

The Special Educational Needs in Secondary Education (SENSE) study

Final Report

**A study of the teaching and support experienced by pupils with
Statements and Education, Health and Care Plans in mainstream
and special schools**

by

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The Special Educational Needs in Secondary Education (SENSE) study

Executive Summary

Introduction

Little is known about the educational experiences of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) over time, and how inclusive these experiences are relative to those without SEND. The SEN in Secondary Education (SENSE) study was conducted following extensive reform to the SEND system in England, and at a time when schools were implementing a wider set of policies and adjusting to funding constraints, the consequences of which are likely to impact on the sustainability and quality of inclusive education.

The SENSE study builds on our earlier Making a Statement (MAST) study, which collected systematic data on the educational experiences of pupils with Statements of SEND in primary schools. Our aim was to extend our understanding of the day-to-day educational experiences of pupils with Statements into mainstream secondary schools and special schools by gathering minute-by-minute data on pupils' interactions with teachers, TAs and peers, and the contexts in which they occurred.

The SENSE study's longitudinal component additionally provides insight into the educational journeys of 30 young people with SEND, between 2011 and 2016. While not the principle focus of research, the study also presented an opportunity to collect data on schools' and families' experiences of transition from primary school, and their views and experiences relating to the implementation of the 2014 SEND reforms, which were introduced after the MAST study and before the start of the SENSE study.

Methods

The analyses are based on data collected on pupils who were in Year 9 over the 2015/16 academic year. Fieldwork was conducted in 43 schools across England: 34 state-funded mainstream schools (18 of which were academies); eight state-funded special schools; and one independent special school. Findings are based on results from extensive systematic observations of 60 pupils with Statements or Education, Health and Care Plans (herein, referred to jointly as Statements), and 112 average-attaining 'comparison' pupils. Observation data were supplemented with detailed, individual case studies on each of the 60 pupils with Statements, based largely on 295 interviews with teachers, TAs, SEN/SEND co-ordinators (SENCOs/SENDCOs), parents/carers and the pupils themselves. Data collection involved researchers shadowing pupils over one week each. Below, we present the key findings, drawing also on results from the MAST study observations and case studies, which were collected when this cohort was in Year 5 (2011/12). The two projects together involved a total of 1,340 hours of observation, making this research arguably the largest classroom observation study ever conducted in the UK on pupils with SEND.

Pupils with Statements (and SEND generally) are not a homogeneous group. The majority of pupils in the SENSE study sample had a primary need related to cognition and learning. The

results, therefore, do not claim to be representative of other types of complex SEND for which Statements are granted. The school and classroom processes and practices identified in our research relate to pupils in Year 9. Processes and practices may differ in other secondary year groups within and across the schools we visited, but this was outside the scope of the study.

Key findings

1. Organising for learning: from separation to segregation

We found that in mainstream secondary schools, the educational experiences of pupils with Statements are characterised by being taught together in small, low-attaining classes, with at least one TA present alongside the teacher. Their average-attaining peers, meanwhile, are taught together in larger classes, with just the teacher present. For the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, pupils with and without SEND were taught in discrete attainment groups in at least 85% of instances. Pupils with Statements were taught in classes of 16 or fewer pupils in 54% of instances (vs. 11% for average-attainers), and in classes of 21 or more pupils in 26% of instances (vs. 69% for average-attainers).

At Year 5, pupils with Statements spent the equivalent of over a day a week away from the classroom, their teacher and their peers. When they worked in groups, it was mostly with other pupils identified as lower-attaining and/or as having SEND. While the mainstream experience at Year 9 for pupils with Statements features more in-class, teacher-led teaching, they are taught mostly in whole classes with other low attainers and those with SEND. This segregation is very close to a form of 'streaming'. Secondary schools view this as part of a wider strategy for teaching and learning. However, some pupils felt stigmatised by being in the 'bottom sets'.

2. Teaching assistants are central to SEND provision in mainstream schools

Average-attaining pupils have vanishingly little interaction with TAs, as TAs are not typically present in their lessons. However, TAs are a consistent and central feature of the educational experiences of pupils with Statements in mainstream schools. While the proportion of time they spend interacting with TAs is less in Year 9 compared with Year 5 (18% vs. 27%), it nonetheless accounts for around one-fifth of all their interactions (vs. 1% for average-attainers), and outweighs peer interaction. Their interactions with teachers are largely as part of the class audience, but with TAs, interactions are more active, as they are more often the focus of attention.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that primary and secondary mainstream schools view the employment and deployment of TAs as a key strategic approach to including and meeting the educational needs of pupils with Statements. TA support was identified as an important factor in pupil progress, with school staff and parents indicating that pupils would be unable to 'cope' in a mainstream setting without it.

Despite smaller class sizes and the increased number of adults in special school classrooms, we found little evidence that pupils in these settings have more one-to-one interactions with teachers and TAs, compared to pupils with Statements in mainstream schools. Interestingly, there were no explicit references to the impact of TAs or TA support in specialist settings.

3. Implicit and ambiguous notions of teaching and support

It was hard to define the pedagogical approaches teachers in both mainstream and specialist settings use to meet the learning needs of pupils with Statements. Likewise, TA 'support' is a fuzzy concept. The broad features of the TA role, as identified by staff across the schools, overlap with that of teachers. It was hard to determine the extent to which the TA role differs qualitatively and meaningfully from what teachers do. One explanation might be that teachers struggle to make the implicit explicit. Schools may be providing effective teaching and support for pupils with SEND, but staff working with them find it difficult to articulate what they do. It is also unclear how the widespread use of high amounts of individual, one-to-one support interact with the role many TAs were reported to have in developing pupil independence. Getting the right balance of adult attention and need for support seems to be a complex, on-going challenge.

4. Differentiation takes multiple forms, but practical strategies lack precision

The concept and operationalisation of differentiation for pupils with Statements was variously described as ranging from broad organisational approaches to lesson level strategies. In over half of primary schools, setting Year 5 literacy and numeracy classes by attainment (or 'ability') was described as 'first tier' differentiation, and within-class grouping in these subjects was referred to as 'second tier' differentiation. In secondary mainstream schools, allocation to lower-attaining sets is seen in some cases to obviate the need for differentiation at the task level.

At Year 5 and Year 9, some teachers provided an alternative, individualised task for pupils with Statements, but in the main they talked about differentiating tasks for groups of pupils, relative to their perceived ability. Often, however, this is not enough to reach pupils with Statements. Instead, TAs emerge as a key means of differentiation, by 'bridging' the learning in the moment. Differentiation by TAs is characterised by 'simplifying', 'breaking down' and repeating teachers' talk and instruction. It was difficult to get beyond this and uncover what these practical strategies looked like, and what drives TAs' decision-making in terms of how, when and why to use them in their moment-by-moment practice. While well-intentioned, it is questionable how successful and sustainable this is as an appropriate and as a long-term pedagogical strategy.

5. The persistent problem of preparedness

As in the MAST study, we found gaps in teachers' and TAs' knowledge concerning meeting the needs of pupils with Statements, and the acquisition of skills and knowledge relating to SEND. Some new teachers can be 'overwhelmed' or 'don't know how to start' with SEND, raising concerns over whether initial teacher education coverage and in-service professional learning is sufficient. Induction training for TAs seems rare, with some 'picking it up on the job'. Typically, training opportunities for teachers and TAs tend to be on types of SEND, with attendance voluntary. On a practical day-to-day level, teachers and TAs lack time to meet, plan, prepare and feed back either side of lessons. The general busyness of schools and TAs' hours of work falling in line with the school day are seen as impediments to creating liaison time with teachers.

6. SEND is not a school priority

We were unable to find evidence of an effective and theoretically-grounded pedagogy for pupils with SEND in the instructional approaches used by either teachers or TAs, across all the schools that participated in the MAST and SENSE studies. In light of our findings on the organisational and operational approaches to including and teaching pupils with Statements in mainstream settings, it is difficult not to question the overall effectiveness of provision and quality of the educational experiences available to these pupils, compared to that received by their (non-SEND) peers.

At the time of our fieldwork (autumn 2015 to spring 2016), we found the degree to which the 2014 SEND reforms were understood by teachers and parents varied, suggesting more work might be needed on raising awareness. The reforms had been well received by those with a good grasp on their implications, but the overhaul to the SEND system does not yet appear to have had a profound effect on secondary school leaders' thinking and approach to provision for pupils with SEND. We are, therefore, left to query the effectiveness of leadership for SEND in mainstream schools, and its status within the drive towards whole school improvement.

Implications

The SENSE study findings emerge at a time of great uncertainty. Funding for SEND and schools in general is parlous. According to the Dept. for Education's (2016g) own projections, the number of children needing some form of specialist education is predicted to increase by 15% by 2025. In the apparent absence of any central planning, it seems unavoidable that mainstream schools will be required to play a key role in local approaches to educating pupils with often complex SEND. We identified positive aspects of practice that suggest at least some schools seem equipped to play an effective role in a more inclusive system. For example, we found some new teachers were open to taking proactive steps to understanding the needs of pupils with Statements. Also, the process of transitioning from primary to secondary schooling seemed to have been handled thoroughly and successfully in all but a few cases.

The SENSE study findings add to a body of empirical research stretching back over 12 years (Blatchford *et al.*, 2012; Webster and Blatchford, 2013b; 2015), which suggests the system of support for pupils with high-level SEND in mainstream schools in England is too reliant on TAs. As schools reluctantly cut TA roles to balance budgets, we question the sustainability of this widespread approach to inclusion. Moreover, we query whether the systemic use of TAs is compensating or covering for failures elsewhere; including, for example, the continued failure to adequately cover SEND as part of initial teacher training. We do not doubt that schools are doing their best in challenging circumstances, but on the basis of the findings from the SENSE study and the earlier MAST study, it is difficult to see how mainstream schools would accommodate the inclusion and teaching of pupils with high-level SEND in the long-term, if TAs were to disappear from classrooms tomorrow.

A more balanced system is urgently required; one where effective support from TAs is part of a coherent approach to including and teaching children and young people with SEND. For this to happen, we believe that SEND must become a strategic priority.

Recommendations for local authorities and schools

Despite the overhaul to the SEND system in 2014, the evidence from our latest research suggests the association in the minds of schools and parents between statutory assessment, EHCPs and securing individual TA support is strongly residual within the reformed system, and continues to have a direct bearing on the widespread school and classroom practices described in our results. We find ourselves, therefore, restating our recommendation from the MAST study that this should be challenged. When it comes to the co-construction of EHCPs with families and schools, we recommend LAs prioritise the *quality* of support (i.e. who provides pedagogical input and how), not the quantity of support, which too often is still couched in the currency of TA hours.

An advantage of an autonomous system means that schools do not have to wait for a policy response in order to address some of the persistent problems our research has uncovered. Schools are the more effective engines of change, capable of rethinking their approach to the way provision is made for pupils with SEND. We call on school leaders to lead the way in developing a more inclusive ethos. We have advocated for some time for school leaders to rethink the role of TAs with regard to SEND, but improving how pupils with Statements are included and educated will not be resolved by this alone. On the basis of our key findings, we identify four areas for action needed to bring about a more balanced, more inclusive system.

Firstly, secondary school leaders could take the bold step of organising grouping by mixed attainment, for at least some subjects and contexts. At the least, they should adopt grouping strategies that militate against the more harmful effects of streaming or 'hard' setting. This would include: using only attainment data as the only basis for composing groups; ensuring porosity between groups; balancing groups on the basis of frequent assessment; and making sure the best teachers do their fair share of teaching more challenging groups.

Secondly, schools must be mindful of the classroom practices that result in pupils with high-level SEND having less time with teachers, relative to other pupils. Efficient TA deployment can help organise and maximise opportunities for these pupils to receive high quality teaching. Teachers should ensure pupils with SEND are not routinely grouped together for paired or group work, but have opportunities to interact and work with other classmates.

Thirdly, a concerted, system-wide effort to improve the confidence and competence of teachers to teach pupils with SEND seems both necessary and overdue. Beginning with what is already known about the features of high quality teaching, further research is needed to define the terms, qualities and practical expressions and indicators of effective pedagogy for SEND. Fruitful collaborations between researchers and teachers working in inclusive settings could begin to identify the characteristics of teaching and curricula for SEND, and the models needed to embed practical strategies at scale.

Finally, we need to consider the institutional levers that can influence school leaders' decision-making and action, so that they do not lose sight of SEND as a priority. At the individual and multi-school level, governing bodies and boards of trustees, together with leadership teams, should institute career progression systems for teachers and leaders throughout the organisation, which are contingent on evidencing practice that has a demonstrable impact on outcomes for pupils with SEND.

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1. Introduction

Our 2012 Making a Statement (MAST) study provided an insight into the educational experiences of pupils with high-level¹ special education needs and disabilities (SEND) educated in mainstream primary schools. The MAST study specifically focussed on the systems of support and provision for pupils whose needs qualified them for a Statement. The purpose of the MAST study was to provide data to help inform results from our earlier Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project, which showed that day-to-day support for pupils with SEND in mainstream settings is typically provided by teaching assistants (TAs), instead of teachers. This, we have argued, is one main reason for other results from the DISS project, which found that support from TAs had a negative impact on the academic progress of all pupils, but particularly those with SEND (Blatchford, Russell and Webster, 2012).

The results of the MAST study showed that, compared to average-attaining pupils, those with a Statement experienced a high degree of separation from teachers and peers as a result of having a TA allocated to them, and who, in effect, took on the role of their 'primary educator' (Webster and Blatchford, 2013a; 2013b; 2015). This, together with the lower quality instruction these pupils received from TAs (Radford *et al.*, 2011; Rubie-Davies *et al.*, 2010), added to our understanding of why pupils with the highest level of SEND make less academic progress than their peers (Blatchford *et al.*, 2012). A main reason for the present SENSE study was that there were question marks over whether these experiences endure when Statemented pupils progress to secondary education. In fact, overall, little is known about their long-term experiences of education and SEND provision, and how inclusive these experiences are. The SENSE study was, therefore, set up to build on the MAST study, and had two main aims:

1. To provide a detailed picture of the day-to-day educational experiences of pupils with Statements in English mainstream secondary schools.
2. To use these data together with data from the MAST study to create, for the first time, a longitudinal study of the educational experiences of a cohort of pupils with Statements at two points in their school career (ages 9-10 and 13-14).

The main findings from the SENSE study, reported here, are based on results from extensive systematic observations of 60 pupils with Statements and 112 average-attaining 'comparison' pupils. The observation data were supplemented with detailed case studies, based largely on interviews with nearly 300 teachers, TAs, SEND coordinators (SENCOs), parents/carers and pupils with Statements. Data were collected over the 2015/16 school year, and involved researchers shadowing pupils in Year 9 over one week each. Through the SENSE study, we hoped to produce findings that built on those from the MAST study and our previous research to help inform how schools can provide efficient and effective support for pupils with SEND.

¹ We use the term 'high-level SEND' throughout this report to refer collectively to pupils with a Statement or an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), and to distinguish them from pupils who are identified as having SEND, but do not have either a Statement or an EHCP.

Background

Changes to the SEND system in 2014 mean that in England, children and young people on the SEND register are categorised as either SEN Support (formerly School Action and School Action Plus), or as having an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP): a legal document that sets out a child or young person's needs and the support they should receive to meet those needs. As part of the reforms, EHCPs replaced Statements². Both documents, and the assessment processes by which they were produced, have the same function, but as the name implies, EHCPs have a remit beyond educational needs. The key differences are that EHCPs run from the age of 0 to 25, and were more explicitly person-centred than Statements. As of September 2014, local authorities (LAs) in England had to assess children and young people with SEND for an EHCP, and the process of issuing Statements was wound down. LAs must convert all existing Statements to EHCPs by 31st March 2018. To date, the transfer from one to the other is about a third complete (DfE, 2017a).

According to government data, the proportion of the school population identified as having SEND has been in decline since 2010. Yet while the proportion of pupils on SEN Support has fallen steadily from 18.3% in 2010, to 11.6% in 2016, the proportion of pupils with a Statement or EHCP has remained stable at 2.8%. Overall, around 1.2 million pupils have SEND. As of January 2017, 287,290 pupils had either a Statement or an EHCP (DfE, 2017a). Less than half of all pupils with a Statement or EHCP attend a state-funded mainstream school (44.8%). This proportion has dipped recently as the proportion of pupils with SEND being educated in state-funded special schools has increased from 38.2% in 2010, to 42.5% in 2017 (DfE, 2017a). Additionally, the proportion of pupils educated in independent schools has increased over the same period: from 4.2% to 5.7% (DfE, 2016a).

The long-term trend for more pupils with SEND being included in mainstream setting has been accompanied and assisted by an increase in the numbers of classroom- and pupil-based support staff, known variously as teaching assistants or learning support assistants (referred to collectively throughout this report as TAs³). The number of full-time equivalent (FTE) TAs in mainstream schools in England has more than trebled since 2000, from 79,000 to 265,600 in 2016 (DfE, 2017b). The increase over time has been fairly even across the mainstream and special school sectors. In November 2016,, TAs comprised 28% of the school workforce in England: 35% of the nursery and primary school workforce; 14% of the secondary school workforce; and 50% of the special school workforce. On the basis of headcount, the TA workforce in state-funded primary schools outnumbered the teacher workforce (277,500 vs. 241,300). In secondary settings, there were 63,600 TAs and 206,900 teachers (DfE, 2017b).

Data from the Dept. for Education's annual School Workforce Census show that the average school spend on employing TAs is around £200,000 per year, and the national annual spend is over £5bn. On the face of it, this might be a worthwhile investment, given that school leaders report that one of the main reasons for the increase in TAs, and indeed some other support

² Although LAs no longer prepare Statements, many pupils in the SENSE study had not yet had their Statement transferred to an EHCP. To aid readability, we mainly use the term Statement in this report to refer to both.

³ In line with common usage, we use the term 'teaching assistant' to cover equivalent classroom based paraprofessional roles, such as 'learning support assistant', 'special needs assistant' and 'classroom assistant'. We also include 'higher level teaching assistants' in this definition.

staff (such as bilingual support assistants), is that inclusion policies would be impossible to implement without them (Blatchford *et al.*, 2012). However, results from the longitudinal DISS project, which was designed to provide much needed information on the deployment and impact of TAs and other school support staff – and which is the main inspiration for both the MAST and SENSE studies – raised serious questions about the negative consequences of how TA deployment has become closely connected to policies of including pupils with SEND in mainstream schools (Blatchford, *et al.*, 2011; Webster *et al.*, 2010).

Results from the DISS project (described in full in Blatchford *et al.*, 2012) show that TAs have a predominantly pedagogical role, and spend much of their time supporting pupils with SEND and lower-attaining pupils. This has obvious benefits: it allows hard-pressed teachers to devote time to the rest of the class, in the knowledge that pupils in most need are given potentially valuable individual attention by TAs. There are additional benefits in terms of reductions of teacher workload. But unfortunately, the DISS project also found there are serious unintended consequences: there was a negative relationship between the amount of TA support received and the progress made by pupils, and in particular, those with the highest levels of SEND (Webster *et al.*, 2010). The more support pupils received from TAs, the less progress they were found to make. This finding was not explained by pupil characteristics, such as prior attainment, SEND status or income deprivation, and was found consistently over seven year groups in mainstream primary and secondary settings.

On the basis of extensive data collected via observations, surveys, interviews and audio recordings of lessons, the main explanation for these results on pupil attainment appears to be the way TA-supported pupils spend less time interacting with the teacher, and become separated from the teacher and curriculum. In effect, the least qualified staff (TAs) have been assigned primary educator status for the pupils in most need. It is perhaps not surprising that pupils with SEND make less progress than their peers. In a similar way, Klassen (2001) found that pupils who had a Statement for a specific learning difficulty or dyslexia, and who were assigned additional support for literacy, made less progress than their unsupported peers.

The situation described above raises both significant concerns about the support given to pupils with SEND and concerns about fairness and discrimination in education. As Giangreco *et al.* (2005) have argued, it is unlikely that we would allow such an educational regime for pupils without SEND. In addition, school failure – in terms of leaving compulsory education without qualifications, or having inadequate literacy and numeracy skills – is known to have long-term damaging effects on society, as well as for the individuals concerned (Feinstein *et al.*, 2008). Poverty is a cause and effect of SEND (Shaw *et al.*, 2016). O'Brien (2016) lists the arresting statistical differences in the outcomes and life chances of young people with and without learning difficulties. Those with SEND are:

- Twice as likely to be bullied at primary school
- Nine times more likely to receive a school exclusion
- Seven times less likely to find paid employment
- Twice as likely to live in poverty
- Four times more likely to have mental health problems
- Three times more likely to end up in prison
- Likely to die at least 15 years younger.

Educational failure feeds into social problems and the financial cost, through the involvement of social welfare, health and judicial systems, can be seen as avoidable expenditure. Moreover, for many, the effective education of children and young people with SEND is a moral issue. Yet the UK policy trajectory over recent years, as it relates to mainstream schools, has made it harder for school leaders to reconcile moral purpose with the effects of a high stakes accountability system that prioritises 'raising standards' (Norwich, 2014), and the lack of financial means to deliver inclusive teaching for those with SEND.

The Making a Statement (MAST) study

The main starting point for the present study are the findings from our previous MAST study, which tracked the educational experiences of 48 9- and 10-year-old pupils with Statements, who attended mainstream primary schools. The pupils' needs were categorised as moderate learning difficulties (MLD) or behaviour, emotional and/or social difficulties (BESD). The results, based on data collected through systematic observations and detailed pupil case studies, provided a detailed insight into how pupils with Statements are included and have their needs met in mainstream settings (Webster and Blatchford, 2013a; 2013b; 2014).

Firstly, we found that the educational experiences of pupils with Statements was strongly characterised by a high degree of separation from the classroom, their teacher and peers. Compared to average-attaining pupils without SEND, those with Statements spent the equivalent of over a day a week away from the main classroom, and thus, their regular class teacher. A clear point to emerge was the intimate connection between TAs and the locations, in and away from the classroom, in which pupils with Statements were taught. High amounts of TA support were associated with a subtle form of segregation within the classroom, where interactions with TAs cut across, replaced and reduced opportunities for pupils to interact with the teacher and their peers. In addition, the results provided a clear picture of the social contexts within which pupils with Statements worked and socialised, and the extent to which these tended to be homogeneous in terms of comprising similarly lower-attaining pupils. It was common, therefore, for pupils with Statements to find themselves somewhat detached from the main teaching activity: they were 'in' the classroom, but not 'of' the classroom. This was not something pupils without SEND experienced to anywhere near the same degree.

Secondly, we found that in an informal and pragmatic sense, TAs assumed much of the responsibility for planning and teaching pupils with Statements, making decisions on the basis of what the TA thought the pupil would be able to access or achieve. It was rare for the teacher to have as high a level of involvement. In almost every case, we found TAs had a high level of responsibility for moment-by-moment pedagogical decision-making. TAs, in effect, took on the role of 'primary educator'. We found that the high involvement of TAs in the school life of Statemented pupils stemmed from an organisational reliance on TAs to provide the means by which pupils with high-level SEND were included in mainstream settings. A key factor appears to be the particular power invested in the Statement itself, and the way in which the specification of TA hours contributed to how TAs tended to absorb the responsibility for pupils with Statements. This calls to mind what Sikes *et al.* (2007) referred to as the 'yes buts' of inclusion, where the inclusion of pupils with SEND is conceived as being contingent on available resources, and which therefore, somewhat undermines its power as an educational principle. Furthermore, teachers often positioned TAs as the 'expert' on both the pupil and

how best to help them access the teaching in lessons, moment-by-moment. Again, while this essentially validated the organisational decisions that gave TAs a high level of responsibility for Statemented pupils, it was also evidence of what Giangreco (2003) refers to as the 'training trap': the tendency for teachers to relinquish instruction of pupils with SEND to TAs who have received more or less any kind of training, no matter how scant (more below).

Thirdly, we found that pupils with Statements received a high amount of verbal differentiation from TAs. As was previously found in the DISS project (Blatchford *et al.*, 2012), when compared to the experiences of pupils without SEND, pupils receiving a high amount of TA support have a different – and less effective – pedagogical diet. TAs' contributions to the support of pupils with Statements were clearly well intentioned, but the appropriateness and quality of what they provided in terms of their pedagogical input (in terms of tasks and interactions) was questionable. We found that tasks (including some intervention programmes) were often inappropriately targeted, repetitive or undemanding. TAs were very often left to work within the gaps left by teachers. A stark conclusion drawn from the MAST study was that across the schools, we found little evidence of an effective and theoretically-grounded pedagogy for pupils with SEND in the instructional approaches used by either teachers or TAs.

Fourthly, we found that there were considerable gaps in teachers' and TAs' knowledge concerning meeting the needs of pupils with Statements. Many staff were unsure how to best deal with the challenges and sometimes complex difficulties posed by pupils with high-level SEND. Teachers reported having had no training on meeting the specific needs of pupils with Statements, though TAs were more likely to have received training in various types of SEND (e.g. dyslexia, autism). This lack of knowledge would seem to be a contributing factor in teachers' lesson and task preparation; their planning rarely extended to cover the learning needs of these pupils. The situation was compounded by the fact that – similar to what was found in the DISS project (Blatchford *et al.*, 2012) – there was little opportunity for teachers and TAs to meet before or after lessons to prepare and debrief.

Finally, there were over-arching concerns relating to the strength of leadership in relation to SEND, and where it featured in a school's order of priorities. Having a Statement – and crucially, a specified number of hours of TA support – seemed to get in the way of schools thinking through an appropriate pedagogy for pupils with the most pronounced learning difficulties. Overall, therefore, it appeared there was greater emphasis on the provision of resources (i.e. the quantity of support), than on carefully worked-through approaches to teaching and learning (i.e. the quality of support).

The opportunity presented by the MAST study to observe at close quarters and talk with practitioners and parents/carers brought home the challenges schools face in successfully including pupils with high-level SEND. Many teachers described the difficulties they experienced in meeting the needs of pupils whose educational needs were significantly more demanding than the other 28 or so pupils in the class. The MAST study was conducted at a time (2011/12) when the maintained school system in England was in an intense period of flux. New, more stringent, funding arrangements, increasing levels of school accountability (e.g. in terms of school inspection and assessment) and more-or-less wholesale reform of the primary curriculum were factors that appeared to conspire to lower the priority schools gave to meeting the needs of pupils with Statements.

The SEN in Secondary Education (SENSE) study

The SENSE project, then, built on the DISS project and the MAST study specifically, to investigate whether the experiences of pupils with Statements found in mainstream primary schools are replicated in mainstream secondary schools. Our three key research questions are listed further on. A key difference between primary and secondary settings is the use in the latter of class-level grouping by attainment for certain subjects. Pupils with similar levels of current attainment are grouped homogeneously for specific lessons (referred to as ‘setting’ in the UK). This is different to the grouping of pupils by attainment levels for all subjects (referred to as ‘streaming’ or ‘tracking’), which was once common in the UK. This is done on the assumption that teaching becomes more effective or efficient with a narrower range of attainment in a class.

Often referred to as grouping by ‘ability’⁴, setting or streaming by attainment at the year-level can have several repercussions. While homogeneous grouping has been shown to have some benefit for higher-attaining pupils, it can be detrimental to the learning of average- and lower-attaining pupils (Boaler *et al.*, 2000; Francis *et al.*, 2017; Ireson *et al.*, 2002; Kutnick *et al.*, 2005; Taylor *et al.*, 2016), and is likely to increase the achievement gap between lower-attainers and their peers (Schofield, 2010; Ireson and Hallam, 2009). Indeed, grouping by attainment can entrench disadvantage, as there is little movement between year-level sets and streams. ‘Once placed in an ‘ability group’, pupils tend to remain there, irrespective of their progress or attainment’ (Francis *et al.*, 2017). Stobart (2014) showed that 88% of 4 year-olds placed in lower-attaining groups were still there by the end of their schooling. While pupils in the high-attaining groups benefit from the positive affirmations of being top of the class, there is a corrosive effect on the confidence and self-concept for those in the ‘bottom’ group (Peacock, 2016).

While the literature is relatively thin on the effects of grouping by attainment on pupils with SEND, we know from the DISS project that when they are taught in attainment groups, pupils with high-level SEND tend to be in classes with similarly lower-achieving pupils (Blatchford *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, we can reasonably assume that what the literature says about the effects of grouping by attainment for low attainers applies correspondingly to those with SEND.

While we are relatively well informed about the broad organisational arrangements in mainstream secondary schools within which pupils with high-level SEND are educated, we have little descriptive information about the type and nature of operational approaches involving these pupils, which play out at the lesson level within these contexts. Since the 1970s, defining features of classroom life have been captured with particular effectiveness via a method of obtaining valid and accurate information called systematic observation. The development of systematic observation studies in the USA in the 1970s coincided with researchers’ realisation that existing efforts to describe and understand the features of effective teaching were limited. Systematic observations studies have made a substantive contribution to our understandings of how classroom behaviours relate to achievement

⁴ Although setting is often referred to as organising pupils into ‘ability’ groups, this is rather misleading because allocation is usually based on some measure of attainment. There is now a strong view that it can be misguided to assume pupils can be grouped on the basis of some underlying and fixed ‘ability’.

(Walberg 1991; 1995), and how teachers can improve their classroom practices (Good and Brophy, 1974; Stallings, 1980).

A number of landmark UK studies have used systematic observation to provide valuable insights into what happens in primary classrooms. Webster (2015) provides an analysis of data from six large-scale systematic observation studies of the classroom experiences of primary-aged pupils with and without SEND, conducted between 1976 and 2012. One of the earliest studies in secondary settings was the research reported in Rutter *et al.*'s (1979) seminal text, '*Fifteen Thousand Hours*'. The title reflected the amount of time children spent at school from the age of five, to leaving at 16. Researchers observed 402 lessons across 12 secondary schools as part of a multi-method study investigating the broader patterns of life in schools and the environments for learning they present to their pupils. The focus of attention for the systematic observation component was on the teachers and their teaching, rather than pupils. Rutter *et al.* found that, on average, teachers spent half their time addressing the class or walking around the room interacting with pupils. On average, 37% of lesson time was comprised of 'silent working'. The proportions of time teachers spent interacting with groups or individuals is not specified. Large-scale observation studies in the USA (Sirotnik, 1983; Waxman and Huang, 1999) have found similar patterns of passive activity in secondary (high) school classrooms, with the majority of classroom time spent with teachers delivering whole-class instruction, or with pupils working independently, and thus not interacting with anyone.

Overall, there is a paucity of systematic observation research from mainstream secondary settings. One exception is the DISS project. In summary, what emerged from this study was similar to what was found in the MAST project: for pupils with high-level SEND, individual attention from TAs cuts across opportunities to interact with their teacher and classmates. Not only is this a contrast to how pupils without SEND experience the secondary classroom, but it is also noticeably different to the experiences of other pupils with SEND, but whose needs fell short of the criteria for a Statement. The effects of this arrangement were revealed in further results from the DISS project. Across 535 pupils with SEND in Years 7, 9 and 10, those receiving the most TA support were found to made less progress than similar pupils who received little or no TA support in English. This extended to mathematics for pupils in Year 7 and 9, and also into science just for those in Year 9. To reiterate, the relationship between TA support and attainment stood even after controlling for factors likely to be related to attainment and the allocation of TA support, such as prior attainment and SEND status (Webster *et al.*, 2010; Blatchford *et al.*, 2012). Again, the effects were particularly marked for pupils with Statements.

