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# University of Southampton

Faculty of Environmental and Life Sciences

School of Psychology

**A systematic and empirical investigation into the factors that influence the mainstream school belonging of children with special educational needs and their peers.**

by

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Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Educational Psychology

[August 2022]



# University of Southampton

## Abstract

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The first chapter introduces the research topic and the research paradigm and highlights the learning that took place throughout the thesis process. The second chapter summarises the results of a systematic literature review examining variables impacting the school belonging (SB) of children and young people (CYP) with special educational needs (SEN). SB is positively associated with multiple positive academic, psychological, and behavioural outcomes. However, these benefits are limited for CYP with SEN as they typically have lower SB than their typically developing peers. A textual narrative synthesis was conducted to explore the factors influencing SB for CYP with SEN attending mainstream schools. Findings from 11 studies were extracted and synthesised into four themes consisting of nine variables: individual characteristics (SEN status, age and gender); peers (friendships and peer interactions); school staff (student-teacher relationships and teacher characteristics, attitudes and strategies), and school characteristics (ethos, size and safety). The results highlight the importance of positive relationships with peers and school staff and how these need to be reciprocal rather than simply positive or the absence of negative interactions. The type of SEN was identified as a variable impacting how CYP with SEN are accepted and treated by others, with those with less visible needs having lower SB. Understanding the needs of each CYP and the importance of accepting and treating them as an individual were pertinent themes; strategies of individual teachers and whole-school approaches and ethos were identified as potential methods of achieving this and are discussed regarding implications for practice.

The third chapter outlines an empirical study which explored the impact of teaching assistant (TA) support and relationships with classroom adults on the SB of children with SEN. Children with SEN often spend a significant proportion of their school day supported by TAs, which often occurs away from the classroom, meaning they can spend large amounts of time away from their class teacher (CT) and peers. This study used a mixed-methods design to explore whether a strong relationship with a TA can protect a child against the absence of one with their CT, a factor shown to be positively associated with SB, with regards to SB and whether the amount of TA support they receive is an influencing factor. Forty-nine primary-aged children self-reported their sense of SB and the quality of their relationships with their classroom adults, and their CTs reported the amount of TA support they receive per week. Children with SEN were found to experience lower SB, attend fewer extracurricular clubs, have more TA support and have weaker overall relationships with their CT than their non-SEN peers. SB was influenced by the warmth and conflict of each relationship but not by the amount of TA support received. No evidence was found to suggest that a strong relationship with their TA can compensate for a weak CT relationship. Children reflected that their relationships with classroom adults are influenced by the logistics of their support, such as location, amount and availability; the characteristics of the adult, including personality traits and job roles; and the quality and length of the relationship, impacting how adults make them feel. Implications for future research and practice are discussed.



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## Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name: Charlotte Carey Finnegan

Title of thesis: What Impacts the School Belonging of Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Settings?

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission.

Signature: Charlotte Finnegan Date: 30.08.2022





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## Definitions and Abbreviations

ADHD.....	Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
ASD.....	Autism spectrum disorder
CT .....	Class teacher
CYP .....	Children and young people
EHCP.....	Education Health and Care Plan
MLD.....	Moderate learning difficulties
PRISMA.....	Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses
PSSMS .....	Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale
SB .....	School belonging
SEN .....	Special educational needs
SEMH.....	Social, emotional and mental health
SLR.....	Systematic literature review
TA .....	Teaching assistant*
TD .....	Typically developing
TEP .....	Trainee Educational Psychologist

\*In this review, TA refers to teaching assistant and any equivalent paraprofessional with a different job title such as learning support assistant or teacher aide.



# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Area of Interest

Having been a teaching assistant (TA) previously, I had firsthand experience of the significant role TAs play in the learning, social and emotional aspects of a child's education. Given the value that I felt my fellow TA colleagues and I added to children's development, I was shocked to read of the findings from the renowned Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project (Blatchford et al., 2009) that reported the more TA support a child receives, the worse they perform academically. After reading the study findings and the follow-up research in detail, I understood why this was the case, given that many TAs are not given adequate time to prepare their interventions and are often used as a replacement to the class teacher (CT) for many children with SEN. I was fortunate that the school where I worked were skilled in the deployment of their TAs, providing us with frequent training, preparation time and regular opportunities to talk to the CT. However, I was convinced that even TAs who do not receive such opportunities would still have a positive impact on the development of the children in their school, although not necessarily their academic progress. Blatchford et al. (2009) acknowledged that the focus of the DISS was on the academic progress of children and that the social and emotional impact of TA support remained under-researched.

After reading the thesis of a previous trainee educational psychologist (TEP) (Frisby, 2018; Pinkard, 2021), which explored the views and experiences of TA support from children with SEN taught in mainstream schools, I was intrigued by her findings that indicated that TAs helped foster school belonging (SB) of the participants. Given that SB had been identified from the broader views of TA support and therefore was not a primary focus of Frisby's (2018) work, she reflected that "[researchers] might [like to] conduct more investigations around the emotional and social impacts, with links between TA support and sense of belonging in school being a potential interesting focal point" (p.67). As SB has been associated with multiple positive outcomes (Babakhani, 2014; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Gillen-O'Neel & Fuligni, 2013; Korpershoek et al., 2019; O'Rourke & Cooper, 2010; Uslu & Gizir, 2017), and the social-emotional impact of TA support is an area that requires more attention, I was inspired to explore whether TAs, like their CT colleagues (Allen et al., 2018; Crouch et al., 2014; Slaten et al., 2016; Uslu & Gizir, 2017), play an important role in fostering this variable that is crucial to children's development in multiple areas.

## 1.2 My Thesis

Although the role of TAs in fostering SB in children with SEN was a particular area of interest for me, I also wanted to explore the other contributory factors. The majority of research on SB focused on children without SEN, meaning the results could not be generalised to those with SEN, who often face different and additional barriers in feeling they belong in school to those of their peers. Therefore, in my systematic literature review (SLR), I chose to explore the contributory factors of SB in children with SEN. With previous research (Pinkard, 2021) having started to recognise that TAs offer more than just learning support, I was keen to explore this further and examine whether there was a relationship between the amount of support received and SB. The findings from both my SLR and empirical papers will contribute to the relatively small field of research into SB for children with SEN attending mainstream settings and will have implications for education professionals by offering insight into how to best foster SB in children with SEN.

## 1.3 Research Paradigm

My realist ontological position that there is a reality free from human perceptions and concepts and constructionist epistemology, that meaning is constructed from an individual's engagement with the world, contributed to the critical realist philosophical position taken in this research (Bhaskar, 2013; Crotty, 1998; Danermark et al., 2001; Fryer, 2020; Scotland, 2012). Research that adopts critical realism seeks causal mechanisms that act as tendencies between relationships rather than absolute truths and acknowledges that social structures and agency influence such relationships (Fryer, 2020). Critical realists recognise that knowledge is fallible and can be subject to biases and error in generating knowledge and measuring constructs, meaning that the knowledge we have at any one time is conjecture (Popper, 1959). Given the potential for biases and contextual variation, critical realists recognise the value of research replicability and data triangulation (Mcevoy & Richards, 2006).

It was important to me to ensure that the children's voices remained at the heart of my research, especially given that the voices of those with SEN are particularly under-represented in this area (Bland & Sleightholme, 2012; Frisby, 2018; Giangreco, 2021; Tews & Lupart, 2008) and that the SEND code of practice (DfE & DfH, 2014) highlights the need for children to be involved in decision-making. However, given that previous research (Cullinane, 2020; Dimitrellou & Hurry, 2019; Porter & Ingram, 2021) and personal observations from having worked in schools suggest that children with SEN tend to have lower SB than their non-SEN peers, I was keen to explore the causal mechanisms for this tendency, which I felt would be best achieved using a quantitative

measure to increase the likelihood of validity and consistency in measurement. In addition, I felt it was important to use a quantitative measure to effectively further Frisby's (2018) findings, who had identified the need for quantitative research on the role TAs play in social and emotional outcomes. Therefore, when adopting a critical realist position, I used a mixed-methods approach to identify the causal mechanisms between children's support and relationships with their classroom adults and their sense of SB. Using interviews and quantitative data, which were triangulated and given equal weight in the analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), I acknowledged that the experiences of each child would be unique to them but sought similarities that might contribute to a greater understanding of the relationships between the variables.

## **1.4 Ethical Challenges**

The University of Southampton Ethics Committee granted ethical approval for my research, for which I provided all documentation that I would be using to recruit participants, inform them of the process and collect my data (see appendices). The main ethical challenge that I predicted was obtaining participants' assent, particularly from those with SEN who might not be fully aware of what they are agreeing to. To overcome this challenge, I provided information about the research directly to the child in the questionnaire, which informed them of what a study is, why my study was being conducted, and that they need only answer the questions if they were happy to do so. In addition, I asked the parents of the children being interviewed to read through the child information sheet with them before agreeing for them to be interviewed. Before commencing each interview, I also talked through the information sheet and reminded the children that they could change their minds about being interviewed at any time, which they could communicate either verbally or by holding up the stop sign. I also allowed each child to choose whether they would like a familiar adult with them before starting the interviews. Although the precautions I took were enough for me to be comfortable that the children participating in my study, especially those being interviewed, gave informed assent to their involvement, I also trusted the professional judgement of the school contact, class teacher and parents who played active roles within the research, that the children's best interests were safeguarded.

I did not believe that any distress would be caused to children as a result of participating in my study. However, I was aware that children with SEN do not always have positive relationships with their classroom adults (Demirkaya & Bakkaloglu, 2015), meaning some children may feel uncomfortable talking about these relationships, especially to a person they have not met before. Therefore, I assigned time before the interview for rapport building and offered to

play a game at the end of the interview as a mood repair in case negative emotions were experienced.

## 1.5 Reflective Learning

Given the associated challenges of conducting doctoral-level research and the additional ones resulting from doing so during a global pandemic, my resilience has been tested on multiple occasions. As I am sure is the case for most individuals studying at a doctorate level, I have learned that hard work, organisation, and commitment are required to achieve goals and that the same attributes can usually help overcome barriers. Therefore, I found the elements of this study that were out of my control the hardest, as no matter how much time, effort, or work I put into the process, I was completely reliant on others for some aspects. For example, due to the Covid restrictions and other demands on teachers, only one school was initially willing to participate. This was an extremely stressful period, and it resulted in the re-design of my study to reduce the required contribution of teachers. After re-designing the study, I still found recruitment extremely challenging and, despite my best efforts and the help of my supervisors and colleagues, had a final sample that was significantly smaller than hoped for, meaning that I could not do my planned analysis. This experience was frustrating and disappointing and caused me to worry about whether the data that I had collected would be enough to produce useful results and conclusions that could further the field and demonstrate the work that I had put into my study for the course requirements. The experience of feeling out of control has made me reflect on the advice I give to children and young people and their supporting adults, in that they should use their time and effort to focus on the factors which are within their control rather than those which are not. Although my own advice was hard to follow, I found that by using the support and resources available to me, such as supervision, and focusing on the actions that I could take, such as concentrating on the systematic literature review whilst I was in limbo with my empirical study enabled me not only to continue to make progress but prompted me to recognise my resilience and the support I had from my supervisors, friends and family, for which I am grateful.

