they would feel isolated from their peers. A pupil with learning difficulties said that she had found it difficult to accept help in the past, as she thought that sometimes working with a TA: '*can distract other students*'. However, she also said that her attitude towards the TAs had changed and that she was more willing to accept help now.

As the pupils' needs were different, it was expected that they would explain different ways in which they were supported. For example, an HI pupil explained, it was note taking which was beneficial for her. Whereas, another pupil who has learning difficulties explained that she was given differentiated materials to work from:

'I have got they normally give me different papers from others to make it easier for me to make it so that I understand the work what I am given'.

Pupils did not only refer to the support which they received but also stressed that it was important that there was flexibility. One pupil said that her support had changed over time as she gained more independence:

'They used to do for me than they do now but they usually sit near. Throughout the lesson if I need things taken out or at the end of the lesson. Or if I need to use rulers or fold paper, all those kinds of things'.

Whereas another pupil recognised that different support was needed at different times according to different subject areas and tasks.

The findings show that the pupils had experienced support from TAs in the classroom, modified resources and specialist equipment. Although, there were some similarities in the way that the pupils were supported, the provision was also tailored to the individual and their needs, with an element of flexibility. In general, the pupils made positive comments about the support and they did not say that they were made to feel any differently from their peers. There was also evidence that pupils had been consulted about the support and were able to have a voice, see Section 5.2.2.

The following section will explore pupil comments about interventions which take place outside of the main classroom.

5.2.4. Interventions Outside of the Classroom

As well as in class support, a number of the pupils at Belmont also receive interventions outside of the classroom and their views on this will be explored in this section.

When interviewed pupils with learning difficulties who receive one-to-one lessons with the school's specialist teacher, all commented positively on the support that she provided. For example, when one pupil ranked the support that she received, she placed the specialist literacy teacher at the top of her list, saying: *'Mostly happy with the specialist teacher'*. It was clear from the responses that the pupils felt that they benefitted from the one-to-one support. For example, one said: *'I always had specialist teachers all the time to help me and that improved my English a lot and my maths'*. The pupils also remarked that the specialist teacher helps them in a number of ways. One pupil stated: *'She asks me to help me about different subjects'*. As well as academic support, another added: *'Yes my specialist teacher she has helped deal with a lot of school related stuff and a lot of home related stuff'*.

Similarly, both HI pupils reported that they valued the time that they had spent with the specialist teacher for the deaf. They are at KS5 which means that they do not miss lessons to attend sessions with the specialist teacher, as pupils have study periods. However, in the past both pupils will have missed lessons but again neither pupil said that having interventions had had any detrimental effects.

Although all of the interventions regarding teaching were conducted by specialist professionals or teachers, pupils also explained that TAs met with them to help organise resources or to mentor them. A VI pupil was happy with this provision, saying that it was: *'Good meeting with TA tutor once a week to make sure that everything is going OK'*. She also

suggested that this would help pupils similar to herself in the future and as a result, three other pupils will have an hour a week with a TA mentor starting in the following term.

As well as, individual support from TAs, the older VI pupil also explained how she benefitted from regular meetings with teachers outside of the classroom. She stated: *'I have chats with teachers and TAs every week to make sure that everything is going OK'*. Whereas, the support that another pupil received from teachers was more *ad hoc* and informal.

'Teachers help as well they give me support, not always specific to their subject sometimes they are just there for a chat'.

This section has found that although all pupils are entitled to be taught in the main classroom by the teacher, the pupils interviewed said that they benefitted from interventions by specialist professionals. The pupils did not say that they missed being in the mainstream class or felt isolated from their peers. One pupil also said that she benefitted from having regular meetings outside of the classroom to be mentored by TAs and she thought that others would benefit from the same provision, so this will be trialled with other pupils at KS4 and KS5. The following section will consider support that pupils receive during offsite activities.

5.2.5. Support for Offsite Activities

As well as support in the classroom the pupils also have support from TAs when they participate in offsite activities. Although, when talking about support none of the pupils mentioned trips, when asked for clarification as to whether she was supported on trips, a VI pupil responded: *'No I am just cool'*. The comment implies that she does not realise that there is always a TA present on trips keeping an eye on her to make sure that she is safe in unfamiliar environments. Similarly, the physically disabled pupil, who requires high levels of

support whilst on trips, mentioned the importance of trips but there was no mention of the support which she received.

When questioned about her support on offsite activities, another pupil explained that a TA accompanied her at college. Although she requires help accessing the curriculum at college, according to Annual Review reports the main role of the TA is to alleviate her anxiety and to prepare her for her transition to full time college at age 16.

This section has explored the views of pupils about being supported during offsite activities and the following section will consider views on support during tests and examinations.

5.2.6. Tests and Examinations

This section will consider the comments by pupils on the support which they receive during tests and examinations.

As part of their Statement, all of the pupils receive extra time in tests and examinations. In addition, the sensory and physically impaired pupils and a number of pupils with learning difficulties also receive additional access arrangements. The VI pupils explained that they receive 50% extra time and a reader and a scribe in tests and examinations. One of them said:

‘In tests they like. TAs like read the question out and then they at the time they get me like they’ll read and they’ll ask the question again and then I tell the answer’.

However, neither VI pupil mentioned that they also have modified materials and the use of laptops in examinations, possibly because they had previously mentioned that this was their normal way of working.

Whereas, neither the VI pupil nor the physical disabled pupil, who also has the opportunity for a TA to act as a scribe if she is too tired to write, mentioned the support, possibly as they very rarely take advantage of the provision. Similarly, neither of the HI pupils said that they had been provided with a live speaker when they studied foreign languages for GCSE, even though one of them spoke about her successful French result, this is probably because it was in the past. On the other hand, the other HI pupil explained that currently she has: '*a live speaker for music*'.

Although the pupils explained the support which they receive, with the exception of one pupil, they did not comment on whether it was beneficial or not. One pupil said: '*I get extra time and TAs scribes and readers so that helps a lot*'. The fact that none of the pupils spoke negatively about the support could imply that they found it useful, which is also implied by a VI pupil who said: '*I get help in exams*' and also explained that she was involved in the decision about her examination support.

This section has explored the pupils' views on the additional access arrangements which pupils have for tests and examinations. Support for preparing for life after school will be discussed in the next section.

5.2.7. Support with Future Plans

This section will consider the support which the pupils said that they received to prepare them for their futures.

Responses regarding support with future plans were dependent on age and not on SEN. Some of the younger pupils had ideas of what they would like to do in the future but they were

unsure of how they would be supported with this. Whereas pupils who were about to leave school explained that they had been helped with choosing college courses and completing application forms. As well as mentioning individual support a number of pupils also referred to support which is available to all pupils. Three pupils mentioned the support from the careers mentor and the outside speakers who came to talk to the Sixth Form about next steps. For example, one referred to: '*Connexions to talk about careers and how to deal with uni stuff*'. Another two pupils commented on support they had received in preparation for university; the former discussing the quality of the academic support and the latter the help which she received to complete the university application process. Even though the pupils have additional provision from the SEN department and outside agencies they said that they are also able to access the support available to all pupils and find it beneficial.

Another theme arising from the data was the pupils' views on how pupils made friendships and whether they needed adult help with this. Friendships will be explored in Section 5.3.

5.3. Friendships

This section will explore the views of the pupils interviewed about relationships with peers and in particular whether pupils with SEN want adult help with friendships.

Pupils said that interventions had been put in place to try to build more inclusive cultures. For example, one pupil said that her peers had been told about her disability but referring to adult intervention, she explained: '*They can stop bullying but they can't force you to be friends*'.

Other pupils said that interventions had been put in place to help with friendships but that they had been to help all new pupils, not just pupils with SEN. She was the only pupil to

stress the negatives of teacher interventions when trying to make friends. She explained that teachers had intervened by placing her in a certain group for an activity weekend.

'I asked to be in a room with this girl who I was going to go swimming with and a couple of girls who she was friends with who I thought were really really nice but I never got put with them. I was very uncomfortable in that situation but I think my Head of Year did it because she wanted to make people bond but it didn't work'.

Six years after the event and it appears that the pupil still has a sense of injustice that she was not able to be in a room with all of the pupils that she had named.

The pupils reported finding friends in different ways. Two pupils said that they came from primary school with friends. One said:

'My best friend I know that we became friends in primary school and it was just a case of so do you want to be my friend'.

She also explained that she thought that it was easier to make friends in primary school: *'whereas I think it is more complicated in secondary school. It just sort of develops'*. Again, extra-curricular activities and sharing similar interests were important when making friends, as one pupil stated: *'if you were in a group with a common interest then it is easier to grow a bond'*. However, three pupils also mentioned the opportunity to make friends from the lessons and groups that they were in. One said that it was useful that pupils had both form and teaching groups so that they could interact with more pupils but she also said that this was restrictive as there were some pupils in her year group that she had not met until Sixth Form as they had not been in her classes.

