Exploring pupils' perspectives on their interactions with peers and Teaching Assistants.

A mixed methods study of Key Stage 1 pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Needs in mainstream schooling.

(Volume 1)

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Abstract

This study investigates the perspectives of a group of pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) with specific regard to their peer interactions, views of Teaching Assistant (TA) support and the relationship between these issues. A primary aim of the study was to capture pupils' own ideas and opinions in relation to these, in line with the current children's rights agenda which asserts the right of children to have their views heard about their experiences of support. As such, a further aim of the study was to ensure that data collection methods were designed that best enabled pupils to be empowered co-creators of research data throughout.

Eleven pupils, aged six and seven, with a statement of SEN and in receipt of TA support were observed and then interviewed as part of a two stage mixed methods research design. The mixed methods focus captured the complexity of pupils' peer relationships and the interplay between these and the support from TAs. The pupils were observed to determine levels of peer interaction and to collect information about who they were interacting with and how this varied throughout the school day. This information formed a background for the data collected in the second stage of the research.

During my second visit, pupils undertook tours of the school, took photographs of places they played and took part in drawing activities during data collection. These methods empowered the pupils within the research process, enabling them to take control of much of the data collected. Interviews were carried out with TAs and information collected from student support documents. Analysis of the results from both stages of data collection formed the basis to create individual case studies. Thematic analysis was undertaken within and across these case studies.

In total, analysis revealed six themes relevant to the experience of pupils within this study: variation in peer relationships, multiple views of the TA role, varied focus on social support, separation from peers, no standard TA approach and the effects of the environments pupils inhabit. These have been related to implications and recommendations for practitioners.

A key message from the study is that the current ways in which some TAs are working with pupils with SEN may be related to levels of peer interaction for pupils with SEN. TAs in this study were observed to be directly influencing pupil-peer interactions within class and results from observations suggest that TA proximity may also have a negative effect on levels of peer interaction. This is reflected in the views and opinions

expressed by the pupils themselves.

The findings of this study suggest that clarification of the TA role, as well as training for school staff related to how best to support social skills for pupils with SEN could be beneficial. Alongside this, work needs to be done to ensure that pupils with SEN have a greater number of opportunities within the classroom to interact with peers as the majority of students had very low levels of peer interaction within this environment. A recommendation for further research is a focus on methods which could be used within the school setting to ensure pupils with SEN, including those with needs related to speech, language and communication, are able to give their own views and ideas about their TA support.

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Pupil	Staff name	Job role
Olivia	Mrs A	Allocated TA
	Mrs AB	Class teacher
Jake	Mrs B	Allocated TA
	Mrs C	Allocated TA
Charlie	Mrs D	Allocated TA
	Mrs E	Allocated TA
Ryan	Mrs F	Allocated TA
	Mrs G	Allocated TA
	Mrs T	Class teacher
Kai	Mrs H	Class TA
	Mrs I	Class TA
	Mrs R	Teacher (Literacy)
	Mrs S	Class teacher
	Mrs Z	Class TA
Matthew	Mrs J	Allocated TA
	Mrs K	Allocated TA
	Mrs V	TA (lunch and break times)
Gopal	Mrs L	Allocated TA
	Mrs AA	TA (allocated to another pupil)
Sneha	Mrs M	Allocated TA
	Mrs W	TA (allocated to another pupil)
	Mrs X	Year 3 teacher
Lucie / Henry	Mrs N	HIRB TA
	Mrs O	TA (allocated to another pupil)
	Mrs Q	HIRB teacher
	Mrs Y	SENCO / HIRB teacher
Seth	Mrs P	Allocated TA
	Mrs U	Class teacher

Table 1: List of the adults included in the thesis detailing their job role and which pupil they were observed with

Introduction

In England, the majority of pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) are now taught in mainstream school settings (Department for Education, 2014a). The trend toward including pupils with SEN alongside their peers without additional needs has been motivated by a view that there may be substantive academic and social benefits to be gained as a result of inclusive schooling (MacBeath *et al.*, 2006; Kennedy, Shukla and Fryxell, 1997). The increase in the inclusion of pupils with SEN within mainstream settings has been accompanied by an increase in the number of classroom based support staff (termed throughout this study as Teaching Assistants / TAs). Since 1997, the number of full time equivalent (FTE) TAs has more than trebled and TAs now account for 26.4% of the school workforce (Department for Education, 2014b). This parallel increase is not coincidental. Ofsted reported in 2004 that schools with the highest numbers of pupils with SEN were opting to employ greater numbers of TAs to support this (Ofsted, 2004). More recently, researchers have reported that TAs have taken on primary pedagogical responsibility for pupils with SEN in mainstream schools (Webster and Blatchford, 2013). It is clear that TAs are being routinely allocated to support the inclusion of pupils with SEN in England, however little research exists regarding the effect of this academic support on the pupils themselves (Alborz *et al.*, 2009).

In recent years, a number of researchers have raised questions regarding TA support effects, and specifically the potential impact on pupils' peer relationships. Researchers have shown pupils with SEN are spending a high proportion of their time in school involved in one-to-one interactions with their TAs which result in a separation from peers (Blatchford *et al.*, 2009; Giangreco, 2010b). This finding was echoed by an Ofsted review of provision for pupils with SEN in the UK which criticised the deployment of adult support staff in schools, reporting that often these adult supports served as a barrier to the successful inclusion of pupils with SEN (Ofsted, 2010). Studies, both in the UK and internationally, have reported high levels of TA proximity for pupils with SEN which may also reduce opportunities for peer interaction (Giangreco and Broer, 2005; Blatchford, Russell and Webster, 2012). There is some evidence to suggest that fewer peer interactions occur for pupils with SEN while their TA is proximal (Malmgren and Causton-Theoharis, 2006). Further research is needed to better understand TA influence on the peer interactions of pupils with SEN in mainstream settings.

Only a small number of studies have sought to capture the views of pupils with SEN regarding their TA support (Rudduck and Flutter, 2000). These have shown that, while

pupils are generally positive about their support, many have raised concerns about lack of independence and control in relation to the help they receive (Skär and Tamm, 2001; Mortier *et al.*, 2011). Where pupil views have been sought, these have involved secondary school pupils rather than those still in primary school settings. The contemporary children's rights agenda (Blandford and Gibson, 2000) asserts the right of children to have the opportunity to express their views in relation to issues of concern to them regardless of their age, and also asserts the duty of adults to listen to them (Sinclair Taylor, 2000). Related to this there is a need for more research aimed at hearing the views and opinions of primary pupils with SEN in relation to their experience of TA support and any links between this and their peer interactions. This study aimed to develop a set of data collection methods which enable pupils under the age of eight with a statement of SEN to talk confidently about their experiences of TA support and their peer interactions in school.

Following a discussion of my previous experience and interests and their links to the study, this thesis begins in Chapter 1 with the aims and research questions developed for this study, setting out the focus of the research work. The contextual background for the study in relation to pupils with SEN and TAs is also outlined.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the current literature related to TA effects and to the peer interactions and relationships of pupils with SEN. The chapter outlines the research that has been conducted in relation to the use of TAs within schools and highlights gaps in the research. With regard to peer interactions, the importance of these for development is discussed alongside previous research related to the peer interactions of pupils with SEN. The chapter concludes by drawing together literature related to pupil voice in research.

In Chapter 3, the methodology chosen for the study is presented. Working from an interpretivist standpoint this study uses a two stage mixed methods design. The chapter begins with a description of the philosophical underpinnings of interpretivism and moves on to discuss mixed methods research and the use of case study designs. The methods chosen for data collection are then outlined and the benefits and potential challenges related to these are discussed. The methods used for data analysis are also presented. A description of the sampling technique and methods of recruitment follows alongside details about the participants chosen for the sample. The chapter closes with an examination of the ethical implications of this study, with specific focus on research with children and those with SEN.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study following data analysis. The chapter opens with results from systematic observations including the number of minutes recorded and levels of interaction observed for the pupils in this study. Moving on from this, themes arising from thematic analysis of the individual participant case studies are presented alongside extracts from these.

A discussion of the results is presented in Chapter 5. Links are made between previous literature and the findings of the study bringing together results into six broad themes.

Chapter 6 builds on the themes presented in the discussion chapter by outlining a series of implications and recommendations for practice based upon these. Implications are outlined for school management, school staff and for pupils with SEN. Resources related to these are included within the appendices.

Chapter 7 presents a reflection of the methods used within this study and the extent to which they supported the aims of this thesis. Specifically, methods are evaluated in relation to how the pupils in the study responded to them and the effect they were seen to have on adult-child relationships within the research environment. The chapter concludes that the methods were effective in supporting pupils to feel comfortable and in control during data collection.

Finally, Chapter 8 closes the thesis by presenting a series of final conclusions. The contribution of this thesis to the current body of knowledge is offered, followed by the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research. The closing comments emphasise the need for a greater understanding of pupil experience of TA support, and highlight the importance of active social support and ensuring opportunities for peer interaction for pupils with SEN within mainstream settings.

My previous experience and interests

It is important for researchers, and especially those with a qualitative focus, to make explicit their previous experiences and interests and to consider the influence these have upon the design of the study and upon data collection, analysis and the interpretation of results (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009). This section describes my previous experience related to the study and discusses how this may have influenced the decisions made in relation to this study.

My work experience influenced both the focus and the design of this study. I spent close to ten years working in schools and colleges, providing educational support for

pupils with SEN. Throughout this time I became frustrated about the ways in which I was being deployed as a TA and the ways in which 'inclusive schooling' was being implemented within the classroom. I increasingly felt as though the pupils with SEN, to whom I was allocated, felt very separate to the rest of the class and that my presence was part of the reason for this. I felt like a gatekeeper for the pupil, often asked to talk for them or to relay information back to them. This work experience was one of the motivating factors behind focussing on the influence of TAs on pupils with SEN, as I felt my work as a TA had impacted upon their inclusion in class. It also influenced my research design, as I felt it important to hear from the pupils themselves in relation to their TA support and their peer interactions rather than using adult proxies to speak for them (as has happened in much previous research on the subject; Garth and Aroni, 2003).

Alongside this, I worked on the Making a Statement (MaSt) research project which aimed to better understand the experience of pupils with SEN, including the support they were receiving from TAs (Webster and Blatchford, 2013). That project's results showed a high degree of separation from the main class for these pupils, alongside high levels of TA interaction. It also reported that TAs had more responsibility for pupils with SEN than class teachers, and raised questions about the effect of this on pedagogy and on support to meet the complex needs listed on the pupils' statements.

As my own work and research experience had left me feeling concerned about the use of TAs in schools, I am aware that this could have led to a biased view of the educational support observed as part of this study. I have taken care to leave my personal experiences and agenda aside throughout the data collection, analysis and discussion sections of this study and have worked hard to ensure that the data presented reflects the experiences, views and opinions of the pupils included in this study. Reflection on this process is included in section 3.8.3.

My previous research experience also affected the methodology chosen for this study. In my last project I spent 6 months observing pupils with SEN, talking to TAs, SENCOs, teachers and parents about them, reading their statements and support notes but did not, at any point, talk to the pupils themselves about their school experience or their views about their support. When I was writing up the results as case studies, this felt like an important omission. I was writing about what school was like for each pupil with SEN, without actually knowing their thoughts or views about it. I decided that the inclusion of pupil voice would be important for accessing the actual experiences of pupils with SEN, and that I would need to choose methods which enabled these pupils

to give their views and opinions.

Much of my previous research experience, both in my own work and with other projects, has had a strong quantitative focus and I feel this has also influenced me throughout this study. As a result of my positivist background, I am not a naturally interpretivist researcher and it took me some time to change my mindset from focussing on statistics and proof to looking at the lived experiences of the pupils in this study. Reading around my research philosophy helped me to find my own position in regard to this study and to think of the quantitative data as contextual background for the qualitative information coming from the pupils themselves.

1.1 Aims of the study and research questions

This section defines the aims of this study and links these to the research questions framing the work.

The aims of this study are summarized here:

- To add to existing research exploring the role of Teaching Assistant (TA) support in relation to pupils' peer interactions.
- To design a method which effectively enables primary school pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) to express their own views and opinions, and which minimizes adult-child effects on pupil responses.
- For the pupils in this study to be empowered co-creators of research data, and for their contribution to the research to be acknowledged (without breaking confidentiality).
- To use systematic observations to investigate levels of interaction for pupils with SEN, and for these data to be used as contextual background for the qualitative information collected.

These aims led to the formulation of the following research questions:

1. How is the role of the TA understood by both pupils with SEN and by TAs themselves?
2. What are the perspectives of pupils with SEN regarding the relationship between their TA support and their peer interactions?
3. How do TA characteristics and behaviours relate to levels of peer interaction for pupils with SEN?

Moving on from the aims and research questions, the following section provides contextual background for the study in relation to both pupils with SEN and TAs.

1.2 Contextual background

As is clear from the aims and research questions outlined, this study has as its focus the peer interactions of pupils with SEN within mainstream school settings. Alongside this, this study further aims to investigate the influence of TA support upon interaction levels for the group of pupils with SEN involved in the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of the current literature relating to peer interactions and friendships of pupils with SEN and to the impact of TA support within school. Prior to that, this section provides contextual background, defining what is meant by 'SEN' and outlining the numbers of pupils with SEN currently taught within mainstream school settings. As further context, this section closes with a clarification of what is meant by the term 'TA' within the context of this study.

1.2.1 Context: Pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN)

1.2.1.1 Definitions

As this study has pupils with SEN as its focus, it is worth taking some time to explain some of the terminology used to describe these pupils and to clarify which pupils formed the sample for this study. The revised SEN Code of Practice defines a pupil as having a learning difficulty if they have significantly greater difficulty learning than same age peers or have a disability which affects their school experience. The 'special educational provision' provided for these pupils to enable them to access education refers to any form of support that is additional to the educational provision made generally for children of their age in Local Education Authority (LEA) maintained schools (DfES 2001b). In 2015, Pupils in English schools identified as having some form of SEN are typically labelled as being in one of three groups: School Action, School Action Plus or having a statement of SEN.

School Action

A child is deemed as requiring support through School Action if they are seen as failing to make adequate progress, having persistent emotional or behavioural issues, communication or interaction difficulties or sensory and physical problems despite having been offered differentiated/targeted support (DfES, 2001b). Once a child has been identified as requiring School Action, an Individual Education Plan (IEP) will be written for the child detailing pupil targets, support to be offered and success/exit criteria.

School Action Plus

Pupils are identified as requiring support through School Action Plus if their needs are best met through support from external agencies (e.g. Speech and Language support, Behavioural support). This is generally due to ongoing lack of progress despite concentrated intervention at School Action level.

Pupils with a statement of SEN

If a pupil is thought to have a significant level of need, parents/teachers can request that he/she be assessed by the Local Authority (LA). Relevant professionals such as educational psychologists, speech and language therapists, health professionals, will work with the pupil to draw together information as to their particular difficulties and to make suggestions about support. This information is then drawn together by the LA into a single document called a 'statement of Special Educational Needs'. These statements outline a pupil's specific learning needs and suggest a plan for the pupils' education, for example outlining types of intervention to be put in place or methods of support which could facilitate learning. Statements also include the number of hours support that the pupil will need (from teachers, TAs, other professionals) in order to make progress in school. Annual reviews are held to ensure that information on the statement remains relevant and that support is changed in line with pupil progress.

At the time of writing, the practice of defining pupils under these titles was under review, and the process of awarding statements of SEN was changed. A new Code of Practice came into force in September 2014, which started the process of phasing out statements and replacing them with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) (Department for Education, 2013a). EHCPs are designed to give greater control over funding and support choices to parents and the pupils themselves. Under an EHCP, support is extended to the age of 25 (statements currently end at age 16) and involves a coordinated support package from education, health and care services under a single document. The threshold for applying for an EHCP is the same as for a statement of SEN. Like a statement of SEN, EHCPs will detail the needs of the pupil and will include strategies and interventions to support the pupil within school. All statements have to be transferred to EHCPs by 1st April 2018.

In this study, the sample was made up of children under the age of eight, with a statement of SEN, being taught in mainstream school and in receipt of TA support.

1.2.1.2 Identification of pupils with SEN – concerns

Despite the fact that there are specific procedures in place for the identification of pupils with SEN, concerns have been raised about how pupils are being identified as requiring additional support within school. An Ofsted review of provision for pupils with SEN in mainstream schools reported that the most common reason for schools to identify pupils as having SEN was low attainment or slow progress in school (Ofsted, 2010). The report questioned whether this was an appropriate measure for SEN intervention as these factors could also be indicative of a need for better teaching or pastoral support within school.

Alongside this, Ofsted (2010) questioned the high number of pupils being awarded a statement of SEN and reported inconsistencies both in relation to how pupils were being labelled and to the support being offered. During observations, the researchers found that children with similar levels and types of need were being assessed as requiring different levels of support both within and between local areas in the UK. The support offered to children with SEN was also found to lack consistency, with some cases reported of pupils receiving support that was not in line with their identified need (e.g. behavioural support offered for a pupil with speech, language and communication difficulties).

The review offered a number of recommendations in response to its' findings which included clarifying the role of additional support staff and ensuring appropriate training and monitoring were in place, and supporting pupils to have a say about their support needs including when they would prefer to work alone. The review also emphasised the need to consider the quality of both teaching and pastoral support prior to putting a student forward to be assessed as needing additional support. As will be shown in section 1.2.1.4 (below), following on from this review the number of pupils identified as having SEN has been steadily decreasing. The percentage of pupils issued with a statement of SEN has remained stable.

1.2.1.3 Mainstream versus specialist provision

In recent years, there has been a focus in the education sector on ensuring that mainstream schooling provides an environment that is inclusive for all pupils, including those with SEN (MacBeath *et al.,* 2006). This shift towards the inclusion of pupils with SEN within mainstream schools can be traced back to the 1978 Warnock Report. Prior to the report, pupils with moderate to severe learning difficulties or disabilities were primarily supported in specialist settings. Baroness Warnock proposed that, although

around 20% of the school population might have some form of SEN, just 2% of these would have needs severe enough that they could only be supported in specialist settings (Warnock, 1978). With a differentiated curriculum or the provision of specialist support, Warnock suggested that the remaining 18% could be educated successfully within mainstream schools.

From this starting point, policy changes, including the 1981, 1993 and 1996 Education Acts, focused on the need to make schools accessible for all pupils, particularly those with additional needs. As the 1997 Government Green Paper 'Excellence for all children' states,

> "*While recognising the paramount importance of meeting the needs of individual children, and the necessity of specialist provision for some, we shall promote the inclusion of children with SEN within mainstream schooling wherever possible"* (DfEE, 1997, p.5)

The legal right for parents to place their children with SEN in mainstream school should they choose, unless this was deemed to harm the education of other children, was guaranteed by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001.The result of these policy changes and the shift towards more inclusive schooling was an increase in the number of pupils with SEN in mainstream school settings.

1.2.1.4 Pupils with SEN - numbers

The majority of pupils with statements of SEN in England are now taught in mainstream schools. In 2014, 46.3% of pupils with statements of SEN were enrolled in mainstream settings, a slight decrease from numbers in 2013. 44.4% were attending special schools, a small increase from previous years. The remaining pupils were educated in some other form of provision, for example home schooling.

In England the percentage of pupils with a statement of SEN has remained stable since 2007. In January 2014, 2.8% of pupils across all schools in England had a statement of SEN. This percentage is stable despite the actual number of pupils having decreased (2007: 232,670; 2014: 232,190; Department for Education, 2014a).

In 2013, there was a 1.6% increase in the number of children assessed for special educational needs (a total of 30,030 pupils). Consistent with this there was also a 1.6% increase in the number of statements issued (29,110 pupils, up from 28,635 in 2012). This increase is consistent with previous results, as the number of statements issued per year has been rising incrementally since 2008. As in previous years, 96.9% of those assessed for special educational needs were issued a statement.

In primary schools in 2014, pupils with statements of SEN accounted for 1.4% of the population (60,830 pupils, see Table 2). A further 15.2% of pupils were identified as having some form of SEN without a statement. Statements are more prevalent with age, and so in years one and two (the focus of this study) pupils with statements accounted for just 0.9% and 1.1% of the school population respectively.

National Curriculum Year Group	Number of pupils with a statement of SEN	Percentage of pupils with a statement of SEN
Nursery	650	0.2%
Reception	5375	0.9%
1	7030	1.1%
2	7945	1.3%
3	8535	1.5%
4	9555	1.7%
5	10445	1.9%
6	11185	2.1%
7+	110	3.6%
Total	60830	1.4%

Table 2: Proportion of pupils with a statement of SEN by National Curriculum year group. (Department for Education, 2014a)

For pupils with statements, information has been collected about the most common types of primary need listed. For all pupils with statements, autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) is the most prevalent type of primary need (22.5% of all statements). In primary schools, speech, language and communication needs are recorded most often (31.6%), followed by Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD; 19.1%) and Emotional, Social and Behavioural Difficulties (ESBD; 18.4%).

Looking at all forms of SEN, the proportion of pupils identified as having SEN in England has been decreasing steadily in recent years (Table 3). This is due to a reduction in the number of pupils identified as having SEN but without a statement (School Action or School Action Plus) which was 18.7% in 2013 and 17.9% in 2014. In January 2014, the level of pupils with SEN in school was 17.9%, a total of 1,492,950 pupils across all schools.

Year	2010	2013	2014
Percentage of pupils with SEN	21.1%	19.9%	17.9%

Table 3:The percentage of pupils in schools in England identified as having SEN(including School Action, School Action Plus and pupils with a statement of SEN).(Department for Education, 2014a)

These figures are close to the proportions seen in other areas of the UK. In Wales, 22.6% of pupils are identified as having some form of SEN (The Welsh Government, 2014). In Scotland, the figure is 21% (The Scottish Government, 2014) and in Northern Ireland it is 22% (Department of Education Northern Ireland, 2015; all other figures from Department for Education, 2014a)

1.2.2 Context: Teaching Assistants

1.2.2.1 Definitions and roles

Previous research has shown that a broad range of titles are being used to define support staff within schools and that the use of these titles is inconsistent with different terms sometimes applied to staff performing the same basic role (Kerry, 2005). Alongside this, a recent rise in new types of support staff (such as 'higher level teaching assistants') has further confused the issue of who school support staff are and how they can be grouped. As such, this section is focused on clarifying what a 'Teaching Assistant' is within the context of this study and what the broad characteristics of the role are.

For the purpose of this study, 'teaching assistants' are defined as support staff primarily working directly with pupils (both in and out of class) towards improving academic outcomes. This classification is drawn from the typology of support staff presented in Blatchford, Russell and Webster (2012). In order to build the typology, the researchers asked school support staff to choose, from a list of 91 tasks, those which they carried out within their posts (this list was adapted from research conducted by the National Joint Council for local Government service; NJC, 2003). A cluster analysis resulted in a division of support staff into seven groups: TA equivalent, pupil welfare, technicians, other pupil support, administrative staff, facilities staff and site staff.

Of most relevance to this study is the 'TA equivalent' group which was made up of seven job titles:

- Teaching Assistant (TA)
- Classroom Assistant (CA)

- Learning Support Assistant (LSA)
- LSA for SEN
- Nursery nurse
- Therapist

The researchers determined that people working under each of these job titles were engaged in very similar activities within their jobs.

Blatchford, Russell and Webster (2012) also compiled, using 'work pattern diaries', a systematic description of the tasks undertaken by each of the seven groups over a typical working day. This showed that the TA equivalent group spent the vast majority of their time on direct learning support for pupils (3.8 hours per day), more than double the amount of time spent on this activity by any of the other groups. The remainder of TA equivalent time was taken up with supporting teachers (1.4 hours per day) with a further hour split between direct pastoral support for pupils, indirect support for pupils and support for the school (physical environment).

In the study sample, both the job titles 'Teaching Assistant' and 'Classroom Assistant' were used within schools to describe the support staff working with the pupils observed. In line with the work of Blatchford, Russell and Webster (2012), I consider these to be equivalent roles and use the term 'TA' throughout this thesis.

1.2.2.2 Increase in numbers of TAs

In recent years there has been a significant increase in the number of TAs working in schools in the UK. Government statistics show that in November 2013 there were 243,700 TAs employed by state schools in England, accounting for 26.4% of the workforce. Table 4 shows the number of full time equivalent TAs employed at increments since 2000, alongside the incremental percentage increase. As is clear, the number of TAs has risen by over 200% in the last 14 years (Department for Education, 2014b). Between 2013 and 2014, 11,400 more TAs were employed, a 4.9% increase.

Department for Education figures show that in maintained nursery and primary schools (Department for Education, 2014b) the number of TAs has risen from 137,900 to 138,400 since 2013, an increase of 0.7%. TAs accounted for 33.1% of the school workforce in these settings. Lower numbers were seen in maintained secondary schools, where TAs accounted for just 15.61% of the workforce in 2014 (26,100 TAs). 15% of TAs in maintained schools have higher level teaching assistant (HLTA) status.

Year	Number of FTE TAs	Total percentage increase
2000	79,000	-
2005	147,200	86.3%
2010	194,200	145.8%
2014	243,700	208.5%

Table 4: Proportion of Full Time Equivalent Teaching Assistants employed by state schools in England between 2000 and 2014 plus the percentage increase. (Department for Education, 2014b)

The impact on public spending as a result of this increase is worthy of note. In 2015, a report by the Education Endowment Foundation reported that schools spend approximately £4.4 billion each year on TAs, accounting for 13% of the total education budget (Sharples, Blatchford and Webster, 2015).

This rise in TA numbers in England is similar to a general increase in the employment of educational support staff with similar roles in the USA (Giangreco and Doyle, 2007).

1.2.2.3 Reasons for the increase in TA numbers

The recent increase in the number of TAs in England can be seen as linked to two main developments in education; policy changes linked to teacher workloads and the movement towards effective inclusion of pupils with SEN within mainstream schooling.

In the early 2000s, concerns were raised by teachers about excessive workloads and low morale resulting from the 'performance culture' in education (PricewaterhouseCooper, 2001; Hancock and Eyres, 2004). In response, the government made a series of policy changes related to the deployment and role of TAs in order to alleviate the pressure felt by teachers. In 2001, the White Paper 'Schools achieving success' put into place £350 million of funding in order to recruit 20,000 more TAs that year (Department for Education and Skills, 2001a). Following on from that, the National Agreement (Department for Education and Skills, 2003) put in place a period of 'Workforce Remodelling' in which teachers' conditions of service were changed and the TA role was developed to support this.

The National Agreement was designed to reduce teacher workloads, raise pupil standards and to reshape the ways support staff were being used in schools. TAs were key to facilitating the changes, taking on additional roles outside of class (for example

routine clerical tasks, marking tests, preparing resources) in order to allow teachers to focus more on core teaching tasks. Teachers were guaranteed weekly non-contact time for Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA) and so the remodelling also involved the use of support staff in the delivery of the curriculum to cover this time. As a consequence of these policies, TA numbers rose by more than 68,000 between 2000 and 2005 (Department for Education, 2014a, see section 1.2.2.2 for more data about TA numbers).

Aside from this need for TAs to support the changes in teacher workloads, the increase in numbers employed has also been driven by the increase in numbers of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools (this is discussed in section 1.2.1.4). As more pupils with SEN have been placed in mainstream settings, the assignment of TAs as supports has become increasingly common. TAs, who are able to support pupils with SEN on a one-to-one basis, have been seen as key to supporting teachers who felt ill-prepared to facilitate successful inclusion (Carrington, 1999). Despite limited evidence as to the effectiveness of TA support (Alborz *et al.*, 2009), schools with high proportions of pupils with SEN have taken on greater numbers of TAs and these TAs have increasingly became responsible for planning and teaching as well as removing pupils from class for interventions (Ofsted, 2004). In 2012, primary head teachers reported that one of their main reasons for employing high proportions of TAs was in order to implement inclusion policies (Webster and Blatchford, 2013).

Finally, some researchers have suggested that the growth in TA numbers has also been driven by costs. Teachers are more expensive to train and relatively well paid. TAs (the majority of whom have no qualifications higher than AS or A level; Blatchford, Russell and Webster, 2012) are cheaper to employ and easier to source (Gunter and Rayner, 2007). As Hancock and Eyres (2004) state, TAs are *"a cheap and readily available source of potentially valuable labour"* (p.231). Further support for this view comes from evidence that, even where they are planning activities and teaching pupils as part of their role, TAs are not compensated for this at the same level as teachers (Hammersley-Fletcher and Lowe, 2011).

Having clarified the contextual background of the study, the following chapter provides a review of previous research undertaken in relation to the deployment and impact of teaching assistants, and to the peer interactions and friendships of pupils with SEN. Research linking these two subjects is discussed and an argument made for more work focused on looking at the relationship between adult support in school and the peer interactions of pupils with SEN. Following this, the importance of pupil voice and

supporting pupils to give their own ideas and opinions is outlined, and a case presented for a stronger focus on pupil voice within educational research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Rationale for the Literature Review

In order to inform the current study, a review of previous research work was undertaken, the results of which are presented here. The study aims to understand the peer interactions of pupils with Statements of SEN in mainstream school and the ways in which the support they receive from TAs may be interacting with or influencing their peer relationships. As such, the literature review opens with a discussion of research related to inclusion in mainstream settings. This study seeks to focus particularly on the potential influence of Teaching Assistant (TA) support on pupils' interactions. As a result, the role of the TA is discussed in relation to findings from published research studies regarding the effects and impact of TA support. Following this, research about children's friendships and the ways in which they play is reviewed, providing a picture of what is typical for children in Key Stage 1. Literature regarding the importance of positive peer interactions for social engagement and academic outcomes is briefly reviewed, alongside research looking at the features of interactions for pupils with SEN. This study seeks to capture the voices of its participants, enabling pupils with SEN to explain their experiences and views in their own words. It has been noted by previous researchers that primary school pupil voice is largely missing from research into SEN (Lightfoot, Wright and Sloper, 1999; Curtin and Clarke, 2005).The literature review concludes with an outline of previous research which has included pupil voice and a discussion as to why this is an area requiring further study.

Despite the large numbers of TAs currently deployed in schools worldwide, there exists very little research concerning the impact of TA support upon pupil outcomes (Alborz *et al.*, 2009; Giangreco, Edelman and Broer, 2001). In England, two recent projects have been carried out to try to clarify how TAs are being used in schools and what effect this is having on the pupils they support. First, the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff project (DISS: Blatchford, Russell and Webster, 2012) researched both the roles and responsibilities assigned to TAs in schools and the effect of support on pupils' academic outcomes. The second project, 'Making a Statement' (MaSt: Webster and Blatchford, 2013) was an observational study designed to build a description of the school experience of pupils with SEN, all of whom had TA support of some kind. Both studies are drawn upon heavily throughout this literature review as they are the most comprehensive and up-to-date analyses of TA impact and deployment in England. A number of small scale studies are also included that relate to TA support and its effects as well as research conducted outside of England.

2.2 Concerns about the inclusion agenda

Within the context of this study, the term 'inclusion' in relation to pupils with SEN refers to a process by which schools, Local Authorities (LAs) and others develop their practices and policies within mainstream schools to effectively include pupils with SEN (Department for Education and Skills, 2001b). This could involve differentiating work, bringing in specialist equipment or staff, or implementing strategies to support pupils' needs within school. As described in section 1.2.1.4, the majority of pupils with SEN are now taught in mainstream schools rather than specialist settings. Although widely received as a positive change (MacBeath *et al.*, 2006; see section 2.3 for details about this), the increase in numbers since the 1990s has brought with it concerns about the effect that including higher proportions of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools may be having upon school staff, the other pupils in class and the pupils with SEN themselves. These concerns are presented in this section.

2.2.1 Teachers

In relation to the inclusion of pupils with SEN, several studies have reported that teachers are concerned about the lack of training given regarding methods of support for pupils with additional needs. The training leading to Qualified Teacher Status in the UK requires some study relevant to the support of pupils with SEN within school (Department for Education, 2013b). Despite this, research which has investigated teacher views of inclusion suggests many teachers still feel ill-prepared to include pupils with SEN within mainstream classes (Glazzard, 2011; Cole, 2005) and that, as a result, many defer support of pupils with SEN to TAs within class (Marks, Schrader and Levine, 1999). Alongside this, researchers have also reported that teachers who have been trained to teach pupils with SEN are much more favourable towards the inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream settings than those who have not been trained (Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden, 2000). Avramidis and Norwich (2002) reported that teachers' attitudes to inclusion were also affected by pupil variables. Reviewing the literature, they found that teachers seemed to be generally more positive towards the inclusion of pupils with physical and sensory impairments than to those with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties (ESBD; accounting for 18.4% of all pupils with a statement of SEN; DfE, 2014a).

MacBeath *et al.* (2006) in a review of inclusion in mainstream schools reported that teachers agreed that exclusion of pupils with SEN from mainstream schooling could harm their prospects. However, many of the teachers spoken to by the study also explained that the reality of including pupils with SEN in school was more complicated.

The levels of differentiation required, lack of consultation prior to pupils' arrival and lack of expertise were all listed as barriers to successful inclusion and many teachers spoke about a feeling of guilt that they were not able to better include all pupils within their classroom. Glazzard (2011) also found that the standards agenda (schools being measured by their academic results) was seen by many school staff as contradictory to inclusion,

> *"We know from experience that [including pupils with SEN] has affected our performance. One year we had a lot of children with statements and it pulled down our results. The Head had to justify this to Ofsted"*
>
> (Bev: Glazzard, 2011, p.59)

The tension between these two competing agendas meant that, in some cases, teachers reported targeting some pupils over others, focusing on those that would have the greatest impact on results. Consequently, the pupils with SEN were not effectively included within the classroom (see below, for discussion of the impact of the standards agenda on the experience of pupils with SEN).

Finally, teacher views of inclusion have also been linked to differences in their perceptions of the pupils they teach. Grütter and Meyer (2014) found that pupils taught by teachers who were pro-diversity (assessed using a five point scale) were less likely to report intentions to socially exclude pupils with SEN within their schools than pupils whose teachers did not share those views. As this study only measured pupil intention (rather than action) it is not clear whether pupil behaviour towards pupils with SEN was affected by teacher views. Despite this, the findings suggest it is possible that the negative views and concerns reported by teachers regarding inclusion (detailed above) could be affecting the way pupils with SEN are viewed by their peers in school.

2.2.2 Pupils within the classroom who do not have identified SEN

Concerns have also been raised within the literature that the inclusion of pupils in mainstream schools may be negatively affecting the pupils in the classroom who do not have identified SEN. School staff have suggested that pupils with SEN, in particular behavioural needs, may make it harder for other pupils to focus or learn within class (Glazzard, 2011; although this finding was the result of a single focus group in one school which affects its generalisability to the wider population). Jellison (2002) investigated levels of on and off-task behaviour in relation to pupils' proximity to a pupil with SEN within a mainstream classroom. It was found that sitting next to (rather than away from) a pupil with SEN resulted in higher levels of off-task behaviour and that the levels of off-task behaviour increased when sat next to pupils with more severe forms of SEN. The researchers acknowledge that there was a lot of variation between

individual pupils as some pupils were observed to stay on task regardless of where they were sat in class. This research suggests that there may be individual differences in pupils' responses to inclusion.

Alongside this, many teachers report feeling that the inclusion of pupils with SEN gives them less time to support those pupils in class without additional needs, leading to poorer provision for all pupils (MacBeath *et al.*, 2006). Some studies have also found that some children see the provision of additional support as unfair and resent pupils with SEN receiving any form of extra help within school. De Schauwer *et al.*, (2009), carried out interviews with pupils with disabilities (including 'intellectual disabilities') in mainstream schools in Belgium. A number of the pupils they interviewed reported feeling that peers were jealous of their TA support and that this isolated them within the school setting. Supporting this finding, a large scale study carried out by Bowers (1997) captured the views of both pupils with SEN and their peers in relation to TA support. Results showed that the pupils who did not receive TA support did not feel the additional support was fair and that some were concerned that the pupil with SEN being supported did not enjoy having TA help. It is possible that the resentment identified in these studies may form a barrier to peer interaction between pupils with SEN and their peers.

2.2.3 Pupils with SEN

The inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream rather than special school settings may also be negatively affecting the pupils with SEN themselves. In 2005, Baroness Warnock (whose previous work had formed the basis of the inclusion agenda in the UK, see section 1.2.1.3) published a pamphlet outlining a number of concerns about the way inclusion was being implemented and the effects of this on the pupils with SEN within mainstream schools (Warnock, 2005). Warnock argued that although greater numbers of pupils with SEN were "*physically included"* in mainstream schools, they remained "*emotionally excluded*" (Warnock, 2005, p.32) as their individual needs were not being recognised and supported. Warnock recommended abolishing the system of issuing statements of SEN and called for a review of inclusion in schools to ensure the needs of all pupils were being met by the inclusion agenda (see section 1.2.1.1 for details about the changes being made to statements of SEN).

Following on from this, MacBeath *et al.* (2006) conducted a major review of inclusion in English schools, which reported a number of concerns about the impact of inclusion upon pupils with SEN. A major finding from the review was that, within mainstream

school settings, children with a statement of SEN were nine times more likely to be excluded from school than peers without statements. The researchers questioned whether the pupils with SEN may be exhibiting higher levels of disruptive behaviour (leading to exclusion) as a result of their frustrations about their needs not being met within the mainstream classroom. The MacBeath *et al.* review also reported that the focus on testing in schools was marginalising some pupils with SEN, for whom progress may not be in line with same age peers. Beveridge (1999) has previously expressed similar concerns, arguing that classrooms where academic attainment and competition are highly valued may result in pupils with SEN having poor status among their peers. Special school classrooms, where academic progress may not be the primary focus, would not result in this same comparison of attainment levels.

Contrary to the parental view that inclusion may support the acquisition of social skills and provide greater opportunities for peer interaction (Frostad and Pijl, 2007; Cullinan, Sabornie and Crossland, 1992), some researchers have found that pupils with SEN feel isolated from or rejected by mainstream peers. Alongside this, children with SEN may compare themselves to children without additional needs and this may negatively impact upon their self-confidence (Bakker et al., 2007). McArthur *et al.* (2007) reported that pupils with SEN were aware of feeling different to and feeling that they were treated differently by peers within mainstream settings. Other researchers have also reported a stigma to additional support in school that results in peer rejection and isolation (Skär and Tamm, 2001). Research investigating the interactions and friendships of pupils with SEN is presented in section 2.8.3 of this literature review, and the effect of TA support on peer interactions is discussed in section 2.6.5.

Perhaps as a result of these issues, it has also been reported that pupils with SEN may be less likely than other pupils to enjoy school. McCoy and Banks (2012) interviewed children (both with and without SEN), parents and teachers as part of a large scale, longitudinal study in Ireland. They found that children with SEN in mainstream settings were significantly more likely to respond that they ‘never like school’ than peers without SEN. With regard to specific forms of SEN, they found that pupils with learning disabilities or ESBD were much more likely to say that they ‘never like school’ than pupils with other forms of SEN (physical, hearing or visual impairments, needs related to speech, language and communication). Although the researchers in this study conducted interviews to capture child voice, participants were limited in relation to their response options (the pupils were asked ‘What do you think about school?’ and could answer either ‘always like it’, ‘sometimes like it’ or ‘never like it’). This method could have affected results as pupils were not fully able to express their views.

It is clear from the literature reviewed in this section that the inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools is not without its challenges. Despite this numerous positive effects have been reported and these are discussed in the next section.

2.3 Positive effects of inclusion

A number of positive effects have been reported for pupils with SEN of mainstream school placement, primarily in relation to peer interactions. For many parents of children with SEN, the major reason for choosing mainstream schooling is for the perceived social benefits of interaction with children without additional needs (Cullinan, Sabornie and Crossland, 1992). In line with this, several studies have reported that inclusive mainstream schools facilitate the social development and peer interactions of many pupils with SEN (MacBeath *et al.*, 2006) as well as those with physical disabilities (Kennedy, Shukla and Fryxell, 1997).

The reason for this positive effect on levels of social interaction may be that the inclusion of pupils' with SEN is positively affecting pupil views of mainstream peers. A project, reported in Wade and Moore (1992), brought together pupils from a mixed ability school and a special school (for pupils with moderate and severe learning difficulties) in order to put on a musical production. Interviews after the performance showed a change in the mainstream pupils' perceptions of the pupils with SEN, as in this quote,

> *"Once you get to know them you realise that they aren't stupid"*
>
> (Keeley: Wade and Moore, 1992, p.92)

This finding suggests that contact between pupils with SEN and peers may lead to a greater sense of empathy for, and understanding of, each others' needs. The researchers reported that a number of the pupils maintained friendships across the two settings even when the project finished. Further support from this finding comes from MacBeath *et al.* (2006) who reported that the inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream school can have social benefits for all parties involved.

Moving on from the inclusion of pupils with SEN, the next section focuses on research related to TAs. The role of the TA has changed in recent years and this change is discussed in relation to its effect on the school experience of pupils with SEN.

2.4 Statements of SEN and Policy Enactment within schools

As explained in section1.2.1, in recent years in the UK pupils with SEN that require additional support within school have been awarded a statement of SEN. This is a document which details the pupils' individual needs alongside strategies for support. Very little research exists regarding the ways in which school staff are using these statements within schools or the way in which decisions about support are shaped by these documents (Webster and Blatchford, 2013). Relevant to this, however, is research looking at the way in which schools enact policy more broadly and the various factors which can impact upon policy responses. This section brings together research related to school responses to policy change, and relates this to the use of statements within schools.

2.4.1 Policy Enactment in schools

A number of studies have investigated how schools enact policies, both in terms of the active decisions made regarding how policy changes can be enforced within schools as well as the contextual factors which may also affect these decisions (Spillane *et al.*, 2002). Braun *et al.* (2011), working from detailed case studies in four schools, found that the way in which schools changed their practice to reflect new policies was shaped by four types of contextual information:

1. Situated contexts – locale, school history, intake, reputation
2. Professional contexts – teacher values, teacher experiences
3. Material contexts – school budget, staffing, availability of technology
4. External contexts – Ofsted, school league tables, levels of support from the Local Authority

Braun *et al.* (2011) explain that each of these factors can affect the extent to which a policy is enacted. Schools whose values closely match the new policy initiative, for example, will embed more of the policy changes than schools for whom the policy contrasts with their aims. Schools who have the financial means to buy new equipment or train staff will also be better equipped to make changes to accommodate policy shift.

Other studies have shown that the way in which policies are introduced to school staff can also impact on their response. Wallace (1991) found that schools reacted differently to policies in relation to whether they were mandated, strongly recommended or suggested. The researchers reported that policies were enacted more fully when they were seen as mandated but that school staff also reported feeling more resentful about having to make the changes. The researchers suggest that this, in turn, could affect the success of the policy change in the longer term.

In relation to behaviour management specifically, Maguire, Ball and Braun (2010) reported that school staff reported a tension between policy and practice in the classroom. Many of the teachers spoke about the complexity of classroom life and the effect of this on their own responses to policy. Teachers reported that behaviour policies would be enacted to different degrees dependent on teacher experience, on the pupils in the class and on the subject being taught; concepts which cover a range of the factors identified in Braun *et al.* (2011).

Maguire, Ball and Braun (2010) reported that a consistent finding across the schools studied was that teachers and TAs had rarely actually read policy documents and that, instead, information had been passed onto them by senior school staff. This leaves the teachers and TAs open to interpret this information on an individual basis, which could also lead to a range of different approaches to new initiatives.

In relation to inclusion, studies have found little consistency in how inclusion is understood and policies are enacted both within individual schools (Slee, 2011) and internationally (Hardy and Woodcock, 2015). In relation to UK inclusion policy over the last decade, Hardy and Woodcock (2015) reported inconsistencies and incoherence between policies and resultant confusion as to how to meet all of the aims of the policies in place.

What is clear from the research presented here is that the way in which schools understand and respond to policy change is complex and varies according to a range of factors. The relationship between these findings and the enactment of statements is discussed below.

2.4.2 Statement enactment

The most comprehensive recent study in relation to how statements are being used in UK schools is the MAST project (Webster and Blatchford, 2013). Interviews with a range of school staff suggested that schools were using the statements to determine the number of hours of support required for individual pupils but were not using these documents to decide on appropriate pedagogical approaches or support strategies.

> *"The resources 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 and Blatchford, 2013, p.9)

As a result TAs were found to be making decisions about pupil support within the

classroom, rather than these coming from the statement itself. This is an interesting finding in relation to the literature in 2.4.1 regarding policy enactment within schools. As the decisions regarding pupil support are being made on an individual basis, the factors outlined by Braun *et al.* (2011) could mean that very different approaches are being taken to pupils' support needs.

Another relevant finding from the project was that a number of school staff did not feel confident in their understanding of the pupils' statement of SEN (Webster and Blatchford, 2013). Just 12 out of 56 teachers interviewed expressed a high level of confidence in relation to this, and 23 out of 66 TAs. In some cases staff expressed that they lacked understanding as they did not work directly with the statement, whereas others talked about the documents being hard to work with. This echoes the finding from Maguire, Ball and Braun (2010) above that some school staff are asked to enact policies that they have not read.

The MAST project (Webster and Blatchford, 2013) also asked school staff whether they felt there was a 'good fit' between the provision on a pupils' statement and the provision received. Two thirds of all respondents reported that they felt that the support received matched the details on the statement, despite the fact that many agreed that they did not have a good understanding about these statements. The researchers did not assess whether provision matched the statements during their observations.

2.5 TA role

2.5.1 Changes to the TA role

The 'Workforce Remodelling' put in place by the National Agreement has resulted in a number of changes to the TA role within mainstream schools (Department for Education and Skills, 2003). Where TAs were previously primarily used as support for administrative tasks within the classroom, research in recent years has shown that many TAs are taking on primary responsibility for the teaching and support of the pupils with SEN to whom they are allocated (Marks, Schrader and Levine, 1999; MacBeath *et al.*, 2006). Blatchford, Russell and Webster (2012) observed that TAs were regularly taking on a direct teaching role for pupils, in some cases covering whole classes during teachers' PPA time. TAs were most often observed to be working with pupils in small groups, thereby enabling the teacher to work with other members of the class.

Similar results were reported by Cajkler and Tennant (2005). The researchers carried out a review of research related to the perceptions of pupils, parents, teachers, head

teachers and support staff regarding the main role of TAs in relation to pupils' academic and social engagement. Following this they conducted interviews with 32 TAs regarding their findings. In line with the other research discussed, they found TAs were viewed as primarily responsible for tasks related to pupils' learning. The respondents in the study reported feeling that the TA's role was primarily to differentiate work for pupils and help them to complete tasks as well as working with pupils in small groups. The pupils, parents and school staff also saw TAs as responsible for promoting pupils' independence within class.

Marks, Schrader and Levine (1999) interviewed TAs to investigate their views on their roles and responsibilities and to discuss any dilemmas faced by them in their work. As in the other studies, a number of the TAs felt that they had primary responsibility for teaching the pupils they supported. For many this was because they felt teachers were busy with the rest of the class. Others explained that they felt their role was to stop the pupil being 'a bother' to the teacher; to make sure they did not disrupt the work going on in the class. The TAs reported feeling that they, and the pupils supported, were isolated from the rest of the classroom (see section 2.6.4 for further discussion of this). As this study was undertaken in the United States of America, it is possible that differences in TA deployment or school experience may have affected these results, however findings from Webster and Blatchford (2013) suggest TAs in schools in England also report feeling primarily responsible for the pupils they support which is in consistent with these findings.

The changes to TA roles, and specifically the move towards a more direct teaching role for TAs, has lead researchers to raise issues for further investigation, which are discussed in the next section.

2.5.2 Questions being raised about the TA role

A number of researchers have identified issues which have raised questions about the ways in which TAs are being deployed in schools and the impact this may be having upon the pupils being supported. As research has consistently found that TAs are taking on a direct pedagogical role (Blatchford, Russell and Webster, 2012; Webster and Blatchford, 2013; Giangreco, Edelman and Broer, 2001), researchers have started to question how this is affecting the school experience of the pupils being supported. TAs are not trained to deliver the curriculum, and yet they are often serving as the primary teacher for pupils, most often those with SEN (Blatchford *et al.*, 2009). Giangreco and Broer (2005) outline the issue with this type of deployment clearly,

> *"The least qualified personnel are assigned to provide the bulk of instruction and support to students with the most challenging learning characteristics,"*
> (Giangreco and Broer, 2005, p.10)

The researchers argue that the tasks being asked of TAs do not match their skills or training, especially in regard to pupils with complex needs. Webster *et al.* (2010) also reported that TAs make pedagogical decisions daily which are *"beyond their expertise"* (p.331) and questioned the effectiveness of this style of support for pupils with SEN.

A further finding from the DISS project (Blatchford, Russell and Webster, 2012) regards the ways in which TAs talk to the pupils they support. Comparing recordings of pupil interactions with teachers and TAs, Rubie-Davies *et al.* (2010) found a difference in the quality of talk for the two groups. Teacher talk was found to be formal and focused on learning; explaining underlying concepts and asking questions. In comparison, TA talk was informal and was more focused on task completion. TAs were often heard giving answers to pupils rather than working through questions with them. The researchers reported that the TA talk was less effective for teaching as it did not promote pupil thinking or encourage pupils to develop their own ideas. The researchers also found that TAs sometimes did not understand the concepts they were supposed to be supporting pupils to learn, but did not seek support for this. These findings are consistent with Ofsted (2010) who reported finding that many TAs observed were focused on completing activities rather than supporting actual learning. Taken together, these findings suggest the use of TAs in a direct teaching role might not always be impacting positively upon the pupils they support.

Finally, a number of researchers have identified that TAs are underpaid and undervalued in schools, especially given that they are spending such a large proportion of their time teaching (Giangreco, Edelman and Broer, 2001; Blatchford, Russell and Webster, 2012). Some studies have also argued that the 'role creep' between the TA and teacher role (with TAs taking on more pedagogical support) threatens teacher professionalism, with the separation between the two roles becoming less and less clear (Hammersley-Fletcher and Lowe, 2011; Thompson, 2006). The primary concern raised, however, has been the lack of research relating to TA impact on pupils school experience (Giangreco, 2010a), especially given the high numbers currently working in schools (see section 1.2.2.2). The following sections outline the research that has been undertaken into TA impact on teachers' school experience and on the pupils receiving TA support.

2.6 Teaching Assistants - Impact

Despite the recent increase in TA numbers (see section 1.2.2.2) there has been relatively little research into the impact of TAs on the teachers they work with and the pupils they support (Alborz *et al.*, 2009). This section outlines research relating to the impact of TAs on teachers' school experience, pupils' academic outcomes, pupils' classroom experience and their peer interactions. All of the references included in this section are listed in Table 5 (below).

2.6.1 TA impact: Teachers' school experience

In relation to teacher experience of TA support, the vast majority of studies point to positive outcomes. The Alborz *et al*. (2009) systematic review reports that a number of studies have reported that the use of TAs enables teachers to spend more time working with small groups and individuals within the classroom. They also reported a reduction in class-related workload for teachers working with a teaching assistant, although this was balanced by a parallel increase in management time as teachers had to plan work for and supervise their TAs. In support of this, in a survey undertaken as part of DISS, Blatchford, Russell and Webster (2012) found a significant positive effect of TAs on teacher workloads, job satisfaction and levels of stress. Over half of the teachers questioned felt that working with TAs decreased their workload, while just 12% felt that having a TA had caused them more work. Over 65% of teachers interviewed felt that working with a TA had also reduced their levels of work-related stress. Further to this, 75% of head teachers spoken to felt that the introduction of TAs to classrooms had reduced the workloads for their teachers.

Another finding of the DISS study was that two thirds of all teachers interviewed felt that the introduction of TAs had led to an increase in their job satisfaction. Specifically, teachers reported feeling that TAs helped ensure that pupils were supported more effectively and that pupil learning was enhanced. They explained that they had more time to teach due to a reduction in routine tasks as these had been taken on by TAs. Many reported feeling that the quality of their teaching had improved as a result. In line with this, the Alborz *et al.* (2009) review reported that teachers felt that TA support enabled them to use more creative and practical activities within their teaching and facilitated small group work and individual support for all pupils. Increased job satisfaction and reduced stress were also reported as a positive result of TA support.

Study	Topic	Age of sample	Method	Country
Alborz *et al.* (2009)	Impact of TA support	N/A	Review	UK
Blatchford, Russell and Webster (2012)	Impact of TA support	5 – 16 years old	Systematic observations Interviews with school staff	UK
Causton-Theoharis and Malmgren (2005)	The peer interactions of students with disabilities	6 – 11 years old	Action research	USA
Eriksson, Welander and Granlund (2007)	Participation in school activities of pupils with SEN	7 – 12 years old	Social participation measures	Sweden
Farrell *et al.* (2010)	Impact of TA support on academic achievement	N/A	Review	UK
Giangreco and Broer (2005)	TA role and deployment	Adults	Questionnaires (School staff and parents)	USA
Giangreco *et al.* (1997)	Effects of TA proximity on pupils with SEN	4 – 20 years old	Observations and interviews (students and school staff)	USA
Giangreco *et al.* (2005)	TA role and deployment	N/A	Opinion piece	USA
Klassen (2001)	Academic progress for pupils with SpLD	11 – 15 years old	Reading tests	Canada
Lacey (2001)	Pupil views of TA support	5 – 11 years old	Interviews and observations	UK
Malmgren and Causton-Theoharis (2006)	Impact of TA proximity on peer interactions	7 years old	Case Study	USA
Marks, Schrader and Levine (1999)	TA support	Adults	Interviews (TAs)	USA
Moran and Abbott (2002)	TA role	Adults	Interviews (Head teachers)	Northern Ireland
Savage and Carless (2008)	Impact of interventions delivered by TAs on attainment	6 –7 years old	Experimental design Literacy tests pre and post intervention	UK
Tews and Lupart (2008)	Pupil views of TA support	3 – 30 years old	Interviews	Canada
Webster and Blatchford (2013)	School experience of pupils with SEN	9 – 10 years old	Systematic observations	UK
Wendelborg and Tossebro (2011)	TA impact on social participation	Adults	Questionnaires (parents of pupils with SEN)	Norway

Table 5: List of references relevant to the impact of TA support, detailing the age of the sample, methods chosen and the country in which the study was undertaken.