Another key learning point for me throughout the process was during the qualitative analysis. During and straight after the interviews, I worried that they would not be helpful for various reasons. However, when following Braun and Clarke's (2006) guide to thematic analysis closely, I was surprised to find the content valuable and that it had a multitude of important insights that I had not noticed during the interviews. I found myself comparing this to my work as a TEP in that often, immediately after an assessment, I worry that I have not gained enough information about the child. However, after giving myself time and space to reflect, I typically find that I have gained even more about the child than planned. Therefore, this experience has shown



me that I should have confidence that with sufficient planning and preparation, which in this case was the careful creation of the interview schedule and choice of resources, I will be able to achieve what I set out to do. It has also emphasised the importance of building reflection time into the process, which I found challenging. Due to my personal situation of expecting to have major surgery, I wanted to ensure that I built in time for my pace of work to reduce; however, this meant that initially, I did not factor in other times when I would need to take a break, for example when my placement workload was heavy, or I had Covid, which only added to my stress. Although meeting the deadlines that I set myself was an accomplishment, the fact that I learned throughout the process to factor in time for my wellbeing is, in my view, more of an achievement. It is also a lesson that I can take with me into my work as an EP, in which there will always be more work to do. Given the nature of EP work, protecting my wellbeing is a priority, and although I was not always good at this throughout the whole thesis process, I feel I have learned how to be flexible when barriers present themselves, how to communicate what I need with those supporting me and how to acknowledge and celebrate the small successes.



## Chapter 2 What Impacts the School Belonging of Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Settings?

### 2.1 Introduction

School belonging is defined as “the extent to which they [students] feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others ... in the school social environment” (Goodenow & Grady, 1993, p.60-61). The construct of SB originates from the overarching concept of belonging, which refers to the relationships in various aspects of an individual’s life. In contrast, SB is concerned specifically with a pupil’s attachment to school as an institution and its people, such as teachers and peers (Dimitrellou & Hurry, 2019). SB has been researched extensively and is found to be positively associated with multiple positive academic, psychological and behavioural outcomes. Children and young people (CYP) with a high sense of SB are more likely to: find school more enjoyable (Gillen-O’Neel & Fuligni, 2013); be happier (O’Rourke & Cooper, 2010); engage more with their work and self-regulated learning (Babakhani, 2014; Furrer & Skinner, 2003); perform better academically (Korpershoek et al., 2019); have a positive self-concept (Korpershoek et al., 2019), and have positive peer relationships (Uslu & Gizir, 2017) amongst other benefits. CYP with a strong sense of SB are also less likely to experience adverse outcomes such as: conduct problems and risk-taking behaviour (Loukas et al., 2010; Resnick et al., 1993); be engaged in inappropriate behaviours in school such as talking back to teachers and disobeying rules (Demaneet & van Houtte, 2012); have mental health problems (Shochet et al., 2006) and be absent from school (Korpershoek et al., 2019).

The multiple benefits of SB can be explained by our innate desire to connect with others through positive and significant relationships, which forms the basis of the belonging hypothesis (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). If our “pervasive drive to form and maintain ... lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships” (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p.497) is not satisfied, negative emotions will be experienced, which, in turn, can have detrimental outcomes as reported in the literature. Similarly, Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs posits that if our basic need of “love and belonging” is not met, more of an individual’s cognitive resources will be spent trying to meet this at the expense of higher-level needs (self-esteem and self-actualisation). An example of this can be found in Furrer and Skinner’s (2003) research which found that children who scored highly on relatedness were more likely to participate in lessons enthusiastically and experience fewer

## Chapter 2

negative emotions with their learning, ultimately resulting in more successful learning opportunities. In contrast, those who do not feel they belong are more likely to feel frustrated and alienated, which are not conducive to effective learning. Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) can also explain Furrer and Skinner's (2003) results and many of the associated benefits of SB, as relatedness to others is identified as one of three needs, alongside competence and autonomy, required for intrinsic motivation, which in school is often demonstrated through interest and engagement in learning. In addition, as theorised by Fredrickson's (1998) broaden-and-build theory, as a feeling of belonging is positive, having a high sense of SB might enable individuals to be more alert to new opportunities and behaviours. In turn, this could build personal skills and resources such as friends, resilience and skills, resulting in more positive emotions, leading to further benefits and positive experiences. For example, if a child has a strong sense of SB, they might be more inclined to engage in group activities, therefore gaining an opportunity to develop their academic and social skills. In turn, this might increase their abilities and confidence in these areas and the likelihood they will engage in similar opportunities in the future, leading to further opportunities for success.

Given the numerous benefits of SB, it is unsurprising that SB is becoming a more widely researched area of interest, with education professionals keen to discover ways of enhancing the SB of their pupils. Research has shown that some variables such as gender and whether a CYP has special educational needs (SEN) influence the SB of pupils, with girls (Allen et al., 2018) and typically developing (TD) pupils having higher SB than their peers (Cullinane, 2020). School development initiatives can have a significant impact on many of these variables. The school environment such as: size, location and pastoral strategies (Anderman, 2002; Slaten et al., 2016; Waters et al., 2010); students' perceived safety (Allen et al., 2018; Slaten et al., 2016); teacher supportiveness and care; parent support and peer relations (Allen et al., 2018; Ibrahim & El Zataari, 2020; Uslu & Gizir, 2017), have all been identified in the literature as variables that impact SB.

Although extensive research has been carried out into the influencing factors of SB, the large majority of the research has focussed on TD pupils. However, as the research has shown that children with SEN tend to have lower SB than their peers, it is imperative that attention is given to why this difference may exist and whether the same factors impact the SB of CYP with SEN as their TD peers. Furthermore, children with SEN often have very different school experiences from their TD peers in mainstream schools which could mean there are additional influencing factors or that the same variables have a different effect. For example, CYP with SEN often spend some of their day away from their classroom, peers and teacher, being educated elsewhere by their TA (Webster & Blatchford, 2013a). Given the importance of belonging for

wellbeing, academic progress and other life outcomes, this systematic literature will explore the factors that influence SB in CYP with SEN attending mainstream schools and consider the implications for education settings.

## **2.2 Literature search**

### **2.2.1 Search Strategy**

An initial scoping search was conducted to: understand the breadth and range of available literature; develop the search strategy (Appendix A) by identifying synonyms used in the literature for each of the terms 'school belonging', 'child' and 'special educational needs'; and to ensure the inclusion of known relevant papers using the search strategy. Following this, a systematic search was conducted within three databases: PsycINFO, Web of Science and ERIC. Given the limited research in this area, no filters were applied to restrict any of the searches. After duplicate removal, 140 articles remained.

### **2.2.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

Inclusion and exclusion criteria (Appendix B) were produced to ensure the articles' relevance to the review question. Articles were included if they (a) reported on CYP with SEN aged 4-16 years old and in mainstream provision, (b) focussed on factors that influence SB or had school belonging as one of the outcome variables being measured and (c) used primary data. These criteria were initially applied only to the abstracts; the full papers of the remaining articles were then screened for suitability using the same criteria, leaving 11 to be included in the review. Please see Appendix C for details of exclusion at the full-text screening level.

### **2.2.3 Data Extraction**

Data extraction (Appendix D) was performed before the quality assessment (Appendices E, F & G) to limit any bias in the reporting of information associated with the research quality (Boland et al., 2017).

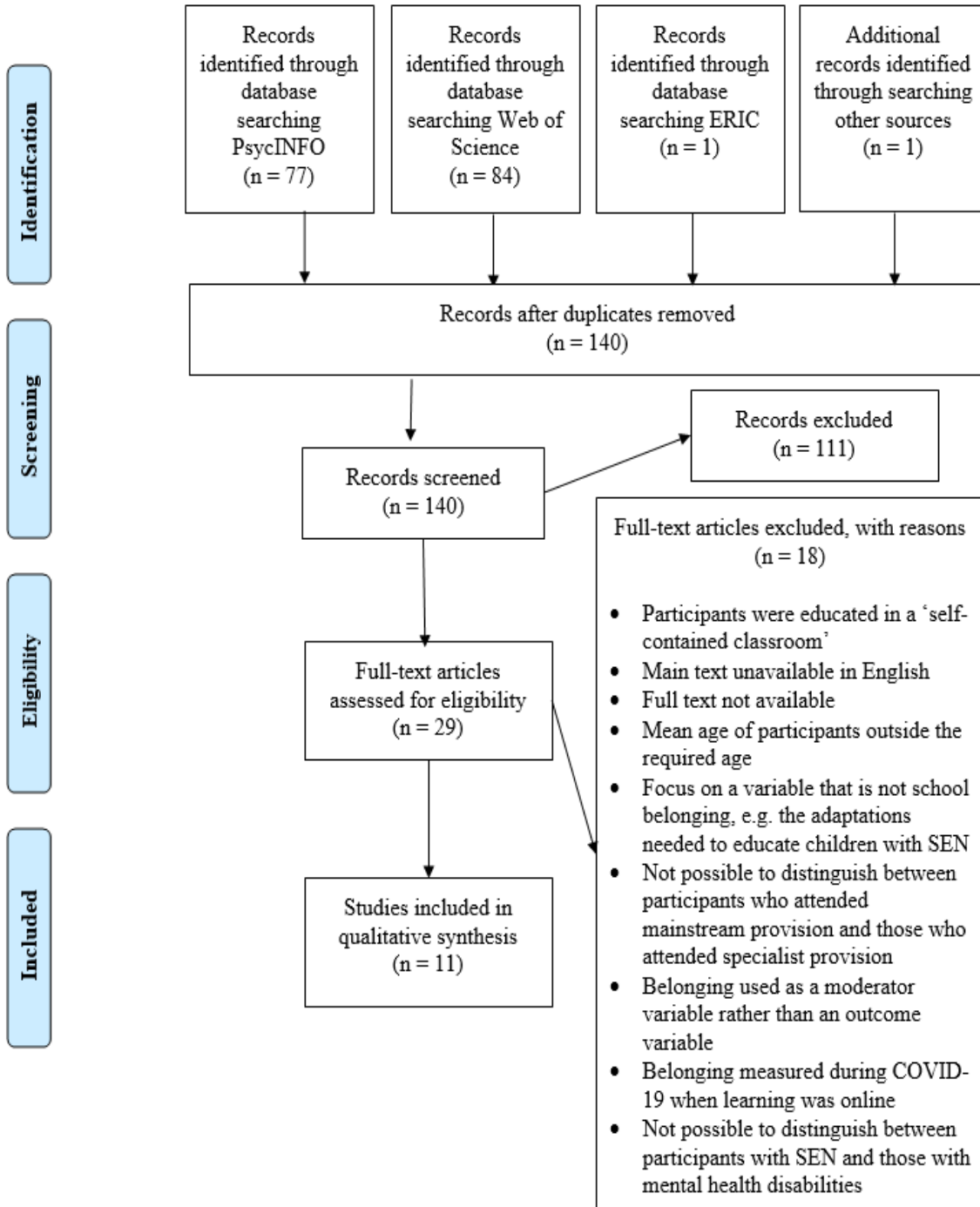
### **2.2.4 Quality Assessment**

The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (Hong et al., 2018) was used to appraise each study. Due to the additional considerations needed when quality assessing qualitative research, such as the researcher's theoretical position (Boland et al., 2017), the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP, 2018) qualitative checklist was used in addition to appraise the quality of the qualitative

studies. The authors of both quality assessments advise against scoring the quality of studies (CASP, 2018; Hong et al., 2018); therefore, a rating of ‘yes’, ‘no’, or ‘can’t tell’ has been assigned to each criterion. These ratings can be found in Appendices E and F and a summary in Appendix G.

**Figure 2**

*PRISMA Flow Chart (Moher et al., 2009).*



*Note.* The flow of information and the number of articles identified at each stage of the systematic literature review process (n = number of articles).

## **2.3 General characteristics of included articles**

### **2.3.1 Study Characteristics**

The eleven included studies were conducted between 1998 and 2021, with nine being published in scientific journals and two being doctoral dissertations (Brosnan, 1998; Konecni-Upton, 2010). The majority of the research was carried out in the United Kingdom (four) and the United States of America (three). Three studies utilised quantitative research methods, six used qualitative, and two used a mixed-method approach. All studies collected data at a single point in time, as opposed to longitudinal research. Two studies (Palmgren et al., 2017; Shogren et al., 2015) are part of larger research projects, and two different studies (Alesech & Nayer, 2020, 2021) share the same data set.