Two pupils reported being able to have friendships in lessons, which suggests that close support from TAs does not cause a barrier to the pupils being able to interact with their peers

socially. There were concerns from Annual Reviews that VI pupils rely heavily on adult support to access the curriculum which may mean that they are isolated from their peers during lessons, even due to the simple fact that they have so much equipment in the classroom which prevents other pupils being able to work next to them. However, this response suggests that the pupils themselves do not consider that this has affected their ability to make friends.

Although the literature implies that pupils with SEN may need help making friends (De Schauwer et al., 2009), the pupils interviewed said that they wanted to form their own friendships without adult assistance. Two pupils said that the ability to make friends was something that they would need to learn to do independently throughout life. When talking about adults helping with friendships, one said: *'No they will not be there for me forever. I think it is my own decision'*. And another explained: *'I made friends by myself I don't think the school can help you to make friends because that person has to do it themselves'*. Even pupils who said that they had experienced difficulties with friendships said that they needed to make friends on their own. One pupil explained that she had attended sessions lower down the school aimed at improving her self-esteem and to help her with friendships but although she said that she enjoyed the sessions she said that she still preferred to make her own friends.

This section has explored the way in which pupils with SEN want to make their own friends without adult intervention, although they appreciate opportunities which are in place for all pupils to meet both inside and outside of the classroom.

5.4. Recommendations for Others

This section will address the Part B of the research question: How can provision for pupils with SEN be improved? Pupils were asked to suggest improvements to their own provision but also to recommend improvements for other pupils with SEN.

Only a few of the pupils made recommendations of ways to help similar pupils. For example, one pupil said: *'Maybe there should be more events that we can do to build people's confidence'*. Whereas, another referred to an issue which was more whole school than SEN. She thought that being able to have more opportunities of meeting other pupils in the year group may help pupils in the future. She said:

'.. by being in different teaching groups and different forms allows you to meet different people. I know that when we started A levels and we were more mixed between the two sides that definitely meant that I met a lot of people that I would not have if that had not happened'.

This comment is linked very closely to friendships and the importance of giving all pupils opportunities to make friends, discussed in Section 5.3.

On the other hand, recommendations from two other pupils with learning difficulties focussed more on academic support which was already in place for them but that they thought others would also benefit from. For example, one said: *'Maybe if they are stuck on something then have extra support in lessons'*.

Another pupil's comments were also related to overcoming difficulties but directed at future pupils themselves. She explained:

'Sometimes you might have difficult times in school or you might not feel that you have any friends. But sometimes you put that behind. Think about exams think about everything you have to do it helps'.

This section has given some of the suggestions by pupils of helping others in the future.

Having looked at the results from the pupil interviews, thematically the following section will discuss the main themes arising from the pupil comments in more detail, bringing in the findings from the review of current literature on both inclusion and the use of pupil voice in research.

Chapter 6. Discussion

This thesis explores the views of pupils with SEN regarding their experiences of inclusion in a mainstream secondary school. The discussion chapter explores the findings from the 13 interviews with pupils at Belmont School, which address the following research questions:

Main research question: What do pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEN) think about their experiences in a mainstream secondary school?

Part A: What are the factors behind pupils with SEN feeling included in the school community?

Part B: How can provision for pupils with SEN be improved?

The discussion takes into account the raw data from the research. It frames this within the context of the literature and contextual background information about the pupils, collected from their Statements of Educational Need, teacher reports and minutes from Annual Review meetings. The research methods allowed the voices of the pupils to be heard; therefore, their rich views help to frame this chapter. The pupils provided information about their experiences of attending a mainstream school, including areas of good practice and areas where practice could be improved. The pupils' experiences and views can be used to improve the situation for themselves, but could also potentially inform practice for other pupils with SEN both at Belmont School and in other mainstream schools. This chapter will explore and discuss these ideas further within the wider context.

There are three main themes which emerge from analysis of the data. Firstly, in answer to Part A of the research question, concerning the factors behind pupils with SEN feeling

included in the school community, there is the importance which the pupils give to both the pastoral and social aspects of school in order to help them feel included. Secondly, in reference to Part B of the research question, there are the pupil comments on ways to provide effective support. Thirdly, also relating to Part B of the research question, on how provision for pupils with SEN can be improved, there are advantages and disadvantages of listening to pupil voice to inform provision for pupils with SEN. The first theme to be discussed will be the importance of the social aspects of inclusion and the role of extra-curricular activities.

6.1. Social Aspects of Inclusion and the Role of Extra-Curricular Activities

This section relates to Part A of the research question, which refers to the factors supporting pupil perceptions of feeling included in the school community.

In line with Booth et al. (2011) when the pupils were questioned about factors behind feeling part of the school, they focussed on involvement in wider school life, including activities outside of the classroom and relationships with adults and friends. This is particularly important as Self-Determination Theory states that social-contextual factors have a real impact on a person's attitude, values, behaviours and motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000), suggesting that, if pupils feel part of the school community and have positive relationships, then they will be able to develop their intrinsic motivation and therefore actualise their potential. However, whereas Booth et al. (2011) also stressed the importance of inclusion in the curriculum as a factor behind pupils feeling part of the school, there were few mentions of practical applications, such as access to the site or resources, by the participants. It was interesting to note the level of importance which pupils placed on the social aspect and the role of extra-curricular activities. In short, pupil responses suggest that, the sense of full

inclusion is determined by the quality of relationships and participation in non-academic activities. However, this tendency does not necessarily mean that the pupils are not concerned with their academic support. For example, all of the post GCSE pupils said that they were proud of their examination results and a number of the pupils with learning difficulties were proud of achieving or exceeding their targets. It appears that the pupils are more concerned with the social aspect of school.

It could be argued that the respondents have had positive experiences with accessibility to the school site and curriculum, shown by positive comments about the installation of a stage lift and the laptops and modified resources used by the VI pupils and more importantly by the lack of negative comments. In general, depending on their disability, is it access to the site or curriculum that makes the school experience of pupils with SEN different to their peers? If the pupils had experienced issues in this area, then their comments about feeling part of the school may have been very different and focussed more on academic aspects than social ones. However, the pupils in the study seem to take accessibility to the site and curriculum as a given and because everything is running smoothly, they are able to move beyond the practical day to day considerations of inclusive provision, forget about it and concentrate on social aspects of school, in the same way as their peers. This is therefore interpreted as a positive outcome, as the aim of the SEN Code of Practice (2015) is that pupils with SEN are able to engage in the activities of the school alongside their peers who do not have SEN.

The research was originally motivated by a concern that in the past, the main focus for pupils with SEN at Belmont has been the accessibility to the site and the curriculum and that there are only a limited number of interventions, specifically aimed at SEN pupils, which address social or pastoral issues. Therefore, as the research suggests that, as teenagers, the pupils'

priority appears to be at a more social level, the implication is that more may need to be done in these areas. This significant theme emerging from the data will be discussed in more detail in the following sub-sections.

6.1.1. Social Issues

This sub-section will discuss the importance of positive social relationships to pupils with SEN. When interviewed over half of the pupils said that positive relationships with staff helped them to feel part of the school. For some pupils, this meant being treated like an adult by teachers but for others it meant being praised and encouraged. The findings are consistent with Kluth (2003) who states that a successful inclusive school is one that has a supportive school community and culture. Similarly, Booth et al. (2011) advocate that inclusive cultures need to be built and Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) present findings that teachers require knowledge and skills to be able to help pupils with SEN feel included. This is particularly important as there is evidence from the research that if pupils do not have positive relationships with teachers then this can lead to pupils not feeling included. For example, Matilda said that she felt that other pupils had more positive relationships with teachers than her, which she said was a barrier to her feeling part of the school. There is the possibility that Matilda's positive relationship with the one-to-one teacher has given her unrealistic expectations of how all teachers will be able to treat her. The strong bond between the pupils and the specialist teacher was particularly evident as they all referred to her as, '*my specialist teacher*', using the first person possessive pronoun '*my*', as opposed to the definite article '*the*'. Also, pupils said that she helped them in a number of ways, both academically and in general. As the specialist teacher only works with a small number of pupils she is able to give each individual a lot more attention than a teacher in a classroom environment. With the additional attention pupils are more likely to feel that they are more valued, however, when

they do not get a similar level of attention from subject teachers they can feel undervalued, as in the case of Matilda. By giving pupils a voice there is the possibility of identifying any issues and working on addressing them, either by speaking to the individuals concerned or in the form of teacher training, so that a balance is found.