2.6.2 TA impact: pupils' academic progress

Alborz *et al.* (2009) reported that the majority of studies looking at academic progress in relation to TA support have been focused on literacy learning and so little evidence exists as to any potential effect on the wider curriculum. The studies that have looked at this do not provide a clear picture, as results are very mixed. Farrell *et al.* (2010) reported that the presence of TAs had no effect on the average attainments of pupils. Other studies have reported positive results on academic progress, but the majority of these relate to specific interventions undertaken by TAs rather than TA deployment in class (Savage and Carless, 2008; Alborz *et al.*, 2009).

Negative results have also been published. The Deployment and Impact of Support Staff project (DISS) found a negative relationship between the amount of TA support received and the progress made by pupils. Comparing progress by looking at end of year key stage tests in English, maths and science, Blatchford, Russell and Webster (2012) found a consistent negative relationship between TA support and academic progress. In the second wave of the research, it was found that the pupils making the lowest levels of progress were also those with the highest levels of TA support, and the researchers felt confident that this was an independent effect related to TA support rather than a reflection of the rate of progress that pupils would have been expected to make given their academic needs (to support this claim results were controlled for characteristics such as prior attainment, income level and SEN status). These results were found across settings (primary and secondary) and were confirmed by repeated analyses so this remains a strong finding. Similar results were reported by Klassen (2001) regarding pupils with a statement of SEN for dyslexia. In this study the pupils' assigned specific support from a TA for literacy made less progress than peers who were not receiving TA support.

2.6.3 TA impact: inclusion in classroom activities

In the Making a Statement project (MaSt) Webster and Blatchford (2013) carried out systematic observations of 48 primary school pupils with statements of SEN in mainstream schools in England. They found a high degree of separation between pupils with SEN and their peers. On average pupils with SEN spent over a quarter of their time outside the classroom (primarily undertaking interventions or working in small groups on separate tasks). This inevitably led to a lessening of opportunities to be

involved in the whole class environment or to interact with peers. Even where pupils with TA support remain within the classroom, the researchers reported a barrier to peer interaction because of the task attempted. Blatchford, Russell and Webster (2012) found that, for 61% of the time observed, pupils with SEN were working on a different task to the main class focus. This meant that although they were included in terms of location, these pupils would be unable to take part in group work or paired learning with peers. This finding is similar to previous research which has reported that pupils with SEN have been found to participate less in general school activities than their peers (Eriksson, Welander and Granlund, 2007).

Webster and Blatchford (2013) also recorded information about pupil context during observations. The researchers compared the results for their pupils with SEN to a group of 'control' pupils (middle attaining pupils, identified by class teachers, matched to target pupil gender). They found that although the two groups both spent the majority of the time observed as part of the whole class, the pupils with SEN spent 14% of their time in class in one-to-one interactions with adults (as compared to 1% for control pupils). Across all locations, pupils with SEN spent 21% of their time in one-to-one interactions with adults, compared to 1% for control pupils. A high proportion of one-to-one supervision from TAs has been named as a potential barrier to successful inclusion (Beveridge, 1999). Ofsted (2010) identified this as a concern with specific relation to partner / group work where pupils with SEN were often observed to work with a TA rather than a peer.

Giangreco *et al.* (2005) also identified physical separation from classmates as an inadvertent detrimental effect of TA support. They suggested that pupils with SEN are often physically separated from the other pupils in the class, either because they are seated with their TA or because they are positioned at the back of the room. As previously discussed in section 2.5, Marks, Schrader and Levine (1999) conducted interviews with paraeducators in America (one-to-one assistants for pupils with SEN or disabilities, a broadly similar role to TAs). They found many talked about a feeling of distance between themselves, the pupil being supported, and the rest of the classroom. This isolation was felt both in terms of their school experience (as they were often outside of the classroom or working on different tasks) and the TAs' experience of support from other school staff,

> *"I felt sometimes that, although the kids in the classroom were very supportive, we were sort of on an island"* (Marks, Schrader and Levine, 1999, p.320).

The paraeducators reported feeling that they were viewed as the experts regarding the pupils they supported and, as such, were left alone to make decisions about the pupils'

schooling. Webster and Blatchford (2013) also reported that TAs were seen as the 'experts' in relation to the pupils they supported and that this lead to a lack of support or management from teachers and other school staff of the work being done by TAs.

2.6.4 TA impact: TA proximity levels

Findings regarding potentially negative effects of TA support on interactions need to be considered in line with results related to the amount of time that pupils with SEN typically spend being supported by a TA each day. Giangreco and Broer (2005) conducted a questionnaire study investigating TA perspectives on deployment, roles and inclusive education practices. In terms of their day-to-day work, TAs reported spending about 86% of their time within 3 feet of their assigned pupil (a child with SEN). Just 15% of the TAs expressed any concern about the impact that this high level of proximity may be having on interactions for that pupil with either teachers or peers. As the researchers conclude, this high level of proximity could negatively impact upon pupils' opportunities to develop socially within school,

> *"Part of the socialization that goes on in schools is learning how to negotiate the social and academic environment without constant adult involvement and developing an increasing sense of autonomy and interdependence with classmates as pupils progress through the grades"*
>
> (Giangreco and Broer, 2005, p.22).

Observational research has also recorded high levels of adult proximity for pupils with SEN (Webster and Blatchford, 2013; Giangreco *et al.*, 1997).

Malmgren and Causton-Theoharis (2006), in their observations of a single pupil with ESBD, found he had an adult proximal for 270 minutes of the 420 minutes of the time observed (64%). Although the design of this study affects its generalisability to the wider population the finding is consistent with large scale studies. Blatchford, Russell and Webster (2012) found that TAs spent 64% of the time observed working with pupils and that the most common activity they were observed undertaking was one-to-one support of a pupil (29%).

2.6.5 TA impact: levels of peer interaction

The Alborz *et al.* (2009) systematic review found that there is a general perception amongst educational professionals that TAs have a positive impact on pupils' social and emotional development. However, multiple studies have reported results which suggest that pupils may become isolated from their peers as a result of TA support. Studies of interactions (for pupils with SEN) have shown both that the vast majority take place with adults and that far fewer peer interactions happen with a TA present.

Webster and Blatchford (2013) carried out systematic observations of pupils with SEN and of a group of ‘control’ pupils in mainstream primary school settings. The control pupils were middle attaining children matched to the same sex as the target pupil in each observation and chosen by the class teacher. The researchers found that pupils with SEN spent a significantly larger amount of their time involved in interactions with adults than control pupils did. More than half of the interactions (including non-verbal interactions) that the target pupils were observed undertaking were with TAs and teachers (59%); very few occasions were noted where target pupils were observed communicating with peers (18%). This compared to control pupils who spent 41% of their time in interactions with adults and 33% of their time interacting with peers. This finding suggests that having a TA present may inhibit peer interactions for the supported child. As the target pupils within the study were identified by the class teacher it is hard to know how true a representation they offer of the population they are drawn from. Alongside this, the teachers may have been influenced by the project aims when they selected the control pupils which could further have affected results.

In a study carried out in Norway, Wendelborg and Tossebro (2011) found that the practice of interventions outside of the classroom (which they refer to as 'special education') and the use of TAs were both negatively associated with classroom participation. Those pupils receiving the highest levels of support were also those with the fewest reported peer interactions, suggesting that participation in classroom activities is strongly related to social participation with peers. Although this study is large scale, it is worth noting that this result is based upon questionnaires carried out with parents of children with disabilities (physical or intellectual). The level of social participation of the children with peers was assessed by parents using a list of statements which were answered on a three point scale. As parents answered these questions, it is not clear whether the answers given relate to school experience (as parents have little access to their children during school time).

Malmgren and Causton-Theoharis (2006) also found an effect of TA support for the pupil in their qualitative case study. The target child, a 7 year old pupil with Emotional, Social and Behavioural Difficulties (ESBD), was observed over a four week period. Over the 420 minutes of observations, the pupil participated in just 84 interactions, 62% of which were with adults. Of most relevance to this study, the researchers found a connection between TA proximity and levels of peer interaction. Of the 32 interactions that the pupil had with peers (sixteen of which were with another child with SEN), 90% occurred during the 2.5 hours when the TA was not physically proximate. The pupil had just three interactions with peers while the TA was present. The study focused solely on

one child which resulted in in-depth information relating to that child's experience but limits the generalisability of these findings to pupils with SEN as a whole.

Looking at the reasons for the potential effect of TA support on peer interactions, researchers have suggested that TA behaviour may be the cause. Moran and Abbott (2002), reported that head teachers in Northern Ireland were concerned that TAs were often overprotective of the pupils they supported and that this could be limiting the pupils' chances to interact with peers, as this quote suggests,

> *"To go into a secondary school and see a Down's syndrome pupil arm-in-arm with a classroom assistant – unless he or she needs that sort of protection – is soul destroying for me,"* (Moran and Abbott, 2002, p.168)

The head teachers expressed that the TAs were seen to be 'guarding' the pupils with SEN, meaning that other pupils might not feel confident to approach them. Individual TA characteristics may also be linked to levels of peer interaction. Tews and Lupart (2008), for example, found that the pupils they interviewed recognised that some TAs were better able to facilitate interactions with peers than others.

There are some examples in the literature of TAs supporting interactions between pupils with SEN and their peers. Lacey (2001) notes a specific interaction between a TA and her target pupil (who had severe learning difficulties) in which the TA used questions to promote discussion between the pupil and a peer group. This was one observation out of a total of 24 so its importance should not be overstated. Results further showed that the TAs involved in the study talked about social integration as one of their primary roles in including pupils with SEN and Lacey states that this was clear in their practice (specific examples aside from the one detailed above are not included). Similarly, Causton-Theoharis and Malmgren (2005) describe specific TA training with regard to promoting peer interactions for pupils with severe disabilities in mainstream school settings. Four pupils were involved in the study; two with ASD and two with cerebral palsy (CP). The researchers found that the pupils of TAs who had been taught methods for promoting social integration went on to have higher levels of interaction than they had previously and that these were maintained over time. Prior to the training the pupils with SEN were observed to have little or no interaction with peers. As this study involves such a small sample it is possible that the individual needs of the pupils included in the study could have impacted upon results.

2.7 Pupil views

2.7.1 TA support and its effects

There has been little research into pupil's perceptions of TA support, either in terms of the perceived role undertaken by TAs or the experience of receiving academic support (Rudduck and Flutter, 2000). This section draws together results from the small number of studies which have spoken to pupils with SEN or disabilities who have received or are receiving support from TAs in school.

All of the references included in this section are listed in Table 6, which details the topic studied, the age of participants, the method of data collection and the country where the study was undertaken.

Study	Topic	Age of sample	Method	Country
Bowers (1997)	Pupil views of TA role	5 – 16 years old	Group interviews	UK
Broer, Doyle and Giangreco (2005)	Pupil views of TA role	19 – 29 years old	Interviews	USA
Curtin and Clarke (2005)	Pupil voice	10 – 13 years old	Interviews	UK
Eyres *et al.* (2004)	Pupil views of TA role	5 – 11 years old	Interviews	UK
Farrell, Balshaw and Polat (1999)	TA role, training and management	Adults	Observations Questionnaires	UK
Fraser and Meadows (2008)	Pupil views of TA support	5 – 11 years old	Questionnaires and interviews	UK
Giangreco and Broer (2005)	TA role and deployment	Adults	Questionnaires (TAs)	USA
Giangreco *et al.* (1997)	Effects of TA proximity on pupils with SEN	4 – 20 years old	Observations and interviews (students and school staff)	USA
Mortier *et al.* (2011)	Pupil views of TA support	9 – 18 years old	Interviews	Belgium
Moyles and Suschitsky (1997)	TA role and deployment	Adults	Questionnaires (adults) Observations	UK
Rudduck and Flutter (2000)	Pupil participation	N/A	Review	UK
De Schauwer *et al.* (2009)	Pupil views of TA support	3 – 18 years old	Interviews and observations	Belgium
Skar and Tamm (2001)	Pupil views of TA support and TA role	8 – 19 years old	Interviews	Sweden
Tamm and Skar (2000)	Play for children with restricted mobility	6 – 12 years old	Interviews and observations	Sweden
Tews and Lupart (2008)	Pupil views of TA support	3 – 30 years	Interviews	Canada

Table 6: List of references relevant to pupil views of TA support detailing the age of the sample, methods chosen and the country in which the study was undertaken.

Where researchers have looked into pupil views of TA support, the pupils asked have generally spoken positively about the support they receive in school (De Schauwer *et al.*, 2009; Fraser and Meadows, 2008). Pupils have talked about enjoying the company of their TAs (Tews and Lupart, 2008) and appreciating the support for things they find challenging in school (Mortier *et al.*, 2011). However, in many of these studies, pupils have also expressed concerns about the amount of support they receive and the impact of this upon their independence (Broer, Doyle and Giangreco, 2005). Skär and Tamm (2001), speaking to children with restricted mobility (between 8 and 19 years old) in Sweden, found that many felt they were not listened to by their TAs and that this resulted in a lack of autonomy, as they had little control over the help they received. Mortier *et al.* (2011) reported similar results. The pupils they spoke to said that they felt they got too much support in school, and often received help for things they felt they could have done on their own. This lack of control over their support runs contrary to the children's rights agenda which guarantees children, including those with disabilities and SEN, the right to have their views heard and emphasises that this may be the best way to achieve effective support (Blandford and Gibson, 2000; Curtin and Clarke, 2005; see section 2.11 for more discussion of pupil voice and children's rights).

Researchers have also found that the TA-pupil relationship is seen in different ways by children depending on the ways in which they are supported. Broer, Doyle and Giangreco (2005) spoke to 16 young adults (aged 19 – 29) about their previous experiences of TA support in mainstream classrooms in America. They found that the pupil views of TA-pupil relationships could be grouped into four main themes, with pupils describing their TA as fulfilling the role of: mother, friend, protector or primary teacher. Fraser and Meadows (2008), speaking to 5 to 11 year olds, also found pupils who described their TAs as friends, as in this extract:

> *"She feels like a friend as well [...] I think everyone in our class, it would be safe to say, thinks Miss Hart isn't there to teach us, she's there as a friend'*
>
> (Carol, 10: Fraser and Meadows, 2008, p.354)

In contrast to their views of teachers as authority figures, TAs were seen as friends. The researchers suggest that the pupils may have chosen to interact with TAs as friends, as they found peer interactions challenging due to their SEN (Broer, Doyle and Giangreco, 2005). In line with this, a number of studies have reported pupils with SEN opting to interact with their TAs rather than with peers inside school. Giangreco and Broer (2005), speaking to school staff (including TAs), reported that 45.71% of the TAs they spoke to agreed that the pupils they supported saw them as a 'primary friend' at school rather than this role being fulfilled by one of their classmates. A further finding

linked to this is that of Tamm and Skär (2000) who reported that the pupils they studied with restricted mobility more often choose to play with adults than with peers in school.

This view of TAs as friends may be problematic for a number of reasons. First, in some cases, pupils seemed to be choosing the relationship with the TA in place of friendship with same-age peers, an issue because it is through these early social and play interactions that we learn the socialization skills needed for later life (Roffey, Tarrant and Majors, 1994; Erwin, 2013). A further issue is that all of the TA roles identified by Broer, Doyle and Giangreco (2005) were seen to impact negatively upon peer relationships in some way. While some of the respondents felt very positively about these 'friendships' with TAs, others felt that the TAs interfered with peer relationships by cutting into conversations or being over familiar (Broer, Doyle and Giangreco, 2005). Some pupils felt embarrassed about receiving TA support in school, saying they felt they were treated differently by peers as a result of the support,

> *"That's why I didn't have any best friends or a girlfriend in high school because I always had a mother on my back"* (Broer, Doyle and Giangreco, 2005, p.421).

A number of studies have also reported that pupils feel they are treated differently as a result of their TA support because peers feel it is unfair; that the pupils with SEN are receiving preferential treatment (Mortier *et al.*, 2011; De Schauwer *et al.*, 2009). Where TAs were well-liked, those pupils receiving little support resented this lack of attention and, as a result, grew to dislike the children receiving support (Bowers, 1997). Similarly, with specific regard to physically disabled pupils, Skar and Tamm (2001) reported a stigma attached to TA support. Several of the pupils interviewed talked about negative reactions from peers to their TA being present which lead to social isolation at school,

> *"My friends don't want to play with me if the assistant is there so I mostly sit and watch when they play"* (Skar and Tamm, 2001, p.924).

Section 2.6.5 includes further information about TA impact on levels of peer interaction for pupils with SEN. In contrast to the other results outlined here, the pupils surveyed by Fraser and Meadows (2008) reported no perceived negative response linked to TA support.

Tews and Lupart (2008) found that some pupils with SEN feel they require support from TAs (referred to as 'educational assistants' in Canada) to interact with peers (see also Skär and Tamm, 2001). They received positive reports from pupils as to the support received from TAs, and found many of the respondents in their study saw their TA as a facilitator of social interaction. Several pupils talked about their social standing in

school as being linked to the popularity of their TA; if the TA was liked then this resulted in increased interactions for the pupil. This 'package deal' phenomenon has been previously reported by Giangreco *et al*. (1997) and can have negative effects in cases where the TA is not liked by peers. In the Tews and Lupart (2008) study, despite the positive feelings about support, all participants reported spending the vast majority of their time in interactions with their TA (see section 2.6.4 for other studies reporting high levels of TA proximity) and many talked about being socially isolated. In this case the TA seems to have filled a void for the pupils, however in doing so they may also have impeded social integration.

2.7.2 TA versus teacher role

Some studies have focused on pupils' understanding of the role of TAs in school. Moyles and Suschitsky (1997) interviewed 60 children and found that pupils were not clear about the distinction between teacher and TA roles. The children recognised that TAs more often worked with particular children and that teachers took on a more managerial role in the classroom, but they also saw a lot of overlap between the two positions (a similar finding was reported by Eyres *et al.*, 2004). More recently, however, Fraser and Meadows (2008) in a larger scale study, reported that the children in their study saw a clear distinction between teachers and TAs. Class teachers were seen as responsible for telling the TA 'what to do' (reflecting the managerial role found in Moyles and Suschitsky, 1997). Children also used the word 'teaching' far more often in relation to teachers and 'helping' in relation to TAs (see also Farrell, Balshaw and Polat, 1999). In another study looking at pupil views, Bowers (1997) interviewed pupils (both receiving TA support and not) as to their perceptions of the TA role. The majority of pupils expressed that the TA was there to help the teacher and to keep pupils focused on the task at hand. Taken together these findings suggest that pupils are able to explain their views of the TA role; however they also raise questions about how pupils understand the distinction between teacher and TA roles within school.

2.7.3 Characteristics of an effective TA

Skär and Tamm (2001) asked a group of children with restricted mobility in Sweden to describe their 'ideal assistant'. The children felt TAs should be young (under 25 years old) because they felt this would make them easier to play with and more likely to listen to their opinions. The children felt an assistant of the same sex would be best, in case they needed support with personal care. They wanted TAs to be available on their own terms, which perhaps reflects the findings from previous studies (see section 2.7.3

above) that pupils with SEN often feel they are not listened to by TAs or that TAs can offer support even where it is not needed. Further evidence that the children valued autonomy in relation to their TAs is suggested by a finding that the children would prefer to choose the person who worked with them rather than having that decision made for them.

Farrell, Balshaw and Polat (1999) found that pupils with SEN felt it important that support be given non-obtrusively as they did not want to be singled out as different to other members of the class. Fraser and Meadows (2008) asked their participants 'what makes a good Teaching Assistant?". Their responses showed the children felt TAs should be helpful, kind, caring and should be good at listening. They emphasised that it was important for the TA to like children and to pay attention to the children they worked with.

A consistent finding across this literature is that pupils value being included in decisions about their TA support. The studies included here involved children from the age of five, which suggests that very young children are able to express their views about TA support and the role of the TA in school.

2.8 Peer relationships

2.8.1 Primary school children

The focus of this study is on pupils under the age of eight who are attending mainstream school. This section discusses the typical development of friendships for pupils in this stage of childhood, identifying why this is an interesting age to study with regard to pupils' peer interactions. Research related to the friendships and peer interactions of children with SEN is reviewed in section 2.8.3.

As a developmental stage, early childhood (Key Stage 1) is an important time for children's peer relationships as it is during this time that friendships with peers take on more significance for the children and the bonds between them become less transient. In the early years, friends are seen as people who do things for you and friendships change often, however once children start school, they begin to understand that friendships involve reciprocity (Roffey, Tarrant and Majors, 1994). Rather than opting to play with others based on their proximity, from the age of six children start to make conscious choices about whom they want to be friends with and, as a result, their friendships become more and more stable as childhood progresses (Erwin, 2013). During Key Stage 1, the number of friends that children have increases, and they

become more concerned about belonging to the peer group and upset if they feel rejected or isolated (Meadows, 2010). These changes to friendships reflect a shift in the child's understanding of and empathy for other people's feelings. From a very early age (as toddlers), children have been found to be sensitive to the feelings and intentions of peers and this sensitivity develops rapidly throughout this stage of childhood (Dunn, 1993). This new-found empathy enables children to build supportive caring relationships which can be maintained over time.

As is clear from this section, the first years of primary school mark a shift in the ways in which children form relationships with each other. For the first time, children start to build stable bonds with non-family members and simultaneously recognise that these bonds are significant (Roffey, Tarrant and Majors, 1994). The next section details research into the importance of peer relationships and the negative effects of peer rejection on child development.

2.8.2 The importance of peer relationships and the negative effects of rejection and bullying

A major impetus for placing pupils with disabilities into mainstream school classrooms is to enable them to reap the social and academic benefits experienced by their peers without disabilities (Cullinan, Sabornie and Crossland, 1992). An inclusive classroom both provides more opportunities for interaction, as compared to specialist provision where school days typically involve more interventions or individual support (Kennedy, Shukla and Fryxell, 1997). This type of support also enables pupils with SEN to learn from, interact with and befriend both pupils without additional needs and those with SEN (MacBeath *et al.*, 2006). Research has proposed that successful inclusion within a mainstream classroom can improve the social competence of pupils with SEN (Fryxell and Kennedy, 1995) which can lead to an increase in numbers of interactions with peers, to the pupils receiving higher levels of social support from peers and to larger and more durable peer networks for the pupil with SEN (Kennedy, Shukla and Fryxell, 1997; Hunt *et al.*, 1994). These findings are particularly important when considered against research showing that what happens in children's peer relationships affects development and functioning in multiple aspects of their lives. What follows is a brief outline of that research.

The positive effects of peer relationships have been widely noted. Successful childhood friendships have been shown to be important for the development of positive self-image (Azmitia, 2002; Erwin, 2013) and are essential to establishing feelings of belonging (Kunc, 2000). Children who have friends have been found to have higher

levels of self-esteem and increased academic achievement (Wentzel and Caldwell, 1997) compared to children who do not. Friendships have also been seen as a buffer against some of the stresses experienced in childhood including school transitions (Ladd and Kochenderfer, 1996), being bullied (Schwartz *et al.*, 2000) and the upset caused by family issues (e.g. divorce - Criss *et al.*, 2002).

In contrast, children who do not have stable peer relationships have been found to have resultant negative outcomes. Rejected children (socially isolated with very few or no stable friendships) have been shown to exhibit more aggressive behaviours both in childhood and in later life (Newcomb, Bukowski and Pattee, 1993). Peer rejection as a child has also been suggested as a predictor of a wide range of externalising problems in later life including delinquency, attention difficulties and substance abuse (Kupersmidt and Coie, 1990; Kamper and Ostrov, 2013). These findings remain, even when results are controlled for the aggressive behaviours known to be a cause of peer rejection (Ladd and Burgess, 2001). Isolated children report less positive perceptions of self-worth than children with strong peer relationships (Harter, 1990, Bagwell and Schmidt, 2013) and this negative impact on self-worth has also been shown to last into adulthood (Bagwell, Newcomb and Bukowski, 1998). Further negative outcomes resulting from isolation in childhood include anxiety problems, depression and feelings of loneliness that have been found to last into adulthood (Gest, 1997).

Bullying has also been linked to a range of negative outcomes in later life. Studies have reported that being a victim of bullying in childhood has been linked to persistent depression symptoms in adolescence (Zywierzynska, Wolke and Lereya, 2013), anxiety (Gini and Pozzoli, 2009) and increased risk of self-harm. The effects have been shown to be longlasting, with studies reporting that children who were bullied in school were at increased risk of a range of mental health problems including anxiety and depression in adulthood (Lereya *et al.*, 2015) and higher rates of suicide reported from adults who were bullied as children (Winsper *et al.*, 2012). Alongside these health concerns, Wolke *et al.* (2013) reported that adults who had been bullied as children were at greater risk of being impoverished in early adulthood and were more likely to report having difficulty keeping a job. Victims of bullying were also found to have higher rates of disrupted social relationships (multiple short-term relationships/friendships) than people who had not been bullied.

2.8.3 Peer relationships and the effects of pupils' SEN

The relationship between pupils with SEN and their peers within mainstream settings is

complicated. Firstly, the title 'pupils with SEN' is incredibly broad, taking in pupils with physical impairments, those with behavioural difficulties, pupils with learning needs as well as those with needs relating to speech, language and communication. A child with autism may have difficulties interacting with peers as a result of a social communication difficulty, where a child with a hearing impairment may simply not have the spoken language skills to talk to peers; both would come under the heading 'pupils with SEN' and both could have fewer peer interactions than pupils without additional needs. However it is clear these two pupils would have very different experiences and needs. Secondly, the nature of a child's SEN may have an impact upon the way they are seen by peers. Research has suggested that there is a stigma attached to having specialist equipment within the classroom (Weiserbs and Gottlieb, 2000) that might lead to a child being socially isolated. There is also research which claims that children who exhibit violent or aggressive behaviours have fewer successful peer relationships (Ladd and Burgess, 2001). Despite these complications, some broad statements can be made about the social experiences of pupils with SEN in mainstream settings.

Research has found that children with SEN often prefer to play with other children with similar needs and may choose relationships with adults rather than with peers (Broer, Doyle and Giangreco, 2005). The building of relationships requires the acquisition of social skills and, for some pupils with SEN, their needs may impact upon this process (Garrison-Harrell and Kamps, 1997). A consistent finding is that pupils with SEN have been reported to be at greater risk of social rejection than peers (Mand, 2007) and are far more likely to experience some form of bullying (Farrell, 1997). Frostad and Pijl (2007), studying both primary and secondary school children in Norway, reported that pupils with SEN tend to be less popular and have fewer friends (tested using peer nomination techniques). They also found that 20 – 25% of pupils with SEN were not included within the peer group, a much higher level than for pupils without identified SEN (8%). In relation to bullying, Norwich and Kelly (2004) conducted semi-structured interviews with 101 pupils with statements of SEN for Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD) across mainstream and special schools in England, with a view to better understanding pupil views on their own inclusion. Although the majority of pupils expressed positive feelings for their current school (65%), 83% of the pupils had experienced some form of bullying within school. 49% of these pupils said the bullying had specifically related to their learning difficulty. Roffey, Tarrant and Majors (1994) suggest pupils with SEN are more likely to be bullied in school because the other children recognise that they may be more vulnerable than peers. These findings are of particular concern given research relating bullying in childhood to a range of negative outcomes in later life (see section 2.8.2).

Although pupils with SEN have been reported to be generally more isolated (Frostad and Pijl, 2007), it is also possible to determine various factors which have been linked to levels of participation with peers. Wendelborg and Tossebro (2011) explored the relationship between pupil variables, the support strategies in place and the levels of social participation for secondary school pupils with SEN in Norway. The researchers found that 'type of disability' (intellectual versus physical) and 'degree of impairment' (rated based on assessments across six areas of ability) had no direct effect on levels of social participation with peers. However, these factors did have an indirect effect via educational support and classroom participation. Pupils with intellectual difficulties and those with the highest levels of impairment were found to have fewer interactions but, rather than being directly related to these factors, this was the result of greater amounts of time spent outside of the classroom and less participation in the social aspects of classroom life. As explained before (section 2.6.5) the results of this study were drawn from questionnaires completed by the parents of children with disabilities rather than being the result of direct observation or contact with the pupils themselves.

Another questionnaire study by Bossaert *et al.* (2012) found a relationship between particular types of need and feelings of loneliness for some pupils with SEN. The researchers matched a group of 108 secondary school pupils with SEN (half had a diagnosis of ASD and half had needs related to sensory or motor difficulties) to a group of ‘typically attaining’ pupils in Belgium. They found that twice as many pupils with ASD reported feeling lonely than pupils in either of the other groups. The researchers did not look at differences in the support strategies in place for the two groups which could have helped to explain this finding. Alongside this, the use of closed questions within the questionnaires limited the pupils’ responses. Finally, it is possible that this finding could be linked to the social impairments related to ASD rather than differences in school experience for pupils with ASD.

The type of school a pupil with SEN attends may also affect peer relations (see also section 2.2 and section 2.3). Kennedy, Shukla and Fryxell (1997) compared the levels of social interaction for pupils in mainstream and special education settings. The results suggested substantive social benefits for pupils within mainstream classrooms who were found to interact more frequently with peers, have more social support from peers and have larger and more robust friendship networks than pupils being taught in a special school environment. Wiener and Tardif (2004) reported similar results in a more recent Canadian study, finding that pupils with SEN in mainstream schooling had larger numbers of friends and better quality relationships than peers being educated in

special school settings. In the UK, MacBeath *et al.* (2006) also reported positive social outcomes of inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream settings (see section 2.3). Some researchers have suggested that for some pupils with SEN, interactions and friendships may not occur naturally without support (Evans *et al.*, 1992). At present, the most common strategy employed by schools to support pupils with SEN within the mainstream classroom is the allocation of a TA to work with the individual pupil (Giangreco, 2010a; MacBeath *et al.*, 2006). Taken together, these results suggest that peer relationships may be challenging for many pupils with SEN. This is of particular concern given that research has reported that levels of peer acceptance can be linked to levels of academic engagement for pupils with SEN (McCoy and Banks, 2012; see section 2.8.2).

2.9 Social skills support for pupils with SEN

In 2014,18.4% of all statements in England made reference to some form of Emotional, Social and Behavioural difficulties and support for social skills was also identified in relation to other forms of SEN (Department for Education, 2014a). Ofsted's 2013/14 Annual Report for Schools states that a key priority for schools is to increase support to pupils with SEN in order to help them gain independence and develop personal and social skills within school (Ofsted, 2014). Previous research has suggested that pupils with SEN may lack the skills necessary to build friendships with peers (Avramidis, 2010) and that they may require support in order to interact with, and be accepted by, peers (Evans *et al.*, 1992, Frostad and Pijl, 2007). This section details research related to social skills support for pupils with SEN.

Spence (2003) defines 'social skills' as the ability to perform the behaviours required to achieve social competence and suggests these skills include:

- An understanding of the use of non-verbal responses such as eye contact and facial expression
- The ability to recognise the meanings behind tone of voice and volume
- An awareness of when it is suitable to initiate conversation and how this is done
- An understanding of socially acceptable topics of conversation

These are the skills necessary to start, maintain and obtain successful outcomes from interactions with others. Social skills support can either be used to develop skills for the pupils with SEN themselves or can be a method for teaching the pupils around the child with SEN how best they can be socially included within school (Nowicki, 2003).

2.9.1 Strategies for effective social skills support

Research has found that support for social skills development for pupils with SEN that focuses on the individual student alone is ineffective (Nowicki, 2003). Looking at the impacts of inclusion on pupils with SEN, Avramidis (2009) suggests a list of strategies and practices for school staff and pupils, that could support pupils with SEN to develop their social skills within school. This list is based on interviews with pupils with SEN and their teachers:

- Peer mentoring
- Schemes which encourage peers to include pupils who 'feel left out'
- Teacher-led mixed groups where pupils can talk together
- Demystifying SEN by talking about individual pupil needs with the other pupils (with pupil and parent consent)
- Encouraging pupils to mix with a range of peers both in the classroom and at playtime
- Building the self-worth of pupils with SEN by developing skills and aptitudes

The researchers also suggest that structured sport or creative activities in which pupils with SEN could take on a leadership role may help them to increase their social position.

2.9.2 Impact of social skills support on pupils with SEN

Research into the impact of social skills support in school settings for pupils with SEN tends to focus on individual forms of SEN rather than looking at SEN more broadly. This section will bring together a range of studies which have examined the effectiveness of social skills support for pupils with a range of forms of SEN.

A number of studies have reported beneficial outcomes of social skills support for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorders. A review by Hughes *et al.* (2012) reported that 13 specific intervention studies all reported positive results in relation to pupil levels of peer interaction and levels of social skill. Of these, interventions which involved peers as part of the intervention (for example peer mentoring) were found to have the greatest impact on numbers of friends.

In relation to pupils with ESBD, social skills training has been linked to lower levels of inappropriate classroom behaviour (Miller, Lane and Wehny, 2005) and to improved anger management and cooperation (Quinn *et al.*, 1999). Both researchers posit that these changes could support pupils to have more successful interactions with peers.

For pupils with moderate or severe learning difficulties, there is limited research but a recent study by O'Handley *et al.* (2016) reported that a social skills intervention undertaken with a group of adults with severe learning difficulties resulted in teacher ratings of improved social functioning.

A consistent finding across the literature is the importance of appropriate training for the people who will deliver the social skills training for pupils with SEN. In a clear example of this, Causton-Theoharis and Malmgren (2005) reported no effect for pupils with SEN whose TA supports had not had specific social skills training prior to working with them. In contrast, higher levels of peer interaction were observed and maintained over time for pupils whose TAs had received social skills training.

2.10 Peer-to-peer talk in the classroom: importance and facilitation

Alongside the developmental benefits of peer interaction, the opportunity to talk within the classroom has also been found to be important for the construction of knowledge and understanding. Effective classroom interaction between peers helps children make sense of what they are being taught, providing the opportunity to try out what they know and to modify that through conversation (Barnes, 2008). Littleton and Mercer (2013) identified three different types of talk between groups of children. 'Disputational talk' was characterised by a lack of cooperation and high levels of disagreement and competition between group members. 'Cumulative talk' was seen where pupils accepted and agreed with each other, but did not evaluate what was being said or build on it. Finally, 'Exploratory talk' involved all members of the group putting forward the knowledge they had on the subject, children asking each other questions and being interested in the reasons behind answers, and a feeling that everyone's contribution was valid and valuable. Exploratory talk was identified as most effective for learning, but was also seen less often than the other types of talk.

Mercer and Dawes (2008) found that children may need support to achieve exploratory talk within the classroom. Although teachers may provide opportunities to talk, the assumption that all pupils know how to carry on a productive discussion needs to be reconsidered. As such, Mercer and Dawes suggest setting ground rules for discussions in the classroom and training pupils to use these. The ground rules they suggest include:

- *Partners engage critically but constructively with each other's ideas*
- *Everyone participates*
- *Tentative ideas are treated with respect*

- *Ideas offered for joint consideration may be challenged*
- *Challenges are justified and alternative ideas or understandings are offered*

(Mercer and Dawes, 2008, p.66)

The researchers found that in classrooms that followed the ground rules set and had an awareness of the importance of exploratory talk for learning, the incidences of exploratory talk increased and effective discussion-based activities became a core part of the work done (Mercer and Littleton, 2007).

As is clear from this section, talk between children in the classroom can support learning. This is especially the case where an environment that supports exploratory talk can be achieved. Given research that suggests TA support can separate pupils with SEN from peers or limit their opportunities for peer interaction (Webster and Blatchford, 2013) it could also be surmised that fewer opportunities for exploratory talk may occur for these pupils.

2.11 Child voice in research related to pupils with SEN

The contemporary children's rights movement emphasises the need to give children the opportunity to express their own beliefs and views within research. This section discusses what is meant by 'child voice' and puts forward an argument for the importance of child voice within research, particularly for pupils with SEN.

2.11.1 Conceptualising child voice

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC; United Nations, 1989) all children including those with a disability have the right to give their opinions about issues of concern to them, and adults have a duty to listen to these views (Sinclair Taylor, 2000). Specifically the UNCRC emphasises the importance of enabling children to have a voice and ensuring that that voice is heard. Researchers have suggested that the concept of 'voice' is unclear and ambiguous (Thomson, 2011) and that it prioritises certain types of expression (I'Anson, 2013). In this section I will present some of the discussion around the use of the term 'child voice' and the arguments around the need to reframe the way the term is being used within research.

Komulainen (2007) suggests that the term 'voice' suggests a straightforward concept; the experiences and views of an individual. This simple view, however, masks the complex factors which shape both how the person expresses their experiences and views and how they are heard by others. The author suggests that an understanding of child voice needs to consider all of the socio-cultural contexts surrounding the voice. Child voice is a social construction, bound by issues of space and place and by the

people listening and working with the information collected (Mannion, 2007). This impacts on all stages of research, but especially the design of data collection methods and the need for reflexive approaches to data analysis (Noyes, 2005).

A particular issue with child voice in research is that adults take what is heard from the child and then make decisions about what is included and how (Thomson, 2011). This process has the potential to reshape children's meanings,

> *"Although children's words quoted in research reports may be 'authentic' – in that they are an accurate record of what children have said – it remains the case that the words and phrases have been chosen by the researcher and have been inserted into the text to illustrate an argument or underline a point of view"*
>
> James (2007, p.264-265)

As the child voice agenda is focused on ensuring can express their own beliefs this should be a major concern of any researcher aiming to include child voice. Lewis (2010) suggests a reflective and reflexive approach needs to be taken to data analysis and to the writing of results, ensuring that researchers are "listening better" to child participants (Lewis, 2010, p.20).

A further criticism of the term 'child voice' is that it prioritises spoken language over other forms of communication (Mazzei, 2007). This focuses on voice disempowers children with speech, language and communication difficulties and those for whom an interview-type setting would be problematic (e.g. children with ASD; Lewis, 2011). Nairn, Munro and Smith (2005) suggests that, especially with very young children, other forms of language can be just as powerful specifically suggesting body language, laughter, and periods of silence should all be considered when trying to understand a child's meaning. Lewis (2010, 2011) has written widely about silence, suggesting that often what a child does not say can tell a researcher just as much as what they do say. As such silence should not be interpreted as a lack of voice but as another method of communicating a view.

2.11.2 Lack of research including the child voice of pupils with SEN

Despite the push from the contemporary children's rights movement, there remains a gap in the research regarding the voice of pupils with SEN and their feelings about support (Lightfoot, Wright and Sloper, 1999; Giangreco, Edelman and Broer, 2001). In much of the research, adults are used as an advocate for pupils with SEN, yet some authors have argued that this does not provide an accurate picture.

Garth and Aroni (2003) compared the views of parents and children with cerebral palsy

(between six and twelve years of age) as to the child's experiences of medical consultations. They found major differences between the reports of the two groups, with children focused on the short term issues in their care and parents more focused on longer term issues. Alongside this, many of the children expressed a desire to be included in consultation as to their care and did not feel as though this was happening. The researchers suggest that the reason for the lack of child voice for pupils with SEN within academic research may be due to the level of difficulty in eliciting clear responses from pupils with learning needs and the ethical implications of working with these pupils (Einarsdóttir (2007) also discusses this issue clearly). However, they are clear that this difficulty should not outweigh the benefits of better understanding pupil experiences,

> *"to exclude children from being informants in research simply because it is too hard is questionable"* (Garth and Aroni, 2003, p.564).

They argue that this outlook undervalues what the children have to say and leads to a loss of crucial information on pupil support.

With specific regard to SEN pupil voice, some researchers have questioned whether a lack of research capturing individual pupil views may be having an impact on the success of inclusion practices in schools. For example, Gibson (2006) asks whether the lack of consultation with pupils with SEN currently within mainstream education may be one of the reasons why inclusive education may be failing for some pupils; that pupil views of their own support might be central to overcoming some of the barriers to their successful inclusion. As Curtin and Clarke (2005) suggest, specifically in relation to pupils with disabilities,

> *"Listening to what young people with disabilities have to say about their education experiences is one way to determine how best to support their needs and to assist schools to develop inclusive practices"*
>
> (Curtin and Clarke, 2005, p.199).

Research has also reported that pupils with SEN feel they often get too much help in school (Mortier *et al.*, 2011) and would appreciate the opportunity to make decisions about their own support (Skär and Tamm, 2001; pupil views of TA support are discussed in section 2.7). These findings suggest that pupils with SEN, if supported to do so, could offer valuable insights into their experience of support and the ways in which they could be better included within the mainstream classroom.

Mortier *et al.* (2011) presents interviews with pupils with SEN and their peers which raise a further issue. They found that pupils with SEN have very similar images of themselves compared to those of same-age peers. The authors suggest that this could indicate a discrepancy between the way the pupils see themselves (defined by

sameness) and the image that those supporting them have (based on difference). This value position could mean adults make decisions regarding pupil support that further isolate pupils with SEN from the mainstream classroom environment when the pupils themselves would prefer to be better included. Including pupils in discussions about their support could limit this.

With specific reference to TA support, very little research exists which has sought to understand the experience of being supported by a TA from the perspective of the child. As Giangreco, Edelman and Broer (2001) conclude from their review,

> *"Absent from the literature are the perspectives of students who receive paraprofessional supports. What do they think about these supports? How do paraprofessional supports affect them academically, socially and personally? We need to spend more time listening to and trying to understand the perspectives of self advocates,"*
>
> (Giangreco, Edelman and Broer, 2001, p.59)

A view echoed more recently by Sharples, Blatchford and Webster (2015). Given the high proportion of time pupils with SEN are spending proximal to (Giangreco and Broer, 2005) and in interactions with TAs (Blatchford, Russell and Webster, 2012), capturing the experiences and opinions of these pupils could provide valuable insight into how TA support can be effective within the classroom and the ways in which it could be improved.

2.12 Conclusions from the literature

It is clear from this review of the literature that TAs are an integral part of the workforce in English schools. Now accounting for 26.43% of all full time staff employed in schools (33.07% of the primary school workforce) TAs are seen by many as key to the successful inclusion of pupils with SEN within mainstream settings. Although TA support has been linked to positive school experiences for teachers (decreased levels of stress, higher levels of job satisfaction, reduced workload), the impact on pupil outcomes is less clear. Mixed results have been reported regarding TA impact on academic progress and a number of studies have suggested that TA support results in pupils with SEN being separated (in some cases physically) from the rest of the classroom. Studies have reported that TAs spend a large proportion of their time within a close proximity to the pupils they support which may further impact upon the pupils' inclusion within the classroom. Although some research has found TAs can facilitate peer interactions for pupils with SEN, others have suggested that TAs can be overprotective and, because of the nature of support, that simply having a TA present may affect pupil's chances to interact with their peers. With specific regard to peer

interactions, questions remain regarding the ways in which TA characteristics and behaviours relate to levels of peer interaction for pupils with SEN.

A small number of studies have looked at pupil views of the support they receive from TAs in school. These studies have suggested that pupils have been generally positive about their TA support. Concerns were raised by some pupils, however, about lack of independence and of control regarding how they are supported within school. Effects on social relationships were also raised, with some pupils reporting that TAs interfered in peer interactions while others felt having a TA with them in school stopped other pupils wanting to interact with them. Researchers have called for more work focusing on the views and experiences of pupils in receipt of TA support, who may have important things to say regarding its impact. Currently missing from the literature is the voice of Key Stage 1 pupils with SEN who are receiving TA support, despite this time being a crucial phase for social development.

The question of TA support effects on peer interactions is of particular importance given the literature suggesting pupils with SEN may find establishing and maintaining peer relationships more difficult than typically attaining peers. Studies have suggested that pupils with SEN may need support to develop friendships with peers and, as primary support in school, TAs are in place to facilitate this. Little research has been done looking at TA influence on peer interactions for pupils with SEN. Furthermore, as findings suggest some pupils with SEN are opting to build friendships with their TAs rather than with other pupils, it is clear that TAs need to be careful as to how they frame their relationship with the pupils they support. A better understanding of pupil views of TA support could support this process.

Taken together, the literature raises questions about the links between TA support and peer interactions for pupils with SEN. Alongside this, the importance of hearing from pupils, including those who are young or who have SEN, has been emphasised both from a children's rights perspective and because pupil views may not match those of adult proxies in reports of pupil experience.

2.13 How might the study add to existing research?

As has been demonstrated in the literature review, the relationship between the role of the TA, the nature of support and the peer interactions of pupils with SEN is an under-researched area. Many of the studies that have been undertaken have focused on pupils with disabilities rather than those with learning difficulties in relation to the

experience of TA support. This study aims to add to existing research by focusing on pupils with SEN in receipt of TA support.

Alongside this, the literature review demonstrates that there exists little research focused on the views of pupils with SEN in relation to their TA support. Where researchers have spoken to pupils about their experience of support, these have most often been pupils in secondary school or older. This study aims to capture the opinions and views of children in Key Stage 1 (under the age of eight) with regard to their peer interactions and their TA support.

Finally, the research related to TA effects or impact on peer relationships has primarily been based upon pupil reports of their experiences in school. This study aims to add to that research by using systematic observations to record instances of TA influence on pupil-peer interactions within mainstream school settings, and by bringing in TA perspectives as a further comparison point.

The following chapter presents the research philosophy underpinning the study, and describes the methods and analyses undertaken to answer the research questions and aims set out for this study.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction to the methodology

This study seeks to understand the peer interactions of pupils with SEN, in particular those supported by Teaching Assistants in mainstream primary schools. Specifically, this research aims to use observations and interviews to investigate levels of interaction for pupils with SEN and to enable these pupils to voice their own opinions, ideas and thoughts both about the support they receive and about the ways they see their own friendships. Finally, this study aims to explore whether the presence of Teaching Assistants can be said to influence the peer interactions of the pupils within the study. Working from a broadly interpretivist standpoint (Crotty, 1998), this mixed methods study uses tools generating both quantitative and qualitative data to build a picture of each of the pupils in the sample. In the first stage of the research, structured observations were undertaken of the pupils' interactions in school. This quantitative information provides contextual background. In the second stage, the pupils were interviewed about their friends, their play in school, their TAs and the support they receive. Case studies were then developed, and the themes identified from these analysed.

This chapter outlines the research philosophy, the approach taken and the rationale for methods chosen. The methods of data collection and data analysis are then described, as is the method by which access was gained to study the pupils. The sample is discussed both in terms of how it was chosen and its characteristics. Finally, this chapter ends with a discussion of the ethical issues involved in research with young children, specifically those with SEN.

3.2 Research Philosophy

When undertaking research, it is important for the researcher to consider different philosophical paradigms and matters of ontology and epistemology to ensure that the approaches adopted are congruent to the nature and aims of the research work. This process also ensures that potential sources of bias are acknowledged and the effects of these upon the work understood or minimised (Crotty, 1998). In order to do this, I started by considering the aims of the study.

As shown in section 1.1, the focus of this study is on the lived experiences, over a sampled time frame, of a group of pupils with SEN and in receipt of TA support in mainstream primary schools. The aims were to capture the perspectives and

experiences of the pupils with regard to their peer interactions and their TA support. The study sought to investigate the types of interactions that the pupils with SEN were experiencing in school and to try to make sense of how these pupils understood their own experiences. After much consideration I determined that interpretivism best supports these aims.

Interpretivism is characterised by a focus on interpreting and understanding the meanings in human behaviour (Neuman, 2000). It does not aim to generalize or predict causes and effects (Greig, Taylor and MacKay, 2007). An interpretivist approach requires personal and flexible research structures allowing the researcher to be open to new knowledge throughout the processes of data collection and analyses, and enabling them to develop knowledge through dialogue with participants (Carson *et al.*, 2001).This focus on the co-creation of data is central to the research aims of this study as is the flexible approach to data collection and analysis to enable underlying meanings to become clear.

Although interpretivism fits well with the aims of the study, it was harder to relate this philosophical position to some of the methods of data collection and analysis chosen for the study. Section 3.3.2 of this chapter outlines how interpretivism fits with the mixed methods approach chosen for the project and section 3.3.4 discusses the relationship between interpretivism and case study methods.

In line with an interpretivist framework, this study has a relativist ontology and is epistemologically subjectivist. Relativists believe that reality is understood as multiple, relative and socially constructed rather than there being a single reality which can be discovered (Ozanne and Hudson, 1989). Access to reality is only possible through social constructions, such as language and shared meaning (Myers, 2008). Epistemologically, this work is subjectivist, following a view that people cannot be separated from what they know, and specifically that researchers are linked to the subject they are investigating. As such, I have outlined my previous research and experience in the introduction to this thesis in order to assess its potential impact on this study, and completed a reflexive research journal throughout the research process (Davis, 1998; see section 3.8.4 for more details about the reflexive methods used within this study).

3.3 Research approach

3.3.1 Mixed methods

This study uses a mixed methods approach to data collection, bringing together qualitative and quantitative methods, and approaches to analysis, to provide a picture of the peer interactions of the pupils studied. This section outlines briefly the discussion around the use of mixed methods in education research, lists some of the advantages and disadvantages of this type of methodology and explains the rationale for using this research approach here.

Historically there has existed a 'paradigm divide' in educational research between qualitative and quantitative research methods, the two approaches being seen as too different to provide any points of compatibility or crossover (Greene, 2005). More recently, however, the validity of this view has been questioned with multiple researchers arguing that 'mixed methods' should be seen as a third paradigm, an acknowledgement that both approaches are important and useful but that, when brought together, they can provide a richer, fuller picture of the subject being studied and can minimize the weaknesses of reliance on a single paradigm (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). In terms of education research, it has been suggested that a mixed methods approach can provide a way to fully engage with the challenge of understanding the complex processes of teaching and learning in the school environment that a simply quantitative or qualitative approach would miss (Greene, 2005). This quote from Flyvbjerg (2006) outlines my reasons for choosing a mixed methods approach,

> *"Good social science is problem-driven and not methodology-driven, in the sense that it employs those methods that for a given problematic best help answer the research questions at hand. More often than not, a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods will do the task best"*
>
> (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p.432)

For this study, a mixed methods approach was deemed the most suitable because of the complex, multi-layered nature of the subject to be studied (Creswell, 2013). I wanted to capture the interactions of the pupils in order to understand this facet of their school experience, but I also wanted to ensure that the voices of the pupils were included. These two questions were seen as requiring different research methods to be effectively investigated. Sammons *et al.* (2005) cited similar reasons for using a mixed methods approach on the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project. Large scale quantitative survey information was paired with qualitative data from observations and non-structured interviews to meet the study aims. The researchers state that the conclusions of the work are made stronger by their commitment to a

mixed methods approach because this enabled them to access multiple and diverse perspectives that would not have arisen in research with a strictly quantitative or qualitative approach. The quantitative data provided contextual descriptive data which enabled the researchers to better group, understand and find patterns in the qualitative information.

Furthermore, the study was designed to be undertaken in two stages, the first informing the latter. As such, the qualitative data collected in this study should be seen as building on the quantitative results from the first stage of the research. I started by finding out how the pupils were interacting with both adults and peers in the school environment (through observations), then I went to the pupils themselves to discover their experience of these types of interactions (through interviews). From a personal perspective, I also wanted to have some understanding of the individual pupil's interactions in school (their engagement with peers, any influence of TA presence, examples of the TA starting or ending interactions with peers) prior to meeting with the pupils to discuss these. This prior knowledge enabled me to tailor questions to the individual pupils, helping them to engage with the interview process. This approach is discussed in more detail in Creswell and Plano Clark (2007).

This study's multi-method approach combined quantitative systematic observation data collection with qualitative individual interviews and observation notes. The specific methods used are discussed in section 3.7.

3.3.2 Mixed methods and interpretivism

The debate concerning how research philosophies relate to mixed methods research is ongoing (Creswell, 2014). Some researchers have argued that a single research philosophy should be partnered with the mixed methods approach (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004), while others have suggested that different philosophies could be successfully used to guide the different methods of a mixed methods research design (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007).What is clear from the literature is that choosing a paradigm to underpin mixed methods research is not simple, as the incongruence between methodological approaches is an inevitable challenge. Freshwater (2007) suggests that researchers working with mixed methods designs should acknowledge this ‘messiness’ as this enables them to include a discourse about the decisions made and recognises mixed methods as a field still in its adolescence where definitions and meanings are ever shifting. I considered multiple options in determining the philosophical positioning of this research and this process is outlined here.

Focusing on a single research paradigm, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) suggest that pragmatism fits well with the mixed methods research approach. Pragmatism is not committed to either quantitative or qualitative methods and has no fixed view of reality and, as such, researchers working within a pragmatic framework choose methods and techniques which best suit their needs and project aims (Morgan, 2007). Pragmatists do not seek to uncover truth or reality, and do not have a fixed view of these, but are rather committed to solving human problems through the generation of useful knowledge (Creswell, 2013). I considered pragmatism as a paradigm for this study. I did choose the data collection and analysis methods used in this study as I felt they would best answer the research questions and aims of this study rather than choosing either a quantitative or qualitative research focus, in line with a pragmatic approach. However, I did not feel that the pragmatic view of truth and reality fit with this study. This study aims to understand the experiences of pupils with SEN, and views this experience as the reality for those pupils, albeit a context-bound socially constructed reality. As such, I discounted pragmatism as the paradigm for this study.

I also considered using different philosophies related to the different methods chosen. An example of this is Creswell and Plano Clark (2007), who linked multiple paradigms to the different phases of their research design, as described in this extract from Creswell (2014),

> *"For example, a mixed methods study that begins with a quantitative survey phase reflects an initial post-positivist leaning, but, in the next qualitative phase of focus groups, the researcher shifts to a constructivist paradigm"* (p.275)

This shifting between approaches did not feel congruent to my research aims because I never aimed for the quantitative research within this study to determine an absolute truth or to test for causality. As a result it felt contradictory to look at my quantitative information in a positivist or post-positivist way. I always saw my quantitative data and qualitative data as working together, with both working together to understand and capture pupil experience and perspectives in their own terms. My quantitative data serves as a description of pupil experience, which is built upon by the qualitative information.