The SENSE study was, therefore, set up to fill this gap in the research, by providing a detailed picture of the day-to-day educational experiences of pupils with Statements in mainstream secondary schools. Bringing together data from the MAST and SENSE studies we have, for the first time, longitudinal data on the educational experiences of a cohort of Statemented pupils at two points in their school career (ages 9-10 and 13-14). As a proportion of pupils in the MAST study cohort transitioned from a mainstream primary school to a special school, through the present study, we additionally obtained observation data on a subsample of secondary-aged pupils in these settings. This provides another point of reference for the data collected in mainstream settings, and also fills a further gap in the evidence base, by providing systematic data on the experiences of young people in specialist settings.

Three key research questions arising from the literature review

Research question 1: How is the day-to-day provision for pupils with Statements organised and distributed within mainstream secondary schools?

Research question 2: What is the composition of the moment-by-moment educational experiences of secondary-aged pupils with Statements?

Research question 3: How do these experiences change over time, and to what extent do they differ between settings?

Additional areas of interest to the SENSE study

The SENSE study provided an opportunity to collect data on two further areas of interest relating to the journey pupils with Statements make through the education system. Firstly, on their experiences of transitioning from primary school into a secondary mainstream or specialist setting; and secondly, on schools' and families' experiences of the implementation of the 2014 SEND reforms, which were introduced after the MAST study and before the start of the SENSE study. These two areas were secondary to the main aims of the study, and the three key research questions above. Below, we provide a summary of the literature on the two areas, which additionally gives yet more context to the SENSE study. At the end of each subsection, we state the research question arising from the literature addressed by the study.

Transition from primary school

The research literature on transition from primary to secondary mainstream settings for pupils with SEND identifies mainly practical concerns, which additionally feature in the literature on transition for pupils without SEND (Cocklin, 1999; McGee, 2004; Odegaard and Heath, 1992). These relate to: adapting to a new and larger building and environment; the complexity and organisation (timetabling) of the school day; different approaches to teaching; and concerns about peer relations. Maras and Aveling (2006) argue that studies comparing the experiences of transition of young people with and without SEND are split on whether having SEND increases the number of or the effect of transition stressors. Indeed, on balance, the literature suggests that the transition experiences of pupils with SEND appear to be broadly similar to that of pupils in general (Barnes-Holmes *et al.*, 2013). We note that the literature suggests there may be particular types or intensities of stress that affect pupils with some types of SEND relative to those other types of SEND. Pupils with autism spectrum conditions emerge as a group who find transition more challenging (Moxon and Gates, 2001; Cumine *et al.* 1998).

There is limited research on transition involving pupils with Statements. We note that transition from mainstream to special schools is under-researched compared to transition between mainstream settings. Maras and Aveling's (2006) research involving just six pupils with Statements found schools used an array of approaches, including the use of TAs, family liaison and 'safe spaces' to which pupils could retreat if feeling upset or overwhelmed. Ofsted (2011) found that nurture groups 'can make a considerable difference to the behaviour and social skills of primary-aged children who might otherwise be a risk of exclusion'. Secondary

schools are known to use nurture groups and ‘primary-style’ settings to ease transition into Year 7, though little is known about their prevalence or overall effectiveness.

Warnock flagged concerns about the utility of the Statementing process in relation to secondary transition in her 2005 critique of special education and inclusion. In her recent reflections on the new system, she suggests there has been little improvement and progress on the well-intended aim of multi-agency working to support transitions between and through educational settings has stalled due to a lack of capacity in the system (Warnock, 2017).

Research question 4: How do pupils with Statements experience transition from primary school?

The implementation of the 2014 SEND reforms

Following the completion of the MAST study, the SEND system in England has undergone major reform. This section of the literature review considers the reaction and impact of the reforms, which were formally introduced in September 2014, and regarded as ‘the biggest shake up of SEND in 30 years’ (Ward and Vaughan, 2011). The 2014 SEND reforms represent another evolutionary phase in the policy and legislation relating to the inclusion and education of children and young people with SEND, which began in the late-1970s. The Education Act 1981 gave legal weight to the recommendations of the Warnock Inquiry into special education (DES, 1978), and was the catalyst to greatly increasing the number of children with SEND educated in mainstream schools. The Act introduced the system of Statementing, whereby a statutory assessment of a pupil’s SEND was set out in a legal document alongside the provision required to meet those needs; in effect, creating a bespoke package of care. Provision for SEND is taken to mean provision that is additional to, or otherwise different from, that normally available to children in mainstream settings. A key feature of the Statement is that provision is very often expressed in terms of a set number of hours of support from a TA (or TAs). In a sense, the resources (hours) attached to the Statement to ensure a pupil’s needs are met have become the accepted currency of Statements, rather than the nature of the provision itself (Webster, 2014; Webster and Blatchford, 2013a).

The 2014 reforms have origins in findings from the 2009 Lamb Inquiry, which found low levels of parental confidence in the SEND system, and, in particular, in the quality and clarity of Statements and school accountability. The vast majority of parents and carers who contributed to the Inquiry stated that they were satisfied with their child’s current placement. However, their experiences of securing a diagnosis and a package of support suggested the current system was dysfunctional and was a major source of stress and anxiety for families (Lamb, 2009). A key tension for parents is how the same body that carried out the assessment of a child’s needs – the LA – also has the statutory duty to provide the provision to meet the identified needs. Reflecting recently on the implementation of the 2014 reforms, Warnock acknowledged this was a ‘major flaw’ in her 1978 report: ‘The Statement had become little more than a list of what they [LAs] thought they could afford’ (2017).

While the 2014 SEND reforms did not address this long-standing discrepancy, new assessment and review processes were made explicitly ‘person-centred’, again in direct

response to findings from the Lamb Inquiry. The level of engagement of families and amplification of their voices was seen as central to overcoming parents' frustrations with the existing system. The reforms also sought to ensure earlier intervention (from birth), quicken the pace of the initial assessment period, encourage better collaboration between schools and other agencies (e.g. health), and focus on outcomes rather than inputs. Statements were to be replaced with more expansive Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), although in practice there meant no fundamental change to their form and function as a legal document of needs and entitlements. Norwich (2014) argues this component of the reforms represents little more than a marginal and procedural change to the previous system.

The evidence on the impact of families' experiences of the new SEND system is mixed. A recent large-scale survey by Adams *et al.* (2017), commissioned by the DfE, found two-thirds of respondents expressed satisfaction with the overall process of getting an EHCP, with 23% saying it was neither a positive or negative experience. The majority of respondents felt the support outlined in the EHCP will achieve the agreed outcomes for their child. One criticism of this survey questionnaire was that it did not explicitly and specifically ask families about the EHCP assessment process itself. This was, however, the principle focus of another piece of DfE-funded research by Skipp and Hopwood (2016). Seventy-seven parents in four regions scored the individual elements of the assessment process (referral, assessment, reviewing EHCP drafting, etc.) differently to how they scored the overall process. In-depth interviews found that, overall, parents were satisfied with the new approach to assessment and co-production, and liked the 'philosophy' behind the reforms (the holistic, person-centred approach). Practitioners, however, identified barriers to delivering services in ways that might lead to higher rates of parental satisfaction; for example: achieving coherent multi-agency working amid rising caseloads; system capacity; and skills deficits. Galton and MacBeath's (2015) interviews with school leaders and LA officers highlighted the 'inordinate amount of effort, considerable paperwork and staff time' involved in the 'long drawn out [assessment] process'.

One of the stated aims of the new reforms was to reduce conflict between parents and LAs by improving the processes of co-production and, reduce appeals to tribunal through mediation. However, an analysis commissioned by the Driver Youth Trust (DYT) – a charity representing the dyslexia community – point to clear challenges in the transition process between the old SEND system and the new one. The DYT report (Bernardes *et al.*, 2015) concludes that, one year after their introduction, the reforms, 'poorly communicated [to LAs] and inconsistently executed', had contributed to 'fragmentation'. 'Navigating the system has become incredibly challenging for students, parents, schools and sector organisations' (Bernardes *et al.*, 2015). Difficulties in sharing information and knowledge meant children and young people did not receive the support they needed, and gaps in the system lead to wasted resources and disconnected or duplicated services.

A particular example of the implementation challenge has been managing the volume of transfers from Statements to EHCPs a task that LAs must complete by the end of March 2018. A DfE (2016c) progress report showed that conversion rates varied by LA, from below 5% to more than 60%. By January 2017, just one third of Statements in place at January 2016 had been transferred to EHCPs (DfE, 2017a). Murray (2016) estimates that the process may not be completed before March 2020 – two years overdue. Faced with a statutory deadline, Warnock

(2017) reports anecdotal evidence that LAs have 'delegated the actual drawing up of the EHCPs to schools'. Lamb (2016) draws attention to the fact that the implementation of the reforms occur in the context of cuts to funding for LAs, schools and health. Skipp and Hopwood (2016) and Galton and MacBeath (2015) identify difficulties arising from the expectation that cross-discipline professionals must collaborate more; workload pressures, plus constraints of time, resourcing and funding, combine to pose a risk to service quality that falls short of parents' expectations.

The peer-reviewed literature has yet to fully reflect the impact and implementation of the reforms, and the views and experiences of parents, school staff and other people of the post-2014 SEND system. One tentative theme appears to be how the intention of the reforms to improve engagement and outcomes for those with SEND does not align with shifts in mainstream educational policy and practice. Implementing the Code of Practice at the school-level is frustrated by practices relating to higher profile, more pressing policy trends. Lehane (2017), for example, argues that vulnerable and disadvantaged young people are disproportionality affected by the process of school academisation.

The National Children's Bureau has raised concerns that secondary academies are reluctant to take young people with SEND unless they had an EHCP (Talwar, 2016). More worrying is a recent analysis by Nye (2017) showing a trend for 'off-rolling': 'In some schools, the number of pupils who have been on-roll, but leave at some point between Year 7 and Year 11, is more than 50% of the number of pupils who complete their secondary education at the school'. These data are concerning. At-risk pupils, including those with high-level SEND, comprise a significant proportion of those recorded as 'missing from education'. In the 2014/15 academic year, more than 30,000 children and young people were missing from schools in England and Wales (Talwar, 2016). More than 10% of these pupils (3,897) could not be traced by local authorities.

Research question 5: How do schools, parents/carers and young people with Statements experience the SEND system in general, and the implementation of the 2014 reforms in particular?

Concluding comment

As with the MAST study before it, it was not the primary aim of the SENSE study to investigate in any depth the processes by which children and young people are assessed for and obtain a Statement or EHCP, nor to measure impact and outcomes for pupils. However, we anticipated that some reactions to and reflections on the SEND reforms were likely and, therefore, we made accommodations to capture this. Instead, the main focus of our study was on what happens *after* a Statement has been awarded; and, in the case of a very small number of the pupils in the sample, what happens once a Statement has been converted to an EHCP.

More broadly, without any systematic empirical evidence of what it is pupils with Statements experience moment-by-moment, day-to-day, it is difficult to know what it is in terms of provision that parents/carers are satisfied with, or how acutely the broader indicators of ineffective provision are felt. Put simply, following the overhaul of the SEND system, we still do not know what the provision set out in a Statement looks like to the secondary-aged pupils

on the receiving end. Without being clear about what pupils with high-level SEND experience in key settings (mainstream and special; primary and secondary), we cannot make effective judgements about which provisions work best. Research into this can also be helpful in terms of documenting examples reflected in everyday educational experiences, which are reported to work well and less well, and which could be used to inform future policy and practice.

Whatever the longer-term impact of the SEND reforms, many of the pupils affected by them will continue to be educated in mainstream schools; therefore, the nature and quality of their classroom interactions and support they receive will remain of utmost interest. Our hope is that this research will inform the structural and classroom processes that comprise support for those with high-level SEND, and contribute to important underlying pedagogical debates about how best to educate children and young people with SEND.

2. Methodology

The overall design of the SENSE study is based on the research approach and data collection methods used in the MAST study (Webster and Blatchford, 2013a). Data were gathered through a rigorous analysis of each pupil's activities and their interactions with teachers, TAs and peers. These data were collected mainly through systematic observations. A researcher discreetly shadowed each pupil over several days and recorded activities on a minute-by-minute basis.

Despite intentions in the 2014 SEND reforms to move away from this practice, in many cases provision for pupils with a Statements or EHCP continues to be made in terms of a weekly allocation of hours. Data were therefore collected over a sustained period, in order to obtain a secure understanding of how the planned provision (e.g. what the Statement said) was operationalised in day-to-day contexts. The SENSE study had two components:

1. A systematic account of the moment-by-moment experiences of pupils with Statements or EHCP in mainstream and special school settings
2. A description of the perceptions and expectations different stakeholders have of the structures and delivery of provision, plus their experiences of transition and the implementation of the 2014 SEND reforms.

Data were collected over three or four consecutive days, over one school week. For the purposes of comparison, researchers in mainstream schools collected observation data in several lessons for pupils in average-attaining sets. Researchers in special schools did not collect comparison data, instead spending all their time observing the pupil with SEND. Towards the end of the visit, researchers conducted interviews with the pupils, his/her parents/carers, and key school staff. These data formed the basis of the pupil case study reports, prepared by researchers.

Completion of the fieldwork was achieved in partnership with five providers of the Doctorate in Educational Psychology programme at UCL Institute of Education, and the Universities of Southampton, Birmingham, Sheffield and Manchester. Trainee educational psychologists at each institution received a full day of training in the data collection approach, methods and tools. Assistant EPs at two of the LAs involved in the study also participated in the fieldwork. All researchers then undertook fieldwork in the following week, either individually or in small teams of two or three, dividing the workload accordingly.

The project involved detailed observations on 60 pupils in Year 9 who had either a Statement or EHCP. Pupils involved in the MAST study were included regardless of their area of need or school setting. The additional pupils recruited to the SENSE study had SEND relating to cognition and learning. This category was selected to be consistent with the main categories of need from the MAST study (MLD⁵ and BESD). Details on the pupil sample follow shortly. We selected these categories of SEND above all others as they are commonly occurring, and were also likely to detect school support factors connected to problems with learning and

⁵ Pupils with moderate learning difficulties have greater difficulty than their peers in acquiring basic literacy and numeracy skills, and in understanding concepts. They may also have associated speech and language delay, lower self-esteem, lower levels of concentration and under-developed social skills, compared to pupils without SEND.

classroom engagement, and allow such issues to emerge. Other categories of SEND (e.g. sensory impairments) were more likely to be affected by, and be seen by schools in terms of, within-pupil factors⁶.

Over the course of the 2015/16 school year, the research team, in collaboration with LA colleagues and tutors on the DEd Psychology course, identified pupils who met the selection criteria. With the help of LAs, we approached the headteachers of the schools these pupils attended to recruit them for the study. We followed up expressions of interest from school leaders and SENCOs, who then facilitated the process of securing permission from the pupils and their parents/carers, and obtaining the necessary consents and ethical clearances. The main bulk of school visits were carried out between autumn 2015 and spring 2016.

Researchers shadowed pupils for between three and five days over a school week, collecting data using the data collection tools from the earlier MAST study, which in turn, were extensions of those used in the DISS project. Just as in the MAST study, the SENSE study's multi-method approach combined quantitative systematic observations from the pupil's perspective, with contextual data drawn from interviews and general qualitative observations and summaries. The tools formed part of a tested methodology, adapted to serve the purposes of this study. In this section of the report, we detail the methods of data collection.

Systematic observations

Systematic observation allows researchers to take snapshots of the classroom at regular intervals, focusing on the observed behaviour of teachers and/or pupils. Mutually exclusive categories of teacher behaviour (e.g. use of statements, questions and non-verbal interactions), pupil behaviour (e.g. interactions with teachers and peers, and working silently) and interactional contexts (e.g. where the pupil is part of the class, with a group or one-to-one with an adult) are coded on a consistent basis, typically minute-by-minute. Analyses conducted on the large datasets these studies produce provide a valuable objective insight into the main features of classroom life often unavailable to everyday experience or received opinion. Systematic observation has contributed to instructional theories, but is a technique not without its critics. Its limitations, however, do not necessarily detract from its value and utility as a method to shine a light on classroom life, and are in any event, incidental aspects of most (if not all) forms of observational research.

The main method of data collection was a systematic observation schedule describing the activities of pupils with Statements and comparison pupils on a minute-by-minute basis. The aim was to provide a rigorous, objective and replicable description of behaviour. The method we used has its origins in earlier schedules used in the earlier Class Size and Adult Pupil Ratios (Blatchford *et al.*, 2003) project and the DISS project (Blatchford *et al.*, 2009). It used a category system determined prior to data collection with explicit and rigorous definitions, and criteria for classifying behaviour and contexts.

⁶ Whilst the same can be said for pupils with BESD, effort was made to select pupils whose Statement also covered learning difficulties connected to BESD, and whose needs closely resembled those defined as, or consistent with, cognition and learning/MLD.

The main focus of the observations was pupils with a Statement, and the bulk of observations completed were of these pupils. Most researchers conducting fieldwork in mainstream schools additionally carried out observations in lessons containing average-attaining pupils. Lessons in the English, maths and science were prioritised. Anticipating that many schools set pupils by attainment for these core subjects, we observed in classes the schools defined as 'average-attaining', rather than develop and apply a distinct definition of 'average-attainment', which may have been problematic to operationalise in some settings. With guidance from the class teacher, researchers selected one average-attaining pupil to observe for the duration of the lesson. Comparison pupils were matched in terms of gender to the pupil with the Statement, who was the primary focus of the school visit.

We were unable to collect data on average-attaining pupils evenly across schools. In some settings, the comparison observations did not take place. The main reason for this was due to the availability of the trainee EPs: some were only able to allocate three days to complete fieldwork, so these instances, observations on the pupils with SEND were prioritised. However, where pairs or trios of trainee EPs shared a school visit, the workload was shared such that additional observations in the average-attaining classes could be conducted.

The systematic observation procedure was the same for all pupils, with and without SEND, in all schools. Consistent with the MAST study, researchers observed for the first ten seconds of each minute, then for the rest of the minute, coded the interactions, activities and contextual information in operation during those ten seconds. The systematic observation schedule, shown in Appendix 1, describes the activities of pupils on a minute-by-minute basis, providing a rigorous, objective and replicable description of behaviour and the contexts in which it occurs. The codeable items and categories used in the MAST study observation schedule were refined to the lowest inference categories. This was principally to maintain consistency among a high number of observers. The categories coded on the minute-by-minute basis were:

- Social mode of pupils' interactions: whether the pupil was interacting with a teacher, a TA, a classmate or not interacting with anyone.
- Interaction level: whether the pupil was the focus of the adult's attention or part of the audience
- Interaction context: whether the interaction took place on a one-to-one basis or with the pupil sat as part of the class or a group
- Group size: if the pupil was in a group, the number of pupils in the group
- Location: whether the pupil was in or away from the main classroom, or in an additional resource provision connected to the school.

Observers recorded activities according to explicit decision rules, which formed a significant part of the fieldworkers' training. A decision tree (shown in Appendix 2) was produced to guide observers and help them determine which cells on the observation schedule to tick. In addition, researchers also took a count of the number of pupils and adults present in the room at five-minute intervals. Finally, researchers collected lesson level data in which each set of observations occurred. The categories used in the analyses in this report were:

- Class attainment: high, middle, low or mixed attainment
- Curriculum subject.

Inter-rater reliability analysis

It is important in studies using systematic observation to determine the reliability of the coding between multiple observers. Achieving this in a study that relied on the observations made by 80 individual fieldworkers was necessarily challenging, which is why an early decision was taken to reduce the observation system to low inference items, over which agreement between observers was more likely. Inter-rater reliability checks were based on the comparison of observations made between pairs of fieldworkers who shared a data collection visit to a school. In total, 22 fieldworkers (11 pairs) coded classroom observations contemporaneously in schools across the localities. Some pairs coded more than one lesson for reliability purposes. Ten dual-coded lesson observations were selected for analysis: six involving pupils with Statements in mainstream secondary schools; two involving pupils in special schools; and two involving comparison (non-SEND) pupils.

The analysis is based on a total of 7.5 hours of observation (452 minutes/data points). Data were entered into SPSS and reliability coefficients (kappa) calculated for the main sets of mutually exclusive categories (variables) coded on a minute-by-minute basis:

- Social mode of pupils' interactions
- Interaction level and context (combined on the observation schedule to create five possible combinations)
- Group size.

Reliability was calculated by taking the observations for each minute as the unit of analysis, and examining the extent of agreement between the codes recorded by the first observers and the second observers. The kappa scores for the three observations variables were consistently high:

- Social mode of pupils' interactions: 0.81 (based on 444 valid cases)
- Interaction level and context: 0.81 (based on 259 valid cases)
- Group size: 0.82 (based on 19 valid cases).

A similarly high and consistent level of agreement between the pairs of observers was also found in the observations made as part of the MAST study.

Pupil and school survey

During their visits to schools, fieldworkers collected some basic background data on pupils with Statements and their schools they attended, which were used to supplement and organise analyses. A copy of the survey can be seen in Appendix 3. The data on schools was incomplete in many places, and but most of the key categories we were interested in (e.g. number of roll; staffing) were recoverable from the National School Census⁷.

⁷ Data were correct at April 2016

Case study reports

Each researcher produced a detailed case study report on an individual pupil with a Statement. Case studies drew together data from interviews, documentation and researchers' observations and field notes. These reports provided a more substantive picture of the educational experiences of pupils with Statements than could be captured by the observations alone. In particular, they provided more detail on the main areas covered by the observation categories: the contexts in which pupils worked; the roles of teachers and TAs in those contexts; and the nature of the tasks pupils undertook. Interviews also explored wider issues, including experiences of the new SEND reforms and processes, and transitions from primary school, into Key Stage 4 and beyond.

Interviews

Data from semi-structured interviews with pupils, their parents/carers, TAs, teachers and SENCOs allowed us to describe the perceptions and expectations of different stakeholders on the structures and delivery of provisions, and to reveal the factors that enabled or impeded the provision being delivered effectively. For the pupils who were in the earlier MAST study, the interviews helped us to gain insight into their journey from mainstream primary to their current setting. Additionally, the questions allowed views and experiences of the new SEND system and EHCP process to emerge. The interviews contained questions about the needs of pupils with Statements and the provision in place for them. The same questions were put to all interviewees in all settings. Teachers and SENCO were asked some additional questions in line with their respective positions and responsibilities. The full interview schedules are presented in Appendix 3.

Interviews were held across the week of the school visits at points where researchers were more acquainted with the situation in school, and so able to nuance certain questions to reflect their observations. Interviews lasted between 20 minutes and an hour, depending on the time available. In the case of TAs, interviews were largely conducted during their hours of work; and in the case of parents/carers, a convenient arrangement was made for researchers to conduct interviews after the pupil had been dropped off at school in the morning, or before he/she was picked up at the end of the day.

Researchers interviewed 53 of the 60 pupils who took part in the SENSE study. Twenty-four pupils from the original MAST study cohort were interviewed at Year 9. There were no pupil interviews at Year 5. The remaining 29 interviews were with pupils only tracked at Year 9.

Documentation

Researchers had access to documentary evidence for the pupil they shadowed, which included the Statement/EHCP and annual reviews. These documents provided details of each pupil's current educational needs (and, where relevant, health, care and other needs), together with the provisions that should have been in place to meet those needs.

Field notes

Finally, researchers kept on-going field notes of qualitative observations, contextual details, thoughts and impressions on the pupil experience being observed. These notes supplemented and assisted the interpretation of the data from other sources. Field notes were organised in relation to a set of overarching themes, developed from the earlier MAST study and reflecting the main observations categories and the questions in the interview schedule. The themes provided a framework for the construction of the case study reports (see below).

Analysis of the case studies

The case study data relating to each pupil were written up according to a set of predetermined themes, also used for the field notes.

- *Locations*: where pupil spends time; reasons for withdrawal; perceptions/implications for inclusion
- *The role of teachers, TAs and other adults*: forms of support; pedagogical planning and decision-making; behaviour; pastoral/emotional support; developing independence; and facilitating pupil's integration into school/classroom life
- *Curriculum and provision*: differentiation; the use of interventions
- *Training and preparation*: professional learning; opportunities for teachers and TAs to meet; and the nature and quality of lesson planning and feedback
- *Transitions*: from primary to secondary; from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4; and from Key Stage into post-16 and beyond
- *Transfer from Statement to EHCP*: changes to SEND processes and impact
- *Pupil progress and development*: impact of provision; change over time
- *Other points of note*.

Where researchers were deployed in teams, each researcher produced their own report and reflections. These were then collapsed into one, extra-long report. The high amount of duplication was useful in terms of corroborating evidence, with barely any contradictions apparent across reports on the same pupil.

A quarter of the case study reports were carefully selected for interrogation. An expansive set of coding frames were developed for each theme on the basis of issues and points emerging from this subsample, and irrespective of whether the data were collected in a mainstream or specialist setting. All of the reports were then coded by a small team of researchers, who were trained in applying the coding frames to the data. The team conducted inter-rater reliability checks to ensure codes were consistently applied. Following over 120 hours of coding, tables of data were prepared by theme, aggregating codes across the case study reports.

The prevalence of key and recurring features revealed across the thematic data tables were refined and used to organise the presentation of results, which feature later in this report. Throughout this presentation, we provide an indication of prevalence of findings, by stating the number of case studies in which a specific issue, characteristic, experience or viewpoint were identified (as $n=x$). The case studies involving the pupils in special schools were analysed separately. The results are presented in a separate section of this report. In some

instances, it was more appropriate to express prevalence at the respondent level; for example, in the section on school staff training and preparation, we present the results in terms of responses from teachers and responses from TAs. Here, then, the denominator is the total number of teacher and TA interviews. For clarity, we indicate where we have expressed results at the respondent level instead of the case (or pupil) level.

A prevalence was only counted when it was unequivocally evident in a case study report. It is possible, therefore, that *actual* prevalence (e.g. the total number of cases in which a particular issue or experience might apply) may exceed the *stated* prevalence (e.g. the total number of cases in which it was found). In other words, there may be more cases to which a characteristic or viewpoint applies, but it was not possible to draw them out conclusively from the case study report, or advisable to over-reach in terms of extrapolating too far the evidence documented. We indicate where we feel prevalence data may understate the significance or predominance of a particular issue.

3. Sample

Pupils with Statements/EHCPs in mainstream schools

The principle focus of the SENSE study centres on 49 pupils across 34 mainstream secondary schools. These pupils were all in Year 9 (13-14 year-olds) and each had a Statement of SEND (at the time of the observations, five pupils had had their Statement converted to an EHCP). The breakdown of the pupil sample in Table 1 shows the primary special educational need (using the four areas specified in the 2014 SEND Code of Practice) by key pupil characteristics. In addition to these characteristics, two pupils were known to be in public care (or 'looked after') and one pupil attended a school outside their LA.

Table 1. Pupils with Statements/EHCPs: Year 9

	Primary need		Secondary need		Gender				Ethnicity ⁸				EAL		FSM	
					Boy		Girl		White		Other					
<i>Cognition & learning</i>	40	82%	22	17%	28	82%	12	80%	32	80%	8	89%	5	83%	12	80%
<i>Comm & interaction</i>	4	8%	2	54%	3	9%	1	7%	4	10%	0	0%	0	0%	1	7%
<i>Social, emo & ment hlth</i>	3	6%	2	17%	3	9%	0	0%	3	8%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
<i>Sensory & physical</i>	2	4%	1	11%	0	0%	2	13%	1	3%	1	11%	1	17%	2	13%
Total	49	100%	27	55%	34	69%	15	31%	40	82%	9	18%	6	12%	15	31%

In line with the inclusion criteria for the SENSE study, most pupils (82%) had a primary SEND related to cognition and learning. Just over half of pupils (55%) had needs related to a second area, and a few pupils had needs in a third area. The relationship between co-occurring types of primary and secondary areas of need can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Co-occurring SEND: primary area of need by secondary area of need

Primary need	Secondary need								Total	
	<i>Cognition & learning</i>		<i>Communication & interaction</i>		<i>Social, emotional & mental health</i>		<i>Sensory & physical</i>			
<i>Cognition & learning</i>	-	-	15	94%	4	100%	3	100%	22	82%
<i>Communication & interaction</i>	2	50%	-	-	0	0%	0	0%	2	7%
<i>Social, emotional & mental health</i>	1	25%	1	6%	-	-	0	0%	2	7%
<i>Sensory & physical</i>	1	25%	0	0%	0	0%	-	-	1	4%
Total	4	15%	16	59%	4	15%	3	11%	27	100%

⁸ Based on Dept. for Education's ethnicity classification: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2015>

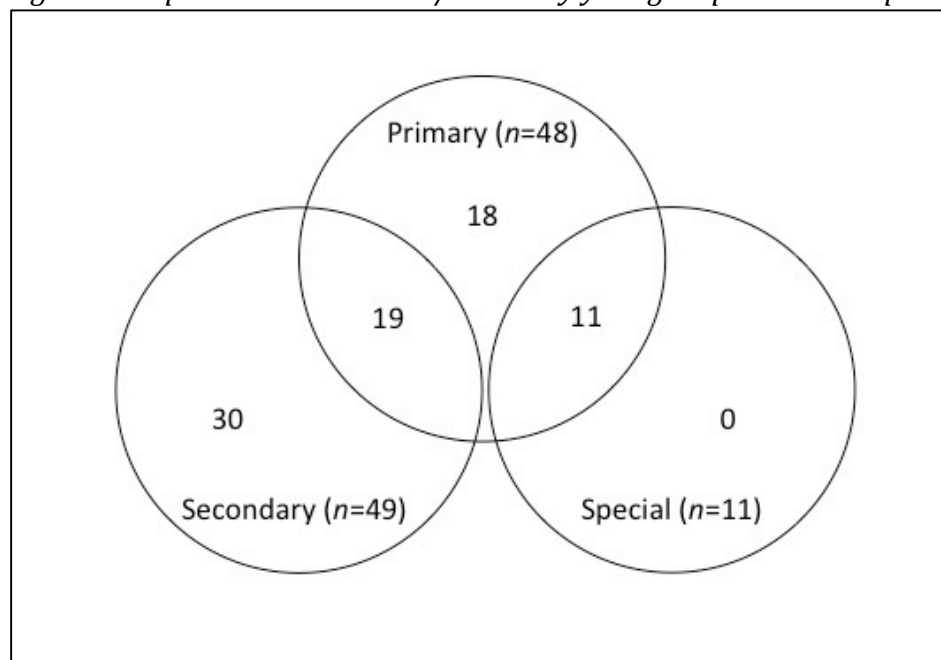
The sample of pupils in mainstream secondary settings included 19 pupils from the MAST study cohort. This report draws on data from this earlier study, conducted in mainstream primary schools. For ease of reference, we provide the breakdown of the MAST study cohort in Table 3. All pupils were in Year 5 (9-10 years-olds). There were five pupils who had a complex composition of difficulties. This is a useful reminder to us that pupils with SEND are not a homogeneous group. The results we report later do not claim to be representative of different types of SEND, or (due to the complexity of the category) fully representative of all children and young people whose primary need relates to cognition and learning.