### **2.3.2 Participants**

Six studies included a comparison group of TD peers. Sample sizes ranged from six to 1440 for total participants ( $M = 255.8$ ); however, the largest number of participants considered to have SEN within each study was much smaller, with Dimitrellou and Hurry (2019) recruiting the most (282). Collectively, the studies included 3,384 participants, of whom 860 had SEN. The type of SEN varied between papers but included: social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) difficulties, moderate learning difficulties (MLD), autism spectrum disorder (ASD), behaviour disorders and developmental delays, amongst others. How participants were characterised as having SEN also varied, with some researchers requiring a statement of SEN or similar, others recruiting only those with a specific diagnosis, and a couple considering CYP to have SEN if they self-disclosed or identified as being so.

Of the ten studies that specified gender (all but Dimitrellou & Hurry, 2019), eight used a mixed-gender sample, and two recruited only female participants. Despite two of the studies using only female participants, males represented 44% of participants and 55.6% of participants with SEN. Only studies in which the mean age of participants was 16 or below were included; however, the age range of individual participants was 8-18.

Five of the studies did not refer to the ethnicity, race or socioeconomic demographics of their sample. The remaining six presented this information either in terms of individual participants, an overview of the schools from which they were recruited, or referred to these demographic variables in terms of the study.

### **2.3.3 Measures**

Measures of SB used included the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (PSSMS) (Goodenow, 1993) used in two of the studies (Osborne & Reed, 2011; Porter & Ingram, 2021) and the Belonging Scale (Frederickson et al. 2007) used by Nepi et al., (2013). Dimitrellou and Hurry (2019) created a new measure to measure SB and one for social relations, as they viewed existing measures focused more on belonging in terms of social relations rather than the school as a whole or as an institution. In addition to the self-report measures, peer ratings from sociometric questionnaires were also used (Brosnan, 1998; Nepi et al., 2018).

When exploring the factors influencing SB, some variables that were measured across the studies included teacher attitudes regarding SEN education, student ratings of feelings at different times and locations in school, teacher perceptions of peer acceptance and academic achievement, parental views on what helps their child be included in school and inclusivity level of the school.

The focus of the qualitative research tended to be on views and experiences of SB, what helps and hinders and the importance of feeling you belong. However, Palmgren et al. (2017) focussed on school engagement and instead asked participants to recall positive and negative school experiences, from which information regarding their SB was derived.

## **2.4 Results**

### **2.4.1 Synthesis of Findings**

Study findings were synthesised using textual narrative synthesis (Lucas et al., 2007; Popay et al., 2006). Textual narrative synthesis encompasses both quantitative and qualitative data and allows for similarities and differences in the measures and variables researched to inform conclusions (Lucas et al., 2007) by 'translating' (Popay et al., 2006, p.18) primary themes presented in each of the studies. The researcher used inductive thematic analysis to identify four overarching groups consisting of nine variables likely to influence SB in children with SEN attending a mainstream school from the literature; these formed sub-groups for the analysis. The nine sub-groups and the studies belonging to each sub-group are shown in Table one. The findings of this review will be discussed in relation to each sub-group.



**Table 1***Analysis Groups and Sub-Groups*

<b>Number of articles</b>	<b>Sub-group</b>	<b>Included papers</b>
<b>Individual characteristics:</b>		
Five	SEN status	Brosnan (1998) Dimitrellou & Hurry (2019) Konecni-Upton (2010) Nepi et al. (2013) Porter & Ingram (2021)
Two	Age	Brosnan (1998) Osborne & Reed (2011)
One	Gender	Brosnan (1998)
<b>Peers:</b>		
Six	Friendships and peer interactions	Dimitrellou & Hurry (2019) Konecni-Upton (2010) Myles et al. (2019) Palmgren et al. (2017) Porter & Ingram (2021) Shogren at al. (2015)
<b>School staff:</b>		
Five	Student-teacher relationships	Dimitrellou & Hurry (2019) Konecni-Upton (2010) Palmgren et al. (2017) Porter & Ingram (2021) Shogren at al. (2015)

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Five	Teacher characteristics, attitudes and strategies	Alesech & Nayer (2020) Alesech & Nayer (2021) Brosnan (1998) Osborne & Reed (2011) Shogren et al. (2015)
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**School characteristics:**

Eight	Ethos	Alesech & Nayer (2020) Dimitrellou & Hurry (2019) Konecni-Upton (2010) Shogren et al. (2015)
Two	Size	Osborne & Reed (2011) Shogren et al. (2015)
Three	Safety	Myles et al. (2019) Porter & Ingram (2021) Shogren et al. (2015)

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### 2.4.2 Individual Characteristics

#### **SEN Status**

Using their own measure of SB, Dimitrellou and Hurry (2019) found that students aged 11-15 with SEMH or MLD scored significantly lower than their peers without SEN. This finding was replicated with statistical significance in Porter and Ingram's (2021) research, which used a more established measure of SB, the PSSMS (Goodenow, 1993), in students of a similar age (12-14) with self-disclosed SEN.

Using The Belonging Scale (Frederickson et al. 2007) and looking solely at the mean belonging score of different SEN groups, Nepi et al. (2013) found that children with cognitive or

sensory-motor disabilities had the lowest SB of the SEN groups and children with learning or behavioural difficulties had the highest. However, the researchers highlight the need for these results to be interpreted with caution, especially as the group of children with cognitive or sensory-motor disabilities was the smallest, making their score the least reliable. Nepi et al. (2013) also explored the social position of students in terms of peer acceptance and rejection by asking children to rate whether they would like to work or play with each of their peers. TD children were typically more accepted and less rejected than those with SEN. The statistical significance of these results was not stated; however, the reported differences in percentages were quite stark, with 48.3% of TD children being accepted and only 3.2% rejected, compared with 27.1% of children with SEN socially accepted and 16.8% rejected. Children with cognitive or sensory-motor disabilities had a more favourable social position than children with learning or behavioural difficulties or those considered SEN due to disadvantage. This latter group was the least accepted and most rejected.

Using a similar method of sociometric scales and an impressive sample size of 810 students, Brosnan (1998) compared children's social acceptance. They too found that students with SEN, across all year groups studied, had significantly lower acceptance scores than their TD peers. Although it was impossible to directly examine the difference between belonging and type of SEN due to the size of the groups, Brosnan (1998) used means and standard deviations to determine above and below average acceptance scores. Those with behavioural disorders or developmental delay were overrepresented in the below-average group, and behavioural disorders were found to be significantly negatively correlated with social acceptance, suggesting such disorders might have more of an impact on social acceptance than other types of SEN. When examining the effects of a developmental delay on social acceptance, Brosnan (1998) found that children with more severe forms were more socially accepted than those with only mild cognitive delay. One teacher suggested that this could be explained because pupils were less accepting of peers who had disabilities that were not "physically distinguishable" (p.105). Whereas, in Konecni-Upton's (2010) study, the views of pupils with various forms of SEN suggest it is the students whose behaviour made them stand out from their peers, such as those with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or Tourettes, that feel the least accepted.

Unlike the other included studies, Dimitrellou and Hurry (2019) identified SEN students using two different methods: the school's classification and self-report using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman 1997). Although there was no significant difference between pupils with MLD and SEMH as classified by the school, pupils who considered themselves to have behavioural problems had significantly lower SB than students classified as having MLD. In addition, when students considered to have MLD but who also self-reported behavioural

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difficulties were removed from the MLD group to leave only those with MLD but no SEMH related difficulties, the remaining group had higher SB than the SEMH group. However, it is not stated whether this was statistically significant. Finally, students who reported having behavioural difficulties (externalising) had lower SB than their peers with internalising (emotional) difficulties.

### **Age**

Osborne and Reed (2011) found that as students' age increased, their SB also did ( $F(2,87) = 3.22, p < 0.05$ ); this will be discussed with reference to wider research in the discussion. The researchers interpreted the increase in SB as impacted by the length of time the pupils had spent in the same school rather than their biological age being the influencing factor. Although Brosnan (1998) did not set out to examine the impact of age, parents disclosed that social interactions with peers had become more difficult as their children aged as social skills differences widened, suggesting biological age could form a barrier. However, it is worth noting that the only parents interviewed in this study were those of children with more severe needs who were unable to participate in the sociometric survey, meaning these parental observations might not be typical of a broader range of SEN.

### **Gender**

Only Brosnan (1998) investigated the impact of gender and found no significant differences.

### **2.4.3 Peers**

#### ***Friendships and Peer Interactions***

Peer interactions were a common theme when discussing factors that both foster and hinder SB. However, only one study collected quantitative data (Dimitrellou & Hurry, 2019), who found that peer relations accounted for 7% of the variance of school belonging in secondary-aged children with SEN, with a relatively weak correlation ( $r = .269$ ).

Porter and Ingram (2021) used the PSSMS (Goodenow, 1993) and open questions to explore the sense of belonging of girls aged 12-14 with self-disclosed SEN. Two of the themes included being part of a friendship group, eliciting the largest number of responses by a considerable amount, and feeling supported by others, referring to both teachers and peers. When discussing their friendships, the focus appeared to be on the practical support friends offer, such as helping them know where to go. One participant in Konecni-Upton's (2010) research also spoke about peer support and how, in addition to receiving such support, helping her TD peers, e.g., with academic work, enhanced her SB. Another shared how peers offer social assistance to

help keep him out of trouble. In addition to practical support, some participants also highlighted their friend's personal qualities, such as generosity of their time and kindness. Palmgren et al. (2017) asked students aged 12-14 with minor learning difficulties to recall in writing their positive and negative school experiences and their thoughts and emotions regarding these events. Emotionally engaging interactions with peers were the most frequent type of positive school event, with 80% of responses from SEN students referring to such; the importance of having friends was also stressed.

Multiple studies conveyed the importance of reciprocal friendships rather than just positive peer interactions, especially in Myles et al.'s (2019) research in which reciprocal friendships were a pertinent theme. Female adolescents diagnosed with autism or Asperger syndrome communicated through semi-structured interviews the key qualities of their friends and explained how their friendships foster their SB. Reasons included a feeling of safety when with their friends, shared experiences and being valued and accepted for who they are. Participants in Shogren et al.'s (2015) study expressed their desire to form more friendships and communicated a wish to have more support in doing so. In addition, although most participants in Konecni-Upton's (2010) research did not express difficulties with forming and maintaining friendships, two adolescents did. As a result, they communicated that they would prefer to be educated away from their TD peers.

Peer interactions were also found to influence a pupil's SB negatively. Porter and Ingram (2021) reported that the majority of participants' responses to what makes it difficult for them to feel included referred to other people. Participants shared experiences of not feeling supported or respected and being on the receiving end of rude and unkind behaviour. Similar results were found by Palmgren et al. (2017), with students sharing how their school engagement was negatively impacted by social conflicts and poor relationships with peers. Comments of this sort contributed to 74% of their SEN sample's responses regarding disengaging school experiences. Students in Myles et al.'s (2019) research offered some examples of how negative peer interactions can make them feel excluded, such as feeling unvalued, that they are on the periphery and would not be missed if they were absent. They also communicated how they found it hard to engage in conversations with peers due to different interests, and conversations tend to revolve around others' interests rather than their own.