Reflecting on these deliberations, I came to understand that this project is based on interpretivist philosophy (see section 3.2). Howe (2004) suggests the term 'mixed methods interpretivism' be used for studies where quantitative methods play an auxiliary role in research that has an over-arching qualitative framework. This matched my view of the data within this study, the quantitative information informing data

collection in the second stage of the research and providing background information and context for the pupil perspectives collected in pupil interviews which were the bulk of the data.

The way in which the two types of data have been used together in this study is described in more detail in section 3.10.

3.3.3 Case Study methods

Once data had been collected and analysed from both stages of the research, individual case studies were written up for each pupil. A case study is an in-depth look at an individual in context, where multiple elements are drawn together to build a 'total picture' of the individual within that context (Greig, Taylor and MacKay, 2007). Critics of case study research argue that the method contains a bias towards verification because the researchers' subjective and arbitrary judgements are not controlled by the method (Diamond, 1996). In contrast, Flyvbjerg (2006) counters that case studies contain no greater bias towards verification than other enquiry methods and that, on the contrary, case studies are more likely to challenge or falsify the preconceived notions of the researcher than to verify them.

Yin (2012) suggests that the suitability of case study methods can be determined by looking at the type of research questions involved,

> *"Case studies are pertinent when your research addresses either a descriptive questions – 'What is happening or has happened? – or an exploratory question – 'How or why did something happen?',"* (Yin, 2012, p.5)

As detailed in section 1.1, this study has a series of descriptive research questions focused on capturing the perspectives of pupils with SEN as well as an exploratory question related to TA characteristics and behaviours. As such, the focus of the study could be said to fit well with case study methods.

Case studies were chosen for this study because I wanted to look at each pupil in detail and to have all of the information collected about them linked together in a single document. I felt that this approach would help me to understand the ways in which factors, such as their TA support and their types of SEN, related to the ways the pupils interacted with their peers in school and their own perspectives of these experiences. I also felt this approach would help me to clearly link together the different types of data I had collected. Case study methods are not linked to either a strictly quantitative or qualitative approach. As such Yin (2012) suggests that case study can work well as part of a mixed methods design. Finally, case studies enabled me to ensure the

individual perspectives of the pupils were captured within the research, which is in line with the Children's Rights Agenda that underpins this study (Blandford and Gibson, 2000; Sinclair Taylor, 2000).

For each case study, the results of systematic observations, research diaries, observation notes and interviews with the pupils were brought together into a single case study for each of the pupils. I decided to write my case studies to a specific frame so that it would be possible to look across themes for the sample as a whole, thereby determining similarities and differences between cases (Yin, 2012; see Appendix C1 for the frame used in this study). The process of writing case studies undertaken in this study is described in section 3.8.2.2 and the methods chosen for analysing the case studies is presented in section 3.8.

3.3.4 Case study methods and interpretivism

The aims of case study methods have many similarities with the aims of interpretivist research. As described in section 3.3.3, case studies focus on bringing together multiple elements from different sources to build an in-depth picture of an individual being studied (Greig, Taylor and MacKay, 2007). This is consistent with an interpretivist approach which aims to interpret and understand human behaviour and its underlying meanings (Neuman, 2000). Bassey (1999) talking specifically about educational case studies, suggests that case study methods are essentially interpretive by design,

> *"The exploration of a case is essentially interpretive, in trying to elicit what different actors seem to be doing and think is happening, in trying to analyse and interpret the data collected [...] and in trying to make a coherent report which is long enough to be meaningful and short enough to be readable"*
>
> (Bassey, 1999, p.44)

In this study, the use of case studies bound by an interpretivist approach enabled me to bring together multiple forms of data (both quantitative and qualitative) to form a clear picture of the peer interactions and the experiences of TA support of the pupils within the sample.

3.4 Research with children

Conducting research with child participants involves a differing set of challenges than research where the participants are adults. Child participants may be affected by their understanding of adult-child roles or by their lack of agency within research. The first part of this section outlines how the effect of adult-child power relationships was considered and limited within the study. The pupils in this study supported me to co-

create research data and so the move towards including children as active participants rather than the object of research is also outlined in this section. The children's rights agenda and its impact on this research is included in section 2.11, and the ways in which children's meanings were focused on within this work is discussed in section 3.8.3.

3.4.1 The effect of adult-child power relationships within the research environment

In order for child voice to be captured within the research process it is important to limit the effect of adult-child power relationships and enable children to become active co-creators of research data. As such, researchers need to consider the unequal power relationships between adult and child, and the impact this could have upon the child's responses within the research environment (Mayall, 2008).

Child participants may see adult researchers as having the authority in the research setting which could affect their responses. Children may feel unable to express areas of disagreement or views that they fear adults would not understand or view as acceptable. This is particularly a problem within school settings where children are accustomed to being given instructions and having their answers graded by the adults (Hviid, 2008). Alongside this, children in research may choose to give answers that they feel adults want to hear rather than expressing their own thoughts and feelings, an effect called social desirability bias (Fisher, 1993). This could be a particular issue in research which includes questions about other adults.

Researchers have put forward a number of strategies to limit the effects of adult-child power relationships within research. Explaining to children the role of a researcher can support this process, making it clear that the researcher is not a teacher or other member of school staff (Mayall, 2000). The effect of adult-child power relationships may also be lessened by familiarity with the researcher, which may make them feel more comfortable to voice their views and ideas. Researchers have also emphasised the importance of positioning the child as the 'expert' within the research process. Telling children that they have the knowledge about their situation and you, as a researcher, want them to teach you empowers children to choose the topics they talk about and gives them confidence in what they say (Graue and Walsh, 1998). Finally, the move towards having child participants as active researchers has been seen as beneficial to the breaking down of traditional adult-child power roles. This is discussed further in the next section.

3.4.2 Children as active researchers

Historically, children have been viewed as the 'object' of research rather than active subjects or participants (Kellett and Ding, 2004). More recently, however, the agency of child participants has been recognised and a move towards viewing children as active participants or co-researchers has evolved (Kellett, 2005; Adderley *et al.*, 2015).This move is in line with the children's rights agenda (see section 2.11) which emphasises the right of children to have their views and opinions heard by adults. Researchers have listed multiple benefits to approaches that enable pupils to collect or create their own data. Kellett (2006) trained secondary school pupils to be able to carry out a research project of their own choice. She reported the pupils involved in the project had increased self-esteem and confidence, improved communication skills and were seen to participate more in other areas of school. Alongside this, the pupils reported feeling that their work was valued which brought with it a strong sense of worth. Messiou (2014) reported similar positive results for student co-researchers.

Aside from benefits for the children, researchers have also suggested that including children as active researchers may result in data that could not have been collected by an adult researcher. Carlini and Barry (2005) suggest that in cases where child researchers are investigating areas related to their own lives, they might bring with them an 'insider perspective' which could result in richer data unaffected by adult views or perspectives.

In this study, the pupils in the sample were not solely the object of the research as they were given the opportunity in the second stage to lead the data collection process. As explained in section 3.7.2, the pupils took me on tours of their school choosing where we should go and what they wanted to show me. The pupils also decided what they wanted to photograph within the school setting and what they wanted to draw during the activities. Although they did not initiate the project or choose the methods of data collection, the pupils can be considered co-researchers because they led these processes (Fielding, 2001; Messiou, 2014).

Having outlined the philosophical assumptions and methodologies chosen for this study, and discussed the challenges of research with children, the following section describes the data collection and analysis methods used. This section starts with information about how these methods were piloted prior to data collection with the study sample.

3.5 Pilot study

In early January 2014 I conducted a pilot study to test the suitability of the methods of data collection chosen. This section discusses the pilot, both in terms of what was done and its impact on my later work.

The setting chosen for the pilot study was a primary school in the West Midlands of England. As with the main sample, I contacted the school via email specifying my sample (children under the age of eight with a statement of SEN in receipt of TA support). Suitable pupils were identified by school staff who then approached parents for consent for inclusion in the study. As well as the sheets given to all parents of pupils involved in the study, the parents of the pupil to be observed here were also given a supplementary information sheet, explaining that their child was being observed as part of a pilot study and that this could mean methods might be adapted throughout the week (see Appendix A2).

I visited the school on two occasions, first to pilot my systematic observation schedule and research journal (stage one) and then later to test my interview methods (stage two). On both occasions I observed a boy called Arthur (name has been changed to a pseudonym), aged six and in a mainstream Year One class for all of his lessons.

3.5.1 Stage one: Observations

The pilot study helped me to narrow down the categories I was interested in observing during my research visits. Prior to attending the school I had designed a draft observation schedule, which had 16 categories in total and had to be printed in A3 to make it readable as a single sheet. I used the pilot to determine which of these categories were unnecessary or incompatible with my research aims or questions, thereby narrowing down my schedule to a simpler more user friendly document.

The first category removed was one noting whether an interaction (between either adult and pupil, or peer and pupil) was non-verbal. This was a category I had included because of its use in previous studies (Webster and Blatchford, 2013) but I determined it was not relevant to my research aims in this study. As such non-verbal interactions were still recorded as interactions but were not highlighted as being non-verbal within the data. Similarly, I had originally put in a section to record whether pupils were exhibiting on-task or off-task behaviour, but decided this was not directly relevant to TA influence on peer interactions or to the pupils' views of their friendships so discarded this section. I did, however, note whether interactions were broadly task based or non-

task based as I thought this might provide interesting context for occasions where TAs ended or provided negative support for pupil-peer interactions (the categories for the observation schedule are detailed in section 3.7.1.2).

While observing Arthur, I also became interested in the effect of TA proximity on peer interactions. It seemed as though Arthur was spending the vast majority of his time with his TA very close to him and that he was less likely to talk to peers when they were there. I observed him cutting short interactions as his TA approached or whispering rather than talking to peers if she was close by. I decided to add a category to the schedule, recording when a TA was within approximately a metre radius or less of the pupil being observed, regardless of whether they were actively interacting with the pupil. I trialled my amended schedule with Arthur at the end of the week and found it was simple to use within the allotted time and that all categories were collecting data relevant to my research aims and questions.

During the pilot there were multiple occasions where the other pupils in the classroom approached me and talked to me while I was trying to observe. This was an issue as it led to several lost minutes where I missed the slot to observe the pupil as I was busy interacting with these other pupils. For the pilot, I had not given any instructions to the teacher about how I should be introduced to the class and as such she had introduced me by saying “she is here to help us this week”. As a result, the pupils in the class saw me as an adult who was present to offer support and this resulted in them approaching me at regular intervals. Following on from the pilot, I asked teachers to introduce me by saying I was there to observe the class, rather than to help (see section 3.7.1.3) and this seemed to make it easier for the pupils to understand my role in the classroom as I had far fewer interruptions in other research visits than I had in that first week.

3.5.2 Stage two: Interviews

I used the pilot to test ways of achieving informed assent from the pupils included in the study. Before visiting for the interview stages I had developed a set of questions for the pupils. I was unsure whether this would best be presented to pupils as a written document or through a verbal conversation. Through discussions with teachers and the pilot with Arthur, I decided that the written document did not seem to add anything to the process. Arthur had low literacy levels (although he could recognise his name written down) and so the sheet (included in Appendix A3) just looked like a confusing list of different faces to him. I discussed assent with Arthur, following the points on the sheet, and felt doing this verbally allowed me more opportunities to check his

understanding and to ensure he was happy to continue. I continued with verbal checking of consent for the main study following on from the successful pilot and based on the success of this method in other studies (Einarsdóttir, 2007).

The pilot was also my first chance to see how the pupils I would be observing would react to the methods chosen. Although photo-elicitation techniques have been used before with young pupils and with those with SEN (Epstein *et al.*, 2008), I still needed to know that the camera I had chosen could be used by the pupils in my sample, that they would be happy to take photographs with both myself and an adult (in most cases a parent) present and whether this would add any useful information to my data collection. Arthur was happy to use the camera and only required a small amount of instruction before he was confident taking photographs independently. At first he seemed cautious as he was unsure what to photograph but this soon wore off and he was happily leading us around the school to the places he said he liked to play.

I had not placed a limit on the number of photographs Arthur could take (although the camera can only take ten photographs before the film needs changing) and this seemed to confuse him as he could not decide on where we should go. I asked him if it would be easier if he could just choose his five favourite places to play and he agreed. I limited each pupil to five photos in the later interviews, in part because of this feedback from Arthur and partly because I was wary of letting interviews become too long as many of the pupils in the study were identified as having needs related to concentration and attention. I also wanted to ensure that pupils were not removed from class for extended periods of time as I did not want them to miss too much class time.

I trialled multiple methods with Arthur to determine which would be the most successful for engaging him in the interview. I brought Lego figures with which he could act out peer interactions, paper shapes which could be glued to make pictures, and a worksheet with spaces to draw and colouring pencils. Arthur found the Lego figures very distracting. He enjoyed playing with them but seemed to find it difficult to do this while talking to me and especially while talking to me about his interactions with peers (he talked a lot about Lego sets he had or wanted). Once I had put the Lego away, Arthur opted to do the drawing task (a picture of someone he liked to play with and a picture of an adult who helps him in school). He told me this was a fun task and that he *“loved doing drawing”*. Arthur was far more able to converse with me while drawing than he had been when the Lego was out. He referred to the things he was drawing and to games he liked to play. He asked to label the people he had drawn. He showed no interest in the paper shapes, although this might have been because I had been

working with him for some time at this point. Following on from my experience with Arthur I decided to use the drawing task (described further in section 3.7.2.2) in my interviews, although I also brought Lego figures with me in case the other pupils did not engage with the drawing in the same way Arthur had.
Perhaps the most important thing that came out of the piloting of my data collection was a renewed confidence in the methods chosen and their ability to support pupils with SEN to talk purposefully with me about their friendships and the TA support they receive in school. School staff informed me that Arthur was a shy child, with limited speech. Despite this, through the use of photo-elicitation and drawing tasks and my ability to refer to specific occasions I had observed in school, he talked with me for close to 30 minutes about some quite personal subjects (loneliness, difficulties with writing). Arthur told me when we had finished that it had been a *"fun time"* and that he wished he could *"do more cameras at school"*.

Having learnt multiple lessons from the pilot, the following section outlines in greater detail the finalised methods of data collection used in the two stages of this study.

3.6 Sampling

3.6.1 Population

The population of a study refers to every possible person who could be included in a piece of research (David and Sutton, 2004). In order to answer my research questions, this population includes all pupils with SEN studying in mainstream primary schools in England and in receipt of TA support. I felt it was important to make my population more focused to ensure a cohesive sample that was relevant to the research aims. As children start school at the age of four in England, this determined my lower age limit. I decided to restrict my sample to pupils under the age of 8 as this early school stage is where children start to make distinctions between friends and non-friends and where friendships become more stable (Erwin, 2013). As I was interested in TA influence, it was also important to me that I study pupils within school and that pupils included in the study have at least 15 hours of adult support each week (at least half their time in school) so that I could observe interactions between TA and pupil.

In terms of the pupil's levels of SEN, I decided to focus solely on pupils with a statement of SEN rather than those identified as School Action or School Action Plus. I did this as I felt the additional information provided by the pupil statements would help me to better understand the experience and history of the pupils within this study. These statements also detail pupil needs and suggested interventions which I used as

contextual background in the case studies. I also felt that pupils with a Statement of SEN would be most likely to have allocated TA support. Finally, although I was keen not to exclude pupils based on their level of need, I decided that pupils should have at least a basic level of verbal ability so as not to need an interpreter within the research interview. This decision was made as I was not sure I could provide an interpreter in all cases. I also felt that basic verbal skill would make it easier for me to confirm assent to participate in the study (see section 3.11.2).

As a result of my sampling technique, the final sample for the study includes children with a range of Special Educational Needs. The benefit of this is that the data collected in the study captures a wider view of the experience of pupils with SEN than a study which focused on a particular form of SEN. Alongside this, to choose pupils with a particular type of SEN and exclude others felt contradictory to the focus on pupil voice and childrens' rights which underpins this study. Interestingly, although specific forms of SEN were not chosen, all eleven of the pupils included in the final sample had speech, language and communication needs identified on their statements of SEN. The impact of this on the methods chosen is discussed in section 3.12.

3.6.2 Purposive sampling

The study used purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique where participants with particular characteristics are selected from a population of interest to form a sample (Silverman, 2010). More specifically, I used homogeneous purposive sampling as I was looking to create a sample whose participants all shared certain experiences: pupils with a statement of SEN and TA support, under the age of eight and studying in a mainstream school. The pupils to be included in the study also needed to have a level of cognitive ability and verbal skill that would allow them to take part in a spoken interview with me in the second stage of the research. Purposive sampling enabled me to select participants that fit these criteria.

A disadvantage of purposive sampling is the possibility of researcher bias as members of the sample are selected based on judgements made by the researcher (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2011). The impact of this was minimised in this case as school staff, rather than me, made decisions about potentially suitable participants and I simply included the first eleven whose parents consented to them being part of the study. Alongside this, the non-probability based nature of participant selection affects the generalisability of the sample (Mays and Pope, 1995). The small scale of this study (just eleven pupils) prohibits claims of generalisability to the population as a whole,

although I feel the range of needs included in the sample allows comparison to other similar samples (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2011).

3.6.3 Sampling technique

In order to find suitable participants, schools were contacted in spring 2014. Emails and letters were sent to head teachers and school contacts were also made through a number of online forums (such as TES online and the government run SENCO forum; see Appendix A1 for the letter used). Schools were asked to contact me if they felt they had a pupil who fitted the above description and were happy to move forward with the study. An invitation to take part in the study, information sheets and consent forms were then sent to parents by school staff and returned to me if they agreed (See Appendices A4 and A5). In one case I was asked to contact a parent directly as she had some questions regarding the interview stage – this was done by email. Of the sixteen parents contacted by schools, eleven consented to their children taking part in the study.

As schools opted whether or not to put forward pupils for the study there is a possibility of self-selection bias. Self-selection can lead to biased data as respondents who choose to be part of the study may not well represent the entire target population (Mays and Pope, 1995). In this case, the school's decision to be involved in the study might reflect a greater interest in research or more confidence in the school's academic support system. Schools who were concerned about the TA support offered or the peer relationships of pupils with SEN may have been less likely to take part. I acknowledge that this could have impacted upon the results of this study and discuss the effect of this in the limitations section (8.3).

3.6.4 Characteristics of the sample

3.6.4.1 Schools

As Table 7 shows, the final research sample was distributed across seven schools (eleven pupils in total) from six Local Education Authorities (LEAs); four in the West Midlands, one in East Anglia and two in the South West of England. Five of the schools taught an age range of three to eleven years, one was an infant school for pupils aged three to seven years, and one school was a three to eighteen all-through academy (although the primary school is in a separate building). One school had a resource base for pupils with hearing impairments on site.

It is possible that having multiple pupils from the same schools could have impacted upon the results, especially in the case of school S2 which accounts for three of the eleven pupils (27.3% of the sample). The effects of this are acknowledged and discussed further in section 8.3.

School ID	Pupils	Age range	County
S1	Olivia	3 – 11	West Midlands
S2	Jake	3 – 11	East Midlands
	Charlie		
	Ryan		
S3	Kai	3 - 11	West Midlands
S4	Matthew	3 - 11	West Midlands
S5	Gopal	3 - 7	West Midlands
	Sneha		
S6	Lucie	3 - 18	South West
	Henry		
S7	Seth	3 - 11	South West

Table 7: School information for the pupils included in this study.

3.6.4.2 Pupil characteristics

	Gender		Ethnicity		Pupils with EAL	Eligible for FSM
	M	F	White	Other		
Number	8	3	8	3	1	3

Table 8: Characteristics of the pupils included in this study.

The sample is made up of eight boys and three girls and ranged in age (at the time of observation) from six years, two months to seven years, nine months. Four of the pupils were in Year One at the time of data collection, seven in Year Two.

The range of needs listed on the individual pupils' statements are shown in Table 9. The most common needs identified were speech language and communication skills (all eleven pupils), social interaction skills (ten pupils) and self-help and independence skills (eight pupils). Three of the pupils were identified as having an autistic spectrum

disorder.

School ID	Pupil	Hours allocated on Statement	Speech, language and Communication skills	Early learning / cognition skills	Social interaction skills / social vulnerability	Emotional Wellbeing	Autistic Spectrum Disorder	Attention and listening / Concentration	Self-help and maintenance / self-care	Hearing impairment	Fine / Gross motor skills
S1	Olivia	30	√		√			√	√		
S2	Jake	32	√	√	√		√	√	√		
	Charlie	32	√	√	√				√		
	Ryan	32	√	√	√	√	√				
S3	Kai	18	√		√			√	√		
S4	Matthew	32	√	√							√
S5	Gopal	30	√		√			√	√		
	Sneha	32	√	√	√			√	√		√
S6	Lucie	20	√		√				√	√	
	Henry	17	√		√			√	√	√	
S7	Seth	25	√		√	√	√				
		Mean: 27.5	11	5	10	2	3	6	8	2	2

Table 9: The hours of support and needs listed on statements of SEN for each of the pupils.

3.6.4.3 TA support

As shown in Table 9, all pupils received over seventeen hours of TA support each week. Five pupils had full time support (including break and lunchtimes) and a further two were supported except for TA breaks (30 hours a week). Eight of the sample had an allocated TA working with them for at least 25 hours per week, the remaining three were supported by a range of TAs within class. These eight also had specific support during break and lunchtimes, although this was in some cases provided by a different member of staff.

School ID	Pupil	TA ID	Details
S1	Olivia	Mrs A	Allocated TA
S2	Jake	Mrs B	Allocated TA (am)
		Mrs C	Allocated TA (pm)
	Charlie	Mrs D	Allocated TA (am)
		Mrs E	Allocated TA (pm)
	Ryan	Mrs F	Allocated TA (am)
		Mrs G	Allocated TA (pm)
S3	Kai	Mrs H	Class TA
		Mrs I	Class TA
S4	Matthew	Mrs J	Allocated TA (am)
		Mrs K	Allocated TA (pm)
S5	Gopal	Mrs L	Allocated TA
	Sneha	Mrs M	Allocated TA
S6	Lucie / Henry	Mrs N	Hearing Impaired Resource Base TA
		Mrs O	TA (allocated to another pupil)
S7	Seth	Mrs P	Allocated TA

Table 10: Details of the TAs allocated to the pupils within this study

Table 10 lists the allocated TAs for each of the pupils in the study. As shown, four pupils had a single allocated TA, four were supported by a pair of TAs (one in the morning and one in the afternoon) and the remaining three were supported by multiple TAs who were present in all classes but did not necessarily work with the pupil for the entire time.

Having described the sampling techniques used in this study and the characteristics of the sample, both in terms of their SEN and their TA support, the next section provides details of the data collection methods chosen for this project.

3.7 Data Collection

As described in section 3.3.1 the research was conducted in two phases. The first involved systematic observations of the sample pupils. In the second stage, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with the pupils themselves.

3.7.1 Stage one – Observations, Conversations with school staff, Document collection

3.7.1.1 Systematic Observations

Observations were chosen because I wanted direct access to the phenomena being studied. I was aware that self-report methods would be difficult for young pupils and felt observations would enable me to capture data about the ways in which the pupils were interacting with peers and the influence their TAs were having on these interactions. I undertook non-participant observation, meaning that I did not interact with the pupils during the observation stage of the study so as not to affect the behaviour of my subjects. My observations could be said to be covert, as sample pupils were not aware that I was observing them in particular, although I was not hidden in any way in the classroom and the class as a whole were told I was there to observe. I undertook time interval coding.

I chose to use systematic structured observations as they have previously been used to look at the interactions of pupils with SEN in the mainstream classroom (Webster and Blatchford, 2013). I also wanted to see how my sample compared to this previous research in terms of their interactions. A disadvantage of time interval coding is that it provides a restricted view, with only the interval recorded. In this case, although I only coded in the given intervals, notes were made of relevant interactions occurring in the remaining time thereby limiting this as an issue (See Appendix B3 for an example of these notes).

A further disadvantage of observation worth mentioning is observer bias. In order to limit the impact of this, I identified my own value position prior to observation, in relation to my previous experience and interests (as detailed in the introduction to this thesis) and acknowledged the effect this could have on my view in observations. I also worked from a very specific set of criteria when coding responses, thus ensuring that my

coding choices were defined clearly and decisions between codes set out before I started (see Appendix B2 for the coding criteria used in this study and worked examples of how decisions were made).

3.7.1.2 Observation schedule design

During the first stage of my research, data were collected using a systematic observation schedule designed to capture the interactions of pupils (and the effect TA presence was having upon these) on a minute-by-minute basis. The observation schedule used was based upon schedules used in both the DISS (Blatchford *et al.*, 2009) and MaSt projects (Webster and Blatchford, 2013), both studies which investigated the experiences of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools, although new sections were included to focus on TA impact and types of peer interaction.

The schedule can be split into three broad sections: Interactions, TA influence on interactions and Classroom information (see Appendix B1 for a sample observation schedule).

Interactions

This section is based on the observation schedule used in Blatchford, Russell and Webster (2012). An interaction occurs when the pupil being observed speaks to another person or is spoken to by another person either directly or indirectly. The pupil can be coded as interacting in one of three ways: with an adult, with another pupil or not interacting. In the case of interactions with adults, whom they were interacting with (Adult ID) was noted. Whether the pupil was active or passive within the interaction was also noted (i.e. if the adult was talking to the pupil or the pupil was talking to the adult). A sixth option 'Bin' was included for instances that were unclear or where I could not observe the pupil. A criterion for coding responses was developed and is included in Appendix B2. This section was included to provide information about whom the pupils were interacting with while in school, relevant both to their experience of TA support and to their levels of peer interaction.

TA influence on interactions

This section focused on instances where TAs were noted as having a direct influence on the pupil's interactions with peers. The identity of the TA was recorded and their behaviour was coded as one of four types, either starting or ending an interaction with a peer for the pupil, or offering positive or negative support regarding a peer interaction. Starting an interaction included instances such as inviting peers to work with the pupil, setting up games for the pupil and peers or suggesting the pupil interact

with a peer. Ending an interaction was seen as telling the pupil to stop interacting with a peer or moving them away from peers to stop them talking. Positive support was recorded where adults praised the pupil for interacting with peers and negative support where they were chastised for interacting with peers. The criteria for coding responses and how these types of behaviour were categorised as positive or negative is included in Appendix B2.

Where instances were recorded of TAs impacting on the interactions of the pupil, the actual words used were recorded in the 'Notes' section of the observation schedule (see Appendix B3 for examples of this).

Classroom information

The location of the observation was recorded to see if location factors could be shown to have an effect on levels of interactions or TA influence on interactions. Locations were allocated a code (e.g. 1 = main classroom, 2 = playground) that was recorded for each minute.

3.7.1.3 Description of observation method

Pupils were shadowed for up to four days of a school week both in class and during unscheduled times (break and lunch times). Visits lasted four days because school staff contacted during sampling agreed this time frame would not be overly intrusive on the classroom environment. When I arrived the teacher explained to the class that I was there to observe the way they worked together, so as not to single out the observed pupil (the ethical implications of using observations that could be considered covert are discussed in section 3.11.1). Where possible I sat close to (but not with) the pupil so that I could hear what was being said to them and what they were saying.

Observations were recorded on a minute-by-minute basis. I observed for the first ten seconds of every minute and then coded what had taken place. As well as the observation schedule data, notes were also made of the pupil's location in their main classroom and of any information relevant to the focus of the study which I received about the pupil during the observation (for example, teachers/TAs would sometimes tell me things about whom the pupil most enjoyed to work with, or types of games they liked to play).

Number of observations recorded

Research visits ranged from two to four days depending on the pupil's availability and

school factors. For example pupil illness impacted on one set of observations and school events (a production, school trips, a filming study) impacted on others. Alongside this, there were some sessions in school that were not suitable to be observed for this study. For example, I did not go into any session that was a one-to-one between the pupil and an adult or any sessions where the pupil was simply an audience member (such as school assemblies). This is because the focus of this study is on interactions with peers and these sessions did not provide opportunities for these to take place. Lastly, I did not observe pupils while they were eating at lunchtimes, but did observe when they went out into the playground after eating. I did not observe the pupils eating because the school dinner halls tended to be large and noisy, making detailed observations, without sitting with the pupil, difficult to undertake. Not observing at this point also enabled me to complete my research notes from the morning sessions while they were still fresh in my mind.

Additional data recorded

I kept a research journal throughout the data collection process in which I recorded qualitative observations, contextual information not picked up by the schedule, my thoughts and feelings about what was being observed and any questions I would like to cover in the second stage of the research (Clough and Nutbrown, 2002). This also helped me to remain alert to themes emerging during data collection and to capture ideas as they occurred during fieldwork (Holliday, 2007; Etherington, 2004). The process of writing my research journal is described in section 3.9.

As well as being a means to gather data about peer interactions and classroom experience, the first stage of the research served to make me more familiar to the pupils which I hoped would make the pupils feel more comfortable about talking with me.

3.7.1.4 Adults observed

In total, while observing the pupils, 99 adults were included in observations as they were interacting or proximal to the pupils. Table 11 provides details of who these adults were and the numbers linked to each pupil. Adults included as 'Other adult support' included five dinner ladies, a school SENCO and two parents who were in class as helpers. As shown, slightly lower numbers of teachers were seen than TAs.

Pupil	Teachers	TAs	Other adult support	Totals
Olivia	5	4	2	11
Jake	4	1	0	5
Charlie	3	4	0	7
Ryan	5	5	2	12
Kai	5	5	1	11
Matthew	3	3	0	6
Gopal	2	8	0	10
Sneha	3	11	1	15
Lucie	4	3	1	8
Henry	4	3	1	8
Seth	3	3	0	6
Total	41	50	8	99

Table 11: Numbers of adults observed for each of the pupils, separated by adult job role

On average, pupils came into contact with three teachers and four TAs during the observation period. Sneha's unusually high numbers of TAs can be explained by a strategy put into place by her allocated TA where Sneha is allowed to go and show her work to members of staff if she works solidly on a task for a set period of time.

TAs were asked about their main role in relation to the support of their allocated pupils, and this information is included in section 4.4.2.1. I asked TAs for this information during my research visits (see 3.7.1.5 below). The ethics of talking to TAs within school is discussed in section 3.11.8.

3.7.1.5 Interviews and conversations with school staff

During my research visits I undertook both unstructured conversations and interviews with a range of school staff. The unstructured conversations took place with TAs, teachers and SENCOs and were used to clarify what I had seen during observations (i.e. the reason a particular intervention was in place or why the target child had left the classroom). Handwritten notes were made on either the observation schedule or in my research journal while I was talking to the member of staff. The questions asked were individual to the observation and to the target pupils so no schedule of questions was used. The information collected from these conversations served as contextual background for the observations, helping me to understand the bigger picture of the pupil's support rather than just my own view. This information also helped to ensure that my observations were more accurate as I was able to check that I had understood what was happening during observations.

Interviews were carried out either with the pupil's allocated TA or with the TA who provided the majority of support for the target pupil. Structured interviews were used in this case because I was looking for specific information (Braun and Clarke, 2013). These interviews were undertaken to clarify how the TAs understood their role in support of the target pupils, in order to compare this to the pupils' view of their own support. I also asked TAs how long they had worked within the school and how long they had supported the target pupil. These interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder. The questions asked of TAs are included in Appendix B5 and the ethics of TA interviews and conversations with adults are discussed in section 3.11.8.

3.7.1.6 Document collection

School staff made available photocopies of documentary information about the pupil, including the pupil's current Statement of SEN and recent IEP targets. In some schools, I had the opportunity to look through the pupil's books and at work completed. Additional information, such as reports from outside agencies (Speech and Language, Play therapist, Family support worker) were also offered in cases where school staff deemed this relevant to the research being carried out. This documentation provided a background of the pupil's educational needs, of the support deemed necessary to support these and of the role the TA was seen as fitting for that pupil. In several schools I was shown the timetable of support from allocated TAs for target pupils and this served to clarify hours of allocated support and numbers of TAs working with the pupil.

The ethics of using documents collected from schools is discussed in section 3.11.7.

3.7.2 Stage two – Interviews

3.7.2.1 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with the pupils in this study. Interviews were chosen because this research is focused on individual experience and this method enables participants to respond to questions in their own words; giving a personal perspective (Braun and Clarke, 2013). I decided to use a semi-structured approach to ensure that all pupils were asked the same list of questions (to help me compare responses) but also to enable the pupils to raise issues that I had not anticipated prior to the interview and to allow me to follow these up (Adderley *et al.*, 2015). Questions were asked in varying orders depending on pupil responses.

3.7.2.2 Interview design

One of the major challenges in this study was to design an interview that would enable the pupils to express their ideas and opinions while simultaneously minimising the impact of adult-child power relationships and keeping these pupils (many of whom have needs related to concentration or task focus) interested and engaged.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as this gave pupils the opportunity to express ideas and perspectives on a range of topics in their own terms (Folque, 2010). This type of research has also been shown to be effective in eliciting reliable specific information in relation to young people's experience of schooling (Palikara, Lindsay and Dockrell, 2009). An interview schedule was designed to cover the research questions and then specific questions were tailored to the pupil based on the observations in stage one. Despite the schedule, the aim was to have an interview that felt more like a conversation or dialogue so that the whole experience felt less formal to the pupil so that this would reduce the issues of power relationships and of adult-child roles (Greene and Hogan, 2005). I adapted the language according to the abilities of the pupils in order to make the questions more accessible and related to each pupil's specific situation, for example naming specific TAs or talking about individual lessons (Lewis and Porter, 2004; examples of these adaptations are included in Appendix B9).

In order to gain real meaning, research with children has to overcome the issue of unequal power roles and the effect this can have on responses (see section 3.4.1; Mayall, 2000; Bruck and Ceci, 1998). Children may see adults as having the authority in a situation (especially when it takes place within a school setting; Hviid, 2008) and as

such may struggle to disagree, or to say things they think will be seen as unacceptable. Children may also seek to give the answer they feel the adult requires rather than their own personal opinion (social desirability bias; Fisher, 1993). Lastly, many children (particularly those with learning needs or disabilities) may not be used to being asked their views or may feel that their views have been previously disregarded by adults and so may be reticent to put their ideas forward (Cloke, 1995). Multiple methods were used within this study to try to lessen the impact of these issues; these are outlined in the following paragraphs.

My previous presence in the classroom helped to make me more familiar to the pupils which, in turn, may have made the pupil feel more comfortable talking to me (Hviid, 2008). Alongside this, my role within the classroom was established as a 'non-official adult' (Mayall, 2000) rather than a Teacher or TA role. To do this, teachers explained to the class upon my arrival that I was doing a study and would be observing the class but was not there to help or intervene at all. A further distinction was made as pupils were asked to call me by my first name rather than the more conventional 'Miss [surname]'. It was made clear to the pupils throughout that they were the experts in the situation and I was looking to learn from them about their peer relationships (Graue and Walsh, 1998). The interview process itself was also designed to break down barriers between myself and the pupils.

A combination of tours (Moss and Clark, 2011), photo elicitation (Epstein *et al.*, 2008) and children's drawings (Clark and Moss, 2005) was used to structure the interviews and to gain a rich collection of data about the peer relationships of the pupil and of their view of the support they receive in school. Having a choice of materials for data collection has previously been shown to support a more equal power balance between participant and researcher (Broome and Richards, 2003). Having a diverse range of data collection tools also enables children with different skills and strengths to contribute to the research by not prioritising particular types of communication (Adderley *et al.*, 2015).

Tours have been used by researchers as a participatory technique which aims to explore the child's view of their environment from their own perspective (Clark and Moss, 2005; Langsted, 1994). Moss and Clark (2011), using this as an element of the Mosaic approach, suggest that the process extends the ways adults listen to children as the children are in charge of both the touring event and of what is documented about it (in their case using drawings, photographs or through recorded dialogue).

Photo-elicitation techniques have been recommended by many researchers as a way to involve children in the research process as it is an enjoyable activity that is not overly time-consuming, does not feel like a school task and produces an end result that can be revisited later for discussion and analysis (Clark and Moss, 2005; Hurworth and Clark, 2005). Furthermore, as it combines visual and verbal language, the use of photography can also work well with children with limited verbal language or poor writing skills; enabling them to express their views in a different (potentially more accessible) way (Einarsdóttir, 2007; Cappello, 2005). The process may also be beneficial when interviewing nervous or anxious children, as the photographs rather than the children themselves are the focus (Epstein *et al.*, 2008). Finally, photo-elicitation is also seen by many as a good way of building relationships between researcher and participants (Mandleco, 2013).

It is important to note that many researchers mention the importance of considering the context of the image (who was present? what limitations were placed on the child's choice of image? what impact did the child's level of skill with the camera have? etc.) when looking at the photographs taken by children, as this may not be clear in the resulting image (Veale, 2005). As Barker and Smith explain, *"the intention behind a photograph may be more relevant to the research than the actual product"* (2012, p.94). As such, pupils in this study were asked to explain why they wanted to take each image and this was checked again during the individual interview stage of the process.

The use of drawings in this study was as a means of facilitating conversation (as an ice breaker) rather than as a way of producing an image to be analysed. Engaging the pupils in a familiar and enjoyable task was intended to help them relax and feel comfortable enough to talk to me about their friends and the help they receive in school (Parkinson, 2001). The hope was also that offering a fun task that we could engage in together would further break down the adult-child power relationships previously discussed (Brooker, 2001). The emphasis was on listening to the pupil while they were drawing, as this provided a better picture of the child's own views than an adult interpretation of the image could (Einarsdóttir, 2007; Veale, 2005). As with photography, the child's narrative during the process was seen as more meaningful than the resulting image (Kress, 2005).

Drawing tasks have also been recommended for research with children because the nature of the task encourages participants to take their time to respond to questions (Einarsdóttir, Dockett and Perry, 2009). While engaged in the act of drawing, children may be more likely to engage in discussion or to maintain focus than when simply in a

one-to-one interaction with a researcher. Lastly, as with photo-elicitation techniques, drawing may be a more accessible method for participants with communication difficulties as it allows them to express themselves through a combination of verbal and non-verbal means (Barker and Weller, 2003). As Einarsdóttir, Dockett and Perry (2009) explain,

> *"When engaged in conversations with children, drawing can provide a focus that enables children to interact on their own terms – for example, by not necessarily maintaining eye contact with an adult, by having something to do when interacting with others and by controlling the discussion about drawing"* (p.229)

This collection of research methods was designed so that the process of data collection in this second stage was a participatory one with both pupil and researcher involved. Particular care was taken to ensure that the impact of adult-child power relationships was limited, and that pupils felt confident that their voice was being heard. The process was also designed to be an enjoyable one, helping pupils to remain engaged and interested throughout.

3.7.2.3 Description of interview method

The purpose and form of the interview was explained clearly and directly to the pupils at the outset, helping them to understand my intentions and what we were going to be doing. I also explained how the information they were giving me would be used and made them aware that we could stop at any point should they want to. The pupils were shown the activity sheet to be completed so they were aware of what was to be expected of them. They were also shown the camera and how it is used.

Parents were present throughout the interview process as a support for the pupils. They did not take part in the interview but were simply on hand to help the pupil feel comfortable and more able to voice their own ideas (Einarsdóttir, 2007). In some schools parents were not available, in these cases an adult from the school took their place – the effect that this could have on results is discussed in section 8.3.

After gaining informed consent from the pupil (see section 3.11.2 for more information on this), they were asked to give me a guided tour of their school showing me the places where they like to play with their friends. Pupils were asked to take up to five photographs (using an instant camera) of these places or of the things they liked to play with with their friends. They were told not to take pictures of people. In some cases, I took the photos as some pupils did not feel confident using the camera and others wanted to be in the image itself. I used a digital voice recorder to capture what was said during the tours so I could link the reason given by the pupil for taking the

photograph to the resulting image.

The pupils led the tours, guiding me to the places where they played with their peers and the things they liked to play with. As previously explained, this gave over control of the interview to the pupils, in that they made the choices about where we went and about what should be photographed. The pupils were able to pick out things that were important to them and to their peer interactions.
Once the photographs had been taken, we went to a room within the school for the next phase of the interview. Interviews were recorded with the digital voice recorder. Pupils were presented with an A3 sheet divided into three tasks. The first part of the interview involved sticking their photographs onto the sheet (in whichever order they chose) and then writing (or telling me to write) something about the image. Only two pupils chose to write for themselves. Writing down what they said about the image was important at this stage to show the pupil that I thought what they were saying was interesting and valuable (Brooker, 2001). As they stuck the photographs on, we discussed what was in the picture and why they had chosen to take it/for me to take a picture of it. We also talked about how they played and whom they played with in the various settings captured. This stage of the interview was very much directed by the photos, meaning that the pupil's perspective of their social experience became the subject.

Next the pupils were asked to engage in a drawing task of two parts, first drawing their favourite people to play with in school and then to draw an adult who helps them in school. Pencils, crayons and paper shapes were available to pupils to make their pictures.

Most of the pupils talked openly and incisively on the topic of their friendships, of the way they play and of the support and help they receive in school. Allowance was made when pupils chose to talk about topics unrelated to the questions asked as these responses were still seen as potentially interesting to the overall picture of the pupil's social life and as they helped to maintain a conversational style in the interview. None of the pupils appeared to have any difficulty completing the interviews, with the exception of the pupil for whom the drawing task had to be changed, and many expressed enjoyment about the process.

Colour photocopies were made of the finished task sheet (including photographs) for all pupils. This was done to show the pupils that they had produced a valuable piece of work and as many expressed a wish to show their drawings and photographs to others.

Interviews took place in a number of different settings within schools with decisions about where they took place based on which spaces were available. Six took place in an office-type space, two within the pupil's main classroom (while the rest of the class were elsewhere), two in spaces linked to the main classroom (a cloakroom and an intervention space) and one in an ICT suite.

3.7.2.4 Adults present in pupil interviews

In stage two of data collection I undertook interviews with the pupils in school. I contacted parents and asked them to be present during the interviews to make the setting more comfortable for the pupils (Einarsdóttir, 2007). As shown in Table 12 (below), eight mothers came in and were present while I was talking to their children. The parents of the remaining three children were unable to come into school when the interviews took place, so the pupils had another adult present to support them. In all three cases this was a member of school staff that the pupil knew. None of the staff members present were TAs who had worked with the child, as I felt this could affect results.

Pupil	**People present during interview**
Olivia	Mother
Jake	Mother
Charlie	Mother and brother
Ryan	School SENCO
Kai	Mother and sister
Matthew	Mother
Gopal	School receptionist
Sneha	School librarian, Year Three teacher
Lucie	Mother
Henry	Mother
Seth	Mother

Table 12: Information about the adults present during the interview stage of the research

In two cases, the parents brought the pupil's younger sibling with them. Charlie drew his brother as part of the interview activities, which suggests his presence may have affected responses. Kai did not draw his sister but did spend a large proportion of the interview talking about her, even where this was not relevant to the questions being asked. A similar thing happened with Sneha, who drew the teacher who will be teaching her when she joins Year Three. All of these pupils have identified needs relating to concentration and attention, which could explain why this happened in their interviews. Information about the things pupils drew in the interviews is included in section 7.5.

3.7.2.5 Interview information

The time taken to complete each interview varied according to the pupil's interest in the process and their ability. In two cases, interviews were limited in time due to school factors – one taking place during lunchtime and the other prior to a scheduled meeting with a Speech and Language therapist. One pupil refused to take part in the drawing activities as he did not want to come out of a school assembly.

In total, including the pilot, the eleven interviews resulted in four hours and 35 minutes of recording, with an average length of 24 minutes. In three cases the tour element of the interview was not recorded, either because the child asked for it not to be (two cases) or because of an issue with the voice recorder (one case).

For one pupil, the drawing tasks were not attempted due to him lacking the fine motor skill to complete them. Instead, he looked at a series of photographs (taken by school staff) of pupils at the school and we talked about who his friends were and what he liked to play. For the last task, he simply answered questions about his helpers in school and how they worked with him.

3.7.2.6 Conversations with adults

During my research visits, I had multiple informal unstructured conversations with school staff. I used these interactions to clarify things I had seen in observations. I also asked TAs about how they saw their support role in class, and the responsibilities they had in relation to the pupil. I explained to these adults that this information would be used to provide context while I was writing about the pupil's experience in schools. The ethical implications of including this supplemental information are discussed in section 3.11.8.

3.8 Data Analysis

3.8.1 Stage one – Observations, Conversations with school staff, Document collection

3.8.1.1 Observations

The quantitative observation data were collated in Microsoft Excel following these steps for each pupil:

- Each observation sheet was input in full including blanks (sheets were labelled according to whether they were classroom based or playtime sessions)
- Blank data points were removed
- Total minutes recorded were calculated for each set of observations
- Totals and percentages were calculated for each data sheet and the results saved into a main totals page

Comparisons were made between each pupil's interaction results in this order:
a. Classroom versus playtime
b. TA present versus no TA present
c. Comparison of individual TA's presence
d. Comparison between all location codes
e. Averages were calculated for each schedule category for the sample as a whole
f. Examples of TA influence on peer interactions were collated

These figures are included in Chapter 4 as contextual information to inform the qualitative data.

3.8.1.2 Interviews and conversations with school staff

Notes from the unstructured conversations with school staff were collated for the individual pupils. Information clarifying what had happened during observations was used to support the writing of case studies, enabling me to detail both what I had seen and the reason for this. For example, Kai was observed trying to get into the school buildings during playtimes and conversations with school staff helped me to understand the potential reasons for this behaviour. Throughout the case studies, the source of information such as this is clearly stated.

The audio recordings of interviews with TAs were transcribed in Microsoft Word. Transcription was verbatim and without narrative description (Jenks, 2011). The information collected from these interviews was included in pupil case studies and was used to make comparisons more broadly between TA views of support and the views of the target pupils themselves (see section 4.4.2).

The questions asked of TAs are included in Appendix B5 and the ethics of TA interviews and conversations with adults are discussed in section 3.11.8.

3.8.1.3 Document collection

The documents collected from schools were collated for the individual pupils and were used to detail contextual information in pupil case studies. The needs detailed on the statement of SEN were used to write the 'pupil background' section alongside information from IEPs, observations and conversations with school staff. These data were also used to determine pupil characteristics of the whole sample and to clarify details regarding TA deployment (see sections 3.6.4.2 and 3.6.4.3).

As the statements had a range of different formats, textual analysis was undertaken to ensure that the same types of information were being included for each pupil. For example, a pupils' 'primary need' and 'identified need' were found to be the same category across statements.

In order to collate information about pupil characteristics, similar types of need were brought together into single categories. The labels for each type of need were kept to improve clarity in relation to the pupils' additional needs.

The ethics of using documents collected from schools is included in section 3.11.7.

3.8.2 Stage two – Interviews

3.8.2.1 Transcription

The interviews were transcribed in Microsoft Word from the audio recordings taken. Transcription was approached as a line-by-line account of what was said by the people taking part in the interview rather than including any sort of narrative description (Jenks, 2011). Punctuation markers were included where the nature of the sentence was clear but intonation was not. Pauses and periods of silence were recorded by noting the amount of time on a separate line. Here is an example from Ryan's transcription:

> *Me: Do you want to take a picture?*
> *Ryan: Yes*
> *Me: What would you like to take a picture of?*
> *(2.1)*
> *Ryan: Take it inside*
> *Me: Come on then, let's go inside.*

The (2.1) denotes 2.1 seconds of silence. Lewis (2011) emphasises that periods of silence may be just as significant as what is said, especially in the cases of children with needs related to speech, language and communication. As such periods of silence were noted within the transcripts made of the interviews with children) and the significance of these silences was considered during data analysis. Silence was not

treated as simply a gap between responses but rather as part of the conversation within the interview (Lewis, 2011). Alongside this, I was careful during interviews to give pupils time to respond after I had spoken and accepted silence as a response if this was how the pupil responded. By doing this, I have focused on the meanings contained in responses from the pupils.

All talk that was recorded was transcribed even where it was not clearly linked to the research aims and questions as I felt its relevance may become clearer during data analysis.

Each recording was listened to all the way through while at the school to ensure that the recording was clear and so I could ask school staff to clarify any words that I was not sure of. In a few cases (Sneha and Jake) some words were not clear enough for either school staff or I to understand and these were labelled in the transcripts as [unintelligible]. Next, recordings were transcribed using Phillips noise cancelling headphones to ensure quality of sound. Finally I, and a fellow research student, checked all recordings against the completed transcripts to ensure accuracy. In all cases we agreed about the words transcribed.

Themes common to multiple pupils were noted and these were used to design a frame to which the case studies could be written (see Appendix C1 for this frame, and section 3.8.2.2 below for a description of the case study methods used in this project).

3.8.2.2 Case Study

With transcriptions complete, a case study was then written for each pupil, putting both quantitative and qualitative data together into a single report. Yin (2012) suggests that the first stage of case study research is to define what a ‘case’ will be within the context of the work. In this study each of the eleven pupils in the sample is an individual case and the focus of each case study is on the pupils’ perspectives of peer interactions, their experience of TA support and any perceived link between these.

The case studies were written as a descriptive account of the pupils’ school experience, and brought together information about the pupils, notes from the research visits and results from the analysis of data. As such, they fit within the description provided by Bassey (1999) of ‘picture-drawing’ case studies. In this study, case studies were written according to a frame that I designed during the transcription process (see Appendix C1). This was based around the study's research questions and aims as well

as the themes arising from the transcripts. A frame was used to aid comparison between cases and to ensure that relevant information from the data collected was not missed (Yin, 2013).

3.8.3 Focusing on Children's Meanings

Ensuring child voice is heard within research work does not just involve choosing methods which give children the chance to talk and support their ability to do this, it also means making sure that what they have said is interpreted and understood fairly by the researcher (Merrick and Roulstone, 2011). Davis (1998) suggests that reflexivity is a good way to safeguard against misinterpretation. Researchers should take the time to reflect on their previous experiences and preconceptions and the effect these could have on their view of the data collected in research (Etherington, 2004). This process makes sure the researcher is genuinely open to what the participants are trying to say and are not looking for their own arguments within responses (Roberts, 2008).

In order to reflect on my position within the research and the ways in which my preconceptions and previous experiences were affecting my view of the data collected, I took the time to write a research journal (see section 3.9). Etherington (2004) suggests that keeping a journal throughout the research process can support the researcher to capture their changing and developing understanding of the data and can make instances of bias or negative response to data more apparent. Once bias has been acknowledged, the researcher can work to ensure it is not affecting their judgements in relation to the data collected. Reflexivity within the research process supports the researcher to be open to the meanings of the participants rather than interpreting data to meet the study aims (Davis, 1998).

Supporting children to say what they mean is also important within the research environment. It is important that researchers have patience while talking to children and wait for answers or responses rather than answering for or interrupting children (Mauthner, 1997). I was aware of this during my interviews with the pupils within this study and checked the transcripts following data collection to ensure I was not giving answers for the pupils or leading them to answer in any way. Allowing children to have the time to explain their answers can also support this process (Westcott and Littleton, 2005). The tours, photography and drawing activities gave pupils multiple opportunities to talk about their peer interactions with me.

3.8.4 Reflexive thematic analysis of case studies

Thematic analysis, underpinned by a focus on reflexive research, was undertaken of the case studies. This process is outlined in this section.

1. Case by case analysis

Each case was reread multiple times and notes made of themes relevant to each of the research questions. Codes were developed for these themes and used to label sections of the case studies. Themes were also colour coded within the transcripts. Notes were made alongside this process about connections between themes, similarities and differences between cases and other information significant to the research questions. Once a full list of themes and codes had been generated, all transcripts were reread and colour coded to ensure themes had not been missed. Throughout this process I was open to themes that had not been identified during the initial review of the literature (Roberts, 2008). Appendix C2 includes a mind map showing the themes which emerged from this stage of the analysis.

Throughout the case by case analysis I continued to write a research journal to reflect on how I was making decisions in my analysis. This was done to recognise how my previous experiences were linked to my analysis of the results in the research and to try to limit bias (see Appendix B4 for examples from my research journal and section 3.9 for details on the process of writing a research journal). The writing of a research journal also made my insights and understanding of results emerging from analysis more open and transparent as my thought processes were outlined and challenged by this process.

2. Cross-case analysis

Once cases had been look at individually, the cases were then analysed looking for themes, similarities and differences across pupils. As before case studies were read multiple times to check for information that could have been overlooked. At the end of this process, as shown in Appendix C3, I made a mind map of the themes arising and of connections between subjects and colour coded these according to the research questions to ensure all information included was relevant to the study's aims (this process is discussed further in section 3.8.5). Transcripts were reread again following this process to ensure new themes had not been missed when information was chosen for inclusion.

Thematic analysis was approached as an iterative and reflexive process in this study, as detailed in this quote from Berkowitz (1997)

> *"[data analysis is] a loop like pattern of multiple rounds of revisiting the data as additional questions emerge, new connections are unearthed, and more complex formulations develop along with a deeper understanding of the material"* (online)

As such, each case study was reread multiple times following the same pattern. Also, following data analysis, the themes emerging from the literature review were used as the basis for a literature search in the same way that the research questions had been at the start of the research. This process of familiarising myself with the data and revisiting the cases enabled me to ensure the patterns were emerging from the data rather than being imposed upon it. The reflexive approach undertaken in this study is described in greater detail in section 3.9.

3.8.5 Avoiding losing pupil voice while crafting the case studies

One of the primary aims of this study was to ensure that the voices of pupils with SEN were heard, in relation both to their peer interactions and to the support they receive from TAs. During data analysis it soon became clear, however, that the pupil case studies could not be included as whole entities. This section talks through the reasons for this, how I made choices regarding which information to include and exclude, and how I can justify these exclusions in light of my focus on capturing pupil voice.

As described, I wrote a case study for each pupil drawing together all of the information collected during both phases of the research (this process is described above). These case studies are on average 2,300 words each and follow a frame which I developed as part of data analysis (see Appendix C1). Originally I had planned to include all eleven of these as whole cases but, as I was writing, I began to feel as though doing this would make it more difficult for the reader to see the similarities and differences between cases. First, I felt that, as I used a case study frame, including all case studies concurrently would make each case seem less novel or unique; that the most interesting elements in the narrative would be lost in the weight of information. Furthermore, I was concerned that including whole case studies for comparison would disadvantage those pupils who had been less able to take part in the research process as their cases were often shorter (fewer quotations from interviews and from tours for example). Lastly, I was aware that the case studies included information about the schools and about the pupil which might, when collected together, make the pupils more recognisable despite my use of pseudonyms and efforts to remove recognisable traits.