Table 3. Pupils with Statements: Year 5

	Primary need		Gender				Ethnicity				EAL		FSM	
			Boy		Girl		White		Other					
<i>Mod learning difficulties</i>	29	60%	18	50%	11	92%	24	65%	5	45%	3	100%	10	45%
<i>Behav, emo & soc difficulties</i>	14	29%	14	39%	0	0%	12	32%	2	18%	0	0%	8	36%
<i>Composite</i>	5	10%	4	11%	1	8%	1	3%	4	36%	0	0%	4	18%
Total	48	100%	36	75%	12	25%	37	77%	11	23%	3	6%	22	46%

Adding in the 18 pupils from the MAST study that we were unable to recruit to the SENSE study, this report draws on data collected on 78 individual pupils with a Statement or EHCP. In Figure 1, we depict how the samples from the studies at Year 5 and Year 9 fit together.

Figure 1. Pupils with Statements/EHCPs by year group and school phase/type



Representativeness

How representative is the sample of mainstream pupils in the SENSE study of pupils with Statements/EHCPs nationally? To answer this question, we drew on detailed data collected by the Department for Education (DfE, 2016d) on pupils with SEND in English schools collected during the school year our research was conducted. At January 2016, there were 50,884 pupils attending state-funded secondary schools who had a Statement or EHCP. Just under 20% (10,089 pupils) were in Year 9. Of these Year 9 pupils, 75% were boys and 25% were girls; 75% were white British and 25% were identified as being in another ethnic group. As can be seen from the data in Table 1, our sample was marginally out of line with these proportions. Pupils with Statements attending mainstream secondary schools known to be eligible for free school meals (FSM) were also slightly over-represented in our sample (31% vs. 26% nationally), whilst pupils whose first language is known or believed to be one other than English (EAL) were in line with the national picture (12% vs. 11 % nationally).

As our aim was to track pupils with Statements related to the areas of cognition and learning, our sample cannot claim to be representative of all pupils with Statements. We note, however, that the pupils with a Statement or EHCP related to the categories of need most prevalent under this area – MLD and severe learning difficulties (SLD) – together account for 16% of all Statements in mainstream secondary schools. The most commonly occurring categories of need under which pupils in mainstream secondary schools are granted Statements/EHCPs are autistic spectrum conditions (25%) and speech, language and communications needs (18%). Overall, MLD and SLD are the most commonly occurring categories of need for girls with Statements/EHCPs in England. A greater proportion of girls have a Statement for MLD or SLD than boys: 34% vs. 24%. However, in terms of raw numbers, there are almost twice as many boys with a Statement for MLD or SLD than girls (38,049 vs. 20,602). The most prevalent category for boys is autistic spectrum conditions (30%).

Attendance and number of hours TA support

We collected data on two additional characteristics of pupils in the SENSE study sample: their attendance record and the number of hours of support from teaching assistants. The results are shown in Tables 4 and 5 respectively. We are unable to provide any point of comparison as there are no national data available, nor were these data collected as part of the earlier MAST study. Based on their record from the previous school year (2014/15), 88% of pupils for whom we obtained data had at least a 90% attendance rate, and just over half (54%) had a 96% attendance rate or better. Most pupils (78%) had a specific number of TA support hours expressed on their Statement. Three-quarters (74%) of these had 20 or fewer hours, and only a few pupils had what might be termed ‘full time TA support’ (e.g. around 30 hours).

Table 4. Pupil attendance

78%-79%	2	5%
80%-81%	0	0%
82%-83%	0	0%
84%-85%	1	2%
86%-87%	0	0%
88%-89%	2	5%
90%-91%	2	5%
92%-93%	6	15%
94%-95%	6	15%
96%-97%	6	15%
98%-99%	5	12%
100%	11	27%
Total	41	100%

Table 5. Number of TA hours

10-15 hrs	16	42%
16-20 hrs	12	32%
21-25 hrs	6	16%
26-30 hrs	3	8%
31+ hrs	1	3%
Total	38	100%

Comparison pupils in mainstream schools

For the purposes of comparison, systematic observations were collected on 112 average-attaining pupils. These pupils were matched to the pupils with Statements by gender. No further data were collected on comparison pupils. In the earlier MAST study, we collected data on 151 average-attaining pupils, again matched by gender.

Mainstream schools

Researchers visited 34 schools across England to collect data. The geographical spread of the schools and the distribution of pupils within those schools can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6. Schools and pupils by region of England

	Schools		Pupils	
<i>Inner London</i>	2	6%	2	4%
<i>Outer London</i>	1	3%	1	2%
<i>South-east</i>	7	21%	7	14%
<i>East of England</i>	8	24%	10	20%
<i>West Midlands</i>	8	24%	11	22%
<i>North-west</i>	6	18%	16	33%
<i>Yorkshire & The Humber</i>	2	6%	2	4%
Total	34	100%	49	100%

Using the Government Statistical Service’s (2011) rural-urban classification for higher level geographies, Table 7 shows that most schools (71%) were located in predominantly urban areas. The self-reported data from school leaders on the level of affluence and deprivation in the communities they serve presents a mixed picture (see Table 8). At the time of conducting the data collection, the DfE were reviewing its classification of affluence and deprivation, therefore, we used a rudimentary scale to capture these data.

Table 7. Rural-urban classification

<i>Predominantly urban</i>	24	71%
<i>Urban-significantly rural</i>	5	15%
<i>Predominantly rural</i>	5	15%
Total	34	100%

Table 8. Affluence and deprivation

	Affluence		Deprivation	
<i>Low</i>	8	24%	10	29%
<i>Low to mid</i>	7	21%	10	29%
<i>Mid</i>	9	26%	8	24%
<i>Mid to high</i>	8	24%	1	3%
<i>High</i>	2	6%	5	15%
Total	34	100%	34	100%

We collected additional data from the National School Census⁹. Table 9 shows school type by Ofsted category. Just over half of the schools (53%) were academies. There was one small free school attended by two pupils in the sample. In line with the national picture (Ofsted, 2016), three-quarters of schools were rated either good or outstanding at their last inspection.

Table 9. Type of school by Ofsted category

	Outstanding		Good		Requires improvement		Inadequate/special meas.		Total	
<i>Community school (LA maintained)</i>	1	13%	6	33%	2	29%	0	0%	9	26%
<i>Academy or free school</i>	6	75%	8	44%	3	43%	1	100%	18	53%
<i>Foundation; Voluntary Aided/Controlled</i>	1	13%	4	22%	2	29%	0	0%	7	21%
Total	8	24%	18	53%	7	21%	1	3%	34	100%

All of the schools were comprehensives and did not select by attainment. Six of the schools were faith schools. All but two schools had a mixed in-take; there were two all boys’ schools. Two schools were all-through (for ages 3-18) and a further 16 schools had a sixth form. Eight schools had an additional resource provision (ARP) for pupils with SEND.

The schools varied in size. The number of pupils on roll ranged from 317 (the free school) to 2,187 (see Table 10), with the most having between 1,000 and 1,299 pupils. This is slightly above the national average for state-funded secondary schools of 939 pupils (DfE, 2016e). The most recent data show that the average proportion of pupils in secondary schools in England

⁹ Data were correct at April 2016

with a Statement or EHCP in mainstream is 1.7% (DfE, 2016c). This figure is the same whether the school is an academy or another type of state-funded school. Table 11 shows that just over half the schools in the SENSE study sample exceeded this average figure.

Table 10. Pupils on roll

<i>599 or fewer*</i>	4	12%
<i>600-999</i>	8	24%
<i>1,000-1,299</i>	13	38%
<i>1,300-1,599</i>	4	12%
<i>1,600-1,899</i>	4	12%
<i>1,900 or more</i>	1	3%
Total	34	100%

Range: 317-2,187

Table 11. Proportion of pupils with Statements

<i><1%</i>	4	12%
<i>1%-1.5%</i>	8	24%
<i>1.6%-2%</i>	4	12%
<i>2.1%-2.5%</i>	1	3%
<i>2.6%-3%</i>	6	18%
<i>3.1%-3.5%</i>	3	9%
<i>3.6%-4%</i>	1	3%
<i>4.1%-4.5%</i>	4	12%
<i>>4.6%</i>	3	9%
Total	34	100%

Range: 0.3-5.9%

As Table 12 shows, school population varied in terms of the proportion of pupils with English as an additional language (EAL); in mainstream secondary schools, the national average is 14% of the population. Table 12 also shows that most schools had a greater proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) compared with the national average (13%).

Table 12. Proportion of pupils with EAL and FSM

	%EAL		%FSM	
<i><10%</i>	17	50%	0	0%
<i>11%-20%</i>	5	15%	12	35%
<i>21%-30%</i>	7	21%	9	26%
<i>31%-40%</i>	2	6%	4	12%
<i>41%-50%</i>	0	0%	7	21%
<i>51%-60%</i>	2	6%	2	6%
<i>>61%</i>	1	3%	0	0%
Total	34	100%	34	100%

EAL range: 0.5%-67.4%

FSM range: 10.7%-59.2%

Staff in mainstream schools

Using data from the School Workforce Census (DfE, 2016b), we can see how many teachers and TAs were employed in the schools visited (see Table 13). Teachers outnumbered TAs in terms of both full-time equivalent (FTE) and headcount data (e.g. total number of individual full- and part-time staff). This is in line with what we see nationally in secondary schools.

Table 13. School staff

	Teachers				TAs			
	Headcount		FTE		Headcount		FTE	
<10	1	3%	1	3%	2	6%	6	18%
10-20	0	0%	0	0%	14	41%	13	38%
21-30	0	0%	0	0%	8	24%	10	29%
31-40	2	6%	2	6%	5	15%	3	9%
41-50	5	15%	7	21%	1	3%	0	0%
51-60	4	12%	3	9%	2	6%	2	6%
61-70	2	6%	2	6%	1	3%	0	0%
71-80	4	12%	3	9%	1	3%	0	0%
81-90	3	9%	8	24%	0	0%	0	0%
91-100	5	15%	2	6%	0	0%	0	0%
101-110	1	3%	2	6%	0	0%	0	0%
111-120	2	6%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
>120	5	15%	4	12%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	34	100%	34	100%	34	100%	34	100%

The average ratio of teachers to TAs (calculated using FTE figures) in these settings is 3.7:1. There is also a degree of consistency with the national data in terms of the ratio of qualified teachers to pupils (see Table 14). The average teacher-pupil ratio for secondary mainstream schools in England is 16.1:1. For the mainstream schools in the SENSE study sample, the average teacher-pupil ratio was 16.4:1. Data on TA-pupil ratios are not collected as part of the School Workforce Census.

Table 14. Teacher-pupil ratio

12	3	9%
13	3	9%
14	7	21%
15	6	18%
16	6	18%
17	4	12%
18	3	9%
19	1	3%
Total	33	100%

Data missing for one school

We did not collect the same systematic data on primary schools and their staff in the MAST study. However, the reader can refer to our final report (Webster and Blatchford, 2013a) for a narrative summary of the schools we visited as part of the earlier study.

Pupils in special schools

The SENSE study sample additionally comprised 11 pupils from the earlier MAST study, who had moved to a specialist setting on transition from primary school. At Year 9, two of the 11 pupils had had their Statement converted to an EHCP, and three pupils were attending a special school in a different LA to the one that was responsible for maintaining the Statement or EHCP. Table 15 shows the breakdown of the special school pupil sample (primary special educational need by key characteristics). Of the six pupils with a secondary area of need, four pupils had a secondary need related to communication and interaction, and two had a secondary need related to social, emotional and mental health.

Table 15. Pupils with Statements in special schools: Year 9

	Primary need		Secondary need		Gender				Ethnicity				EAL		FSM	
					Boy		Girl		White		Other					
<i>Cognition & learning</i>	9	82%	6	100%	6	75%	3	100%	7	78%	2	100%	1	100%	4	80%
<i>Comm & interaction</i>	2	18%	0	0%	2	25%	0	0%	2	22%	0	0%	0	0%	1	20%
<i>Social, emo & ment hlth</i>	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
<i>Sensory & physical</i>	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	11	100%	6	55%	8	73%	3	27%	9	82%	2	18%	1	9%	5	45%

Representativeness

By way of background on the national picture, we note that at January 2016 (during the period when the observations were collected) there were a total of 10,027 pupils in Year 9 attending special schools, of which 99% had a Statement or EHCP (DfE, 2016d): 73% were boys and 27% were girls; 72% were white British and 28% were identified as being in another ethnic group. A total of 37% of pupils attending special schools were known to be eligible for free school meals. In terms of area of need, pupils classified as having MLD and SLD together accounted for 40% of pupils attending special schools; whilst the most commonly occurring categories of need were autistic spectrum conditions (26%) and SLD (24%).

Attendance and number of hours TA support

The results on pupil attendance are shown in Table 16, alongside data from the earlier sample of Year 9 pupils in mainstream settings. Compared with the Statemented pupils in mainstream schools, attendance was marginally better for the small number of pupils in special schools, for whom data were available. We are unable to provide any additional points of comparison,

as there are no national data available, nor were these data collected as part of the earlier MAST study.

Table 16. Pupil attendance

	Mainstream		Special	
78%-79%	2	5%	0	0%
80%-81%	0	0%	0	0%
82%-83%	0	0%	0	0%
84%-85%	1	2%	0	0%
86%-87%	0	0%	0	0%
88%-89%	2	5%	1	14%
90%-91%	2	5%	0	0%
92%-93%	6	15%	0	0%
94%-95%	6	15%	2	29%
96%-97%	6	15%	1	14%
98%-99%	5	12%	3	43%
100%	11	27%	0	0%
Total	41	100%	7	100%

Special schools

Researchers visited nine special schools to collect data. The geographical spread of the schools and the distribution of pupils within those schools can be seen in Table 17, in the context of the wider data collection involving all schools in the SENSE study.

Table 17. Schools and pupils by region of England

	Mainstream				Special				Total			
	Schools		Pupils		Schools		Pupils		Schools		Pupils	
<i>Inner London</i>	2	6%	2	4%	1	11%	2	18%	3	7%	4	7%
<i>Outer London</i>	1	3%	1	2%	1	11%	1	9%	2	5%	2	3%
<i>South-east</i>	7	21%	7	14%	3	33%	4	36%	10	23%	11	18%
<i>East of England</i>	8	24%	10	20%	4	44%	4	36%	12	28%	14	23%
<i>West Midlands</i>	8	24%	11	22%	0	0%	0	0%	8	19%	11	18%
<i>North-west</i>	6	18%	16	33%	0	0%	0	0%	6	14%	16	27%
<i>Yorks & Humber</i>	2	6%	2	4%	0	0%	0	0%	2	5%	2	3%
Total	34	79%	49	82%	9	21%	11	18%	43	100%	60	100%

With reference to the Government Statistical Service's (2011) rural-urban classification for higher level geographies, six of the nine special schools were located in predominantly urban areas. On the basis of self-reported data from school leaders, most of the schools were in areas described as experiencing relatively low levels of deprivation.

Table 18 shows the special schools by school type and Ofsted category. In line with the national picture (Ofsted, 2016), the majority of special schools were rated either good or outstanding by Ofsted at their most recent inspection. The proportion of special schools with these ratings tends to be somewhat higher than proportion of good and outstanding mainstream secondary schools.

Table 18. Type of school by Ofsted category

	Outstanding		Good		Total	
Community (LA maintained)	0	0%	7	100%	7	78%
Academy/free school	1	50%	0	0%	1	11%
Independent school	1	50%	0	0%	1	11%
Total	2	22%	7	78%	9	100%

Eight of the special schools were mixed; there was one all boys' school. Seven special schools were for secondary-aged pupils (e.g. the age of entry was 11 years-old); two schools admitted pupils from an earlier age. Five schools educated children until they reached 18 or 19 years-old. One of the schools was a faith school, which is rare for special schools. Unsurprisingly, the number of pupils on roll at the special schools were all much smaller compared to the mainstream schools. Roll size ranged from 32 pupils to 444, which is large for specialist setting. Four schools had a roll of 99 or fewer pupils, and four had roll between 100 and 199 pupils. As a point of comparison, the average roll of a special school in England is 108 pupils (DfE, 2016d).

Table 19 shows the proportions of pupils in mainstream and special schools with English as an additional language (EAL) and who were eligible for free school meals (FSM). Proportions of EAL pupils in both settings were generally lower than the national average for both phases (14%). Special schools had a greater proportion of FSM pupils compared with the average for that phase (37%), whilst in mainstream settings, it was around the phase average of 25%.

Table 19. Proportion of pupils with EAL and FSM

	Mainstream				Special			
	%EAL		%FSM		%EAL		%FSM	
<10%	17	50%	0	0%	4	50%	0	0%
11%-20%	5	15%	12	35%	2	25%	0	0%
21%-30%	7	21%	9	26%	1	13%	1	13%
31%-40%	2	6%	4	12%	1	13%	1	13%
41%-50%	0	0%	7	21%	0	0%	4	50%
51%-60%	2	6%	2	6%	0	0%	0	6%
>61%	1	3%	0	0%	0	0%	2	25%
Total	34	100%	34	100%	8	100%	8	100%

EAL range: mainstream (0.5%-54%); special (0%-38%)
 FSM range: mainstream (11%-46%); special (30%-83%)
 No data from one independent special school

Staff in special schools

Using data from the School Workforce Census (2016b), we can see how many teachers and TAs were employed in all the schools visited for the study. The results, shown in Table 20, show that in mainstream settings, teachers outnumbered TAs in terms of both FTE and headcount. However, the reverse was the case in special schools: there were many more TAs than teachers. This is in line with what we see nationally in both these settings. The average ratio of teachers to TAs (calculated using FTE figures) in mainstream schools is 3.7:1; in special schools, the average ratio is 1:1.7.

Table 20. School staff

	Mainstream								Special							
	Teachers				TAs				Teachers				TAs			
	Headcount		FTE		Headcount		FTE		Headcount		FTE		Headcount		FTE	
<10	1	3%	1	3%	2	6%	6	18%	1	13%	1	13%	1	13%	1	13%
10-20	0	0%	0	0%	14	41%	13	38%	3	28%	4	50%	4	50%	5	63%
21-30	0	0%	0	0%	8	24%	10	29%	4	50%	3	28%	1	13%	0	0%
31-40	2	6%	2	6%	5	15%	3	9%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	13%
41-50	5	15%	7	21%	1	3%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	13%	1	13%
51-60	4	12%	3	9%	2	6%	2	6%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
61-70	2	6%	2	6%	1	3%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	13%	0	0%
71-80	4	12%	3	9%	1	3%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
81-90	3	9%	8	24%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
91-100	5	15%	2	6%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
101-110	1	3%	2	6%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
111-120	2	6%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
>120	5	15%	4	12%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	34	100%	34	100%	34	100%	34	100%	8	100%	8	100%	8	100%	8	100%

Data missing from one independent special school

There is a degree of consistency with the national data in terms of the ratio of qualified teachers to pupils (see Table 21). The average teacher-pupil ratio for secondary mainstream schools is 16.1:1, and 6.1:1 in special schools. For the mainstream schools in the SENSE study sample, the average teacher-pupil ratio was 16.4:1; for special schools, it was 6.2:1. Data on TA-pupil ratios are not collected as part of the School Workforce Census.

Table 21. Teacher-pupil ratio

	Mainstream		Special	
5	0	0%	1	13%
6	0	0%	5	63%
7	0	0%	1	13%
8	0	0%	1	13%
9	0	0%	0	0%
10	0	0%	0	0%
11	0	0%	0	0%
12	3	9%	0	0%
13	3	9%	0	0%
14	7	21%	0	0%
15	6	18%	0	0%
16	6	18%	0	0%
17	4	12%	0	0%
18	3	9%	0	0%
19	1	3%	0	0%
Total	33	100%	8	100%

Data missing from one mainstream school and one independent special school

Data used in the analyses

Systematic observations

The analyses relating to mainstream secondary schools are based on 583 hours of observations (coded at minutely intervals), which yielded a total of 34,981 data points. Observations were made in 599 lessons, with an average duration of 43 minutes. Of these, 487 lessons involved pupils with Statements. To provide a comparison and point of reference for the results on those with Statements, researchers also collected data from observations of average-attaining pupils across a further 112 lessons. These observations were not made concurrently with those involving those with Statements, but at different times over the week of the visit. Comparison pupils tended to be educated in different lessons and classrooms.

The analyses relating to Year 9 pupils in special schools are based on an additional 110 hours of observations (again, coded at minutely intervals). Researchers conducted observations in 164 lessons in specialist settings, yielding 6,646 data points in total. Comparison data were not collected in special schools. Table 22 presents a breakdown of all observations of all pupils included in the SENSE study by gender, alongside the observations for pupils in the earlier MAST study. Across the two studies, researchers conducted 1,231 hours of observation, across 1,485 lessons in mainstream primary and secondary settings, amassing 73,846 data points. Adding the observations made in special schools, we find that across the entirety of the two studies, researchers conducted a total of 1,340 hours of observation, across 1,649 lessons, amassing 80,492 data points – a uniquely large data set.

Table 22. All observations of all pupils in all school settings

	Year 5				Year 9							
	Mainstream				Mainstream				Special			
	Comparison		Statement		Comparison		Statement		Statement		Total	
<i>Boys</i>	4,176	5%	26,625	33%	4,283	5%	19,493	24%	5,130	6%	59,707	74%
<i>Girls</i>	829	1%	7,235	9%	2,119	3%	9,086	11%	1,516	2%	20,785	26%
Total	5,005	6%	33,860	42%	6,402	8%	28,579	36%	6,646	8%	80,492	100%

Total comparison: 11,407 (14% of all observations). Boys: 8,459 (74%). Girls: 2,948 (26%)

Total Statement: 69,085 (86% of all observation). Boys: 51,248 (74%). Girls: 17,837 (26%)

A note on the longitudinal sample

Thirty of the 60 pupils in the SENSE study sample also featured in the MAST study sample: 19 pupils attended mainstream schools, and 11 pupils attended a special school. We wanted to know to what extent the results involving only the 19 pupils in the longitudinal group were consistent with the results from the wider cross-sectional group of 49 pupils Statements and the 112 comparison pupils. We therefore conducted separate analyses comparing these groups. However, we found very few differences between the two sets of results. The experiences of the wider group of all Year 9 pupils with Statements in mainstream secondary schools, presented in the results section that follows, can therefore be seen as indicative of the smaller subgroup of 19 pupils in the longitudinal sample.

Case studies

A case study report was compiled on each of the 60 pupils in the SENSE study sample: 49 pupils in 34 mainstream schools; 11 pupils in nine special schools. A total of 295 interviews were conducted and used as basis for the construction of the reports. Across mainstream and special schools, researchers interviewed 207 school staff, 53 pupils, and 35 with parents/carers. Not all parents/carers or pupils gave their consent to taking part in an interview, though they gave us their permission to be part of the study overall. A breakdown of interviewees by school type is shown in Table 23.

The results section on analysis of the case study reports additionally draws on findings from the analysis of the 48 pupil case study reports from the MAST study. These reports were based on a total of 195 interviews: 40 SENCOs; 56 teachers; 66 TAs; and 33 parents/carers of the pupils with Statements. Pupils were not interviewed when they were in Year 5.

Table 23. Case study interviews by interviewee and school type

	<i>Mainstream</i>		<i>Special</i>		<i>Total</i>	
Pupil with Statement/EHCP	44	15%	9	3%	53	18%
Parent/carer	27	9%	8	3%	35	12%
Teaching assistant/ Learning support assistant	54	18%	6	2%	60	20%
Teacher (inc. Form tutor)	56	19%	13	4%	69	23%
SENCO (inc. Inclusion manager; Deputy/Assistant SENCO)	57	19%	8	3%	65	22%
Senior/middle leader (inc. Head/Principal; Head of dept)	5	2%	4	1%	9	3%
Other school staff	3	1%	1	0%	4	1%
Total	246	83%	49	17%	295	100%

4. Results

4.1. Results from the systematic observations

Pupils in mainstream schools

Curriculum subjects and attainment groups

Most observations were made in the core subjects of English and mathematics, particularly for comparison pupils, as researchers were asked to prioritise observations in these lessons. As can be seen in Table 24, there was a relatively even balance of observations involving pupils with Statements in other curriculum areas.

Table 24. Observations by curriculum subject

	Year 5				Year 9			
	Comparison		Statement		Comparison		Statement	
<i>English</i>	1,547	34%	8,511	35%	1,686	27%	6,478	23%
<i>Mathematics</i>	765	17%	5,254	22%	1,528	24%	4,835	17%
<i>Science</i>	566	12%	2,442	10%	1,193	19%	3,690	13%
<i>Humanities</i>	599	13%	2,470	10%	977	15%	3,592	13%
<i>Mod foreign languages</i>	77	2%	278	1%	413	7%	1,646	6%
<i>Art/Music/Drama*</i>	442	10%	1,942	8%	174	3%	3,044	11%
<i>Design & tech/ICT*</i>					215	3%	2,399	8%
<i>Other subjects</i>	612	13%	3,201	13%	166	3%	2,846	10%
Total	4,608	100%	24,098	100%	6,352	100%	28,530	100%

* Art, music, drama, design and technology, and ICT coded as one category in MAST study (Year 5)

In mainstream secondary schools, pupils are often taught in sets, that is, classes organised in terms of attainment or 'ability', at least for core subjects. The present study allowed us to examine this precisely in terms of the amount of time comparison and mainstream pupils spent in high, average, low and mixed attainment sets, for different subjects. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 25.

We can see that comparison pupils were, as would be expected, most often taught in average attainment sets for English, mathematics and science. Comparison pupils spent 84% of their time in English, 99% of their time in mathematics, and all their time in science, being taught in average attainment sets. Mixed attainment classes were relatively uncommon for these subjects, though more common for other subjects (e.g. humanities). Overall, average-attaining pupils were taught in average-attaining classes for 80% of all observations across all school subjects. This reveals that the teaching of pupils in classes organised by similar levels of attainment was commonplace in many of the schools in the study.

Turning to pupils with SEND, we can see from Table 25 that they experienced teaching in very different classes. Over all subjects nearly two-thirds of all lesson observations (64%) of pupils with Statements were made in low attainment classes. This proportion increases markedly when we look just at the core subjects. Pupils with Statements spent 85% of observations in English, 84% of their time in mathematics, and 83% of their time in science, being taught in low attainment sets. Relatively few of these pupils were taught in average attainment sets, and almost none in high attainment sets. Across all subjects, pupils with Statements were in mixed attainment classes in just under a third of observations (30%).

Table 25. Curriculum subject by attainment group: Year 9

	Comparison						Statement									
	Average		Mixed		Total		High		Average		Low		Mixed		Total	
<i>English</i>	1,341	84%	255	16%	1,596	26%	0	0%	199	3%	5,377	85%	778	12%	6,354	23%
<i>Maths</i>	1,378	99%	11	1%	1,389	23%	0	0%	546	11%	4,076	84%	213	4%	4,835	18%
<i>Science</i>	1,193	100%	0	0%	1,193	20%	0	0%	400	11%	3,023	83%	217	6%	3,640	13%
<i>Hum'ties</i>	468	50%	460	50%	928	15%	54	2%	151	4%	1,595	44%	1,792	50%	3,592	13%
<i>MFL</i>	236	57%	177	43%	413	7%	0	0%	46	3%	1,188	77%	300	20%	1,534	6%
<i>Arts</i>	53	30%	121	70%	174	3%	0	0%	44	2%	781	27%	2,043	71%	2,868	10%
<i>D&T/ICT</i>	109	51%	106	49%	215	4%	0	0%	98	4%	624	28%	1,515	68%	2,237	8%
<i>Other</i>	105	63%	61	37%	166	3%	0	0%	64	3%	940	38%	1,464	59%	2,468	9%
Total	4,883	80%	1,191	20%	6,074	100%	54	<1%	1,548	6%	17,604	64%	8,322	30%	27,528	100%

The key finding here is just how much time pupils in Year 9 spent being taught in classes of similar attainment, and how this effectively provides a discrete educational environment for the average-attaining pupils and those with SEND. Even though they may be in the same registration class (e.g. form group or tutor group) at the start the school day, they then split out into a quite different educational environment and experience. This arrangement puts a lot of emphasis on the quality of the teaching and support in the low-attaining sets, and this is examined in our analysis of the case study data later.

By way of comparison with the experiences of pupils in primary schools, we show the data from the MAST study in Table 26. It needs to be noted that at Year 5, pupils are organised into groups in a different way, and the observation system necessarily had to reflect this. As there was relatively little setting at Year 5, comparison and Statemented pupil were usually present in the same (mixed attainment) classrooms. We therefore recorded the attainment level of the groups pupils were working in within the classroom. When the pupils were not in a group, the coding defaulted to 'mixed', reflecting the mixed level of attainment of the whole class. So, the Year 5 data are different to the Year 9 data from the SENSE study, wherein comparison and Statemented pupils tended to be in different classes, and attainment was coded at the whole class level.

Table 26. Curriculum subject by attainment group: Year 5

	Comparison						Statement									
	Average		Mixed		Total		High		Average		Low		Mixed		Total	
English	49	7%	650	93%	699	26%	55	1%	38	1%	1,252	32%	2,580	66%	3,925	23%
Maths	67	20%	264	80%	331	23%	70	3%	211	8%	1,447	52%	1,055	38%	2,783	18%
Science	12	3%	362	97%	374	20%	0	0%	0	0%	142	9%	1,359	91%	1,501	13%
Hum'ties	4	1%	370	99%	374	15%	0	0%	0	0%	9	1%	1,431	99%	1,440	13%
MFL	0	0%	61	100%	61	7%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	223	100%	223	6%
Arts/DT*	0	0%	219	100%	219	3%	0	0%	0	0%	27	3%	937	97%	964	10%
Other	0	0%	407	100%	407	3%	0	0%	0	0%	170	9%	1,820	91%	1,990	9%
Total	132	5%	2,333	95%	2,465	100%	125	1%	249	2%	3,047	24%	9,405	73%	12,826	100%

* Art/music/drama/design and technology/ICT

By contrast with their experience in secondary schools, Table 26 shows that pupils in primary schools at Year 5 were much more likely to be in mixed attainment groups. This was particularly marked for comparison pupils, who spent 95% of observations in mixed attainment groups. Pupils with statements, on the other hand, spent three quarters of all observations in mixed attainment groups. Nevertheless, pupils with Statements did spend a quarter of their time (24%) in groups that included similarly low-attaining pupils.

Class size and adults in the classroom

Researchers collected data on the number of pupils and adults in classrooms. As these features of lessons tend to remain stable during classroom observations, these data were recorded at five minute intervals, rather than one minute intervals. These data are helpful in addressing questions to do with class size, in terms of the actual number of pupils in the class at any given moment (what we have elsewhere called the 'experienced' class size, rather than a more nominal and less accurate total taken from the class register). We were also able to look at the presence of additional adults, as experienced by pupils at any given moment.