Linked to the previous point, the pupil comments implied a contradiction. Although pupils said that they did not want to be treated any differently from their peers, on the other hand they expected all adults to treat them in the same way that they are treated on a one-to-one. For example, Helen who has worked with the specialist teacher for the deaf since primary school explained that at transition she felt that classroom teachers did not know her. There was the expectation that all of her teachers, as well as having a knowledge of her needs and ways to help her access the curriculum, would have a personal relationship with her. She said that teachers knew her better now, in the Sixth Form, than in the younger years, which is possibly linked to the fact that there are fewer pupils in an A level class, that the same teacher generally teaches the same class for the two year course and that there are more hours of instruction per week at A level. Therefore, in the Sixth Form, there is more of an opportunity to get to know the pupils and find out about their interests etc. It would be interesting to ask pupils without SEN about their expectation of the way that they are treated by staff to see whether they expect such individual treatment or whether they see themselves as being part of a class of pupils.

Although, the pupils expressed a desire to have positive relationships with specialist and subject teachers, none of the pupils spoke of TAs in this way. This is interesting to note given that, the literature asserts that TAs are often identified as individuals who can help pupils to be part of the school community (Webster and Blatchford, 2013). A number of pupils with

learning difficulties did say that they appreciated encouragement and praise from TAs, but for most pupils the focus was on the support that TAs could provide in enabling them access to the site and curriculum, as opposed to having a relationship with them. For example, Zoe commented that, it did not matter whether she liked a particular TA but the important thing was that they all helped her in a similar way. There are a number of possible reasons why pupils did not state that positive relationships with TAs were an important aspect of them feeling included. Firstly, the aim is for the TA to be as invisible in the class as possible, allowing the pupil to have independence and a similar learning experience to their peers. Therefore, the greater personal detachment of the TA arises out of socialised concerns intrinsic to the role, such as resisting any growing dependence shown by the pupil. Therefore, Zoe's attitude could be influenced by previous TAs working effectively with her and her subsequent understanding that she needs to work with TAs to achieve good learning outcomes and not be friends with them. Secondly, it may be the pupil who wants to detach themselves from the TA, as they may feel that it is the presence of the TA in the class, which makes them feel differently from their peers. An example of this view is Matilda's concerns that when TAs worked with her other pupils were distracted. Both possibilities suggest that the most effective relationship between pupils and TAs is likely to be a working relationship as opposed to a social relationship. So the fact that the respondents do not identify relationships with TAs as a factor that reinforces their sense of belonging is not necessarily a negative point. In fact, the lack of comments about relationships with TAs, either positive or negative, leads to an assumption that the norm is that pupils are being supported to access the site and curriculum, discretely and in this way they do not feel any differently than their peers.

As well as relationships with adults, respondents also said that positive relationships with their peers helped them to feel part of the school community. Rose and Shevlin (2004) and López et al. (2016) presented findings that indicate that some pupils with SEN experience pity, sympathy and sometimes bullying at school. In contrast, at Belmont, there are interventions, in place, to ensure that not only adults but pupils have an understanding of other pupils' needs, for example, Helen explained that someone had spoken to her class about HI and ways to help her. Helen said that her peers having a better understanding of her needs may have prevented her from being bullied. However, Helen also said that these interventions did not help facilitate friendships.

One of the aims of the research was to find out what the pupils themselves thought about forming friendships and whether they required adult help with social interactions. Pupils stressed the importance of friendships in order for them to feel included, thus reflecting the findings of Prunty et al. (2012) who conclude that as well as positive relationships with adults, friendships are important and affect a pupil's enjoyment of school. Belmont has a strong history of providing support to encourage friendships, evidenced by the fact that the respondents all said that there had been interventions in place to help all pupils to make friends, especially at transition from primary school. In addition, there are continuing interventions and pastoral support available for everyone. However, the participants were all adamant that they did not need the help. This is interesting to note given that, previous literature has asserted that friendships are often difficult for pupils with SEN (Tetler and Baltzer, 2011). Similarly, from Annual Review meetings it was evident that teachers and in some cases parents assumed that pupils needed help with social interactions (Skårbrevik, 2005). The comments suggest that although adults may be concerned that the pupils had issues with social interaction, the pupils themselves did not want to be treated any differently

from their peer group and said that they could make their own friends. Even pupils, such as, Robyn, who was part of an intervention to help her with both self-esteem and making friends, said that she had found the sessions helpful but she still expressed that pupils should have ownership of making their own friends. In some instances, pupils also said that the teacher intervention had not been useful. For example, Helen cited the example of teachers putting her in a certain group at an activity weekend, against her wishes. What did emerge was that although the pupils did not want any intervention, both Alison and Nicola thought that there could be further opportunities available to be able to form friendships. Alison said that this would be easier if there were more opportunities to be with pupils who had similar interests and Nicola stated that the way in which classes were formed meant that pupils rarely mixed with all of the pupils in their year group.

The picture seems to be forming that pupils value positive relationships with both teachers and their peers, which is important as one of the main intrinsic needs in Self-Determination Theory is the ability to interact with others and feel cared for (Ryan & Deci, 2000). However, probably like most teenagers the respondents do not want adults to interfere in the process of making or sustaining friendships, and instead value autonomy. This recalls the earlier point of the positive impact on motivation and personality of being able to make decisions for oneself. Therefore, a different approach to supporting social interactions may be more beneficial in certain cases. Both the experience and training of the adults involved needs to be considered as well as listening to the pupil voice.

As well as social issues, attendance at extra-curricular activities was also stated as an important factor to feeling included, this will be discussed in Section 6.1.2.

6.1.2. Extra-Curricular Activities and Offsite Trips

This sub-section will discuss the importance of activities which occur outside of the main curriculum, to the way that pupils feel part of the school.

What emerged from the interviews was a strong correlation between attendance at extra-curricular activities and the extent to which the pupils said that they felt included in the school, with those who attend clubs generally responding more positively to the question. These findings support the views of Florian et al. (2010) who state that: *'Schools have to be more than places where children prepare for, take and pass (or fail) examinations'* (Florian et al., 2010: 402). Another reason that extra-curricular activities may make pupils feel included could be linked to Self-Determination Theory. The pupils are able to decide whether to attend the activity or not, giving them autonomy and, similarly the environment is both supportive and integrative, all of which are likely to have a positive impact on the pupil's intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Although there is little in the literature about pupils with SEN and extra-curricular activities in mainstream settings, there are a number of relevant papers on pupils with SEN participating in sport. In her research, Fitzgerald (2005) raised the issue that pupils with SEN were not able to participate in the same sporting activities and as a result often experienced social isolation. This idea contrasts with the findings of the study, where all of the physical and sensory impaired pupils attended extra-curricular clubs in either sport and/or music. Possibly, one of the reasons that this is in contrast to the findings of Fitzgerald (2005) is that her research was based on sport in lesson time, whereas clubs are elective, meaning that pupils can choose to participate in activities where they have particular strengths or interests.

Taking part in activities where they have a strength may mean that pupils with SEN feel able to compete in the same way as their peers, being able to do as well as, or better than them. Similarly, as the school encourages all new pupils to join clubs in order to make friends and when asked about ways to improve provision for future pupils, Amy said that being able to meet pupils with similar interests is one of the ways to make friends, an assumption was made that the main reason that pupils attended clubs was to make friends and to be sociable. However, none of the respondents mentioned friends in relation to clubs, although they did mention feeling a sense of pride and achievement. Even the pupils who did not participate in competitive sport, for example members of the gardening club, still stressed that they were proud of the achievements of the club in a recent competition. This suggests that the pupils attended clubs to strengthen their identity and not necessarily to make friends, although from additional information about the pupils this was undoubtedly a by-product.

One reason that the pupils may feel more included during extra-curricular activities is that, with a few exceptions, the respondents are able to participate in activities without additional adult support, which could mean that they are able to feel similar to all of the other members of the club. Even the physically disabled pupil, who according to Annual Review reports needs help to access clubs, does not need the same level of adult support as she does in a classroom, which is possibly why she said that she felt part of the school when she was singing in the choir or taking part in the gym and dance show. This is in accordance with the views of Fitzgerald (2005) who states that TA support can isolate pupils from their peers meaning that pupils could miss out on the social element of clubs. On the other hand, due to her physical needs, Nicola also requires high levels of support during trips but although she commented on the benefits of attending school trips, she did not mention the support which she received. As her comments about trips were positive, there is the implication that the

support was successful and enabled her to have a similar experience to her peers and did not affect her social interaction. Similarly, one of the VI pupils, did not mention TA support during trips, which suggests that depending on the needs of the pupil it is possible to support discretely or from a distance and without the pupil feeling any differently from others. This is in complete opposition to support in the classroom where the VI pupils in particular, rely heavily on TAs to be able to access written text, so often have to be in close proximity to them. This highlights the differing needs of pupils and also the way in which individual pupils' needs change depending on the situation and the need for flexible support.