I decided to write my results section around the themes arising from the cases, pulling

out extracts from the relevant case studies to illustrate how that theme affected the pupil and, where possible, their views of their own experience. As such, a theme (for example: TAs as gatekeepers) might have supporting examples and information from four of the eleven case studies. To ensure this process was viable, and would lead to all pupils being included, I made a mind map of all the themes arising from the case studies and then mapped this against the pupils (Appendix C3). I wanted to ensure that all pupils would be fairly included, i.e. that the same pupil was not used to illustrate every case where another was not used at any point. Although some pupils had many more links to the themes than others, I determined that an even distribution would be possible as I would not use portions of the case studies from these same pupils for every theme relevant to them.

The issue with only choosing to include a proportion of each of the case studies is that, by necessity, this involved making decisions about which information was worthy of inclusion and what could be excluded. As this study has a pupil voice focus, I was wary of losing information that the pupils had deemed important and, as such, felt it necessary to think carefully about how decisions about information to include and exclude should be made. I started this process by reading through the cases and trying to summarise each pupil's case against these five questions (derived from the study's research questions):

- What are the pupil’s perspectives on their friends?
- What are the pupil’s perspectives on their TA(s)?
- Does the pupil relate their TA support to their peer interactions?
- Can TA characteristics and behaviours be linked to peer interactions?
- Were instances of TA influence on peer interactions observed?

These five questions narrowed my focus to information directly related to the research questions, rather than a wider stance looking at the pupil's whole school experience.

Next, I reread the case studies and highlighted any information that did not link to any of the questions above. For the most part, this related to pupil characteristics such as the needs included on their statements or to their behaviour in class. I collated some of this into tables (now included in section 3.6.4) and used some of this as contextual information to help the reader to better understand the needs of the pupils in this study. I determined that information not related to any of these questions, or important as context to the extract examples, was not relevant to the current study and, as such, could be excluded without impacting on pupil voice in relation to this subject.

I am confident that this process ensured that all information linked to the study's stated

aims has been included in the analysis and case studies, and that any exclusions can be justified. The pupil's voices in relation to their peer interactions and their TA support have remained intact.

3.9 Keeping a reflexive research journal

As previously described, I kept a research journal throughout both stages of data collection and analysis. This section details this process and outlines the impact that this had on the research process and my view of the project data.

For my research journal I used a notebook which I brought with me on school visits. I also sometimes recorded information using a digital voice recorder as this was a quick way of recording thoughts between lessons or while I was driving. I occasionally made notes on scraps of paper and on my observation schedules during lessons which I later transferred into the journal. I tried to write in the journal every day during data collection as a reflection on what I had observed and my emerging understanding of pupil experience. As described in section 3.3.2, matching my research philosophy to my mixed methods approach was a complicated process and the research journal supported this.

Etherington (2004) emphasises the value of a research journal for enabling researchers to reflect on the ways in which their personal experiences and background may be influencing their view of the research or their understandings of the data collected (my previous experience is outlined at the start of this thesis). The research journal helped me to recognise that I was making a lot of assumptions about TA deployment and support based on my own work experience. This then prompted me to ensure I was gathering all of the information from school staff.

The research journal also supported the process of thematic analysis. Looking back through the journal it was clear that certain topics (such as ‘the effect of class position’) were being mentioned regularly. This process helped me to ensure I was not missing themes from within the data.

3.10 Making links between quantitative and qualitative data

As explained in section 3.3.1, I chose a mixed methods design for this study as I felt a combination of quantitative and qualitative data would be best able to capture the complex, multi-layered nature of peer interactions and the factors that can affect these

for pupils with SEN in mainstream schools. This section outlines the ways in which the quantitative data collected within the first stage of the study informed data collection in stage two, and describes how quantitative and qualitative data will be presented alongside one another in the results sections of this thesis.

3.10.1 How the interviews were informed by the observations

I designed the study in two stages in part because I felt the data collected through systematic observations could be used to inform the types of questions asked in stage two, ensuring that the interviews were relevant to the social relationships of the pupils (see Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) for another multiple stage mixed methods design). During stage one of the research, I captured quantitative data related to levels of interaction for the pupils, levels of TA proximity and of TA influence on peer interactions. I analysed the systematic observation data for each pupil prior to returning to the schools for stage two. Based on the results from stage one of data collection, I adapted the interview schedule for all pupils to include questions related to different school spaces (as I had observed higher levels of peer interaction in playground as compared to classroom settings) and to differences in TA approach (another factor I had identified as potentially affecting peer interaction). Prior to observations, I had not identified either of these factors as linked to peer interaction in school.

Based on the results from stage one observations, I tailored the interviews for the pupils so that the questions fit their experience. Based on my observation notes I made reference to specific school spaces (e.g. the sensory room for Sneha) and to people the pupils had come into contact with, as I felt this context would support them to talk about their peer interactions and TA support. The quantitative results also helped me determine the relevance of particular questions for the pupils. I varied some of the questions within the interviews based on the level of peer interaction observed for the pupil. For example, I asked pupils who had been observed to have higher levels of peer interaction “can you tell me about some of the children that you play with in school?” but this question was not asked of pupils with low peer interaction as I thought it could be upsetting for them. The full interview schedule, including the different questions adapted based on peer interaction levels, is available in Appendix B8.

The observations in stage one also gave me the opportunity to learn about the abilities and needs of the pupils so that I was better able to ensure the interview process would be accessible to all. For example, I learned during observations that Jake found drawing and writing tasks very difficult due to his level of fine motor skill. As a result, I modified the drawing and labelling tasks for him so that he could still have the

opportunity to express his views (see section 7.5 for more detail about these adaptations).

Finally, the two stage data collection process was also valuable as it enabled me to identify similarities and differences between pupil reports of their experiences and my observations.

3.10.2 Data presentation: links between quantitative and qualitative data

This section explains the way in which the different types of data collected within this study were linked together and will be presented in the results section. After both stages of data collection had been completed and the interviews had been transcribed, a case study was written for each of the pupils (see section 3.8.2.2 for information about this process). For the case studies, the qualitative data both from observation notes and from the interviews was treated as the primary information and the quantitative systematic observation results were used as supporting information (the EPPE project, as described in Sammons *et al.* (2005), used quantitative and qualitative information together in a similar way). So, as in this extract from Sneha's case study, the qualitative information became the primary focus (highlighted in blue) and the quantitative data supportive evidence of this (in red):

> In class, Mrs M was only away from Sneha for short intervals and, even when she moved away, she would stand watching to ensure Sneha was ok. In total, across the research visit, Sneha had an adult proximal for 65.2% of the time. This is higher than the average for sample pupils (52.2%). On 66% of occasions an adult was proximal it was Mrs M (her allocated TA).

I wanted to ensure that, in line with my pupil voice focus, the lived experiences of the pupils (and, where possible, their own perspectives of these) were at the front of the results presented but felt the quantitative data provided strong support for these findings. Throughout the results chapter, quantitative and qualitative information will be presented together in this way.

3.11 Ethical Issues

Prior to undertaking my data collection, ethical approval was granted by the University of the West of England's Faculty Research Ethics Committee. Written parental consent was gained prior to any data collection, with parents consenting to their child being

observed and to their taking part in an interview with me (see Appendix A5). School staff also verbally consented to me being in school and observing in lessons.

3.11.1 Observations prior to pupil consent

Pupils were not asked to assent prior to the observations as I was concerned about the effect this may have on their behaviour (observer effect, McCarney *et al.*, 2007). I wanted to ensure that I saw natural behaviour and that the pupils would not be changing their behaviour to fit with what they thought I was looking for. I was also wary of singling out the observed pupil as the focus of research as far as the class were concerned, as I was worried about the potential effect this would have on other members of the class (Greene and Hogan, 2005).Specifically, I did not want the pupils I was observing to be singled out or made to feel different as a result of my presence. As my observations did not directly impact on the school experience of the pupils, I felt that parental consent was sufficient in the first stage of the research but was careful to gain assent from the pupils at the start of the second stage of the research. At this stage, pupils were made aware that any and all of their data could be removed from the project should they wish. No information was removed from the observation data.

3.11.2 Gaining assent from children

The National Children's Bureau guidelines (National Children's Bureau, 2003) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (2008) define a child as any person under 18 years of age. Where children are included as research participants there is a tension between acknowledging that they have independent views and are autonomous individuals, and legislation which states that children are not legally competent to provide consent (Tisdall, Davis and Gallagher, 2008) . Although children as a vulnerable group need to be protected, there is a possibility that excluding them from research can lessen their opportunities to have their opinions heard or to take part in studies relevant to their interests (Balen *et al.*, 2006; Robson, 2011). The Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2009) states that although not legally competent to give consent, child participants must *assent* to involvement in research work where they have the understanding to do so, and that parental permission is not an adequate replacement for this (although it should also be gained).

As with standard consent, assent refers to the child telling the researcher that they are willing to participate in research work. This does not have to be a signed document, but simply a signal from the participant that they are happy to be involved (The Society for

Research in Child Development (SRCD), 2007). Assent differs from consent as it acknowledges that children may not fully comprehend the nature or purpose of the study (abstract concepts such as research goals may be hard to understand; Hurley and Underwood, 2002) prior to agreeing to take part. They may also find it difficult to assess any risk involved in taking part (British Educational Research Association, 2011). Despite this, there is still a responsibility on the part of the researcher to provide information about the study and to check understanding, using techniques that are accessible to children.

The language used to confirm assent with child participants needs to be considered, and this is especially the case for children with SEN. Einarsdóttir (2007) emphasises the need to ensure that information is given in a way that is understandable to the child, while other researchers recommend the use of tape recorded information, photographs or diagrams could be used for children who have difficulties with reading (Thomas and O'Kane, 1998). The discussion about assent was done verbally in this study, to allow an opportunity for questions to be asked and for understanding to be checked. That I was coming into school to meet with them was also discussed with pupils prior to my arrival so that they were more prepared to see me. I piloted my assent information to ensure that the process was clear and easily understood (see section 3.5). The information given to the pupils in this study prior to assent is available in Appendix B7.

Researchers working with child participants must also consider the effects that levels of comprehension and adult-child power relationships may have on the process of assent (National Children's Bureau, 2003). In terms of comprehension, it is wrong to assume that younger children are incapable of assent simply because of their age. In fact, researchers have shown that even very young children are capable of making reasoned decisions about their involvement when information about studies has been presented in an accessible, appropriate way for them (Allen, 2005). Instead each participants' understanding should be assessed on an individual basis (Weithorn and Scherer, 1994). Having an independent advisor available to the child has been shown to help both the researcher in this assessment and the child in their decision as to whether they take part (Nicholson, 1986) and can help children to feel their views will be understood and valued within the research (Lewis and Porter, 2004). In this study, either the child's parent or another known adult was available to the child throughout the interview process.

Adult-child power relationships can have an effect on a child's ability to freely assent to participation in research (National Children's Bureau, 2003). If the child sees the

researcher as being in a position of authority, they may struggle to say that they do not want to participate or that they wish to withdraw from the study (Einarsdóttir, 2007; Mayall, 2000). Furthermore, researchers need to be aware that even where children may give their assent, their behaviour during the research process may indicate a different view that they may not feel able to voice (Alderson and Morrow, 2004; Ireland and Holloway, 1996). In this study, efforts were made to ensure that I was seen by children as a 'lesser adult' to limit any authority effects (see section 3.4.1). Alongside this, a participatory interview method was chosen to try to redress the power imbalance, enabling pupils to take the lead in certain parts of the interview (Morrow and Richards, 1996). Finally, as previously explained, all pupils had a known adult available to them throughout the interview to whom they may have felt more comfortable expressing any concerns (Ware, 2004). In fact, this was the case for the single pupil who opted not to take part in the second stage of the interview process; rather than speaking to me, he told the other adult present that he wanted to finish.

Lewis and Porter (2004) emphasise that assent should be treated as an ongoing process in research with children, as their desire to be involved with the study might change in response to the research activities attempted (also Harker, 2005). Throughout the second stage of data collection, I made sure to ask pupils at regular intervals whether they were happy to continue or would prefer to stop.

3.11.3 Protection from harm

Researchers have a duty to protect participants from psychological or physical harm within the research process (Alderson and Morrow, 2004; British Educational Research Association, 2011). This process involves exploring potential sources of harm that may result from the study and ensuring the methods chosen minimize the risk of harm. In this study, I was concerned that discussing personal subjects such as friendships and learning needs might be upsetting for the pupils or might impact negatively on the pupil's self-esteem. I managed this risk by piloting all questions used within the study to ensure they were easily understood and did not cause any anxiety or upset to pupils (see section 3.5).

I also considered the need to safeguard children within the research study (Furey, Kay and Barley, 2010). As such, I was aware that any information collected relating to pupils being harmed or at risk of harm during data collection would need to be reported to school staff. In one school, I observed a pupil being spat at and verbally abused by peers during lunchtime play. I reported this to the school SENCO who then dealt with the incident.

3.11.4 Confidentiality and anonymity

Assurances of anonymity were given to pupils as recommended by ethical guidelines (National Children's Bureau, 2003; British Educational Research Association, 2011). As such, the locations where the research took place have not been identified, pseudonyms have been used to protect pupils' identities and information which might make pupils recognizable (e.g. specific health conditions) has been omitted or changed throughout. The nature of the qualitative data collected in this study also causes problems with confidentiality. The quotes included from the interviews are an important part of the work but may mean pupils are more easily identifiable (Lewis and Lindsay, 1999). The risk of their inclusion has been weighed up against the benefit in all cases.

Confidentiality was not promised to pupils, in line with safeguarding guidelines which means that information related to child protection must be disclosed (Furey, Kay and Barley, 2010).

The children's right to anonymity as data participants within their school settings during data collection also needed to be considered. As the tours and interviews took place within school time both school staff and peers may have seen the pupils working with me around the school, and as such, could have been aware that the pupil was taking part in my research. In line with ethical guidelines, this was discussed with parents and with children during the consent/assent process.

3.11.5 Consent/assent for photographs to be included

In order to limit issues of consent, photographs were not taken of people not included in the study (e.g. other pupils, school staff). This was made clear to the pupils prior to images being taken and was not an issue during the photography stage of the data collection.

Some photographs were taken with the pupil in (at the pupil's request). In these cases both pupils and their parents were asked to verbally consent to these being used as part of the study. Both pupils and parents were assured that pupils would not be identifiable in any photographs used publicly. Some parents / school staff were unhappy to have particular photographs included in publications; these were noted and have not been included in this study.

The ownership and copyright of photographs taken for research has been the subject of much debate (McCauley, 2008; Barker and Smith, 2012). According to UK copyright law, the person who takes the photograph is the owner and, therefore, possesses copyright and the right to decide how that image is used (UK Copyright Service, 2005), although this is less clear where the photographer is less than eighteen years of age (Barker and Smith, 2012). As such, researchers simply need to gain consent to use the photos by the image-taker. In this study, as explained previously, both the pupil and their parents were asked whether photographs could be included in the research or published. Parents signed a written consent form for this (see Appendix A5).

A further debate concerns sourcing photographs used in publications. Some researchers have noted the importance of crediting the photographers when using images publicly, as this acknowledges the contribution made by the participants (Young Lives, 2008). The issue here is that that clearly conflicts with guarantees of anonymity. Barker and Smith (2012) provide both a critical discussion of this issue and the solution I have used in this study. All photographs taken by pupils will be credited with pseudonym, age and location in this thesis and future work; thereby promoting the participant's contribution, clarifying that I am not the photographer and reinforcing that the data collection was a collaborative process without breaking anonymity.

3.11.6 Consent/assent for drawings to be included

Verbal assent was also gained from pupils and written consent from their parents for the drawings produced in the interviews to be used publicly (see Appendix A5 for the parental consent form). Previous researchers have suggested that drawings may be more difficult to anonymise than other data (Levin, 1995), especially in this case where they are pictures of friends and school staff. All labels have been removed from published photographs to make them anonymous portraits. Pictures which it was deemed would be easily recognizable have not been included. As with the photographs, pupil pseudonym and age have been listed alongside the images included in recognition of the contribution of the participants (Barker and Smith, 2012).

3.11.7 Consent/assent for documents to be used

As described in section 3.7.1.7, a range of documents were collected from schools during my data collection. These documents included private and personal information about the pupils, and as such the ethical implications of using these data need to be considered.

Prior to my research visits, parents were asked to consent to my use of the pupils' statement of SEN alongside other documents from the school (see Appendix A4). I explained that information from the documents would be anonymised prior to its inclusion in the study and that data would be stored securely. Pupils' agreement for me to use these documents was included in the assent conversation prior to the second stage of data collection (this process is described in section 3.11.2).

3.11.8 Consent from adults in the study

Although the focus of the observations was the target pupils, this process inevitably involved some observation of the adults who were interacting with and working close to them. Alongside this, unstructured conversations were undertaken with adults throughout data collection in order to clarify what I had seen during the observations and I also collected specific information from the allocated TAs for the target pupils. This section discusses consent in relation to these adults.

Prior to my research visit, head teachers signed a consent form for me to undertake my data collection in schools and were asked to talk to all staff in the classrooms I would be visiting to ensure they were happy for me to observe. Alongside this, when I arrived at the school for data collection I also spoke to each adult observed to check that they were happy for me to observe, When I spoke to adults in school I explained how the information being collected could be disseminated and that data would be anonymised to protect identities and asked if they were happy for me to include it in the study. I used verbal consent with these adults as I could not predict prior to visiting who I would need to talk to and I often had very little time with them (conversations happened at the end of classes and during lunchtimes).

The issue with this type of verbal consent is that the adults may not have been given sufficient time to decide whether they would like their information to be included in the study (Comstock, 2013). Furthermore, the adults may have felt pressured to take part in the study as I was with them at the time of their consenting to involvement (Greene and Hogan, 2005). Although the prior consent from head teachers should have meant that adults were prepared for my visit, this impact of this type of consent should be considered.

I tried to minimise the effects of verbal consent by checking back with the adults I had spoken to at the end of each research visit as to whether they were still happy for the

information they had given to be included. By this time they had had the opportunity to consider their involvement and to make decisions about consent. All adults agreed to the inclusion of their information. Following data collection, feedback about the results of the study was sent to head teachers and to school staff and parents. This provided school staff with another opportunity to query or object to any findings or data included.

Each pupil had an allocated TA or TAs who provided the majority of their support (see section 3.6.4.3 for details). During my research visits, alongside the clarification questions detailed above, these TAs were also asked for information regarding their role in support of the pupils being observed (Appendix B5 details the exact questions asked). From these TAs I gained verbal consent as described above while I was within the school setting and followed this with written confirmation of consent afterwards. In order to do this I collated the information that had been given by each individual TA and sent this to the TAs for their approval. TAs responded by signing a consent form if they were happy for this information to be included (see Appendix B10 for TA consent form). All of the allocated TAs provided written consent for their information to be included.

3.11.9 Incidental observations

A result of my observations of the peer interactions of target pupils was that I also observed other children and adults within the school settings. These people were not the focus of the study but as they shared the same environments as the target pupils or interacted with the target pupils they became part of the observation (British Educational Research Association, 2011). These people did not consent or assent to involvement in the research and, for the children, their parents did not consent to their participation in the study (except in school S2 who sent a letter out to all parents of children at the school asking for consent for the study to be undertaken). Although this is an inevitable part of field research (Gray, 1980) the ethics of their involvement needs to be unpicked.

Incidental observation of adults occurred when the target pupil came into contact with an adult who was not part of their teaching team (as teachers and TAs were asked to consent to my observation prior to my research visit, and I spoke to them about their involvement during my visits). Examples included lunch time assistants, parent helpers and a school nurse; all of whom were present in spaces where I was observing target pupils. Similarly, incidental observation of children occurred during my observations. There were children in the playground and in the classroom who were in the same space as the target pupil and were observed as a result. The risk of harm to these

people from my observation was minimal, as I recorded no information about them and did not actively interact with them in any way.

The children who were observed interacting with target children during observations are a more complex issue. For some of these children, information was collected as to their relationship to the target pupil (for example, Charlie's friend Molly – section 4.2) or their academic level (for example, the children who shared Olivia's table in her main classroom – section 4.4.4.2). This information was collected to better inform me about the target child and their peer relationships but the result was that I gathered information about these children without their prior assent or consent from their parents.

Although these children did not agree to their involvement in the research, a number of things were done to protect them within the research. First, all names and identifying features have been changed throughout (Alcadipani and Hodgson, 2009). Alongside this, no photographs were taken of other children during the tours of the school. Although pictures were drawn of some of these children by the target pupils, they are not identifiable within these images.

Across all incidental observations, the benefits of being able to observe the target pupil within their school environment were weighed against the potential risk to others of being observed. In line with BERA guidelines, I felt that this consideration enabled me to ensure that my actions were justifiable in the face of the ethical risk (British Educational Research Association, 2011).

3.11.10 The impact of adults present in interviews

As explained in section 3.7.2.3, adults were present during pupil interviews. In some cases these were the parents of the target pupils, but in other settings members of school staff were present instead (see section 3.7.2.4 for details of who was present for each individual child). This section discusses the ethical implications of the inclusion of these adults during the second stage of the research.

Although studies have shown that child participants within research can be supported to successfully participate within research, it is also important that researchers recognise that children, especially those with SEN, remain a vulnerable group (National Children's Bureau, 2003). Without support children may struggle to express their view about involvement in research or take part in research tasks (Einarsdóttir, 2007).

Alongside this, researchers have found that gatekeepers can be reticent to consent to the involvement of children in studies where there is no direct adult support (Gray, 1980; Mahon *et al.*, 1996). One solution used by researchers is the inclusion of a known adult who can both help the child to feel more comfortable, and knows the child well enough to flag up any concerns about the child's inclusion in data collection (Alderson and Morrow, 2004). This strategy is not without its own ethical implications.

In this study, the decision to include adults was made in part to help the target pupils to feel more comfortable and able to voice their views within the research setting. Ware (2004) reported that child participants were more open to expressing their views in research interviews with known adults present than with people they had not previously met. Similarly, Davis (1998) found that child participants were more likely to take on the role of expert within data collection when they were supported by adults that they knew.

As the questions asked in this interview were about peer interactions and school experience, it is possible that the target pupils responded in ways that they thought would please the adults present, including myself (Einarsdóttir, 2007). The ethical challenge of this is that the pupils may not have felt able to express their individual views or opinions. This is particularly an issue for the pupils who were supported by school staff within the school setting where a range of expectations are implied by adult support roles (Graue and Walsh, 1998). In this study, methods were chosen which supported the target children to take control of the data collected, which may have limited the effect of this issue.

A further factor that requires consideration is that adults may be used to voicing their opinions in relation to children with SEN. Garth and Aroni (2003) reported a difference between parent and child views, but also found that the parents were prone to interjecting if present during discussions with children. This was even the case when questions were specifically directed at the children. Einarsdóttir (2007) suggests clearly outlining the role of any adults present during data collection to ensure there is an understanding about this. In line with this, I explained to adults both during the consent process and prior to the second stage of data collection that I would like them to be present to help to make the target pupils feel comfortable, but that questions and discussion would be directed at the pupils themselves. Despite this, some examples were observed of adults intervening in pupil interviews; these are discussed in section 7.7.

Despite the challenges outlined in this section, I felt the inclusion of adults within data

collection was important to support the child participants within this study. During recruitment for the study, schools and parents also expressed that they felt more confident about pupils taking part in the study with an adult support who knew the child. Adult presence was seen to comfort many students, enabling them to take part in data collection (this is discussed further in section 7.8). Alongside this, the adults present were able to support pupils to voice decisions about their involvement (see section 3.11.2 above).

Examples of adult effects on pupil responses in the interviews are discussed in section 7.7.

3.11.11 Reflection on ethical approvals

Prior to carrying out my research I was granted ethical approval by the University of the West of England's Faculty Research Ethics Committee. Considering the various factors outlined above, it is worth reflecting on this approval process.

Elliott (2008) questions the use of ethics committees at universities, citing evidence of contradictions both within single committees and across institutions. With specific relation to research with children with SEN and/or disabilities, Boxall and Ralph (2010) reported a much higher level of rejection of approval. The authors suggested that these types of studies are more difficult to assess in terms of risk/benefit ratios. Furthermore, studies with a large number of different people connected to the research have been shown to have the greatest number of inconsistencies (Angell and Dixon-Woods, 2008). Ramcharan and Cutcliffe (2001) suggest that ongoing approval may be more suitable, especially for qualitative data collection. This process would enable researchers to identify potential risks as part of a reflexive research method.

In relation to my research, some risks were not identified by either myself or the research committee within my application for ethical approval. For example, no discussion was included of the incidental observations of children within the school environment.

3.12 Considering the impact of speech, language and communication needs

In total, ten of the pupils included in the sample for this study have needs related to speech, language and communication identified on their statements. This section considers what impact this had upon data collection methods chosen and considers the

challenges involved in listening to the views of children who may have difficulty communicating their views.

Although the methods chosen had been designed to support pupils with SEN, once I realised that there was such a high proportion of pupils with needs relating to speech and language in the sample, adaptations were made to ensure the study would capture the views of these children. Previous research has shown that the inclusion of non-verbal ways of listening to children during data collection can remove barriers to participation in research for children with communication needs (Holliday, Harrison and McLeod, 2009; Malchiodi, 1998). Based on this evidence, I adapted the drawing task in stage two of the study. Rather than providing strict instruction or putting restrictions on what should be drawn, I opened up the task to interpretation by the pupils, giving them more flexibility about what they would like to draw. As such, alongside the pictures of people, some pupils chose to draw areas in the school, toys they play with and people not directly related to the question asked (what the pupils drew and the meanings behind these drawings are discussed in section 7.5). These additional drawings and the conversation that came with them provide valuable context, especially in the case of pupils who found talking directly to me challenging.

This Chapter has presented the research approach, the data collection and analysis methods chosen and the ethical challenges of research with children. Moving on from this, the next chapter presents the results from this study.

4. Results

4.1 Introduction to Results

This chapter presents the results from the study. Systematic observations, one-to-one interviews with pupils and TAs, and document analysis were undertaken. This chapter brings together the results from both stages of data collection. The chapter opens with an introduction to the eleven target pupils, detailing their individual needs and specifically those related to peer interaction. Following on from this, results from the observations are presented, including information as to the number of minutes recorded and numbers of interactions observed for each of the pupils. Next, results from the case studies are presented in line with the four research questions guiding this study. Extracts from the pupil case studies are included throughout and the complete case studies are available in Appendix D.

4.2 Introducing the Target Pupils

Eleven target pupils were observed and interviewed as part of data collection. All had a statement of SEN and were being taught within a mainstream school setting with support from TAs. This section provides details about the characteristics and needs of the pupils in the study to provide an introduction to the pupils themselves and to present a picture of their school experience (this information is provided in greater detail in the individual case studies, Appendix D).

Olivia

Olivia was a six year old girl in Year One at a large community primary school during my research visits. The school SENCO told me that although she could be shy when it comes to social interaction, Olivia was full of confidence in class and got really excited about new tasks. Despite this excitement, Olivia found it hard to concentrate on activities for long periods of time and so spent a lot of her time in class being asked to focus on what she was doing or to sit properly in her seat. Olivia had a statement of SEN as a result of a medical condition which affected both her cognitive and physical abilities. Her statement listed needs relating to expressive/receptive language, cognition and understanding, behavioural responses and social interaction skills. As a result of her medical condition, Olivia had some unusual behaviours which the other pupils in class seemed to find difficult to understand. She rocked from side to side constantly (including when she was sitting on the carpet) and I observed peers asking her not to do this as she was bumping them. Alongside these behaviours, Olivia had a speech and language impairment which made some of what she said difficult to

understand and her needs relating to expressive and receptive language meant that she may not have always understood what was said to her. Olivia was supported in school by a single allocated TA, Mrs A, for 30 hours each week.

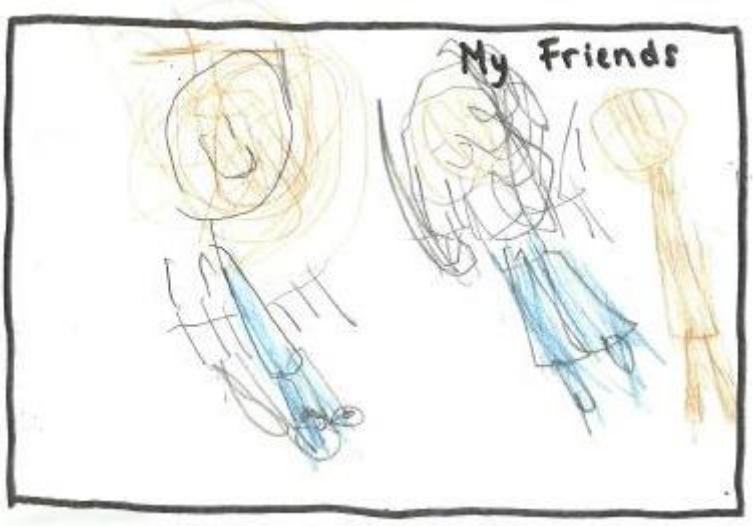


Figure 1: Drawing of herself, a friend and her cousin. Olivia, aged 6.

During observations Olivia seemed content to play alone and played the same games each day. She was seen actively engaging with peers at some points during the week observed. This only happened in the classroom and, for the most part, involved a boy who sits opposite her at her table, Gary. Despite him being the peer she interacted with most frequently, when asked to draw her favourite friend to play with in school, Olivia did not choose to draw Gary, instead opting for a girl in her class (Alexa). This felt like an aspirational choice as Olivia talked about Alexa playing with other people rather than giving examples of when they had played together. At no point did she talk about herself playing with Alexa, instead only pointing out a reason that she could not join in with her games “I can't skipping [sic]”.

Jake

Jake was a six year old boy who I noted never seemed to stop moving. At the time of observation he was in a Year One class at a large primary school. During observations he spent a lot of his time in school very close to a TA, either holding their hand, sitting on their lap or leaning into them as they sat next to him. Jake had a statement of SEN due to a diagnosis of ASD, with needs identified relating to communication and interaction, cognition and learning, behavioural, emotional and social skills, and sensory and physical support. Jake had multiple complex behaviours which may have been difficult for peers to understand without support. He communicated primarily through noises and gestures and, when he did speak, was hard to understand. His statement said he could become aggressive if struggling to express himself or when he

misunderstands social cues. According to the school SENCO, he regularly threw tantrums. School staff and parents were in discussions about whether a special school placement might be more suitable for Jake when he reached secondary school age. Jake was supported in school by two allocated TAs, Mrs B and Mrs C, who worked with him for half of each day to make up 32 hours of support each week.

Jake did not take part in the drawing activities and found the interview process difficult as a result of his speech and language difficulties. Although he clearly interacted successfully with peers throughout his time in school, Jake did not talk about any other pupils at any point during his interview, even when provided with visual prompts. It is unclear whether this was due to his response to the interview process or whether this reflects a lack of interest in peers within his class. From observations though, it was clear that Jake had a very different approach to peer interaction between classroom and playground sessions. In the classroom he was quite isolated due to his position at the back of the class next to his TA, he also spent a large amount of time outside of the classroom as he needs breaks from his work. In the playground however he was observed interacting with a range of peers. This difference in peer interaction levels in relation to environments in school is discussed in section 4.4.4.

Charlie

Charlie was seven years old and in Year Two at a large primary school. He was small for his age but his main class teacher described him as full of confidence and always smiling. Charlie had a statement of SEN due to developmental delay, which provided funding so that he could receive full time TA support in class. On Charlie's statement, his needs relating to language and social skills were deemed of most relevance to his peer interactions. Charlie had a speech impediment which could make him difficult to understand and a short attention span which meant he did not always fully understand what was being said to him. This may have impacted on his peer interactions as other pupils in school may not have given him enough time to process information or may not have taken the time to decode his speech when it was hard to understand. According to his statement, Charlie could also be socially naïve, struggling to read social cues, which may have been frustrating for peers. Charlie was supported by two TAs. Mrs D worked with him in the morning and Mrs E in the afternoon, together accounting for 32 hours of support each week.

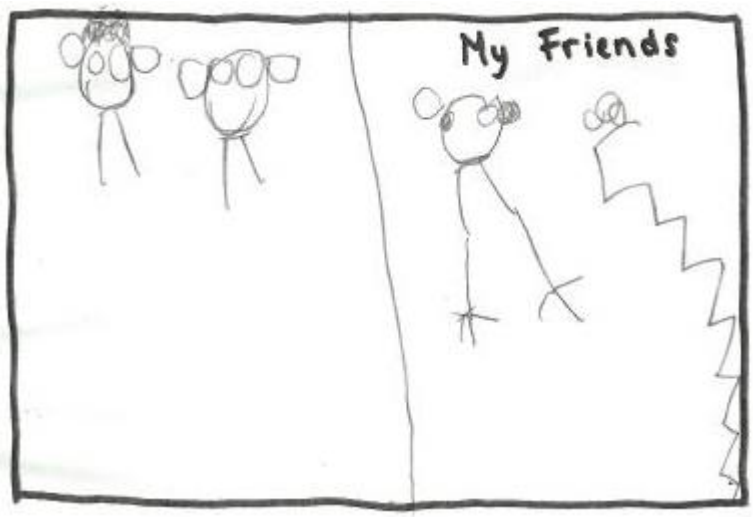


Figure 2: Drawing of himself, his brother and a peer. Charlie, aged 7.

Across the time observed, it became clear that Charlie had a strong, stable friendship with a girl from his class (Molly). He labelled her as his best friend and gave concrete examples of things they had done together which matched my own observations. Although Charlie did play with Molly every day, he only did so in the playground and when asked about games he likes to play in class he named independent activities (reading). When I asked him about playing with Molly in the classroom he seemed confused and answered “we work in the classroom”. This distinction between classroom and playtime sessions was seen across the sample and is further discussed in section 4.4.4.1 of this chapter

Ryan

Ryan was a seven year old boy in Year Two at a large community primary school during my research visits. His TA, Mrs F, described him as a quiet boy, who enjoyed singing and playing football. Ryan had a statement of SEN due to a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) which identified four main areas of need: speech, language and communication, early learning skills, social interaction skills, and emotional wellbeing. Several of the needs identified on his statement impacted upon Ryan's ability to interact successfully with his peers. Notes from his speech and language therapist suggested he spoke rarely, even when he was being spoken to, which could be confusing for peers if he failed to respond to them. School staff told me that Ryan did not like other pupils touching him or being very close to him and so often played alone rather than with peers. Finally, Ryan also struggled to interpret emotional responses in others so could respond inappropriately to other pupils. Ryan was supported by two TAs, Mrs F and Mrs G, who supported him morning and afternoon for a total of 32 hours each week.

Ryan spent just 8.5% of his time during observations interacting with peers, the lowest of any pupil in the sample. This finding can be explained by the high proportion of time Ryan spent not interacting with anyone (25.5%, higher than any other pupil within the sample). At playtimes he seemed happiest alone, playing the same game every day. Perhaps as a result of his limited peer interactions, or possibly because of his needs relating to speech, language and communication, Ryan struggled to answer some of the questions within the interview, either not answering questions or responding 'yes' as in these extracts from his interview transcript:

> *Me: Who do you play with at playtime?*
> *Ryan: Yes.*
>
> *Me: What games do you like to play?*
> *Ryan: Yes.*

Alongside this, Ryan did not take part in the drawing activity which limited his opportunities to talk about peers. The only time he mentioned any other pupil throughout the entire interview was while we were labelling the photographs he had taken and the child he named (Neil) was one that TA Mrs F said she had never seen him interact with.

Kai

Kai was a seven year old boy and in Year Two at a community primary school in the West Midlands of England. I noted during observations that he was easy to spot in the classroom because he often got out of his seat to show his work to teachers and TAs or just to give them a hug. Kai had a statement of SEN focused around behavioural, emotional and social difficulties due to concerns about how he controlled his emotions in school. His statement stated that he also had needs relating to speech, language and communication, social interaction skills, and attention and listening. His main class teacher told me that Kai was prone to angry outbursts, which were difficult to understand for his peers, and may have caused them to avoid playing with him (as he often got into trouble for his behaviour). Further to this, his poor expressive language meant he could not always explain how he was feeling or what he wanted which could also make peer interactions difficult. Kai was kept in during break times on three occasions during the week observed for fighting with other pupils in school. His statement had 18 hours of funding attached for allocated support each week. Kai had support available from TAs in all of his classes, but he did not have an allocated TA. Most often he was supported by Mrs H and Mrs I.

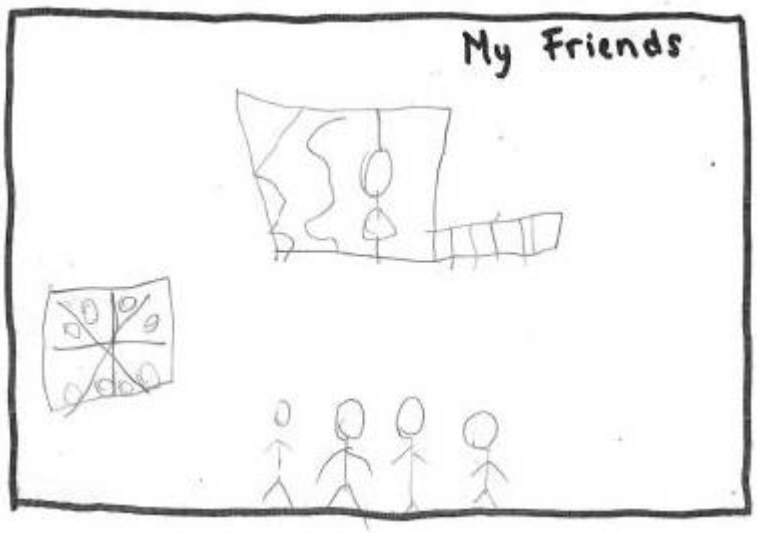


Figure 3: Drawing of three friends and some play equipment. Kai, aged 7.

During observations, Kai did not seem to have any consistent friends that he interacted with every day. Instead he seemed to choose whoever was closest at the time. It felt as though Kai was keen to interact with the other pupils in the class but was not always confident about how best to do this, opting to give them things (coloured pencils, sharpeners) rather than starting a conversation.. In the drawing task, when asked about who he had drawn, Kai could not name the figures in his picture. This is very different to the second task, drawing someone who helps him in school, when he was very keen to both name the figure he had drawn and to write a description of the things that person does to support him. School staff explained that Kai had had a difficult time in his early schooling and had been regularly reprimanded for fighting. They felt he was now less confident in peer interactions.

Matthew

Matthew was a seven year old boy with a statement of SEN related to a medical condition that affected both his cognitive and physical abilities. His TA, Mrs J, said he was very focused on doing well in school and got really excited each time he completed a task or received praise for his work. I noted that Matthew took part in all activities within his classroom, although some needed to be adapted to accommodate his physical impairments. Matthew's SEN could have affected his ability to interact with peers in a number of ways. His speech was quite difficult to understand, and his needs relating to expressive language meant he sometimes just repeated what had been said to him rather than answering himself. This could have been confusing for peers who were trying to interact with him. Alongside this, Matthew had poor balance and could not move around quickly which meant he was limited in the types of games he could play; something that was not fully understood by his peers. Matthew was supported by

two allocated TAs in the time observed, Mrs J in the morning and Mrs K in the afternoon. Together they supported him for 32 hours each week.

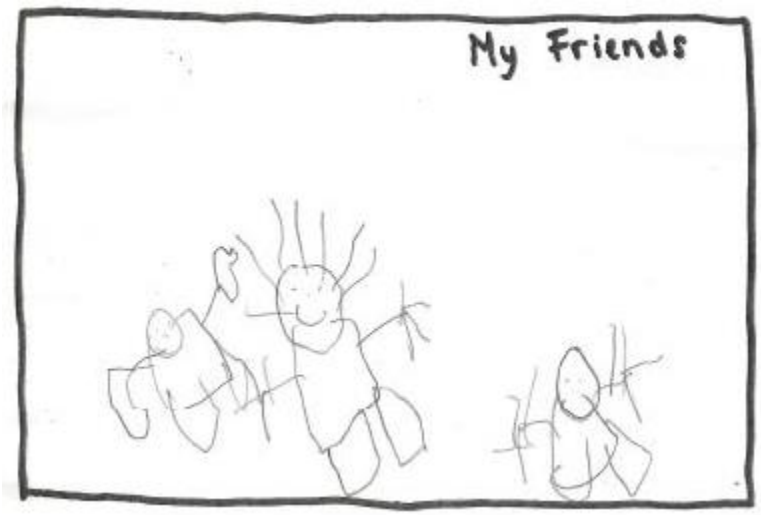


Figure 4: Drawing of TA Mrs J and two friends. Matthew, aged 7.

During observations, Matthew very rarely interacted with peers. This is in direct contrast to the high number of friends talked about on his statement of SEN. It is also contradictory of school reports which informed me that he had a very strong relationship with a girl at school and that he played regularly with multiple peers. Instead, Matthew seemed to see his TAs as friends talking about his interactions with them far more often than any interactions with peers. This focus on TAs as friends is discussed further in section 4.4.1.2.

Gopal

Gopal was a six year old boy in Year One at an infant school when I visited him. His allocated TA described him as full of energy and I noted he was always moving around or wriggling in his seat. At playtimes during the week observed he ran around the entire time until the bell went. Gopal had a physical condition the maintenance of which had caused him to miss a lot of schooling in the past according to school records. He had a statement of SEN which provided funding to achieve full time TA support to help him both with the day-to-day support of his health needs as well as a number of educational needs including speech and language skills, social interaction skills, and attention and listening. Gopal's statement suggests that he might sometimes find it difficult to interact with peers because his social behaviour was that of a much younger child. He was noted as struggling with turn-taking and as snatching things from peers if he wanted them. He also interrupted and talked over both adults and peers, and raised his voice if he felt he was not being listened to. These behaviours could be upsetting or annoying

for peers who may not have understood them. While I was in school, several pupils in his class were observed asking to move away from Gopal so as not to be distracted by him or disciplined themselves. Gopal had a single allocated TA, Mrs I, for 30 hours each week. He also came into contact with a number of other TAs during intervention s and playground sessions.

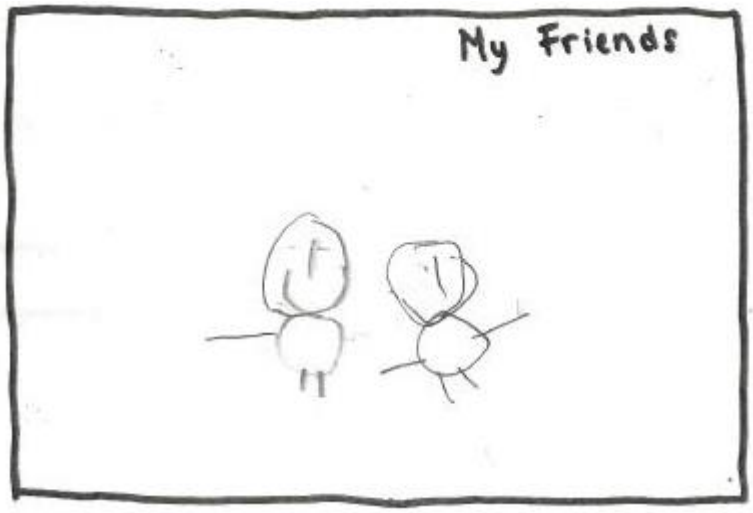


Figure 5: Drawing of two friends. Gopal, aged 6.

During my research visit, I noted that Gopal played with multiple peers, although whom he played with seemed to be based on who was available to him rather than choosing the same peers each time. When asked to draw his favourite friend to play with in school, Gopal opted to draw a pupil from his mainstream class that he has quite a difficult relationship with, Jai. This is an interesting choice, in part because he spends very little time in his mainstream class but also because I observed Jai and Gopal having a negative interaction in a “choosing” session during the week (Gopal broke a race track Jai was building multiple times, Jai ended up crying). After drawing Jai, Gopal also drew a boy who was identified as someone who he regularly plays with, Adrian. The way he spoke about the two pupils is quite different Adrian, whom he does play with in school, was described with concrete examples and in an animated way (the description of him playing with Adrian on the bench involved Gopal actually hiding under the table in our interview). In comparison, Gopal could not tell me about games he had played with Jai or things they had done together.

Sneha

Sneha was a seven year old girl, coming to the end of Year Two at an infant academy school when I observed her. According to her most recent school report she loved attention from adults, especially praise, and often went to show her work to the school's

head teacher when it was felt she had worked hard in class. Sneha had a statement of SEN due to Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD) and needs relating to speech, language and communication skills. She had multiple learning needs and had literacy needs at a level well below her chronological age. Sneha's speech was hard to understand as her speech sounds were unclear and she had a tendency to whisper, which could make it difficult for her to converse with peers. She also had expressive and receptive language needs, often repeated what had been said to her and found it hard to express herself, especially in regard to how she was feeling. Her statement identified that Sneha lacked independence and was happiest in adult company and suggested this could lead her to prioritize time with adults over time with peers. Finally, as a result of her MLD, Sneha's style of play was that of a child much younger than her chronological age and she often chose games and toys aimed at pre-school children. This could prove a barrier to interaction as same age peers may not want to take part in this type of play. Sneha was supported by a single allocated TA, Mrs M, for 32 hours each week. Like Gopal, she also worked with other TAs throughout the week observed.

Sneha was rarely seen interacting with peers, and seemed to be more focused on interacting with adults within school. Like Matthew, when asked about who she played with in school she talked about her TAs before mentioning peers. Interestingly, however, when asked to draw her favourite friend to play with in school, she opted to draw children from her class. Pupil views of TAs as friends are discussed in section 4.4.1.2.

Lucie

Lucie and Henry (below) attended the same large academy in the South West of England, and spent a lot of their time in school together.

Lucie was six at the time of observation. The school SENCO said she could be quite shy but, when interested in a topic, would talk happily and confidently to other members of her class. Lucie had a statement of SEN due to moderate hearing loss and associated delays in her speech and language skills. Her speech was sometimes unclear because she often spoke very softly and was still learning to form some speech sounds correctly. Alongside this, her interactions with peers could also have been affected by her ability to hear what was being said to her. Lucie could hear well with her hearing aids, but often forgot to bring these into school. Lucie's statement suggests that she would benefit from regular contact with mainstream peers, who could model appropriate language for her, and consequently her time in school was split between a mainstream classroom (approximately 1 day each week) and a Hearing Impaired

Resource Base (HIRB: 4 days) on the same site. Lucie had funding for 20 hours of support each week but did not have an allocated TA. Instead she had support available throughout her time in school with TAs present in all of her lessons.

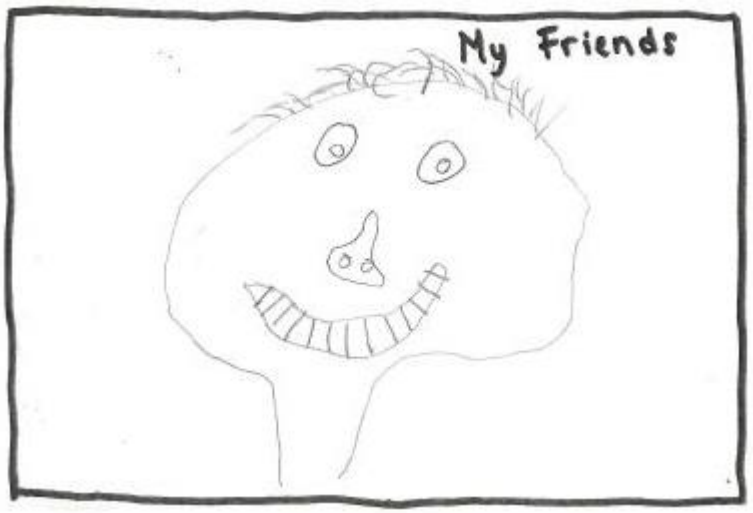


Figure 6: Drawing of a friend. Lucie, aged 6.

At break and lunch times, Lucie played with the same close-knit group of peers every day. They moved out of the school together as a group and stayed with each other for the entirety of the time they were outside. During the drawing task, Lucie opted to draw one of these peers from the HIRB, a boy called Spike. What is particularly interesting about Lucie is that, despite her time in mainstream class, all of the peers she was observed interacting with were pupils who spent at least part of their time in school in the HIRB. Perhaps more notable, Lucie was aware of this and spoke about it as a conscious decision; she only wanted to play with other pupils from the HIRB. Henry (below) also spoke about this.

Henry

Henry was seven years old and also spent the majority of his time in school within the HIRB (he too had approximately one day each week within a mainstream class). The school SENCO described him as a very confident and inquisitive child, often the first to put his hand up to answer a question in class. She also said that some concerns had been raised by school staff about his behaviour, however, because this confidence could be seen as challenging as he could be stubborn or refuse to follow instructions. Henry had a statement of SEN due to severe hearing loss which had resulted in needs related to speech and language delay and concentration. His ability to hear spoken word fluctuated, so on his worst days he found it difficult to hear his own voice or what was being said to him. Although Henry used British Sign Language (BSL), meaning he could communicate even on days when his hearing was very impaired, some pupils

within the HIRB and those within his mainstream class did not sign so this remained a barrier to interaction. Alongside this, Henry had difficulties with spatial awareness and struggled to maintain personal space, which other pupils found difficult. He did not consistently share or take turns which also upset peers. Henry had 17 hours of allocated support identified on his statement (the lowest in the sample). Like Lucie he did not have an allocated TA but had TAs present in all of his lessons should he require help.

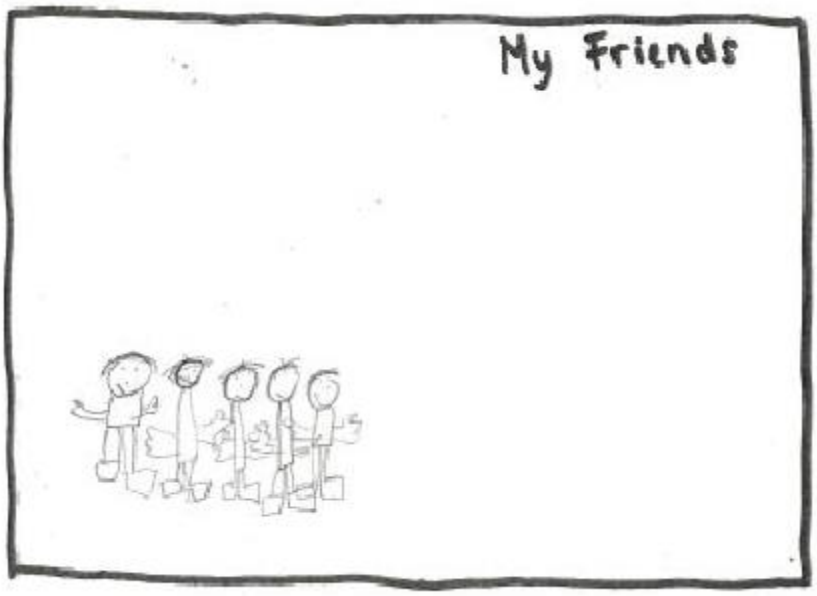


Figure 7: Drawing of himself and four friends. Henry, aged 7.

Like Lucie, Henry also had a small close-knit group of peers that he interacted with in school. When asked to draw his favourite friend to play with in school, Henry opted to draw several children, including himself. All of the children that Henry drew were peers that I had seen him work and play with on many occasions during my research visits. The fact that he chose to draw multiple peers could be explained by his friendship network, as he didn't seem to have a particular best friend but, rather, played with whoever was available at the time. It could also be explained by Henry's difficulties with peer interactions. As previously explained, some of Henry's behaviours in school had been identified by school staff as negatively affecting his peer interactions. This means that Henry often falls out with peers in his class and, consequently, has to play or work with other peers until they have resolved the problem. Henry may have opted to draw several children because he knows that his friendships fluctuate; that he is not always on good terms with all of his peers. Consequently he has to have a pool of friends to draw from, as shown in the group of children he opted to draw. While Henry did not name a particular “best friend” it was clear that he was very confident in his friendships in school; he knew that he had a number of friends and was happy talking about the

things they do together and games they liked to play.

Seth

Seth was a seven year old boy in Year Two at a small primary school during my research visits. His class teacher told me he was quiet and often seemed anxious even when nothing stressful was happening. I noted his hair was quite long and he pulled it over his eyes when he was upset. Seth had a statement of SEN due to a diagnosis of ASD with needs relating to speech, language and communication, and social vulnerability outlined. In relation to his speech and language needs, Seth was reticent to speak, sometimes failed to respond when spoken to, and did not always understand everything that was said to him. These behaviours could be seen as rude or upsetting by peers who tried to interact with him.

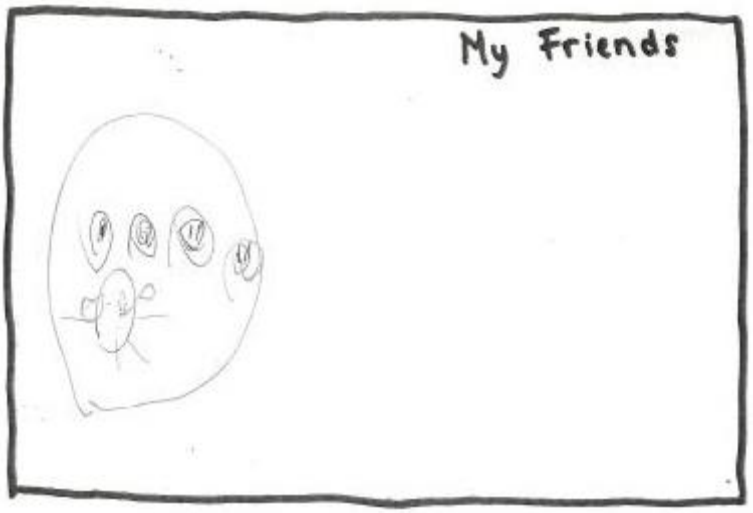


Figure 8: Drawing of himself and four friends. Seth, aged 7.

