

The participation of pupils with autism in decision-making about their school experiences: A case study of one school

Research questions

What school practices facilitate pupils with autism to participate in decision-making about their school experiences?

How are the views of pupils with autism used to inform decisions about their school experiences?

When do pupils with autism feel their voices have been heard?

AIMS

The research aims to carry out a **qualitative, single-case study** of one school in order to:

- provide a **detailed, exploratory analysis** of school practices that enable pupils with autism to participate in decisions about their school experiences
- generate new knowledge about pupil participation that will lead to **changes to school practice** and **improved outcomes** for pupils with autism

BACKGROUND

Children with autism are vulnerable to exclusion from decision-making due to difficulties with communication, learning and social interaction (Brewster and Coleyshaw, 2011)

Relevance

Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice states that schools now have a legal commitment to ensure that children and young people with SEND participate in decision-making about their lives (Dfe, 2014)

There is research on the importance of increasing pupil participation (e.g. Franklin and Sloper, 2009) but little research documenting how schools might do this

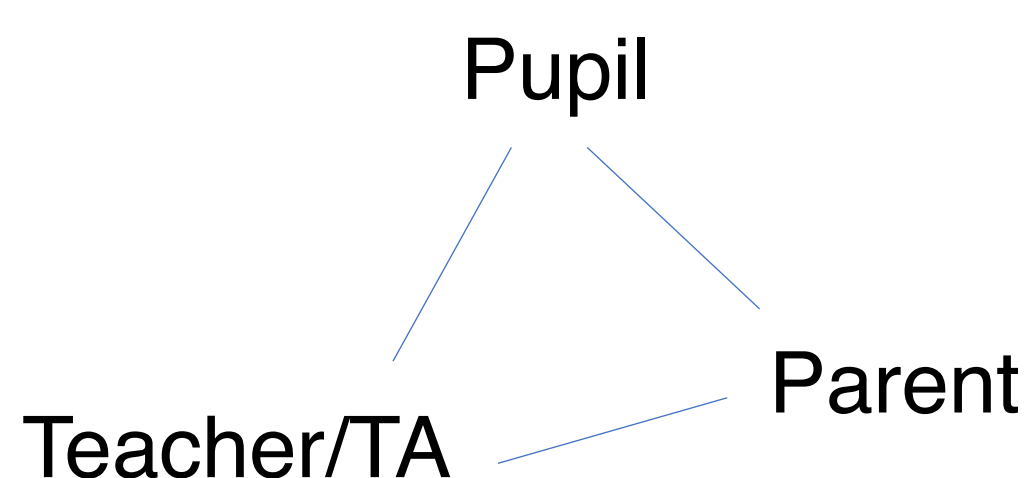
SAMPLE

Case school

A small, independent school for children who have not had a successful placement at a mainstream school or pupil referral unit

Participants

- 6 triads of participants:



- 11-16 year olds (Years 7 to 11) with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- Inclusion criteria:* must have been attending the case school for at least one academic year, must have a diagnosis of ASD

PROCEDURE

Conduct **thematic analysis** of:

- 2-5 observations** of pupils in decision-making contexts e.g. classroom and behaviour support plan meeting
- Semi-structured interviews** with parents and school staff
- School documents** (e.g. website and policies)
- Photo trail:**

- Pupils take photos of people, places or objects in the school which represent them feeling listened to
- Explain their choices using printed photos as prompts for discussion



Project status The research project is awaiting approval from the Research Governance Office. Data collection to start July 2017.

Strengths

- ✓ In-depth understanding of pupil participation in context
- ✓ Multiple perspectives
- ✓ Multiple sources of data
- ✓ Participatory approaches



Researchers

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Brewster, S., & Coleyshaw, L. (2011). Participation or exclusion? Perspectives of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders on their participation in leisure activities. *Brit. J. of Learning Disabilities*, 39(4), 284–291. Department for Education and Department of Health. (2014). Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years, (June). Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25>. Franklin, A., & Sloper, P. (2009). Supporting the participation of disabled children and young people in decision-making. *Children and Society*, 23(1), 3–15.

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