Although the majority of pupils in the study attended extra-curricular activities, it was apparent that some of the pupils with learning difficulties did not attend elective clubs or trips outside of the school day. Even though, many of the pupils who said that they did not attend clubs, showed an interest in either sports or dance. This raises the question of whether all pupils have the same access to extra-curricular activities. On closer inspection there are a number of possible reasons why these pupils do not attend clubs. Firstly, as Haycock and Smith (2011) suggest some clubs may not be accessible for all. From their research they found that that although during lessons PE is differentiated to include pupils with SEN, afterschool clubs still: *'continues to be heavily dominated by competitive team sports that retain a strong emphasis on performance, excellence and skills'* (Haycock and Smith, 2011: 507). Similarly, from his research with TAs and SENCos, Maher (2013) found that Statements of Educational Need generally state the needs and outcomes for pupils in academic subjects and rarely relate to PE, which means that it can be difficult for PE teachers to plan for them, so they may not have the same access as their peers to such a wide range of clubs. However, the pupils at Belmont did not raise this as a concern but gave examples of sports, music and other clubs which they attended. Although some of the clubs did require

pupils to have a skill at a specific level other clubs had no entry requirements except for an interest. For example, as well as competitive sports' clubs there were also clubs where pupils were just encouraged to come along and have fun. Secondly, another possible reason why pupils said that they did not attend clubs is that the majority of clubs are after school.

According to Annual Review minutes, the pupils who do attend clubs either come to school on their own, either on foot, by car or with a taxi arranged by the LA. Although, in their research Florian et al. (2010) found that the provision of transport arranged by the LA was a mixed blessing, as it often meant that pupils missed out on afterschool clubs, however, it was clear that the pupil in the study whom this applied to, was able to have flexibility of when she was collected so was able to attend clubs. However, the pupils who did not attend clubs were generally the pupils who were collected from school, by a community minibus at an allocated time, or by other parents as part of a carpool system. Therefore, not having flexible transport arrangements seems to be a significant factor which could impact on the pupils' ability to attend extra-curricular activities. If pupils want to attend clubs but are not able to arrange transport after school then communication with parents may be necessary to help them to arrange this. If it is not possible to arrange transport for after school then there may be the possibility of attending shorter lunchtime clubs. Although pupils may not need help participating in clubs they may need help with organisation, for example: getting to the club on time, remembering to eat their lunch at break time and help getting changed quickly if necessary. Thirdly, pupils may not be allowed to stay after school. For example, there is strong evidence from two of the pupils Statements of Educational Need and Annual Review minutes, that they have limited life experiences and that the family does not expect them to have interests outside of the family or classroom. Again, pupils may need help persuading their parents of the benefits of attending extra-curricular clubs, seeing as so many of their peers, state that it is one of the main reasons that they feel included in school.

This sub-section has discussed the importance of activities outside of the classroom to enable pupils with SEN to feel part of the whole school. It has also suggested the positive impact of the social environment on a pupil's attitudes, values, behaviours and motivation. The following section will discuss the pupils' views on effective provision.

6.2. Effective Provision

As the aim of the research was to find out about the experiences of pupils with SEN in a mainstream school, the pupils were asked about the ways in which they were supported. Although it was a small-scale research project, it was expected that pupil comments would highlight areas of good practice and areas which require improvements, which could benefit both the pupils inside and outside of the research.

The findings show that the majority of pupils with SEN at Belmont are happy with their support and would not change anything. The respondents said that they felt supported by specialist teachers, teachers or TAs when they were either in the classroom, during interventions or whilst taking tests and examinations. Although, as discussed in Section 6.1.1., pupils wanted positive relationships with teachers, when it came to comments about classroom support pupils generally spoke about the experience for all pupils in the class as opposed to the individual, for example, Sam referred to the quality of teaching, by saying: *'science has always been quite good here'*. Similarly, Helen explained the benefits of pastoral support from teachers, form tutors and Heads of Year that was: *'there for everyone'*. On the other hand, pupils gave more detailed comments about support from TAs and specialist teachers, which will be discussed in the following sub-sections. What was evident from the pupil comments was the difference in support depending on the individual and the flexibility

of support after consultation with the pupils. The following sub-section will discuss the pupils' views on TA support.

6.2.1. TA Support

This sub-section will discuss the support which pupils receive from TAs. Recent studies into the deployment of TAs in schools suggest that pupils do not always benefit from the support, in particular that pupils with SEN are not achieving as well as pupils with SEN who are not supported (Blatchford et al., 2013; Webster and Blatchford, 2013). However, the pupils interviewed said that they were proud of their achievements and from their comments there was evidence that they were making good progress, with individual pupils both at GCSE and KS3 saying that they were meeting or exceeding targets. This suggests that pupils with SEN can make good progress with effective TA support.

Moreover, there are a number of possible reasons why pupils with SEN at Belmont are making good progress, for instance, as reported in the most recent OFSTED report, it is a high-achieving single-sexed school in an affluent area. Another reason that the pupils are doing well could relate to the quality of teaching and flexible deployment of TAs. From the pupils' responses, it was evident that they benefitted from being in mainstream classes, being taught by the teacher and supported by TAs. In general, the pupils explained that the only time that TAs removed them from the classroom was to give them the opportunity to have a reader and a scribe during class tests. One exception to this was Sam who explained that she had a timetabled hour once a week to organise her work, in particular her modified resources, with a TA which she found useful and suggested would help other pupils.

A further concern about TA support is that pupils who are supported in the classroom can become over reliant on adult support (Blatchford et al., 2013; Lehane, 2016). However, effective TA support enables the pupil to acquire skills that will make them more independent and less reliant on adults in the future. With most of the pupils interviewed, greater support has been needed at KS3 to enable them to manage the transition from primary to secondary, especially regarding having different teachers for each subject who are likely to have different ways of working. Therefore, in general, as the pupils progress throughout the school TAs tend to allow them more space to work independently. For example, Nicola as a KS5 pupil with a physical disability said that she requires TAs to do less for her now than when she was in the lower years. There are a number of reasons for this, firstly, with help she has developed skills to be able to complete tasks on her own, secondly, she has grown in confidence and is willing to ask others for help, thirdly, she has made friends who are able to support her and finally with careful consideration, she has chosen A level subjects which play to her strengths meaning that she needs less support. Nicola herself stressed the importance of flexibility in her support over time. Careful timetabling of TAs is one way to ensure that pupils feel safe and supported but pupils are also given time to develop skills to allow them to be independent. Helen explained the difference between having one TA at primary school and a number of TAs at secondary school, working with different TAs reduces the chances of the pupil forming too close attachments. If TAs and teachers work together in the classroom supporting the whole class, then the pupil with SEN is able to have time to work independently, with the TA but also with the teacher. If TAs are deployed in this manner then other pupils in the class can also benefit from additional help.

On the other hand, the sensory impaired pupils explained that the demands of the curriculum meant that they had to work more closely with a TA at KS4 and KS5. For example, the HI

pupils said that they were more reliant on the TA to take notes at KS5, possibly because of the faster pace of the lessons but also because noteworthy comments not only came from the teacher but other pupils in the class. Both Alison and Helen lipread well but they are still perfecting the skill of taking notes at speed without looking at the paper. However, if the TA is also taking notes then the pupils said that they are confident that they will not miss any information during lessons. Similarly, the VI pupils are more reliant on adults in lessons at KS4 and 5 than lower down the school, as subjects such as science and technology have more demanding practical elements, with added risks. Although, there are many tasks that the VI pupils could perform totally independently in the classroom, such as reading text from adapted materials and writing their own responses, they may be encouraged to use TA support for these tasks. Sam and Zoe explained that they are likely to use a TA to read and scribe for them, as well as using modified papers and a laptop during examinations, due to the effect of stress and tiredness on their eyesight. Both pupils also understood that according to the rules of the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ), examination entitlements need to be the candidate's normal way of working. Both Sam and Zoe also said that they needed to practice the skills of working with a reader and scribe, to be prepared for the examinations. Therefore more than any other pupils at Belmont, the older VI pupils are likely to have TAs sitting next to them in lessons, so that they are on hand when they need support. Consultation is key in this scenario as a fine balance needs to be maintained, pupils need to develop skills to be as independent as possible now but also be able to accept help from the TAs, so that they can benefit from the help in examinations. Sam's recent GCSE results and her progress on the A level course suggest that it is possible to maintain the balance of being able to study independently and work with a TA.