Further to this, the statement identifies Seth as being socially vulnerable. It suggests he is keen to be around other children but finds it difficult to read social cues, which can be hard for peers to understand. An example I observed was of Seth trying to join in with a game when he had been asked by the pupils playing not to. This was upsetting for both Seth and the peers involved. Finally, some of Seth's behaviours may also affect his peer interactions. School staff told me he threw tantrums when upset, and had recently started to touch and pinch himself in class. As these behaviours are not socially acceptable, it may have been hard for peers to understand why he was doing them. Seth was also told off by school staff for exhibiting these behaviours, which may have caused peers to avoid contact with him as they did not want to be told off with him. Seth was supported by an allocated TA, Mrs P, during his time in school. His statement suggested he received 25 hours of support (although this was not in line with my observations, see section 7.8).

For Seth, interactions with peers were often stressful and lead to him being told off or becoming upset. His class teacher, Mrs U said that meetings had been called with his parents about his negative interactions with peers and that targets had been set to try to improve Seth's behaviour. Aside from these stressful interactions, I also observed him interacting without support with a number of pupils during my research visit. During the drawing task, Seth drew a boy from his class; Isaac alongside some other boys from his class. I recorded in my interview notes feeling that Seth was keen to name multiple children as he felt this would please his mother (the impact of having adults present in the interviews is discussed in section 7.7).

4.3 Results from observations

This section brings together results from the structured observations. The number of minutes recorded for each target pupil is presented and the reasons for these figures discussed. Data related to numbers of interactions for the whole sample and for individual pupils follows.

4.3.1 Minutes recorded

In total 5,412 data points (one for each minute observed) were collected from the systematic observations, amounting to just over 90 hours of observations (see Table 13 below). 4,807 minutes of observations were carried out of the pupils, with an average of 437 minutes per pupil (just over seven hours).

The number of minutes observed per pupil varied according to time in class, access to the pupil and activities within school. Jake, for example, was taken out of the classroom by his TAs for regular breaks during the day. I did not observe these breaks as I felt it would confuse or upset Jake to have me following him around the school. As a result, Jake has a lower number of observations than some pupils. Similarly, in the week I observed Lucie there was a school trip and an activity day which limited the number of observations I could carry out.

Pupils	Minutes recorded
Olivia	731
Jake	314
Charlie	373
Ryan	684
Kai	675
Matthew	326
Gopal	234
Sneha	365
Lucie	269
Henry	296
Seth	540
Total	**4807**

Table 13: Numbers of minutes recorded for individual pupils

The following sections detail the results of analyses related to the systematic observations of pupils' interactions.

4.3.2 Interactions

As described in section 3.7.1, the pupils in this study were observed for up to four days of a school week, both in class and during unscheduled times. This section pulls together results from the observation schedule, presenting results for individual pupils and the sample as a whole.

Interactions for the pupils observed were recorded as happening in one of six ways.

1. Adult – Target: An adult is speaking to the target pupil
2. Target – Adult: The target pupil is talking to an adult
3. Peer – Target: A peer is talking to the target pupil
4. Target – Peer: The target pupil is talking to a peer
5. No interaction: No interaction is occurring
6. Bin: Interaction is unclear

For the presentation of results here, interactions coded as 'Bin' have been removed as these did not give any information about pupil school experience. Across all observations, the 'Bin' code accounted for just 2.7% of interactions coded (for more discussion on how the 'Bin' code was used see section 3.7.1.2 or Appendix B2).

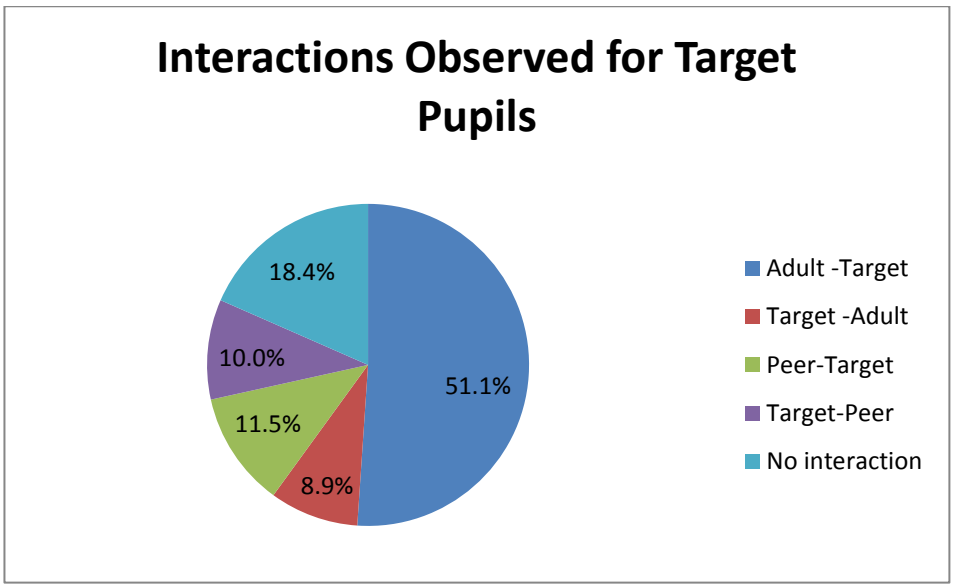


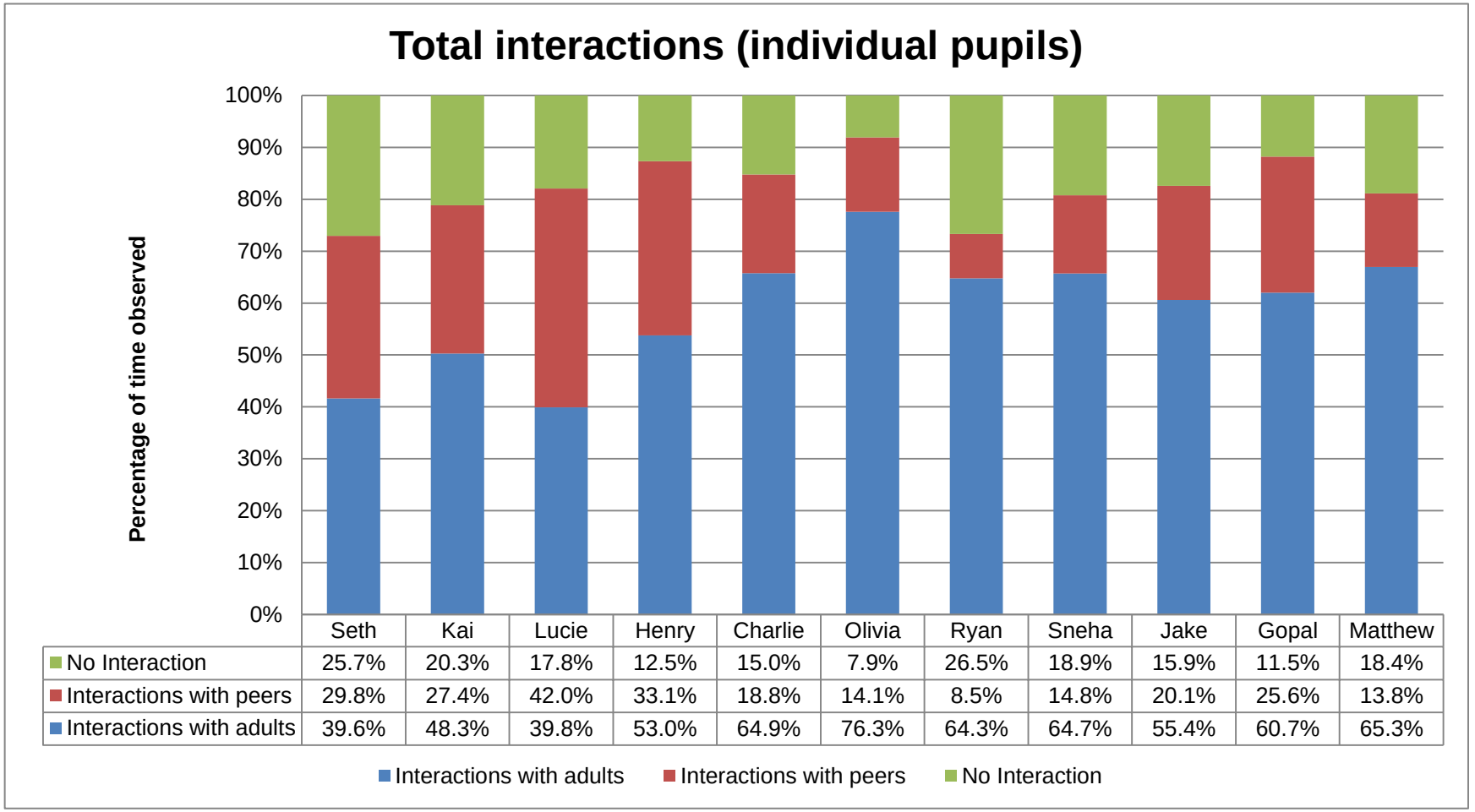
Figure 9: Mean average levels of interaction for the whole sample

Figure 9 presents the proportions of each of the types of interaction recorded for pupils during observations. As is clear, Adult-Target interactions happened far more frequently for pupils than any other type of interaction, accounting for more than half of all interactions observed for these pupils (51.1%).

Taken together, the two types of interactions with adults make up 60% of all interactions observed for pupils. In comparison, peer interactions accounted for just 21.6% of interactions observed for pupils in the sample. Across all observations, the pupils were seen to be not interacting with anyone for 18.4% of the time.

Figure 10 (below) presents the levels of interaction observed for each of the individual pupils. Levels of adult interaction varied across the sample from 39.8% (Lucie) to 78.3% (Olivia).

Within the sample, peer interaction accounted for between 8.5% (Ryan) and 42% (Lucie) of observations observed for each pupil. Lucie has an unusual result here compared to the other pupils as she is the only pupil who spent more time interacting with peers than with adults.



	Seth	Kai	Lucie	Henry	Charlie	Olivia	Ryan	Sneha	Jake	Gopal	Matthew
No Interaction	25.7%	20.3%	17.8%	12.5%	15.0%	7.9%	26.5%	18.9%	15.9%	11.5%	18.4%
Interactions with peers	29.8%	27.4%	42.0%	33.1%	18.8%	14.1%	8.5%	14.8%	20.1%	25.6%	13.8%
Interactions with adults	39.6%	48.3%	39.8%	53.0%	64.9%	76.3%	64.3%	64.7%	55.4%	60.7%	65.3%

Figure 10: Levels of interaction for individual pupils

The proportion of time pupils were observed not interacting with anyone ranges from 7.9% (Olivia) to 26.5% (Ryan).

Pupil responses to the data collection methods chosen for this study are discussed in Chapter 7. The next section presents information from the case studies written for the target pupils.

4.4 Results from the case studies

In this section I will be presenting themes arising from the case studies related to the research questions. The section is split into four broad themes, each of which is relevant to one of the research questions. As pupil voice was an important focus of this project I have included extracts from the case studies throughout.

4.4.1 What are the perspectives of pupils with SEN regarding the relationship between their TA support and their peer interactions?

During stage two of data collection, pupils were asked to talk about both their peer interactions and their experience of TA support. As part of this discussion, pupils were asked about the relationship between these two ideas (see Appendix B8 for the interview schedule). In the interviews, only one student (Kai) made specific reference to a TA having a direct impact upon peer interactions; this is discussed in section 4.4.3 below. Other pupils, however, spoke about their TAs as friends, focusing on these interactions with adults rather than with peers. The perspectives of these students is outlined in section 4.4.1.2.

4.4.1.1 Pupil perspectives of TA impact on peer interaction: Kai

Although all students were asked about the relationship between TA support and their peer interactions, Kai was the only student who directly linked these two factors. During the interview stage of the research, this exchange was recorded:

Me: So, do you play with the same person every playtime?
Kai: I play with different people sometimes.
Me: OK
Kai: Sometimes I get lonely.
Me: Really? How come?
Kai: Sometimes no people come to me.
Me: OK Do you not go to them?
Kai: No.
Me: Have you told an adult? Like Mrs I?
Kai: They make it worse.

Kai could not explain how the adults were affecting him interacting with the other pupils or give examples of this happening.

Source: Kai Case Study, line numbers 217 - 229

Although he could not explain how Mrs I was impacting negatively upon his interactions with peers, this exchange suggests that he feels that she does not help him interact with peers and that, more specifically, her involvement in his peer interactions make the situation worse.

4.4.1.2 Pupils who talked about their TAs as friends: Matthew, Sneha and Jake

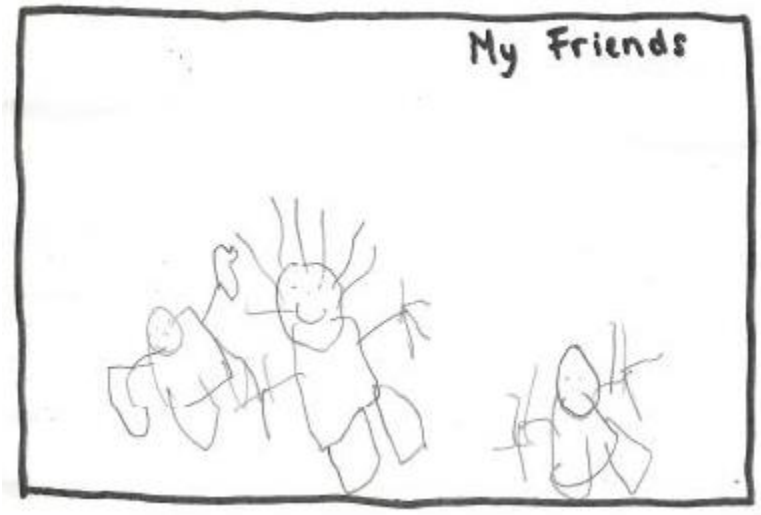


Figure 11: Drawing of TA Mrs J and two friends. Matthew, aged 7.

Three pupils from within the sample, while not directly talking about their TA support as being related to peer interaction, made references to their TAs as friends. This understanding of the TA role tells us something about these pupils' perspectives on the relationship between TA support and peer interactions because, for these pupils, 'friendships' with TAs were talked about more readily than friendships with peers.

When asked to draw his 'favourite friend to play with in school' Matthew opted to draw his morning TA, Mrs J saying she was "the most fun one". The following section from Matthew's case study gives an example from our interview of the way he described his relationship with his TAs:

I asked about the support he receives in the playground and he expressed that his TAs were there to play with him:

Me: Do they go out in the playground with you?
Matthew: Yeah, at playtime in the playground with me.
Me: What do they do out there?
Matthew: They play chasing.
Me: They play chasing with you?
Matthew: Yeah, we play.

Source: Matthew Case Study, line numbers 106 – 113

Later in the interview he also talked about playing with Mrs V, another TA who supports him at lunch times:

As with his other TAs, Matthew seemed to see Mrs V as a peer rather than as an adult support, as this exchange shows:

Me: Who did you play with today?
Matthew: I played with Mrs V.
Me: Ok, did you go outside at lunchtime today?
Matthew: No we played inside.
Me: You played inside?
Matthew: Mrs V and me.
Me: What did you play?
Matthew: We played games.

Source: Matthew Case Study, line numbers 154 - 163

At one point Matthew talked about some girls from another class that he considers to be his friends (including Nina) and the language used is the same for both his TAs and these same-age peers

Matthew talked about his TAs playing with him and spoke about them throughout the interview using the same language as he used for his peers.

Matthew (referring to his TAs): *They play chasing.*
I play games with her.
(referring to his peers): *They play tag,*
I go down on the climbing frame with them.

Source: Matthew Case Study, line numbers 181 – 187

Sneha's interactions with adults and her response to the drawing task also point to an understanding of TAs as friends. The following case study extracts focuses on this:

In my research diaries I noted that, when playing, Sneha called to TAs to join in with her games rather than peers. For example, she regularly called Mrs W to join her on the slide in the early years playground even though there were up to 7 other pupils available to play.

Sneha did not approach peers to play with her at any point. On a number of occasions, peers asked Sneha to join in with their games but, on more than one of these, Sneha

left the game shortly thereafter to play with or talk to an adult.

Source: Sneha Case Study, line numbers 203 – 210

Due to her speech and language needs, Sneha found the interview process quite difficult giving only limited responses throughout. She did, however, talk about her TAs, and in particular her allocated TA, Mrs M, several times during the interview and the majority of these occasions related to play:

Sneha also made several references throughout the tour and interview about playing with the TAs who support her. In relation to Mrs M, I recorded the following exchange:

Me: What do you and Mrs M do?
Sneha: Play
Me: You play together
Sneha: Play all day

When asked about whom she likes to play with in the playground (referring to the photographs taken), Sneha named Mrs M and Mrs W but did not name any peers. This fits with my observation notes which show that Sneha was much more likely to choose an adult to play with than a peer at play times

Source: Sneha Case Study, line numbers 139 – 149

Sneha seemed to perceive the adults working with her as fulfilling a 'friend' role and, as such, was not as interested in interacting with peers. Unlike Matthew, she did not seem to be interested in playing with other pupils at any point during my observations, only doing this when adults were not available to her. Sneha also used the word 'Mummy' to describe Mrs M at several points during the interview, which could also suggest that she sees her as fulfilling a parental role in some domains in school.

Notably, given her focus on adult attention and interactions, when asked to draw her favourite friend to play with in school, Sneha chose to draw children from her class:

Sneha was asked to draw her favourite friend to play with in school. She chose to draw two girls, Priya and Asha, and a boy, Imran, who are in her main class. Sneha was not observed interacting with any of these children at any point and Mrs M said she could not recall Sneha playing with them. Priya and Asha are both popular, high attaining girls so it is possible Sneha chose them as people she would like to play with, rather than people she regularly played with.

Source: Sneha Case Study, line numbers 214 – 219

The fact that Sneha drew children here also suggests she knows that friends are

normally same age peers. This could be an example of her trying to look for the right answer to my question rather than giving her own answer.

> Sneha also chose to draw her teacher for the coming school year, Mrs X, whom she had seen that morning and some sausages so it is also possible she did not fully understand the task at hand.
>
> *Source: Sneha Case Study, line numbers 221 – 223*

Despite this possible confusion, what is clear is that Sneha is much more focused on the adults that she comes into contact with (especially her TAs, who are proximal for 65.2% of her time in school) than the other pupils she sees each day. Jake is another pupil who seems to see his TAs as friends.

Due to the various needs identified above, Jake found the interview process difficult and various phases had to be adapted specifically to enable him to take part. Although he did take part in the process, much of what was captured was unintelligible noises. He did, however, say some things about his TA support which suggests he sees their role in a similar way to both Sneha and Matthew:

> Unlike the other pupils in the sample, Jake was not asked to draw his TA as it was felt, by both his parents and the SENCO, that this would be too stressful for him (he dislikes even holding a pencil due to his limited motor control). Instead Jake was shown photographs of his TAs (provided by them) and asked about them. Jake could name both TAs and identified them as 'morning' and 'afternoon'. When asked what they did to support him he said 'play' multiple times. He did not answer questions about support in the playground or ways in which his support could be improved.
>
> *Source: Jake Case Study: line numbers 113 - 119*

As with the other pupils, Jake seemed to see the TA role as being focused on play. Again, this could be due to the high proportion of time he spends with his TAs in school and the pupil roles they perform for him (e.g. TA Mrs C was his partner in a PE dance activity where all other pupils were paired with a peer).

The next section focuses on the ways in which the pupils talked about the support they receive from their TAs and compares this to the ways the TAs themselves described their roles and responsibilities.

4.4.2 How is the role of the TA understood by both pupils with SEN and by the TAs themselves?

Each of the target pupils were asked about the TAs who support them in school. TAs were also asked about their own perspectives on their support roles. This section opens with a comparison of the ways in which TAs and the pupils themselves talked about the role of the TA and the types of support in place. Next, some of the pupils talked about TAs and teachers in a very similar way and the blurred lines between these roles are discussed. Finally, a number of the pupils seemed to be trying to distance themselves from the TA in the way they spoke about their academic support. This phenomenon and the potential reasons for it end this section.

4.4.2.1 Understanding the TA role

In total, sixteen TAs were allocated to support the eleven pupils within this study and all were asked about their main support role during the first phase of the research (Table 10 in section 3.6.4.3 has details about these TAs alongside the number of allocated hours per pupil, Appendix B5 has information about the questions asked of TAs). Although the primary focus of the research work was on pupil perspectives of their own support I felt that a comparison of pupil and TA views would help me to gain insight into pupil understandings of their TA support and the amount of knowledge they had regarding this. This section discusses the responses from both TAs and pupils and looks at similarities and differences between them.

Pupils were asked about their TA support during stage two of the research (the interview schedule in Appendix B8 details the questions asked of the pupils). One pupil, Ryan, did not take part in this task and did not speak about his TAs at any point during the interview so his views could not be collected for this task. All other pupils said something about the support they receive from TAs in school. Table 14 shows the responses given by both TAs and pupils within this study. For clarity, I have grouped answers into four sections: academic, social, behaviour and physical support. Lastly, an 'Other' section was included as a number of the pupils talked about non-specific help; for example, this extract from Seth's interview:

> *Me: What does Mrs P do?*
> *Seth: Works with me*
> *[….]*
> *Me: How does she help you?*
> *Seth: She helps everyone*
>
> *Source: Seth Case Study, line numbers 133 - 140*

In order to collate results, similar responses were grouped under the same heading, for example: “simplifying tasks” (Charlie's TA Mrs E) and “breaking down tasks” (Matthew's TAs Mrs J and Mrs K) were both counted under the heading of 'Differentiating work'. Where possible, responses that broadly matched between the two groups, such as 'Keeping safe in the playground' and 'Help at playtime', have been aligned within the table and separated by a dotted line to more clearly show where the two groups agreed about support. Figures 12 and 13 show the proportion of responses in each section for both pupils and the TAs.

Type of support	TAs said:	Pupils said:
Academic	Differentiating work (6 TAs)	Help with work / help with writing (6 pupils)
		Reading support (2 pupils)
		ICT (1)
	Planning /providing interventions (2)	
Social	Setting up games (1)	Playing (3)
	Keeping safe in the playground (3)	Help at playtime (2)
	Practising communication (2)	Help with speech (1)
	Improve confidence (1)	
	Turn taking / politeness (1)	
Behavioural	Pay attention / keep on task (8)	[no responses]
	Stopping pupil distracting others (4)	
Physical	Helping pupil move around school (1)	[no responses]
	Helping with physical impairments (1)	
Other		“Just helps me” (4)

Table 14: Main TA role as described by TAs and pupils within the study. The ‘Types of support’ categories are taken from the sections included on pupils’ Statements of SEN.

As shown in Table 14 (and in Figures 12 and 13) responses from pupils and TAs differed in a number of ways. Almost half of all pupil responses made reference to some kind of academic support, suggesting this is what these pupils view as the

primary role of the TA in their support. In total, six of the eleven pupils mentioned academic support when talking about their TAs. Pupils also mentioned social support, although three of these responses were from pupils talking about their TA playing with them rather than supporting them to play with others (this view of TAs as friends is discussed in section 4.4.1.2). 21% of all pupil responses made reference to non-specific help from the TA which may suggest the pupils are not clear about what the TA does to support them in school.

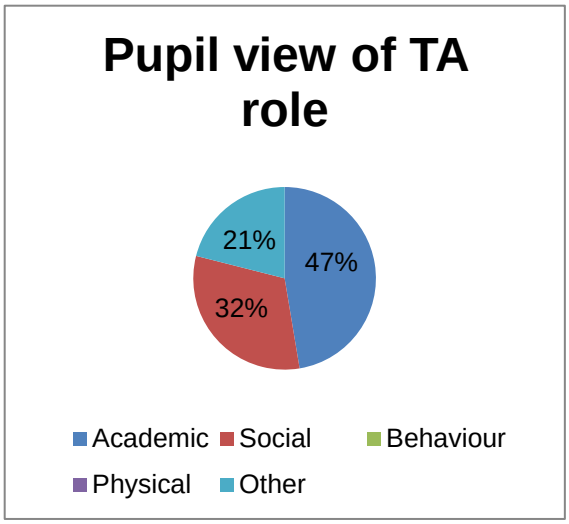


Figure 12: Graph to show the percentage of each type of support mentioned by pupils.

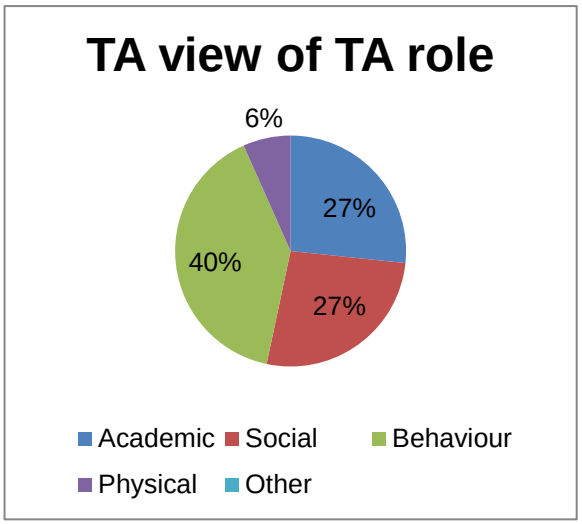


Figure 13: Graph to show the percentage of each type of support mentioned by TAs

In contrast, the TAs spoke about behavioural support more than any of the other categories (40%), with academic support only accounting for 27% of their responses. This is especially interesting given the fact that the pupils did not mention any form of behavioural support at any point. References to social support also accounted for close to a third of responses, another interesting finding given that very little active social support was observed during my research visits (this is discussed later in this section). The TAs also made reference to physical support for the pupils. Curiously, neither of the pupils in receipt of this type of support (Gopal and Matthew) mentioned this, even though the physical support they received from their TAs happens daily. Matthew, for example, had to have an inhaler at multiple points throughout the day and this was always administered by one of his TAs. Despite this, he did not mention this as something that his TAs do to support him in school.

The following section looks in more detail at the ways in which the pupils talked about their TAs' roles in school, and the types of support the pupils talked about within their

interviews and links this to data from phase one of data collection. As before, extracts from the pupils' case studies will be included as illustrative examples. Two of the pupils, Sneha and Jake, spoke solely about playing with their TAs when asked about their TA support and, as this has been discussed in section 4.4.1.2, their views will not be repeated here.

4.4.2.2 Pupil views of TA role

Blurred roles: Teachers and TAs

"All the helpers help lots of children": Lucie

Three pupils within the sample, Lucie, Henry and Kai, did not seem to see a distinction between the ways in which they were supported by teachers and TAs in school. The following extract from Lucie's case study illustrates this:

> Lucie did not seem to see a difference between the HIRB's main teacher and the TAs, in terms of the roles they undertook in supporting her. She said that "all the helpers, help lots of children" and that they worked "inside and outside". She did not use the words "teacher" or "TA" at any point while I was talking to her, calling all adult supporters "helpers".
>
> *Source: Lucie Case Study, line numbers 144 - 148*

In the HIRB, Lucie is supported by a teacher, Mrs Q and two TAs, Mrs N and Mrs O. Although she talked a lot about the ways in which they work with her and others in school, she referred to all of these adults as helpers throughout and did not describe any difference in the types of roles they undertook in class.

Henry, who attends the same school and HIRB as Lucie, talked about the adults in school in a very similar way. When asked to draw someone who helps him in school, Henry opted to draw all of the staff associated with the HIRB, including the school SENCO who teaches occasional lessons.

Figure 14: Drawing of five resource base teachers and TAs. Henry, aged 7.

This extract from his case study discusses the way he talked about these adult supports while he was drawing:

When asked to draw an adult who helps him in school, Henry chose to draw the entire team who work in the HIRB (the SENCO, a teacher and three TAs). He did not seem to see a distinction between the TAs and the teaching staff either in terms of the role they undertook in school or the ways in which they helped him. This is evident in this exchange:

> *Me: Can you draw me a picture of one of your helpers in school?*
> *Henry: Mrs N, Mrs Q, Mrs O, Mrs Y. There are lots.*
> *Me: Which one will you draw?*
> *Henry: All of them*
> *Me: Ok, can you tell me what do they do? Do they do different jobs?*
> *Henry: If I need their help, I just put my hand up and one of them comes to help me*
> *Me: Ok. What might you need help with?*
> *Henry: Hard stuff. Mrs Q is good at maths but Mrs N is good at writing.*

Throughout the interview, and before I introduced the term, Henry referred to all the HIRB staff as 'helpers'.

Source: Henry Case Study, line numbers 146 - 162

It was hard to see any difference in the way Henry spoke about Mrs Q compared to the TAs in the HIRB. So far as he was concerned, they all just supported him when he needed help.

Pupils not differentiating between TA and teacher roles was not just seen for the pupils

within the HIRB. Kai, a pupil from another school who is in a mainstream class full time also talked about the adults in school in this way and I recorded feeling that this might be linked to the way in which staff are deployed in his school:

> Interestingly, Kai did not seem to see a difference between teachers and TAs in terms of the support he received. He termed Mrs I his "teacher" on several occasions during the tour and interview. He also asked that she be labelled as his teacher on the drawing he did of her. At another point he referred to Miss J (his main class teacher) as his "favourite helper" in school. This view may be the result of the deployment of staff in Kai's school. Two of the members of staff working as TAs with Kai (Mrs H and Mrs Z) also teach lessons on a fairly regular basis, either covering PPA time or where teachers are otherwise outside of class (in meetings for example). It should not be surprising therefore that Kai feels that the differing members of staff perform the same role.
>
> *Source: Kai Case Study, line numbers 97 - 105*

This pattern of deployment is very similar to the adults within the HIRB and so could be key to understanding how the pupils saw the roles of the staff present in class. In the HIRB, Mrs Q, Mrs O and Mrs N taught the pupils as a team. All did some leading of activities and some supportive work with pupils. As such, their roles became blurred for the pupils they were working with. Similarly, Kai was sometimes supported by his TAs in class and sometimes taught by them. Furthermore, these are the only three pupils within the study who do not have a specific allocated TA for at least some of their time in school. This confusion about staff roles was not seen in any pupils who did have specific allocated TA support.

The following sections detail the types of support that the pupils within the sample discussed in their interviews, starting with academic support which was seen as the primary support role of TAs by the majority of pupils.

<u>Academic support</u>

<u>"She helps me with my work": Kai</u>

As previously stated six of the eleven pupils in the sample mentioned academic support as something their TA does to support them in school. Kai is a good example of this, as he was very clear throughout that this was the type of support he received from his TAs. Kai is supported across the week by multiple TAs (five in the week observed) but answered the questions in the interview in relation to one, Mrs I, who was present in the majority of his lessons during observations.

In the drawing task, Kai chose to draw TA Mrs I, who had supported him on a regular basis across the week observed. Describing the ways in which she supports him he said,

> *Kai: She helps me with my work.*
> *Me: How does she help? What does she do?*
> *Kai: Well she does some work with me when I get stuck.*
> *Me: So she helps you when you don't know the answers?*
> *Kai: Yeah, which is a lot!*
>
> *Source: Kai Case Study, line numbers 77 - 84*

This view of his TA as linked to academic support is reinforced by the drawing he did of Mrs I. As shown in Figure 15, Kai chose to draw Mrs I holding his writing, explaining to me at the time *"it's because that's what she does".*

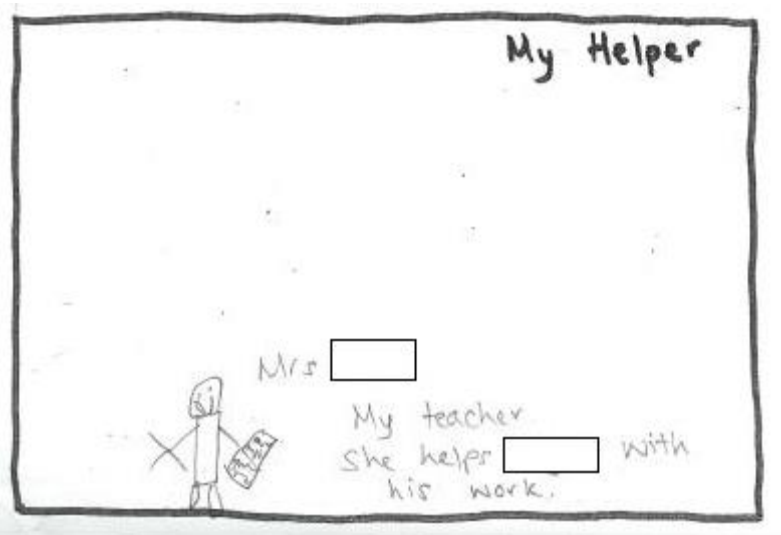


Figure 15: Drawing of TA Mrs I with labels written by researcher. Kai, aged 7.

The label on the drawing was written by me but Kai told me what he wanted me to write. Kai referred to his TAs throughout as 'teachers' and this confusion about teacher and TA roles is discussed further in Chapter 5. What is clear here is that, despite receiving support in school for various needs, Kai feels that he is only supported to complete his academic work.

As a result of his behavioural needs, Kai always has a member of staff available to him in the playground. Although this occurred throughout the week observed, and has been in place for the past year, Kai did not make reference to any kind of social support in his interview and was quick to tell me that his TA Mrs I did not help him in this way.

> When I asked if [Mrs I] helped him in any way with his friends he told me she didn't, *"That's not her job".*

I asked specifically whether she helps him in the playground. He said that she went in the playground for some break and lunchtimes but just to do duty, *"She makes sure no-one gets naughty or hurt".* He said he only spoke to her in the playground to say hello, and did not feel she was there specifically for him.

Source: Kai Case Study, line numbers 89 - 95

Another pupil who responded in a very similar way was Olivia. In the week observed, I saw TA Mrs A support Olivia in a number of ways aside from academic help including setting up games for her in the playground, working as her partner in PE lessons and undertaking speech and language therapy. Despite this, Olivia described the support she receives from Mrs A as related to academic work.

I asked Olivia how Mrs A helps her in school.

Olivia: She does writing
Me: She helps you with your writing?
Olivia: Yes
Me: Can you tell me any other ways she helps you?
Olivia: Um.... she reads words
Me: She reads with you
Olivia: Just me

This exchange is interesting in two ways. First, everything Olivia said regarding her support from Mrs A was in relation to academic work. Later in the interview she said "She does letters" and also "she writes me". Olivia clearly relates the support she receives from Mrs A to her written work, rather than to any social or emotional support or to the interventions (such as speech and language therapy) that she does. Secondly, this view of Mrs A as only helping her was repeated throughout the interview. Olivia referred to Mrs A as "mine" and said she "only helps me" more than once while we were talking. This sense of ownership may be because of the large amount of time the two spend together.

Source: Olivia Case Study, line numbers 119 - 136

This feeling of ownership is echoed by other pupils in the sample. What is clear here is that, like Kai, Olivia sees her TA as offering academic support in school. Also like Kai, Olivia felt that her TA did not help her in the playground (although this is contrary to my observations):

I asked Olivia what Mrs A does in the playground and she said "walks around".

Me: Does Mrs A help you in the playground?
Olivia: No. Not me.

Me: Do you see her in the playground?
Olivia: No. in class.

This is interesting, especially given that I observed multiple occasions where Mrs A talked to Olivia in the playground or helped her to interact with other pupils. This further suggests that Olivia sees Mrs A as linked to her academic work rather than to anything outside of class.

Source: Olivia Case Study, line numbers 138 - 147

It is unclear why many of the pupils within the sample felt the primary supportive role of their TA was to help them with academic work, especially given the range of support types I observed. Although this was the overriding theme in many of the interviews, some pupils mentioned types of social support they received from their TAs and these are the focus of the next section.

Figure 16: Drawing of two TAs and some writing. Charlie, aged 7.

<u>Social support</u>

<u>"They sort out problems": Henry</u>

Henry was the only pupil in the sample who mentioned support with social interaction during his interview with me. I asked all pupils whether their TAs ever 'help you to play with people' or 'help you talk to other children' and Henry responded that they did. The full exchange is included in this section from his case study:

I asked Henry about whether Mrs O or Mrs N ever help him when he was playing with friends.

Me: Do they help you when you play with people?
Henry: Sometimes
Me: How do they help?
Henry: Um.. they sort out problems

Me: They sort out problems? That's nice of them
Henry: Yeah
Me: Can you give me an example? Can you tell me of a time when they helped you with a problem when you were playing?
Henry: All of the time!

This exchange suggests that Henry knows that he receives regular support to play well with others. I observed one occasion where Mrs O stopped a game that Henry was part of because other pupils were being knocked over as the group were running. She said that this happens quite often and that Henry is often the instigator of these more lively games.

Source: Henry Case Study, line numbers 164 - 184

Henry did not offer specific examples of how they supported him in his interactions with peers. As discussed in section 4.2, Henry has some needs related to interactions with peers that are currently the focus of support from school staff which might explain why he, in comparison to other pupils in the sample, is more aware of the social support he is receiving.

Lucie, who attends the same school as Henry, was the only other pupil to mention social support of any kind (the other three responses detailed in the table above refer to three pupils who talked about their TA playing with them in place of peers). When asked about the types of support she receives from her TAs, Lucie made reference to speech and language training that she has with TA Mrs O:

I asked Lucie about the adults in the HIRB and the ways they help her. She said that Mrs O *"helps me the most"* and that *"Mrs N helps if I am confused with sounding out*".

Source: Lucie Case Study, line numbers 129 - 130

This was the only specific example Lucie gave of any of her TAs supporting her in school (although she did make reference to generic 'help' at one point towards the end of the interview). From observations she really enjoyed this training, which could explain why she felt the need to mention it when speaking to me.

<u>Non-specific help</u>

<u>"She helps": Gopal</u>

Four pupils within the study made reference to non-specific help from their TAs. They did not seem to know exactly how they were being supported and, as such, responded simply with the word 'help'. One of these pupils was Gopal who gave me a lot of detail about who was supporting him but very little about the activities they were undertaking:

As with the other pupils, Gopal was asked to draw an adult who helps him in school. Gopal chose to draw Mrs L; although he named multiple adults who work with him (all TAs).

Me: Who will you draw?
Gopal: Mrs L.
Me: Mrs L, Ok.
Gopal: Mrs L works with me every day.
Me: In all of your lessons?
Gopal: Yes and Mrs AA and Mrs M and Mrs L again.
Me: You have lots of different helpers!
Gopal: Every day. Most of all Mrs L.

Gopal was very clear that Mrs L was his primary adult support, but that she was not the only adult who helped him. He seemed to think the distinction was that Mrs L was there for him and that the other adults worked with many children, as shown in this exchange:

Me: What does Mrs L do?
Gopal: Mrs L just helps me.
Me: What does she do to help you?
Gopal: She helps.
Me: Ok. Can you tell me how?
Gopal: The helpers help everybody but Mrs L just looks after me.

Source: Gopal Case Study, line numbers 114 - 135

Gopal receives a wide range of different types of support from TAs in school, spending at least half of each school day outside of his main class receiving interventions, so it seemed particularly strange to me that he could not name any specific forms of support offered to him. I asked at various points in the interview, and he offered no examples of support he receives from Mrs L or any other TA that he comes into contact with in school. It is possible that, because the majority of these interventions take the form of small group sessions, Gopal did not mention them as he felt I was asking him about the ways in which the TAs help him alone. Another pupil who was vague about the support they received from their TA was Seth.

As detailed in section 3.6.4.2, according to Seth's statement he receives 25 hours of support from an allocated TA each week (although this did not match with the levels of support observed during my research visit, see section 7.8). Despite this apparent high level of TA support, Seth did not offer any detail about the types of support he receives or the ways in which his TA, Mrs P, helps him in school.

I asked Seth what Mrs P does and how she helps him. Seth did not name anything specific about the support he receives from Mrs P. Everything he said about Mrs P was clear that she worked with multiple pupils, not just him:

Me: What does Mrs P do?
Seth: Works with me.
Me: Ok does she...
Seth: [interrupts] works with everyone.
Me: She helps other children?
Seth: Yes, not just me sometimes.
Me: How does she help you?
Seth: She helps everyone.

Source: Seth Case Study, line numbers 130 - 140

Two things are worthy of note in this exchange, First, as Gopal did, Seth spoke about his TA in this way throughout the interview, simply saying “she helps” in response to any question focused on how he is supported in school by Mrs P. I think, for Seth, this also reflects the way he is supported in school. Mrs P has a range of administrative tasks that she undertakes on a daily basis and so is not in class with Seth full time. When she is in class she does not sit with Seth often, instead standing at the back of the classroom and going to him if she feels he needs help. This irregular pattern of support might have been difficult for Seth to explain.

The second thing relevant from the extract is that Seth was very clear that Mrs P worked with multiple pupils in his class rather than just being there to support him. It felt to me as though he was trying to distance himself from TA support, making sure I knew that working with Mrs P was something all the pupils in the class did rather than something unique to him. Seth was the only pupil in the sample who talked about their TA in this way during the interviews. He was also the only pupil who seemed to dislike having a TA with him in school.

I recorded in my research journal that Seth clearly didn’t like having adults proximal. He would put his head down and lean away from the adult. It is possible he is unhappy about having support and this is why he wants to be clear to me that he is not the only person getting help.

Seth: Everyone works with Mrs P.
Me: She doesn’t just work with you?
Seth: No, all the children in my class.

Source: Seth Case Study, line numbers 142 - 148

Seth had the lowest level of TA support of any pupil in the sample (he spent just 14.8% of his time with his TA present) which may also explain why he felt less comfortable with his support than others in the study; having a TA proximal is a less common occurrence for him. Alongside this, Mrs P does work with all of the pupils in the class to complete tasks such as spelling tests and reading practice, however her primary role in class is to support Seth. It may be that Seth does not see a difference between the way

Mrs P interacts with him compared to the other pupils within his class. The next section details pupils who spoke about their TAs in a very different way, making sure that I knew the TA was there to support them in class.

Ownership of TA

"She only helps me": Olivia

Olivia and Gopal were both clear in their interviews that their TAs were present in class to support them, rather than being present to help other members of their class. For Olivia, this seemed especially important as she mentioned it on six separate occasions during the interview. As detailed in the case study extract above, Olivia referred to Mrs A as "mine" and repeated "she only helps me" several times during the interview. At one point I asked if Mrs A ever worked with other children in the class and Olivia told me she didn't, this is contrary to my observations which showed Mrs A regularly helped the other pupils on Olivia's table in class.

Gopal also used very similar language when talking about his TA, Mrs L. On four occasions during his interview he used the phrase "Mrs L just helps me". As shown in the case study extract above, Gopal explained that, although he came into contact with a lot of different "helpers" in school, Mrs L was there specifically to support him. As with Olivia, when asked if Mrs L ever helps other pupils Gopal answered that she didn't despite my observations that she often helped other members of the class.

This sense of ownership may come from the fact that both pupils had been working within their TAs since they started at the school. While teachers and classrooms had changed, their TAs had remained constant. Both pupils seemed very happy with their TAs, often hugging them or leaning in closer to them in class, and so this may also have been a way of expressing the strong bond they each have built with their TAs.

Friends as helpers

"It's a children but she helped me all the time": Lucie

As with the other pupils in the study, Lucie was asked to draw an adult who helps her in school but chose to draw a peer. This extract details the reasons Lucie gave for this:

Lucie was asked to draw an adult who helps her in school. She decided she would draw a peer instead:

> *Me: So in this box I would like you to draw an adult who helps you in school.*
> *Lucie: I will draw a girl*
> *Me: Ok, who are you going to draw?*
> *Lucie: It's a children but she helped me all the time. Sometimes she's a little bit*

grumpy.
Me: Is she?
Lucie: Yes, but Natalie not always.
Me: No...
Lucie: It's Natalie!
Me: Ah, that's nice! How does she help you?
Lucie: Um, when I'm confused she knows how. […] when we was doing our list didn't know how to spell bananas right? I asked Natalie how to spell bananas, so I told her and she told me.
Me: That's very kind of her. Do you help her too?
Lucie: I help her and she helps me.

Lucie's decision to draw a peer may be the result of her low levels of both adult interactions and adult proximity. Her peers, such as Natalie, may have a larger number of chances to help her; she has more of an opportunity to work with her friends without support.

Source: Lucie Case Study, line numbers 106 - 127

Lucie had the highest level of peer interaction of any pupil in the sample and low levels of TA proximity and interaction with adults (see section 4.4.3.1). Of all the pupils in the sample she seemed the most independent of adult support and so it is perhaps unsurprising that she felt her friend Natalie offered her the most help in school. Lucie and Natalie were observed working together on multiple occasions during my research visit and worked well as a pair, sharing out tasks and using each other to check their work.

Figure 17: Drawing of a friend who helps her in school. Lucie, aged 6.

It is clear that pupil views of their TAs varied widely across the sample, and that the pupils responded in many different ways to support.

4.4.2.3 Comparing the TA support role as described on pupil statements and in observations

The statements of SEN for the target pupils listed a range of suggested interventions related to pupil need (the identified needs of individual pupils are outlined in section 3.6.4). While carrying out pupil observations, I asked school staff whether these suggested interventions were in place at the time of observation.

School ID	Pupil(s)	Interventions suggested on Statement	In place at time of observation	
S1	Olivia	Speech and language therapy programme	Yes	
		Behaviour management programme	No	
		Physiotherapy (when required)	No	
S2	Jake	Speech and language therapy programme	Yes	
		Attention and listening skills	Yes	
		Social skills support programme	No	
	Charlie	Speech and language therapy programme	No	
		Social skills support programme	No	
	Ryan	Speech and language therapy programme	Yes	
		Social skills support (small group work)	No	
S3	Kai	Speech and language therapy programme	No	
		Social skills support (small group work)	No	
		Attention and listening skills	No	
S4	Matthew	Communication skills	No	
S5	Gopal	Speech and language therapy programme	Yes	
		Social skills support programme	No	
		Attention and listening skills	Yes	
	Sneha	Speech and language therapy programme	Yes	
		Early learning progress	Yes	
		Support to build confidence	Yes	
		Social skills support programme	No	
S6	Lucie	Speech and language therapy programme	Yes	
		Social skills support programme	No	
		Play skills	No	
	Henry	Speech and language therapy programme	No	
		Behaviour management programme	No	
S7	Seth	Speech and language therapy programme	No	
		Social skills support (small group work)	No	
	Total number of interventions listed		**28**	
	Total number of interventions happening		**10**	**35.7%**
	Total number of interventions not happening		**18**	**64.3%**

Table 15: Interventions listed on pupil statements and whether they were in place at the time of observation

As is clear from Table 15, the majority of suggested interventions were not in place. Five of the target pupils did not have any of their suggested interventions in place at the time of observation. Across all schools, speech and language therapy was most likely to be in place. Of the ten pupils with this listed on their statement, six had interventions in place during observations. Social skills support was less likely to be in place than other forms of intervention. Eight pupils had this type of intervention suggested on their statement, and this was not in place in any setting visited (these pupils have been highlighted in red). For five of the target pupils, social skills were not in place even when other interventions were happening; suggesting that these other forms of support may have been prioritised over social skills.

It is not clear why this disparity between pupil statements and actual practice in the schools existed. This lack of focus on targeted social skills support intervention could explain why pupils did not talk about social support as the primary role undertaken by their TAs (see section 4.4.2).

The next section looks at how TA characteristics and behaviours were seen to be related to levels of peer interactions for pupils within the study, starting first with a discussion of TA proximity, giving examples of TAs directly influencing pupil peer interactions, and then moving on to look at the effect of space on TA behaviours.

4.4.3 How do TA characteristics and behaviours relate to levels of peer interaction for pupils with SEN?

One of the primary research questions for this study was to look at the ways in which TA support might be influencing the peer interactions of the pupils within the study. As such, this section focuses on the ways in which TA presence and TA support were seen to be linked in some way to the interactions of the pupils. First, an analysis of levels of TA proximity is presented, alongside data about the levels of peer interaction for each of the pupils within the sample. Levels of adult interaction for the pupils are also discussed.

A number of pupils within the sample had very few opportunities to interact with peers, as they spent the vast majority of their time in school in one-to-one interactions with their TA. These cases are presented and linked back to the observation data about peer interaction levels. Next, during observations, I recorded examples of TAs actively influencing the peer interactions of the pupils (stopping, starting, offering positive support for, or negative support for an interaction with a peer). Results linked to this are included alongside examples from the case studies. Finally, the support strategies used

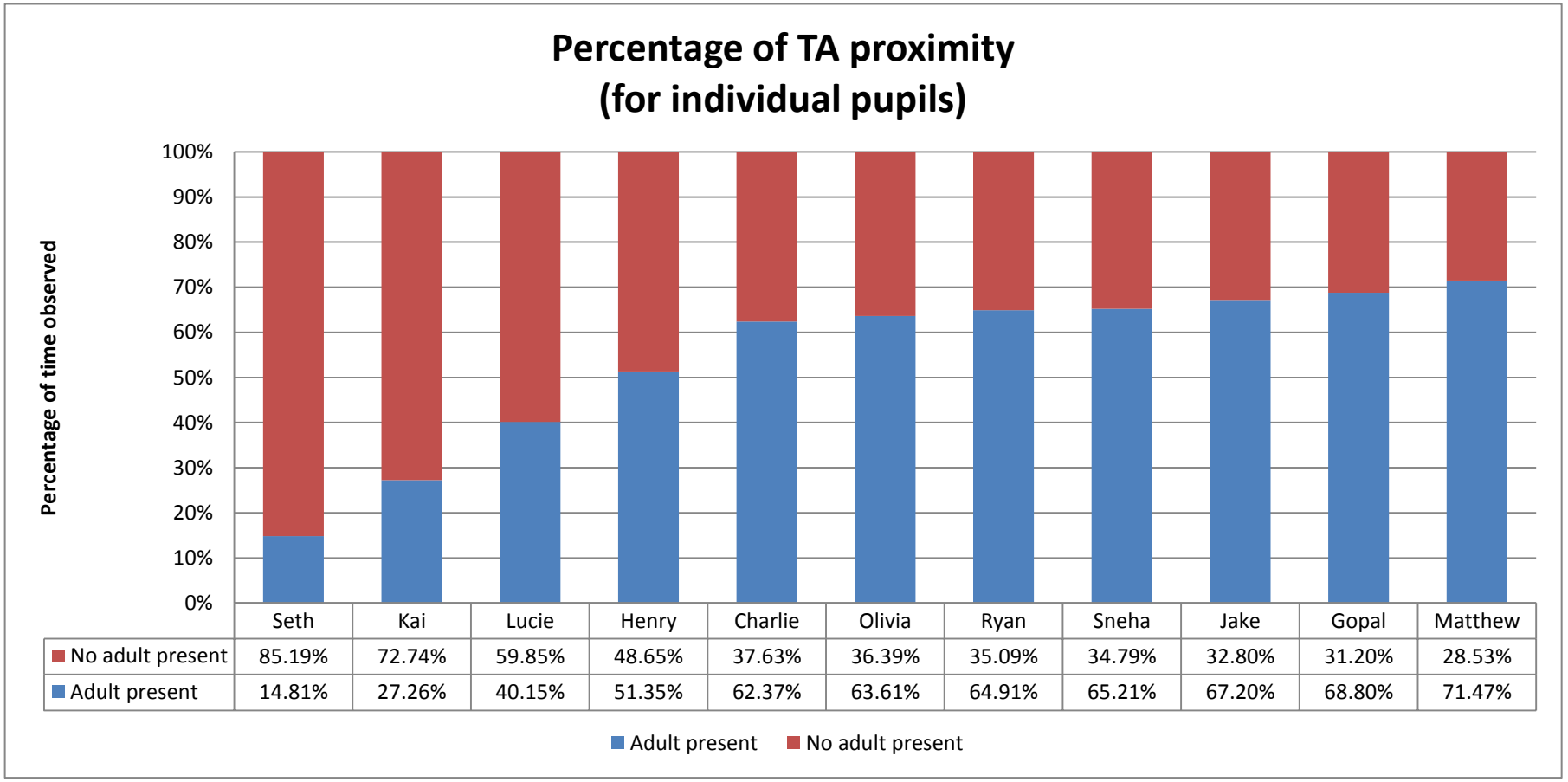
by some of the TAs seemed to impact upon the ways in which those pupils interacted with their peers. This section closes with examples of the effect of differences in TA approach. Based on my close exploration of the data I have termed two forms of TA behaviour as ‘gatekeeping’ and ‘interpreting’ for the pupils they support. Results related to these are presented.

4.4.3.1 TA proximity

During observations, I recorded all occasions where a TA was within an approximate one metre radius of the pupil being observed, regardless of whether they were interacting with the child at the time. This section outlines levels of TA proximity for the sample as a whole and for individual pupils, and then looks at levels of peer interaction in relation to TA presence.

Figure 18 shows the levels of TA proximity recorded for each of the pupils, as a percentage of the time observed. The percentage of time spent with a TA proximal varied across the sample with a range from 14.8% (Seth) to 71.5% (Matthew). More than half of the pupils had an adult present for more than 60% of the time observed. The mean average for the sample was 52.2% of time observed with an adult proximal.

Aside from Seth, these differences in levels of TA proximity are broadly in line with the hours of support allocated to the pupils; the pupils with the lowest levels of allocated support also had the lowest levels of TA proximity. The pattern can also be explained in some way by the styles of support in place in the pupils’ schools. Kai, Lucie and Henry were supported in school by a group of TAs who worked with all members of the class but were on hand should the pupils require their support. All of the other pupils, including Seth, had a TA (or pair of TAs) allocated to work with them for a specific number of hours each week (this information is outlined in section 3.6.4.3). Although he has 25 hours of support funded on his statement and an allocated TA, Seth spent the vast majority of his time in school during my research visit without an adult proximal. I felt this was because the TA was avoiding being observed (this is discussed further in section 7.8). I have opted to include Seth in the research despite this, as his lack of TA support provides contrast to much of the sample.