#### **2.4.4 School staff**

##### ***Student-Teacher Relationships***

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Using a Social Relations Scale developed specifically for their research, Dimitrellou and Hurry (2019) found a medium correlation between student-teacher relationships and SB ( $r = .48$ ), accounting for 23% of the variance for pupils with SEN. They also reported a medium correlation ( $r = .37$ ) for the influence of student-TA relationships, which accounted for 13% of the variance. Palmgren et al. (2017) quantified the impact of emotionally engaging student-teacher interactions by coding text segments. They reported student-teacher interactions to account for 15% of the positive and 27% of negative school experiences, which predominantly focused on social conflicts and the teachers' response to such, which they argued were influencing factors of SB. Of the comments made by CYP referring to student-teacher relationships, the authors noted that 58% of these were negative. These figures illustrate student-teacher relationships were less influential on school engagement than peer interactions for participants in this study.

Participants in Porter and Ingram's (2021) research shared that staff members were valued as sources of comfort and support when needing help but also as people who might pick on them in class or fail to meet their learning needs, making them feel inadequate. Participants communicated that teachers could support their SB by helping them feel supported and respected, recognising their efforts and achievements and demonstrating they truly know them, e.g., their interests. Conversely, feeling misunderstood and disliked by teachers were identified as barriers.

Students in Konecni-Upton's (2021) study also referenced the importance of feeling accepted by their teachers, with positive relationships with teachers forming one of the four themes derived from the qualitative data. Responses of those who felt accepted by their teachers referred to being treated the same as their TD peers, respected, encouraged, having appropriate support for their needs and teachers taking an interest in them. However, two of the students with SEN that could be considered more disruptive in a classroom (ADHD and Tourettes) felt less accepted, and one student voiced his views that teachers were less accepting and willing to help students with SEN than their TD peers. However, these students did report a positive relationship with their SEN teacher, although this was not enough to negate the experience of rejection from their class teacher. Students with SEN also communicated that teachers contributed to them not feeling accepted by failing to acknowledge their individual needs, not showing an interest in their lives or regularly talking to them.

Similarly, participants in Shogren et al.'s (2015) focus groups shared they felt supported by teachers and discussed the role of the school principal in fostering a sense of inclusion. Participants described how their principals were very involved with the day-to-day running of

their school and often engaged in social interactions with the student, which promoted a sense of inclusion and fostered positive relationships.

### ***Teacher Characteristics, Attitudes and Strategies***

Participants in Shogren et al.'s (2015) study also emphasised the importance of teachers having high expectations and providing students with appropriate and tailored support to help them meet these expectations. They valued the encouragement and patience provided by teachers, their strictness in terms of support and safety and the focus they placed on non-curriculum aspects of the classroom, such as peer interaction and inclusion.

Alesech and Nayar (2020, 2021) explored how New Zealand schools enhance and hinder SB in children with SEN. Both articles report the findings from interviews with six children with a range of SEN, their parents and associated educational professionals. The 2020 paper discusses five themes, two of which were specific to teachers: teacher characteristics and teaching techniques. The researchers discuss the importance of teachers having an in-depth understanding of a range of SEN and how to teach children with these appropriately, but more importantly, they must be aware of the individual impact of these needs on children within their class. Good teachers were identified as those able to reflect on what strategies did or did not work well for each individual and change their teaching accordingly. The researchers also shared that teachers who created an "affirming culture" (p.100) supported children's SB. In terms of the strategies used, ensuring children experience success and utilising fun teaching techniques that enhance participation and enjoyment were identified as successful in fostering SB and inclusion. Examples referenced directing learning at a child's specific interests, a buddy system and motivating incentives.

Alesech and Nayar's 2021 paper focused solely on teacher strategies. They identified teacher skills and techniques that promote acceptance as important for promoting belonging. These encompass communication that is clear, concise and repeated when required; step-by-step written instructions and other forms of scaffolding; allowing extra time; and positive and regular feedback and checks of understanding. The researchers also discussed the use of fun activities and small group work with children of similar academic abilities. The importance of teachers creating an inclusive environment to ensure all children feel accepted was emphasised, with careful consideration of seating arrangements and enabling participation in-class activities such as through special jobs being methods to facilitate this.

Using a self-report measure, Osborne and Reed (2011) found that teacher knowledge and training on ASD significantly impacted SB ( $F(2,102) = 7.54, p < .001$ ). Upon further inspection,

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those whose knowledge and training were considered 'good' elicited a significantly higher SB ( $p < .05$ ) in their students than those rated 'none' or 'some'; however, there was no significant difference between the two latter ratings. Brosnan (1998) also used a teacher self-report measure to assess their attitudes towards inclusive education; results show this did not impact their students' social acceptance.

### 2.4.5 School characteristics

#### *Ethos*

Dimitrellou and Hurry (2019) directly assessed pupils' perceptions of school ethos using a measure designed specifically for their study, which had two sub-scales: inclusion and behaviour management. Perceived ethos was strongly and significantly correlated with SB ( $r = .575, p < .001$ ) and accounted for 33% of the variation. The inclusivity of participants' schools was also identified using School Census statistics, specifically the number of pupils with SEN on roll and exclusion data. Students from the school deemed 'very inclusive' had significantly higher SB than those from the 'less inclusive' school. However, there was no significant difference between the 'just inclusive' school and the other two schools.

Pupils, parents and educational professionals in Alesech and Nayar's (2020) study stressed the importance of other people's attitudes in fostering SB. The majority described positive experiences when people demonstrated inclusive attitudes such as being accepting and nice. However, the experiences of some were more mixed, with one parent communicating that she felt the school did not view her child as part of the school community because of his SEN. Some of the negative attitudes reported included school staff making offensive comments and other parents complaining about their child. An individualised approach was another theme, with the majority of participants referring to it. Collaboration in creating an individualised approach was considered crucial, especially during transitions, to ensure all staff members were aware of an individual's strengths and areas of need and that goals set were appropriate and reviewed regularly. More references were made to a lack of an individualised approach, specifically proper planning, and how this had a negative impact on their transition to new schools. With TAs often being used to support the delivery of individualised approaches, several reflections were provided on how they are utilised, which varied amongst participants. However, there was a general consensus that the effectiveness of such support was dependent on the person appointed rather than the role itself. Examples of a lack of inclusivity were also shared more explicitly, with examples of one student being asked not to attend school events where he may cause an "incident" such as the Christmas concert and another having to fight for an appropriate provision.



In contrast, Shogren et al. (2015) interviewed students attending schools considered “exemplars of successful inclusive” education (p.243). Participants in this study expressed how an inclusive ethos pervaded their schools through schoolwide actions, policies and expectations such as signs stating that everyone is included; consistent and positive behaviour policies; and being educated in class with their peers rather than outside of the classroom whilst still receiving the support they need. Similar sentiments were shared in Konecni-Upton’s (2010) research, in which participants articulated their enjoyment of working with their TD peers, joining in with classroom activities and remaining in class. All pupils also voiced that feeling equal to their peers in the expectations put on them and their own attitudes and ambitions whilst feeling supported and respected was imperative to experience SB.

### ***Size***

Osborne and Reed (2011) found that school size had a significant impact on their sample of children with SEN ( $r = .203, p < .05$ ), with larger school sizes being correlated with greater SB. However, when these were analysed by their Asperger’s and autism diagnoses, the effect was only significant for those with Asperger’s ( $r = .30, p < .05$ ). The opposite was found for class size, with bigger classes being significantly negatively correlated with SB in children with Asperger’s ( $r = -.29, p < .05$ ), as were the number of other children with SEN ( $r = -.42, p < .01$ ) and support staff ( $r = -.37, p < .01$ ). Other children with SEN ( $r = .32, p < .05$ ) and the number of support staff ( $r = .31, p < .05$ ) were also significantly correlated for children with autism, although interestingly these had a positive effect. Hours of TA support was also measured, but none with statistical significance were found. School and class size was only reportedly mentioned by one other participant across the included studies, which was in Shogren et al.’s (2015) research, who commented that small school and class sizes are beneficial in contributing to high SB.

### ***Safety***

Participants in Myles et al.’s (2019) research expressed that their friends helped them feel safe and supported, especially during busy periods such as break times, and that they preferred spending time with their friends in quieter and calmer areas of school. Similar opinions were shared in Porter and Ingram’s (2021) research, in which they explored belonging in terms of “feeling part of the school and feeling safe”. Students were asked to share their thoughts of being safe in school. Of the 31 responses, only five were positive, with others discussing mixed experiences, but the majority shared negative experiences that predominantly referred to peers, e.g., bullying and not feeling able to be themselves. Other responses referenced teachers, locations within the school and the curriculum.

The participants in Shogren et al. (2015) who attended schools exemplary in inclusive education reported that overall, they felt very safe in school, giving examples of how this was achieved, e.g., “playground police”, security officers and prompt and effective actions from senior school staff when bullying occurred. However, both students with and without SEN reported awareness of bullying, either other people or themselves, that typically occurred away from the structure of the classroom, e.g., playground or school bus, although it was acknowledged that this happens significantly less than in previous schools they attended.

## 2.5 Discussion

### 2.5.1 Summary of Results

This review sought to answer the question “what impacts the SB of CYP with SEN in mainstream settings?”. The 11 articles explored variables encompassing individual characteristics, peers, school staff and school characteristics. Given the complexity and interactions between the variables and additional environmental factors, it is not possible to directly compare each variable's effect, nor is it possible to conclude causality. However, the salience of each variable within the literature and the quality of the evidence will now be discussed.

Research has shown that CYP with SEN typically have lower SB than their TD peers (Cullinane, 2020). Two papers within this review corroborate this finding (Dimitrellou & Hurry, 2019; Porter & Ingram, 2021); however, the broader results indicate it is not simply the presence of SEN but the type of SEN that impacts belonging. There is a consensus that children with behavioural disorders or difficulties are less socially accepted (Brosnan, 1998; Konecni-Upton, 2010; Nepi et al., 2013). Interestingly, the findings are more varied for the papers that specifically measured belonging, as opposed to peer acceptance, which is identified as a core element in Goodenow and Grady's (1993) definition of SB, referring to students feeling “accepted, respected, included, and supported by others” (p.60-61). Nepi et al. (2013) reported it was children with behavioural difficulties who had the highest SB, whereas students who considered themselves to have behavioural problems scored the lowest in Dimitrellou and Hurry's (2019) research. It is likely that, although acceptance is a core component of SB and therefore, it might be thought that if a child is socially accepted and included in their school, they would have strong SB, it is the interaction of the elements contributing to the construct of SB that is important, rather than the individual components. Nepi et al.'s (2013) research provides convincing evidence for this hypothesis as they explored both social acceptance and belonging within the same sample and found conflicting results. Consequently, the validity of the relevance of Brosnan's (1998) findings in the field of SB should be considered. Brosnan (1998) herself highlights a limitation of using

sociometric ratings; they measure 'likeability' but not necessarily friendships. In addition, Lambeth (2017) speculates that sociometric measures reflect friendships, social acceptance and exclusion, whereas the self-reporting of SB would represent the impact such social interactions have on that individual. Given the findings of the importance of reciprocal friendships over simply positive peer interactions discussed under the 'peers' section of this review, results derived from sociometry measures are likely to need careful consideration regarding SB.