At secondary school in particular, young people are trying to create their own personal identity and to fit in with their peer group, therefore pupils can feel differently from their peers if they perceive that they are the only ones supported by a TA. However, only one pupil made negative comments about TA support. Matilda said that she would have liked more of a say in which TAs supported her when she joined the school. She also said that although she worked well with TAs at KS4, when she was younger she thought that having help from a TA could distract other pupils. The reason for this comment is unknown. However, it suggests that Matilda felt differently from her peers due to TA support. The fact that she now works better with TAs could be because she is more used to the support, that TAs are more used to the way in which she requires support or it could even be that her peers are more used to the support being in the classroom. When TAs are supporting in the classroom there are a number of factors to take into consideration to achieve a positive class dynamic. It is not only a case of an individual pupil being supported by a TA it also concerns the teacher and the rest of the pupils in the class. These views are echoed by Lehane (2016) who states that most effective support occurs when the teacher and TAs work together to support all of the pupils in the classroom.

From this research, pupil responses show that if deployed effectively TAs can provide a range of beneficial support both inside and outside of the classroom. There are a number of factors to take into consideration when supporting a pupil with SEN and there is a fine balance to be struck between ensuring that pupils are supported to be able to access the curriculum but that they also do not feel differently from their peers.

The following section will discuss interventions outside of the classroom.

6.2.2. Interventions Outside of the Classroom

The literature shows that there is a difference of opinion as to whether pupils with SEN should receive interventions which take them out of the mainstream classroom. Both Cairns and McClatchey (2013) and The SEN Code (DfES, 2001; DfE & DoH, 2015) state that in an inclusive school both pupils with and without SEN are welcomed into the same classroom and that teachers are teachers of all pupils. It is apparent from responses that the majority of pupils in the study attend regular one-to-one sessions outside of the classroom. For example, both the sensory impaired pupils and those with learning difficulties said that they had sessions with specialist teachers. This alleviates the concern from the literature that TAs as opposed to teachers, are teaching the most vulnerable pupils as part of interventions outside of the main classroom (Lehane, 2016; Blatchford et al., 2013). Similarly, attending individual tuition with a specialist teacher is the most common form of intervention, according to Croll (2002). Another concern from the literature is that interventions outside of the classroom may cause pupils to feel differently to their peers and not included in the mainstream classroom or the curriculum (Shah et al., 2004). However, the fact that none of the pupils taken out of mainstream classrooms for interventions, said that they had missed lessons suggests that they benefit from access to the same curriculum as everyone else and that they do not feel differently from other pupils. Similarly, pupils also reported that the specialist literacy teacher was able to help them with a number of issues across the curriculum and also pastorally, which suggests that pupils can benefit from being taught away from the mainstream classroom (Hornby, 2015).

The following section will discuss ways in which the provision for pupils with SEN can be improved.

6.3. Suggested Improvements for Provision

This section relates to Part B of the research question, which refers to the ways in which the provision for pupils with SEN can be improved. Although this is a small-scale research project, the respondents identified areas of good practice but also areas which would benefit from improvement. Actions to address several of the lessons learnt from the findings have already been implemented at Belmont School.

Although the pupils were asked how their support could be improved, only one pupil suggested a way in which her support in the past could have been better. This is possibly due to the fact that the majority of pupils said that they were happy with the support, so they had no recommendations of ways to improve their provision. Another possibility could have been that the position of the SENCo as interviewer may have made the respondents less likely to point out negatives as they did not want to criticise. However, the school encourages pupils to express constructive criticism and in general the pupils express their views, particularly if they have had a negative experience. However, when the participants were asked about ways to help other pupils in a similar circumstance, there were a few more responses. Similarly, it was not always what the respondents said but what was not said which suggested possible changes to improve practice.

Firstly, regarding her past support, Matilda suggested that it would have been more useful if she were able to choose the TAs who worked with her from Year 7, so that she felt: '*more comfortable*' working with them. This raises the issue of the importance of transition between schools and the sharing of information, both with adults but also with the pupil. All of the respondents had had an opportunity to visit the school at least once before starting Year 7, to

look around the site, take photographs, ask questions and meet the SENCo and key members of staff, such as the Head of Year and their Form Tutor. However, as the pupils work with a number of TAs across the curriculum and the timetabling of TAs generally takes place after the pupil visits, they are unlikely to have met the TAs that they were going to work with until they started secondary school in the September. One way of addressing Matilda's issue is to choose a few TAs who will definitely work with the new pupils and make sure that they have a chance to meet one another during transition visits. Although, there was not time to implement this change this year, SEN pupils transitioning to Belmont School were sent the photographs and names of the TAs to look at during the summer holidays. Practically it is not possible for Year 7 pupils to choose their TAs but at least they will be able to recognise friendly faces and hopefully feel more confident during the first few days.

Secondly, when asked about ways to help similar pupils in the future, five of the pupils made recommendations. Nina's advice was to the pupils themselves, she said that pupils should know that there would be difficult times at school, especially regarding friendships but that they should focus on work and examinations. Whereas, Sally and Sam's recommendations for improvements focussed on academic support, which was already in place for them but that they thought others would also benefit from. Sally said that pupils should be given extra help if they are finding work difficult, whereas Sam said that she really benefitted from her weekly meeting with a TA mentor, who helped her organise her A level work. In light of this finding, all of the SEN pupils in Year 11, 12 and 13 now have weekly meetings with a TA or the SENCo in order to help organise their work and resources.

On the other hand, the other two pupils made recommendations which referred more to social issues. Alison said that it would be beneficial to arrange more activities to boost pupils' self-

confidence and Nicola referred to an issue which was related but more whole school than SEN. She thought that being able to have more opportunities of meeting other pupils in the year group may help pupils. In order to address these suggestions there will be an audit into clubs which are available to all pupils and a further investigation into whether there are any specific reasons why pupils with SEN would find it difficult to attend. The reason behind this is that pupil responses suggest that participating in extra-curricular activities enables pupils to feel included and to feel positive about themselves, as well as mixing with other peers who have similar interests. However, it was evident that some pupils do not attend afterschool activities. One reason which appears to impact on the pupils' ability to attend extra-curricular activities is not having flexible transport arrangements. Another reason seems to be that some of the parents do not expect pupils to stay after school to participate in clubs. Therefore, additional communication with parents is essential to alleviate barriers to attendance, such as arranging transport or so that parents realise the benefits of pupils attending extra-curricular activities. Similarly, communication with pupils is also important, as knowing their strengths and interests could help to find something that every pupil can enjoy and participate in. Depending on the individual, pupils may also need support initially to gain confidence or to be organised when joining a club, or they may need continued support to access the activity. As many of the clubs in existence have competitive elements and are generally after school, there is the intention to set up a lunchtime club to play board games and socialise. Initially pupils with SEN and those having any friendship or self-esteem issues will be invited to join but they will be encouraged to bring along a friend. The aim is to raise pupils' self-confidence and enable them to mix with others outside of their classes. However, on the other hand it may just be that the pupils themselves do not wish to attend clubs and that has to remain their decision. In order to address this issue, all pupils with SEN have been asked about their likes and dislikes and this information is available on the SEN register so that all

teachers, including Form Tutors and Heads of Year are more able to advise and encourage pupils to attend relevant clubs.

When interviewed, pupils said that having positive relationships with staff and in particular receiving praise and encouragement from them, made them feel included. The fact that a sense of pride can come from either extra-curricular or academic achievements suggests that it would be beneficial for both teachers and TAs to also have knowledge of a pupil's interests and achievements, in order for pupils to be supported more holistically. In response to this, information has been added to the SEN register by asking pupils what they think their strengths and weaknesses are and what they enjoy doing both inside and outside of school. The hope is that this information sharing will give adults further opportunities to praise and motivate pupils using all of their achievements not just those within the classroom. Another means of enabling staff to have a better understanding of the pupils with SEN and their needs has been the introduction of Sixth Form pupils with SEN, joining staff training sessions. At present they have attended air and share meetings, where teachers divide into small groups to discuss ways to support pupils with specific needs. A member of the group writes up the groups findings to be shared with all teachers. Feedback from both pupils and teachers has been very positive, even though initially the pupils were rather daunted by the idea and some teachers were concerned that they would have to be careful what was said in front of them.

Although the respondents said that they were consulted about their support by teachers and TAs, the process of transferring pupils from a Statement to EHC Plans, which began in September 2014, has meant that pupils now have a greater role in writing their EHC Plans and also leading the EHC Plan transfer meetings. Several, pupils at Belmont School have

already been very involved in writing their new plans, discussing their provision and setting outcomes.

Lessons learnt have already had an impact at Belmont school and certain changes have already been introduced to address issues and improve the situation for pupils with SEN. For example, pupils at transition are given names and photos of TAs to help them recognise friendly faces initially and know where to ask for help, pupils in Years 11, 12 and 13 have help out of lessons to organise their work, the SEN register includes more information on pupils' interests in order to build better relationships and offer advice on clubs and activities, pupils in the Sixth Form have been included in staff training sessions and finally as pupils begin to transfer over to the new system of EHC Plans, they are being given more control in deciding upon their own provision and outcomes.