	Seth	Kai	Lucie	Henry	Charlie	Olivia	Ryan	Sneha	Jake	Gopal	Matthew
No adult present	85.19%	72.74%	59.85%	48.65%	37.63%	36.39%	35.09%	34.79%	32.80%	31.20%	28.53%
Adult present	14.81%	27.26%	40.15%	51.35%	62.37%	63.61%	64.91%	65.21%	67.20%	68.80%	71.47%

Figure 18: Levels of TA proximity for individual pupils

Throughout this section, pupils will remain in this order in all figures (from lowest level of adult proximity to highest) to aid comparison.

4.4.3.2 Time without a TA present

As part of data analysis I collated information about the longest period of consecutive minutes each pupil had without a TA in close proximity during taught sessions. These results are presented in Figure 19.

Only four of the pupils in the sample spent more than 20 consecutive minutes without a TA present during the week observed. Kai had the longest period of time unsupported (51 minutes) and Jake had the shortest period of time recorded (three minutes). As the trend line shows, most of the pupils with the lowest levels of TA proximity recorded across their research visit were also those with the longest period of consecutive minutes with no TA present. Olivia runs contrary to this trend, as, despite her high levels of TA proximity, she had no TA present for a period of 29 minutes during an observation. This can be explained by the deployment of her TA who finishes early each day, leaving Olivia unsupported.

Five pupils in the sample did not spend longer than ten consecutive minutes during observations without a TA proximal. This suggests limited opportunities for independent work or one-to-one peer interaction for these pupils.

4.4.3.3 Levels of peer interaction

I was interested to see if the levels of peer interaction within the sample could be seen to follow a pattern according to the levels of adult proximity observed. As such, I collated the number of peer interactions observed for each of the pupils and calculated this as a proportion of the time they were observed. Figure 20 illustrates these results.

On average, pupils within the sample interacted with peers for 22.5% of the time observed, with a range from 8.5% (Ryan) to 42.0% (Lucie). As the trend line shows, in broad terms, levels of peer interaction decrease across the sample as levels of adult proximity increase. The pupils with the lowest level of adult proximity (less than 60%; Seth, Kai, Lucie and Henry) had the highest levels of peer interaction within the sample, a mean average between them of 33.1%. In comparison the pupils with higher levels of adult proximity had an average of 16.5%.

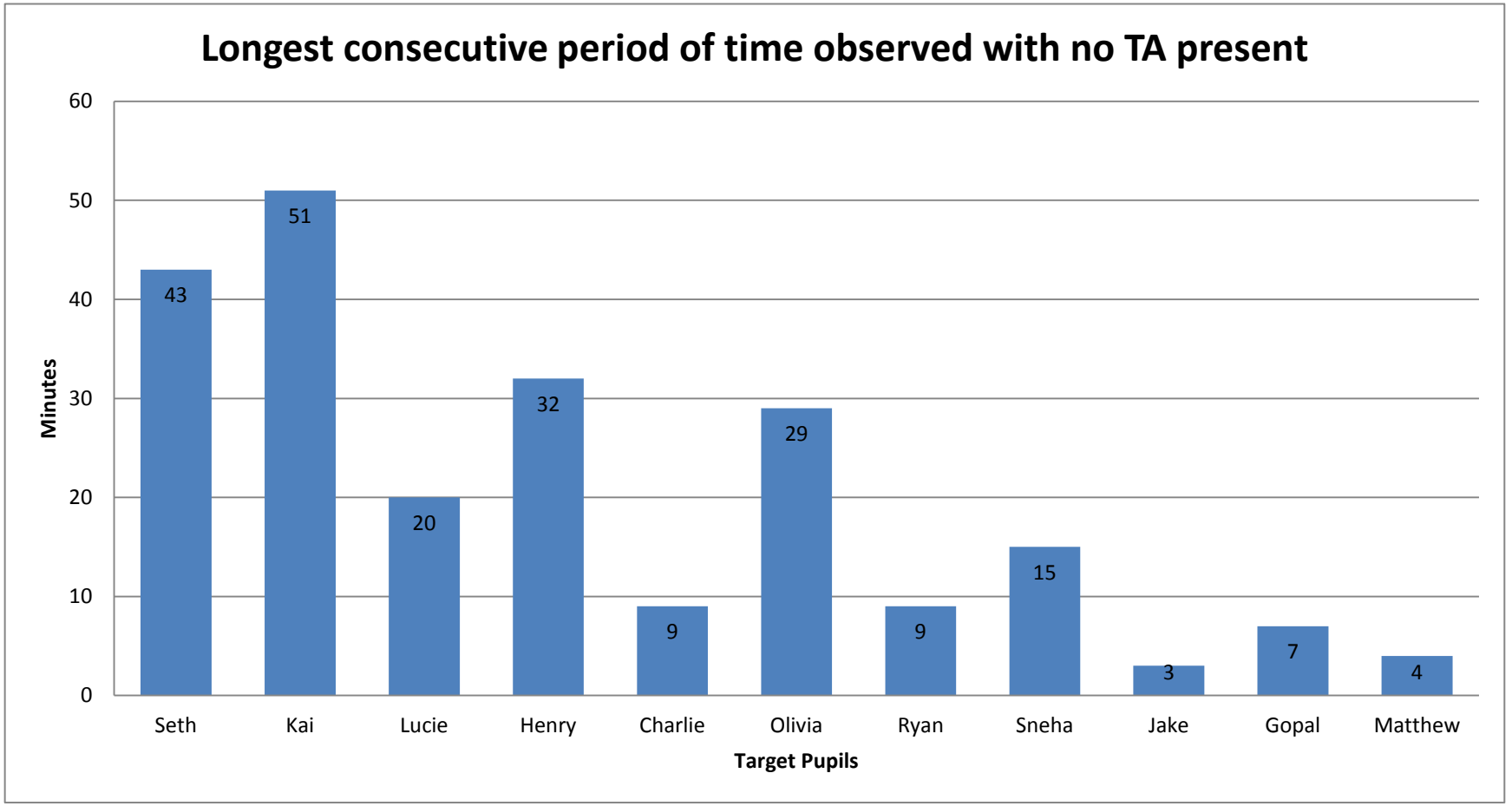


Figure 19: The longest period of consecutive minutes with no TA present for individual pupil

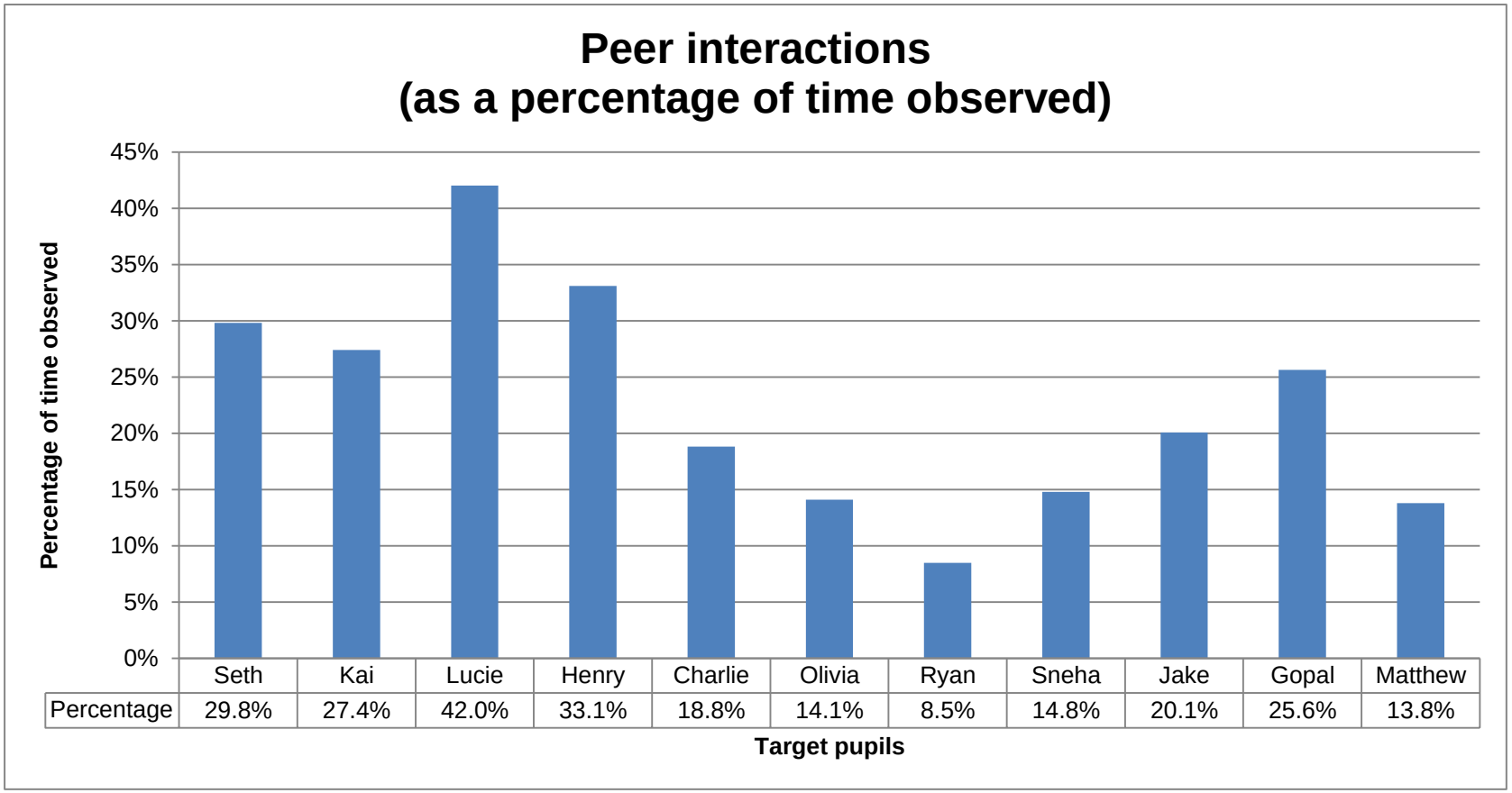


Figure 20: Levels of peer interaction as a proportion of time observed

4.4.3.4 TA proximity and levels of peer interaction

A comparison was made between levels of peer interaction both with and without a TA present to see if a difference could be seen. Figure 21 shows the percentage of time during observations that interactions with peers were recorded for the sample as a whole, divided between times when an adult was present and when they were not. On average, across the sample, just 19% of the pupils' peer interactions occurred while an adult was proximal.

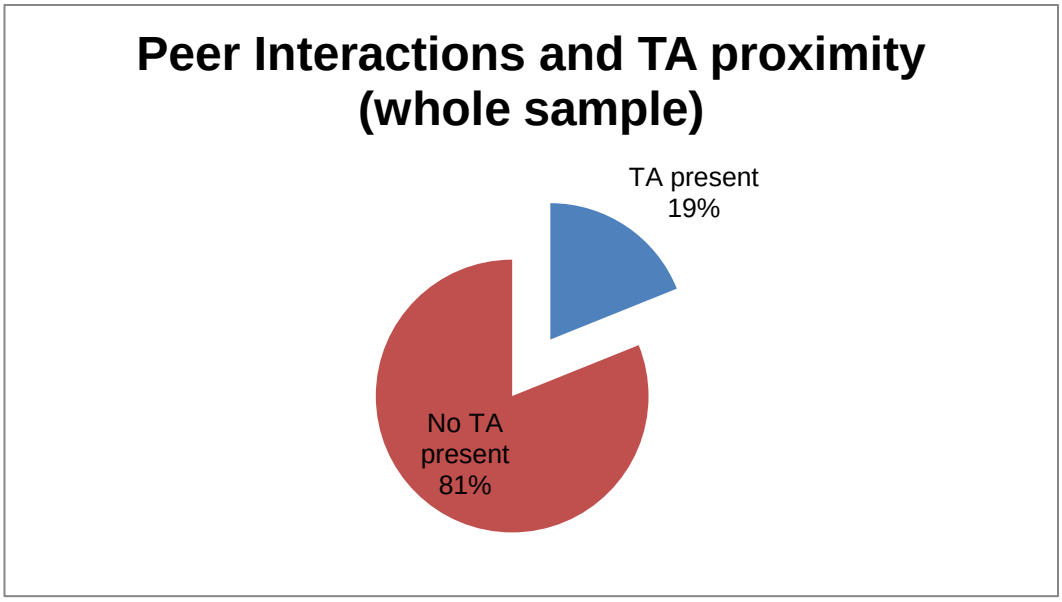


Figure 21: Percentage of time recorded as peer interaction for the whole sample both with and without a TA present.

For nine of the eleven pupils, the vast majority of their peer interactions happened while no TA was present. As shown in Figure 22 all of the pupils, except Matthew, had higher levels of peer interaction while there was no adult present. I think it is possible that this finding is reversed for Matthew because of his very high levels of TA proximity; he had very little time unsupported in which to interact with peers (the finding that some pupils within the sample had limited opportunities for peer interaction is the focus of section 4.4.3.5). Alongside this, one of Matthew's allocated TAs (Mrs J) often supported him by sitting with him and his peers and facilitating small group and partner work in class. This could also explain why peer interactions were happening for him more frequently with an adult present during his time in school.

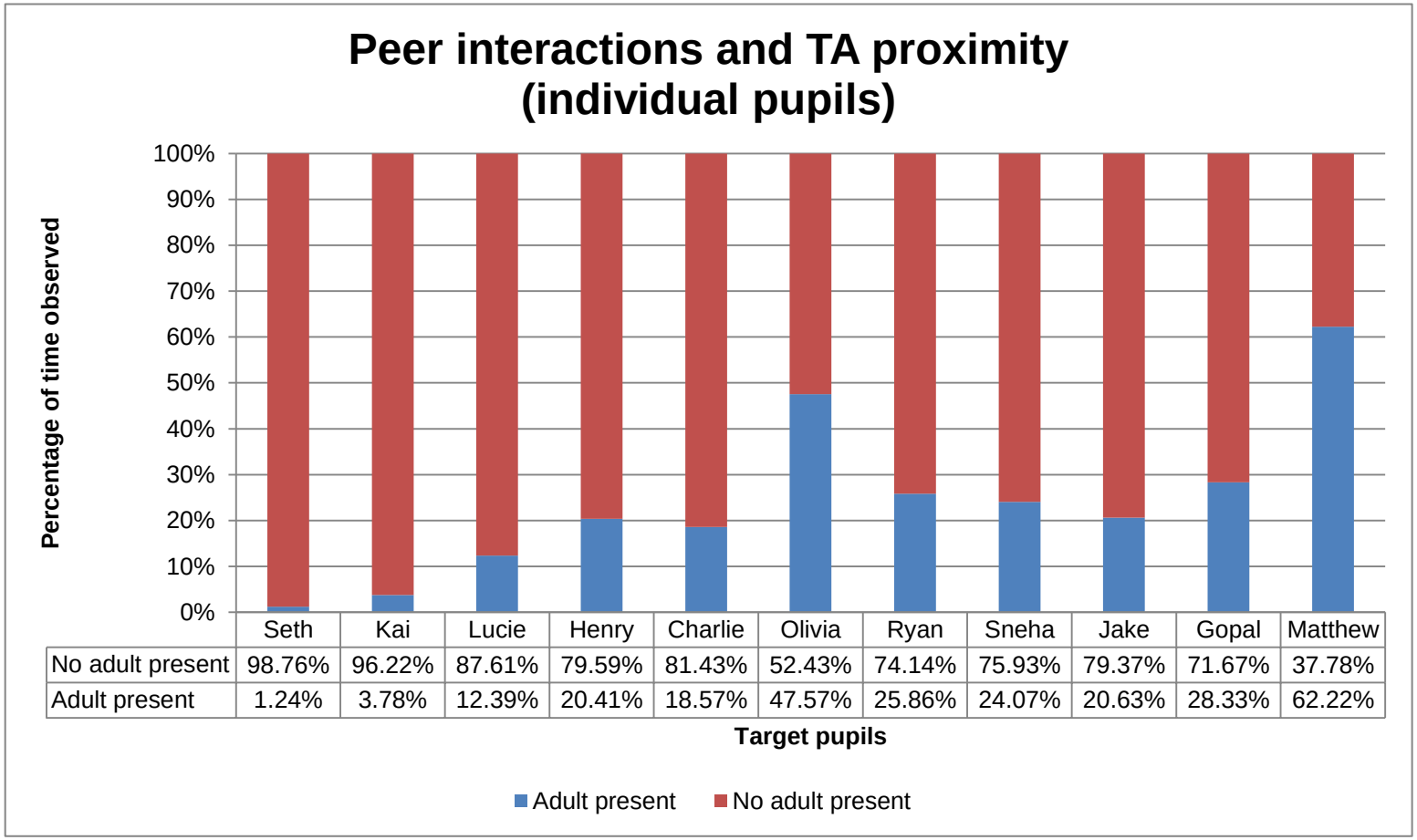
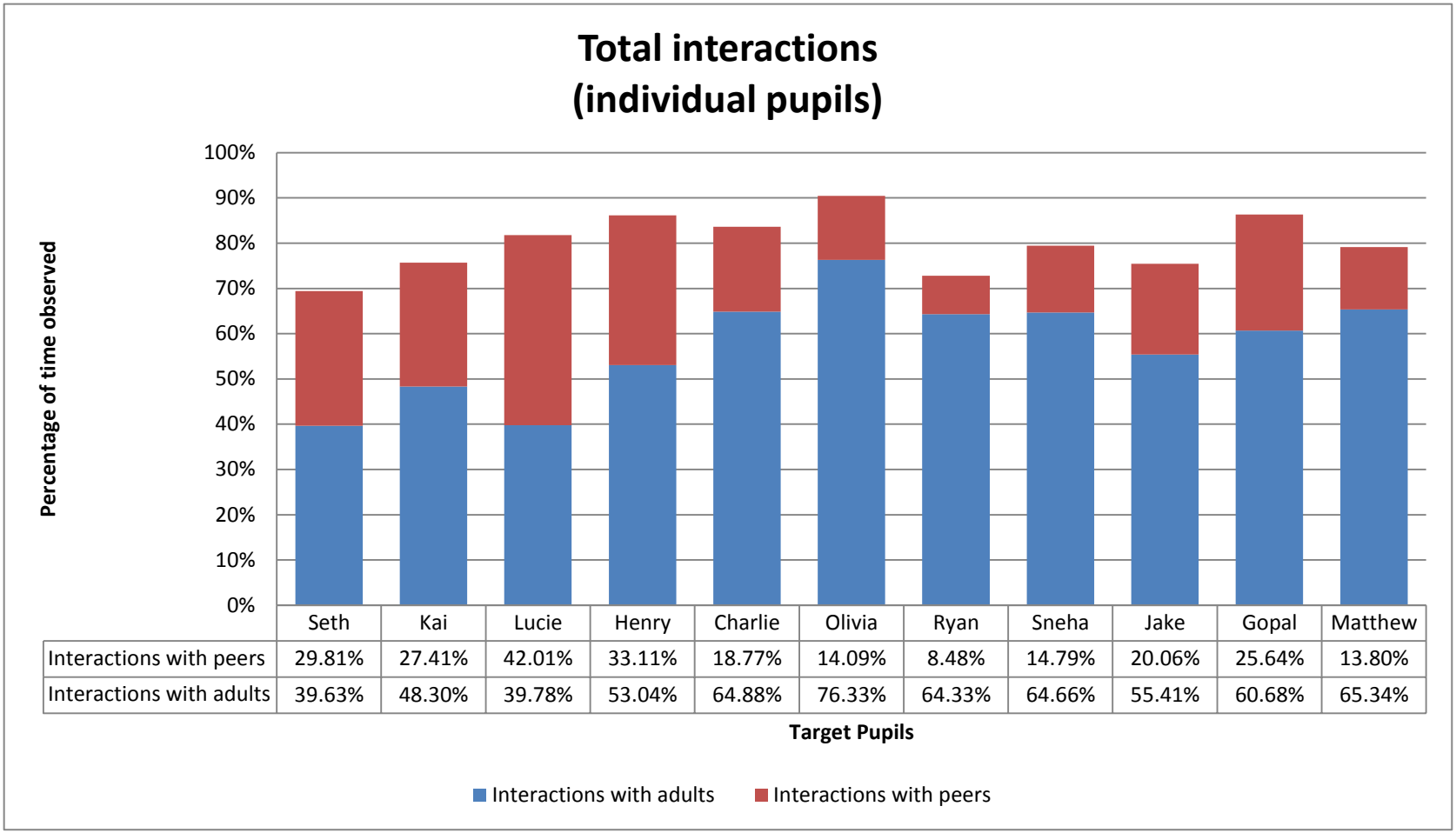


Figure 22: Percentage of time observed in peer interaction for each of the individual pupils both with and without a TA present.

For the pupils with the highest levels of adult proximity, it is particularly interesting that the majority of peer interactions still managed to occur in the small amount of time that they did not have a TA proximal. For Gopal, for example, 71.7% of his interactions with peers occurred in the 31.2% of his time in school that he did not have a TA close by. Similarly, 79.4% of Jake's interactions with peers happened in the 32.8% of time observed where no TA was proximal. For many of the pupils in the study, I think this finding is linked to the amount of time they spent interacting with adults in school rather than interacting with peers. The lack of peer interaction with an adult proximal could be the result of high levels of adult interaction during these times.

As shown in Figure 22, ten of the eleven pupils in the sample had higher levels of interaction with adults than with peers during observations. Only Lucie had more interactions with peers than with adults. Across the sample, pupils spent an average of 57.5% of the time observed interacting with adults (this includes teachers, TAs, other members of school staff. Details of the adults observed are given in section 3.7.1.4), this is more than twice the amount of time spent interacting with peers (22.5%). In many cases it felt as though the pupils were interacting with their TAs in place of a peer, for example working with them on partner tasks where other pupils were paired together. As such, it felt as though the pupils with the highest levels of adult interaction simply had fewer chances to interact with peers within class. This lack of opportunity to interact with peers is discussed in more detail in the next section.



	Seth	Kai	Lucie	Henry	Charlie	Olivia	Ryan	Sneha	Jake	Gopal	Matthew
Interactions with peers	29.81%	27.41%	42.01%	33.11%	18.77%	14.09%	8.48%	14.79%	20.06%	25.64%	13.80%
Interactions with adults	39.63%	48.30%	39.78%	53.04%	64.88%	76.33%	64.33%	64.66%	55.41%	60.68%	65.34%

Figure 23: Percentage of adult and peer interactions recorded during observations for individual pupils

4.4.3.5 Limited opportunities for peer interaction

I noted this as a theme in the case studies of Matthew, Jake, Charlie, Ryan and Gopal. Ryan will be discussed later in relation to TA approaches (section 4.4.3.10) and Gopal in relation to TA influence on interactions (section 4.4.3.12). Focusing on Matthew, I observed that he had very few chances to interact with peers due to very high levels of adult interaction. As shown in Figure 23 (above), Matthew spent more time with a TA proximal than any other pupil within the sample. The following extract is from his case study:

> In the week observed, Matthew spent 71.5% of his time with a TA proximal; the highest of any pupil in the sample (who had an average of 52.2%). In my research diaries I wrote that his TAs very rarely moved away from his side and, even when they did they continued to communicate with him, talking to him from across the room. I recorded feeling that Matthew seemed very unsure of how to behave when his TAs were away from him, suggesting this was a very rare occurrence. Across the week including playtimes, the longest continuous time Matthew spent unsupported was a five minute stretch in a morning lesson. This happened because Mrs J was on the other side of the room helping another pupil with her spellings.
>
> *Source: Matthew Case Study, line numbers 51 - 59*

Alongside this, Matthew spent almost two thirds of the time observed interacting with adults, and just 13.8% interacting with peers (Figure 23). The following extracts detail his levels of interaction both in the classroom and in the playground:

> **In the classroom**
>
> Around 10.3% of Matthew's time in class was spent interacting with a peer (this was roughly equal in terms of direction). In comparison, 71.1% of his class time was spent in interactions with adults and the vast majority of these (72.2%) were adult led. I felt there were very few opportunities for Matthew to talk or work with peers independently as his TAs spent so much of his time talking to him. My observation notes show I felt that although he was in class and sat at a table with peers, much of his time in school looked like a one-to-one session between Matthew and a TA. His attention was very much on the TA supporting him and he rarely even looked at the other pupils in his vicinity.
>
> **At playtime**
>
> In the week observed, Matthew only went out to play at lunchtime on one occasion.

Mrs V, who supports him at lunch time, gives him the option to stay in school and play on the library computers rather than going into the playground should he wish. Sometimes he is joined by another pupil with SEN, but most often this is a one-to-one session between Mrs V and Matthew. I went to see him every day in school at lunchtime, and only once was he outside with the other members of his class.

Source: Matthew Case Study, line numbers 134 - 151

These extracts detail a number of ways that Matthew's TA support seemed to form a barrier to peer interaction. First, these one-to-one type exchanges I observed in the classroom precluded Matthew from talking to anyone other than the TA he was with. Often the TA supporting him would set up small group work at his table for the other pupils, and then direct Matthew to work in a pair with her. I did not observe Matthew working as part of a group at any point, even when other pupils in the class were doing so.

Secondly, the support he receives at lunchtime is also affecting the number of opportunities Matthew has to interact with peers. Although he is given the option to go outside to join his peers, he most often chooses to stay inside with Mrs V. Across my observations, a higher proportion of peer interactions were observed for the pupils while they were in the playground (see section 4.4.4.1) so it is possible Matthew is missing out on multiple chances to interact with other pupils by staying inside.

Another pupil within the sample whom I observed having few opportunities to interact with peers was Jake. As shown in Figures 18 and 19 (above), Jake had one of the highest levels of adult proximity recorded (67.2%). He also had a lower than average level of peer interaction (20.1%). For Jake, a clear difference could be seen in his behaviour towards peers in the classroom compared to the playground which is interesting here as his levels of adult interaction varied across these spaces.

In the classroom

Almost all (99.4%) of Jake's interactions with adults occurred in the classroom, in fact just one occasion was recorded of a TA interacting with Jake in the playground. In contrast, just 6.4% of his interactions with peers happened in the classroom. I recorded, in my research diaries, feeling that there was a separation between Jake and the other pupils in the classroom. Although he was in the same room with them, he spent just a third of his time working on the same task (33.6%) and even when he was, he would be working on it with his TA rather than with a peer.

[....]

I noted that Jake seemed to have little interest in the other pupils during class time, rarely looking up from his table to see what they were doing.

At playtime

93.7% of Jake's interactions with peers occurred during playtime. It is worth noting that he had much lower levels of adult proximity here too (just 17.2% of his time outside). In contrast to his behaviour in the classroom, in the playground Jake was observed interacting with peers for the vast majority of his unstructured time (92.2%). He played with multiple peers and engaged in many different games. Of his peer interactions, 73.4% were led by a peer and 26.6% by Jake himself. Where Jake did lead interactions, it was primarily non-verbal: hand-holding, hugging and chasing. Jake seemed happier and much less anxious in the playground.

Source: Jake Case Study, line numbers 136 - 174

Jake's levels of adult proximity also varied between classroom and playground sessions:

Looking at his observation results, Jake spent 67.2% of his time with an adult proximal (within approximately a 1m radius of him). Jake spent a much higher proportion of his time in class with an adult proximal (80%) than he did in the playground (17.2%). In class, the longest stretch he spent unsupported was three minutes in a literacy lesson.

Source: Jake Case Study, line numbers 56 - 60

This difference in levels of peer interaction between classroom and playground sessions was a finding repeated across many members of the sample and is discussed fully in section 4.4.4.1. For Jake, I noted in my research diaries that he most often interacted with TAs inside school and with peers in the playground, where his TAs did not monitor him as closely. As described in section 4.2, Jake has complex needs and spends a lot of his time in school being led around by the hand by his TAs. In the playground, however, he is allowed to play freely and monitored from a distance and this seems to be a very positive experience for him.

Although Charlie did not have the highest proportion of TA proximity, close to two thirds of his interactions during the time observed were with adults and I reflected that the way he was supported, and his close relationship with his TAs, were leaving him with few opportunities to interact with peers.

Observation results show that Charlie spent 62.4% of his time in school with an adult

within approximately a one metre radius of him. On more than one occasion he was seen being flanked by both teaching assistants (one on each side), both working with him on the set task. His TAs rarely moved away from him, and when they did it was to collect things or to talk to the teacher rather than to enable him to work independently. Across the time observed, the longest duration Charlie had without an adult next to him was a twelve minute stretch when TA Mrs E had gone to photocopy a sheet for him.

Source: Charlie Case Study, line numbers 40 – 48

As with Jake, this was specifically the case in the classroom:

98% of Charlie's 242 interactions with adults occurred while he was in the classroom, and just 28.6% of his peer interactions. As the figures suggest, there were very few opportunities for Charlie to interact with peers in the classroom as he spent the vast majority of his time involved in interactions with his TAs. When group work/partner work was set up as the class task, Charlie worked in a pair with his TA rather than with a peer. He very rarely spoke to the other pupils on his table and, on the few occasions he did, was stopped and told to concentrate. Due to his position at the back of the classroom, he had no access to other pupils without leaving his seat.

Source: Charlie Case Study, line numbers 122 - 129

As detailed in the extracts, Charlie's TAs very rarely left him to work unsupported for any length of time. Alongside this, they often took the place of peers in group and partner tasks. As with Matthew, even when I saw group work being set up at Charlie's table, his TAs would work directly with him rather than including him in the group. Both of these support strategies meant he was interacting with an adult at a time when he could have had the chance to interact with a peer. The example given here of TAs stopping interactions between pupils and peers is not unique to Charlie. TAs having direct influence on the peer interactions of the pupils within the sample is the focus of the next section.

4.4.3.6 TAs actively influencing pupils' peer interactions

In order to look at the ways in which TAs may be influencing the peer interactions of the pupils supported, I recorded on the observation schedule all occasions where TAs directly intervened in interactions between the pupils in this study and their peers. The identity of the TA was recorded (so that I could see if they were impacting in the same way across the week observed) and their impact on the interaction was coded as one

of four categories (these categories are described more fully in section 3.7.1.2 where they are outlined alongside examples). The four categories are:

- Starts an interaction – the TA starts an interaction between the pupil and a peer/ peers
- Ends an interaction – the TA ends an interaction between the pupil and a peer/ peers
- Positive support for an interaction – the TA praises or speaks positively to the pupil about the interaction they are having with a peer / peers
- Negative support for an interaction – the TA criticises or speaks negatively to the pupil about the interaction they are having with a peer / peers

If possible, I also noted the words used by the TA and the impact this had on the interaction taking place (i.e. if an instance of negative support lead to the pupil ending an interaction).

In total, 116 instances of TAs directly impacting upon the peer interactions of the pupils within the study were recorded, which is a low number considering 4,806 data points were recorded for the pupils as a whole. This may be linked to the low level of peer interactions recorded for the pupils in the sample, the TAs could not intervene in peer interactions that were not occurring. It may also be linked to the finding from discussions with TAs that many did not see social support as their primary role (see section 4.4.2.1 above).

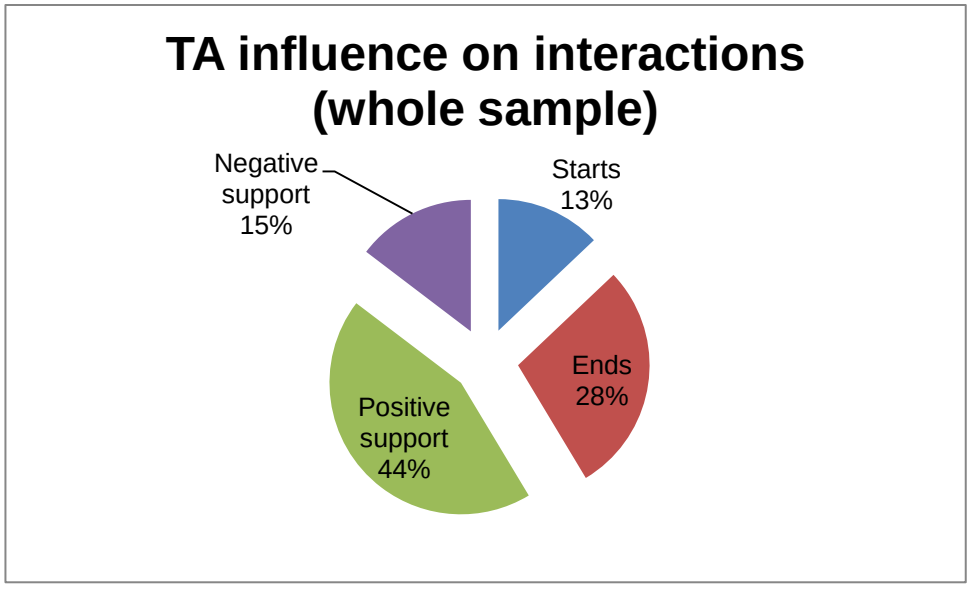


Figure 24: Levels of TA influence on pupil-peer interactions for the whole sample

Figure 24 (above) shows the proportions of each category that occurred during observations. By far the most frequent category of influence observed was positive support being offered by the TA to the pupil for interacting with a peer (44%). This was most often (82.4% of occurrences) due to the TA praising pupils for sharing resources or for working well together, as in this extract from Lucie's case study:

> Only two occasions were observed of a TA directly influencing an interaction between Lucie and a peer. Both of these were incidences of positive support, where Mrs N praised Lucie for working well with another pupil.
>
> *Mrs N: Lovely sharing Lucie, well done!*
> *You are working together so nicely!*
>
> *Source: Case Study Lucie, line numbers 220 - 224*

The other 17.7% of instances of positive support were linked to Sneha and Gopal who were regularly praised by TAs in their intervention sessions and at playtimes for 'behaving like a good friend' by remembering to take turns, holding doors for other pupils or being polite.

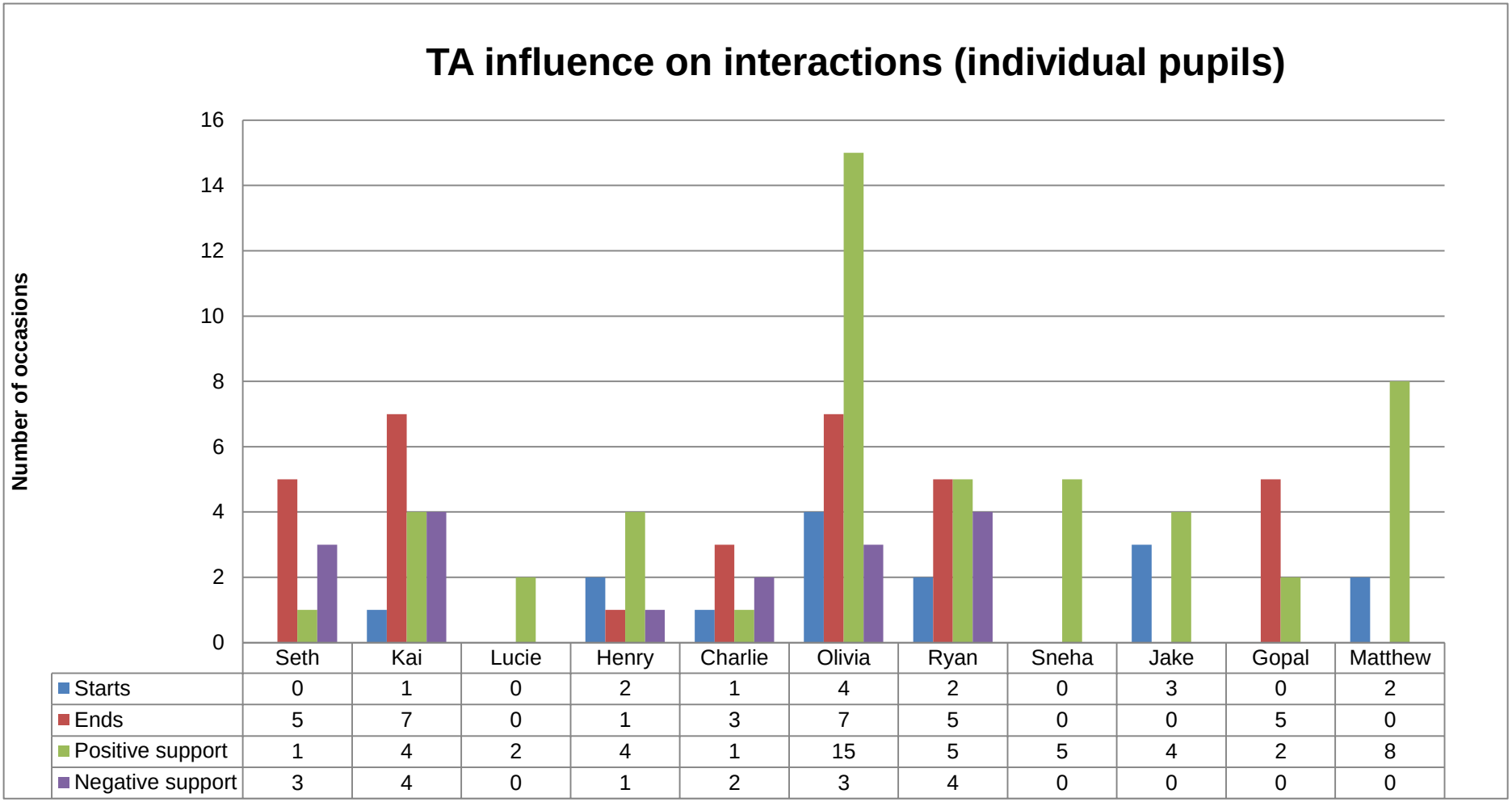
I recorded only fifteen examples of TAs starting interactions for the pupils they support (13% of the times a TA impacted upon an interaction between pupil and peer). This figure seems very low, especially considering that ten of the pupils have been identified as having needs relating to social interaction and eight have interventions linked to social support suggested on their statements. In total, 28% of all recorded instances of TA impact on peer interactions involved the TA ending an interaction between a pupil and a peer, and 15% were of negative support for pupils' peer interactions. Taken together this means 43% of all occasions a TA directly impacted upon an interaction with a peer it was not supportive of that interaction. Examples of TAs stopping interactions between pupils and their peers are the focus of a section in this chapter.

Figure 25 (below) shows the number of each category of TA impact recorded for each of the pupils within this study. All eleven pupils received some kind of positive support for peer interactions during observations, making this the most common type of support observed. In comparison, six pupils in the sample had negative support for peer interactions from their TA recorded at any point. Just over half the sample (seven pupils) had TAs who on at least one occasion started an interaction between the pupil and a peer at some point during observations. Seven pupils in the sample also had TAs who ended interactions between pupils and peers while being observed.

As is clear, Olivia's TA directly influenced interactions between her and a peer far more

often than any of the other TAs observed. Fifteen separate occasions were recorded of TA Mrs A positively supporting interactions between Olivia and a peer, which accounts for 29.4% of all occasions this occurred across the sample. Olivia also has the highest number among the sample of occasions where a TA started an interaction between pupil and peer (four). Alongside Kai, Olivia had the highest number of occasions where a TA ended an interaction between pupil and peer (five). As these figures suggest, Olivia's allocated TA Mrs A was very proactive about managing her peer interactions both in the classroom and in the playground. Examples of this from Olivia's case study are presented in sections relating to TAs starting and ending interactions below. Ryan and Kai have the highest recorded number of occasions of negative support from TAs within the sample (four).

Having collated these figures, I next looked at what information had been collected as to the effect of these incidences of TA involvement on the peer interactions of the pupils being observed.



	Seth	Kai	Lucie	Henry	Charlie	Olivia	Ryan	Sneha	Jake	Gopal	Matthew
Starts	0	1	0	2	1	4	2	0	3	0	2
Ends	5	7	0	1	3	7	5	0	0	5	0
Positive support	1	4	2	4	1	15	5	5	4	2	8
Negative support	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	0	0	0

Figure 25: Numbers of instances of each of the TA influence categories observed for each of the pupils

4.4.3.7 The effect of direct TA involvement on peer interactions

I collated information from the observation schedules as to what happened in the subsequent minute after a TA had intervened in a social interaction for a pupil. As Figure 26 shows, in the minute following TA involvement I either found that the pupil was continuing to interact with a peer / peers or that any interaction that had been taking place had stopped.

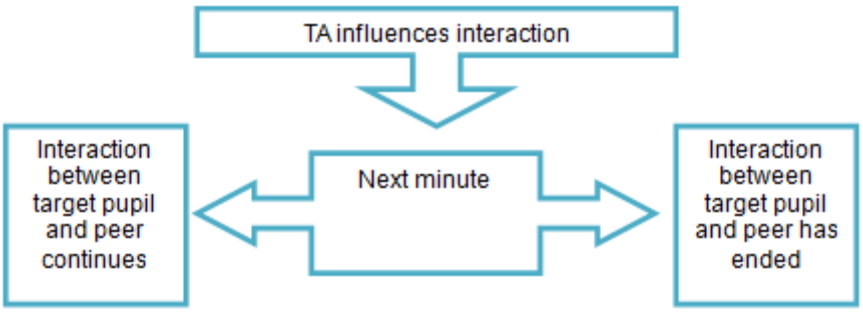


Figure 26: Diagram to show how the impact of instances of TA influence was determined.

Table 16 shows the results collated from the observation schedules for the sample as a whole. Perhaps unsurprisingly, after TA influence in the form of negative support and involvement focused on ending interactions, fewer interactions with peers were found to be happening than occasions where positive support and help to start interactions were observed. Although causality cannot be claimed, it is clear that within the sample interactions happened less often after certain types of TA involvement, and more frequently after others.

Category of TA involvement	Interaction continues	Interaction ends
Starts interaction	73.3%	26.7%
Ends interaction	18.2%	81.8%
Positive support	58.8%	41.2%
Negative support	41.2%	58.8%

Table 16: Percentages of interactions continuing and ending following instances of TA influence

Another interesting pattern within the data is that TAs starting and ending interactions seemed to have a greater impact on the peer interactions than examples of negative and positive support. 81.8% of the times a TA ended an interaction between a pupil and a peer, in the subsequent minute the pupil was found not to be interacting with a peer. This is a much higher figure than for occasions where TAs offered negative support for

interactions (58.8%). This finding is in line with the notes I made during observations, which identified occasions where TAs ended interactions as the most effective category of TA influence; the category most likely to have the desired effect on peer interaction.

The following sections use extracts from the case studies to look in more detail at examples of TAs starting and ending interactions between the pupils and their peers.

4.4.3.8 TAs starting interactions

As discussed above, Olivia had the highest number of occasions observed of a TA starting interactions between her and peers. Compared to the other TAs within the study, Mrs A was very focused on ensuring that Olivia played and worked safely and successfully with peers, identifying this as one of her key supportive roles (see section 4.4.2.1 for a discussion of TA views of their roles). This extract from Olivia's case study describes an occasion where Mrs A started an interaction between Olivia and another pupil in class:

> When tasks were set up for collaborative peer work, Mrs A tried to facilitate this where possible. For example, in a PE class they were practising throwing and catching. Mrs A set Olivia up with a middle attaining peer and praised them throughout the session for how good a team they were. In another lesson, the pupils were writing book reviews and Mrs A asked the pupils in turn to tell the others about their book.
>
> *Source: Olivia Case Study, line numbers 264 – 268*

Although some of Olivia's behaviours made it difficult for her to interact with peers (see section 4.2), Mrs A made efforts to promote peer interaction in both the classroom and the playground.

> On multiple occasions, Mrs A was seen either setting up games between Olivia and other children or encouraging her to play with others. She also praised Olivia if she was playing well with other children, rewarding her with stickers and by telling the teacher when they came back into class.
>
> Mrs A was seen helping Olivia to play successfully with others. For example, on one occasion Olivia was playing on a rocking horse and was not sharing with other pupils who were becoming increasingly upset. Mrs A told all the pupils that they could have ten rocks back and forth on the horse and then it was the next person's go. Olivia followed these rules and managed to play happily with the other pupils.

Source: Olivia Case Study, line numbers 198 – 207

When Mrs A did not intervene to start interactions in the playground between Olivia and peers (she did not support her for part of each lunchtime break) Olivia played independently. This suggests that Mrs A's support may be important in helping Olivia to start interactions with peers.

Jake had similar types of support from his TAs. In total, three occasions were observed during my research visit of TAs starting interactions between Jake and peers (the second highest number of any pupil within the sample). In particular, one of his TAs (Mrs C) had specific strategies in place during lunchtimes to support Jake to play successfully with peers:

> Mrs C was seen on two occasions setting up a game for Jake and other pupils in the playground. She said that she does this at least two lunchtimes per week, offering Jake a choice of which game to play. She said she did this to help him have a structure to his play as he had previously struggled with appropriate behaviour during break times.
>
> *Source: Jake Case Study, line numbers 176 – 179*

Mrs C explained to me that this strategy had been suggested by a play therapist that had been brought in to help Jake's inclusion in school. From observations, Jake seemed very happy to play with peers during break and lunchtimes (his interactions with peers are described in detail in section 4.2) which would suggest he has benefited from this support.

Jake's TAs also set up interactions between him and peers to help him to manage some of his challenging behaviours, as this example describes:

> One afternoon Jake became very fixated on a toy that another child had brought into school for show and tell. He attempted to snatch the toy from the other child and became very upset when he was told off for doing this. Mrs C asked the child if he would be happy to sit with Jake and show him the toy. While they were doing this she praised him for sharing well and for being polite.
>
> *Source: Jake Case Study, line numbers 199 – 203*

It was clear during the example described above that Jake could not have managed his own behaviour without support at that time. With Mrs C's help he was able to sit quietly with a peer and the two played together for several minutes.

Charlie only had one occasion during the time observed where a TA started an interaction between him and another pupil, but the nature of the incident is quite interesting and so bears inclusion. The following extract describes the incident:

> Only once did a TA start any interaction between Charlie and a peer. This happened in a PE lesson when Mrs D asked another pupil to help Charlie balance during a dance warm up because she had to leave. When she returned, she took over from the pupil as Charlie's partner.
>
> *Source: Charlie Case Study, line numbers 188 – 191*

Although Mrs D did start an interaction between Charlie and a peer here, the goal of this was not to start a conversation between the two but rather to make sure Charlie had someone with him for the time she was out of class. This shows that even when TAs did start interactions for the pupils, this was not always linked to social support. It is also worth noting that, even when TAs did aim to start interactions, for some the ways in which they then supported the pupils precluded successful peer interaction. For example, this extract from Matthew's case study:

> On two occasions TAs started an interaction between Matthew and a peer. These both happened in the same literacy lesson, where Mrs J was setting him up to work with another pupil. It should be said she then only moved away to let the pair work independently for a total of seven minutes in the hour long class.
>
> *Source: Matthew Case Study, line numbers 217 – 221*

Although Mrs J set up partner work in the literacy session, she continued to talk to both pupils throughout the task (aside from the seven minutes detailed above) meaning that Matthew only recorded four minutes of peer interaction in this lesson (and 34 minutes of adult interaction). The following section describes examples where TAs were observed stopping interactions between pupils and their peers.

4.4.3.9 TAs stopping interactions

During observations, seven pupils within the study (Olivia, Kai, Seth, Ryan, Gopal, Henry and Charlie) had interactions with peers ended by a TA on at least one occasion. For Kai, this was the most common way in which TAs directly impacted upon his interactions with peers. In total, TAs stopped interactions between Kai and peers on seven occasions in the week observed (just under half of all occasions they intervened

in his interactions in class). As described in section 4.2, Kai has needs relating to attention and listening which can mean he struggles to remain on task in class. As such, the majority of occasions TAs sought to end interactions with peers in class it was primarily because the interactions were perceived as off-task behaviour.

> On seven occasions, TAs were observed trying to end interactions between Kai and other pupils. In class, this was primarily to get him to focus on his written work instead of talking. It also happened once in the playground, where Kai was stopped playing because a pupil had complained he was being too rough.
>
> *Source: Kai Case Study, line numbers 202 - 206*

It was hard for me to tell whether the interactions between Kai and other pupils in the class were related to the task set or not (I was not always close enough to hear what was being said), but what was clear was that often other members of the class were being allowed to talk while they completed their work while Kai was discouraged from doing the same.

Olivia also had seven occasions recorded where TAs stopped interactions with peers. As described above, Mrs A was very focused on supporting Olivia in her interactions with peers, however there seemed to be a difference in her approach in the classroom compared to the playground. Outside of class, Mrs A encouraged Olivia to interact with other pupils, in class she regularly stopped her doing so:

> Seven occasions were recorded of Mrs A ending an interaction between Olivia and a peer. These all happened in class, and involved Mrs A stopping Olivia talking to peers as she felt this was off-task behaviour. Mrs A was trying to refocus her to the task at hand, or stopping Olivia distracting others. I noted that Mrs A used the phrases *'you need to do your own work'* and *'stop bothering X'* on more than one occasion during my visit.
>
> *Source: Olivia Case Study, line numbers 270 - 274*

As with Kai, Olivia's TA responded to her peer interactions in class as a distraction from the task set and ended them. This view of the classroom as a space where peer interaction should be discouraged is the focus of section 4.4.4.1. A very similar pattern was recorded for Gopal, who had five instances of peer interactions being stopped during my research visit. Looking at the sample as a whole, these three pupils have commonalities of need because all have needs relating to attention and listening. The TAs could have been trying to support these needs by cutting off sources of distraction

(peer interactions) in class. Interactions were also observed being ended for pupils without these types of need.

Seth does not have identified needs relating to his ability to concentrate in class. Despite this, five occasions were recorded of TAs ending interactions between Seth and his peers, more than any other category of TA impact on interactions for him. The following extract from Seth's case study details the circumstances of these occasions and the language used by allocated TA Mrs P:

> Nine data points were recorded where a TA influenced an interaction between Seth and a peer, which is a high figure given the low level of TA proximity recorded, it seems that (when in the room) Mrs P focused on managing Seth's peer interactions. Eight of nine interactions recorded involved Mrs P either ending (five) or criticising (three) an interaction between Seth and a peer. These all occurred in the classroom and some of the phrases used are listed here:
>
> *Mrs P: Seth, concentrate. No talking.*
>
> *Leave Louis alone now*
> *Mouth shut now Seth.*
> *We're not talking now, we are sounding out our words.*
> *Concentrate now. Leave them alone.*
>
> It felt as though Mrs P deemed it necessary to stop peer interactions in the classroom, as she saw these as impacting negatively upon both Seth's and the other pupils' ability to concentrate on the tasks set.
>
> *Source: Seth Case Study, line numbers 248 - 263*

Although this is similar to the experience of Kai and Olivia above, I felt that Mrs P was more focused on stopping Seth from affecting others' ability to work than on ensuring he was concentrating on his task. This is borne out by the fact that Mrs P described her main role in school to me as keeping Seth working and stopping him distracting others. Seth has multiple complicated behaviours which are resulting in difficult peer relationships in school (see section 4.2 for details) and it could be that Mrs P is trying to limit the chances of Seth upsetting his peers or the other pupils upsetting him.

Ryan is another pupil within the sample who had a number of peer interactions ended by TAs (five in total), and is a surprising inclusion here because he had such low levels of peer interaction recorded (8.5% of his time in school, the lowest of any pupil in the sample) and showed very little interest in interacting with peers at any point during the time observed (see section 4.2 for a description of his interactions with peers). For Ryan, it was just one of his TAs who seemed focused on ensuring he did not speak to

other pupils at any point in class:

Mrs F:	*(to Ryan)*	*No talking Ryan* *Don't talk. You should be doing good listening*
	(to peer)	*No, we're not talking now.*
		Source: Ryan's Case Study, line numbers 203 - 205

Ryan had two allocated TAs with very different approaches to his support, which is discussed further in the next section. What was clear from observations was that TA Mrs F felt that interactions with peers in class were a distraction from the task set and should be stopped. As with Kai, Ryan and the other pupils at his table were not permitted to talk to each other while they were working, even where other pupils in the class were given the opportunity to do so (I recorded these occasions in the notes section of my observation schedule).

4.4.3.10 The effect of differences in TA approach

Seven (Jake, Ryan, Charlie, Kai, Matthew, Lucie and Henry) of the pupils in the study had more than one TA working with them on a regular basis during their time in school (details of TA deployment are provided in section 3.6.4.3). In the schools where this was in place I was told by school management (the SENCO in one case, and head teachers in the others) that this strategy was used to try to avoid pupils with SEN becoming overly reliant on one member of staff for support. What was noteworthy about a number of these pupils is that their school experience varied according to who was supporting them at the time because their TAs had varying approaches to their support in school, and specifically to their interactions with peers.

Henry spent the majority of his time in school in a HIRB which is staffed by a teacher, Mrs Q, and two TAs, Mrs O and Mrs N (see section 4.2 for a more detailed description of Henry's school experience). He has funding to achieve seventeen hours of support in school although, in reality, he has someone on hand to support him in every lesson should he require help. Mrs O and Mrs N have very different backgrounds, as described in this extract from Henry's case study:

> In the HIRB, aside from teacher Mrs Q, Henry is supported primarily by Mrs N who works full time in the resource base but is allocated to support multiple pupils. Mrs N has worked at the school for more than five years, three years with Henry, and previously worked at a school for children with hearing impairments. She has qualifications in BSL, can use Makaton and has had specific training in strategies to

support learners with hearing impairments. Mrs N described her role supporting Henry as keeping him working and stopping him distracting others. She also said that she does specific work with him about politeness and being a good friend.

Henry also receives support from Mrs O, who is allocated full time to another pupil but helps answer questions and check work if needed. Mrs O has worked at the school for less than two years and has known Henry since the start of Year Two (approximately nine months at the time of observation). Mrs O said she supports Henry by reminding him of what he should be doing and stopping him if his behaviour becomes challenging. She did not mention support with peer interactions but did say she sometimes had to talk to him in the playground (she is outside during break and lunch times to support her allocated pupil) as his play can become very boisterous which has been known to upset other pupils.

Source: Henry Case Study, line numbers 118 - 136

Mrs N and Mrs O seemed to have different priorities in their support of Henry. As is clear from the extract, Mrs N emphasised the need to support Henry in his peer interactions. This view was evident in the ways I observed that she supported Henry, reminding him about appropriate behaviours in class and often setting him up in partner tasks where he can practise these skills. In contrast, Mrs O seemed more interested in ensuring Henry was on task and was not affecting the work of others (this may be because she is allocated specifically to support another pupil in the HIRB who has behavioural needs). As a result, she more frequently ended interactions or was negative about peer interactions. This extract shows this contrast:

Eight occasions were recorded during the research visit of TAs influencing interactions between Henry and peers. Twice during the week, Mrs N started an interaction between Henry and a peer, both times setting him up working with a partner in class *"Henry, you talk to Spike"*. One occasion was recorded of a TA ending an interaction between Henry and a peer. This was Mrs O, who stopped Henry dancing with a friend in class.