Firstly, we were interested in whether the different attainment sets varied in their size; in other words, whether class size differed depending on attainment grouping. The results of this cross-tabulation are shown in Table 27, and is followed by comparable data from the earlier MAST study (Table 28). Comparison pupils tended to be taught in average attainment classes within the range of 17 to 28 pupils (76% of observations). In contrast, the size of the classes in which pupils with Statements were taught tended to be much smaller. In the clear majority of observations (77%), the low attainment classes in which pupils with SEND were taught comprised 16 or fewer pupils. In just over half of cases (55%), these pupils were in classes of 12 or fewer pupils. This is a lot smaller than the average class size for mainstream secondary schools in England of 20.4 pupils (DfE, 2016e).

Table 27. Class size by attainment group: Year 9

	Comparison						Statement									
	Average		Mixed		Total		High		Average		Low		Mixed		Total	
<4	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	23	1%	10	1%	33	1%
5-8	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	437	14%	14	1%	451	9%
9-12	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	9	3%	1,216	40%	100	7%	1,325	28%
13-16	81	9%	43	18%	124	11%	0	0%	7	3%	669	22%	177	12%	853	18%
17-20	166	19%	56	24%	222	20%	0	0%	57	22%	470	15%	311	21%	838	18%
21-24	192	22%	53	23%	245	22%	0	0%	151	59%	196	6%	383	26%	730	15%
25-28	325	36%	61	26%	386	34%	0	0%	26	10%	24	1%	334	23%	384	8%
29-32	127	14%	20	9%	147	13%	0	0%	8	3%	15	0%	124	9%	147	3%
Total	891	80%	233	20%	1,124	100%	0	0%	258	5%	3,050	64%	1,453	31%	4,761	100%

In Table 28, we have set out the total class size data for comparison and Statemented pupils alongside comparable data from the MAST study for Year 5 pupils. We can see that, compared with what was found in secondary schools, in primary schools average-attaining and pupils with Statements were most often taught together in larger classes, within the range of 21 to 28 pupils (66% of observations).

Table 28. Class size by attainment group

	Year 5		Year 9		Year 9	
	All pupils		Comparison		Statement	
<4	0	0%	0	0%	33	1%
5-8	0	0%	0	0%	451	9%
9-12	26	1%	0	0%	1,325	28%
13-16	55	2%	124	11%	853	18%
17-20	303	10%	222	20%	838	18%
21-24	841	29%	245	22%	730	15%
25-28	1,092	37%	386	34%	384	8%
29-32	415	14%	147	13%	147	3%
33+	217	7%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	2,949	100%	1,124	100%	4,761	100%

Secondly, we were interested in how schools used additional adults. Table 29 shows that in the majority of observations (75%) classes for average-attaining pupils had just one adult present: the teacher. In a quarter of observations, a TA was also present. In Table 30, we can see that almost the opposite is true for pupils with Statements. Three-quarters of lessons (76%) included at least one TA, with a quarter of lessons led by just one teacher.

Table 29. Composition of adults in lessons: Year 9 comparison pupils

Number of TAs	Number of teachers							
	0		1		2		Total	
0	0	0%	900	75%	17	1%	917	76%
1	1	<1%	245	21%	6	1%	252	22%
2	0	0%	26	2%	0	0%	26	2%
Total	1	<1%	1,171	98%	23	2%	1,195	100%

Table 30. Composition of adults in lessons: Year 9 pupils with Statements

Number of TAs	Number of teachers							
	0		1		2		Total	
0	0	0%	1,224	24%	26	<1%	1,250	24%
1	76	1%	3,218	62%	63	1%	3,357	65%
2	49	1%	436	8%	6	<1%	491	9%
3	25	<1%	70	1%	0	0%	95	2%
Total	150	3%	4,948	95%	95	2%	5,193	100%

By way of comparison, Table 31 shows the data from the MAST study on the composition of adults present in primary schools. As comparison and Statemented pupils spent most of their time in the same classroom, the data are for all pupils together. It can be seen that in 73% of observations there was one teacher and at least one TA present. What we might call the 'historical' arrangement of one teacher and no TAs occurred in only 14% of observations. Taken together, the results of classroom composition from primary and secondary schools show how much the presence of TAs has become an established feature of classroom life.

Table 31. Composition of adults in learning contexts involving all pupils: Year 5

Number of TAs	Number of teachers							
	0		1		2+		Total	
0	311	1%	5,291	14%	1,374	4%	6,976	18%
1	2,553	7%	11,731	30%	3,357	9%	17,641	45%
2	895	2%	9,859	25%	1,701	4%	12,455	32%
3+	246	1%	1,547	4%	0	0%	1,793	5%
Total	4,005	10%	28,428	73%	6,432	17%	38,365	100%

Putting the data on class size and adults together, we can conclude that average-attaining pupils were generally taught in a homogenous, average attainment classes by one teacher, whereas pupils with Statements tended to be taught in a much smaller homogenous, low attainment classes with a teacher and one TA in the room.

Comparing these results with those from the MAST study, we can conclude that while Year 5 pupils with SEND in mainstream primary schools were often taught outside the class and via high amounts of TA support in class, in contrast, pupils at Year 9 were taught in different attainment level classes. In effect, what is happening in mainstream secondary settings is very like ‘streaming’, which was common in schools in the 1950s and 1960s; that is, children are being taught in a different class for most of their time and school subjects, with this allocation made on the basis of a judgement about their level of attainment, usually on or soon after their entry into the school. In the SENSE study, we see that for most of their time, pupils with SEND are being taught in classes alongside other pupils, also judged to be low-attaining and/or as having SEND.

Another general point might be made about class sizes. The UK is unusual in the world in having larger class sizes at primary school level than at secondary school level. One might have expected that, pedagogically speaking, it would make more sense for the younger pupils to be in smaller classes. But the situation that emerges from the SENSE and MAST studies is even more troubling, in that pupils with high-level SEND in primary schools are in much larger classes than they experience in Year 9. If it is true that in general, learners with SEND are most effectively taught in smaller classes, then one might ask why wait until they reach secondary school before educating pupils in such small classes? It is difficult not to conclude that class sizes at primary level are too large for the effective teaching of pupils with SEND in mainstream classes. Together with the fact that there are far more TAs working in primary settings than in secondary settings, this could be a reason why primary schools have evolved to rely so heavily on the use of TA support, and on teaching outside the classroom.

Interactions with adults and peers

In order to provide a comprehensive view of the interactions of pupils with and without SEND, we have constructed a table drawing together all the relevant observation data on interaction categories. In line with the observation system we designed for the SENSE and MAST studies, the table is structured around three key ‘social modes’: the instances where pupils were interacting with adults (teachers or TAs); instances where pupils interacted with their classmates; and instances where they were not interacting with anybody. These three social modes are mutually exclusive (i.e. only one can be coded at any time) and comprehensive (i.e. they cover all observations that were made).

Table 32 presents the data for these three social modes for the comparison pupils and those with Statements. In addition, the adult-pupil interaction social mode is further divided into whether these interactions involved teachers or TAs, and, further still, in terms of whether each of these types of interaction occurred as part of the whole class, part of a group or on a one-to-one basis. The observations of comparison pupils only took place in the classrooms (these pupils are not routinely withdrawn from lessons), but observations for pupils with Statement are divided into whether the location occurred in classroom or outside the classroom (including in an ARP). The observation data in Table 32 cover multiple school days, comprising five or six lessons in each day, so providing a wide-angle view of what a school day looks like for pupils with Statements in mainstream secondary settings, in relation to the common experiences of pupils who do not have SEND.

Comparisons between Year 9 and Year 5

Table 32 contains data from the observations of pupils in Year 9 (13-14 year-olds). It is the same in design as a composite table produced to show results for pupils in Year 5 (9-10 year-olds), presented in Webster and Blatchford (2013a). We have reproduced this table below in Table 33. It is instructive to compare the results in these two tables in order to reveal key differences in interactions and locations between the two age levels for pupils with and without SEND.

There are some obvious similarities in how time was distributed across the three social modes (adult-pupil; pupil-pupil; and not interacting) for the average-attaining pupils. In Year 9, they were interacting with teachers in about half of all observations (47%), very rarely interacting with TAs (1%), and in a quarter of observations each they were interacting with peers (27%) and not interacting (26%). The results for Year 5 pupils were broadly similar: 40% with the teacher; 2% with TAs, 32% with peers, and 26% not interacting. The results, therefore, indicate that the quantity of interactions in the three social modes are similar for average-attaining, non-SEND pupils across primary and secondary phases.

There were more obvious differences in the experiences of pupils with Statements across the two time points. The vast bulk of observations at Year 9 took place in the classroom (96% vs. 4% out of class), and, in this respect, were similar to average-attaining pupils. In contrast, at Year 5, a greater proportion of observations occurred away from the classroom (27%). The degree of physical separation from the mainstream classroom we found for Year 5 pupils was, therefore, not evident at Year 9.

As for time in the three social modes, at Year 9 pupils with SEND, when in classrooms, spent 42% of observations interacting with teachers, 15% with TAs, 16% with their classmates, and 23% not interacting. Comparable figures for Year 5 were: 26% with the teacher; 15% with TAs; 13% with peers; and 19% not interacting. So, by Year 9, the balance had shifted to a greater proportion of interactions with teachers in classrooms, yet there were the same percentage of observations with TAs. There was not, therefore, as great a difference as at Year 5 in the amount of interactions pupils with SEND had with their teachers in class, compared to average-attaining pupils (Year 5: 26% vs. 40%; Year 9: 42% vs. 47%).

As at Year 5, there was still at Year 9 the same reduction in the amount of interaction pupils with Statements had with their classmates, compared to average-attaining pupils, though a little less marked (Year 5: 18% vs. 32%; Year 9: 16% vs. 27%). Across both time points, then, it is noticeable that pupils with SEND spent less time interacting with their classmates in comparison to pupils without SEND. It seems as if the higher number of interactions with TAs occurs at the expense of interactions with peers, and to a lesser extent, with teachers. This is examined in more detail in the case study section.

The overall balance of whether interactions with teachers and TAs were as part of the class, part of a group or on a one-to-one basis were similar across Year 5 and Year 9 for both pupils with and without SEND. As at Year 5, interactions with teachers at Year 9 were most often as part of the class, but for pupils with Statements interactions with TAs at both time points were most often on an individual basis.

Table 32. Composition of pupil interactions by interaction type, social mode and location: Year 9

		Comparison		Statement					
		In class		In class		Out of class & ARP		Total	
Teacher	Part of class	2,676	43%	9,115	34%	98	<1%	9,213	35%
	Part of group	96	2%	652	2%	67	<1%	719	3%
	One-to-one	146	2%	1,538	6%	36	<1%	1,574	6%
	Total	(2,918)	(47%)	(1,105)	(42%)	(201)	(1%)	(11,506)	(43%)
TA	Part of class	1	<1%	248	1%	103	<1%	351	1%
	Part of group	7	<1%	666	2%	125	<1%	791	3%
	One-to-one	25	<1%	3,131	12%	543	2%	3,674	14%
	Total	(33)	(1%)	(4,045)	(15%)	(771)	(3%)	(4,816)	(18%)
Peer interaction		1,672	27%	4,137	16%	29	<1%	4,166	16%
No interaction		1,605	26%	6,186	23%	11	<1%	6,197	23%
Total interaction		6,228	100%	25,673	96%	1,012	4%	26,685	100%

Table 33. Composition of pupil interactions by interaction type, social mode and location: Year 5

		Comparison		Statement					
		In class		In class		Out of class & ARP		Total	
Teacher	Part of class	1,489	35%	6,659	22%	429	1%	7,085	23%
	Part of group	79	2%	454	1%	759	2%	1,213	4%
	One-to-one	109	3%	915	3%	342	1%	1,257	4%
	Total	(1,677)	(40%)	(8,028)	(26%)	(1,527)	(5%)	(9,555)	(31%)
TA	Part of class	42	1%	609	2%	15	<1%	624	2%
	Part of group	26	1%	1,054	3%	924	3%	1,978	6%
	One-to-one	25	1%	2,857	9%	2,984	10%	5,841	19%
	Total	(93)	(2%)	(4,520)	(15%)	(3,923)	(13%)	(8,443)	(27%)
Peer interaction		1,361	32%	4,114	13%	1,396	5%	5,510	18%
No interaction		1,102	26%	5,856	19%	1,418	5%	7,274	24%
Total interaction		4,233	100%	22,518	73%	8,264	27%	30,782	100%

Additional interaction observation categories

Focus vs. audience

There were a few observation categories, shown in Tables 34 and 35, which give a yet more detailed picture of interactions between adults and pupils. In the observation system, for each adult-pupil interaction, researchers recorded whether the pupil played an active role in the interaction ('focus') or had a passive role ('audience'). A pupil was the focus of an interaction when an adult was talking specifically to them and vice versa, whether individually, in a group or as part of the class. A pupil was in the 'audience' mode when the adult was talking to another pupil or all pupils in a group or class in which the target pupil was included.

Table 34 shows these two levels of interaction by adult type across all locations. The pupils with Statements were a little more likely to be the focus of attention by the teacher, compared with their average-attaining peers (focus: 17% vs 13%), and less likely to be one of the audience (audience: 54% vs. 86%). What stands out is that pupils with Statements were much more likely to receive individualised attention (i.e. be the focus of attention) in their interactions with TAs than they were in their interactions with teachers (26% vs. 17%).

Table 34. Level of interaction by adult and location

			Comparison		Statement	
In class	<i>Teacher</i>	Focus	370	13%	2,618	17%
		Audience	2,548	86%	8,687	54%
	<i>TA</i>	Focus	27	1%	3,548	26%
		Audience	6	<1%	497	4%
	Total		(2,951)	(100%)	(15,350)	(93%)
Out of class & ARP	<i>Teacher</i>	Focus	N/A	N/A	121	11%
		Audience	N/A	N/A	164	15%
	<i>TA</i>	Focus	N/A	N/A	687	64%
		Audience	N/A	N/A	106	10%
	Total		(N/A)	(N/A)	(1,078)	(7%)
Total				16,428	100%	

Observations on levels of interaction were handled slightly differently in the MAST study, so the data from Year 5 is not directly comparable with the data from Year 9. In the observations at Year 5, we recorded the direction of the interaction (adult-to-pupil vs. pupil-to-adult) as a way of getting at pupils' level of involvement and activity in interactions. Assuming pupil-to-adult interactions are a sign of a more active form of engagement in interactions (and, by contrast, adult-to-pupil is more passive), then the results from Year 5 suggested that pupils with Statements had a more active role with TAs than they did with teachers (Webster and Blatchford, 2013a), just as they seem to have at Year 9. At Year 5, when in the classroom, pupils with Statements were over three times more likely to direct an interaction at a TA than the teacher. When outside of the class, they were ten times more likely to direct an interaction

at a TA than a teacher. This is a similar result to that found in the DISS project (Blatchford *et al.*, 2012).

Size of group

For interactions with adults that occurred when a pupil was part of a group, researchers recorded how many pupils were in the group (including the pupil who was the target of observation). These results for groups sizes for in-class observations only are shown in Table 35. Although the overall number of observations of comparison pupils were relatively low, we can see that they tended to work in groups of three or four (65% of the total). Pupils with Statements, on the other hand, tended to work in smaller groups, mostly pairs or groups of three (52% in total). It is difficult to account for the finding that pupils with Statements worked in groups of seven or more pupils in 14% of observations, while the equivalent figure for comparison pupils was 3% of observations.

Table 35. Number of pupils involved in group observations by group size and location: Year 9

	Comparison		Statement				<i>Total</i>	
	In class		In class		Out of class & ARP			
<i>Pair</i>	24	16%	498	26%	76	4%	574	30%
3	38	25%	336	17%	81	4%	417	22%
4	60	40%	264	14%	32	2%	296	15%
5	18	12%	206	11%	16	1%	222	12%
6	6	4%	73	4%	67	3%	140	7%
<i>7 or more</i>	4	3%	241	13%	31	2%	272	14%
Total	150	100%	1,618	84%	303	16%	1,921	100%

In the MAST study, researchers were asked to record group sizes in Year 5 classrooms using two broad categories: small groups (comprising 2-6 pupils) and medium groups (comprising 7-11 pupils). As can be seen in the results in Table 36, the overall number of observations of comparison pupils were also quite low. But, when interacting with teachers and TAs as part of a group, we can see that these groups were smaller in size. Similarly, pupils with SEND were most often in smaller sized groups. However, the striking finding relating to pupils with Statements was how just over half their interactions when in groups (53%) occurred away from the classroom – and where they were typically with TAs, rather than teachers.

Table 36. Number of pupils involved in group observations by group size and location: Year 5

	Comparison		Statement				<i>Total</i>	
	In class		In class		Out of class & ARP			
<i>Small group</i>	86	82%	1,372	43%	1,266	40%	3,191	83%
<i>Medium group</i>	19	18%	136	4%	417	13%	7,712	17%
Total	105	100%	1,508	47%	1,683	53%	3,191	100%

Pupils in special schools

Curriculum subjects

Table 37 shows observations in relation to curriculum subjects in special schools, alongside the observations made in mainstream primary and secondary settings. Pupils in special schools tended to spend less time in humanities and modern foreign languages than pupils with Statements in mainstream settings, and spent more time in practical arts subjects and vocational learning (captured within 'other subjects').

Table 37. Observations by curriculum subject

	Year 5				Year 9					
	Mainstream				Mainstream				Special	
	Comparison		Statement		Comparison		Statement		Statement	
<i>English</i>	1,547	34%	8,511	35%	1,686	27%	6,478	23%	1,313	20%
<i>Mathematics</i>	765	17%	5,254	22%	1,528	24%	4,835	17%	1,042	16%
<i>Science</i>	566	12%	2,442	10%	1,193	19%	3,690	13%	638	10%
<i>Humanities</i>	599	13%	2,470	10%	977	15%	3,592	13%	354	5%
<i>Mod foreign langs</i>	77	2%	278	1%	413	7%	1,646	6%	111	2%
<i>Art/Music/Drama*</i>	442	10%	1,942	8%	174	3%	3,044	11%	1,302	20%
<i>Design & tech/ICT*</i>					215	3%	2,399	8%	636	10%
<i>Other subjects</i>	612	13%	3,201	13%	166	3%	2,846	10%	1,209	18%
Total	4,608	100%	24,098	100%	6,352	100%	28,530	100%	6,605	100%

* Art, music, drama, design and technology, and ICT coded as one category in MAST study (Year 5)

Class size and additional adults

Table 38 shows the total observations made for each year group and phase. Compared with mainstream settings, class sizes in special schools were generally very small, with many lessons involving fewer than eight pupils (45%). As far as we could tell from the case study reports, classes in special schools were arranged chronologically by age, rather than by developmental stage, as can be the case in schools and classes for pupils with severe and profound difficulties. In mainstream secondary settings, pupils with Statements tended to be taught in classes of 12 or fewer pupils. There are no national data on average class size in specialist settings to which we can compare these results with the wider situation across all schools.

Table 38. Class size by school setting and year group

	Mainstream						Special	
	Year 5		Year 9		Year 9		Year 9	
	All pupils		Comparison		Statement		Statement	
<4	0	0%	0	0%	33	1%	48	4%
5-8	0	0%	0	0%	451	9%	501	41%
9-12	26	1%	0	0%	1,325	28%	459	38%
13-16	55	2%	124	11%	853	18%	193	16%
17-20	303	10%	222	20%	838	18%	0	0%
21-24	841	29%	245	22%	730	15%	13	1%
25-28	1,092	37%	386	34%	384	8%	0	0%
29-32	415	14%	147	13%	147	3%	0	0%
33+	217	7%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	2,949	100%	1,124	100%	4,761	100%	1,214	100%

These results add to the earlier comments on class size, age of pupil and SEND, where we questioned why class sizes should be larger in primary schools than secondary schools. We can now see that the same children who were taught in relatively large class sizes when they were 9-10 years old in primary schools, are now experiencing small class sizes when they have reached 13-14 years in Year 9 in mainstream schools, and very small class sizes at the same age when in special schools.

As with the previous analyses, we were interested in how schools used additional adults, and whether this differed from the results from mainstream schools. Roughly in line with what we observed in mainstream settings, a fifth of observations in special schools were in lessons led only by one teacher (see Table 39). There was a greater tendency in special schools for more than one TA to be present in lessons. In a total of 44% of observations, there were two or more TAs present, which, given the smaller class sizes, ensured a higher adult-pupil ratio. This is a marked difference in the composition of adults in lessons involving pupils with Statements in mainstream schools. In those settings, there were two or more TAs present 11% of the time (see Table 30) and just 2% of the time in primary classrooms (see Table 31).

Table 39. Composition of adults in lessons involving pupils with Statements: special schools

Number of TAs	Number of teachers							
	0		1		2		Total	
0	0	0%	224	19%	11	1%	235	20%
1	3	<1%	360	30%	76	6%	439	36%
2	12	1%	319	26%	41	3%	372	31%
3	30	2%	91	8%	0	0%	121	10%
4+	15	1%	22	2%	1	<1%	38	3%
Total	60	5%	1,016	84%	129	11%	1,205	100%

Interactions with adults and peers

Next we come to the results on pupil interactions in special schools. The results are shown in Table 40, alongside the percentage figures only from Table 32. As in the mainstream settings, all but a tiny percentage of observations occurred within the main classroom. The main, and perhaps unexpected, conclusion from these data is that there is little difference between the amount of interactions of pupils with Statements in mainstream schools and special schools.

The number of interactions with teachers are the same in both settings (43%) and the percentage of observations with TAs and peers are also broadly similar. Compared with their counterparts in mainstream schools, pupils in specialist settings had half as many one-to-one interactions with TAs (7% vs. 14%). Pupils in special schools spent a slightly greater proportion of time not interacting with anyone (27% vs. 23%).

It is worth noting that the balance of interactions in specialist settings can depend on whether class groupings are made on the basis of chronological age or ability. As noted, though we are missing systematic data on this point, on the basis of what was reported in the case studies, classes in special schools appeared mostly to be arranged by age. In this sense at least, data collected in these classes were that bit more comparable with data from secondary mainstream classes.

Table 40. Composition of all pupil interactions by interaction type, social mode and location: Year 9 all schools

		Mainstream				Special					
		<i>Comparison</i>	<i>Statement</i>			<i>Statement</i>					
		In class	In class	Out of class & ARP	Total	In class		Out of class & ARP		Total	
Teacher	Part of class	43%	34%	<1%	35%	2,054	33%	0	0%	2,054	33%
	Part of group	2%	2%	<1%	3%	151	2%	0	0%	151	2%
	One-to-one	2%	6%	<1%	6%	487	8%	0	0%	487	8%
	Total	<i>(47%)</i>	<i>(42%)</i>	<i>(1%)</i>	<i>(43%)</i>	<i>(2,692)</i>	<i>(44%)</i>	<i>(0)</i>	<i>(0%)</i>	<i>(2,692)</i>	<i>(43%)</i>
TA	Part of class	<1%	1%	<1%	1%	121	2%	1	<1%	122	2%
	Part of group	<1%	2%	<1%	3%	295	5%	32	1%	327	5%
	One-to-one	<1%	12%	2%	14%	418	7%	48	1%	466	7%
	Total	<i>(1%)</i>	<i>(15%)</i>	<i>(3%)</i>	<i>(18%)</i>	<i>(834)</i>	<i>(13%)</i>	<i>(81)</i>	<i>(1%)</i>	<i>(915)</i>	<i>(15%)</i>
Peer interaction		27%	16%	<1%	16%	952	15%	15	<1%	967	15%
No interaction		26%	23%	<1%	23%	1,704	28%	0	0%	1,704	27%
Total interaction		100%	96%	4%	100%	6,182	98%	96	2%	6,278	100%

Comparisons between Year 9 and Year 5

Table 41 adds in the results from the MAST study to those from the SENSE study. In the table, we have drawn together the percentage figures for observations across the two time points (Years 5 and 9) and across all schools and locations. We have already examined differences between Year 5 and Year 9 for the mainstream schools, where we saw that for pupils with SEND, interactions with teachers had increased and interactions with TAs had decreased by the time the pupils reached Year 9. Factoring in the results from special schools, we see the same broad trends as we do in mainstream secondary settings, but with the most noteworthy exception being the drop-off in one-to-one interactions with TAs, compared to similar aged pupils with SEND in mainstream schools and pupils with SEND at Year 5.

Table 41. Composition of all pupil interactions by interaction type, social mode and location

		Year 5				Year 9						
		Mainstream				Mainstream				Special		
		Comp	Statement			Comp	Statement			Statement		
		In class	In class	Out of class & ARP	Total	In class	In class	Out of class & ARP	Total	In class	Out of class & ARP	Total
Teacher	Part of class	35%	22%	1%	23%	43%	34%	<1%	35%	33%	0%	33%
	Part of group	2%	1%	2%	4%	2%	2%	<1%	3%	2%	0%	2%
	One-to-one	3%	3%	1%	4%	2%	6%	<1%	6%	8%	0%	8%
	Total	(40%)	(26%)	(5%)	(31%)	(47%)	(42%)	(1%)	(43%)	(44%)	(0%)	(43%)
TA	Part of class	1%	2%	<1%	2%	<1%	1%	<1%	1%	2%	<1%	2%
	Part of group	1%	3%	3%	6%	<1%	2%	<1%	3%	5%	1%	5%
	One-to-one	1%	9%	10%	19%	<1%	12%	2%	14%	7%	1%	7%
	Total	(2%)	(15%)	(13%)	(27%)	(1%)	(15%)	(3%)	(18%)	(13%)	(1%)	(15%)
Peer interaction		32%	13%	5%	18%	27%	16%	<1%	16%	15%	<1%	15%
No interaction		26%	19%	5%	24%	26%	23%	<1%	23%	28%	0%	27%
Total interaction		100%	73%	27%	100%	100%	96%	4%	100%	98%	2%	100%

Focus vs. audience

Once again, we have divided observations between those when pupils were the focus of adult attention and when they were in 'audience' mode. Table 42 shows the level of interaction by adult type for all Year 9 pupils. For the purposes of this analysis, only in-class observations are included. Pupils with Statements in special schools tended to be somewhat more likely to be the focus of attention in their interactions with teachers, compared to their counterparts in mainstream, and much more active compared with average-attaining pupils. Conversely, pupils with Statements in specialist settings were less likely to be the focus of attention in their interactions with TAs, compared with those in mainstream settings.

Table 42. Level of interaction by adult and school type: in class observations only

		Mainstream				Special	
		Comparison		Statement		Statement	
Teacher	Focus	370	13%	2,618	17%	841	24%
	Audience	2,548	86%	8,687	57%	1,851	52%
TA	Focus	27	1%	3,548	23%	592	17%
	Audience	6	<1%	497	3%	242	7%
Total		2,951	100%	15,350	100%	3,526	100%

Size of group

We look lastly at the size of the groups pupils were in during the instances when they interacted with adults. Table 43 shows the results for special schools alongside the percentage figures from mainstream schools (shown earlier in Table 35). The results for pupils with SEND in mainstream and special schools are very similar. Pupils with Statements in both settings tended to work in groups of two or three for just over half of the time (special: 54%; mainstream: 52%). Given class sizes are smaller in special schools, it is perhaps surprising that pupils were not taught in smaller groups.

Table 43. Number of pupils involved in group observations: Year 9 all schools

		Mainstream				Special				
		Comp	Statement			Statement				
		In class	In class	Out of class & ARP	Total	In class		Out of class & ARP		Total
Pair	16%	26%	4%	30%	307	28%	51	31%	358	29%
3	25%	17%	4%	22%	265	24%	49	29%	314	25%
4	40%	14%	2%	15%	204	19%	32	19%	236	19%
5	12%	11%	1%	12%	159	15%	0	0%	159	13%
6	4%	4%	3%	7%	12	1%	35	21%	47	4%
7 or more	3%	13%	2%	14%	142	13%	0	0%	142	11%
Total	100%	84%	16%	100%	1,089	87%	167	13%	1,256	100%

In summary, the results on interactions in special schools are surprising, as it was expected that the smaller classes and increased number of adults in classrooms would have led to more pupil interactions with teachers and TAs. Pupils with Statements in special schools have roughly the same proportion of interactions with teachers as their counterparts in mainstream schools, though these interactions seem more likely to involve the pupil being the focus of attention. The fact that pupils' interactions with TAs in special schools were, if anything, rather less individualised suggests that the more interactive (and compensatory) role of TAs in mainstream schools has been replaced by a more teacher-led interactive role, and slightly more opportunities to work independently. Nevertheless, these differences are

relatively minor and the key finding, as above, is how similar the pattern of interactions in classrooms is for comparison and Statemented pupils. We look at other key differences between mainstream and special schools in our examination of the case study data.

Summary of results from the systematic observations

- At Year 9, pupils with Statements in mainstream schools tend to be taught in smaller classes and smaller within-class groups, compared to average-attaining pupils.
- At Year 5, the educational experiences of pupils with Statements was characterised by a separation from the classroom, teacher and peers. At Year 9, it was characterised by being taught in different attainment-level classes. This is more like 'streaming' than 'setting'.
- Overall, pupils with Statements were mostly taught alongside other pupils identified as low-attaining and/or as having SEND. At Year 5, they were taught in low-attaining, within-class groups, while at Year 9, they were segregated out and taught in low-attaining classes.
- Pupils with Statements in mainstream settings had more in-class interaction with their teachers at Year 9 than at Year 5. They had the same proportion of in-class interactions with TAs. At Year 5, pupils with Statements had fewer in-class interactions with their teachers compared to average-attaining pupils, but this was less marked at Year 9. Average-attaining pupils in mainstream settings had comparatively little interaction with TAs.
- In contrast to interactions with teachers, in the interactions pupils with Statements had with TAs at both Year 5 and Year 9, they were more likely to be the focus of attention.
- At both Year 5 and Year 9, pupils with Statements had far fewer in-class interactions with their peers, compared to average-attaining pupils. This difference was a little less marked at Year 9.
- It was expected that the smaller class sizes and increased number of adults in special schools would have led to more one-to-one interactions with teachers and TAs. Surprisingly, there was little evidence that these pupils had more interactions with their teachers, compared to pupils with Statement in mainstream schools. However, they did have more interactions where they were the focus of the teacher's attention.
- At Year 9, pupils in special schools had fewer interactions with TAs on a one-to-one basis, compared with similar pupils in mainstream secondary schools, and also at Year 5 in mainstream primary schools. To some extent, this may be explained by more interactions with teachers in which they were the focus of attention. There are, therefore, some modest signs that in special schools, the balance was tilted toward more individual interactions with teachers, rather than TAs.
- Results for no interaction suggest pupils in special schools had slightly more opportunities for independent work, compared with pupils with Statements in mainstream settings.

4.2. Results from the case studies

Pupils in mainstream schools

Locations for teaching and learning

Class sizes and attainment groupings

The systematic observations revealed that the separation from the classroom, teacher and peers found for Year 5 pupils in the earlier MAST study had, at Year 9, been replaced by being taught in different attainment level classes. The use of smaller sized classes for pupils with Statements in mainstream schools was mentioned as a general feature of their provision in half of all cases: 24 out of a possible 49. There was a universal view across interviewees that this was helpful for pupils with high-level SEND, and especially from the pupils' point of view, where it provided a quieter and calmer learning environment than larger classes, such as those in which average-attaining pupils were taught.