In addition to contemplating what the construct is, how it is operationalised and measured also needs to be carefully considered. Nepi et al. (2013) highlighted that a limitation of sociometric measures is that students' ratings could have been influenced by compassion, which would not necessarily equate to a tangible positive impact on the child's SB. For example, peers may report they are happy to work or play with an individual; however, this might not happen in reality, resulting in the CYP feeling excluded, which only measures of the individual's subjective views would detect. This limitation is further supported by the findings that CYP with less apparent forms of SEN were less accepted (Brosnan, 1998) as their peers may not have been aware they have SEN and were, therefore, less understanding of their behaviours. Similarly, it is plausible that the SB captured by measures that focus heavily on social relations do not reflect the additional elements of the construct of belonging or effectively measure difficulties that CYP with SEN face in school. While Nepi et al. (2013) used the Belonging Scale (Frederickson et al. 2007), Dimitrellou and Hurry (2019) created their own after identifying that many existing scales of SB predominantly focus on social relations despite research showing that "belongingness to the school as an institution" (p. 318) is also a crucial factor. The differences in methodologies between Brosnan (1998), Nepi et al. (2013) and Dimitrellou and Hurry's (2019) studies could be indicative of the increased research into the field of SB - as our understanding of the construct and the influencing factors increases, the measures are being developed accordingly. Another explanation for the discrepancy could be in the overall methodologies, with Dimitrellou and Hurry's (2019) research being assessed as slightly more favourable on the quality assessment (Appendix E).

Given the limited number of studies that explored the differences in the type of SEN, the range of SEN of participants, and the discrepancy in the results between them, it is concluded that SB cannot be predicted by the label(s) used to describe the difficulties they face, age or gender. Instead, environmental factors play a more significant role in determining a CYP's SB, such as how accepting others are; the findings suggest that people tend to be less accepting of behavioural difficulties than other less disruptive and more visible types of SEN. Empathy is likely a contributory factor to this finding, as the more visible an individual's differences, in areas of development such as physical, cognitive and language, the easier it is for others to understand their difficulties. Conversely, compassion for CYP with SEMH or behavioural difficulties is

considerably harder as they may appear 'normal' to their peers but exhibit unkind or unwanted behaviours which are not typically tolerated in society. Dimitrellou and Hurry's (2019) findings of differences within the method of SEN classification also highlight a limitation of research that attempts to make conclusions based on SEN sub-groups, in that the needs and difficulties of individuals might not be accurately captured by their 'label', or at all. This finding adds to the debate over the validity and usefulness of labels (Lauchlan & Boyle, 2020; Norman, 2017) and emphasises the importance of focusing on the individual needs of each child rather than any label(s) which may or may not be representative of their strengths and difficulties. Although only one study (Osborne & Reed, 2011) directly explored the impact of age, its results refute those found in the broader research that suggests SB declines with age (Anderman, 2003; Gillen-O'Neel & Fuligni, 2013). One possible hypothesis for this divergence could be that CYP with SEN tend to have fewer opportunities to belong elsewhere, e.g., extracurricular activities or informal social situations (Cullinane, 2020), meaning more emphasis and possibly cognitive resources are placed on belonging in school. This hypothesis could also explain the absence of widely reported gender differences (Allen et al., 2018) in Brosnan's (1998) research, as any differences in the social habits between genders might be minimised for CYP who do not socialise outside of school.

The importance of friendships and positive peer interactions is well recognised in the literature as a significant influencing factor on SB (Allen et al., 2018). The results of this review are no different, with peer interactions being a prominent theme in most studies. Although Dimitrellou and Hurry (2019) reported that peer relations accounted for only 7% of the variance in SB, the qualitative data suggests the impact is considerably larger. Qualitative data could arguably be considered a more appropriate way to examine the impact of peer relations as they vary substantially for each individual, making it difficult to quantify experiences (Celo et al., 2008). In addition, the qualitative studies were generally of a higher rigour than the quantitative ones (Appendix E). Participants across studies shared the importance of reciprocal friendships in which they feel supported, valued and liked for who they are rather than simply engaging in positive or avoiding negative peer interactions, e.g., bullying, which further highlights the need to consider the usefulness of sociometry measures. Although reciprocal friendships are important in fostering SB, not all children with SEN can or have the opportunities to make or maintain friendships as easily as their TD peers. Specific barriers to this were shared, with participants communicating difficulties with social skills and having different interests to others (Brosnan, 1998; Myles et al., 2019). This finding substantiates previous research showing that children with SEN typically have less developed social skills than their TD peers (Garrote, 2017) and are less likely to be involved in peer interactions (Schwab et al., 2021; Webster & Blatchford, 2013a). Therefore, they often rely on being explicitly taught social skills through interventions (Garrote et al., 2017). Traditionally

many social skills interventions take place outside of the classroom, which not only make it difficult for children to transfer their learnt skills into social contexts within the classroom (Bellini et al., 2007) but, with relevance to belonging, increase the time they were away from their peers and likely contribute to them feeling different. The participants in Konecni-Upton's (2010) study who did have difficulties forming friendships discussed how they would prefer to be educated away from their TD peers, which raises the widely debated question of what successful inclusion means (Conner, 2016). If it simply means educating children with SEN in mainstream schools, this has been achieved; however, educating them in a place where they do not feel they belong is not considered successful by most (Conner, 2016; Warnock, 2005). Therefore, it can be argued that the absence of reciprocal friendships is a significant barrier to forming SB, which in turn could have a detrimental impact on the successful inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream schools.

In agreement with the broader research (Allen et al., 2018), social relations with teachers were considered to have a more significant influence on a pupil's SB than peer interactions (Dimitrellou & Hurry, 2019); yet, in Palmgren et al.'s (2017) research the opposite was true. While it can contribute to our understanding of the research questions, Palmgren et al.'s (2017) study has less direct application because SB was not directly assessed or raised in the questions to participants. Instead, it is considered a "central antecedent for engaging school experience" (p.29) which was the focus of their study. Therefore, it could be argued that the participants' responses are not truly reflective of what influences their SB. Although, on the whole, qualitative data emphasised the importance of student-teacher relationships, with pupils valuing the support, respect and recognition of their efforts from their teachers, in agreement with Palmgren et al.'s (2017) findings, this was a less prominent theme in the data than peer interactions. These findings may diverge from the broader research due to the differences in how children with SEN are often taught in mainstream settings. Webster and Blatchford (2013a) report that children with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) spend the equivalent of more than one day a week away from their classroom and teacher, typically being taught in small groups by a TA. Therefore, they have reduced opportunities to interact and form positive relationships with their teachers. Irrespective of this standard practice in which TAs make up 27% of children with EHCP's interactions at school (Webster & Blatchford, 2013a), only two of the included studies explored the impact of TAs on SB. Given that very few of the included studies disclosed their interview schedule, it is not possible to determine whether the children were prompted or had the opportunity to discuss their TAs in the same way they did with their teachers. In addition, some of the barriers participants face in feeling they belong were being misunderstood and disliked by their teachers (Porter & Ingram, 2021), which could be less common in their relationships with TAs with whom they may spend more time. A limitation of Porter and Ingram's (2021) collection

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of qualitative data in written form rather than interviews is that follow-up questions could not be asked. However, the participants' comments in Konecni-Upton's (2021) research which suggest a preference for their SEN teacher (over their regular teacher) suggests the possibility that participants may further have preferred their TA.

The research into teacher characteristics, attitudes and strategies consisted predominantly of the one set of data discussed in Alesech and Nayar's (2020, 2021) papers. These were considered to be of a high standard (Appendices E & F); however, some of the interview questions could be regarded as leading. For example, the only two provided examples of questions aimed at adults ("what do you think helps (child's name) feel like he/she belongs in school?" and "tell me about the activities that (child's name) is included in at school?") suggest that the child feels like they belong and that they are included at school when this might not be the case. Considering that their research question was "How do New Zealand school settings help or hinder a sense of acceptance and belonging ... ?" (2020, p.1140), these questions seem to be assuming that schools help rather than hinder. It is possible that parallel questions on what might hinder SB were asked; however, these were not disclosed in the articles. The researchers also rightly acknowledge that the results are not generalisable due to the small sample size and the fact that different approaches and strategies work for each child. Despite the limitations, their results emphasise the importance of high-quality and differentiated teaching, understanding the needs of each child and viewing and treating each child as an individual.

The final theme discussed was school characteristics which encompassed ethos, size and safety. In Dimitrellou and Hurry's (2019) research, school ethos accounted for the largest variance in SB. Although ethos is difficult to conceptualise, overlaps with several of the other themes and was not directly measured in any of the other studies, the prominence of this variable was shared in almost all included studies. The overwhelming message communicated from the data as a whole was the importance of feeling accepted by others for who they are. Similarly, the shared negative experiences were typically due to not feeling accepted or belonging due to their behaviours associated with their SEN. Many of the difficulties CYP with SEN face in mainstream settings, such as bullying (Chatzitheochari et al., 2016); mental health difficulties; (Emerson & Hatton, 2007) and increased exclusions (Ofsted, 2020), can be explained solely or in part by a lack of acceptance by those around them, verifying the findings of this review regarding perceived safety, specifically bullying. When CYP with SEN feel that they are accepted and belong, they enjoy and thrive from working with their TD peers (Konecni-Upton, 2010; Shogren et al., 2015). However, this success relies on the school staff's ability and willingness to adopt an individualised approach where appropriate and exude and act upon the message that everyone is accepted. With SEN funding being inadequate to meet the needs of many SEN children in mainstream

schools (Vibert, 2021), the ability to do so is often out of the control of individual teachers or schools. However, Shogren et al.'s, (2015) findings offer some idea of how such a culture can be fostered with minimal expense, such as implementing consistent behaviour policies and expectations and supporting children with SEN inside the classroom rather than in 'pull-out' groups. The broader research contributes further suggestions— for example, training teachers on active listening, using strategies that foster positive relationships, and encouraging participation in extracurricular activities (St-Amand et al., 2017).

Osborne and Reed (2011) investigated the impact of school size regarding the number of students in total and others with SEN, class sizes and the number of support staff. They found that larger school sizes are associated with greater SB. Although this might be surprising, Newman et al.'s. (2006) systematic review found that large and small schools each have unique advantages, with smaller schools considered more positive and personalised school environments and larger schools offering more opportunities such as extracurricular activities and teacher specialisation. Given that CYP with SEN often receive a personalised approach through EHCPs and other funding (DfE, 2014) yet tend to lack opportunities to attend extracurricular activities (Cullinane, 2020), the unique benefits of large schools may be more in line with the needs of CYP with SEN. It is also important to consider that although school size significantly impacted SB, the effect size was small. Similarly, more support staff was significantly negatively correlated with lower SB in CYP with Asperger's (Osborne & Reed, 2011). Additional results from this research showed that support staff aid behavioural and emotional problems but hinder social behaviour; this might further explain the negative impact of higher support staff numbers on SB. Given the results of this review and the wider literature highlighting the importance of peer relations, it is unsurprising that a factor that impedes social relations will negatively impact SB. Interestingly, support staff positively impacted SB for those with autism. Although autism and Asperger's are considered on the same spectrum of disorder so that the diagnostic term "Asperger's" was retired in 2013, one difference between the (now outdated) diagnoses is that individuals with Asperger's were considered more socially motivated (Eisenmajer et al., 1996). Therefore, the negative social impact of support staff may be less problematic for CYP with autism.

### **2.5.2 Strengths and Limitations of Included Studies**

Overall, the quality of the qualitative research included in this review was high; however, it was not possible to determine whether this was also the case for many of the quantitative studies due to lack of information regarding the research design or analysis processes (Appendices E & G). For example, only one study (Brosnan, 1998) referenced power regarding the number of participants required to draw accurate conclusions, which might not be considered problematic as

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all quantitative studies had reasonable sample sizes. However, it is not clear whether the sample sizes were sufficient for all of the statistical analyses carried out across sub-groups, e.g., type of SEN, as understandably, these groups were considerably smaller. In addition, not all studies within the review communicated that ethical approval had been sought. Some lacked detail regarding the procedure, making it difficult to determine whether ethical standards had been maintained; in others, it was unclear whether participants truly understood that participation was voluntary. Kilinc and Firat (2017) argue that voluntary participation is essential in ensuring validity and reliability of participants' responses, as those who believe participation is compulsory are likely to give less sincere responses than those who volunteered.