The following section will discuss the implications of using pupil voice.

6.4. The Implications of Listening to Pupil Voice

This section will discuss the implications of enabling pupils with SEN to have a voice about their support, both as part of this research study and in general.

As well as respondents commenting on being asked about ways in which they prefer to be supported in the classroom, this research study has enabled the respondents to have a voice about their own experiences of a mainstream school. This is particularly important as although pupil voice is becoming more commonplace in schools, the literature suggests that pupils with SEN often still do not have their voices heard (Hodkinson, 2010). Similarly,

Runswick-Cole (2011) suggests that there are gaps between what policy suggests should happen for pupils with SEN and what actually happens in schools, so asking pupils about their experiences will provide another view of what is actually happening in school on a day to day basis.

An advantage of using pupil voice is the anticipated benefit to the pupils themselves. Hopefully, a positive of the research will be that the pupils interviewed will be more independent, have better self-esteem, feel more valued and have a sense that they are making a contribution to school life (Cheng, 2012; Bergin and Logan, 2013). Having a greater sense of belonging may also make pupils feel as if they have more of an investment in their own learning (Deuchar, 2009). Similarly, Self-Determination Theory suggests that although people are motivated by others, the greatest impact on intrinsic motivation is autonomy (Ryan and Deci, 2002). However, the benefits are not only to the pupils who are listened to, using pupil voice can also be beneficial to schools, as well, as they have another point of view from which to improve provision for pupils with SEN (Ryan, 2009).

One area of concern is that although all pupils should be able to have a voice (Billington, 2006), there are still some pupils who are not heard (Gibson, 2006). In accordance with these views, although it was apparent that the pupils interviewed were able to talk about their experiences, not all pupils with SEN had a voice. In both the pilot and the main study only pupils in Year 9 and above were consulted, meaning that younger pupils were unable to express an opinion. Similarly, not all of the pupils who were invited to participate did so. The two pupils with global learning difficulties refused to be interviewed, from their responses it was apparent that they did not understand the purpose of the research and thought that it was part of a test. The researcher respected their wishes not to be included in the research but

instead asked about their experiences of school as part of their Annual Review meeting. In this way, they were still able to have a voice concerning their provision, their opinions were listened to and acted upon accordingly.

If pupils are given more opportunities to express their views and teachers are more receptive to listening to pupil voice, then speculatively, both may develop skills which will improve the practice. In order for pupil voice to be effective it needs to be embedded in school practice. If the voice of pupils with SEN is used more regularly then it could alleviate some of the concerns that pupils and adults have about the use of pupil voice, as the school will have more experience and systems in place (Morgan, 2011). As well as, taking part in the research it was apparent that the respondents had some experience of being consulted about different aspects of their support. Some pupils said that TAs consulted them about help in lessons, whilst others said that TAs asked them about exam provision or that teachers asked them about resources. It is significant that pupils were able to discuss their needs and support, at a time when changes to SEN provision place stronger onus on the views of the pupil. The changes to Chapter 6 Part 3 of the 2014 Children and Families Act HMSO (2014) emphasise the LA's responsibility to seek the pupils' views, wishes and feelings. Before September 2017 the majority of the pupils will transfer to an EHC Plan, so pupils will have a much larger role in how they wish to be supported and the outcomes which they wish to achieve. As the aim is for the EHC Plan to be more pupil-led than Statements, pupils will play a greater part in the writing of their EHC Plans initially and will then be expected to have more of a voice during Annual Review meetings to discuss progress and any necessary changes to their provision.

As pupils with SEN are to have greater autonomy, they also need to understand that sometimes it may not be possible or appropriate to act on their comments. They will need to appreciate that there may be incidences when it is not only about the right decision for one pupil but for all. There is the argument that the pupil may not know what is most effective for them and they need to realise that sometimes the adult will need to make the decision. An example from the research was one pupil not wanting to continue with French GCSE but being encouraged and supported by TAs to carry on and then saying that it was one of her best achievements. Again this highlights the importance of the adults involved having a good knowledge of the pupil's individual needs, capabilities and personality, in order to support them effectively, whilst still enabling the pupil to have a voice and feel that they have been listened to. If pupils have positive relationships with the adults that they work with then they are more likely to trust that adults will listen to them and act accordingly when appropriate. They are also likely to be able to adapt and cope when their requests are not possible. Similarly, if the adult knows the pupil well enough it will be easier to predict how the pupil will react if they feel that their wishes have not been acted upon. Both pupils and adults need to realise that ongoing communication can lead to compromise and flexibility of support.

This section has discussed the way in which pupil voice can improve provision for pupils with SEN. If it is embedded in the school ethos, then both pupils and teachers will be able to develop skills over time to improve its effectiveness. This includes pupils being able to trust that they will be listened to but also being able to understand that it is not always feasible to act on their ideas. The next chapter will draw together the main conclusions of the research.

Chapter 7. Conclusions

The research set out to answer the following research questions: What do pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) think about their experiences in a mainstream secondary school?

What are the factors behind pupils with SEN feeling included in the school community? How can provision for pupils with SEN be improved?

Despite the fact that this was a small-scale investigation, using interviews to listen to the voice of 13 Year 9 – 13 pupils with a Statement at an all girls' secondary school, the aim was to determine predominantly what they felt about their educational experience. This is in line with new SEN Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015) which places more emphasis on the views of pupils themselves. The intention was that barriers to learning would be identified, as well as examples of good practice and effective provision, and suggested improvements. The intention was that by consulting pupils with SEN, Belmont School would be able to improve provision for current pupils, as well as learn lessons to be used in the future. Only those with a Statement were included to be able to consider in detail but to have more of an opportunity to initiate changes. Even though every child and every circumstance is different, it was also hoped that the findings would be useful for other schools, both secondary and primary.

Therefore, in order to make it beneficial for others context was added in the form of a brief background of each pupil.

The main findings from the interviews fell into three areas, namely, reasons that the pupils felt part of the school community (see Section 5.1), the support which they receive (see Section 5.2) and ways in which they develop friendships and whether they need adult assistance with this (see Section 5.3). The discussion section explored these themes in more

detail, linking them to findings from the review of the current literature, regarding the social aspects of inclusion, effective provision for pupils with SEN in mainstream schools, suggested improvements for provision and the implications of listening to the voice of pupils with SEN.

The findings show that when interviewed the majority of participants said that they regularly felt part of the school, stating the main reasons for this as: taking part in extra-curricular activities, having positive relationships with teachers and peers and feeling a sense of pride in achievements. This is in-line with Self-Determination Theory which focuses on the effects of social-contextual factors on motivation, behaviour and personality (Ryan & Deci, 2000). When it came to their support, the participants said that they were consulted about their support and that they felt well supported by teachers and TAs, both in the classroom and during examinations. Those who attended sessions with specialist teachers also remarked on how beneficial these were. On the other hand, when it came to friendships, pupils were adamant that although there were interventions in place for all pupils, they wanted to take ownership of making and maintaining their own friendships. The fact that the pupils had positive relationships with both adults and their peers also suggests that according to Self-Determination Theory, they will be able to actualise their potential with help from a positive social environment (Van Lange et al., 2011).

The research highlights a number of ways to improve provision for pupils with SEN. Firstly, all pupils should have the opportunity to attend extra-curricular activities if they wish to, this may mean arranging clubs in a wider range of interest areas, communicating with parents to organise transport afterschool or organising clubs during lunchtime. Secondly, positive relationships with both staff and peers are very important to pupils with SEN and although

they do not want help with friendships they benefit from having opportunities to meet pupils with similar interests. Finally, pupils with SEN benefit when they are consulted about their support and when teachers and TAs work together to find the most effective solutions.

7.1. Changes Implemented as a Result of the Research Findings

In response to the findings of the research, several changes have already been implemented at Belmont School. In response to the pupil who wanted more of a say in which TAs worked with her, for the first time this year, as soon as the TA timetables were completed, the new pupils and their primary schools were sent photographs and names of the TAs who the pupils would be working with, so that they could recognise TAs and talk about them in preparation for transition. Similarly, this year as part of the Annual Review process existing pupils were asked to name several TAs who they felt they worked well with and this information was used when building the TA timetables. The aim is that by including pupils more in the decision of which TAs support them, they will build better and more effective working relationships with TAs. Also, in response to the finding that pupils benefit from positive relationships with staff and appreciate praise about achievements both inside and outside of the classroom, additional information has been placed on the SEN register about pupils' interests, their strengths and weaknesses. Also as part of weekly teacher information meetings, there are regular reports of all pupils who are doing well, not only academically but also in extra-curricular activities. The hope is that by using this information staff will be able to talk to pupils about their interests or praise them when they do well in activities, both inside and outside school. The aim is that by having something positive to speak to pupils about then more effective relationships will be built and that in turn will create a more positive learning environment. Although this research suggests that pupils with SEN value

relationships with teachers, the school's assumption is that all pupils will benefit from a positive approach.