"His class is a Foundation class [of 10 pupils]. It models the primary school format in that they are taught most core subjects together. For other subjects – PE, music and drama – they are integrated within the year group" ... "If we had to put him into a bigger class, his progress would have been a lot slower".

TA

A key result from the observations was how teaching for core subjects was often organised in terms of classes set by attainment. As we explain later, there was a clear way in which separating out pupils for teaching was conceived as a form of differentiation. Evidence from interviews suggested that the 'streaming' system in operation may have benefits for pupils with SEND.

Streaming Year 9 teaching groups based on ability in core and humanity subjects allows for a good degree of differentiation of teaching techniques and learning resources. The lessons observed were prepared and delivered in a way that was accessible to the target pupil with some support from the LSA and teachers, where necessary. LSAs and teachers were able to further adapt activities and resources if the target pupil required a higher level of support.

Excerpt from case study report

The low attainment classes in which pupils with SEND were most frequently found to be educated were typically referred to as the 'low ability' groups. This, as we noted earlier, is a somewhat freighted term that carries implicit meanings about innate and fixed levels of aptitude. Pupils and adults seemed to use the term 'bottom set' to describe these classes. However defined, there was evidence that some pupils felt there was a stigma attached to being taught in these classes.

"I don't really like telling my friends that I'm in the bottom set, because I think they would find me different. I don't find it comfortable telling my friends".

Pupil

"It's alright, but I don't like being in a lower class. People start being rude, they say rude things, and I want to go to a higher one, so then I can do a proper test".

Pupil

Interestingly, one pupil felt the other members of his low attainment class were "*holding him back*", though he may well have been referring to the teaching. He was looking forward to the prospect of working with different pupils at Key Stage 4 at a faster, more energised pace.

Withdrawal from the classroom

In 19 cases, it was claimed that pupils spent 100% of their time in classrooms, though in more cases (29), it was reported that pupils were withdrawn from the classroom, typically for interventions/catch-up programmes and therapies. It was common for pupils to be withdrawn from lessons in their 'weaker' curriculum areas (20). Typically, this was described as for the benefit of the pupil, as they could work in a quieter, less distracting environment that would aid their concentration, focus and engagement. One pupil had a specially-made 'dark room' to allow her to concentrate for long periods. However, in several cases there were perceived advantages for the teacher, teaching and/or the rest of the class.

Whilst there was a perception that [pupil] could not access the work in the mainstream lessons, there was also a perception from some members of staff that she would "hold other children back".

Excerpt from case study report

[Pupil] was removed from an entire English lesson by the Assistant SENCO, who had commented that they had a lot of assessment to do that day.

Excerpt from case study report

In a small number of cases, pupils were removed from or asked to leave the classroom as a result of poor behaviour (4) or due to experiencing anxiety or upset (4). Pupils with SEND tended to have a 'safe space' to which they could go when withdrawn or removed from the mainstream classroom – typically the Learning Support department (9).

"[Learning Support] is like a double-edged sword. It gives them safety and security, but then sometimes it becomes all encompassing, so are we stopping them from going out and facing the world, and making friends. I don't think with [pupil] that would have happened. I think they'd have been mercifully bullied and they would have had a miserable time at school, rather than develop good friendships".

SENCO

It is not clear the extent to which pupils had a say in, or resisted, being withdrawn from the class, but there was good evidence that some pupils recognised the potential downsides of working away from the classroom too often.

The pupil said he works out of class “only if I’m really upset”. In these instances, he said the LSA will tell him what to do, but “sometimes I miss valuable information in the classroom. It’s better to learn in class, because the teacher knows more than the LSA, probably, about that subject”.

Excerpt from case study report

“I like staying in class and learning more about stuff I really need to. I don’t really like going out” ... “I don’t mind doing it in a lesson I don’t like, but if it’s a lesson I like, I want to stay in there, but then I have to go. Then I just get annoyed that I have to go”.

Pupil

“I’m not as involved as everyone else, because they’ve been in there longer and understood”.

Pupil

At Year 5, pupils with Statements were physically separated from the primary classroom much more regularly. They were typically withdrawn for interventions (or catch-up) programmes and therapies (e.g. to support their speech and language development). There were subtler forms of separation noted at Year 5. Even when pupils with Statements were in the same teaching and learning environment as their peers, there was a tendency for these pupils to be in the class, but not ‘of’ the class; separated, for example, in terms of having an individual workstation away from others, and as a consequence of high-intensity support from TAs in a corner of the room (see below).

SEND provision in mainstream settings

Inclusive approaches

Many schools were described by the staff working in them as ‘fully’, ‘very’ or ‘highly’ inclusive (22). It was difficult to derive from the case studies the extent to which this view was shared across staff in the same school. There was variation in way staff in some schools spoke about pupils with SEND, suggesting expectations of these pupils were inconsistent across teaching and support staff. However, a comment from a school receptionist – “[pupil] does not belong in this school due to his low ability” – reminds us that any conclusions about school inclusivity are necessarily limited, not only by dint of the fact that only a small number of staff per school were interviewed, but also that members of the wider school workforce, whose expectations of pupils with SEND may differ, were not selected for interview. The effects of high stakes accountability were detectable in several comments about school priorities.

The SENCO said: “The school focus is unfortunately not on SEN”. Instead [the school] focuses on higher level learners to achieve top exam grades. The responsibility [for pupils with SEND] therefore falls heavily on [the Learning Support department] and any teachers who show interest ... An element of the SENCO role is about engaging staff members in taking an interest and taking up training opportunities

Excerpt from case study report

[The SENCO had] concerns that the ethos of the school is not good for the emotional well-being of SEN children, as in assembly, the headteacher talks a lot about students getting five A-Cs at GCSE, which SEN students know they can't do. They then feel devalued and need to be reminded how they've progressed is brilliant.

Excerpt from case study report

One-to-one support

In secondary schools, there had been something of a departure from the one-to-one model of TA support more commonly found at Year 5, where the same TA supported the pupil on a day-to-day basis. In 22 cases, it was reported that the secondary school allocated a one-to-one TA, and in 21 cases it was reported that this was actively avoided. However, as the findings from the systematic observations showed, in practice, pupils with Statements experienced a high amount of individual attention from TAs throughout the week. The case study reports suggest that it was rarely one TA who provided it; so, at any one lesson, one-to-one support was provided by one of a small number of TAs.

The SENCO noted that, when [pupil] started school in Year 7, her parents' expectations were that she would receive one-to-one support in the classroom from a TA allocated specifically to her. The SENCO discussed the potential disadvantages of this approach (lack of independence, social stigma, etc.) with parents. The SENCO informed me that, whilst it took time for parents to adjust, they are now supportive of the school's use of TA support.

Excerpt from case study report

In the case of one pupil, the school had “poached his TA from primary school”, which was described as helpful in his integration into a large secondary setting. Some TAs provided an insight into how decisions were made about which pupils they were paired with, and the advantages of one-to-one support. In contrast, there were fewer comments from SENCOs and teachers on this matter.

The TA explained that each TA develops their own strengths and weaknesses. They become better at working with a particular type of child, and then get matched up with a child according to their strengths.

Excerpt from case study report

“We get to know them a lot better. Their teacher might only see them maybe once a week, but we spend more time with them, so you know what works with them and you know how to relate to them”.

TA

In the MAST study, TAs were described as the ‘expert’ on the pupil with the Statement, in terms of their learning needs and their personal preferences and habits. It was they, rather than class teachers, who had developed and possessed the expertise and knowledge about the child and his/her needs. There was an echo of this in some of the case study reports from Year 9, where there appeared to be a tacit expectation that TAs shared their knowledge and understanding of the pupil they supported with teaching staff.

The SENCO felt that TAs have responsibility for knowing the child's profile and making the teachers aware of this.

Excerpt from case study report

Interestingly, a few interviewees commented on a wider, or alternative, rationale for one-to-one support in terms of maintaining classroom order. As one TA put it, an aspect of the in-class support role was *"to keep him quiet"* whilst the teacher teaches.

"Some teachers do like someone to be sat with him all the time... mainly to do with behaviour rather than attainment".

SENCO

*"Within my class I have at least a couple of support staff in there as well. And those support staff give them a place to sit next to them and work through with these pupils" ...
"Also, it splits them up, so there is no messing around".*

Teacher

High levels of one-to-one TA support were noted to have a stigmatising effect on the pupils (10), including where it meant being withdrawn from the classroom (4) or being given an obviously different or separate task to everyone else in the class (7).

"Sometimes I just like working on my own. So like, in lessons where I'm not in the bottom group and I have a helper there, it just lowers my confidence. Because I don't like feeling that I need help and that everyone else thinks I need help, when I don't. It's just sort of embarrassing".

Pupil

"It annoys me though, because sometimes I think they [TAs] speak to me like I'm dumb. Because they're saying, 'Do you know what that is?' and it's easy work. But then they think I don't understand, when I probably understand more than most other people. They just sit next to me when other people don't get it".

Pupil

[Pupil] knows the TAs in class are there to support his learning. He said he doesn't want to be seen as different, so doesn't like to ask for help in front of the class. He said that sometimes he will ask quietly or wait until near the end of the lesson to request help.

Excerpt from case study report

In a small number of cases, researchers observed how the presence of a TA restricted opportunities for interactions with peers (7) and teachers (5).

In maths and science, there is a TA stood behind [pupil] and at times talking over the teachers explanations, working on a one-to-one basis. In these lessons, it appeared there were less opportunities for peer interactions, as the TA is positioned between students.

Excerpt from case study report

It appeared that the English and maths teachers spent less time clarifying [pupil's] understanding in comparison to other students in the class, potentially because she had a TA in close proximity.

Excerpt from case study report

The roles of teachers and teaching assistants

Teachers

Teachers viewed their role as having responsibility for the pedagogical planning (29 cases) and for assessment and target-setting (11). In about a quarter of cases, there was an explicit mention of teachers' 'good' knowledge of the Statemented pupils' needs (12) and of their responsibilities under SEND Code of Practice (14). In just under half of cases (23), teachers reported that they give pupils with Statements individual attention during lessons. The features of their interactions with pupils, which emerged in the teacher interviews, included: questioning (11); clarifying and repeating information (11); teaching new concepts (6); reinforcing concepts (5); deepening understanding (5); and modelling (5).

More procedurally, teachers talked about: prompting, reminding, encouraging and praising pupils (14); motivating pupils and helping them to start work (10); and helping them to stay on task (4). In many schools, teachers promoted pupil independence (14). Few teachers talked about their role in relation to behaviour management (5) or pastoral care (8).

On the basis of these infrequent and rather general mentions, the impression from the case studies was that teachers do not find it easy to articulate what they do in relation to teaching and instruction for pupils with SEND. Teachers were unable to pinpoint ways in which they provide additional or different support. In at least some cases, it may be indicative of the difficulty of making the implicit explicit. Overall, the impression about pedagogical approaches gained from the case study data was one of ambiguity and vagueness. This in turn, is likely to contribute to inconsistency in approach.

In Year 5, primary teachers expressed having varying degrees of responsibility for pupils with Statements. While there were a small number of teachers who had a strong and full responsibility for the education of pupils with high-level SEND, there were somewhat more who were seen to have little or no responsibility. In the main, the most common approach revealed via the case studies (20 out of 48), fell somewhere between these two extremes. We concluded that the teacher had the overall responsibility for planning the curriculum and general teaching strategies, whilst the TA effectively took on the actual teaching in terms of the delivery of the curriculum. Schools appeared content with this arrangement.

Teaching assistants

Classroom and pupil-centred support staff had variety of alternative titles in mainstream settings: 'learning facilitator'; 'co-educator'; and 'learning coach'. In the main, these adults were commonly called 'teaching assistants' and 'learning support assistants'.

Very few TAs had a role relating to pedagogical planning and decision-making. In terms of teaching and instruction, TAs tended not to introduce new concepts and information (4), but reinforce what the teacher was doing. In the MAST study, TAs described their role in supporting pupils with Statements in Year 5 using a variety of illuminating metaphors. These included: 'mediator'; 'conduit'; 'advocate'; and 'crutch'. There were fewer metaphors used at Year 9, but two phrases in particular – 'prod' and 'memory jogger' – seemed to speak to some of the recurring features of the TAs' role, as described in the interviews. These were: clarifying and repeating information (22); reinforcing concepts and information (11); questioning (11); deepening understanding (10).

A key purpose of the role of TAs concerned procedural behaviours and routines: keeping pupils on task and focussed (21); prompting, reminding, encouraging and praising pupils (17); motivating and helping them to start work (14); and to stay on task (21). Promoting pupil independence appeared to be a greater feature of the TAs' role than the teachers' role (20). Likewise, in some cases, TAs scribed or acted as a reader for the pupil with the Statement (13); a role teachers did not perform. These instances may be related in some way to the descriptions provided by some pupils of TAs "telling me what to do" and "writing what I tell them" (8). (We describe some of the effects of this particular practice on pupils later). It was quite common for TAs to write homework tasks in pupils' homework diary or planner.

"Task simplification, re-explaining tasks, helping him to make sense of what has been asked of him, breaking tasks down and just getting [pupil] going by setting him off in some way".

TA

The TA also discussed how she differentiates tasks within lessons for [pupil], by breaking them into smaller chunks after the teacher has explained them, asking the pupil to write a smaller amount and scribing the rest for them to reduce writing demand, and "set them a target they can achieve".

Excerpt from case study report

In his interview, [pupil] mentioned he likes working with TAs as they 'tell him all the answers'. He later referred to TAs and commented that they just make it easier for him by writing instructions or breaking into steps.

Excerpt from case study report

TAs also described a role in relation to behaviour management (11) and pastoral care (15), which again seemed to be a greater feature of their work than teachers. Some TAs had a 'keyworker' role (7), which had a pastoral/emotional support nature. Distinct from teachers, some TAs had an advocacy or mediation role within school, between teachers and the pupil (9) and/or between home and school (5).

In the MAST study, we found that the primary TA role was typified in most cases by: monitoring behaviour and keeping pupils on task (33); providing pastoral/emotional support (18); and promoting independence (16). Unlike in secondary settings, however, primary TAs had a greater role in pedagogical planning and decision-making (34).

There was evidence that secondary schools were deploying TAs in classrooms in ways that were consistent with recommendations stemming from our other work (e.g. Webster *et al.*, 2016). Many schools had one or more subject-specific TAs (19) attached to a curriculum area. In classrooms, TAs would 'float', 'circulate' and work with 'other pupils' (e.g. not those with high needs) (33). However, in only a relatively small number of cases were TAs explicitly described as being used to free up teachers up to work with these pupils (7).

"I actually do it the other way around. The majority of the time – 80% of the time – I will use the LSA for the other pupils, and I will use myself for this particular pupil. The reason being is the LSA is not the English specialist – I am".

Teacher

"Traditionally I have used my LSA, basically, just as a second teacher, if I can't be with somebody. I trust their mathematical knowledge" ... "If a LSA is in there for a specific person, sometimes they might be working with that specific person, but sometimes if I want to work with that person, they will go and work with other people. We just swap places, as it were".

Teacher

The TAs' role and input were principally described in instructional terms, and overlapped with the features of the role of teachers. It was difficult to disaggregate and distil the key features of each role, and define what distinguished one from the other. The respective roles of teachers and TAs in relation to working with pupils with Statements were not always clear-cut, which in turn meant there was a lack of clarity about who was responsible for what.

Who is responsible?

We have already drawn attention to the high prevalence of one-to-one TA support for pupils with Statements, which was consistent with what we have found in the MAST study of Year 5 pupils and our previous research (specifically, the DISS project). Later we will build on what has been so far revealed about the effects of individual support, but before we do, it is worth addressing an issue of particular interest to the SENSE study: *why*, given what the DISS project revealed about the negative associations between high amounts of TA support for pupils with high-level SEND, does this practice remains commonplace in secondary schools?

There were several recurring themes within the case studies reports, which provide potential indicators. Firstly, there was the general confusion and inconsistency about the use of individual support, to which we have already alluded. A key conclusion of the MAST study was that where there was confusion about who is responsible for pupils with Statements, it was almost always TAs who filled the void, rather than teachers. The case study excerpt below revealed a similar situation in secondary settings. In the absence of an effective alternative to one-to-one TA support, the status quo persisted.

The SENCO said she thinks that teachers are of the opinion that the TAs are there to deal with child with SEN, so they don't have to. She said she feels this is especially the case where there are higher needs, meaning that teachers are less engaged with [pupil]. This diminishes them of responsibility, which the new [SEND] Code of Practice reinforces is theirs! They try to distance themselves from accountability, which leaves TAs in a vulnerable position, as it's expected that they will sort and fix everything. There is a fear with autism and teachers expect the TA to manage meltdowns, etc. They are the lowest paid staff with the great responsibilities. Newer teachers are more open to conversations about SEN and support.

Excerpt from case study report

In the minds of TAs, their role was to support specific pupils. A second indicator, therefore, was the way they referred in interviews to the pupil with the Statement they predominantly supported as 'my child' or 'my one-to-one'. This was also a feature of the TA interviews in the MAST study.

I heard the TA say to another student that she would have to wait for her help, as [pupil] was her priority student who she had to work with.

Excerpt from case study report

Some TAs acknowledge that the reason they are in lower ability lessons is to support the Statemented children, so feel obliged to solely work with those children

Excerpt from case study report

A third indicator was in the dependent behaviours exhibited by pupils with SEND. We will explore the issue of dependence more fully momentarily.

The TA described how [pupil] still asks for one-to-one support. For example, when the TA walks in a room, they look over, get a chair as a sign to get the TA to come and sit next to them.

Excerpt from case study report

A fourth signal, parental expectations about individual support, was not as evident in the Year 9 case study data as it was in the case studies at Year 5. Nonetheless, it was striking just how frequently TA support was cited as a critical factor in pupils' successful inclusion and progression in mainstream secondary settings. We will return to this in the later section on 'progress and development'.

Fuzzy notions of 'support'

As with teachers, there was a sense that TAs did not find it easy to describe the 'support' and 'help' all of them said they gave to pupils with SEND. This extended to teachers' descriptions of the TA role. By and large, pupils with Statements described the support they received from TAs as always or often helpful, but they too struggled to capture its key characteristics. A theme within the examples of what we might describe as more effective expressions of TA support was how TAs left space for pupils to attempt tasks.

"If I have an assistant in maths, they will come to me in the first three questions and see I've done it like the first 30 seconds, so they just leave me to it and by the end of it I've got onto the extension work and maybe finished that".

Pupil

"In most of the lessons it'll be spelling; like if I ask for a spelling. But in English, sometimes it's if I'm confused. I've looked at the question – deep, deep into it – and just don't know what the answer is, I'll ask maybe for a bit of a clue".

Pupil

"[TAs] do understand when, when I'm not working, I'm probably either thinking of a question or I'm thinking of... I'm doing one question maybe. Just focussing on that question".

Pupil

Conversely, an aspect over which the feeling from pupils were particularly strong related to TAs providing too much help and eroding the opportunity for independent working.

"Sometimes when I don't need them [TAs], I'm like: 'go away. I don't need the help'".

Pupil

"It feels like cheating... if they are writing down everything for me".

Pupil

[Pupil] stated that [TAs] also sometimes write in her book, but she doesn't like this. She stated that she is aware that she writes really slowly, but that TAs make her feel rushed when they take over some of the writing at times. She stated that she dislikes this as it looks to the teacher as though she hadn't done her own work. [Pupil] does not feel comfortable telling the TA that she doesn't like this.

Excerpt from case study report

It was evident that where pupils with Statements were on the receiving end of high amounts of TA support, there was an increased risk of the pupil remaining dependent on that support and/or TAs taking on too much responsibility for completing the task – with the pupil at times conceding the space for that to happen.

I observed the TA say to [pupil]: 'I have some excellent ideas for you'. [Pupil] appeared to take a more passive approach to his learning, frequently asking the TAs to complete activities for him, which he was able to complete, such as cutting and sticking, and asking the TA to do his spelling, rather than looking in a dictionary like other pupils had been asked to.

Excerpt from case study report

As we have found in previous research, including the MAST study, TAs' motivations for providing support are well-meaning, but this can have unintended consequences; no more so, when it clashes with the stated aim of improving pupil independence.

“It’s not always the case, but the TAs are not supposed to sit with the kids. They’re supposed to be in the class, letting them get on with things, but offering support when it’s needed”.

SENCO

If [TA] feels it’s still too difficult for the children, they will feed this back [to the teacher] or alternatively will say to the child, ‘you do this bit and I’ll do this bit here for you’.

Excerpt from case study report

The TA takes it upon herself to ensure [pupil] doesn’t get into trouble, for instance, if he needs a certain colour pen. She gets him one, as he becomes very upset if he forgets or loses something.

Excerpt from case study report

Overall, the case study data imply a somewhat fuzzy notion of what comprises ‘support’ from TAs, which was also evident in the overarching findings from the MAST study. Given the aforementioned lack of precision and ambiguity relating to teachers’ pedagogy, it is difficult on the basis of the evidence collected in this study to distil the essence of TA ‘support’ and determine the extent to which this differs qualitatively and meaningfully from what teachers do. Even where more productive forms of TA deployment (e.g. the ‘floating/circulating’ model) were noted, one limitation of the SENSE study is that we did not set out to collect substantive data at the interaction level, which may have revealed productive talk-level practices, and thus the ‘added value’ of TA support so readily and effusively described in the interviews.

Expressions of differentiation

The fuzziness relating to definitions of support in many ways extended to school staff’s conceptualisations and operationalisations of differentiation, which was the predominant topic of the case study data captured under the theme of ‘curriculum and provision’. Differentiation operated at organisational and interactional levels. Overall, it was widely interpreted, but quite narrowly defined.

Differentiation by organisation of the year group and/or class

In more than half of cases, SENCOs, teachers and TAs referred to the use of attainment grouping (28) as a broad, structural approach to differentiation.

The school has addressed differentiation through small class-based lessons for the entire group of low attainment pupils, which meet their needs. Differentiation is achieved through keeping pupils with similar abilities together

Excerpt from case study report

It is interesting to note how setting and grouping were the only or principal form of differentiation. As the excerpts below suggest, this appears to reflect a rather superficial view of effective differentiation.

I think the setting helps because [pupil] will be in lower bands. She's in lower groups, she doesn't actually need differentiation".

SENCO

The SENCO recognised that many teachers within the school did not know how to differentiate effectively, which had an impact on pupils with SEN. He felt the provision was differentiated, as many classes [pupil] attended were streamed.

Excerpt from case study report

Differentiation at Year 5 was found to operate at the same organisational and interactional levels as at Year 9. Consistent with what was found in secondary settings, over half of primary schools (27) describe setting Year 5 literacy and numeracy classes by attainment as 'first tier' differentiation. Within class grouping in these subjects was referred to as 'second tier' differentiation. At Year 9, TA-led interventions and catch-up programmes, delivered away from the classroom (27), were also constituted as an organisational expression of differentiation.

Differentiation by task

Differentiation occurred, additionally or alternatively, at the lesson level in a high number of cases at primary school (43). The results from the systematic observations in Year 5 revealed that in nearly one in five instances, pupils with Statements did a task that was either differentiated from, or different to, the task given to the average-attaining control pupils. As observations of pupils with and without SEND at Year 9 were conducted separately from one another, we were unable to collect comparable data as part of the SENSE study. As an aside, a consistent feature of the case study reports from both Year 5 and Year 9 was the way differentiation was spoken about in interviews as if it were something tangible, such as a worksheet or – as indicated above – a physical grouping.

"Differentiation doesn't always happen all the time, but it does help."

TA

In Year 9, secondary school teachers and TAs talked about differentiating at the task level in two ways. Firstly, for groups of lower-attaining pupils and those with SEND within the class (13); what was offered referred to as 'differentiating three ways'. In a few cases, pupils had the option of choosing from a small selection of tasks, thereby selecting the level of challenge. Secondly, and more commonly, for individual tasks (28) the pupil with a Statement would be given a specific and separate worksheet. Interestingly, it was reported in some cases studies that these differentiated tasks tended to have a lower level of challenge.

The Assistant SENCO, TA and the maths teacher all regarded differentiation for students with SEN as making the work easier. They gave no indication that differentiation may include, for example, presenting the material in a different way.

Excerpt from case study report

Differentiation by outcome

In just under a third of cases, secondary school staff referred to differentiation by outcome (15): the expectation that pupils with SEND would produce less work than their peers. This was somewhat fewer than was found at Year 5: in half of cases, primary school staff referred to differentiation by outcome.

The TA was clear on her role in the class to support differentiated learning as directed by the teacher. She believed support staff have very good knowledge of individual pupils.

"[Teachers] will say, 'Will [pupil] manage this?', and I'll say: "No. Is it alright if we do the first five out of ten questions?"

Excerpt from case study report

"A lot of it is differentiation by outcome, as where I'll know that the others write two paragraphs, [pupil] is only going to write one, but I will help him craft that making sure he has a sense of achievement in what he's done".

Teacher

"At the moment, there's no written differentiated work, but teachers will say for example, if you are Level 5 and above, I want you to write questions one to ten, but if you're Level 4, answer questions one to four".

TA

The first comment is revealing. It reveals something about teachers' confidence and ability to set appropriate tasks for pupils with high level SEND, and the reliance on TAs to facilitate learning and outcomes, despite not possessing the pedagogical training expected of teachers.

Subtler forms of differentiation that did not take a physical form, and which were not so readily observed, where a recurring feature of comments on this topic. The comment below from one teacher illustrates the way in which he blends various forms of differentiation.

"It's all different types. It could be differentiation by questioning – so I might push him, try and ask him higher level questions; differentiation by task; differentiation by grouping – sometimes he'll go in the easier group if I think he's going to struggle; then I might put him into the higher group once he's got the fundamental stuff. Sometimes he has support from [TA], so differentiation by support. Sometimes I'll support him one-to-one. All different types".

Teacher

Differentiation by use of TAs and TAs' interactions with pupils

The most recurrent expression of practical differentiation, as the comments above intimate, was in terms of the allocation and presence of TAs (29), and the support they provide via their interactions with pupils (more of which momentarily). This is consistent with what was found in Year 5, where the allocation and presence of TAs was described as a form of differentiation in almost every case study report (46).

Primary TAs had a high level of responsibility for devising and selecting tasks for pupils with Statements. In half of all cases in the MAST study, teachers provided ‘three-way’ differentiation, but this was rarely at the level required for pupils with Statements. TAs typically differentiated further in order to make tasks accessible (43). There was a similar trend in secondary schools: TAs tended to operate in the gaps left by teachers, but this was not as frequently mentioned as it was in the interviews in primary schools.

“Don’t just leave it to the TA. [Teachers] shouldn’t forget that they have to teach [pupil] too”.

SENCO

“In theory, it should be the class teacher’s responsibility [to differentiate]. Often, we find it’s the TA in practice who does that”.

SENCO

“The TA is the bridge... I see her as bridging what I do for the whole class, into something for [pupil], adapting it for his needs.”

Teacher

“Teachers are required to do their own differentiation, and then the TA’s role is to re-differentiate this if it’s still pitched too difficult”

SENCO

As at Year 5, the differentiation provided by TAs working with pupils with Statements in Year 9 was via their interactions with pupils. This is a nuanced example of differentiation that can evade direct observation in busy classrooms (i.e. observers might be too far away to hear what is being said). It emerges as the most common expression of differentiation for pupils with SEND described across the two studies. At Year 5, differentiation at the talk level was characterised by ways in which primary TAs made moment-by-moment amendments to their language – ‘simplifying’ and ‘breaking down’ teachers’ talk and instructions (37), and repeating things (11). At Year 9, the same terms, plus ‘modifying’ and ‘rephrasing’, were evident in about half of all case studies. The impression drawn from the case study reports was that TAs were trusted and empowered to differentiate in the moment. SENCOs and teachers reported that TAs had the knowledge and skill to do this effectively.

“TAs are responsible and professional. They will differentiate, and read and scribe, and whatever [pupil] needs. Teachers often leave the differentiation for the children with Statements to the TA”

SENCO

Differentiation by use of resources

Finally, resources were considered to be a form of differentiation. Visual aids and physical resources, such as large font sheets, were mentioned most often (23), and in a quarter of cases, ICT/assistive technology (13) was cited. This is consistent with what was found in the MAST study at Year 5. The comment below from a pupil reveals an interesting reflection on the use of supportive aids.

[Pupil] uses assistive technology for producing written work, but when I asked him about this, he said that it wouldn't help: "It's all about practise. If you have bad handwriting, a computer won't help. You just need to practise".

Excerpt from case study report

What emerges overall from the analysis of the case study data relating to differentiation is the extent to which the TAs take on a high level of responsibility for making teaching accessible for pupils with Statements, and how remarkably ambiguous and open-ended school staff's conceptualisations and operationalisations of differentiation are. This was a consistent feature in the data from both the SENSE study and the earlier MAST study. It is clear that in both primary and secondary settings there was a fine-grained, nuanced and prevalent form of differentiation at work, which occurred in the gentle calibration of TAs' expectations and moment-by-moment interactions. However, despite many hours of interview recordings with many staff in many schools, it was difficult to get precise examples of what this practice looked like at its most effective.

Preparedness

Training and guidance

SENCOs, teachers and TAs referred to their training and professional learning in general terms, with very few detailed comments on how staff obtained the knowledge and skills required to work with pupils with high-level SEND. There was little offered beyond general mentions of having received training on types of SEND: autism; dyslexia; and speech, language and communication (SLCN).

A similar picture was found at Year 5 in terms of the case study reports containing little detailed comment from teachers and TAs on their SEND training. Again, primary TAs (13) had mainly received training in types of SEND, with SLCN singled out as a common topic. However, a third of those interviewed said they had received no specific training to help them support the needs of the Statemented pupils they supported.

A recently-recruited TA had no training on supporting students with SEN and said he had to "pick it up as he went along".

Excerpt from case study report

The LSA said that they "had not received any training" and was told to "pick it up on the job".

Excerpt from case study report

Over a third of teachers interviewed in the MAST study said they had received no specific training to help them support the needs of the Statemented pupils they taught. Only two secondary school teachers mentioned having any input on SEND as part of their pre-service, initial teacher training. There were scarcely any explicit mentions in relation to training on instructional methods, teaching strategies or differentiation in either phase. It is noted that extensive curriculum and subject knowledge is a key factor in effective differentiation. There was little or no mention of the extent to which teachers or TAs possessed a high level of such

knowledge. However, we note our interview schedule did not contain an explicit question to address this point.

Secondary school SENCOs seemed aware of the lack of knowledge and skills of teachers in relation to SEND. They described some teachers being ‘overwhelmed’ or ‘did not know how to start’. However, new and recently qualified teachers seemed somewhat more prepared or at least knew what to do in order to gain the knowledge they felt they lacked.

“Being open and honest about it is probably the best way to go. So I spoke to him and asked him, you know, is there anything I need to change about my lesson for you... I like to think that it’s gone towards me understanding what he needs in a lesson”.