Given that multiple and complex variables influence SB, it is a strength of the included research that all but one study (Brosnan, 1998) used self-report measures of the children with SEN, allowing them to share their views and experiences and not have them assumed by others. The importance of which is emphasised in the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2014, p.14) with the need for "a clearer focus on the participation of children and young people and parents in decision-making at individual and strategic levels". Despite the inclusion of child voice being a strength of the research, it is important to note the possible limitations of such methodologies. Some participants may have misrepresented their SB. For example, negative emotions associated with some of the factors impacting SB may have influenced their ratings, such as a lack of friends (Dimitrellou & Hurry, 2019; Myles et al., 2019). Their ratings might also have represented how they felt on the day rather than an overview of their SB (Lambeth, 2017). The reliability and validity of self-report data in schools has also been deemed problematic in the broader literature (Anderman, 2002). Alesech and Nayar (2020; 2021) overcame this limitation by triangulating data between multiple sources (multiple interviews, observations and school reports and mission statements), although they did not disclose what weighting was given to each in the analysis, but simply that they were "reviewed and merged" (2020, p.94).

Given that the participants had SEN, very few of the studies referred to modifications of traditional methodologies such as visual supports or communication aids that would have ensured all participants could express their views fully. Although it can be assumed the methods in each study were appropriate for the various needs of the participants, the lack of detail raises doubt regarding whether the views of those with more severe SEN were captured effectively or whether they were not invited to participate for this reason. Some researchers explicitly stated modifications such as having pictures of children and their names for the sociometric scales (Brosnan, 1998) and the inclusion of drawing activities in child interviews (Alesech & Nayar, 2020, 2021); however, the majority did not.



### 2.5.3 Limitations of the Review

One limitation of this review is the dependence on one researcher to apply the inclusion and exclusion criteria to the results of the systematic search. It is recommended that at least two researchers carry out this process to reduce bias and increase the robustness of the review (Boland et al., 2017). Although this was not possible when selecting the included articles, the quality assessment and data extraction of three of the eleven papers was also conducted by a colleague not involved in the research, with 100% inter-rater reliability of the quality assessment ratings.

Another limitation is the reliance on the researchers of each study's interpretation of results, which is particularly pertinent for the qualitative data. Only one researcher (Konecni-Upton, 2010) evidenced a critical examination of their own biases and potential influence over the research. As a result, four biases were acknowledged and 'bracketed', and the researcher was able to "continually examine whether or not personal experiences influenced the results" (p.70). With the absence of similar consideration in other included studies, it is possible that their research, and hence the findings of this review, have been subjected to the biases of multiple researchers. A similar limitation can be made about the analysis of this review - although the textual narrative synthesis allowed for the synthesis of multiple different methodologies, the decisions, specifically around which sub-groups to use can be considered subjective (Lucas et al., 2007). The researcher has strived to be transparent when reporting the synthesis process but acknowledges this type of analysis is vulnerable to researcher biases.

It is also important to consider the limitations of the field of literature obtained by the systematic search, especially concerning the terms encapsulating SEN. Although the search terms were intentionally kept broad within this review, with no inclusion or exclusion criteria applied with reference to who is considered to have SEN, e.g., whether they have a diagnosis or EHCP, such decisions will have been made by the individual researchers of each of the studies. It is assumed that decisions were guided by the knowledge and understanding at the time of the research, in addition to any cultural influences. For example, professionals have begun to challenge the usefulness of diagnostic labels (Norman, 2017), and some previously used diagnoses have now been retired, e.g. Asperger's, which researchers may have considered when defining their sample in the more recent studies. Although the different definitions of SEN between studies could be considered a strength as it shows the progression and understanding of SEN, it could also be a limitation. Given the vast differences between different types of SEN, e.g. cognitive or SEMH, and even between those with the same diagnosis, it is not possible to draw conclusions about CYP with SEN as one homogeneous group. Furthermore, only one of the

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included studies (Dimitrellou & Hurry, 2019) considered the visibility of SEN when grouping their participants, which they sought to tackle by including a self-report measure. As a result, those who might not be observed to have SEN by those in positions to seek support or diagnoses, e.g., teachers, parents and professionals, might remain unheard within the literature.

More importantly than how SEN is defined within each study is the conceptualisation of SEN and its influence on SB. This review was interested in how CYP with SEN are treated in schools, such as receiving support outside of the classroom away from their teacher and peers, rather than an innate quality or characteristic. However, due to how SEN was categorised in some of the studies, it is possible that there were participants who were not treated differently from their peers, e.g., they received no additional support, or that due to a lack of diagnosis or similar, there were individuals whose voices remain unheard. Furthermore, it is possible that some results might be misinterpreted to conclude that differences in SB between those with and without SEN are due to within-child factors as opposed to environmental ones. The term SEN, specifically the word 'special', can be considered to endorse the medical model as opposed to the idea that the difficulties children face result from how society functions and is organised (Algraigray & Boyle, 2017; Phillips, 2001). Given the multitude of possible negative impacts of labelling children as having SEN, it is understandable why alternative terminology is used in some societies to determine the support that individuals require, which is often cited as a key endorsement for categorisation and diagnoses. For example, in Scotland, they used 'additional support needs', which encompasses solely environmental factors such as bereavement (Algraigray & Boyle, 2017). Although the researcher's views do not align with the medical model of SEN, conveyed through the focus on environmental factors rather than within-child characteristics, the terminology used within this research mirrored the language that is used within the national context, and that is outlined in the latest Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2014, p. 11).

Although the terms used for the systematic search were derived from a scoping search and identifying synonyms, as with all reviews of this nature, it is possible that not all relevant synonyms were included. The risk of this is thought to be higher for the terms related to SB as this is defined in multiple different ways within the literature. Although false-positive results are an expected outcome of a systematic search, some terms considered too broad, such as 'relationships', were excluded as SB is the result of the interaction of multiple components rather than the individual factors that make up the construct. In other words, although relationships, support and respect, among other factors, are all pertinent to the construct of SB, the systematic search was conducted based on an assumption that having some of these things is not the same as having high SB. By choosing not to search separately for the related terms, but instead only for

terms that threaded together the core concepts of SB, it is possible that the search method missed some studies that might have shed further light on the discussion.

#### **2.5.4 Future Research**

The importance of an inclusive ethos was exuded in most studies; therefore, researchers might like to focus their attention on the possibility of systemic change through whole-school approaches, which have the potential to have a significant and long-lasting impact. As the interaction of influencing factors of SB is unique to each individual, it would be advantageous for research to continue utilising and developing methods and not rely on the views of others such as in sociometry or ones in which CYP could easily mask their experiences. It would also be helpful for more studies to incorporate data triangulation methods without taking emphasis away from the CYP's views to benefit from the advantages of multiple methodologies, such as the robustness against affective influences of sociometry. It would be especially beneficial if such methods could be ones that schools could also use to gather opinions regarding a CYP's individualised support; this was identified as necessary in both the findings of this review and government policy (DfE, 2014). Finally, with TAs playing a prominent role in the education of CYP with SEN, there was a surprising lack of focus on their role. For this reason, it would be valuable for future research to explore their relationship with students and how this influences a pupil's SB.

#### **2.5.5 Implications for Practice**

Educational professionals must recognise the salience of environmental factors such as the school ethos or culture, social relationships and teaching strategies in developing SB in students. With a lack of resources and funding to schools (Vibert, 2021), schools are finding it challenging to meet the needs of all the individuals within their classes. In the past, resources have often been allocated to enhancing their students' academic progress above their emotional needs. The mental health and wellbeing of children are now gaining more attention and funding within education settings (DHSC & DfE, 2018). However, much of this support requires those who face difficulties to receive 1:1 or small group support away from their classrooms, which could increase the likelihood that the CYP will feel different from their peers. Results from this review have illustrated that although support staff offer many benefits to CYP with SEN, they can also have a negative impact on a CYP's social interactions. When individualised support from TAs or teachers is imperative and cannot be replaced by support within-class through differentiation or other means, opportunities to enhance peer relationships and support them in overcoming the barriers imposed by support staff should be a priority. In addition, attention must be given at a more systemic level to buffer against any negative impact on being out of class and enhance the SB for

all children. As the results have shown, an inclusive school ethos that permeates a school and becomes a culture can significantly impact the SB experienced by pupils. Creating such ethos does not require time or heavy resource investments but relies on the buy-in of school staff. Education professionals must accept a CYP with SEN for who they are and hold high expectations of them as they would for any other student. They should offer appropriate and individualised support in meeting such expectations, and, as commissioned by the Department for Education (2014) the CYP should have input into the support offered. CYP should be made to feel valued in their class and school, which could be achieved through staff learning about and utilising each individual's strengths and interests or helping them understand they are an integral part of the class through special jobs or roles. Given the importance of peers in fostering SB, pupils with SEN should be supported in forming reciprocal friendships where appropriate and getting involved in activities that would facilitate positive interactions such as extracurricular activities. These positive relationships should be modelled by school staff who show unconditional positive regard, which in itself will help foster SB for all students (Corey, 2020). Boosting SB in TD pupils will likely increase the belonging of CYP with SEN indirectly. If their peers feel secure socially, they will feel more comfortable taking social risks by being empathetic towards and befriending others who are not similar to them or who are outside their group (Silke et al., 2018). Schools might also like to consider specific interventions such as Circle of Friends (Barrett & Randall, 2004; Newton et al., 1998), direct teaching on the invisibility of SEN, or the incorporation of compassion into the curriculum (Al-Ghabban, 2018; Kohler-Evans & Barnes, 2015) to develop understanding and acceptance, particularly for CYP whose SEN might be less obvious to their peers. Above all, school staff should be trained in the importance of SB, variables that might place CYP at risk of low SB and those that might indicate this, and how they can enhance it in their pupils.

## 2.6 Conclusion

The results of this review align with the three needs identified in the self-determination theory: relatedness, competence and autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The results emphasise the importance of CYP with SEN having positive, reciprocal relationships with both school staff and peers (relatedness) that are supportive, respectful and accepting of who they are. A CYP's perceived academic and social competence is impacted by teaching strategies and relationships with others. Teaching strategies and relationships with students also influence an individual's autonomy; specifically, an individual's input over their individualised support and perceived safety can impact their ability to be autonomous throughout the school day. It can be argued that all three needs can be met through an inclusive ethos that permeates a school. Although it is evident that children with SEN face more and bigger barriers to developing SB, the identified variables are

similar to those that influence the SB of their TD peers. For this reason, research should focus on ways to foster SB for all CYP whilst being aware that children with SEN will likely need more support in overcoming difficulties in feeling they belong.



## Chapter 3 Exploring the Impact of Teaching Assistant Support on School Belonging

### 3.1 Introduction

#### 3.1.1 School Belonging

School belonging (SB) is defined as “The extent to which they [students] feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others – especially teachers and other adults in the school social environment” (Goodenow & Grady, 1993, p.60-61) and is considered a fundamental human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1943). A strong sense of SB is associated with a multitude of benefits for children, including positive academic (Babakhani, 2014; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Korpershoek et al., 2019); social-emotional (Gillen-O’Neel & Fuligni, 2013; O’Rourke & Cooper, 2010; Uslu & Gizir, 2017); and psychological outcomes (Korpershoek et al., 2019). SB is also linked to a reduced likelihood of adverse behavioural (Demantet & van Houtte, 2012; Loukas et al., 2010; Resnick et al., 1993) and negative psychological outcomes (Shochet et al., 2006), all of which demonstrate the importance of CYP having a strong sense of SB to help them achieve their best in all areas of their development. SB is particularly important for children with SEN, who may feel different to their peers; however, research has shown they have lower SB than their non-SEN peers (Cullinane, 2020; Dimitrellou & Hurry, 2019; Porter & Ingram, 2021). Cullinane’s (2020) findings determined that various factors including academic difficulties, negative peer relations and less involvement with extra-curricular activities contributed to the discrepancy between those with and without SEN. He also hypothesised that communication and social difficulties of those with SEN might also play a part.