Four occasions were observed where a TA offered positive support for an interaction between Henry and a peer. These all occurred in the same lesson where Henry was building a model with Timothy and Mrs N was praising him for working well as part of a pair. Only one occasion was recorded of negative support, this was in a humanities lesson where Mrs O asked Henry *"Should you be talking to Spike now?"* thereby discouraging their conversation.

Source: Henry Case Study, line numbers 266 - 278

Henry seemed to be aware of this difference in terms of approach as I noted he seemed more confident approaching and talking to peers with Mrs N present than with Mrs O. This perception is supported by data from observations which showed Henry had a higher level of peer interaction while Mrs N was proximal than he did when Mrs O was supporting him.

As previously mentioned, Ryan also had a very different experience depending on which of his TAs were supporting him. Ryan has full time support in school, which is split between two TAs, Mrs F and Mrs G.

Mrs F supports Ryan in the morning and at break and lunch times. She has worked at the school for more than five years and previously worked as a TA at another school.

Mrs G supports Ryan in the afternoons. She has worked at the school for almost two years. She has a qualification related to educational support and specific training related to supporting learners with ASD.

Source: Ryan Case Study, line numbers 74 – 80

When asked about the ways in which they support Ryan in school, key differences were clear as to their views of support and their primary role in the classroom:

Mrs F described her main role as keeping Ryan on task and helping him to get his work done. In line with this, she was observed telling Ryan to concentrate, pushing him to complete work and breaking up activities for him. She seemed to be very much focused on task completion.

Mrs G described her role as helping Ryan to understand what the teachers were saying and supporting him to learn. She was observed rewording questions for Ryan and regularly did not complete tasks set because she was working on ensuring he understood the underlying knowledge. She was also observed regularly setting Ryan up with tasks and leaving him (at least briefly) to complete them independently.

Source: Ryan Case Study, line numbers 82 - 92

This difference in approach not only affected the ways in which tasks were undertaken but also the amount of time the TAs spent with Ryan. Mrs G was often observed moving away from Ryan so he could attempt tasks on his own. In contrast, Mrs F very

rarely left Ryan's side at any point during observations (where there was a TA present, 77.9% of the time it was her). As with Henry, the TAs varying approaches can also be seen to have affected their impact on peer interactions. Ryan interacted with peers on just eleven occasions while Mrs F was proximal, and on five of these, Mrs F ended the interaction. Although he had fewer interactions while being supported by Mrs G (just four) two of these interactions were started by the TA and the other two received positive support.

Sixteen occasions were recorded during the systematic observations when a TA influenced an interaction between Ryan and a peer. On two occasions a TA started an interaction between Ryan and another pupil. These both occurred in the same literacy lesson, where Mrs G set up partner talk between Ryan and a high attaining girl. Five interactions were observed of a TA offering positive support for Ryan interacting with a peer. Four of these were Mrs G and were praising Ryan for working well as part of a group or partner task. One was a TA from a different class encouraging Ryan to play with others rather than playing alone in the playground.

Five occasions were recorded of TAs ending interactions between Ryan and peers (a high number considering he had so few peer interactions). All five of these were Mrs F, stopping interactions in the classroom.

Source: Ryan Case Study, line numbers 190 - 201

The examples from these two pupils suggest that the ways in which TAs perceive their job role and approach their support in class could be affecting levels of peer interaction. TAs who are focused on task completion may end interactions more regularly, where TAs who are looking to support pupils social skills may be more prone to supporting interactions between pupils and peers. The following section details a specific role undertaken by several TAs within the study, acting as a gatekeeper between peers and the pupils they support, and discusses how this may be impacting upon peer interactions.

4.4.3.11 TAs as gatekeepers

In some schools it was clear that the other pupils in the pupils' class saw their TA as a gatekeeper for the pupil with SEN, that access had to be negotiated through the TA rather than directly interacting with the pupil themselves. In other, more extreme cases, peers opted to talk to the TA instead of talking to the pupil. This section outlines how this affected two pupils from within the sample, Jake and Olivia, and discusses how this

may have impacted upon peer interactions for them.

In his classroom, Jake spent the vast majority of his time (80%) in very close proximity to one of his allocated TAs. I noted in my research journal that his table felt quite isolated from the rest of the class (at the back of the room, next to his TA with a box in the middle of the table to restrict his view as he gets easily distracted) and when he did move from this space he was most often led by hand by one of his TAs. This high level of TA proximity and control of his school experience may explain why many of the other pupils in the class seemed to see the TAs as the best contact point for Jake and chose to interact with the TA rather than with him on a number of occasions, as the following extracts show:

> The other pupils seemed to see his TAs as gatekeepers, asking them questions about Jake. On one occasion I heard a girl ask Mrs B *"how is Jake toda*y?" rather than directing the question to Jake himself.
>
> *Source: Jake Case Study, line numbers 145 - 147*

> In a numeracy lesson, another pupil asked Mrs C *"What does Jake think the answer is?"*. Jake was sat opposite the pupil at the same table.
>
> *Source: Jake Case Study, line numbers 147 - 149*

As previously described (see section 4.2) Jake's speech can be very difficult to understand and he does not always respond when spoken to, which could explain some of the pupils' behaviour. It is possible that the Jake's communication difficulties are hard to understand for peers and so they are opting to approach his TA instead. I also noted, however, that some pupils were approaching the TA rather than Jake directly because they seemed to understand that access to Jake was through the TA, as in this extract:

> It felt as though the other pupils were unsure about whether they were allowed to approach Jake independent of his TA. I noted that one morning a pupil asked TA Mrs C, *"Can I show Jake something that I brought in?"*. Mrs C agreed that she could and then, after showing him (a toy from home) she turned back to Mrs C and said *"Does he like it?"*. Mrs C answered that he did.
>
> *Source: Jake Case Study, line numbers 151 – 155*

This feeling that other pupils had to ask a TA prior to interacting with Jake may also have been an effect of adult-child power relationships within the classroom. It is

normally the case that adults within the room are in charge; therefore it is likely the pupils perceived this was the case with the TAs. Olivia's TA was also seen as a gatekeeper by peers.

As previously explained Olivia's TA, Mrs A, was very focused on managing Olivia's peer interactions in school, recording more examples of TA impact on interactions than for any other pupil in the sample. As in Jake's observations, other pupils in the class were seen approaching Mrs A rather than speaking directly to Olivia as in this extract:

> I noted in my research diaries that the other pupils in class seemed to see Mrs A as a gatekeeper, asking her for permission when they wanted to talk to Olivia. In a literacy lesson, for example, where the pupils had been asked to bring in a favourite book that they wished to share, I observed several pupils approaching Mrs A and asking if it was ok prior to sharing their books with Olivia.
>
> *Source: Olivia Case Study, line numbers 178 - 182*

As with Jake, rather than directly interacting with Olivia (although she was present) the pupils chose to talk to Mrs A first. In this example, the pupils had been told to walk around and share their books with others in the class, but they still felt they had to check whether it was alright to include Olivia in this task. In this case I felt this might be related to the fact that Olivia often works on activities independent to the rest of the class (67% of the time observed she was working on a differentiated or different task) and so the pupils could simply have been checking that Olivia was involved in this activity. Examples of pupils approaching Mrs A rather than Olivia also occurred in the playground however:

> One lunch break I heard a girl from Olivia's class ask Mrs A, *"Does Olivia want to play with me?"* Mrs A responded that the girl should ask Olivia. When approached, Olivia happily played with the girl (a chasing game).
>
> *Source: Olivia Case Study, line numbers 209 - 211*

This exchange shows that Olivia did not need support to interact with peers. When the girl directly asked her whether they could play together, Olivia was able to respond and then go on to play with her. Similarly, Jake was seen at multiple points interacting with peers (despite his speech, language and communication needs). For some other pupils within the study, the TAs seemed to be operating as interpreters; explaining what the pupil had said or was thinking both to peers and adults in school. This is discussed in the next section.

4.4.3.12 TAs as interpreters

Unlike in the examples above, the TAs in this section were not approached instead of, or as a gateway to, the pupils, rather they regularly chose to speak for the pupils, even when interactions had been directed at the pupils themselves. This happened most often with Sneha's TA, Mrs M.

As outlined in section 4.2, Sneha has multiple needs relating to speech, language and communication. She often repeats what has been said to her, can struggle to understand instructions and has a tendency to whisper. As such, teachers and peers often seemed to find it difficult to understand the things Sneha said to them. On these occasions, Sneha's TA, Mrs M, would act as an interpreter, explaining what Sneha had said.

Mrs M often took on the role of an interpreter in class, ensuring that other people understood what Sneha was saying or what she wanted, as in this exchange:

Mrs U (teacher): What shall we do next Sneha?
Sneha: House
Mrs U: What do you mean?
Mrs M: She wants to go in the greenhouse
Sneha: Strawberries
Mrs U: You want to water the strawberries in the greenhouse?
Sneha: Strawberries!

Source: Sneha Case Study, line numbers177 - 185

Sneha and Mrs M have worked together for two years since Sneha started at the school and have a very strong bond which helps Mrs M to know what she means by certain words and phrases where more context would be needed for other people listening. In the extract above, this helped Sneha to achieve the outcome she wanted within the session (to water the strawberries). Although in this extract Mrs M's intervention is clearly supportive to Sneha, I also recorded a number of occasions during the time observed where it felt as though Mrs M was speaking for Sneha rather than interpreting what had been said, as in this extract:

In an intervention session I recorded the following exchange

Mrs AA (TA): Sneha, can you tell us what you like?
Mrs M: Sneha likes sausages!
Mrs AA: Do you like sausages Sneha?
Mrs M: Sneha would eat sausages every day
Mrs AA: I will put down sausages then

Source: Sneha Case Study, line numbers 187 - 192

In the session, Sneha smiled in response to the questions but did not attempt to respond at any point, perhaps because she knew Mrs M would answer for her. The gap

between Mrs AA's first question and Mrs M's response was less than two seconds, so very little time was given to see if Sneha was going to respond. When I asked Mrs M about this after the session she said Sneha was having a 'quiet day' and so she had chosen to answer for her rather than delay the progress of the session (which was related to social skills and politeness).

Gopal's TA, Mrs L, also spoke for him on a number of occasions during the week observed most often in order to clarify what Gopal had said. Gopal has a speech impediment and talks very quickly which can make his speech very difficult to understand (see section 4.2). As such, Mrs L often had to step in to interpret for him.

I noted that Mrs L often took on the role of interpreter between Gopal and peers because his speech can be hard to comprehend. I noted the following exchange in an intervention session:

Peer: Can I have that? [pointing to pencil]
Gopal: [unintelligible]
Mrs L: He says he still needs the blue pencil

Source: Gopal Case Study, line numbers 95 – 100

This support from Mrs L helped peers to understand what Gopal was saying. As with Sneha's TA, however, occasions were also recorded where Mrs L spoke for Gopal as in this exchange recorded during our tour of the school:

Me: Where shall we go Gopal? Where do you play in school?
Mrs L: Gopal likes to play in the playground
Me: Do you want to go to the playground?
Gopal: No, the track.

Source: Gopal Case Study, line numbers 103 - 106

Here Mrs L has spoken for Gopal but his response suggests she was wrong in her assumption of what he would say. Although this happened far less often for Gopal than for Sneha, both pupils' TAs took on the role of interpreters for the pupils in school and, in doing so, took an active role in interactions with both peers and adults which could have impacted upon the outcome of these interactions.

4.4.4 Environments which pupils inhabit in school and their relationship to peer interactions and TA support

Although it was not a specific focus of this study to look at the ways in which the environments which pupils inhabit in school impacted upon the peer interactions of the pupils, during observations it became clear that a number of factors relating to the

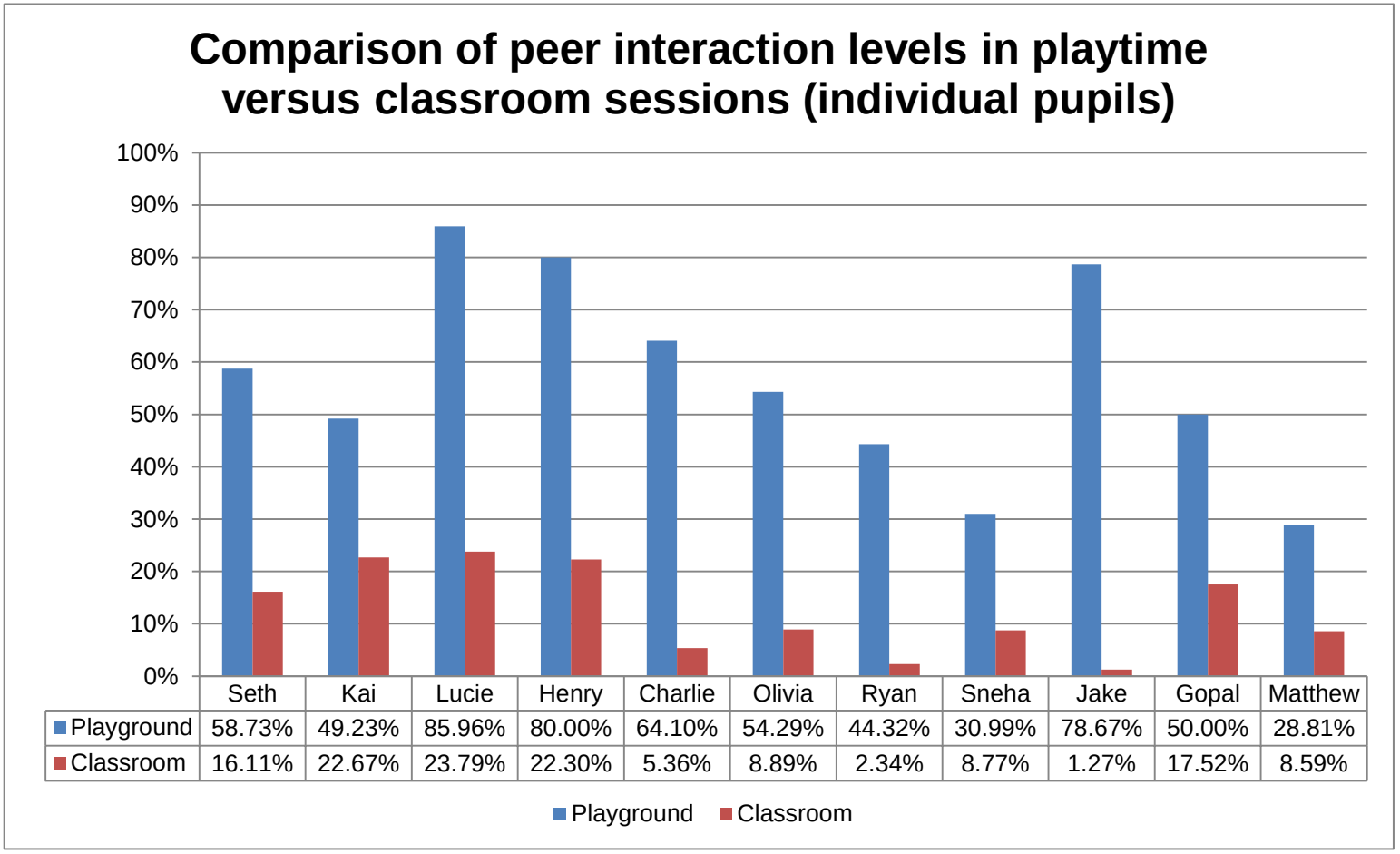
space the pupils were inhabiting seemed to be affecting the pupils' opportunities to interact with peers, the way peer interactions were perceived by TAs and, therefore, TA influence on these interactions. In this section, data from observations comparing the school experience of pupils during playground and classroom based sessions are outlined and discussed alongside contextual information from the case studies. Later in this section, the pupils' position in class is considered as a factor that may affect peer interactions with examples from the pupils' case studies used to illustrate this.

4.4.4.1 Classroom versus playground

Classroom versus playground: peer interactions

For each observation recorded as part of the study, I noted whether the session taking place was a classroom based teaching session or a playground based unstructured session (primarily break and lunch times; see section 4.3.1 for information as to the number of minutes observed) as I was interested in comparing results for these two school spaces, specifically with regard to levels of peer interaction observed.

Observation results show that, for the sample as a whole, a much higher level of peer interaction was recorded in playground as compared to classroom sessions. In playground sessions a mean average of 56.8% of the pupils' time was spent interacting with peers, compared to just 12.5% of their time in the classroom. All eleven pupils had higher levels of peer interaction in playground sessions, with a range from 28.8% of the time observed in these sessions (Matthew) to 86% (Lucie). In classroom sessions, the lowest level of peer interactions recorded was Jake, who spent only 1.3% of his time interacting with peers. The highest level was Lucie again, although she spent less than a quarter of her time in classroom based sessions interacting with peers (23.8%).



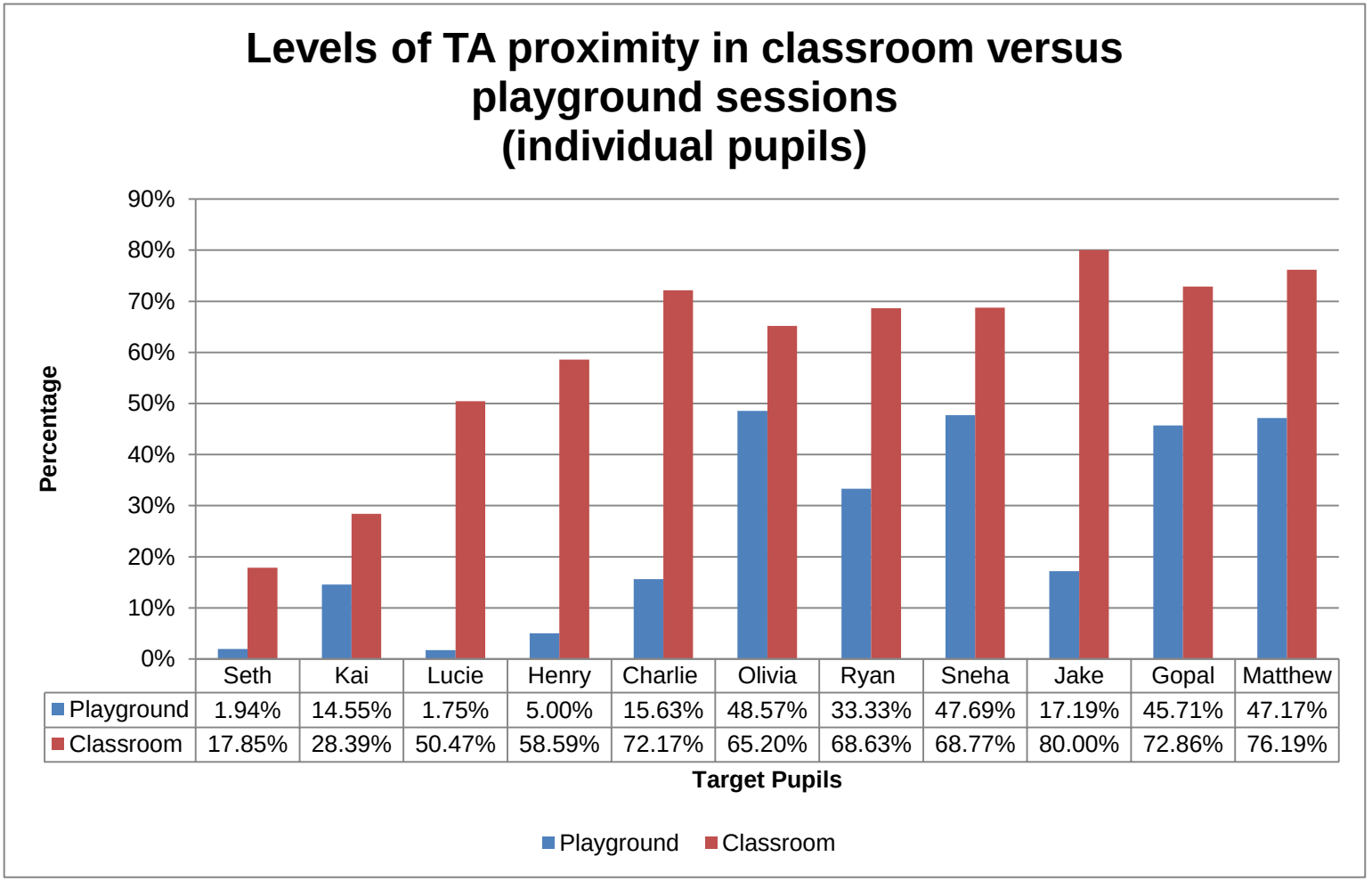
	Seth	Kai	Lucie	Henry	Charlie	Olivia	Ryan	Sneha	Jake	Gopal	Matthew
Playground	58.73%	49.23%	85.96%	80.00%	64.10%	54.29%	44.32%	30.99%	78.67%	50.00%	28.81%
Classroom	16.11%	22.67%	23.79%	22.30%	5.36%	8.89%	2.34%	8.77%	1.27%	17.52%	8.59%

Figure 27: Percentages of time involved in peer interactions observed in playground and classroom sessions for individual pupils.

Classroom vs. playground: TA proximity

As I had previously found results to suggest TA presence might be linked to levels of TA proximity, I collated information about this with regard to the two types of sessions to see if TA presence varied between the two. Figure 28 (below) shows percentages of time with a TA proximal for each of the pupils within the sample, divided between classroom and playground sessions. As is clear from the graph, all eleven pupils had lower levels of TA proximity in playground sessions, with an average of 23.5% across the sample as a whole. In comparison, pupils spent on average 59.9% of their time in classroom sessions with an adult proximal.

These results can be linked to information collected about the deployment of TAs (see section 3.6.4.3), as the pupils with the lowest levels of TA proximity in playground sessions (Seth, Kai, Lucie and Henry) are also the four pupils for whom no TA support is allocated during these unstructured times. All of the remaining seven pupils have a TA present in all break and lunch time sessions, despite the fact their levels of TA proximity vary greatly.



	Seth	Kai	Lucie	Henry	Charlie	Olivia	Ryan	Sneha	Jake	Gopal	Matthew
Playground	1.94%	14.55%	1.75%	5.00%	15.63%	48.57%	33.33%	47.69%	17.19%	45.71%	47.17%
Classroom	17.85%	28.39%	50.47%	58.59%	72.17%	65.20%	68.63%	68.77%	80.00%	72.86%	76.19%

Figure 28: Percentages of time with a TA present in classroom and playground sessions for individual pupils.

Classroom vs. playground: levels of TA influence on interactions

Having discovered that TA proximity varied greatly between classroom and playground sessions for the sample as a whole, I collated the examples of TA impact on pupil peer interactions for each type of session. Figure 29 (below) shows the number of instances of TAs directly impacting on the pupils' peer interactions, split between playground and classroom sessions. All eleven pupils had higher numbers of TA influence in classroom sessions, with just 11.2% (thirteen of 116 occasions recorded) occurring in playground sessions. Six of the pupils did not have any category of TA influence on interactions recorded at any point in playground sessions.

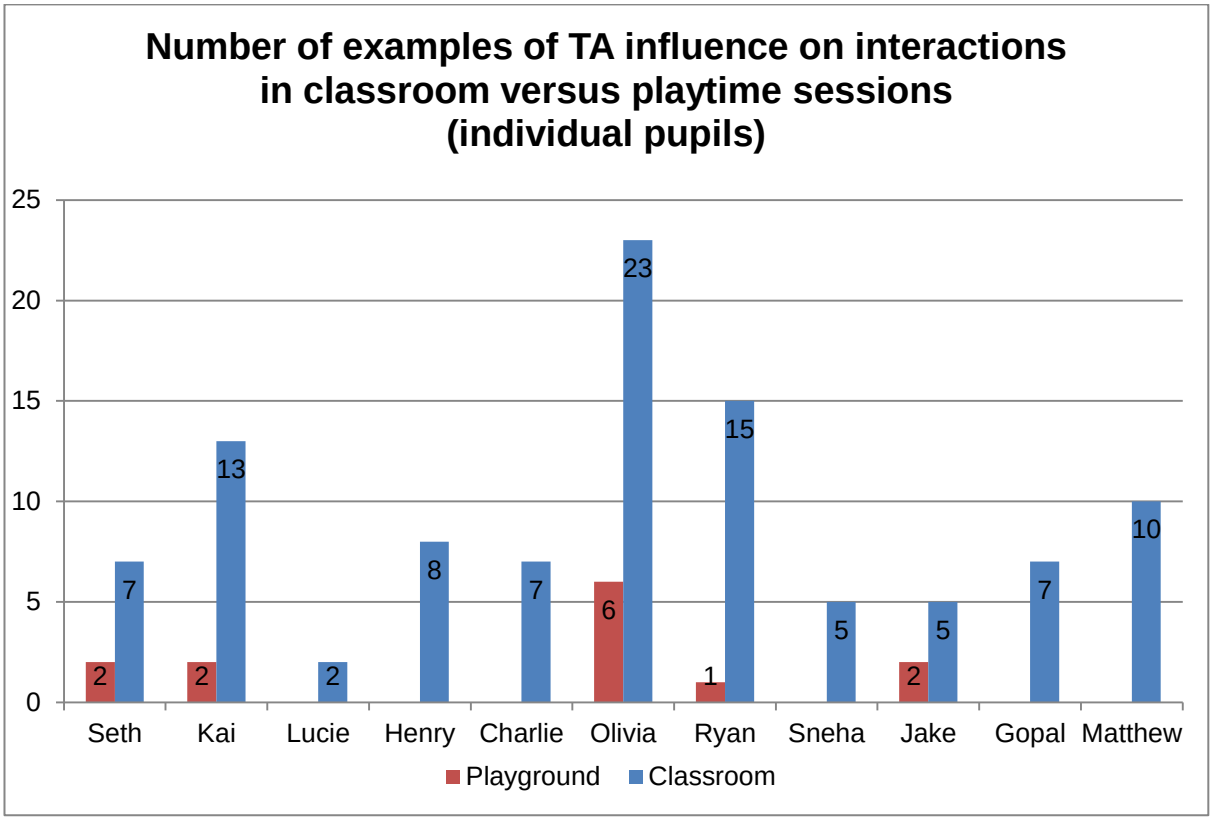
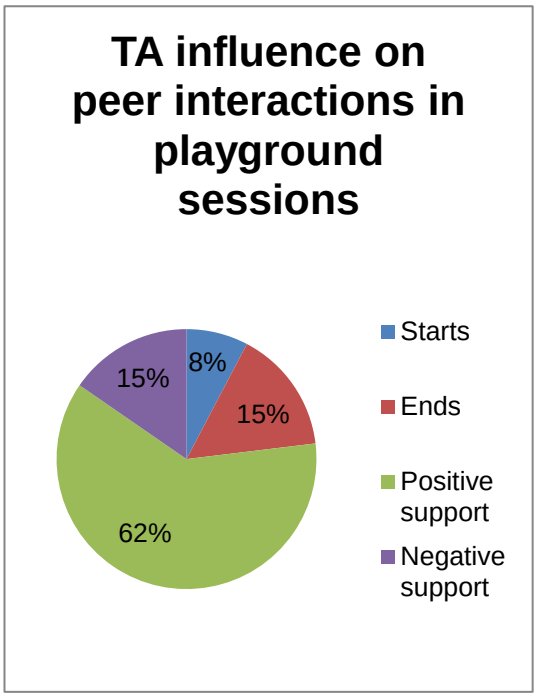


Figure 29: Number of instances of TA influence on interactions in playground and classroom sessions.

What is interesting here is that, even the pupils with the highest numbers of occasions of TA influence, have a higher proportion of these in classroom rather than playground sessions. Of Olivia's 29 recorded occasions, for example, 23 (79.3%) occurred in classroom sessions. In Ryan's case, just one of these occasions occurred in a playground session. These findings show that the TAs observed as part of this study were more likely to manage the peer interactions of the pupils they worked with while they were in the classroom.

As described in section 3.7.1.2, four different categories of support were recorded for



TAs influencing interactions between TAs and peers. Figures 30 and 31 show the proportions of each type of category recorded in both playground and classroom sessions. In both types of sessions, TAs were most likely to offer positive support for a peer interaction, although this category of support was recorded more frequently in playground sessions (62%, in comparison to 42% in classroom sessions). Levels of negative support for interactions were similar between the two types of session. TAs were slightly more likely to start interactions in classroom sessions.

Figure 30: Percentages of types of TA influence in playground sessions.

The graphs show that the TAs observed were far more likely to end interactions between pupils and peers in classroom rather than playground sessions. This finding fits with examples from the case studies, in which I noted a distinction in the ways TAs reacted to interactions with peers depending on the setting in which the interactions took place. As described in section 4.4.3.9, it felt as though some TAs within the study saw peer interaction in class as off-task behaviour and were, therefore, more likely to end interactions in this setting. In contrast, peer interactions in the playground were not viewed in this way. Where peer interactions were ended in the playground, this was primarily linked to managing challenging behaviours, for example Kai had an interaction ended as a peer complained he was being too rough (full extract is included in his case study in Appendix D).

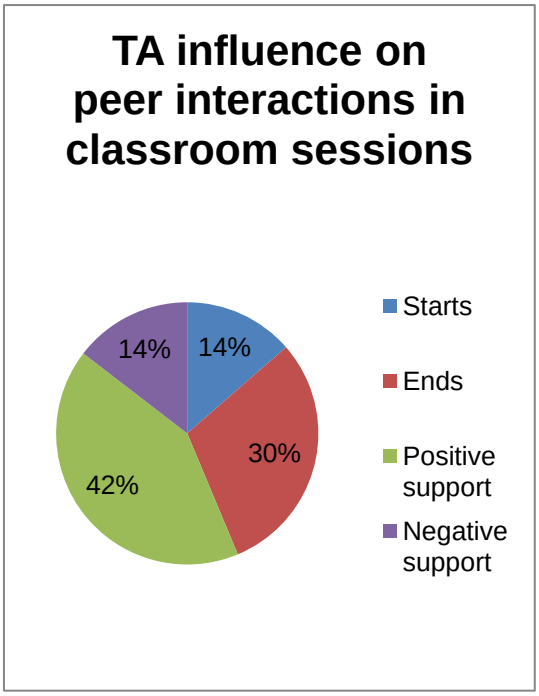


Figure 31: Percentages of types of TA influence in classroom sessions

The information in this section shows that the pupils observed in this study had fewer

interactions in classroom as compared to playground sessions. The data also show that levels of TA proximity and TA influence on interactions also varied across these settings, with higher levels of both recorded in classroom sessions. Taken together, these findings suggest that TAs may be supporting pupils differently between these two settings and this may be linked to differences in levels of peer interaction for the pupils. The next section presents information about the position of pupils in class and links this to peer interaction figures.

4.4.4.2 Pupil location in class

During observations I collected information about where the pupils in the study sat within their classrooms. Across the sample, six pupils had a single classroom in which they received the majority of their education (aside from PE lessons). Three pupils spent most of their time in a single classroom but moved into other rooms for some of their teaching (Olivia moved into a separate class for numeracy for example). The remaining two pupils were taught in a Hearing Impaired Resource Base (HIRB) for most of their schooling (they spent approximately one day per week in a mainstream classroom). Aside from the pupils from the HIRB, who could choose to sit wherever they wanted within the resource base, all pupils had allocated seats within their main classrooms. This section looks at similarities across the sample relating to this position in class and considers whether this could be having an effect on levels of peer interaction.

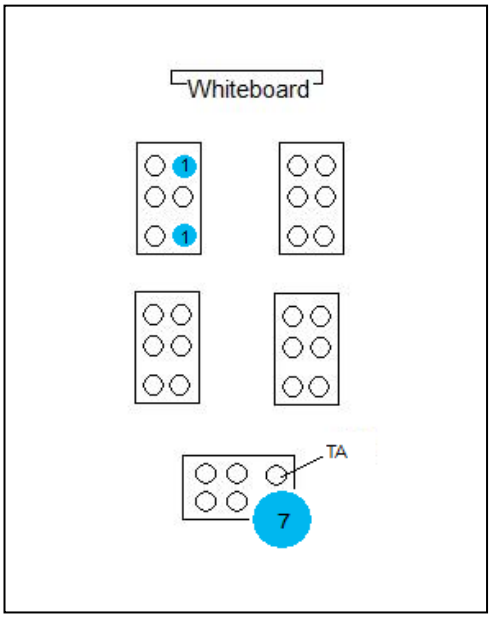


Figure 32: Image to show the position of pupils within a notional classroom.

As shown in Figure 32, of the nine pupils with allocated seats in their main classroom, seven were seated at a table at the back of the classroom. Just two pupils sat elsewhere in the class: Kai was sat at the front of the room, and Gopal was sat towards the middle. Positioning the pupils at the back of the classroom seemed counterintuitive during observations as it was clear that some of the pupils could not clearly see the board from where they were sitting (Matthew, for example, had his back to the teacher). It also felt to me, as an observer, that the pupils at the back of the room seemed to be quite separate from the rest of the class and less able to interact with other members of the class. This example from Olivia's case study illustrates this view:

> In her main classroom, Olivia sits at a table at the back of the room with TA Mrs A and two low attaining pupils (one of whom is undergoing assessment by an Educational psychologist at present). Due to her location in the classroom, any partner talk was undertaken with Mrs A and small group work happened on her table with the low attaining pupils (overseen by Mrs A). I noted that it often felt as though Olivia and Mrs A were very separate to the rest of the classroom as they were so far removed from the other members of the class and were often working on different topics and tasks to the rest of the pupils.
>
> *Source: Olivia Case Study, line numbers 64 - 71*

Mrs A told me that she had asked class teacher Mrs AB if they could sit at the back of the class room as she felt this would stop her work with Olivia from distracting other members of the class. Mrs A often talked to Olivia while Mrs AB (the class teacher) was teaching from the front of the class, and Mrs AB was concerned this could make it difficult for other pupils to hear. I do not have any information about why the other pupils within the sample were placed at the back of the classroom, but it is possible the decision was made for similar reasons.

Peers sharing pupils' table

As described in Olivia's case study, another common finding for the pupils observed is that they often shared their tables with a number of low attaining peers. As shown in Figure 33, eight of the nine pupils with allocated seats sat at a table with a number of low attaining peers. Kai is the only pupil who sits at a table where pupils range in attainment.

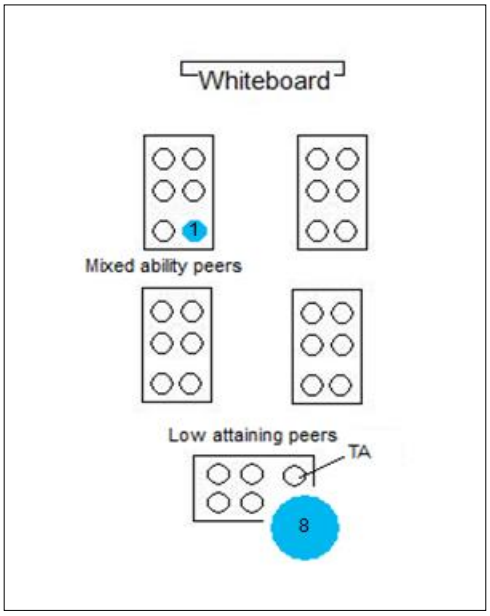


Figure 33: Image to show the position of pupils relative to their TA, as well as details of the academic level of other pupils in their locality within a notional classroom.

It is possible that this could impact upon the peer interactions of the pupils in the study as it limited the options for the pupils. Research has suggested that the peer interactions of pupils with SEN can be supported by interaction with higher attaining peers (see section 2.3), yet the majority of the pupils in the sample spend most of their time due to their position in class surrounded by pupils whose attainment is at a similar level or lower than their own.

> In Seth's classroom, pupils have allocated seats which do not change by subject. Seth sits at a table to the far right of the classroom near the door. He faces away from the whiteboard. Seth shares his table with four other pupils, two of whom have English as an additional language (EAL). The remaining two pupils are low attaining, and one has an IEP for behavioural issues.
>
> *Source: Seth Case Study, line numbers 65 - 69*

Seth was seen talking to other peers within the classroom while the pupils were sat on the carpet with the teacher, but at his table he rarely interacted with anyone. For Seth, who has identified needs relating to speech, language and communication, attempting to establish interactions with low attaining peers and pupils with EAL may be particularly challenging.

Position of TA in relation to the pupil in class

The final similarity in the classroom position of pupils in the sample relates to the TAs

themselves. As shown in Figure 33, eight of the nine pupils with allocated seats were sat next to their TA in class (the TA had a table space next to the pupil). Kai is the only pupil whose allocated seat is not next to a TA.

For the pupils sitting next to their TA I often recorded feeling that the pupil felt isolated from the other members of the class, with their work in class resembling a one-to-one interaction rather than inclusion in the class as a whole. This extract from Charlie's case study is a good example of this:

> All pupils have allocated seats in Charlie's classroom as they are grouped on tables by ability. Charlie's table is at the back of the classroom and he shares it with two low attaining peers and his TA. He sits at the extreme edge of the table and leans in to his TA, meaning there is a large distance between him and the other pupils at the table. He does not move from this place for different subjects although other pupils do.
> On the carpet the pupils also have allocated spaces. Charlie sits to the left, at the feet of his TA who sits behind him on a chair.
>
> *Source: Charlie Case Study, line numbers 52 - 59*

As explained in the extract, although Charlie was in his main classroom, his position in the room (and specifically the position of his TA) meant that he felt very separate to the other members of the class. Perhaps because they had an allocated space, Charlie's TAs rarely moved away from the table (except to collect resources) which impacted upon his opportunities for independent work and, given other results within this study which suggest a negative effect linked to TA proximity, may have affected his levels of peer interaction. Looking back at the results of this section, the pupils who did not sit at the back of the classroom (among low attaining peers or next to their TA) were also the ones with the highest levels of peer interaction, perhaps because these factors are not supportive of interaction.

5. Discussion

5.1 Introduction to the discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the peer interactions of children with SEN in mainstream school settings, and to seek to better understand any potential impact that TA support may have upon these. Systematic observations and one-to-one interviews with eleven pupils were used to build up a picture of the interactions of pupils with SEN and their own views and opinions about these. Case studies were then written for each of the pupils, the findings from which formed the basis of the previous chapter. The results from analysis show the peer relationships of pupils with SEN to be varied and suggest a number of factors related to their academic support from TAs may be affecting how and where they interact with peers. This chapter draws together the results from the study and relates these to the aims and research questions set out at the beginning of the study. Alongside this, connections are made with previous work and synergies and new insights highlighted. The implications of the study findings are discussed in Chapter 6.

5.2 Links to the literature

This section draws out the conclusions from the study in the form of six overarching themes, and makes links between the results of the study and findings from previous work. Appendix C3 has a mind map of the themes presented in this chapter, showing the Results sections each relates to.

5.2.1 Variation in peer relationships

The peer relationships of the pupils within the study varied greatly in terms of both the levels of peer interaction observed and the ways in which they talked about their friends. This is not a surprising finding, given the range of needs identified for the observed pupils as a whole (see section 3.6.4.2) as well as individual differences in childhood peer relationships. In line with previous research, a number of pupils were observed to have very low levels of peer interaction in school (Blatchford, Russell and Webster, 2012; Mand, 2007). Alongside this, a number of pupils were observed to have higher levels of peer interaction and a group of stable friends, which is characteristic of the early childhood stage of development seen in Key Stage 1 (Roffey, Tarrant and Majors, 1994; Dunn, 1993). The pupils' interviews reflected this, as the pupils with low levels of peer interaction found it difficult to name the peers they played with or opted to name pupils whom they were observed having little or no contact with. In contrast, the pupils who had the highest levels of interaction spoke clearly about their friends. Levels

of interaction were found to be similar to previous work focused on the school experience of pupils with SEN (Webster and Blatchford, 2013).

Looking at pupil characteristics, the results from this study suggest that cognitive impairments may have the greatest impact upon pupils' levels of peer interaction as five of the six pupils with the lowest levels of peer interaction (less than 25% of their time in school) had this type of need identified on their statement. This finding supports previous research results (Wendelborg and Tøssebro, 2011). Within the literature, pupils with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) were found to be far more likely to report feeling lonely than peers (Bossaert *et al.*, 2012). In this study, three of the pupils were identified as having ASD on their statements, but there was little similarity between their levels of social interaction with their levels of peer interaction ranging from 8.5% (the lowest level observed) to 29.8% (the third highest in the sample). My qualitative observation notes also vary greatly in relation to the pupils' apparent interest in social interaction.

The Hearing Impaired Resource Base (HIRB) was seen to be very supportive of peer interaction. Previous research has found that pupils with hearing impairments are able to initiate successful peer interactions with other pupils with hearing needs, but experience more failure in interactions attempted with normal hearing peers (Yuhan, 2013), which may explain one of the reasons why the HIRB was such a successful setting for the pupils observed there. Children with hearing impairments have been shown to have greater difficulty making friends (Nunes, Pretzlik and Olson, 2001) and maintaining peer interactions (Antia and Dittillo, 1998) so it is of particular interest that the two pupils observed within the HIRB had the highest levels of interaction of any pupils within the sample. It is possible that results in this study reflect the different style of TA support observed in the HIRB, which involved lower levels of TA proximity and more opportunities for independent or small group working for the pupils. The HIRB environment is discussed further in section 5.2.6 below, which looks at the effects of space.

Some studies have reported that pupils with SEN often prefer to interact with children with similar needs (Frostad and Pijl, 2007). This was the case for several of the pupils observed within the study (Henry, Lucie, Gopal, Olivia) who opted to play with other pupils with SEN, rather than other pupils, daily. As noted in the results chapter, a number of these pupils failed to mention the other pupils with SEN that they were observed to interact with regularly. The reasons for this are unclear, as the pupils did not explain this phenomenon within their interviews.

5.2.2 Multiple views of TA role

The study also captured variation in relation to both TA and pupil views of what TAs do, and the roles TAs undertake to support pupils with SEN. This is in line with previous research which has reported a lack of clarity as to the boundaries of the TA role and the specific activities required of the post (Blatchford, Russell and Webster, 2012; McCoy and Banks, 2012). As in the literature, the pupils spoken to in this study were broadly positive about their support and did not identify things they would like to change about their support (Fraser and Meadows, 2008; De Schauwer *et al.*, 2009).

Within this study, TAs and pupils with SEN reported different primary roles regarding TA support. The TAs spoke most often about behavioural support, keeping pupils on task in the classroom. In contrast, pupils felt their TAs primarily offered academic support. This could suggest different priorities for the two groups, with pupils feeling that they need help with academic tasks and TAs more focused on managing pupil behaviour. Even just focusing on the TA reports, a wide range of roles were included, suggesting TAs are performing a number of different activities in the support of pupils with SEN depending on their school's pattern of deployment (Blatchford, Russell and Webster (2012) and Webster, Blatchford and Russell (2012) focus on the deployment of TAs and reported similar results). The lack of standardisation of TA approach is discussed further in section 5.2.5 below.

As in previous research, and perhaps as a result of the multiple roles being undertaken by TAs, some of the pupils within this study seemed to find it difficult to determine the difference between TA and teacher roles (see Moyles and Suschitsky, 1997). Several pupils within the study spoke about their TAs and teachers in very similar ways, suggesting the two groups are performing broadly similar roles in relation to pupil support. This finding could also reflect the lack of time that pupils with SEN are spending with teachers (a consistent finding with the literature; Blatchford, Russell and Webster, 2012; Giangreco, 2010b) as this could make it more difficult for pupils to determine how the two roles are different.

A key finding is that a number of pupils seemed to see their TAs as friends and prioritised interactions with TAs accordingly. This has been raised as an issue by other researchers, who have felt this impacts negatively upon pupil views of friendships and upon later social outcomes (Giangreco and Broer, 2005; Broer, Doyle and Giangreco, 2005). The TAs within the study were not seen to be enforcing clear boundaries for pupils regarding this at any point, with TAs in one school actively engaging with the pupils in similar ways to peers (playing on playground equipment with them, playing

chase). Only a small number of TAs were observed encouraging pupils to play with peers rather than interacting with adults. Questions need to be asked as to the awareness school staff have regarding the potentially negative impact this could have upon pupils' levels of peer interaction and upon the development of social skills.

5.2.3 Variable focus on social support

Although previous research has reported that TAs see social integration of pupils with SEN as a major part of their role within school (Lacey, 2001), social support was not put forward as a primary role by the TAs spoken to in this study. As previously stated, the TAs in this work most often named behavioural support as their primary role in the support of pupils with SEN. Just five of the sixteen TAs, mentioned any kind of social support as a part of their role. This is noteworthy given that ten of the eleven pupils had needs relating to social interaction skills and social vulnerability identified on their statements (see section 3.6.4.2 for information related to pupil need).

Results from the study showed that pupils did not feel that social support was the primary type of support they received in school. Six of the pupils in the study mentioned some kind of social support, although this figure includes three pupils that talked about their TAs playing with them rather than supporting them to interact with peers; an activity which could in fact negatively influence pupil interest in peer interaction (Broer, Doyle and Giangreco, 2005; see section 2.6.5). Just two of the pupils talked about their TA helping them at playtime. The fact that the majority of pupils did not mention any form of social support further suggests that this is not a regular occurrence in the support of many of these pupils.

Eight of the eleven target pupils had suggested interventions related to social skills support listed on their statement of SEN, but this was not in place at the time of observation (see section 4.4.2.3). Although this was part of a larger pattern of interventions not being in place, it is worth noting that other forms of intervention were found to be in place even in schools where social skills interventions were not being done. This further suggests that programmes of support to improve social skills were not being treated as a primary focus in the support for the pupils within the study or that the importance of this type of support was not as well understood as for other types of need. It could also suggest that social support was not viewed as a priority by school staff or that this type of support was seen as being fulfilled without targeted intervention (although intervention was suggested within the statement).

Webster and Blatchford (2013) reported that the TA role in relation to social skills support was not clearly defined within schools, except where specific interventions were in place. This was the case within the current study where TAs were rarely observed undertaking activities designed to improve pupil social skills or support peer interaction. TA influence on interaction is discussed further in section 5.2.5 below.

It is worth mentioning that a number of positive TA-pupil interactions were observed which could be seen as forms of social skills support. In sections 4.4.3.7 and 4.4.3.8, examples were outlined of TAs praising interactions and of TAs supporting pupils to interact with peers. Although the TAs were supporting pupils' social skills through these activities, this is not the same as targeted social skills support in the form of an intervention as detailed in the pupils' statements of SEN.

An increased focus on targeted social skills support or training for pupils with SEN, including small group interventions, may be key to increasing levels of peer interaction for pupils with SEN. In order for this to happen, the role TAs can play in relation to pupil social skills needs to be clarified and specific interventions put in place to support the development of these skills. Alongside this, the potential negative impact of pupils seeing TAs as friends and of a lack of peer interaction need to be made clear to school staff. Finally, statements and other plans linked to the child need to clarify what is meant by 'social skills support' and include specific examples or strategies that can be used by staff in school (the need to review the way statements are being used within schools is discussed in section 6.3.2).

5.2.4 Separation from peers

As in previous research, the school experiences of the pupils within this study were characterised by a high degree of separation from peers (Tews and Lupart, 2008; Giangreco *et al.*, 2005). In line with Webster and Blatchford (2013) high levels of TA proximity were recorded alongside high levels of interaction with adults (see also Giangreco and Broer, 2005). As shown in section 4.4.3.5, only four of the pupils spent more than 20 consecutive minutes without a TA present during the week observed. Also consistent with this study, many of the pupils observed had a low level of interactions with peers, and also spent a high proportion of their time not interacting with anyone. For a number of the pupils I recorded in my observation notes that their TA support left them with limited opportunities for peer interactions, in part because TAs were not focused on facilitating peer interactions (see section 4.4.3.5) but also because the pupils spent so much of their time talking to their TAs. I recorded that a number of

the TAs seemed to be overprotective of the pupils they were with, keeping them separate from group activities or classroom tasks that the other pupils were doing (TAs being overprotective was a concern raised in Moran and Abbott, 2002).

A consistent finding across the entire sample was that fewer peer interactions occurred for the pupils while TAs were present. This is of particular interest given that many of the pupils spent the majority of their time in school with a TA in close proximity (an average of 52.2% of time observed for the sample as a whole, although more than half of the pupils had a TA proximal for more than 60% of the time observed) meaning that these interactions had to occur in the short amount of time when they were unsupported. This finding is consistent with a number of other studies (Malmgren and Causton-Theoharis, 2006; Skär and Tamm, 2001).

Finally, several TAs within the study were observed acting as gatekeepers or interpreters for the pupils they were supporting. These roles served as a form of barrier between the pupil with SEN and their peers, especially in cases where the TAs were speaking for the pupil. This behaviour raises questions about TA awareness of their potential impact on pupil / peer interactions.

This separation from peers needs to be considered in relation to its effect on pupil inclusion and its potential impact on pupil wellbeing.

5.2.5 No standard TA approach

The approach taken by TAs in the study to the support of pupils with SEN varied greatly across the sample, further suggesting a lack of clearly defined roles (Giangreco *et al.*, 2005; Blatchford, Russell and Webster, 2012). Even where pupils could be said to have broadly similar needs, TAs in different schools were found to approach support in varying ways which, in turn, had differential impacts upon the pupils' school experience. Gopal and Olivia, for example, had the same core needs identified on their statements but very different levels of interaction, potentially as a result of the very different approaches that their TAs took to peer interactions (Olivia's TA ended peer interactions which occurred in the classroom, whereas Gopal's TA was much more open to this form of interaction).

In some cases, single pupils experienced very different support approaches from each of the TAs that they came into contact with. This suggests TA support is not even standardised within single institutions. Pupil statements include an outline of the

support to be offered for pupils, but these differences in TA approach meant that many pupils were not receiving the support suggested as necessary for their successful inclusion in school consistently. A further impact of this variation in approach was that some pupils (most notably Ryan) had some occasions where they were permitted to talk to peers and others where they were not, and this varied according to which TA was supporting him. Ryan's statement specified that 'he would benefit from a consistent support approach' due to his diagnosis of ASD but differences in his TAs' support strategies contradicted this. More contact between the TAs supporting a child, or clear plans derived from pupil statements relating to social support could solve this issue.

In relation to peer interactions, the level of influence observed upon these from TAs also varied according to individual TA approach. Some TAs were found to be keen to set up interactions between the pupil and peers, where others more often ended peer interactions for those pupils. This disparity in terms of the approach used could be confusing for the pupils being supported and for the other pupils in the classroom. It also stands in the way of building stable friendships if the pupils are unclear about where and when they are able to interact with peers. I noted in my research journal a disparity between the experience of the pupils being observed and that of the rest of the class. On a number of occasions, the pupils I was observing were being told to work in silence or having interactions closed down by TAs where the rest of the class were involved in partner or group work activities. This resulted in fewer opportunities for peer interaction for the pupils with SEN.

Although the varying needs of pupils with SEN will inevitably require flexibility in terms of the support offered, standardisation in terms of TA approach could ease transitions between TAs and between school phases. It could also support peers to understand how and when they are able to interact with pupils with SEN, as this would not change in line with TA approach.

5.2.6 The effects on pupils of the spaces which they inhabit in schools

The spaces that pupils inhabit within school were found to be differentially related to levels of peer interaction. As in Webster and Blatchford (2013), a higher proportion of peer interactions were observed to be occurring in playtime, as compared to classroom, sessions. This finding could be linked to a difference in TA approach, as TAs were much less likely to be proximal in playtime sessions and were also less likely to interact with the pupils they were supporting (taking on a more observational role).

The pupils within this study were shown to be able to successfully interact with peers in the playground which suggests more independent or partner time within the school would enable them to improve interaction levels in the classroom.

Position in class was also considered as potentially impacting upon pupils' levels of peer interaction. The majority of pupils were found to be sat at the back of the classroom with their TA and a number of low attaining peers (a finding in line with previous research; Giangreco, 2010a). Given findings that suggest friendship choices in Key Stage 1 can be based on proximity (Roffey, Tarrant and Majors, 1994), school staff undertaking classroom planning should consider the ways in which classroom position could affect pupils' classroom experience and their opportunities to interact with a range of peers. Previous research has shown that the major benefit of inclusion in mainstream schools for pupils with SEN is improved social development due to contact with peers without additional needs (MacBeath *et al.*, 2006) and so it is important that these contacts be enabled and supported where possible.

As previously stated, the HIRB setting was seen to be a positive space for peer interaction. The pupils within this setting did not have allocated seats and were able to move between classrooms and the courtyard. This seemed supportive of successful peer interaction, enabling greater independence for the pupils and a wider range of opportunities for pupils to interact with peers. This further suggests that increased opportunities for collaborative work within the classroom could increase both levels of peer interaction and the opportunity for pupils to develop friendships in school.