Teacher (NQT)

In secondary settings, there appeared to be a preference for in-house training, with fewer instances of staff attending training away from school than. In 11 cases, schools ran an in-house programme. Overall, attendance at in-school training session was typically described as voluntary (11). A key training forum for TAs in many schools were weekly meetings led by the SENCO (11).

Despite having a role in delivering structured interventions, only two TAs mentioned having been on training. There were no comments from TAs in relation to training in behaviour management, despite some of them having a role in covering lessons. Only a few teachers and TAs mentioned having any training to know how to work with one another in the classroom.

Overall, few opinions were shared about opportunities for and the quality of training, but those that did give a view (6 teachers; 7 TAs) were more likely to say that they had had no training (*‘I don’t know what to do to’*) or that it was limited (*‘I’ve had a little bit of training, but I’m still not sure what to do’*). Fewer teachers (4) and TAs (2) described training as either adequate or better (*‘I’m confident; I know what I’m doing’*).

Day-to-day preparation

Given what we have found in our previous research, including the MAST study, it was no surprise to find that in many cases, there was no allocated time for meetings between teachers and TAs (29). The most common reasons cited for this were demands on teachers’ time (17) and TAs’ hours of work preventing meeting time (7); they were unavailable when teachers were.

“That’s a big bugbear, I think, especially of the teaching assistants. You go into every lesson blind. But it’s been there for years and it’s not going to change. I mean, the only reason it works is because the work is at a level that everyone can access”.

TA

TAs always arrived late to lessons, then had to be quickly briefed on the lesson task on arrival. It was a common occurrence for teachers to ask TAs: ‘Do you know what we’re doing?’

Excerpt from case study report

In nine cases, there was some allocated time for teacher-TA meetings for which TAs' were paid.

TAs are in school until 4pm every day, so they can be involved in department meetings, planning of lessons, and kept in the loop with subject specific strategies. This has led to this group of professionals feeling more valued, and as though their skills are being properly utilised to the greatest extent.

Excerpt from case study report

It seemed more common for TAs to have regular briefings within one another, often via SENCO-led meetings (11). Revisiting the data from the Year 5 case studies, it is perhaps surprising to find that fewer primary teachers and TAs reported having allocated time to meet (6 out of 48 cases), compared with their counterparts in secondary schools.

It is generally thought to be more difficult to arrange liaison time in secondary settings, given the organisation of the school day. This is perhaps explainable in terms of the way some schools had subject-based TAs, who were able to make use of 'natural opportunities' to talk with teachers.

The SENCO said that the current provision [for planning] is "not great", as there is no dedicated time for teachers and TAs to meet. There are currently 26 TAs who are linked to departments, as opposed to individual children. The majority of the TAs will go into lessons linked with their subject and department. It is presumed that their knowledge will grow "organically as they are naturally with their teacher".

Excerpt from case study report

TAs are assigned to a department based on their preference and specialisms/expertise. This is so that TAs will become more knowledgeable about a subject and will get to know the curriculum. TAs should be in their departmental lessons 70% of the time. It is hoped that this means that they will [as the SENCO put it] "naturally, organically talk to teachers about planning".

Excerpt from case study report

In the majority of cases primary TAs and teachers met before and/or after school, and during break and lunch times. At Year 9, TAs' lesson preparation was similarly ad hoc and informal. Many managed to have very brief meetings before or after lesson (22), which sometimes relied on TAs' goodwill. To get around the lack of meeting time, teachers often provided TAs with lesson plans via email (19). In a quarter of cases (12), TAs provided feedback for teachers verbally or in writing. In seven cases, TAs had their own preparation time; fewer than in primary schools (13). As with the comments on training quality above, it was hard to obtain a sense of whether the quality of TAs' pre-lesson preparation was adequate to the roles they were given and tasks they were asked to support, as there were very few detailed mentions of this in the interviews with TAs and teachers.

Transitions

Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3

The case study data from the MAST and SENSE studies provide an insight into the experiences of transition between primary and secondary school. Interviews with parents/carers at Year 5 revealed that in 37 of 48 cases, a preferred transition destination had been identified. A mainstream school was the preferred destination in the majority of these cases (21), with a further two identifying a mainstream setting with an ARP. In the remaining 14 cases, a special school had been selected as the preferred choice.

By Year 9, we had identified the whereabouts of 43 of the original 48 pupils in the MAST study cohort. Four pupils were being educated in a school in a different LA; in two cases, this was as the result of a family move. We recruited 30 of the 43 pupils we found to the SENSE study. Of these 43 pupils, 22 were in mainstream, 20 were being educated in a specialist setting, and one was being educated at home.

In all, the LAs we worked with in order to locate pupils three years after the MAST study were unable to tell us the whereabouts of five pupils from the original cohort. Pupils with high-level SEND are one of society's more vulnerable groups, so for authorities with a statutory duty to not have known the whereabouts of 10% of this particular cohort, let alone whether they were receiving an education suitable to their needs, is a clear cause for concern.

In a third of cases from the MAST study (16 out of 48), work had also begun on preparing Year 5 pupils for the transition from primary, which included special trips to the destination school. There were palpable concerns about transition, particularly from parents/carers over whether their child would cope in a mainstream environment (12) and over potential for bullying and 'falling in with the wrong crowd' (10). These concerns seemed to be behind parents' and carers' decision to favour a special school over mainstream.

These concerns were echoed in the interviews conducted at Year 9, which allowed parents and their children to reflect on the transition from primary. In the main, where concerns about transition were expressed (14), they were consistent with the types of anxieties typically expressed by many young people. These included: navigating one's way around a much larger, unfamiliar environment; the much greater number of pupils; and the different set-up and pace of the school day. Peer relations (making new friends and encountering bullying) were a specific worry in 18 cases.

The consensus view across the interviews within individual case studies revealed that the majority of pupils experienced a positive and successful transition from primary school (29). One factor that was said to have made a difference was a 'settling in' period in a 'primary-style' environment or a nurture group (11). In seven cases, the pupil's experience of transition from primary was reported to have been more challenging.

Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4

Asked about the upcoming transition from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4, uppermost in the minds of the school staff (23) and the pupils (11) were the higher demands, expectations and workload of the GCSE curriculum. Some parents mentioned this specific issue and provided insight into the concerns their children had voiced.

"The GCSE exams are not differentiated. How do I differentiate so he understands, but not enough so that he can't complete the task? Am I setting them up to fail?"

Teacher

"I'm concerned with him coping and staying motivated in Key Stage 4 when the texts and challenges will be beyond his current capability"

Teacher

"There are some subjects he shouldn't be taking. He said he has to do either history or geography, but I think he should drop those and do extra English. I'm worried that he will be made to do French next year when he hasn't got English yet."

Parent

Staff stated that Key Stage 4 will be: "too data focused"; "too focused on attainment not progress"; "too structured and strict". [Pupil's] parent is worried he is being "set up to fail" in mainstream, and that this is very demoralising for him and is adding to his SEMH [social, emotional and mental health] needs.

Excerpt from case study report

The more academic nature of GCSEs and the removal of practical and vocational subjects from the curriculum emerged in a number of comments from SENCOs.

"Academically, quite concerned. All the courses we offer are very academic... I'm not sure how well he is going to access them... but what most of the less academic students do are the more practical ones, obviously he's got the issue there as well".

SENCO

"It's not unusual to offer children with SEN who are really struggling with GCSEs either an alternative course... But that is becoming increasingly difficult with the reduction of qualifications that the government are allowing us to offer. So it's having an adverse effect on SEN students as to what their future choices can be".

SENCO

Concerns extended to anxiety about examinations at the end of Key Stage 4 (4 pupils and 2 parents made specific mention of this), and how some of this might be alleviated through access arrangements (7). Several schools mentioned that there had been a deliberate gradual reduction of one-to-one TA support in order to prepare the pupils with Statements for life in Key Stage 4.

Mum feels [pupil] will struggle to access learning in Key Stage 4 to achieve GCSE grades. Teachers are also concerned about the examination process, as his understanding relies on the task being simplified with prompts.

Excerpt from case study report

In some cases, the distance between where certain individuals were in their learning and where they were expected to be, in order to succeed in end of school exams, were feeding into decisions about how and where these pupils might be educated in Key Stage 4 and beyond.

Some members of staff felt that [pupil] was already struggling significantly with the learning content of some courses, and others predicted that this was likely to be the case in future, particularly in the written component of courses. One teacher told me there was a lack of provision for Statemented students in Key Stage 5, as there was no funding for courses below Level 3. Consequently, many students with a Statement/EHCP had no choice but to find alternative educational provisions.

Excerpt from case study report

"[Pupil] definitely struggles without a doubt. You know he can't keep up with his classwork now. He's in Year 9 and I would say is more working as a Year 5 child. So how the hell is he going to do it when it comes to GCSE? It would be like asking a Year 7 child to sit a GCSE. It's stupid really... I have asked [specialist school] to come in and help us... We always knew from Year 7 that it was going to be a struggle to keep him here. We had the conversation in Year 7 with his parents. We will do our best to keep him here, but it wasn't going to be the right place for him long term. So he has managed up to Year 9."
SENCO

However, there was evidence in some schools that planning was in place to ensure pupils with Statements could exit secondary education with essential skills, regardless of the processes and expectations relating to assessment.

The SENCO described how the school were able to look at a bespoke package of education for Key Stage 4. There was a perception from school staff that this was only possible through the funding which came with the Statement.

Excerpt from case study report

"[Pupil] probably isn't going get a GCSE in maths, but that is not my aim for him. So long as he can use number, and he understands money and can read a bus timetable, and things like that, I think that is more important for him, in terms of his maths education. That is what I am interested in. I'm not sure if that is what the school are necessarily interested in, or the government is interested in, but I think with students like [pupil], we have to be realistic".

Teacher

Transition to post-16

Comments from pupils and parents relating to the transition from Key Stage 4 and to life beyond secondary schooling exhibited more aspiration: 13 pupils and six parents talked about careers and specific jobs (from train driver to zookeeper); and eight pupils and six parents talked about going to college. Childcare was a recurring pathway among female pupils.

Experiences of the SEND reforms

The questions researchers asked school staff and parents about the SEND reforms focussed mainly on the transfer of the Statement to an EHCP, but the open-ended nature of the interviews allowed other views and experiences of the SEND system and processes to emerge.

The local authorities (LAs) the 34 schools were located in were working to slightly different timetables to transfer all Statements to EHCPs, before the legislative deadline of March 2018 (DfE, 2016f). Only five pupils had had their Statement transferred at the time researchers visited schools (autumn and spring terms 2015/16), and in a further nine cases, the transfer was due for completion before the pupils reached the end of Year 9.

In over half of cases (29), the SENCO indicated that the schools had written or will write the EHCP. These claims require careful interpretation, as the legal responsibility for the preparation of the EHCP lies with the LA, not with the school (DfE, 2016f). In practice, under the new SEND system, schools can and do play a more pivotal role in drawing together the evidence and advice for EHCP assessments. This is partly pragmatic, as schools are closer to the pupil and family, and so better able to collect and present the requisite evidence. SENCOs' comments may additionally reflect perceptions relating to the division of labour: they were doing much of the work to prepare the EHCP, so in effect, felt they were writing it. In some cases, this seemed to be borne out of convenience or even necessity, as the pressures of workload and deadlines facing LAs connected to the transfer deadline were having the effect of requiring greater school involvement.

The SENCO said that [pupil's] transfer will be straightforward; no difficulties predicted. The school will "just convert it ourselves" without assistance from the LA, as they are overstretched

Excerpt from case study report

In 24 cases where there was sufficient evidence to make a summative judgement about the levels of engagement in and understanding of the SEND reforms. These were evenly split between cases where the school and parents/carers articulated a good grasp of the new system, and those where understanding was less secure. There was also inconsistency within an individual setting, with SENCOs, for example, demonstrating good knowledge and parents and/or teachers admitting to not knowing much about the new reforms or what role they might take in the development of the new EHCP. There was little evidence relating to pupils' awareness of the new system or role of the EHCP.

"It's a bit of paper that says I need more help"
Pupil

The study provided a useful opportunity to collect the views of SENCOs and parents on the new SEND system and the value of EHCPs. SENCOs commented on the more 'holistic' nature of EHCPs (10), insofar as they encompassed health and social needs as well as educational needs, and extended the age range covered (up to 25 years-old). SENCOs also mentioned how the new system was more collaborative (6) and how EHCPs had greater relevance to pupils' needs, compared with Statements (5). For parents, the main advantage was that the new processes gave their family a greater voice (4).

"It's a very supportive way of doing it, and I think it works a lot better, because you've got the child at the centre of the meeting... You don't get the whole picture in a Statement; you just get told what their needs are. It's more outcome focussed, which I think is miles better for the child, because they understand what it is they are supposed to be trying to do" ... "Once it is an EHCP, I think it will be much better, because it's not just about his education; it is about his hearing and his health and his social circumstances".
SENCO

In 17 cases, pupils with Statements were said to have been included in annual review and progress meetings; with only two clear instances of pupils being excluded from these processes.

[Pupil] is involved in his annual review. He said he has gone to the meetings and has the opportunity to say how he has been doing, what his achievements are, and "how I feel and what I think".

Excerpt from case study report

[Pupil] enjoyed attending her annual reviews, but said that they talk about how she is getting on in class, "but don't say anything about how I work. They don't really ask me".

Excerpt from case study report

Compared with Statements, parents saw fewer disadvantages to EHCPs than SENCOs did. SENCOs felt the new SEND system was more complex and time-consuming than the system it replaced (10), and felt the only main difference between the two systems was the nature of the paperwork (6) – specifically that there was more of it. Two parents expressed the same view.

"The paperwork involved in the transfer was a nightmare and is a huge pressure on schools".
SENCO

There were particular references made to the involvement of multiple agencies in the development and review of Statements and EHCPs, and a lack of clarity over the nature and specification and agreement of 'outcomes'.

The SENCO noted the difficulties in getting all external agencies to attend, whereby time/work pressures have already illustrated low attendance at meetings.

Excerpt from case study report

“The main challenge at the moment is people understanding what an outcome is. For school, an outcome would be that we want this child to speak in sentences, as currently they are only using single words. This would be brilliant outcome for the school, but the authority is saying this isn’t an outcome”.

SENCO

In the minds of a number of SENCOs, there were aspects to the new reforms that were uncertain, but would be worked through in the fullness of time.

“I’ve yet to do annual review for EHCP. EHCPs are supposed to be more child-centred, so I imagine it will involve the child. Not sure how it will work out in an annual review, having to look at outcomes. We’ll work that out as we go along, I’m sure”.

SENCO

A few SENCOs (3) said it was too early to tell if EHCPs and the new reforms would turn out to be better or worse than Statements and the previous system, while several more felt there were no perceived benefits or advantages to new reforms (5). Three parents echoed this sentiment. There were interesting commentaries on how the reforms were being implemented in LA areas, and what the implications might be for pupils with SEND. Several SENCOs and parents believed that in their LA, the threshold to obtain a EHCP was higher compared to a Statement.

“In {LA}, 50% of the kids applying for EHCPs haven’t got them. It’s a concern for [pupil]. When children don’t get EHCPs, it reduces resources and first to go would be the TAs. Unless they have an EHCP or Statement, they won’t get support in lessons. All TAs in school are with SEN students”.

SENCO

“The current system has made it harder to gain EHCPs. There is a conflict between highlighting a pupil’s success, but also acknowledging that this success has been due to the support they have had as a result of having a Statement. And if this were to be taken away, their success may decline”.

SENCO

The lower proportion of EHCPs being issued was also related to cuts to funding for SEND at the local authority level. Overall, this was not a topic that featured heavily in the staff interviews, which was perhaps surprising, given both the amount of media attention education funding has received over the period of the SENSE study, and the frequency and ferocity with which this comes up in our discussions with SENCOs and other school leaders in other areas of our work. The comment below provides a flavour of how (where discussed) funding issues impinged on decision-making relating to the pupils with high-level SEND.

“The school has faced massive financial cuts and the only place left to cut is support staff. Inclusion costs money. It’s sad, but it’s going to be the case that it’s cheaper to not develop provisions and encourage parents to send their children elsewhere – special” ... “What am I supposed to do then [when funding ceases]? Tell parents we can’t meet her needs?”

SENCO

Some views about whether specific individuals would qualify for an EHCP in future were linked to the nature of their current performance or progress.

“Yes, I’ve heard that [Statement might be changing to an EHCP]. I don’t know what I’ll have to do until I find out. Because [pupil’s] attendance was quite poor last year, they said his Statement might drop if he doesn’t start going in. But this three-and-a-half weeks, he’s been in”

Parent

School decided that they would not apply for an EHCP, as [pupil] does not need additional support and has showed growth in independence. The SENCO said: “He is a success story and has made positive choices”.

Excerpt from case study report

Asked about the value of having a Statement/EHCP, the view from school staff was that it was essential to securing the funding to pay for TA support (19) and other resources.

“When they’re Statemented... we’ve got funding, we’ve got the manpower to make sure that child is supported fully; that we know then that we can meet the needs; that we’re there for them”.

TA

“Statements are a powerful way of protecting funds allocated for pupils with SEN and are helpful in holding the school accountable”.

SENCO

“He is getting better. He is progressing with his reading, his writing and his spelling, but he’s still nowhere near the benchmark where he should be. In that instance, I think he should keep his Statement” ... “If he didn’t have on his Statement that he had to have SpLD [specific learning difficulty] teaching, he wouldn’t receive it, because I don’t have the funding to supply that SpLD teacher”

SENCO

Statements and EHCPs were also deemed useful for raising the profile of pupils’ needs within the school (9), for making academic progress (5), and addressing their social and emotional needs and/or health needs (5). Of the limited number of comments from parents, most felt that a Statement/EHCP was important for securing TA support (4) and raising the profile of their child’s needs (3).

There are strong similarities with the case study evidence from Year 5. The ‘untouchable’ legal status of the Statement and the guarantee of TA support enshrined it, emerged strongly in the interviews with school staff and parents/carers; the Statement and ‘TA hours’ were inextricably linked. Statements were necessary for successful inclusion (14), ensuring academic progress (10), and helping their social, emotional and behavioural development (9). Parents of children in both Year 5 and Year 9 said that the Statement was essential for securing a place in a mainstream school.

"[Without a Statement] he would not be anywhere near a mainstream school. He knows where he is. It's a big plus and massive achievement. Mixing in mainstream is very good for him. Without his Statement, he would have struggled".

Excerpt from case study report

"I wouldn't like to think where she'd be without a Statement".

Parent

Interestingly, in six cases at secondary school (and 12 cases at primary school) staff said that a Statement/EHCP made no difference to provision put in place, as the school would provide same level of support without one.

"Honestly, I don't think it does [make an impact]. You pick up student's needs through talking to them, through marking, through teaching. I don't think it does. Unless they've got something like [other pupil], where he is very autistic, that makes a big difference, but for [pupil], I don't think: 'Oh! he's SEN'. I just look at what I can do to support him and do it".

Teacher

Pupil progress and development

Our interviews with staff, parents/carers and pupils concluded with an invitation for interviewees to summarise the key areas of impact and development since transition into the school. This question was open-ended and intended to capture broad forms of progress and change, which were not limited to academic performance. In the majority of cases, comments on pupils' progress and development were often made at quite a general level (27). Comments from school staff, parents and the pupils were consistent within individual cases, so there was a shared view about the types of progress made.

The responses from school staff and parents at Year 5 were also made at a general level. Again, there was a high degree of internal consistency in the views expressed relating to individual pupils. Comments related to pupil progress in terms of: acquisition of literacy and numeracy (37); approaches to learning (35); peer relations (20); emotional and behavioural development (19); ability to manage in a mainstream setting (15); and speech and language skills (9).

Overall, the Year 5 case studies described a situation where, in the majority of cases, pupils had made considerable progress (over one, two or even three years) in their social and behavioural development, and this had been key in enabling them to 'cope' in a mainstream classroom. At Year 9, there were specific references to academic progress in the core subjects of English and maths (19). As the comment from SENCOs below illustrates, progress was spoken about in relative terms.

In 19 cases, improvements were noted in pupils' confidence and self-esteem. Improvements in pupils' emotional and behavioural development, and overall maturity, were evident in 14 cases. There were also specific references to improvements in social and peer relations (14).

In a small number of cases (about 4 each), progress was noted in relation to the pupil becoming more independent, enjoying school, and more able to maintain focus.

“He used to be really disruptive. Very, very disruptive. Found it hard to concentrate on anything. Now he seems quite motivated and quite settled, so he’s changed in that and he’s pushing himself a lot more now. You can see that he wants to do well. He always chooses to go in the hard group, so that’s good. So, yeah, he has changed”.

Teacher

“He’s got a lot of confidence now and he picks the hard tasks now... He knows what the bigger picture is, so he can see where it’s all headed. He’s constantly like: ‘How do I get this grade?’ ‘How do I get that grade?’... He’s not confident in his assessment of his own work, but he’s confident in that he can push himself sometimes”.

Teacher

“He takes on board the advice that teachers give him now... He’s been able to make progress, not always progress that he has been hoping for, but progress nonetheless”.

SENCO

“He has not progressed in his writing. He has progressed in maths, in his numeracy levels. So he has shown progress, but not as much as you would expect for a child in mainstream to”.

SENCO

In almost half of the 48 cases at Year 5, pupils’ academic progress was described as having ‘stalled’. The attainment gap between pupils with high-level SEND and typically-developing pupils was quite pronounced. It was noted that in some cases progress was difficult to ascertain due to the pupils’ reluctance to work without TA support (9).

There were far fewer comments of this nature at Year 9 (9), suggesting that progress in learning in the intervening four years was, at least in part, attributable to general maturation. Again, the potentially distorting effect of high amounts of TA support on determining precise levels of progress emerged (5).

“I think that she has made lots of progress with her social and emotional skills, but in terms of her learning, she plateaued”.

SENCO

“Two steps forward and three steps back. His retention is particularly poor. Basic maths is a problem still, such as times tables, etc”.

Teacher

Parents, more than school staff, picked up on developments relating to peer relations.

“He doesn’t have any true friends. He doesn’t get invited round anyone’s house or he doesn’t go out and play. It’s just me and him.”

Parent

Parents stated that [pupil] is struggling to make a stable group of friends. However, [pupil] feels that her classmates help to clear things up when she does not understand what they say when working in groups.

Excerpt from case study report

Factors school staff, parents and pupils identified as having had an impact and helping the pupil to make progress were: high quality provision put in place by the school (9); a carefully planned transition process (7); smaller class sizes (4); and organisational aids (e.g. maps and timetables) (4).

“Being in smaller groups has had a huge impact. Phenomenal”.

Parent

“I think he could easily get lost in a class of, you know, 30... Whereas because he’s got more individualised support, or the smaller classes, you can just keep an eye on what he’s doing, where he’s up to. Whereas I think he’d just get lost otherwise”.

Parent

“When [pupil] first came to [school], we didn’t think he’d stay the course. We really didn’t think it was a safe place for him. But again, with support and with teachers, and really being around other students of his age, boys and girls, it helped him massively grow”.

SENCO

As in the previous MAST study, the greatest single factor mentioned was TA support in relation to pupils’ learning, progress and development. This was clearly expressed by various school staff and/or parents in 26 cases. Interestingly, it was TAs who made such comments more than anybody else.

“Without the TAs, [pupil] would not cope in school”.

TA

“Without us she wouldn’t progress”.

TA

“Without support he can’t survive in school”.

TA

“I think a lot of [pupil’s] progress has been aided by [TA] support. Getting the right people”.

Teacher

“It has definitely helped. I have certainly noticed a difference in his maths since he has had one-to-one. Just having those extra hours, he is just gaining confidence, and that is really important.”

Teacher

“Without TA support, [pupil] would be “tragically unhappy”. He is now very happy and settled”.
SENCO

The praise and valuing of TAs found in both the MAST and SENSE studies is clearly important. However, as already mentioned, there is a sense that, largely due to gaps and weaknesses elsewhere in the school system, this praise is an expression of how the provision for pupils with Statements in mainstream settings continues to rely heavily on TA support.

Pupils in special schools

Locations for teaching and learning

There were very few comments about small class sizes for pupils with Statements in special schools. We speculate that this was possibly because it is rather 'taken for granted' feature of these settings.

"In English, for instance, they are streamed according to ability, but also according to learning need and for social reasons as well".

SENCO

In six out of a maximum 11 cases, it was claimed that pupils spent 100% of their time in classrooms. Despite the smaller class sizes, greater adult-pupil ratios and potential for a more dedicated, personalised curriculum, pupils were still withdrawn from the classroom for interventions and therapies (4).

Provision in specialist settings

Compared with mainstream schools, there was more consistency of agreement regarding the allocation of one-to-one TA support. In eight cases, school staff reported that they did not use this approach, and in only one case was it a feature of provision.

Teachers' role

As in mainstream schools, teachers in special schools viewed their role as being responsible for pedagogical planning (6 cases) and for assessment and target-setting (4). Key features of their role, in terms of teaching and procedure, were described in equal measure, although only a small number of teachers provided detailed enough information: questioning (3); clarifying and repeating information (3); reinforcing concepts (2); vs. prompting and reminding (3), encouraging and praising pupils (2), and helping them to stay on task (3). In about half of cases, teachers mentioned their role in promoting pupil independence (5). Only a few talked about the role in relation to behaviour management (2) or pastoral care (2).

In contrast with the interviews with teachers in mainstream, only one teacher in special schools explicitly mentioned giving pupils individual attention during lessons. The low number of responses may suggest teachers in specialist settings also do not find it easy to articulate what they do in relation to teaching and instruction for pupils with SEND. An alternative explanation is that this could be another example of the 'taken-for-granted' assumptions about special schools.

TAs' role

As with their counterparts in secondary mainstream settings, TAs in special school classrooms also tended to 'float' and 'circulate' (6). In contrast to teachers, TAs more readily described providing individual attention to the pupils in the study sample (6). In fewer cases, TAs were described as being used to free up teachers up to work with the pupil (3). The stigmatising effect of TA support was mentioned in two cases.

"These children have been very unhappy, isolated at school, singled out as being the different one, because they are being taken out or they have a TA with them all the time to enable them to get through the day. All the boys that have come here have hated that. That doesn't mean to say they have hated school; it is not a criticism of schools. It's just they are a square peg in a round hole, and it just doesn't work".

SENCO

As with teachers, TAs described the key features of their role almost equally in terms of aspects of teaching and procedure (again, there were only a small number of responses overall): questioning (2); clarifying and repeating information (5) vs. prompting and reminding (4), encouraging and praising pupils (4), and helping them to stay on task (5). In all cases, TAs promoted pupil independence (6). Some TAs had a role in relation to behaviour management (3) or pastoral care (2). They had no substantive role in pedagogical planning and assessment.

While we note that researchers interviewed only six TAs in special schools (compared with 54 in mainstream settings), again, the overall impression was that they did not find it easy to describe the 'support' and 'help' they gave to pupils. Therefore, what we earlier termed as a 'fuzzy notion of support' appears to extend to support staff working in specialist settings.

Expressions of differentiation

As with staff in mainstream schools, the use of attainment grouping was a way of handling differentiation in a notable proportion of cases (4). The use of TA-led interventions and catch-up programmes, delivered away from the classroom, was mentioned in five instances.

"Differentiation is in the form of ability grouping for work and teacher or TA support in completing it".

SENCO

Again, consistent with what we found in mainstream schools, teachers and TAs talked about differentiation at the lesson task level in two ways: for groups within the class (4); and for individuals (e.g. by providing a separate worksheet) (5). In three cases, staff referred to differentiation by outcome. Common with mainstream classrooms, in the majority of cases, practical differentiation was described in terms of the allocation and presence of TAs (8). Teachers and TAs again spoke about how this was achieved by 'modifying', 'rephrasing', 'simplifying' or 'breaking down' teachers' talk and instructions. Visual aids and physical resources were mentioned in half of cases, but there was just one explicit reference to the use of ICT/assistive technology.

Preparedness

Training and guidance

The picture painted of training and professional learning in specialist settings was very similar to what was found in mainstream schools. Once again, the interviews yielded too few detailed comments to obtain a grasp on how staff obtained the knowledge and skills required to work with pupils with high-level SEND. There were general mentions of having received training on types of SEND (again, autism, dyslexia and SLCN were most commonly mentioned), but there were references to sign language, occupation therapy, personal care, and handling and restraint, which were not evident in the mainstream interviews. There were no references to training on pedagogical practices. In at least one case, this issue seemed particularly acute in relation to supply teachers, who appeared to have little understanding of working in a specialist setting.

Supply teachers seemed to lack information about the ability levels of pupils; for example, asking, 'can they read?', in front of the class during an English lesson.

Excerpt from case study report

As in mainstream, training was very likely to be organised and delivered in-house. But in contrast, staff in special schools were much more satisfied with their training. However, there were few comments overall on this issue and on the opportunities for and the quality of training.

Day-to-day preparation

As with their colleagues in mainstream settings, in many cases there was no allocated time for meetings between teachers and TAs (5), though unlike staff in mainstream, specialist school staff did not express reasons for this. Again, TAs' lesson preparation was ad hoc and informal, with brief meetings held before or after lessons (6) and TAs sent lesson plans via email (5). TAs tended to provide feedback for teachers verbally or in writing (4).

"There is very little time for teachers and TAs to meet. That's a bone of contention for us. We would like a lot more. The TAs are only in school 9am to 2.45pm, and not always given PPA time... There's no time set aside. I think that's a problem".

Teacher

"I sometimes give [TA] a cheat sheet to help explain a complicated lesson, so they don't have to do any heavy thinking. I might have told [TA] the day before what the target is for the day, what I'm looking for, and questions she can ask the kids."

Teacher

In four cases, schools had allocated time for teacher-TA meetings within school day, but there were no explicit mentions of TAs having their own preparation time.

The meetings between TAs and the classroom teacher happen every day. There is so much to discuss and reflect on for the day, and it is also important to prepare for the next day. They are constantly trying to unpack a child's behaviour and finding out the reasoning, so that they can make the following day more effective.

Excerpt from case study report

As we found in the analysis of data from the interviews with staff in mainstream schools, the limited depth of the data on this issue made it difficult to obtain a clear sense of whether the quality of TAs' pre-lesson preparation was adequate to the roles they carried out in classrooms.

Transitions

Of the 43 pupils from the MAST study cohort whose whereabouts were known, 20 moved to a specialist setting. Three pupils transitioned from a mainstream primary to a mainstream secondary, and during Year 7, made transferred to their present special school. In all other cases, the pupils transitioned straight from a primary setting (at the end of Year 6) to a specialist setting, as mainstream was not deemed an appropriate setting.

"The primary school didn't understand his needs at all. They were refusing to meet his needs, with his diet, transitioning between rooms.... almost been nursing him to the end of primary school, because he was struggling. He was well and truly coached to get through his SATs".

Parent

In the main, where concerns about transition were expressed (3), they echoed the types of worry noted above for the pupils in mainstream (e.g. navigating one's way around a new and unfamiliar environment). The consensus view within individual case studies revealed that majority of pupils experienced a positive and successful transition (7). In just one case, the pupil's experience of transition from primary was more challenging.