As the research identified the importance of participating in extra-curricular activities as a factor of feeling included in the school community, information about pupils' interests can also be used to advise pupils of which clubs to join or identify areas where the formation of new clubs would be beneficial. Looking at the most recent list of clubs which are available at the school there are both competitive and fun activities on offer. In addition, there are now some sports and musical activities which pupils can attend either at a competitive level or on a fun level. The plan is to do an audit of all clubs and to further explore why some pupils are still not attending extra-curricular activities.

In addition, following the positive response from the pupil who said how much having a weekly meeting with a TA to help her organise her work and time, we are trialling a weekly session for all Sixth Form pupils with SEN and a fortnightly session for GCSE pupils. The hope is that in this way pupils will benefit from quality teaching from the teacher, whilst receiving additional support from the TA or SENCo outside of the classroom, working on organisation and planning. Similarly, all pupils with SEN have been allocated a TA mentor who can meet them during registration at least weekly to help with any issues.

As this research is all about using and valuing the voice of pupils with SEN, to improve the school's practice and the pupils' provision, pupils in the Sixth Form have been included in a staff training session. So that the pupils would not feel overwhelmed they joined small groups of teachers who were working on cross-curricular planning of how to differentiate resources. Each group focussed on one area of SEN and the pupils were invited to join and contribute to

the group focussing on their area of need. Feedback from the session was twofold, firstly the pupils reported that they felt more included and more valued members of the school community. They also said that the experience helped them to feel more confident when they attended university interviews. Secondly, teachers responded positively about what they had learnt from the pupils during the sessions, saying that they would be able to use the information to improve their practice with other pupils.

All of the pupils with Statements who have begun the process of transferring over to the new system of EHC Plans, as part of the process they are being given more autonomy regarding decisions about their own provision and intended outcomes.

7.2. Limitations of the Research

One limitation of the study is that it is a very small scale research project and the range of disabilities depended on the pupils at Belmont School at the time. Only selecting a few participants could mean that some examples of good practice or barriers to inclusion for certain groups of pupils may not be recorded. Not having pupils with a full range of disabilities also means that the research is not as generalizable. However, the primary aim of the study was to improve the provision of the pupils at the school and by focussing on a small number of specific pupils it was possible to collect and analyse rich data. Therefore, the findings are valuable and will add to the school's understanding of inclusion and also hopefully schools with similar pupils.

As the research took place at an all girls' secondary school, the pupil voice of boys with SEN was not included. Again, the findings are valuable to the school in question but to make the findings more generalizable to all pupils with SEN attending mainstream secondary schools, research would need to be carried out to explore whether boys with SEN have similar or different experiences of mainstream secondary schools than girls do.

Another limitation of the study is that it was the researcher's choice to use pupil voice and that her role of SENCo, could have caused a power imbalance between the interviewer and the participants. However, consulting pupils with SEN about their provision during Annual Review meetings, is already part of the school ethos (Flutter, 2007). Therefore, the pupils are used to speaking to the SENCo about areas which concern them. Even so, the researcher understood the importance of listening to and accurately reporting what the pupils said, even if some of the pupils' opinions could be perceived as criticisms towards teachers or the

school (McKay, 2014). She also realised that due to her role as SENCo, there was the risk that the pupils' responses may be influenced by trying to please her by saying what they thought that she wanted to hear (Mannion, 2007). Therefore, as the SENCo was the sole interviewer she had to ensure that the pupils felt that they could speak honestly, trusted that she would report accurately what they said and protect their identity. By both recording the interviews and enabling the pupils to read, the interview notes and the findings, there was an added insurance that the pupils' views were accurately conveyed. Similarly, by discussing the data collection methods, the data analysis and the findings with the thesis supervisors, provided another means of checking that pupils' view were accurately recorded.

A further limitation is that the area of research was adult led and that the pupils were asked specific questions during the interview. However, the fact that there were unexpected findings, for example, regarding the importance of extra-curricular activities, shows that the pupils had the opportunity to express a view on areas not anticipated by the researcher (O'Connor et al., 2011).

A final limitation is that although the researcher is used to writing a form of case studies as part of the SENCo role, she did not have any past experience of writing case studies in a narrative style.

7.3. Future Suggestions for Research

Further research could include a wider range of pupils in the interview process. It would be interesting to question those pupils requiring SEN Support about their experiences at school, as well as those with Statements or EHC Plans. It would also be interesting to question pupils without SEN on their experience of being educated in mainstream classrooms with pupils who have SEN.

Another area of research could also be using the voice of pupils with SEN, to explore views on the impact of transferring from a Statement to an EHC Plan, their feelings about the process and the impact of having more autonomy concerning their own provision and outcomes.

Finally, it would also be interesting to further investigate the role of participating in extra-curricular activities as a factor of feeling included in the school community.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. The Participants

Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	Year 13
Moderate learning difficulties Looked After (LAC) Robyn	Visually Impaired (VI) English as an Additional Language (EAL) Zoe	Moderate learning difficulties, EAL Nina	VI, Gifted and Talented (G&T) Sam	Physically disabled, G&T Nicola
Moderate learning difficulties, EAL Kia	Moderate learning difficulties and Emotional Behavioural Difficulties (EBD) Sally	Moderate learning difficulties, EAL Matilda	Hearing Impaired (HI) Helen	
Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Iwona		Specific learning difficulties, EAL Rachel	HI Alison	
Moderate learning difficulties, EAL Monika				

Appendix 2. Pupil Information Sheet

Information Sheet

As part of my EdD studies at the University of Reading I am conducting a study into what pupils think about their experience at our school. I would appreciate it if you would help me with this study.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part because you are a pupil at the school.

What will I have to do if I agree to take part?

I will interview you in my office for about 30 minutes. I will give you a list of possible questions beforehand. This interview will be recorded with your permission and I will take notes. You will be asked about your experience of school, for example: 'Give me an example of when you felt part of the school community. Would you feel that this happens: most of the time; some of the time; a little of the time?'

Will anyone know about my answers?

Only the people working on the study, myself and my supervisor from the University of Reading, will know about your answers. I won't tell other people in the school or your parents how you answered, unless there is an issue of safeguarding.

All information collected will be kept strictly confidential (subject to legal limitations). Real names will not be used to ensure neither you nor the school can be identified. All electronic data will be held securely in password protected files on a non-shared PC and all paper documentation will be held in locked cabinets in a locked office. In line with University policy, data generated by the study will be kept securely in paper or electronic form for a period of five years after the completion of the research project. This data may be used in future publications in appropriate academic journals and/or books. All participants will be able to have access to a copy of the published research on request.

Will it help me if I take part?

I think you will find it interesting to take part and be able to give your opinion. Your answers will help your teachers and school to improve the way that they support pupils.

Do I have to take part?

No, not at all. Also, you can stop helping at any time, without giving a reason.

What happens next?

You will be asked to sign a consent form saying that you are happy to take part in an interview, which will be recorded, and that you understand about the project. I will arrange a time that suits you for the interview.

If you have any questions please speak to :

What happens if something goes wrong?

In the unlikely case of concern or complaint, you can contact, University of Reading; email:

This project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University of Reading Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct. The University has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request.

Appendix 3. Pupil Consent Forms

Pupil Consent Form

Please tick as appropriate:

I have read the Information Sheet about the project. ()

I understand what the purpose of the project is and what you want me to do. ()

All my questions have been answered. ()

I agree to take part in this project. ()

I understand that it is my choice to help with this project and that I can stop at any time, without giving a reason and that it won't have any effect on my grades. ()

I have received a copy of this Consent Form and of the Information Sheet. ()

I am willing to take part in an interview which will be recorded. ()

Name:

Signed:

Date:

Appendix 4. Headteacher Consent Form

Headteacher Consent Form

Please tick as appropriate:

I have read the Information Sheet about the project. ()

I understand what the purpose of the project is and what you want the pupils to do. ()

All my questions have been answered. ()

I agree for the school to take part in this project. ()

I understand that I can withdraw my permission at any time, without giving a reason. ()

I have received a copy of this Consent Form and of the Information Sheet. ()

Name:

Signed:

Date:

Appendix 5. Interview Questions

Give me an example of when you felt part of the school.

Would you say that this happens: most of the time; some of the time; a little of the time?

Have you achieved something at school that you are proud of? Give an example.

Have you been asked by adults at school about ways they can support you best. Give an example.

What support have you been given at school?

Have you been happy with that?

If no: what would you like to change?

Does the school encourage all pupils to enjoy learning? Give an example.

Think of a good friend. How did you first become friends? What could the school do better to help you make friends?

Have adults at school helped you to feel good about yourself? Give examples.