In addition to those reported in Cullinane’s (2020) study, many variables have been found to influence a CYP’s SB, with one of the most pertinent being student-teacher relationships (Allen et al., 2018; Crouch et al., 2014; Slaten et al., 2016; Uslu & Gizir, 2017). Research into student-teacher relationships reports that CTs are key in ensuring CYP feel valued, safe and cared for within school, which is achieved through trusting and respectful relationships and which fosters a strong sense of SB (Allen et al., 2018; Uslu & Gizir, 2017). The importance of feeling connected to and supported by adults within school is also demonstrated in the definition of SB, which emphasises the role of “teachers and other adults” (Goodenow & Grady, 1993, p.60-61) in making a student feel accepted and included.

Tillery et al. (2013) discuss the importance of strong student-teacher relationships that are “trusting and supportive” (p.138) and how, through the mechanisms theorised by self-determination theory, social capital and student-teacher attachment foster SB by promoting motivation, attainment and the development of social skills through emotional regulation. By meeting the CYP’s needs of autonomy, relatedness and competence, teachers facilitate the development of intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Regarding social capital (Coleman, 1990; Stanton-Salazar, 1997), teachers offer support such as guidance, encouragement and access to additional information that facilitates them meeting their goals. Finally, in terms of student-teacher attachment, Tillery et al. (2013) discuss research (Davis, 2003; Myers & Pianta, 2008) that sees student-teacher attachment as an addendum to the parent-child relationship, in which teachers help regulate the emotions of CYP with whom they have a positive attachment. Being emotionally regulated enables the successful engagement and development of pupils’ interpersonal skills. Tillery et al. (2013) posit that the integration of these theories explains the many reported benefits associated with SB, including motivation, self-efficacy, attendance and fewer mental health problems. Although current research focuses primarily on how teachers support SB, given the literature demonstrating the emotional support TAs can offer children (Groom & Rose, 2005; Pinkard, 2021; Rose & Doveston, 2008) and their increasingly active role in their direct education (Blatchford et al., 2009; Skipp & Hopwood, 2019; Tews & Lupart, 2008; Webster et al., 2011), it is possible that TAs may have a similar effect on SB.

### **3.1.2 Teaching Assistants**

In 2020, TAs accounted for approximately 30% of the workforce in all state-funded schools in England; over the last two decades, their numbers have risen (DfE, 2021b), and their role has become more pedagogical in nature (Tews & Lupart, 2008; Webster et al., 2011). Over this time, there has been extensive research and guidance disseminated on the effectiveness of TAs, with the most significant being the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project (Blatchford et al., 2009) and how to deploy them effectively throughout the school day (Blatchford et al., 2012; Sharples et al., 2015). Despite TAs being an established part of the school workforce, their role lacks consistency between and even within schools. Skipp and Hopwood (2019) report three main ways in which TAs are utilised: whole-class TA, in-class targeted TAs and withdrawal intervention delivery for children with SEN; however, many TAs are used in more than one of these ways each day. Due to differences in deployment, amongst many other factors, determining the impact of TAs has proved difficult. Given the amount of time TAs spend supporting children with SEN who are already vulnerable to lower academic and social outcomes (Cara, 2013), research suggests that their impact is not as great as would be hoped, but that this is the result of



strategic factors, rather than individual TA skills and approaches. The DISS study indicated that the more TA support a child receives, the less academic progress they make (Blatchford et al., 2009) and this led to related guidance on TA deployment which revolutionised how TAs work (Blatchford et al., 2012). In addition, some research and lived experiences of individuals have demonstrated that TAs help with more than just the academic aspect of school, such as their role in increasing a child's social inclusion and emotional wellbeing (Groom & Rose, 2005; Pinkard, 2021; Rose & Doveston, 2008; Tews & Lupart, 2008). However, the social inclusion dimension of this practice remains under-researched (Saddler, 2014), especially TAs' role, if any, in fostering SB.

### **3.1.3 Current Study**

Although positive student-teacher relationships have been found to foster SB (Allen et al., 2018; Uslu & Gizir, 2017), to the researcher's knowledge, no research has yet been conducted into whether a strong student-TA relationship can replicate this effect in children who receive a lot of TA support. Those who receive TA support may consequently spend significant time away from their class teacher (CT) and classroom (Pinkard, 2021; Skipp & Hopwood, 2019), limiting the opportunities to build a strong student-teacher relationship. Therefore, the aim of this study is to (1) explore the impact of children with SEN's relationships with their CT and TA on their SB and (2) to determine whether a strong relationship with a child's TA can protect against the absence of a strong relationship with their CT with regards to SB. It will also examine whether the amount of TA support they receive is an influencing factor. The following hypotheses will be tested:

1. Children with SEN will have lower SB than children without SEN.
2. The more TA support a child receives, the weaker their relationship with their CT will be.
3. The more TA support a child receives, the stronger their relationship with the TA will be.
4. Children with a positive relationship with their CT will have high SB.
5. Children with a positive relationship with their TA will have high SB.
6. Children who have a positive relationship with their TA but a negative relationship with their CT will have high SB.

## **3.2 Method**

### **3.2.1 Design and Procedure**

The research questions warranted quantitative data. However, as a critical realist epistemological position was taken, which assumes that human experience, perceptions and constructs influence reality and that our knowledge is fallible (Danermark et al., 2001), qualitative data was also used to explore participants' relationships with their classroom adults and how this impacts their SB in more depth. Therefore, a triangulation mixed-methods design, in which both types of data are given equal weighting in analysis, was used (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Schools known to the researchers and their colleagues were invited to participate in the research. All schools were also offered an information pack on SB in return for involvement and entered into a draw for a monetary prize as a thank you for taking part. Four schools agreed to participate, and a member of the senior leadership team from each emailed all parents/carers of children in year groups 4-6, inviting them to complete an online survey with their child, consisting of 45 questions. The questionnaire was open for three weeks, and parents/carers were sent a reminder email after two weeks. Following this, CTs were asked how much TA support each participating child in their class receives per week as a percentage. One survey question asked whether parents/carers were happy to be contacted about their child being interviewed. Consent was gained, and the children were interviewed by the primary researcher in a quiet area at school. Two interviews took place with just the child and the interviewer. A TA joined for one interview at the child's request; however, this was not the TA who regularly supported the child and was spoken about during the interview. Parents/carers were provided with a child-friendly information sheet to discuss with their child before the interviews, and the researcher sought verbal consent. Interviewees were told they could stop the interview at any point. They were provided with a stop sign to indicate they would like to cease the interview. A transcription service transcribed the interviews. The University of Southampton Ethics Committee granted ethics approval.

### **3.2.2 Participants**

Participants were 49 children from four primary schools in Hampshire, England (see Table 2), who completed the survey with their parent/carer. Eight participants were reported by their parents to have SEN, with three having EHCPs. The CT of all participating children was asked to report the amount of TA support each child receives, but this data was missing for four participants. A boy in year five from school one (Dan; all names have been changed to maintain

confidentiality), a girl in year five from school two (Jess), and a boy in year four from school four (Theo), all with SEN, from the initial sample, were also interviewed.

**Table 2**

*School and Year Group Breakdown of Participants*

Year Group	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Total
School 1	5	7	5	17
School 2	1	2	1	4
School 3	5	12	3	20
School 4	6	1	1	8
Total	17	22	10	49

### 3.2.3 Measures

The online questionnaire consisted of items from The Belonging Scale (Frederickson et al., 2007), Young Children’s Appraisal of Teacher Support Questionnaire (Y-CATS) (Mantzicopoulos & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2003), with additional self-report questions. Parents/carers were asked to disclose whether they consider their child to have SEN and whether they have an EHCP or are on the SEN register. They were also asked to report the number of extracurricular activities attended by their child during the last month. Perceived safety was measured by the statement “I feel safe at school” to which the children responded with either “no not true”, “not sure” or “yes true”. Finally, the child’s CT reported the amount of time spent each week supported by a TA by selecting a percentage range, e.g., 0-10%, 11-20%, 21-30% etc.

#### *The Belonging Scale*

The Belonging Scale (Frederickson et al., 2007) was used to determine the sense of SB experienced by each child. This self-report measure is an adapted version of The Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (PSSM), which was shortened to be made suitable for children aged eight and above (Frederickson & Dunsmuir, 2009). It consists of 12 items regarding their school experience, such as “people at my school are friendly to me” to which children respond either, “no not true”, “not sure” or “yes true”. Frederickson and Dunsmuir (2009) reported high internal consistency of the scale when assessed using Cronbach’s Alpha ( $\alpha = .87$ ) (Frederickson & Dunsmuir, 2009). Cronbach’s Alpha was equally high in the current study ( $\alpha = .86$ ).

### **Y-CATS**

The Y-CATS questionnaire (Mantzicopoulos & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2003) assessed the relationships participants have with their CT and TA. It consists of items such as “my teacher listens to me”; “my teacher” was replaced with “this person”, and the children rated each statement separately for their CT and TA with a “yes” or “no” answer. Guidance was given that if children were taught or supported by more than one CT or TA, they should answer the questions about the person to whom they feel closest and that if this was considered equal, it should be the person with whom they spend the most time. The questionnaire has three subscales: warmth, autonomy support and conflict; however, as the items under the autonomy support sub-scale did not apply to the TA role, this subscale was omitted. In the present study, Cronbach’s Alpha was  $\alpha = .77$  for CT warmth,  $\alpha = .78$  for TA warmth,  $\alpha = .43$  for CT conflict and  $\alpha = .65$  for TA conflict. The low Cronbach's Alpha score for the conflict subscales is possibly due to these subscales having fewer items than the warmth subscales. However, as Cronbach's Alpha was considered acceptable for the conflict subscale ( $\alpha = .70$ ) within the broader literature (Longobardi et al., 2017), the low internal consistency may be due to the items being at the end of the questionnaire, meaning respondents' answers may have been impacted by fatigue. Regardless of the cause, the results for the conflict subscales should be interpreted with caution.

### ***Interviews***

The interviews averaged 21 minutes and followed a semi-structured interview schedule adapted from Pinkard's work (2021) (Appendix A). The first part was designed to build rapport and consisted of general questions about school, such as "tell me a little bit about your school" and "tell me about some of the things you do/don't like about school". The main section of the interviews focused on the adults in school, e.g. "How do you feel about your teaching assistant helping you? Why?" and "If you need help, would you ask your teaching assistant or teacher? Why?". During the final part of the interview, the children were presented with GoGos (colourful plastic figurines with neutral gender and ethnic features). They were asked to pick one that reminded them of their CT and TA to facilitate the discussion. After choosing the GoGos, they answered questions focussing on the personal characteristics of the classroom adults and their relationships with them, such as "Can you describe them in three words?" and "How does your CT/TA make you feel?".

### 3.3 Results – Quantitative

#### 3.3.1 Quantitative Analysis

As instructed (Frederickson & Dunsmuir, 2009), belonging scores were established by allocating 1 for “no, not true”, 2, for “not sure” and 3 for “yes, true”; negatively phrased items were reverse-scored, and the individual’s average was calculated. Similarly, following the Y-CATS guidance (Longobardi et al., 2017; Mantzicopoulos & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2003), a mean score for the warmth and conflict subscales was calculated for each child, by scoring positive responses as 1, and negative responses as 0. Overall relationship scores were also calculated by subtracting the conflict average from the warmth average. The results from the questionnaires were averaged for each group; these values are shown in Table 3. The mid-point from the percentage range was used for TA support values; for example, children who were considered to have 11-20% support per week were given the value of 15.5%.