"[Pupil] has been great! Considering he came from a mainstream. And when he first came to visit and for induction days, he was very nervous and very anxious, feeling perhaps that he stood out, and wondering who the other kids were. And joining halfway through with another year group at a different school can be difficult, but the school has felt that he has made a good transition".

Deputy Headteacher

Similar to mainstream, when asked about the upcoming transition from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4, what occupied the minds of school staff (4) and pupils (3) the most was the higher demands, expectations and workload of the Key Stage 4 curriculum. Just one parent mentioned this specific issue. Again, comments on the transition from Key Stage 4 to post-16 and beyond were more aspirational: most pupils and parents interviewed talked about getting a job and attending college. A few parents voiced some general concern about whether their child would be able to live independently.

Experiences of the SEND reforms

Only two pupils had had their Statement transferred at the time researchers visited schools (autumn and spring terms 2015/16), and in a further two cases, the transfer was due for completion before the pupils reached the end of Year 9.

As in the mainstream secondary schools, in over half of cases (6), the SENCO indicated that the schools had written or will write the EHCP. Again, this might reflect perceptions relating to the division of labour, though equally may suggest that special schools were taking on a responsibility that was lawfully within the remit of the LA.

As with the material from mainstream schools, summative judgments of individual case study reports revealed that the levels of engagement in and understanding of the SEND reforms were almost evenly split between cases where the school and parents/carers articulated a good grasp on the new system, and those whose understanding was less secure. There was also inconsistency within an individual setting, with SENCOs, for example, demonstrating good knowledge, and parents and/or teachers admitting to not knowing much about the new reforms and what role they might take in the development of the new EHCP. Given the nature of the young people they work with, we might argue that, compared with their mainstream colleagues, the lack of awareness of the reforms among staff in specialists setting is a little harder to explain.

"I haven't seen one [EHCP]. I have no idea what it is. Yet. From what I understand, it's just the same kind of information presented a different way".

Teacher

The interviews asked SENCOs and parents views about the new SEND system and the development and purpose of EHCPs. Compared to mainstream, a greater proportion of SENCOs drew attention to the way the process gave families a greater voice (3); again, SENCOs commented on the more 'holistic' nature of EHCPs, insofar as they encompassed health and social needs as well as educational needs, and extended the age range covered (2).

There were just two explicit mentions of pupils being included in annual review and progress meetings. Similar to their counterparts in mainstream, a few special school SENCOs expressed some doubts about whether the new system would be better in the long term. Overall, comments from parents were too few and too limited to arrive at a judgement.

In contrast to the findings from interviews with staff and parents of pupils with high-level SEND in mainstream settings, views about the value of having a Statement/EHCP were less about securing the funding to pay for TA support (1) and more about how it secures a place in specialist setting (6). It was also deemed useful for raising profile of pupils' needs within the school (2) and capturing details about pupils in one place (2).

"Without being here at [school] he would have struggled to make progress in mainstream. The discrepancy between what he was being asked to do and what he could do was massive. Now he has access to a curriculum he understands; he understands what's going on in lessons"

SENCO

“Without a Statement, he would still be doing nursery work”.

Parent

Pupil progress and development

As with mainstream, the comments on pupils’ progress and development were often made at a general level. Comments from school staff, parents and the pupils were consistent within individual cases, so there was a shared view about the types of progress made. The data from special schools remind us that pupils with SEND are not a homogeneous group. Compared with the capabilities of some of the pupils in mainstream schools, some pupils in specialist settings were working at very different levels.

[Pupil] is still working at P levels in literacy, numeracy and science... In the last year, she progressed to selecting symbols to make a coherent sentence. She can answer who, what and where questions.

Excerpt from case study report

In five cases, there were specific references to academic progress, especially in the core subjects of English and maths. Improvements were noted in pupils’ confidence and self-esteem (5), enjoyment of school (4), social and peer relations (3), emotional and behavioural needs and overall maturity (2). In just one case was a pupil’s progress described as having stalled in relation to the areas above (including learning).

The factors school staff, parents and pupils identified as having had an impact and helping the pupil to make progress were: high quality provision put in place by the school (4); smaller class sizes (4); and moving to a special school setting (2).

“He didn’t get supported like he should have in primary. He was falling through the cracks. When he got here, that all changed. Instead of being in a group of 30, he is now in a group of 10, so gets a lot more attention. Five kids to one adult in every class”.

Parent

“I’m happy with [pupil] coming here. When he was at primary school, he never used to be happy. He always used to come home and say people were picking on him because he’s different. But here everyone has their own needs, so they’re not checking and looking at what level he’s on”.

Parent

[Pupil] said his school experience was ten out of ten, and added that he cannot think of anything that could make it better.

Excerpt from case study report

While the role and impact of TA support emerged very clearly in the evidence from mainstream secondary schools, there were no explicit references to this made in the specialist settings.

5. Summary of results: eight overarching themes

Here, we draw out our conclusions on the results of the SENSE study in the form of eight overarching themes. We feed in results and conclusions from the MAST study, as appropriate, in order to provide a complete picture of the research conducted across the two studies.

1. Organising for learning

From separation to segregation: class size and grouping by attainment are stronger features of organisation for learning in secondary schools, compared with primary.

Putting together the key results from the observations on class size, composition of adults and attainment grouping, we find that in mainstream secondary schools, the educational experiences of pupils with Statements are characterised by being taught in small homogenous, low-attaining classes, with at least one TA present (in addition to the teacher). Their average-attaining peers, meanwhile, are taught in larger homogenous classes, with just the teacher present. At Year 5, pupils with Statements were found to spend over a quarter of their time away from the mainstream class, class teacher and their peers. When they worked in groups, it was mostly with other pupils identified as low-attaining and/or as having SEND. While the mainstream experience at Year 9 for pupils with high-level SEND features more in-class, teacher-led teaching, they are taught mostly in whole classes with other low attainers and those with SEND. In mainstream secondary schools, this segregation is very close to a form of 'streaming'. Secondary schools viewed these organisational arrangements for pupils with SEND as part of a wider strategy for teaching and learning. However, some Year 9 pupils felt there was a stigma attached to being in the 'bottom sets'.

2. Teaching assistants are central to SEND provision

The employment and deployment of TAs is a strategic approach to including and meeting the educational needs of pupils with high-level SEND in mainstream settings.

Average-attaining pupils in mainstream settings have comparatively little interaction with TAs, and, for those in secondary schools, TAs are not typically present in lessons. However, TAs are a consistent and central feature of the educational experiences of pupils with Statements in mainstream schools. It bears repeating that, historically, the context of the TAs' work in secondary schools relates to the hard-won efforts of schools and families to obtain additional resources via the Statement (now EHCP) process. While the proportion of time pupils with high-level SEND interact with TAs reduces when in Year 9, it nonetheless accounts for around one-fifth of all their interactions, and outweighs peer interaction. In Year 5, 27% of interactions were with TAs, again cutting across opportunities for interaction with classmates. Compared to interactions with teachers, pupils with Statements are more likely to be the focus of attention in their interactions with TAs, whereas the majority of their interactions with teacher are experienced as part of the class audience. Interactions with TAs, therefore, are more active.

Despite smaller class sizes and the increased number of adults in special school classrooms, we found little evidence that pupils in these settings have more one-to-one interactions with their teachers and TAs, compared to pupils with Statements in mainstream schools. In fact, pupils in special schools have noticeably fewer individual interactions with TAs than those with Statements in mainstream settings, but this is not offset by having distinctly more interaction with teachers. Interestingly, our results suggest pupils in special schools may have slightly more opportunities for independent work, compared with pupils in mainstream settings.

Though many mainstream schools reported they did not allocate a specific TA to individual pupils with Statements, in practice, there was a high reliance on and use of one-to-one TA support in both mainstream settings. In Year 5, we found that TAs took on much of the responsibility for the planning and the delivery of teaching of pupils with Statements: devising an alternative curriculum; preparing intervention programmes; augmenting or modifying teachers' lesson plans and tasks; and making a high volume of pedagogical decisions in their interactions with pupils. There was less evidence for TAs have a similarly high level of responsibility for planning at Year 9, although differentiation through TAs' moment-by-moment talk to pupils was a consistent feature (see below).

The potentially isolating effect of near constant one-to-one support were not as pronounced at Year 9 as they were at Year 5, and there was some evidence of attempts to move away for 'primary school' model of individual support in order to build independence. As with the use of attainment grouping, for some Year 9 pupils, TA support had a stigmatising effect. In addition, support was sometimes seen as unsolicited or could get in the way of opportunities to work independently.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that primary and secondary mainstream schools view the employment and deployment of TAs as a key strategic approach to including and meeting the educational needs of pupils with high-level SEND. TA support was identified as an important factor in pupil progress, with school staff and parents indicating that pupils with Statements would be unable to 'cope' in a mainstream setting without it. Interestingly, there were no explicit references to the impact of TAs or TA support in specialist settings.

3. Implicit and ambiguous notions of teaching and support

There is vagueness over what constitutes effective pedagogical approaches for pupils with high-level SEND. It is also unclear what 'support' from TAs is, and how it differs qualitatively from, and interacts, with what teachers do.

On the basis of our extensive analysis of the case studies, it was hard to define the pedagogical approaches teachers in both mainstream and specialist settings used to meet the learning needs of pupils with Statements, and how they acquired these skills and professional knowledge. Likewise, TA 'support' is a fuzzy concept. The broad features of the TAs' role, as identified by staff across the schools, overlapped with those of teachers, and it was hard to determine the extent to which the TA role differed qualitatively and meaningfully from what teachers did. One explanation might be that teachers are not adept at accurately reporting and describing what they do (Good and Brophy, 2002; Nuthall, 2007); in other words, they

struggle to make the implicit explicit. So, while we are not suggesting schools were not providing effective teaching and support for pupils with Statements, the staff working with them found it difficult to articulate what they did. Alternatively (or additionally), it may be further evidence of a schism in the perceptions teachers and TAs have of one another's role. Teachers may believe their input is required less due to pupils' having TA support; yet, TAs may adjust (or hold back) their input, because they do not wish to tread on the teacher's toes. As such, the responsibility for teaching is not fully agreed between the two roles, and this could lead to a duplication of effort and/or result in unfilled gaps.

It is also unclear how the widespread use of high amounts of individual, one-to-one support interacted with the role many TAs were reported to have in developing pupil independence. Getting the right balance of adult attention, the nature of support, and need for support appeared to be a complex, on-going challenge.

4. Differentiation takes multiple forms, but practical strategies lack precision

The concept and operationalisation of differentiation is expressed in multiple ways and work at different levels, but descriptions of practical strategies lack precision.

In mainstream settings, the concept and operationalisation of differentiation for pupils with Statements was variously described as ranging from broad organisational approaches to lesson level strategies. In over half of primary schools, setting Year 5 literacy and numeracy classes by attainment was described as 'first tier' differentiation, and within-class grouping in these subjects was referred to as 'second tier' differentiation. In secondary settings, allocation to lower-attaining sets was seen in some cases to obviate the need for differentiation at the task level.

At Year 5 and Year 9, some teachers provided an alternative, individualised task for pupils with Statements, but in the main they talked about differentiating tasks (usually, 'three ways') for groups of pupils, relative to their perceived ability. Often, however, this was often not enough to reach the pupil with the Statement. In these instances, TAs emerged as a key means of differentiation, by 'bridging' the learning in the moment. In both primary and secondary settings, differentiation at TA level was typically characterised by modifications to language – 'simplifying' and 'breaking down' teachers' talk and instructions – and repetition. It was difficult to get beyond these descriptors and uncover what these practical strategies looked like, and what drove TAs' decision-making in terms of how, when and why to use them in their moment-by-moment interactions with pupils with SEND. While clearly well-intentioned, how successful and sustainable this is as an appropriate and a long-term pedagogical strategy is questionable.

5. The persistent problem of preparedness

Overall, teachers and TAs in mainstream settings have limited opportunities to meet before or after lessons. This remains a key barrier to effective classroom teamwork.

A consistent theme in our work across mainstream and specialist settings, stemming back to the DISS project, has been the lack of time for teachers and TAs to meet, plan, prepare and feedback either side of lessons. This has consistently been found to be a greater problem in secondary schools; for example, due to the nature of the school day, and the fact the teachers share lessons with several TAs. Our results from the MAST and SENSE studies, somewhat surprisingly, show the problem as less acute in secondary schools. Some secondary schools have subject-based TAs, who were able to make use of natural breaks in the day to talk with teachers, which may explain the difference between settings. Overall, the general busyness of schools and TAs' contracted hours of work falling in line with the school day, are seen as barriers to impediments to creating liaison time with teachers.

There are gaps in teachers' and TAs' knowledge concerning meeting the needs of pupils with Statements.

There are concerns over how teachers across settings acquire skills and knowledge relating to SEND, and whether initial teacher education coverage and in-service professional learning is sufficient. This was also evident in special schools, although the sample of teachers surveyed was relatively small. New teachers in mainstream settings can be 'overwhelmed' or 'don't know how to start' with SEND. Induction training for TAs seemed rare; a number of TAs talked about 'picking it up on the job'. Typically, training opportunities for teachers and TAs tend to be on types of SEND, with attendance voluntary.

6. SEND is not a school priority

It is unclear where SEND ranks in the list of strategic priorities, and how well equipped and motivated school leaders are to drive sustainable change and improvement for SEND at the organisational level.

We have seen that we were unable to find evidence of an effective and theoretically-grounded pedagogy for pupils with SEND in the instructional approaches used by either teachers or TAs, across all the schools that participated in the MAST and SENSE studies. Drawing this together with the points above relating to the organisational and operational approaches to including and teaching pupils with Statements in mainstream settings, it is difficult not to question the overall effectiveness of provision and quality of the educational experiences available to these pupils, compared to that received by their (non-SEND) peers.

We are, therefore, left to query the effectiveness of leadership for SEND in mainstream schools, and its status within the drive towards whole school improvement. While it is true we did not interview headteachers as part of the SENSE study, in the evidence from interviews with SENCOs, teachers and TAs, there appeared to be an absence of strong leadership in primary and secondary schools with respect to SEND. With regard to the wider context in which our research took place, it is difficult not to conclude that the present funding and

staffing challenges facing schools are not having some bearing on the prioritisation of SEND. Whilst our data collection did not set out to attend directly to this issue, a recent large-scale survey found just 2% of secondary school leaders and 5% of primary school leaders cited provision for pupils with SEND as their greatest challenge for the forthcoming year (2017/18). Budget pressures and lack of funding (53% secondary; 50% primary), workload (8% secondary; 12% primary), and teacher recruitment and retention (15% secondary; 9% primary) are of overwhelmingly greater concern, looking ahead (The Key, 2017).

We restate our urgent call for school leaders to rethink the role of TAs with regard to meeting the needs of pupils with Statements. We do not doubt that TAs and teachers are doing the best they can in challenging circumstances, but on the basis of the findings from the present study and the earlier MAST study, it is difficult to see how mainstream schools would manage to accommodate the inclusion and teaching of pupils with high-level SEND if TAs were to disappear from classrooms tomorrow.

In an increasingly autonomous school-led system, it falls to headteachers to develop a more inclusive ethos. When it comes to SEND, it is of foremost importance that teachers are skilled and empowered to take on the lead responsibility for the pedagogical planning and teaching of pupils with Statements – as they already do routinely for other pupils. We argue strongly that TAs have an important role in enabling teachers to do this. But if, as part of these arrangements, TAs retain a pedagogical role – teaching pupils with or without SEND – it is essential that this role is carefully thought through, and developed and supported with appropriate training. We see the role of the SENCO as being strategically and operationally important in this regard, in terms of informing and influencing decision-making and practice. Three years into the implementation of the SEND reforms, there may be a case for a formal evaluation of the extent to which the SENCO role is suitable for developing the quality of provision, and whether this needs revisiting in order to embed effective provisions and improve outcomes for those with SEND.

7. Transitions: transfer between phases and settings

There is little difference between the transition-related anxieties of pupils with and without SEND. Transition is mostly a success for pupils with Statements.

Just under half of pupils from the MAST study cohort had transitioned from a mainstream primary school to specialist setting. The view from schools and parents of children in special schools was that these pupils were now in a more appropriate setting. Their needs were less likely to be met in the same way had they stayed in a mainstream setting. There were no specific transfer issues for the pupils in original cohort who had transitioned to a mainstream secondary school. The types of anxiety pupils experienced were no different to those one would expect any other Year 6/7 to have. In almost all cases, transition to a bigger, busier secondary school had been a success. This speaks to the efforts secondary settings had put in to helping pupils settle in, which would have included support from TAs. There was some anxiety about the step up into Key Stage 4. The expectations and demands of new GCSEs and exam-only assessment route were felt to be a particular challenge for pupils with Statements, and could put them at a disadvantage in terms of securing qualifications.

LAs were unable to trace 10% of pupils from the MAST study cohort. This is a concern.

Working with LAs, we identified the whereabouts of 43 of the original 48 pupils involved in the MAST study. A number of LAs had seemingly lost track of five pupils from the original cohort. Given the vulnerability of pupils with high-level SEND, and the statutory duty of LAs to provide an appropriate education for these pupils, this is a clear cause for concern. Amid concerns of a fragmented system (Bernades *et al.*, 2015), processes for reporting the movement and transfer of pupils with SEND between schools and LAs must be watertight.

8. Experiences of the 2014 SEND reforms

There are varied understandings of new SEND processes among school staff and families, and there are both advantages and drawbacks to the new system.

There was variation in the extent to which teachers, TAs and parents understood the new SEND processes. Though benefits were noted, there was concern and scepticism regarding the complex and time-consuming nature of the new processes and paperwork. The benefits of the new system identified by SENCOs and parents relate to: the 'holistic' nature of EHCPs; the extended coverage in terms of age (an EHCP can be in place up to the age of 25); and the more collaborative processes of assessment and review. Families liked that their voice was more likely to be heard. The concerns, which were expressed by SENCOs, mainly reflected the challenges of multi-agency working (it was difficult to get all external agencies to attend the same meetings) and identifying outcomes. The high volume and time-consuming nature of the new 'paperwork' occupied the minds of SENCOs. They perceived this to be the most noticeable difference between the new system and the old system.

One noteworthy point was that over half of schools (mainstream secondary and special schools) said that they (in particular, the SENCO) would 'write' the new EHCP, at the point of transfer. It was not clear whether this reflected a delegation of this duty from the LA to the school (which is against the new Code of Practice), or a reflection of the fact that, as schools are closer to the pupil and family, they are pragmatically better positioned to collect and present the requisite evidence for the drafting of the EHCP (which is very much in the spirit of the new Code). These claims require careful interpretation, and without further evidence, it is perhaps inappropriate to comment any further.

The emphasis on securing resources to enable inclusion has not been sufficiently challenged.

There remains a strong association in the minds of schools and parents about the relationship between statutory assessment, EHCPs and individual TA support. Statements/EHCPs were viewed as essential for securing the funding for TA support, which in turn, ensured and facilitated the inclusion of pupils with high-level SEND in a mainstream setting. In the MAST study, we concluded that hours were the currency of Statements, and we understood that the new reforms (forthcoming at the time) would address this issue. On the basis of the case study interviews at Year 9, which took place in the second year of the SEND reform's implementation, it appears that the mindset that 'Statement[/EHCP] = hours = TA = one-to-one support = pupil's needs met' (Webster, 2014) is residual within the system. While the

legal status of the Statement/ECHP clearly gives families a degree of confidence in terms of securing an appropriate setting for their child, this situation calls to mind what Sikes *et al.* (2007) refer to as the 'yes buts' of inclusion: how the inclusion of pupils with SEND is conceived as being contingent on available resources, somewhat undermining its power as an educational principle.

6. Conclusions

The research programme reported here combines the SEN in Secondary Education study and the Making a Statement study, both of which collected systematic data on the educational experiences of pupils with Statement in mainstream and special schools. This was achieved through 1,340 hours of classroom observation, over the 2011/12 and 2015/16 academic years, and supported with detailed pupil-level case studies, drawing together data from nearly 500 interviews, documentation and researchers' field notes. The collation of findings from the observations and case studies led to the summation of the main messages from across the two studies, in terms of eight overarching themes. In this final section of the report, we first describe some of the strengths and limitations of our methodology, and then position the findings in relation to the existing research in the field. We then turn to the implications of the findings on policy and practice, and set forward some specific recommendations for stakeholders at different levels of the education system in England.

We cannot conclude this report without making it clear that there was some evidence of good practice in a number of schools, and we have drawn attention to these examples in the reporting of the case study data. It would be incorrect and unfair to suggest that schools had 'given up' on the pupils who find learning and/or engaging with learning more of a challenge than others. Spending the best part of a week observing at close quarters, and discussion with practitioners, parents/carers and the pupils themselves, once again, brought home how schools make every effort to attend to the needs of pupils with SEND. It is important to the interpretation of findings, and the recommendations that flow from them, to not lose sight of the context in which our research has been conducted. Schools are in a period of intense flux and uncertainty, in terms of funding shortages, the effects of high stakes school accountability, the implementation of numerous (and sometimes competing) policy initiatives, and the unclear future of long-standing support structures, such as local authorities. At the time of writing (June 2017), a snap general election in the UK has weakened the incumbent Conservative government, adding yet further uncertainty to what might lie ahead for schools.

There were, then, examples of TAs being deployed to work with other non-SEND pupils to allow the teacher to spend time with pupils with SEND, as part of a group or on a one-to-one basis. Although not always explicit in the SENSE study data, this implies that the recommendations we have made elsewhere in relation to better TA deployment (Sharples *et al.*, 2015; Webster *et al.*, 2016) has had some success. Compared with what we found in our previous DISS project, the practical guidance and actionable strategies we developed in collaboration with schools – and prompted by the DISS project results – are taking root in some classrooms.

The SENSE study is not without its limitations. Firstly, we recognise that our research focussed mainly on pupils whose primary need was related to cognition and learning, and so do not represent the full range of complex and sometimes co-occurring needs for which Statements/EHCPs are granted. As we have highlighted throughout this report, 'pupils with Statements/EHCPs' are not a homogeneous group. Similarly, the study was limited only to pupils in middle of the five secondary-aged year groups (Year 9). It is a shame that a greater number of special schools did not take part in the SENSE study. Of the 13 pupils from the MAST study cohort of whose whereabouts we knew, but for who we were unable to secure

consent, nine attended a special school. The case study data from the special schools was somewhat thinner, relative to the case studies from mainstream schools.

Overall, the innovative approach to conducting the fieldwork (training and deploying trainee EPs) was a success, and we are delighted that those who participated valued and gained from the experience. We provide a summary of fieldworkers' reflections of their involvement in the SENSE study in Appendix 5.

The SENSE study in context

The SENSE study's focus on secondary mainstream settings adds an important contextual layer relating to the way teaching and learning is organised for pupils with SEND. In primary schools, pupils with Statements experienced a high degree of separation from the teaching environment (e.g. the classroom and the teacher). But in secondary settings, we observed a form of segregation with parallels to 'streaming': lower-attaining pupils and those with SEND were taught alongside one another, with one average- and higher-attaining pupils taught in other classes. What is more, the classes for those with SEND tend to be smaller and contain one (and sometimes two) TAs, as well as the teacher. The rationale for these organisational arrangements is ostensibly to assist struggling pupils; yet, the evidence for its effectiveness, in terms of improving outcomes, suggests otherwise (Blatchford *et al.*, 2012; Webster and Blatchford, 2013a; 2015)

At the teaching and pedagogy level, evidence from the SENSE study case studies echo and add to our understanding of how schools conceive and operationalise instruction for pupils with high-level SEND. Implicit and ambiguous notions of 'teaching' – and how that is distinct from the equally fuzzy notion of 'support' – plus the absence of a nuanced take on differentiation and theoretically-grounded pedagogical approaches, suggest there is a gap in teachers' knowledge when it comes to SEND. What is more, the persistent lack of time for training and preparation implies there is a considerable lack of opportunity to address these deficits in teaching. In our experience, there is no shortage of desire among teachers for this kind of professional input; the concern it is that circumstances, in terms of demands on teachers' time, workload pressures, and so on, conspire against it.

This summation of the organisational structures and operational contexts within which pupils with high-level SEND are taught in mainstream settings leads us to a profound and troubling thought: to what extent is the systemic use of TAs to facilitate the inclusion and teaching of these pupils compensating or covering for failures elsewhere in system? Put another way, if TAs were removed from the system tomorrow, and all other things remain equal, how effectively would schools manage without them – and for how long? This is far from rhetorical question, because TAs numbers are almost certainly set to decline over the coming years.

A recent survey involving a representative sample of 1,182 school leaders and 1,257 governors from mainstream schools in England found that 68% of secondary schools planned to reduce support staff and increase class sizes as part of their plans to make savings in the 2017/18 academic year (The Key, 2017). Interestingly, data from the latest School Workforce Census (DfE, 2017b) show the number of TAs actually increased by 1% between 2015 and 2016. However, this overall, though modest, rise masks an emerging trend in secondary

schools, which shows TA numbers declined by 4% since 2015, and by 8% since a 2013 high of 54,400. There is, in any case, a drag effect with the census results. Data are collected in November, which tends to be before schools have decided their staffing for the following academic year. What this means is that the full extent of the reduction to the TA workforce, which the anecdotal and survey data suggest are inevitable and imminent, will not be evident until the 2017 census data are published in June 2018.

In the sections that follow, we draw out the implications for government policy and practice at the LA and school level. The recommendations we make are not in response to the imagined scenario above of a sudden loss of TAs, but with a view to a more balanced system, where effective support from TAs is part of a coherent approach to including and teaching children and young people with high-level SEND.

Implications for policymakers

Slee (2012) suggests that where SEND policy has majored on diagnoses and mechanisms of individual support, it has given teachers 'permission to withdraw, while specialists or hired aides get on with the task of inclusion'. Wedell (2005) in the UK and Giangreco and colleagues (2005; 2007) in the USA argue that the increased number, and sustained use, of TAs working with pupils with SEND has staved off debates about how we 'do inclusion'. As Warnock (2005) suggests, 'inclusion should not mean being involved in a common enterprise of learning, rather than being necessarily under the same roof'.

The central issue is that we have drifted toward a systemic practice that, although well intentioned, can be seen as a proxy for the long-standing and unresolved matter about how pupils with SEND are effectively taught and successfully included in mainstream settings. To clarify, it is not TAs that are the 'problem'. We have been very clear in our writing on this topic that TA support should be part of a wider suite of responses to meeting the needs of pupils with high-level SEND – not the default setting. Peacey (2015) addresses the issue head-on, calling for a 'more robust government challenge to the TA as the first line of support... perhaps by suggesting alternatives such as part-time, school-based specialists in SEND'. As we discuss later, recent policy developments in the UK point towards an urgent situation where this debate needs to be put back on the table. Given the potential positives a more inclusive approach to education has for pupils with SEND – one that does not disrupt provision for, or have a detrimental effect on, pupils without SEND – the broader reasons for the lack of progress in the UK deserve some attention.

There are good reasons policymakers should consider supporting system reform that would lead to more inclusive forms of schooling. The evidence suggests inclusive educational settings can confer short- and long-term benefits for *all* learners, in terms of improvements in reading and mathematics, higher rates of attendance, increased likelihood of completing formal education, and participation in post-secondary education. A greater proportion of pupils taught in inclusive environments go on to find employment and live independently, compared to those who are not (see reviews by Hehir *et al.*, 2016; Kalamouka *et al.*, 2005).

Secondly, notwithstanding a proposed new national funding formula for schools (the future of which, at the time of writing, is far from clear), when it comes to SEND funding, local

authorities have been severely stretched for some time – and worse may yet come. This matters, because pupil numbers are rising. The DfE (2016g) predicts a 15% increase in the number of children and young people requiring a place in a special school between 2016 and 2025; in raw numbers, that figure represents 14,000 pupils. So far, there appears to be no central plan for either creating extra places in existing schools, or building new schools to meet demand. The dysfunctional nature of the current free schools policy is, as it stands, insufficient to the task of addressing this structural shortage of places. It makes sense, therefore, to look for and use the available capacity in mainstream schools, and grow it wherever it is feasible to do so.

Thirdly, the perverse incentives and behaviours that have evolved within the system, which affect how schools approach the inclusion of those with SEND already within the system, must be addressed. We found no evidence of ‘off-rolling’ in schools we visited as part of the SENSE study, but a small number of pupils from our original MAST study cohort were untraceable. We cannot say what factors were the cause of this, but given the high level of mobility within our cohort, we speculate it is more likely to be a consequence of a family move, rather than a failing associated with schools. The safeguarding issues, however, are self-evident, and while the government’s response to its consultation on improving information in identifying children missing in education (DfE, 2016h) identified the need to improve information sharing between an increasingly number of autonomous schools and their LAs, it did not address the issue of information sharing *between* LAs.

While the reasons why pupils are absented from schools are numerous and complex – there are factors that pull as well as push – several commentators have identified the process of school academisation and pressure of league table performance as a factor (Lehane, 2017; Mansell and Adams, 2016; Norwich, 2014; Nye, 2017; Peacey, 2015). In their report, commissioned by the National Union of Teachers, on SEND provision following the introduction of the 2014 reforms, Galton and MacBeath (2015) describe the practice of ‘strategic rationing’. Some primary and secondary schools had set a limit of two pupils with high-level SEND per class. The school staff they spoke to argued that they did not have the capacity, expertise and resources needed to adequately meet need beyond this number. Neighbouring schools that took a more principled approach, but admitted that welcoming these pupils had incurred ‘reputational damage’.

There is a potential case for using the national school inspection framework to drive system change; for example, by making the provision and outcomes for pupils with SEND a limiting judgement. In other words, the overall grade for a school cannot exceed the grade given to this particular facet. However, given that there can be unintended consequences to using the accountability system as a mechanism for school improvement, this suggestion would require careful thinking through and trialling.

Recommendation for policymakers

The government’s stated desire to create a self-improving, school-led system means, in theory, individual schools and clusters of schools (i.e. multi-academy trusts) will have greater influence of what happens in and across their settings. For this reason, we reserve our main recommendations for local authorities and, moreover, schools. Here, we make just one important suggestion to policymakers.

- As part of robust safeguarding procedures, create a central record of the whereabouts of pupils with Statements/EHCPs, in terms of where they are receiving their education. Make it a statutory duty for LAs to report all pupil transfers and relocations, into, within and from the LA, to a central body, specifying the exact destination.

Implications for local authorities

The SENSE study presented an opportunity to investigate schools' and families' experiences of the implementation of the 2014 SEND reforms, which were introduced after the MAST study and before the start of the SENSE study. In line with the available literature on this topic, our findings suggest that the reforms have, in the main, been well received. Although, the varying degree to which they are understood by teachers and parents, suggests that more work is needed on raising awareness. We recognise that this is an issue schools should address independently, but LAs could take a strategic role locally to assist this process.