What are your plans for the future and how is the school helping you with these?

Based on: (Booth et al., 2011) 'Index for Inclusion: developing learning and participation in schools.'

Appendix 6. An Example Transcript

Key

How much they feel part of the school

Ways in which they feel part of school

Something they are proud of

Ways they have been asked about support

Ways they are supported

Satisfaction with support

School encourages all learners

Making friends

Can school help with friendships

Adult made them feel good about themselves

Future plans

Interviewer: Hello. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. Can I just check that you have read the info sheet, signed the consent forms and if you have any questions would you like to ask them.

Pupil: Yes I have signed it. No I don't have any questions.

Interviewer: Ok. Could you give me an example of when you felt a part of the school.

Pupil: In terms of socially or academically.

Interviewer: Either in terms of being valued.

Pupil: I don't know. It is a difficult one not so much in lower school but when you get to 6th form you start to feel more valued. Cos teachers know your name and have a chat with you, there are more things to do in that you can get more responsibility. But I think in lower

school you are part of the school in terms that you are included but you don't feel like you are treated like a special person or that you are favoured. You stand out or anything.....

Interviewer: Ok great. Have you achieved something at school that you are proud of and could you give me an example.

Pupil: I was quite chuffed with **my GCSE results**. I don't think anyone would be surprised at that. Yep **my B grade in French**. I was really chuffed with that. Because **I really struggled with the French as my hearing was really very bad**. I didn't really concentrate much in lessons. I just didn't see the point in it. I still had help from the in French listening exercises and still remained in my listening exam they still gave me help. **I was really grateful** but I just lost the energy to do well.

Interviewer: Thinking about support. Have you been asked about ways in which to support you best.

Pupil: **Yes**.

Interviewer: Could you give me an example.

Pupil: **They ask shall we do this or that**

Interviewer: Can you tell me what support that you have been given in general.

Pupil: Quite a lot the general **TAs in lesson** and also have **I my teacher for the deaf**. **K speech and language** People coming from **Connexions to talk about careers and how to deal with uni stuff**. **Teachers help** as well they give me support, **not always specific to their subject** **sometimes they are just there for a chat**. **HOY and form tutors not so much as I think they are there for everyone**. I think you have to find that one teacher that works for you.

Interviewer: Have you been happy with that provision.

Pupil: Yes. At first in year 7 it was **quite overwhelming** as in primary school I had 2 TAs for everything and I knew them very well. Coming here you can have a different one for every subject. **You can see 5 different people a day sometimes it just difficult to take it all in it's too**

much. Too many members of staff and you don't always feel that you have someone to trust and talk to. But as I have gone up the school the people who support me have gone up with me. Not just doing what they have been told to do by government or whoever if it's not working they ask shall we do this shall we do that. That helps that they are not doing what they have been told to do but that they are working with you to find a solution. It is flexible.

Interviewer: Are there any changes you would make.

Pupil: I can't think of anything in detail. There are occasions where you just have the people supporting you that do not do any more than teacher would have done. But I suppose that is lower down the school when there is someone in the lesson. I think as I went up there was a difference in the support 9/10 it was much better. It was more specific to me.

Interviewer: Do you think that the school encourages all pupils to enjoy learning.

Pupil: Certain teachers do. I think you always get the pep talks that Education is key education is power or whatever. Enjoyment at A level yes I think they do because you have to have some enjoyment in the subject otherwise you are basically not going to succeed at all. In lower school quite a lot of teachers expect, especially in subjects like maths and English and science realise that you are not doing them because you want to therefore the enjoyment won't always come naturally. Obviously we are not working in a military environment. I would say that they are encouraging us in some ways to enjoy it. But I wouldn't say that it's (????) either I don't know it's difficult.

Interviewer: Thinking socially. Can you think of a good friend and tell me how you became friends with them.

Pupil: Erm. I don't know I think I made friends by myself. There is one girl that I have been friends with the whole way through since the start of year 7. I don't know how that happened. I think she asked me if I wanted to go swimming one day and I was very confused it was like my first few days in year 7. I knew her but not that well. I never went because I had my

period and I was a bit embarrassed to tell her because I was one of the only people in year 7 to have her periods but ever since then we became friends and we haven't actually ever been swimming. (laughs)

Interviewer: That's funny.

Pupil: We have never seen each other in swimming costumes and never been swimming. So yeah

Interviewer: So you were able to make your own friends.

Pupil: I don't. Yes as I got older. You get yeah when you get to 8,9 or 10 you understand people and their characters and whether they are popular. Years 7 and 8 you just want to fit in and if teachers push you together. I remember when going to PGL I asked to be in a room with this girl who I was going to go swimming with and a couple of girls who she was friends with who I thought were really really nice but I never got put with them I got put with a load of girls who actually when it got to year 10 or 11 they turned out to be the year group bitches. I was very uncomfortable in that situation but I think my head of year did it because she wanted to make people bond but it didn't work and I don't think the school can help you to make friends because that person has to do it themselves. They can stop bullying but they can't force you to be friends.

Interviewer: Cos I remember when we tried to put you together with A (another HI pupil) then we realised that just because you were both HI it doesn't necessarily mean that

Pupil: We get on but we are not BFF we are very different about the way that we accept our disability and cope with it and

Interviewer: Thinking about it you are probably more similar to S (VI Pupil)

Pupil: Probably I mean I have a chat with her now in upper school, lower school not really I didn't really know her. I saw her. But I wonder because when A went to W school they had a

lot of deaf pupils. At my school it was just my brother and I. and we were in different year groups different classes. Very much by ourselves.

Interviewer: Have adults at school helped you to feel good about yourself.

Pupil: Yes when they give you good grades. Yes you sometimes get the occasional pep talk from teachers don't you if you are feeling a bit down or gloomy, the whole sort of you can do it. I haven't had that one teacher that has made me feel that I am invincible. Yes adult do

Interviewer: Do you think that might be J (HI teacher) though.

Pupil: Yes she does in terms of she is I can trust her but she is used to being around people like me. She knows what to say and I think that when you get a teacher who says something that J is saying it makes a bit more of an impact because they don't deal with deaf people every day and what they are saying is maybe something that they think would be like. I don't know it sticks more. But I have never had an adult who has made me feel bad.

Interviewer: Just for the tape. What are your plans for the future.

Interviewer: How has the school helped you with that.

Pupil: Going to uni to study physiotherapy. School are helping in terms of how to fill in UCAS. Actually the PE dept managed to give me a contact for work experience which I got so hopefully because it is a different kind of work experience I will be able to put it on my CV although at the moment it doesn't seem like much. Dr L has helped me with my biology which is only three hours a fortnight but it just even if you don't get it instantly it builds on the knowledge that you already have and it kinda made feel more comfortable if I don't understand I know I can talk to her and go through it and I am likely to understand and it is quite nice.

Interviewer: Is there anything else that might help me to help others in the future.

Pupil: I am really glad that I went to mainstream school because I know that if I went to the specialist deaf school and then put me in the outside world and I would probably have a panic

attack because people can hear and talk properly. You know deafness is not one of the driving factors of life it is an invisible disability and not a lot of people have it to the degree that I do and I think that if I had gone to a deaf school I would not have got the same as in a mainstream school. Cos it's simple things like learning to tell teachers that you haven't heard to talk slower to repeat something and I think at any deaf school I wouldn't have got that confidence to ask someone. Even in school now like going to order coffee from the canteen at a deaf school they would have treated you slightly differently like general canteen staff do but if I go into Costa then it is just so much easier. Even if it is difficult at times in the long run being in school throughout life it's going to make it so much easier because you know how the real world is and you can cope with it.

Interviewer: Excellent thank you very much.

Appendix 7. List of Abbreviations

A Level: Advanced Level, the later of two standardized tests in a secondary school subject, used as a qualification for entrance into a university

ASD: Autistic Spectrum Disorder

BTEC: Business and Technology Education Council, secondary school vocational leaving qualification

DISS: The Deployment and Impact of Support Staff Project

EHC Plan: Education, Health and Care Plan

GCSE: General Certificate of Secondary Education, the first standardised test in a secondary school subject, taken at the end of Year 11

GLD: Global Learning Difficulties

HI: Hearing Impaired

JCQ: Joint Council for Qualifications

KS2: Key Stage 2

KS3: Key Stage 3

KS4: Key Stage 4

KS5: Key Stage 5

LA: Local Authority

MAST: The Making a Statement Study

MLD: Moderate Learning Difficulties

NC: National Curriculum

PSHE: Personal Social Health and Economic Education

SA: School Action

SAP: School Action Plus

SEN: Special Educational Need

SENCo: Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator

SEMH: Social Emotional and Mental Health

SLD: Specific Learning Difficulties

Statement: Statement of Educational Need

TA: Teaching assistant

VI: Visual Impaired