6. Implications and recommendations for practice

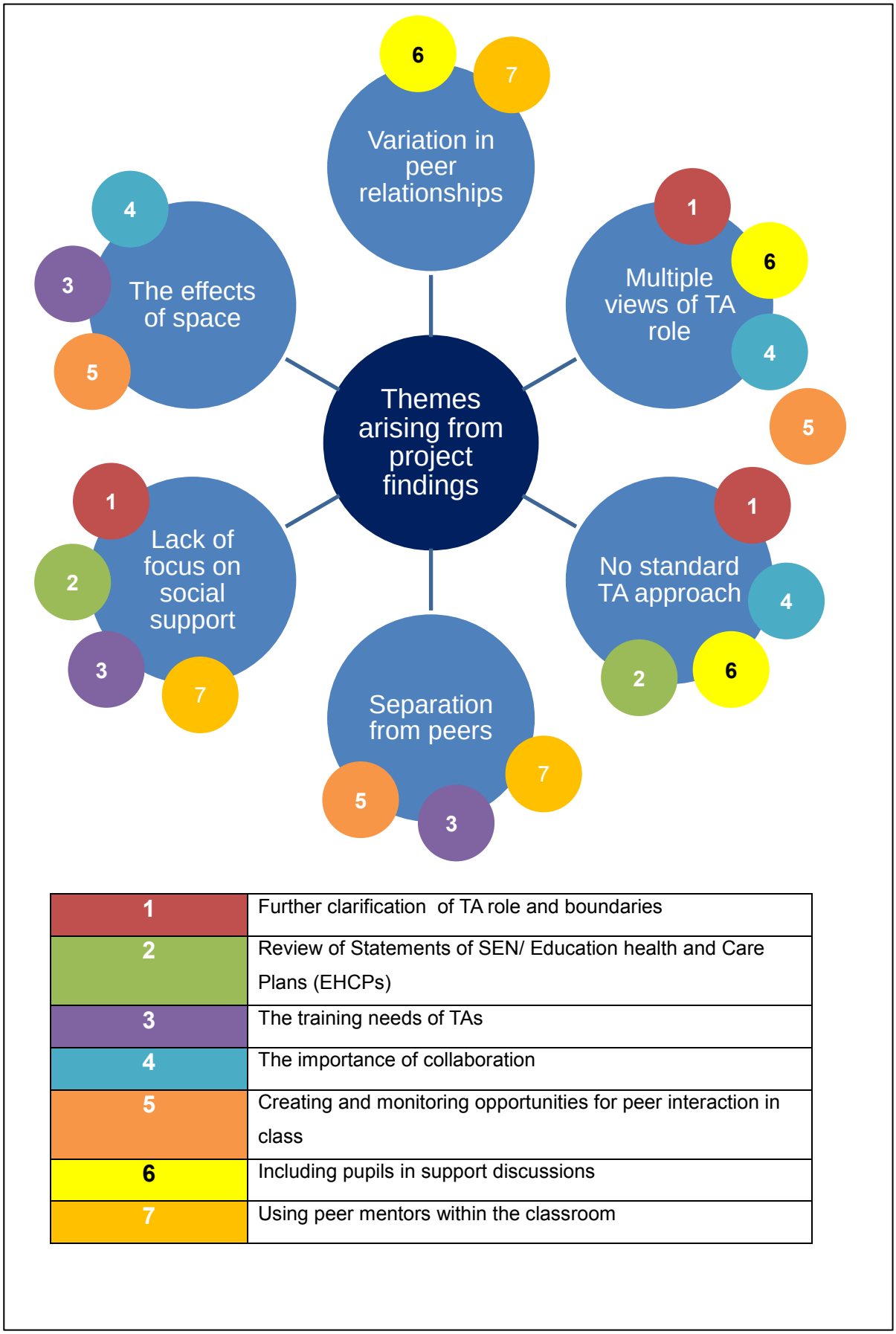
6.1 Introduction to the Chapter

The findings of this study suggest that current methods of TA support may be affecting levels of peer interaction for pupils with SEN in mainstream schools. Results show that many of the pupils within this study had limited opportunities to talk with peers in class, a concern given that research has shown peer-to-peer talk supports effective learning (Littleton and Mercer, 2013). In many cases, TA behaviours could be seen as limiting these opportunities as other pupils within the class were taking part in group and partner activities while the pupils I was observing were in one-to-one interactions with TAs. It is possible that a lack of awareness regarding the importance of social interaction or peer talk is at the root of these TA behaviours, or that school staff are not aware of how social skills can be supported for pupils within school settings. This section details a number of implications based on the results of the study, and gives recommendations for staff working with pupils with SEN based upon these.

Although a primary focus of this study has been on TA support and its influence on the peer interactions of pupils with SEN, I agree with Blatchford, Russell and Webster (2012) that to hold TAs personally responsible for the effects of their support is overly simplistic. Instead, the effects of TA support need to be understood in terms of decisions outside of the control of individual TAs, e.g. the tasks they are asked to do and the expectations of teachers in relation to the management of pupils with SEN in the mainstream classroom. The implications listed here relate to school staff at all levels.

6.2 Making links between findings and implications

Figure 34 below shows the main findings from data collection and makes connections between these and the implications and recommendations outlined in this section. As is clear from the diagram, each theme can be linked to multiple implications. The six themes arising from the project findings are shown alongside the implications that relate to these. For example, the recommendation that there needs to be further clarification of the TA role is driven by findings of there being multiple views of the TA role, no standard TA approach and a lack of focus on social support.



1	Further clarification of TA role and boundaries
2	Review of Statements of SEN/ Education health and Care Plans (EHCPs)
3	The training needs of TAs
4	The importance of collaboration
5	Creating and monitoring opportunities for peer interaction in class
6	Including pupils in support discussions
7	Using peer mentors within the classroom

Figure 34: Diagram to show how the themes arising from data collection relate to the implications and recommendations for practice made

6.3 Implications for school management

- Need to clarify TA role and boundaries
- The way schools are using statements (now EHCPs) needs to be reviewed

6.3.1 Further clarification of TA role and boundaries

In line with the findings of this work, a number of previous studies have shown that TAs are undertaking a range of roles in support of classroom activities and the inclusion of pupils with SEN (Cajkler and Tennant, 2005; Webster *et al.*, 2010). This lack of clarity in relation to the responsibilities of the TA has been seen as confusing for pupils (Broer, Doyle and Giangreco, 2005), potentially harmful to teacher professional identity (Hammersley-Fletcher and Lowe, 2011) and to be a barrier to successful support (because TAs may be unclear about what they need to do in class or may be unprepared for activities; (Webster, Blatchford and Russell, 2012; Giangreco *et al.*, 2005)). Within this study, TAs were found to have contrasting views of their main role within and across schools and were found to prioritise behaviour management over other types of support, even where this was not an identified priority in pupils' statements of SEN. TAs were observed to have differing approaches to support even within the same school setting and in support of the same pupil. Alongside this, the role of TAs was also unclear to the pupils being supported, who identified different main roles to the TAs and spoke most often about academic support. Clear guidance on TA responsibilities and role boundaries could resolve these concerns.

Establishing a national TA role description would ensure the staff performing the role were aware of the responsibilities and limits of the post. It would also empower these workers by giving them a unique identity and value within the school system (TAs being underappreciated within schools has been raised as an issue in previous studies; Hammersley-Fletcher and Lowe, 2011). In relation to social skills support, a clearer view of the TA role could ensure that this type of support was more widely recognised as integral to TA support. In 2006, a set of national occupation standards for support staff in schools was released by the Training and Development Agency (TDA, 2006) but, given the changes that have taken place in the last 10 years (see section 1.2.2.2) these need updating. At the time of writing, the Department for Education is in the process of developing a set of standards for Teaching Assistants which should clarify the expectations of the TA role and provide a measure against which support can be evaluated. For these standards to be successfully implemented, school staff will need to work together to ensure all staff know how TAs are to be deployed and what support they will need to effectively fulfil their role. This could include the training of teachers

regarding how best to use TAs within class, or SENCOs as to successful TA deployment (a training gap that has been identified in previous research; Giangreco and Broer, 2005).

6.3.2 Review of Statements of SEN / Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)

The results from this study suggest that the interventions listed on statements of SEN are not consistently being put in place in schools. Alongside this, the lack of social support observed (despite this being identified on the majority of pupil statements) further suggests that statements of SEN are not being used to guide the support of pupils. As explained in section 1.2.1.1, a new SEN code of practice came into force in September 2014, which started the process of phasing out statements of SEN to be replaced by EHCPs (Department for Education, 2013a). The rationale for this change was to give greater control over funding and support choices to parents and to the pupils themselves. It is too soon to say whether this change will also result in EHCPs being documents that TAs and school staff can better use to guide their practice. What is clear is that there needs to be some monitoring and review of whether interventions and support types detailed by these documents are in place in schools, as well as some justification for occasions where these interventions are not taking place.

6.4 Implications for school staff

- Ongoing regular training, specifically in relation to social skills support
- Collaborative meetings for sharing expertise and support strategies
- Increased focus on opportunities for peer interaction for pupils with SEN within the classroom

6.4.1 The training needs of TAs

The lack of specific training for TAs has been identified as a concern by previous studies (Giangreco *et al.*, 1997; French and Pickett, 1997; Giangreco and Broer, 2005). There is no minimum entry level qualification required to work as a TA, and studies have shown that the majority of TAs are qualified to GCSE level or below (Webster, Blatchford and Russell, 2012). In line with the need for clear role boundaries and standards for TAs (see section 5.2.5 above) there is also a need for ongoing training to enable TA support to be effective.

Ideally training related to the specific needs of pupils to be supported should be in place prior to starting work with an allocated pupil. For example, Sneha uses Makaton

to communicate within school but her allocated TA Mrs M was not trained to use Makaton. Through her work with Sneha she has picked up some signs but this was a barrier to communication and effective support at the start of their time together. Meetings between TAs, teachers and school leaders could be used to identify training gaps and to provide opportunities to share skills between staff members.

With specific regard to social support skills, my results suggest TAs and school management may be unclear about the TA role in support of these. TA training could be used to ensure school staff were clear about the ways in which TAs could support pupils' peer interactions within the classroom. Previous research by Causton-Theoharis and Malmgren (2005) has shown that TA training can be linked to increased peer interaction for pupils with disabilities (including those with ASD and ESBD). After the TAs had been trained, the supported pupils were observed to have higher levels of peer interaction which was maintained during a second research visit. These findings suggest that training for TAs in relation to strategies for facilitating peer interaction could be beneficial for the pupils with SEN that they support.

An example from the data collected in this study relates to Jake. As explained in section 4.4.3.8, TA Mrs C had received some training and strategies regarding social support from a play therapist that had been brought in the previous year. Mrs C explained that many of the strategies she uses during playtimes derived from this training. From observations Mrs C was found to more regularly start interactions between Jake and peers than his other allocated TA Mrs B who reported having no specific training related to Jake's support.

6.4.2 The importance of collaboration

The results of this study show variation in the support strategies employed by TAs across schools and within single institutions. The impact of this variation is outlined above (section 5.2.3). Ongoing and regular discussions between TAs, teachers and other school staff could help to standardise the approaches taken to the support of pupils with SEN, ensuring that interventions and support strategies put in place by individual TAs are built upon by teachers and other support staff. Collaborative planning between TAs could also ensure continuity of support for pupils with SEN. These ongoing meetings could be a place to share expertise, resources and experience across support staff within an institution and would provide an opportunity for TAs to raise concerns about pupil support.

6.4.3 Creating and monitoring opportunities for peer interaction in class

A number of previous studies have reported that pupils with SEN are experiencing a high degree of separation from their peers in school (Webster and Blatchford, 2013; Wendelborg and Tøssebro, 2011; Giangreco and Broer, 2005). Researchers have found that, even controlling for setting, children who are supported by a TA spend the majority of their time interacting with the TA and, therefore, have fewer opportunities for peer interaction (Cole and Meyer, 1991). Alongside this, questions have been raised about the effect of high levels of TA proximity on pupils' school experience (Giangreco and Broer, 2005; Giangreco *et al.*, 1997; Webster and Blatchford, 2013) and on levels of peer interaction (Malmgren and Causton-Theoharis, 2006; Broer, Doyle and Giangreco, 2005; Tews and Lupart, 2008). In line with previous research, this study has found that the pupils observed had high levels of adult interactions and spent the majority of their time in school with an adult proximal. The effect of this was that these students had less time available for interactions with peers. The current study also observed fewer peer interactions occurring at times when a TA was present for all target pupils and found that a number of pupils within the study saw their TAs as peers. Moving on from the previous research, this study has observed examples of TA influence on pupil-peer interactions which suggest that TAs regularly stop or criticise these within the classroom, even where other pupils within the classroom were encouraged to talk.

As previously stated, classroom talk between pupils has been shown to be beneficial to knowledge formation and retention (Barnes, 2008). These early childhood interactions between peers are also important for the development of social skills necessary for successful development (Roffey, Tarrant and Majors, 1994). Further to the training needs identified in section 6.4.1, it is important to ensure that school staff, including TAs, understand the importance of peer interaction for learning and are creating regular opportunities for peer interaction for pupils with SEN within the classroom. Although partner tasks and group work were set up in a number of classrooms visited, for many of the pupils observed TAs took on the partner role thereby turning the activity into an adult-child interaction rather than an opportunity for peer talk. Specific training regarding strategies for supporting peer talk, especially for pupils with SEN, could support TAs to feel confident setting up their allocated pupil with a peer in these types of sessions.

Finally, monitoring of peer interactions for pupils with SEN could provide valuable insights for the school staff. A number of teachers and TAs that I spoke to during observations gave accounts of the interactions of pupils that were not in line with the

levels of peer interaction observed. Sneha, for example, was described by school staff as ‘well integrated’ (teacher Mrs U) into the classroom and ‘always talking to other children’ (TA Mrs M) where my observations showed she didn’t interact at any point with pupils within her mainstream classroom and had very low levels of peer interactions across the time observed (as she preferred to interact with adults). A system for monitoring pupil-peer interaction levels would give school staff a means to ensure that these were happening within the classroom and, with regular review, to recognise if these were changing and pupils needed support. Appendix H2 holds a worksheet that I have developed which could be used by school staff to this end.

6.5 Implications for pupils with SEN

- Pupils to be included in decisions about their support
- Peer mentoring strategies within class

6.5.1 Including pupils in support discussions

The findings of this study show that pupils with SEN, including those with speech, language and communication needs, are able to talk clearly about their experiences of TA support and about their interactions and relationships with peers. The findings further suggest that pupils were unclear about the role of their TA in their support. As discussed in section 2.11, the contemporary children’s rights agenda states that children have the right to give their opinion about issues related to them, and adults have a duty to listen (Sinclair Taylor, 2000). In line with this, children should be given information about the support they will be receiving and should have opportunities to feedback about their experiences of support. Meetings between TAs and the pupils they support, where pupils could say the things they like and dislike about support or could talk about areas they felt they needed help and not, could improve pupil understanding of the TA role as well as the effectiveness of TA support. I have included a document (based upon similar methods to my successful data collection) that could be used to prompt discussion in these sessions within Appendix H1.

In previous research, pupils in receipt of TA support have reported excessive support (Mortier *et al.*, 2011), support that does not meet their needs (De Schauwer *et al.*, 2009) and support that negatively affects peer perceptions of the pupil with SEN (Skär and Tamm, 2001). Research shows that pupils in receipt of TA support have clear ideas about the ways in which it is working as well as the ways it could be changed to better support them. Further, this study demonstrates that there is value in talking about TA support, even with very young children or those with needs related to speech, language

and communication.

Consistent with previous research, this study found that a number of pupils within the study saw their TAs as friends and opted to interact with these TAs rather than with peers (Broer, Doyle and Giangreco, 2005). Including pupils in discussions about their support could also ensure they understand the difference between TAs and friends in school.

6.5.2 Using peer mentors within the classroom

As previously stated (section 5.2.4), the pupils observed in this study experienced a high degree of separation from peers alongside high levels of TA proximity and adult interactions. A strategy that could be employed in schools to facilitate longer periods of time without a TA present alongside greater opportunities for peer interaction is the use of peer mentors within the classroom (Beveridge, 1999). Shukla, Kennedy and Cushing (1999) reported positive effects of peer support (supervised by a TA) as compared to direct TA support for pupils with physical disabilities and learning needs in a secondary school setting. In their study, the peer providing the support was asked to sit next to the pupil with SEN, to differentiate work and clarify instructions where needed, to implement any behavioural support plans and to promote communication for the pupil with SEN (all tasks otherwise undertaken by a TA). Results showed that peer support could be linked to higher levels of peer interaction for pupils with SEN and more social support behaviours from pupils without SEN. No differences in active engagement for the pupil with SEN or the pupil mentoring them were recorded. These findings suggest peer mentoring can be a successful strategy in relation to the inclusion of pupils with SEN within mainstream classrooms.

The list of tasks undertaken by peer mentors in the above study could be excessive for primary school pupils, however there is some evidence to suggest that simply increasing levels of interaction between pupils with SEN and mainstream peers is beneficial (MacBeath *et al.*, 2006). Sitting a pupil with SEN next to a peer without additional needs (rather than their TA) or having an allocated student for them to work with on group or partner tasks would provide greater opportunities for peer interaction.

There was some suggestion from the results of this study that the other pupils within the classroom were not clear as to whether they could approach the pupils with SEN directly or how they should communicate with them. Studies have shown that increased opportunities for interaction between pupils with SEN and those without

additional needs raises pupil awareness as to their similarities and can result in friendships between the groups (Wade and Moore, 1992). Peer mentors paired with a pupil with SEN would have increased knowledge of how to engage with and support pupils with SEN in school, which could be beneficial for both parties. Peer mentoring has already been used successfully to support increased interactions for pupils with autism in early years settings (Laushey and Heflin, 2000).

7. Reflections on methods

7.1 Introduction to the Chapter

This section reflects on the ways in which the pupils in the study responded to the methods chosen for data collection, looking first at the systematic observations from stage one of the research and then looking at school tours, photo-elicitation, the drawing activity and the semi-structured interviews in turn. The chapter closes with a discussion of the impact of adult presence in the pupil interviews, followed by an analysis of adult responses to the observations.

7.2 Stage one: Systematic observations

During the first stage of the research, systematic observations were undertaken of the pupils in school. The pupils were not told that I was there to specifically observe them, but they knew I was present in the class and that I was observing generally. In all cases, pupils responded well to me being in their classroom and it was not necessary to stop observing due to pupil concerns at any point. School staff did not raise any concerns about the observation process or its effect on pupils.

Part of the reason I chose to have a two stage design for this study was to ensure the pupils in this study would recognise me when I returned for the interview stage and might, therefore, be more comfortable talking to me. Some of the things pupils said to me during their interviews suggest that this strategy was successful, for example this extract from Gopal's interview:

> *Gopal: I seen you before*
> *Me: Yes, I was in school a few weeks ago*
> *Gopal: You were in the playground*
> *Me: Yes*
> *Gopal: I knew I had seen you!*

Alongside this, my previous presence in the classroom seemed to make it easier for some of the pupils to talk about their school experience because they knew I had prior knowledge that they could relate things to. This is shown in this extract from Seth's interview:

> *Seth: You know the Gruffalo thing we did?*
> *Me: The picnic when I was in school?*
> *Seth: Yes, we did one of those before but not Gruffalo and Mrs P helped*
> *Me: That sounds fun! When did you do that?*
> *Seth: Summer*

This was an unforeseen benefit of the two stage design but was recorded in a number of pupil interviews.

In terms of the impact of the observations on adult-child power relationships, I felt the way the systematic observations were introduced to the pupils was beneficial. Teachers told the class that I was not a teacher and that I was just in class to observe. This meant that pupils did not see me as an authority figure or someone from the school. Many pupils (including the pupils being observed) talked to me throughout the observations but, as a result of this introduction, they just asked about who I was and what I was doing rather than expecting me to help with work or enforce school rules. As such, my position as an adult with power within the school setting was lessened.

Stage one of the research enabled me to learn about the pupils interactions, their patterns of play and the way they were supported by their TAs. It also made me known to the pupils and resulted in shared experiences that could be used within the interview. The next section looks at pupil responses to the school tours undertaken in this study and the effect these had on adult-child dynamics.

7.3 Stage two: Tours of the school

During the second stage of the research, pupils took me on a tour of the school. The pupils were asked to show me where they played with their friends, and were given the opportunity to take 5 photographs of these places. This section discusses where the pupils took me on their tours, and what this information might indicate about the pupils' perceptions of play in school. The section concludes with a discussion of the effect of these tours on adult-child power relationships.

After being introduced to the task (see section 3.7.2), all pupils successfully lead me around their schools showing me the places and taking photographs of where they liked to play with their friends. The pupils did this without location prompts (i.e. “do you play outside?”) and were told they could take me anywhere in the school that they liked. The only restrictions were that they could only take five photographs and that these had to be of places and things rather than people in school. Table 17 shows which school areas the pupils chose to take photographs of. This accurately reflects the places we visited on our tours, as at no point did a pupil take me to a place that was then not photographed.

As the table clearly shows, the vast majority (58.5%) of photographs taken were of the main playground of the school. This was also where all pupils, except one (Kai), took me first. This shows that, for most pupils, the first place they think of as a location

where they play with their friends is the playground. In total, 79.3% of all pupil photographs are of an outside space at the school which further suggests that the pupils associate playing with their friends with these playground spaces rather than with locations inside the school. This is especially interesting in light of the observation finding that many TAs seem to see peer interaction differently in these two types of spaces; stopping interactions that happen in class and encouraging those that happen outside (see section 4.4.4.1). Kai, who did not photograph any outside spaces, found unstructured times stressful and was often chastised by school staff for his behaviour in the playground so this could explain his avoidance of this area.

Pupil	**Locations of photographs taken**				
Olivia	Main playground	Main playground	Main playground	Second playground	Second playground
Jake	Main playground	Main playground	Main playground	Hall	Hall
Charlie	Main playground	Main playground	Main playground	Classroom	Classroom
Ryan	Main playground	Main playground	Main playground	Main playground	Hall
Kai	Nursery classroom	Nursery classroom	Classroom	Classroom	Hall
Matthew	Main playground	Main playground	Main playground	Main playground	Main playground
Gopal	Main playground	Main playground	Early years playground	Race track (outside)	Classroom
Sneha	Main playground	Main playground	Early years playground	Classroom	Sensory room
Lucie	Main playground	Main playground	Resource base classroom	Resource base classroom	Resource base playground
Henry	Main playground	Main playground	Main playground	Resource base classroom	Resource base classroom
Seth	Main playground	Main playground	Main playground	Main playground	Classroom

Table 17: Locations of the photographs taken on each pupil tour

Where pupils did take photographs of inside spaces, these were often of toys or games that they were allowed to use during 'choosing time' or 'golden time' (Kai, Henry, Lucie Sneha and Seth all did this) meaning that, although they were selecting something inside the school building, these photographs were still related to unstructured times. Contrary to the other pupils, Charlie took photographs of a book he had read and a clay

animal he had made the previous day; both independent tasks. I think this reflects Charlie's behaviour in school; he plays in the playground with peers but in class he is quite socially isolated and rarely talks to other pupils. It is interesting that Charlie opted to take any photographs inside the classroom given his lack of peer interaction in class. It is possible this was because his mother opted to stay in the classroom while we were on the tour and he was very keen to get back to her as soon as he could in order to show her the photographs he had taken.

Three pupils took pictures of the school hall. All three related this to PE lessons where they played with their friends, suggesting that these lessons may provide more opportunities for peer interaction than others.

As this section shows, the ways in which the pupils interacted with the methods used can be seen to tell us more about their experience of school and their perceptions of their own peer interactions. The next section looks at how the pupils responded to the photo-elicitation task, how this affected data collection and whether this can provide more information about the pupils' interactions.

7.4 Stage two: Taking and labelling photographs of school spaces

Photo-elicitation techniques were chosen based on previous research as a way to involve the pupils in the research process and to break down the impact of adult-child power relationships (Epstein *et al.*, 2008; Einarsdóttir, 2005). This section briefly outlines the way cameras were used within this study, discusses whether this method was successful in achieving these aims and how the pupils engaged with the use of a camera within the research, and asks whether the information gathered during the tours and the follow-up labelling of photographs added to the knowledge held about the pupils within this study. The photographs taken by the pupils, along with the labels we wrote together during the interview are presented in Appendix F. Photographs that could have been used to identify pupils have not been included.

The camera was introduced to the pupils during my second visit to the school. After talking through the study and gaining informed consent from pupils (see section 3.7.2.3 and section 3.11.2), I showed them both the digital voice recorder I would be using to record them, and the camera that we would take on the tour (a Fujifilm Instax 8 instant camera). I talked through the controls of the camera and gave the pupils the opportunity to hold it and to ask any questions they had about its use. We practised taking a few photographs without film in the camera. I then asked pupils if they were

happy to use the camera to take photographs of the places they played in school or whether they would prefer me to do this. Seven pupils asked to use the camera themselves and took all of their photographs with little support from me. Two pupils asked me to take the photographs for them, but then changed their mind while we were touring the school and took some photographs themselves. The remaining two pupils asked me to have the camera because they wanted to be the subject of the photographs rather than the photographer. It is clear, therefore, that the pupils were happy to engage with photo-elicitation as a method as even those who did not want to use the camera themselves opted to be part of the process by being in the photographs. All pupils made decisions about what should be photographed during our tour of the school.

In terms of the pupils' special educational needs, photo-elicitation proved to be an effective method for including pupils who may have struggled to express themselves in a traditional interview. For example, the method proved successful for the inclusion of those pupils with limited speech. Sneha, Jake and Ryan all speak in two and three-word utterances and struggle to understand expressive language. Despite this, all three were able to take me to places where they play with their friends and then either take photographs (Ryan, Jake) or show me what they would like photographs of (Sneha). They were also able to tell me how they wanted these photos labelled, providing information about whom they like to play with and the types of games they play in these areas. This is in line with previous research which has shown photo-elicitation to be an effective method for pupils with speech, language and communication needs (Roulstone, Miskelly and Simons, 2011).

The method also proved an effective way of including pupils with low confidence (Mandleco, 2013). School staff identified Lucie as a pupil who was unhappy talking to strangers, however she talked with me for 22 minutes while we were taking photographs and mentioned multiple times how much she was enjoying the activity,

> *Lucie: This is a nice thing*
> *Me: What is?*
> *Lucie: I like taking photos with you*
> *Me: I like it too*

Two of Lucie's photographs are shown in Figure 35 below. Four other pupils also talked about how much they were enjoying using the camera while we were touring the school, and eight of the eleven pupils asked to have copies of the photographs they had taken to show to other people; a further sign that they liked the task.

Figure 35: Photographs of places she plays with friends. Labels written by researcher. Lucie, aged 6.

Exchanges were also recorded while the photographs were being taken which suggest that the task helped to break down pupil views of adult-child relationships. My concern had been that pupils would see me as an authority figure, which could lead them to choosing images they felt I wanted rather than those that they would have chosen independently (this is discussed more fully in section 3.4.1). Instead, the whole process of touring the school felt pupil-led. The pupils decided in all cases where we should go to take photographs and what specifically they would like images of. This exchange, with Henry, illustrates how the process empowered him. Two of his photographs are shown in Figure 36 below:

Me: What shall we photograph next?
Henry: I will take you some where I play
Me: Ok, can you tell me where?
Henry: No. You can follow me.
Me: Ok
Henry: I am going to choose the place
Me: Yes, it's up to you
Henry: Here it is, it's the hopscotch

Henry clearly enjoyed being able to make decisions during the tour and leading me round the school. This was true of many of the other pupils, including those with limited confidence. The photo-elicitation gave the pupils the power in the interview situation and this better enabled them to give their opinions and views.

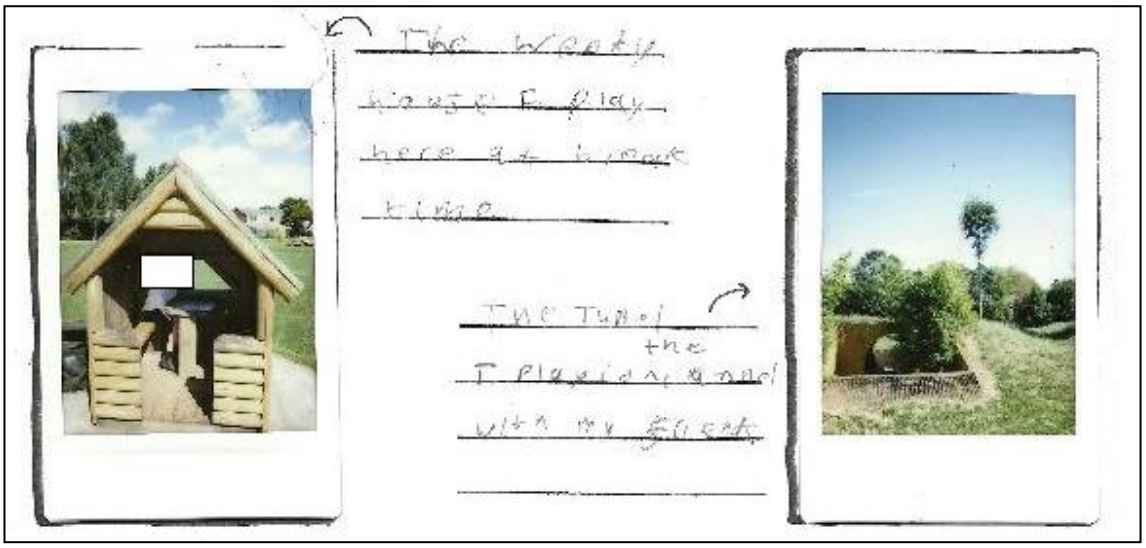


Figure 36: Photographs of places he likes to play with friends with his handwritten labels. Henry, aged 7.

As I've explained, the tour of the school and the use of the photographs were introduced as a means to empower pupils within the research process. They were not seen as key to generating data, however some pupils talked about subjects related to the research questions during the tours and this information has been included as part of the case studies. Many pupils, especially those with expressive language needs, seemed to find it easier to talk about playing with their friends in relation to places they took me (while we were there, or in relation to a photograph) rather than as an abstract concept (in the interview), as these two exchanges with Sneha illustrate:

(Tour) *Sneha: I play slide*
Me: When do you play on the slide?
Sneha: All times
Me: And who plays with you?
Sneha: Mrs M
(Interview) *Me: Can you tell me who you play with?*
Sneha: I play
Me: Who do you play with?
Sneha: I slide
Me: Can you tell me who you slide with?
Sneha: Can't remember

These two exchanges happened less than half an hour apart, and yet it is clear that Sneha found it much easier to explain herself within the context of the tour than during the interview. This was a pattern seen with other pupils across the sample and is a finding referenced in previous research work (Barker and Smith, 2012)

In some cases the types of things the pupils chose to photograph could also be seen as indicative of their school experience (the meanings behind children's photographs

are discussed in Barker and Smith, 2012). Seth, for example, took four photographs of the main school playground but three of these were of equipment that could only be played with independently. This is in line with my observations which showed that Seth spent a lot of his time in the playground on his own rather than with peers. Another example is Gopal, who took more photographs of the main school playground than of the Early Years playground although he spends a lot more time in the latter. This links to Gopal's distancing himself from the other pupils with SEN (with whom he shares the Early Years playground), a theme that runs throughout his case study (see section 4.2). Two of Gopal's photographs are shown in Figure 37 below.

Figure 37: Photographs of places he likes to play with friends with labels written by researcher. Gopal, aged 6.

The photo-elicitation task used in stage two of the research was successful in enabling the pupils to lead the data collection and ensuring they were empowered members of the research process. The following section discusses the drawing task, both in terms of how the pupils responded to the activity and what was learnt about the pupils' peer interactions and their TA support through this.

7.5 Stage two: The drawing activities

In the interview, pupils were asked to take part in a drawing task. The images they created are included throughout Chapter 4.This section discusses who the pupil chose to draw during this activity and asks what this can tell us about the pupils' school experiences. An evaluation of the success of this method in eliciting responses from the children and minimising the effect of adult-child power relationships within the interview setting is also presented.

Once the tour was completed, pupils were given an activity sheet, on one side of which were two boxes for the pupils' illustrations (see Appendix B6). The pupils were asked to draw two pictures, one in each box, in response to the following verbal prompts:

- Box One: Can you draw your favourite friend to play with in school?
- Box Two: Can you draw an adult that helps you in school?

Two pupils did not complete the drawing task, the reasons for this are discussed in section 3.12.1. Table 18 shows who the pupils chose to draw in each of the boxes.

Pupil	**What pupils drew in box one**	**What pupils drew in box two**
Olivia	Herself, a peer, her cousin	TA, her mother
Jake	No pictures	
Charlie	Himself, a peer, his brother	Both his allocated TAs
Ryan	No pictures	
Kai	Three peers, play equipment	TA
Matthew	TA, two peers	TA
Gopal	Two peers	TA
Sneha	Three peers, her Year Three teacher	TA, her house, sausages
Lucie	A peer	A peer
Henry	Himself, four peers	Resource base teachers and TAs (five)
Seth	Himself, four peers	TA

Table 18: Details of what individual pupils drew in the drawing activity

All nine pupils who took part in this activity drew a peer in box one which shows that pupils understood the question being asked of them here. Many also drew other people alongside these peers and the meaning behind these choices is discussed below.

Eight of the nine pupils chose to draw their TAs in box two, all except Lucie who drew a peer. Lucie explained that she wanted to draw her friend instead of an adult as this was the person who she felt helped her most in school (see Chapter 4 for discussion of

Lucie's peer interactions and TA support). These findings suggest that the pupils also understood this activity.

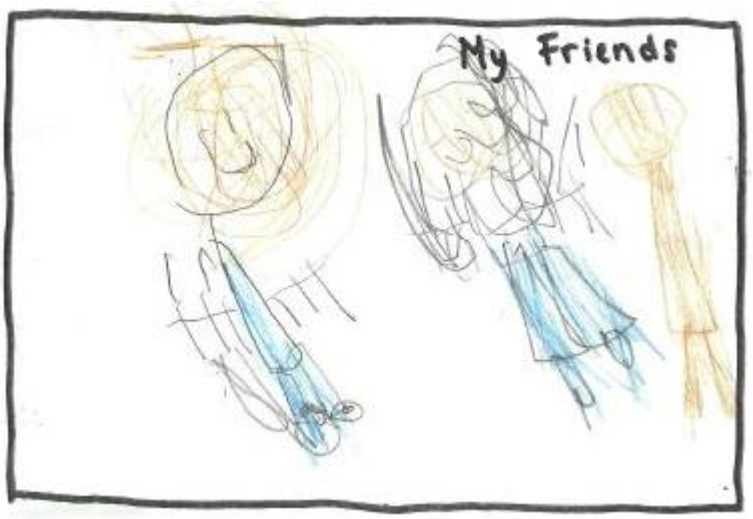


Figure 38: Drawing of herself, a friend and her cousin. Cousin Wayne is the figure on the far right of the image. Olivia, aged 6.

Some pupils drew people who did not fit with the question asked, and I think this can be explained (in some cases) by the people present during the interview (details about which adults were present during the interviews are presented in section 3.7.2.4). Olivia drew her mother in box two (see Figure 38 above), Charlie drew his brother and Sneha drew the woman who will be her Year Three teacher in box one. All of these people were in the room while the pupils were drawing, interacting with the pupil and I think this could be the reason for their inclusion. This exchange, between Charlie and I, seems to confirm this:

> *Charlie: I will draw Luke (brother)*
> *Me: Ok. Do you play with him in school?*
> *Charlie: No. I like drawing him. It is easy to copy his face.*
> *Me: Do you draw him often?*
> *Charlie: Yes, because he is there at home*

The only person drawn who did not fit the question asked and was not present for the interviews was Olivia's cousin (box one). He is four years old and does not attend school, so would not be an appropriate answer to the question asked. I asked Olivia why she had drawn him, and she said *"I can't play him anymore (sic)"*. After the interview, her mother explained that Olivia is not allowed to play with her cousin because he plays out in the street and she does not feel this is safe for Olivia as a result of her developmental delay. She said she thought Olivia had mentioned him because she misses seeing him, and this was something they had talked about on the way into school.

Sneha drew her house and some sausages in box two (see Figure 39, sausages circled in red). I asked her about this and she could not offer an explanation. Her TA, Mrs M, offered some explanation. She had used drawing her house as a task to support Sneha's fine motor skills the previous day and had been praised for working well. Mrs M felt that Sneha may have been looking for more praise by drawing it again. As for the sausages, school staff confirmed Sneha draws these everywhere (including in her written work) although no one, including Sneha, could tell me why she does this.

Figure 39: Drawing of TA Mrs M, her house and some sausages (circled in red). Sneha, aged 7.

The drawing task provided another opportunity for the pupils to be empowered within the research process (Einarsdóttir, Dockett and Perry, 2009). Although they were given prompts for the activity, the pupils were still free to choose whom and what they wanted to draw, and to make decisions about whether to label their images. This extract from her case study shows how Lucie exercised this freedom within her interview:

> *Me: So in this box I would like you to draw an adult who helps you in school.*
> *Lucie: I will draw a girl*
> *Me: Ok, who are you going to draw?*
> *Lucie: It's a children but she helped me all the time.*
>
> *Source: Lucie Case Study, line numbers108 - 111*

Although she was asked to draw an adult, Lucie chose to draw a peer who she felt helped her in school (see section 4.4.2.2 for further discussion of this). This shows both that Lucie felt able to make decisions about who she wanted to draw and that, for her, peers are a form of support in school. As described above, a number of other pupils

opted to draw items and people that were not clearly linked to the prompts and this could be seen as evidence of the freedom they felt within the activity to make decisions about what to draw.

While the pupils were drawing, many of them became more animated and keen to talk than they had been before. The drawing task meant the pupils did not have to maintain eye contact and had time to think about their answers, which I felt was particularly supportive of pupils with low confidence (Holliday, Harrison and McLeod, 2009; Einarsdóttir, 2007).

As in the photography task, a number of pupils expressed that they were enjoying the activity, for example this extract from Kai's interview:

> *Kai: Can we do this again?*
> *Me: Can we do what?*
> *Kai: More pictures?*
> *Me: We can't draw any more pictures because it's home time*
> *Kai: Oh! I like this!*
> *Me: I'm sorry. Maybe Mummy will let you do some more drawing at home*

This suggests the pupils were comfortable in my company and with the activity. I felt this environment limited the impact of adult-child power relationships and ensured that the pupils felt able to express their personal views and opinions in relation to their academic support and peer interactions.

The drawing activity empowered the pupils within the study and gave them the opportunity to include information that may not otherwise have been included but was deemed important by them. The pupils enjoyed the task and spoke freely throughout. The next section evaluates the effectiveness of using semi-structured interviews within this study.

7.6 Stage two: semi-structured interviews

The previous sections give a lot of detail about the interviews themselves and the responses given by pupils. This section provides a brief evaluation of the effectiveness of semi-structured interviews within this study both in terms of pupil responses to the format and its effect on adult-child power relationships.

The interview schedule used with the pupils in this study is included in Appendix B8. I used a set of questions as prompts but was flexible to topics raised by the pupils. The semi-structured approach ensured that all research questions were covered within the interviews while also supporting pupils to voice their views and opinions freely. In line with my pupil voice focus, I tried not to restrict topics within the interview where possible or to make judgements about whether conversation was relevant to the subject of this work. The example from Kai discussed in section 7.3 of this chapter is a strong example of the benefit of this flexibility. That he wanted to talk about, and visit, the early years area in his school and was less happy to take me to his current playground is indicative of his feeling that his friendships were stronger when he started school. In a more structured interview environment, this information might not have been revealed.

The semi-structured nature of the interviews also helped to limit the effect of adult-child power relationships within the research setting. I was able to talk to the pupils about the subjects they raised, even where these were not strictly relevant to the research topic, and this resulted in a two-way conversational atmosphere in many cases, shown clearly in this extract from Lucie's interview:

> *Me: What sort of games do you like to play with Spike?*
> *Lucie: We play all the time. What games did you like to play at school?*
> *Me: Um.. we used to play chase a lot and skipping*
> *Lucie: I don't like skipping. But me and Spike like playing chasing all the time*

As the pupils seemed comfortable talking to me, this could mean they felt more able to say the things they were thinking than they would have been if I was viewed as a member of staff. This is particularly important given that I was focused on capturing pupil voice.

7.7 The impact of adult presence in pupil interviews

As explained in section 3.7.2.3, in order to support the target pupils within the research setting I opted to have a known adult present during the second stage of data collection. The details of which adults were present is in 3.7.2.4, and the ethical implications of this decision are discussed in section 3.11.10. This section looks at examples from the case studies where adult presence impacted upon pupil responses, and unpicks the effect of this on data collected.

Although adults were told that pupils were the focus of the research, a number of examples were seen in the interviews of adults correcting pupils or speaking for them. The clearest example of this is shown in the following extract from Charlie's case study:

Me:	*Could you draw a picture in this box of your favourite friend to play with in school?*
Charlie:	*I play with Mrs E in class*
Mum:	*No, pick a child*
Me:	*You can draw whoever you would like Charlie*
Charlie:	*I'll draw Molly. I play with her every day*
Mum:	*That's better*

Source: Charlie Case Study, line numbers 158 - 164

In this exchange, Charlie's mum changed the image that Charlie drew within the interview. It is clear here that he first planned to draw his TA, Mrs E, but that in response to her intervention he drew a peer. Later in the interview Charlie's mum also offered suggestions of friends that Charlie had in school, but on this occasion he corrected her:

Mum: What about Niall?
Charlie: I actually don't play with him anymore. I don't want to
[pause]
Charlie: No one plays with him.

Source: Charlie Case Study, line numbers 176 - 179

Charlie's mum was the only adult in any of the interviews who directly told a pupil to change something or offered suggestions as to what they should say or do, but there are also examples of adult presence potentially affecting pupil responses.

I recorded in Seth's case study that I felt that his responses to interview questions may have been affected by the presence of his mother during the second stage of the research. During the tour of the school, with his mother at a distance, Seth spoke most often about playing alone, which was in line with observations showing he spent a lot of time in school not interacting with anyone. However in his interview, with his mother sat next to him, Seth drew a picture of himself alongside four friends and named them all. School staff confirmed that the peers he named were not children that he interacted with regularly. I recorded feeling that he was trying to name multiple peers because he felt this would please his mother. This is reflected in the phrases he used to talk about these peers (e.g. "I could play with David" ; *Seth case study, line 229*) which suggest these were children he c*ould* play with rather than those he *did* play with.

Finally, there is some evidence in pupil responses to the drawing task that the presence of these known adults impacted upon the images drawn. Three of the target pupils drew someone who was present in the room at the time of the activity. Olivia drew her mother, Sneha drew her Year 3 teacher and Charlie drew his younger brother (see section 7.5 above). It seems clear that these pupils drew these people due to their presence in the room as drawing them did not fit with the question asked.

There is also evidence that the presence of these known adults was also a positive support for many of the target pupils. Jake, for example, was much more vocal in stage 2 of data collection when his mother was present than he had been during any stage of observations. Kai also responded well to his mother's presence. Earlier in the day that I came to interview him, Kai had been involved in an altercation with a peer and was refusing leave the playground. When his mother arrived, he was much more positive and agreed to take part in the data collection with me. Although there are clear examples of adult effects on pupil responses, I feel that this positive effect in support of the pupils outweighed these.

Despite all of the discussion presented here, the overriding reason for the inclusion of adults during data collection was an ethical one. As discussed in section 3.11.10, in some cases the target pupils seemed to feel more comfortable talking to the known adults about concerns about taking part than to me. Gatekeepers also expressed feeling more confident about students taking part in the study with a known adult present.

7.8 Adult response to observations

Observing pupils' interactions in school inevitably involved some observation of the school staff they came into contact with each day. As such, it is necessary to consider how my presence in the classroom could have affected the behaviour of these adults and to acknowledge cases where this may have impacted upon results.

As the adults observed as part of this study knew that they were being observed, it is possible that their behaviour could have been affected. The observer effect (sometimes known as Hawthorne effect) suggests that a person being observed may change their behaviour as a result (McCarney *et al.*, 2007). Although the adults in this study knew that I was in class primarily to observe the sample pupils, they were aware that interactions they had with the pupil would be observed. This may have led the adults to change their behaviour in line with what they felt my expectations would be of them. In order to assess if and how TA behaviour had changed, I spoke to class teachers at the

end of each research visit whether the week I had observed had been typical of the pupil's school experience. All of the teachers reported feeling that the pupils' school experience and TA support were in line with a normal week.

In one school the teacher's assertion that I had observed a typical week contradicted reports from other school staff and from the pupil's statement. Seth is recorded as having 25 hours of allocated support from TA Mrs P both in class and during unscheduled times. She is scheduled to be in all of his lessons (I was shown her timetable of support by office staff) but has some flexibility to come out of class to complete administrative tasks if needed. In the week I observed, Seth spent just 14.8% of his time in school with a TA present and I noted that this was often because Mrs P was not even in the classroom. I noted in my research journal that Mrs P seemed very nervous on the occasions where I spoke to her and, as such, it might have been possible that she was avoiding coming into class while I was observing. It is possible, therefore, that the low levels of TA proximity and adult interactions recorded for Seth were not typical of his school experience.

The following chapter draws together conclusions from the study, assessing the contribution of the research and making recommendations for future work.

8. Conclusions

8.1 Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter concludes the study by making some final statements about the work. First, a discussion of the contribution of this study to the current body of literature is presented. Moving on from this, the limitations of the research design are listed alongside opportunities for future research based on this work. Finally the chapter ends with closing comments summing up the study results and conclusions.

8.2 Assessing my contribution to the body of knowledge

This study adds to the body of knowledge by providing new insights about how the TA role is understood, both by pupils with SEN and the TAs themselves. Previous research has focused on pupil views of their TA support rather than unpicking how the TA role is understood by those being supported. Building on this, this research also adds to current research by comparing the views of pupils to the views of TAs in relation to the TA support role; a comparison which showed very different viewpoints from the two groups.

The study also provides new insights about the relationship between TA support and the peer interactions of pupils with SEN. The influence of TA support upon pupil-peer interactions remains an under-researched area, but this study contributes to the literature by presenting examples of TA influence on peer interactions and assessing the effects of these. Furthermore, as much of the previous work on this subject has focused on secondary school children, this study fills a gap within the literature by focusing on the experiences of primary school pupils with SEN.

The contribution of this study is also in the identification and design of strategies that enable young children, and in particular those with speech, language and communication needs, to express their views and opinions about the ways they are supported in school. Children have the right to give their views about their experiences and adults have a duty to listen (Sinclair Taylor, 2000). Previous research has shown that young children, including those in the early years, are able to communicate complex ideas and information about their experiences when appropriately supported (Moss and Clark, 2011; Einarsdóttir, 2005). This study builds upon that research by focusing the conversations with children around their experience of TA support. The data collection methods within this study could be used within school settings to provide pupils with SEN the opportunity to talk about the ways in which their support

works for them and make suggestions about improvements.

In terms of dissemination, feedback following data collection was sent to the pupils, parents and school staff involved in the study. Summary documents of broad findings from the project and feedback about the response of pupils to the research methods were prepared and emailed to school contacts who then sent these on to parents and pupils (see Appendices G1, G2 and G3). These did not include specific figures related to individual pupils or information regarding individual TAs for reasons of confidentiality (British Educational Research Association, 2011). This feedback process was important as it supported the rights of the pupils in this study to be involved in the sharing of the outcomes of the work (British Sociological Association, 2002). I received no response regarding this feedback from schools or parents.

8.3 Limitations of the research design

The limitations of the research design need to be recognised and their impact assessed. First, as previously discussed, the small sample has obvious implications for the generalisability of results to the rest of the population. Similarly, the focus only on children under the age of eight further narrows opportunities for links to be made to other primary school children. As the aim of this study was not to generalise findings to the wider population or to determine a truth that could be tested, but rather to focus on capturing the individual experiences of the pupils, this is not a major limitation. Alongside this, although the sample is narrow, the benefits outweigh this limitation as the pupil voice of children in Key Stage 1 is rarely included in research (Sharples, Blatchford and Webster, 2015).

In terms of the study sample, the fact that I included multiple pupils from single schools could also have affected the results. Three pupils (almost a quarter of my sample) came from one primary school which could mean that factors at that particular school could be coming through as a pattern of support for the sample as a whole. Alongside this, my sampling technique involved schools self-selecting to be part of the research. Although I approached them initially, schools then made the decision about whether they would like to be involved and which pupils to put forward for the study. This method could have affected results because the schools that chose to be part of the study were likely to be confident about their practices and interested in research activities.

Further limitations can be found with regard to the methods chosen for data collection.

Structured observations provide a rich quantitative data source, however the use of an observation schedule by its nature limits what can be recorded about what is observed to what is on the schedule sheet. In this study, supplemental information was also recorded (research diaries and notes made during observations) and this was used alongside the observation data to ensure a fuller picture of the pupils' peer interactions was provided.

Drawing tasks were used to facilitate conversation with the pupils; however there are some disadvantages to the use of this method. Previous research has shown that some children refuse to take part in these sorts of activities, either because they do not like drawing or they feel they cannot draw (Richards, 2003). Often this is the case with older children who are concerned about the realism in the images they create. A further issue is that some children are uncomfortable with drawing and talking, preferring to focus on one or the other (Einarsdóttir, Dockett and Perry, 2009). In this study, these factors seemed to have little effect on the data collected. Only one child refused to take part in the drawing task and this was to do with school factors (he did not want to miss a school assembly) rather than an issue with the task at hand. Some of the pupils did seem to struggle with talking and drawing at the same time but this just resulted in longer pauses between responses in the interviews. Overwhelmingly, the participants in the study (including during the pilot) were very positive about the methods chosen, in particular the drawing and photography tasks.

The use of photo-elicitation techniques also has some disadvantages. The camera itself can be difficult for children to master, especially if there is limited time in which they can learn how to use it as there was in this case (Mandleco, 2013). In this study, the camera used (a Fujifilm Instax Mini 8 instant camera) has automatic flash and focus, and a single button to take photographs. This camera was chosen due to its simplicity and seemed to work well for the pupils with none expressing any difficulty using it. Previous researchers have also reported that it can be hard for participants (especially children) to photograph abstract ideas and topics (Cook and Hess, 2003). My pupils were asked to take images of how and where they play, but could not take photographs of other pupils. Perhaps as a result, many of the pupils wanted to be in the photographs themselves which caused some issues with regard to the use of these images publicly and consent (see section 3.11.5). None of the pupils expressed any concerns about what they should photograph, and all produced a set of images relevant to the question asked, suggesting the concept of 'friendships and play' was not too abstract to cause issue in this case.

It is possible that the way in which my photography tasks were set up may also have affected participant responses. Pupils were only allowed to take five photographs over a short period of time (due to limited resources and time constraints put in place by school staff). This likely means that some pupils may not have had the chance to take all of the images they would have liked to (an issue expressed by participants in previous work: Mandleco, 2013). As the photographs taken were primarily used as a talking point in the interviews and as a focus of the tour, rather than as the primary data to be analysed, this issue has minimal impact on this study but further research could give children disposable cameras over a longer period of time to ensure they had more opportunities to capture images of how they play. My presence while photographs were being taken may also have affected what the pupils chose to photograph (Einarsdóttir, 2007) as they may have chosen images that they felt I would want taken. The use of disposable cameras would also enable children to take photographs in their own time and independent of the researcher.

All interviews took place in a school setting and during school time which may also have affected pupils' responses. Due to the educational context, it is possible that the pupils may have seen the tasks set by me as academic and, therefore, open to correction or assessment (Einarsdóttir, Dockett and Perry, 2009). Further, in some cases, where parents were not available for the interview, a member of school staff sat in on the interview as a support for the pupils and this could also have affected responses (see section 3.7.2.4 for details of adults present in interviews). The staff present were all previously known to the pupil from the classroom environment and it is possible that their presence may also have made the pupil more likely to see the task as an academic one. This educational view of the task could affect responses as children are trying to find the 'right' answer rather than giving their own views (Fisher, 1993). I tried to limit any potential effects of this by explaining to the pupils that I was interested in learning from them about their experiences, placing them in the expert role (Einarsdóttir, 2007). I also made it clear that the work they were doing was for me (not their teacher or the adult present) to further separate it from being seen as schoolwork. Despite this it is possible that the school context affected responses and future research could focus on talking with children in their own environments (home, playgroups).

Despite the limitations listed here, I am confident that the first stage of the research captured a rigorous picture of the interactions of the pupils included in this study and that the interview stage enabled the child participants to talk openly about their own experiences and views in line with the ‘child voice’ focus of this work. Further

recommendations for future research are presented in the next section.

8.4 Recommendations for future research

This study has provided new in-depth understandings about the school experiences of pupils with SEN in relation to both their peer interactions and the influence of TA support upon these. Investigating the ways in which TA practice, behaviours and characteristics can affect opportunities for peer interaction on a wider scale is an important area of further investigation arising from this work. A larger sample would enable results to be generalised to the wider population. It would be of particular interest to see whether the impact of TA influence on peer interactions changes depending on the age of the pupil being supported. The longer term aim of this research would be to inform the training, management and deployment of TAs within mainstream schools, ensuring that all adults working with a pupil with SEN are aware of the ways in which they may be affecting opportunities for peer interaction and have strategies in place to limit potential negative effects.

8.5 Closing comments

The inclusion of pupils with SEN within mainstream schooling is routinely being supported by the use of TAs within the classroom. As a consequence, the number of TAs being employed by schools has risen in recent years with TAs now accounting for close to a quarter of the school workforce in England. This study set out to better understand the influence of TA support on the peer interactions of pupils with SEN in mainstream settings. Working from an interpretivist standpoint, this study used a two stage mixed method design to capture the voices of pupils with SEN with regard to their experiences of TA support and their views of any links between this and peer interactions. Observation results and interview transcripts were brought together into individual case studies which provide a picture of the multi-faceted and complex nature of the school experience of pupils with SEN. Analysis of themes arising from these case studies raised questions as to the role of TAs within school, the support of social skills for pupils with SEN, the use of statements of SEN to guide academic support, and the effects of school spaces on pupil-peer interaction levels. Implications and recommendations have been outlined in relation to these.

This thesis has provided new insights in relation to the influence of TAs upon the peer interactions of pupils with SEN. The results suggest that many of the pupils with SEN

had limited opportunities to interact with peers, a finding that needs further investigation given what is known about the importance of classroom talk for learning. Alongside this questions have been raised about the variability of TA support and the effect of this on the school experience of pupils with SEN. This study has contributed to the research by capturing the voices of primary school pupils with SEN regarding their TA support. A key focus of this study was ensuring methods were chosen which supported pupils to give their views and opinions within the research setting. This study has built on previous work which shows that pupils with SEN under the age of eight are capable of talking clearly and coherently about their experiences of academic support and their interactions and friendships with peers. As such a key recommendation of this study is for pupils with SEN to be included in discussions about their support, even at this young age. Research with a larger sample of pupils is needed to clarify whether the results found in this study can be generalised to the wider population.

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