In particular, LAs could use an awareness campaign to address the central issue that emerged in the case study data from both the MAST study and SENSE study. That is, the way in which there remains a strong association in the minds of schools and parents about the relationship between statutory assessment, EHCPs and securing individual TA support. The intrinsic reasons why this persists are understood (see Webster, 2014), and we are fully on the side of families who describe the assessment process as a long and stressful 'battle', in which they feel they hold a weaker position against the LA, which oversees both the process and the stewardship of resources (Hartas, 2008; Jones and Swain, 2001; Lindsay, 2007; O'Connor, 2008; Penfold *et al.*, 2009; Runswick-Cole, 2007; Truss, 2008). We also recognise that LAs should not be cast as the villains of the piece, either. There are contextual reasons affecting LAs, relating to funding and capacity, that cannot be overlooked.

The evidence from the SENSE study suggests that 'TA support' as an end in itself is residual within the reformed system. We find ourselves restating our recommendation from the MAST study that this should be challenged. What is evident now, however, is that there is a distinct lack of alternatives to TA support. It is, perhaps, small wonder families feel they must 'fight' for diminishing resources, because it is all that is on offer (Webster, 2014). Again, we see how the reliance on the use of TAs as the primary means of how schools 'do inclusion' is a proxy for a systemic and long-standing failure to develop alternative approaches, such as more appropriate teaching (more on this below). The central point, then, is what can be done now. Some LAs are intending to refer to bands of funding, rather than specify a set number of hours of TA support. While this approach has some merit, it is a bit of a grey area within SEND law (Webster, 2016). Here, then, we make one over-arching recommendation for LAs that underpins a principled approach to assessment and, crucially, the provision to which it leads.

Recommendation for local authorities

- When drafting EHCPs, emphasise the quality of support (i.e. who provides pedagogical input and how), not the quantity of support (i.e. TA hours). Work with the educational psychology service to ensure early intervention with families and help them understand and advocate for this.

Implications for schools

The emerging research on and evaluations of the impact and implementation of the 2014 SEND reforms suggest the intention to improve engagement and outcomes for children and young people with SEND does not fully align with shifts in mainstream educational policy and practice. Implementing the SEND Code of Practice at the school-level can be frustrated by practices in response to what are perceived as higher profile and more pressing government directives (Lehane, 2017). An advantage of an autonomous, sector-led system is that schools can take action outside of the policy and political context to address some of the persistent problems our research has uncovered. We view schools as the more effective engines of change, capable of rethinking their approach to the way provision is made for pupils with SEND. The authoritative Cambridge Primary Review reminds us that we ‘cannot wait’ for changes in wider societal or educational ecosystems (e.g. schools and classrooms) to become ‘more equitable and inclusive’ (Alexander, 2009). Schools can, and should, drive change where government vacillates, flounders or directs attention and resources elsewhere.

We recognise the current acute financial pressures facing schools, the challenges presented by staff recruitment and retention, and the turbulence caused by big changes to curriculum and assessment. Therefore, we take a pragmatic approach to our summary of the implications and recommendations for schools in a way that is attentive to the prevailing political and economic winds framing and influencing organisational decision-making. We suggest there are two key areas in which school leaders can act in line with the evidence to introduce less exclusory or segregational practices, and to improve teaching for pupils with SEND.

Leading change: towards a more inclusive organisational approach

Black-Hawkins’ (2012) review of commercially-available guidance on developing inclusive practice found a predilection for ‘quick fix’ strategies ‘addressing fairly superficial concerns’, and which positions inclusive practice as an ‘add-on’. We agree that surface treatments are unlikely to produce either coherent and equitable educational practices, or help close the attainment gap between pupils with SEND and others. We must recognise, therefore, that the fundamental reappraisal and reconfiguration of current priorities and practices concerning pupils with high-level SEND in mainstream schools is a long game. Accordingly, change of the nature we believe is required is necessarily a leadership issue.

The situation that emerges from the SENSE and MAST studies with respect to class size is troubling, and counter to what is observed in education systems elsewhere in the world. Pupils with high-level SEND in mainstreams schools are taught in much larger classes in primary settings than they are in secondary settings. It is difficult not to conclude that class sizes at primary level are too large for the effective teaching of pupils with SEND in mainstream schools. Together with the fact that there are far more TAs working in primary settings than in secondary settings, this could be a reason why primary schools have evolved to rely so heavily on the use of TA support, and on teaching outside the classroom. Under current circumstances, schools will understandably view the suggestion to reduce class size as beyond their means. However, secondary school leaders in particular could, for example, adopt grouping strategies that militate against the more harmful effects of streaming or ‘hard’ setting. This would include: using only attainment data as the only basis for composing groups; ensuring porosity between groups; balancing groups on the basis of frequent

assessment; and making sure the best teachers do their fair share of teaching more challenging groups.

Finally, we need to consider institutional levers that can influence school leaders' decision-making and action, so that they comport themselves in a manner compatible with the needs of pupils with SEND. Schools are increasingly becoming clustered in multi-academy trusts, which adds another layer of influence and potential to 'get it right' for those with SEND.

Recommendations for schools

- Secondary schools could take the bold step of organising grouping by mixed attainment, for at least some subjects and contexts. Compared with classes organised on the basis of 'ability', mixed attainment teaching has greater potential to improve outcomes for *all* pupils (see Kutnick *et al.*, 2005; Taylor *et al.*, 2016).
- In lessons, teachers should ensure pupils with SEND are not routinely grouped together for paired or group work, but have opportunities to interact, work with and learn from other peers.
- Schools must be mindful of institutional arrangements and classroom practices that result in pupils with Statements/EHCPs having less time with teachers, relative to other pupils. Instead, schools must organise and maximise opportunities for pupils with SEND to receive high quality teaching as much as possible.
- School leaders should rigorously define the role and contribution of TAs in relation to SEND provision, and take steps to ensure they supplement, not replace, teachers. We have provided extensive practical guidance on this (see Webster *et al.*, 2016; Sharples *et al.*, 2015).
- At the individual and multi-school level, governing bodies and boards of trustees, together with leadership teams, should institute career progression systems for teachers and leaders throughout the organisation that are contingent on evidencing practice that has a demonstrable impact on outcomes for pupils with SEND.

Teaching for SEND: creating confident teachers

The expert group that provided evidence for Menzies and Baars' (2015) paper on those at risk of exiting the school system (a group they refer to as 'pushed out' learners) argue that young people are 'rarely pushed out because schools do not want to help them; more often it is because these young peoples' needs are so far outside the norm that schools, in their current form, are not equipped to support them'. This suggests to us that much more needs to be done at all levels to improve the confidence and competence of teachers, so that they are more able to meet the educational needs of pupils with SEND as part of their routine lesson planning and classroom teaching.

As we approach the 40th anniversary of Baroness Warnock's report on SEND, we are drawn to her conclusion that 'some 40 years will need to elapse' before the English education system is

at a point where all teachers had undertaken adequate SEND training as part of their initial training, and thereby have the requisite skills to teach these pupils effectively (DES, 1978). Hodkinson (2009) draws attention to repeated missed opportunities to address this situation: government rhetoric on the issue of SEND in initial teacher training (ITT) has come to sound, in his view, 'like a scratched record'. Indeed, the most recent review of ITT explicitly recommended that SEND 'should be included in a framework for ITT content' (DfE, 2015). The government has so far failed to adopt this recommendation. We can only restate our conclusion from the MAST study that SEND should be a staple of initial teacher education and a constant topic in teachers' in-service professional learning.

Furthermore, this coverage must extend beyond descriptive content of different types of SEND, as school described to us in both the MAST and SENSE studies. It must include pedagogy. Lehane's (2017) analysis of the successive SEND Codes of Practice reveals a persistent absence of conceptual and theoretical underpinning, and a consistent failure to consider what inclusive practice might look like. 'Similarly, there is no mention of models of disability, of the "special pedagogy" debate, nor disability-friendly practice or universal design, nor any interrogation of the relationship between disability and standards, poverty or minority'. We might explain this historical failure in terms of the inherent contestability and difficulty of defining a clear and grounded concept of 'inclusive practice'. In a careful dissection of the conceptual and practical challenges of defining and operationalising inclusive pedagogy, Norwich (2013) concludes that this term is multi-levelled and multi-directional, and used interchangeably to refer to matters relating to what it is (curricula), how it is achieved (approaches to teaching and learning) and where (in which settings) it occurs. This debate additionally melds with theoretical and practical considerations relating to notions and expressions of 'differentiation', and the very existence of, or need for, 'SEND pedagogy'.

There is, in any event, a paucity of quality research evidence, especially in the UK, about pedagogic practice for pupils with SEND in mainstream settings. A systematic literature review by Rix *et al.* (2009) on this topic (for the UK government) yielded 28 papers for in-depth analysis – just 1% of the total they started out with (2,982) – and only ten of these scored well in terms of research design. How, then, do we reconcile this apparent lack of evidence within the literature on what good inclusive practice looks like with the clearer, more substantive evidence on impact? As we have already suggested, one explanation might be that teachers are not adept at accurately reporting and describing what they do (Good and Brophy, 2002; Nuthall, 2007). Another explanation could be that SEND pedagogy/pedagogies have spectral-like qualities: approaches to teaching for pupils with learning difficulties may not be as materially different and distinguishable from approaches that work for all learners, as we perhaps intuitively believe (Davis and Florian, 2004).

Either way, we lack the empirical evidence to know. While researchers appear able to define features and impacts of inclusive settings, the characteristics of teaching and curricula (the 'how' and the 'what') are less clear. Indeed, we find the evidence from the systematic reviews of the impact of inclusive approaches (Hehir *et al.*, 2016; Kalambouka *et al.*, 2005) is reticent on the practical issues of implementation. Broad statements about success are worthy, but lack precision: it is not exclusively a matter of additional financial resources; more or better training; and teachers and other professionals needing to 'regularly engage in collaborative problem-solving' (Hehir *et al.*, 2016). Consequently, the active ingredients of effective

'inclusive' classroom teaching and learning for pupils with (and without) SEND remain elusive.

Recommendation for schools

- Schools should undertake a deep internal review of teaching quality in order to identify practitioners who are particularly skilled at improving engagement and learning for pupils with SEND. Video excellent teaching and create opportunities for teachers to reflect and distil the essence of effective techniques. Make the implicit explicit, and bring to scale.

Further research

Carrying on from the final recommendation for schools, there is a clear need for the UK research community to address the lack of quality empirical evidence on about effective pedagogic practices for pupils with SEND in mainstream settings. This is an equally clear need for this research effort to move beyond desk-based literature reviews, and into schools and classrooms. Researchers should collaborate with teachers on the task of drawing out their conscious and unconscious pedagogic competences.

In the initial scoping and groundwork for the SENSE study, we were struck by the lack of up-to-date research in secondary schools on the effect of organisational arrangements for pupils with SEND, such as attainment grouping and the deployment of teaching assistants, on peer relations. The clear finding from the observations in the MAST study was that the effects of separation from the classroom and near-constant presence of, and interaction with, a TA cut across opportunities for peer interaction in primary schools. Evidence from case studies reflected a deeper concern, expressed by teachers and parents, regarding the social segregation that pupils with Statements experienced, and their social mix: these pupils tend to form friendships with those similar to themselves, and as a result, become further isolated from their 'typically-developing' peers. The case study data from the SENSE study offered only glimpses of information regarding peer relations in secondary school settings, and how these are shaped by organisational factors relating to teaching. We feel that more descriptive research in this an area would be instructive. These efforts ought to extend to specialist settings, as there is very little evidence from this sector on the use and impact of structural arrangements, such as age-based versus ability-based grouping, and how they may differ to arrangements in mainstream schools.

Thirdly, and perhaps most compellingly, the longitudinal nature of our work on this topic lends itself to a further, and perhaps final, study focussing on the transitions out of secondary school for the 30 pupils who featured in both the MAST study and SENSE study cohorts. There appears to be very little research on the transition of pupils with high-level SEND at the end of their secondary schooling. The experiences of young people with communication difficulties, though, has received attention. Dockrell *et al's.*, (2007) longitudinal study involving 65 school leavers found high retention rates. Overall, 77% continued in full-time education, with a further 12% transitioning to work-based training. There were indications that, despite difficulties throughout school, these young people had positive transition experiences and had a successful first post-16 year, as indicated by improving self-esteem and positive reports

from parents, tutors and the young people themselves. Simkin and Conti-Ramsden (2009) interviewed 139 16 year-olds with specific language impairment, who had all attended a language unit at the age of seven, along with their parents and teachers. Experiences of attending a language unit were broadly positive across the groups; however, a fifth of young people, and nearly a third of parents, felt there had been too little educational support during schooling. It would be interesting, therefore, to capture the reflections on schooling – and plans and aspirations, looking forward – of the pupils in the MAST/SENSE cohort when they reach Year 11 (2017/18 school year). Such a study would require only a qualitative component. A longitudinal study of pupils with high-level SEND at three points in their school career would be unique in the literature.

Finally, we have found in this study strong evidence of the kinds of classroom environments and interactions experienced by pupils with SEND in mainstream schools. One key feature was the way in which these young people spend almost all their time in low attainment sets. One direction for future research would be closer exploration of the educational experiences within these sets, and what role they play in pupils' longer term educational progress. We need to build on suggestions, for example, in Blatchford *et al.* (2016), and examine the type and level of curriculum coverage, teacher and school expectations, and pupil motivation and learner identities.

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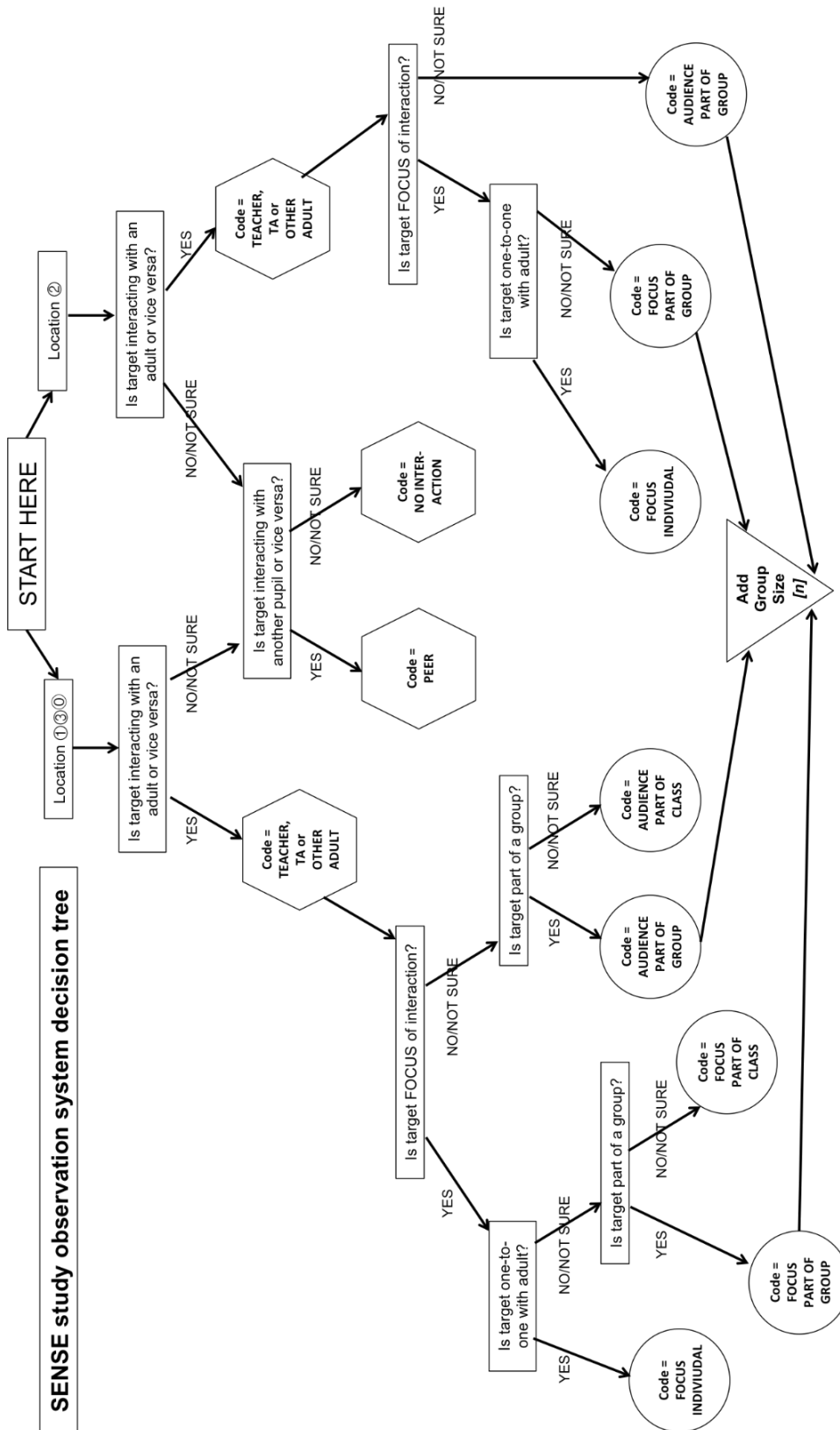
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Appendix 1. SENSE study systematic observation schedule

Pupil ID:	School ID:	LA ID:	Comparison? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Observation ID:	Day: 1 2 3 4	Period: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
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CONTEXTUAL FACTORS <i>(circle relevant number for 'class attainment' and 'lesson/subject')</i>	Time interval (min)	INTERACTION WITH... <i>(tick one column)</i>					FOCUS <i>(tick one column)</i>				AUDIENCE				PEOPLE IN CLASSROOM <i>(enter n per column)</i>	NOTES <i>e.g. lesson topic/focus:</i>		
		Teacher	TA	Other adult	Peer	No interaction	Bin	Individual	Part of group*	Part of class	Part of group*	Part of class	Group size [n]*	Location [code]			Pupils	Teachers
Class attainment	1																	
1 High attainment	2																	
2 Average attainment	3																	
3 Low attainment	4																	
4 Mixed attainment	5												f1 or 3>					
0 Bin	6																	
	7																	
Lesson/subject	8																	
1 English (inc. phonics)	9																	
2 Maths	10												f1 or 3>					
3 Science	11																	
4 History/geography/RE	12																	
5 Foreign languages	13																	
6 Citizenship/PSHE	14																	
7 Art/design/music/drama	15												f1 or 3>					
8 Technology/ICT	16																	
9 Life skills	17																	
10 Other subject: <i>specify below</i> <i>(e.g. hair & beauty; mechanics; cookery; horticulture; construction)</i>	18																	
	19												f1 or 3>					
	20																	
	21																	
11 Non-curriculum/tutor time	22																	
0 Bin	23																	
	24																	
Other adults in the room <i>Where possible, specify the role of any additional adults present, other than teachers and TAs:</i>	25												f1 or 3>					
	26																	
	27																	
	28																	
	29																	
	30												f1 or 3>					
	31																	
	32																	
	33																	
	34																	
	35												f1 or 3>					
	36																	
	37																	
	38																	
	39																	
	40												f1 or 3>					
	41																	
Location codes	42																	
1 In classroom	43																	
2 Out of classroom	44																	
3 Additional resource provision	45																	
0 Bin	46												f1 or 3>					
	47																	
	48																	
	49																	
	50												1 or 3>					
	51																	
	52																	
	53																	
	54																	
	55												1 or 3>					
	56																	
	57																	
	58																	
	59																	
	60												1 or 3>					

Appendix 2. SENSE study systematic observation decision tree



Appendix 3. SENSE study pupil and school survey

PUPIL ID		Gender	✓	Background		Ethnicity	✓
SCHOOL ID		Male		(Tick only if relevant)	✓	White/White British (Irish/ European/Roma/Other)	
LA ID		Female		Eligible for FSM		Mixed (e.g. White & Black African/White & Asian)	
				English Additional Lang		Asian/Asian British (Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi/Other)	
				Looked After Child		Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	
Attendance (Enter % days attended 2014/15):					%	Other ethnic group (e.g. Chinese/Arab)	

Statement/EHC Plan (Circle YES or NO)			Primary and secondary need (Tick one per column)	Primary need	Secondary need
Has Statement been converted to an EHC Plan?	YES	NO		✓	✓
Is the school placement outside LA area?	YES	NO	Cognition & learning		
Number of hours of TA support, if specified: (Enter NS if hours not specified)			hours	Communication & interaction	
				Social, emotional & mental health	
				Sensory and/or physical	

School type	✓	Ofsted	✓	Sector type (see notes below)	✓	Location	✓
Mainstream		Outstanding		LA maintained		Predominantly urban	
Mainstream with ARP		Good		Community/Vol controlled ¹		Urban with signif rural	
Special school		Requires improvement		Foundation/Vol aided ¹		Predominantly rural	
		Inadequate/sp. measures		Sponsored academy ²			
				Converter academy ³			
Number of pupils on roll: (A ballpark estimates is fine)				Free school ⁴			
				Independent/private			
School catchment: Specify average levels of affluence and deprivation in area served by school. Circle one option per row.							
Average level of affluence		Low	Low to mid	Mid	Mid to high	High	Don't know
Average level of deprivation		Low	Low to mid	Mid	Mid to high	High	Don't know

- Admissions for community and voluntary controlled schools are overseen by the LA. Admissions for foundation/voluntary aided schools are overseen by the school's governing body.
- Sponsored academy: formerly a maintained school transformed to academy status and run by a Government-approved sponsor.
- Converter academy: formerly a maintained school that has converted to academy status *voluntarily*. Converter academies do not a sponsor, but some do.
- Free school: definition includes studio schools and university technical colleges.

Appendix 4. SENSE study interview schedule

SENCO interview

Locations

- *Over the week I have seen X spent time away from the main classroom. How typical is this of his/her general experience?*
- *What are the reasons for withdrawing X from the classroom?*

The role of adults

- *What is the teachers' role in X's support?*
- *What is the TAs' role in X's support?*
- *If there are any other adults with a significant role in providing support, what are their roles?*
- *What forms of training and guidance are provided for teachers and TAs to support X's needs?*
- *What provision is made for teachers and TAs to meet to plan, prepare and feedback in relation to meeting X's needs?*

Curriculum and provision

- *Does X require a differentiated curriculum or differentiated tasks to support his/her learning?*
- *How is differentiation handled for X? Who does it? What forms does it take?*
- *What intervention programmes, if any, are in place for X? Who selects, plans, delivers and assesses these interventions?*

Transferring from a Statement to an Education, Health and Care Plan

- *Explain what has been done/is planned in terms of transferring X's Statement to an EHCP.*
- *What benefits and challenges have there been/do you predict there will be from making this transfer?*
- *What effect has the transfer had/do you predict it will have on stakeholders' involvement in and understanding of processes such as annual reviews?*

Transitions

- *Thinking back to 2013/14, what you recall about X's transition from primary school to this school? Were there any issues or particular achievements?*
- *What are your predictions or concerns regarding X's progression to Key Stage 4 in the next school year?*

Impact

- *How has the support X has received helped his/her progress and development?*
- *To what extent has having a Statement/EHCP contributed to X's progress and development?*

Teacher interview

Locations

- *Over the week I have see X spent time away from the main classroom. How typical is this of his/her general experience?*
- *What are the reasons for withdrawing X from the classroom?*

The role of adults

- *What is your role in X's support?*
- *What is the TAs' role in X's support?*
- *What forms of training and guidance are provided for you to support X's needs?*
- *What provision is made for you to meet with TAs to plan, prepare and feedback in relation to meeting X's needs?*

Curriculum and provision

- *Does X require a differentiated curriculum or differentiated tasks to support his/her learning?*
- *How is differentiation handled for X? Who does it? What forms does it take?*
- *What intervention programmes, if any, are in place for X? Who selects, plans, delivers and assesses these interventions?*

Transferring from a Statement to an Education, Health and Care Plan

- *Explain any involvement you have had/will have in transferring X's Statement to an EHCP.*
- *What benefits and challenges have there been/do you predict there will be from making this transfer?*

Transitions

- *Thinking back to 2013/14, what you recall about X's transition from primary school to this school? Were there any issues or particular achievements?*
- *What are your predictions or concerns regarding X's progression to Key Stage 4 in the next school year?*

Impact

- *How has the support X has received helped his/her progress and development?*
- *To what extent has having a Statement/EHCP contributed to X's progress and development?*

TA interview

Note: draw on questions from this schedule for interviews with other support staff.

Locations

- *Over the week I have see X spent time away from the main classroom. How typical is this of his/her general experience?*
- *What are the reasons for withdrawing X from the classroom?*

The role of adults

- *What is your role in X's support? How long have you worked with X?*
- *What is the teachers' role in X's support?*
- *What forms of training and guidance are provided for you to support X's needs?*
- *What provision is made for you to meet with teachers to plan, prepare and feedback in relation to meeting X's needs?*

Curriculum and provision

- *Does X require a differentiated curriculum or differentiated tasks to support his/her learning?*
- *How is differentiation handled for X? Who does it? What forms does it take?*
- *What intervention programmes, if any, are in place for X? Who selects, plans, delivers and assesses these interventions?*

Transferring from a Statement to an Education, Health and Care Plan

- *Explain any involvement you have had/will have in transferring X's Statement to an EHCP.*
- *What benefits and challenges have there been/do you predict there will be from making this transfer?*

Transitions

- *Thinking back to 2013/14, what you recall about X's transition from primary school to this school? Were there any issues or particular achievements?*
- *What are your predictions or concerns regarding X's progression to Key Stage 4 in the next school year?*

Impact

- *How has the support X has received helped his/her progress and development?*
- *To what extent has having a Statement/EHCP contributed to X's progress and development?*

Parent/carer interview

X's support

- *What is your understanding of the types of support X receives at school? Who provides the support?*
- *What are the differences between how teachers support X and how TAs support X?*
- *Statements typically require schools to provide a 'differentiated curriculum'. How does the school handle this for X?*
- *Are you aware of any particular interventions or strategies that are used?*
- *To what extent does the support X receives match your expectations?*

- *Are there any factors that help or prevent a good level of support being provided for X?*

Transferring from a Statement to an Education, Health and Care Plan

- *Explain any involvement you have had/will have in transferring X's Statement to an EHCP.*
- *What benefits and challenges have there been/do you predict there will be from making this transfer?*

Transitions

- *Thinking back to 2013/14, what you recall about X's transition from primary school to this school? Were there any issues or particular achievements?*
- *What are your predictions or concerns regarding X's progression to Key Stage 4 in the next school year?*
- *What would you like X to be able to do when he/she leaves school?*

Impact

- *How has the support X has received helped his/her progress and development?*
- *To what extent has having a Statement/EHCP contributed to X's progress and development?*

Pupil interview

Start with rapport building; for example: *"I have been in your class this week looking at how you and your class are learning. I would like you to tell me more about your learning"*. Follow up on any interesting comments made by the pupil that shed light on their experiences in school.

- *Think back to when you moved to this school in Year 7. What you recall about moving up to secondary school? Did you enjoy it? Was there anything that worried you?*
- *Tell me about your learning what things do you do well and find easy? What is harder for you? Overall, how well do you think you are doing at school?*
- *When you are working on your own, how well can you manage the work?*
- *Tell me about the times when you work with adults: teachers and TAs. What do they do to help you? Do you think this helps you with your learning? In what ways?*
- *What do you like most like about working with teachers and TAs? Is there anything you do not like?*

- *Tell me about what you do when you go out of the class to work (with a TA)? Does it help you with your learning when you are back in class?*
- *What is it like when you work in a group with your friends? Do your friends help you? How do they help you; what do they do?*
- *Do you get a say in how you learn and the things that are done to support you in school (e.g. attend annual review)?*
- *Is there anything else that helps you with learning? Being in a group? Some kind of technology? Having a private workspace? Having different work to the others?*
- *Is there anything about the help you get that could be changed or improved?*
- *Next year, you will go into Year 10. What are your feelings and this? What would you like to do when you leave school?*

Appendix 5. Reflections on the SENSE study fieldwork process

Fieldwork for the SENSE study was completed via trainee educational psychologists (EPs) at five providers of the Doctorate in Educational Psychology programme (UCL Institute of Education, and the Universities of Southampton, Birmingham, Sheffield and Manchester) and Assistant EPs at two of the LAs involved in the study. In total, 80 fieldworkers were deployed, either individually or in small teams, to collect data in schools. Researchers received a full day of training in the data collection approach, methods and tools, and had 'live', on-going support when in the field.

Following the field visits to schools, researchers were sent a link to a short online survey, to collect data on the quality of preparation and their experiences of conducting fieldwork as part of a large empirical study. The survey consisted of two mandatory closed questions, and two optional open questions. There were 49 respondents.

The first question asked researchers to rate the usefulness of the fieldwork experience in terms of its relevance to their professional learning as early-career EPs. A third of respondents (35%) rated it as 'really useful', and a further 31% rated it as 'useful'. Around a quarter (27%) rated the experience as 'somewhat useful', while just 8% claimed it was 'not really useful'.

The second question asked researchers to rate the usefulness of the experience of undertaking empirical research, insofar as it provided a 'real-world' context in which to put into practice their research skills and knowledge. Almost half of respondents (47%) rated it as 'really useful', and a further 33% rated it as 'useful'. Eighteen percent rated the experience as 'somewhat useful', while just 2% claimed it was 'not really useful'.

The third question was an open invitation to briefly list anything they found helpful about the SENSE study training and fieldwork preparation. There were 43 responses. Many responses (40%) cited the value of instruction in systematic observations, and 28% cited the chance to undertake 'real-world' research. Some researchers referred to the experience of dealing with the pragmatic challenges that are part and parcel of doing research in dynamic school environments.

'Unique opportunity to observe children with Statements/EHC plans and compare their experience to their peers'.

'Valuable opportunity to interview staff and gather service-user views about delivery and experience of receiving of SEND support'.

'I found it interesting to learn more about how real-world studies work out in practice. It gave me a greater understanding of the difficulties of organising such a study'.

Twenty-six percent of responses valued learning more about the research background to the SENSE study (e.g. the MAST study and the DISS project). Nineteen percent of responses related to the quality of the training and guidance materials. Finally, 12% of responses mentioned the 'live' support when in the field.

'The training pack was really helpful, along with the day Rob spent running through the process. He was always accessible via email too, which made the process run smoothly.'

The fourth question was an open invitation to briefly list anything that was not covered in the SENSE study training and fieldwork preparation that researchers would have found helpful. There were 23 responses. Most responses (43%) related to researchers having more opportunity to practise using the systematic observation schedule. A number of respondents suggested having a video to support this process.

'Chance to use the observation schedule in the session and talk about any issues in the group.'

'More practice with the observation checklist, ideally using a video of a classroom and then everyone checking their results with each other to make sure we were doing it right.'

A fifth of the responses to this question concerned some of the difficulties relating to setting up the field visits and the allocation of schools to trainee EPs. This was, in a particular challenge in couple of the regions. The process of securing informed consent from schools, parents and pupils was so drawn out, that in more cases than was either desirable or comfortable, the research team were trying to resolve this more or less at the same time as allocating the schools. This last-minute nature of finalising arrangements for field visits, and what this meant for some trainees who had perhaps not yet experienced something similar in their professional lives, was evident in some of their criticisms of the setting-up process.

Over and above these practical challenges that accompany engaging sometimes hard-to-reach families in the research process, and the nature of carrying out data collection in busy secondary schools (and which seemed to affect only a minority of survey respondents), the researchers who participated in the SENSE study valued and gained from the experience.