**Table 3**

*Means and Standard Deviations of Participants' Responses*

	SEN	Non-SEN
Extracurricular clubs	1.00 (1.1)	3.25 (2.3)
Belonging	2.13 (.54)	2.69 (.41)
TA support (percentage of time at school)	72.2 (25.0)	10.93 (10.8)
CT warmth	.73 (.28)	.87 (.14)
CT conflict	.16 (.19)	.05 (.16)
Overall CT relationship	.57 (.40)	.82 (.17)
TA warmth	.67 (.25)	.81 (.17)
TA conflict	.14 (.22)	.04 (.09)
Overall TA relationship	.53 (.40)	.77 (.21)

Due to an insufficient sample size, it was not possible to conduct the planned hierarchical multiple regression. The mean and standard deviation of the number of extracurricular clubs for both groups is reported in Table 3. Of the SEN children, 37.5% reported they felt safe at school,

12.5% said they did not, and 50% were not sure, compared with 90% of those without SEN feeling safe at school, 5% not feeling safe, and 5% stating they were not sure.

The required assumptions were not met for parametric tests; therefore, Mann-Whitney U and Kendall's tau non-parametric tests were used to compare groups and correlations. One participant was excluded due to all scores for the TA warmth and conflict items being 0, indicating they might not have had a TA in their class on whom to report. The "more than ten clubs" response for one participant's number of extracurricular activities was scored as 11 as it was not possible to determine the exact number for analysis. Finally, the data for four participants was incomplete due to school staff not indicating the amount of TA support they received. As a result, they were not included in any TA support variable analyses.

### 3.3.2 SEN and Non-SEN Comparisons

A significant difference was found in the belonging scores for participants with SEN and those without,  $U = 50, z = -3.07, p = .001$ , with an effect size  $r = -.44$  using a Mann-Whitney U test; the number of extracurricular clubs attended ( $U = 56, z = -2.92, p = .003, r = -.042$ ); and the amount of TA support they receive ( $U = 223, z = 4.26, p < .001, r = .64$ ). In contrast, no significant differences were found for CT warmth ( $U = 102, z = -1.64, p = .11, r = -.24$ ), CT conflict ( $U = 221, z = 2.00, p = .095, r = .29$ ), TA warmth ( $U = 103, z = -1.60, p = .12, r = -.023$ ) or TA conflict ( $U = 214, z = 2.03, p = .14, r = .29$ ). However, when the warmth and conflict scores were combined (warmth minus conflict) significant differences were found for CT relationships ( $U = 84.5, z = -2.11, p = .035, r = -.30$ ), but were not significant for TA relationships ( $U = 95, z = -1.81, p = .074, r = -.26$ ). Distributions of the belonging scores for SEN and non-SEN individuals were not similar, as assessed by visual inspection and due to a small sample size of the SEN group, exact significance was used (Field, 2018). However, it is worth noting there were some ties in the data as a result of using questionnaires for the measures. Therefore, when examining the asymptotic significance rather than the exact (Laerd Statistics, 2015), CT conflict is also deemed to be significantly different between groups ( $p = .045$ ).

### 3.3.3 Belonging

A Kendall's tau-b correlation was used to determine the relationship between belonging and the warmth and conflict scores with their classroom adults, as well as the number of extracurricular activities. Belonging had a moderate positive relationship with and CT warmth ( $\tau_b = .28, p = .013$ ) and TA warmth ( $\tau_b = .22, p = .05$ ), and a strong positive relationship with extracurricular activities ( $\tau_b = .37, p < .001$ ). In contrast a moderate negative relationship was

found with CT conflict ( $\tau_b = -.25, p = .037$ ) and a strong negative relationship with TA conflict ( $\tau_b = -.34, p = .005$ ). When the overall relationships with their CT and TAs were considered, a strong positive relationship with belonging was found for CTs ( $\tau_b = .32, p = .003$ ) and a moderate one for TAs ( $\tau_b = .25, p = .019$ ). No significant relationship was found between belonging and the amount of TA support ( $\tau_b = -.21, p = .092$ ).

### 3.3.4 TA Support

A Kendall's tau-b correlation was also used to explore the relationships between TA support and the warmth and conflict scores with their CT and TA. However, due to not having data for the amount of support received for four participants, this analysis was only conducted on the 44 participants with complete data. The amount of TA support received had weak positive correlations with CT warmth ( $\tau_b = .10, p = .42$ ), CT conflict ( $\tau_b = .14, p = .30$ ), TA warmth ( $\tau_b = .13, p = .28$ ) and TA conflict ( $\tau_b = .043, p = .75$ ), none of which were statistically significant. The relationships remained non-significant when considered with the overall relationships for CT ( $\tau_b = .014, p = .91$ ) and TA ( $\tau_b = .13, p = .30$ ).

### 3.3.5 Interaction of Relationships

In order to explore whether a positive relationship with a TA compensates for a weak relationship with a CT, Hayes' PROCESS tool was used. No significant interaction effect was found ( $b = -.52, 95\% CI[-1.89, .84], t = -.77, p = .84$ ), indicating a child's relationship with their TA does not have a greater influence on SB when there is a weak relationship with their CT than when there is a strong one.

Therefore, despite the participants with SEN, as expected, spending more time with their TA and having lower SB and weaker relationships with their CT than their non-SEN peers, there is no evidence to suggest a strong relationship with a TA can protect against the absence of a strong relationship with their CT with regards to SB.

## 3.4 Results – Qualitative

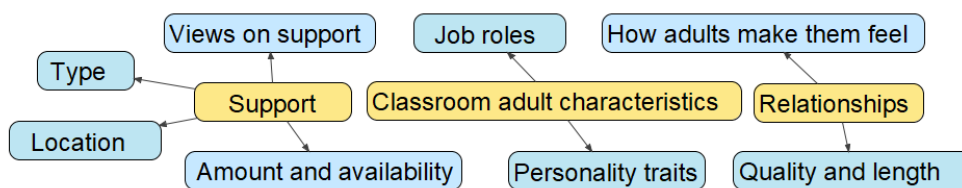
### 3.4.1 Qualitative Analysis

An inductive thematic analysis approach was taken, in which complete coding of semantic themes was carried out following Braun and Clarke's (2006) step-by-step guide. First, I familiarised myself with the data by reading the transcripts while listening to the recordings multiple times and making initial notes for coding. Initial codes were then generated manually by hand-writing

notes on the transcripts and colour-coded. At this point, the codes were digitised with the text extract and a brief description and grouped into potential themes, which were reviewed and re-organised multiple times using thematic maps (see Appendix B for examples of this in the coding manual). Next, codes within each theme were reviewed, and transcripts were re-read to ensure the validity of each theme regarding the overall data and to ensure the inclusion of additional codes. Lastly, the three overarching themes were refined in terms of their sub-themes and their relation to other themes, and the final thematic map (see Figure 2) was produced. The themes, made up of sub-themes, will be discussed; however, the order of presentation does not reflect any perceived order of importance.

**Figure 4**

*Thematic Analysis Map*



### 3.4.2 Theme One – Support

#### ***Type of Support***

All participants spoke about the academic support they receive from classroom adults when they are stuck on questions or need guidance - *"Miss CT showed me a way of completing the maths"*. Dan commented that his TA helps him *"practise spelling, and ... read and stuff"*, and Theo reflected that TAs *"try to make the tasks easier"*. Various methods of academic support were discussed, including suggestions of strategies *"tells you to get ... the whiteboard out and write on it"*; sharing of examples; and more direct support such as with spellings *"they spell it out"*. Theo also communicated how his TA helps him to collect his thoughts, reducing the overwhelm he sometimes experiences *"because just there's lots of thoughts into one whole thought together, and then makes my brain not go [makes squashed sound]."*

Although most comments regarding the type of support referred to academic support, Theo communicated that he also receives support at lunchtime. Although he did not explicitly



label it as such, Theo described his TA's social and emotional support as a core element of their role, responding, *"she picks me up at lunchtime"* when asked what his TA's job is.

### **Amount and Availability of Support**

The amount and availability of support varied amongst the participants. Theo reported that his TA helps him *"all day"*; Dan said different TAs support him for different lessons *"everyday unless they have like a bug or something"*; whereas Jess shared that for the last month, her class have not had a TA, impacting the amount of support she receives. The interviewees were able to consider why some children get more TA support than others *"the people that get less help know a bit more"* and reflected personally about why they receive support *"because I'm dyslexic I find stuff more harder than other people"*.

Views on the availability of support also varied. Jess commented that her CT is *"pretty much always there"*; however, when asked if she would change anything about how her CT works with her, she replied *"probably to help me a bit more"*, specifying *"in like maths and that"* when probed. Jess' comments suggest that although her CT is consistent, possibly unlike her TA, who has not been there for the last month, she does not receive the amount of support she desires.

When considering who they would most likely ask for help, Dan shared he would typically go to his CT, reflecting that his favourite TA is *"normally busy"* but feels that his TAs help him the most. Dan's explanations imply that he values his TA support but that the TAs in his school provide structured support and interventions, rarely making them available within the classroom. A contrasting experience was shared by Theo, who stated his *"teacher is normally marking other people's work and stuff"*, resulting in his TA being his primary source of help. Although *"there's normally not many adults that can come and help"* in Jess' class, she acknowledged that if she needed it, she would *"put her hand up for the teacher to come over"*, implying it is available if she needs but reflected that asking and waiting for support can make her feel *"a bit nervous"*.

### **Location of Support**

All three children spoke about receiving at least some of their TA support outside of the classroom, which for Jess and Dan appeared to be for a planned intervention, e.g., *"she comes to take some people out when it's maths time"*. However, being away from the classroom seemed to offer respite from the classroom environment for Theo *"when I'm usually angry I'll just feel like my brain's mush, I usually go to this area"* and helps him *"to calm down"*. All children also spoke about the TA support they receive inside the classroom, with Theo explaining that the TA tends to *"sit next to ... or in front of"* him.

When considering their preferences, both Dan and Theo communicated that they favour being supported outside of the class, with Dan commenting, "*they're [the rooms] less like noisy and stuff*". Both children also mentioned that they like the resources and environments of the areas they work in, for example, "*it has like beanbags*" and "*I like ... the whiteboard because I usually here draw my own games*".

### **Views on Support**

Overall, the children spoke positively about the support they receive from their TAs, reporting they felt "*good*" and "*happy*" because they get "*some support*". Theo shared that TAs "*make the tasks easier*", and without their support, he would feel overwhelmed "*well just fill my brain up and I wouldn't know how to do it*", and Dan mentioned he would "*struggle with them [questions] way more*".

When reflecting on their CTs' support, Jess suggested that her CT ensure visual resources are always available, explaining she feels stressed when her CT "*tells the work and doesn't show the slide*". In contrast, Theo and Dan said they would not change anything about the support they receive from their CTs or TAs. However, Theo indicated that his TA's explanations are not always beneficial "*Miss TA usually just fills my brain up so quickly*". Dan communicated he finds the consistency of support valuable, meaning he finds the TAs more helpful as they support him "*every morning*" and that the difference in methods of support between his TA and CT can be confusing for him "*I get kind of confused when they say like how about try this one, and then try this one*".

### **3.4.3 Theme Two: Classroom Adult Characteristics**

#### **Job Roles**

There was a general agreement that the CTs job is to "*teach everyone, and to make sure that they understand*" and they tell "*the class what they need to do*". There was also recognition for their workload outside of classroom hours, with Jess commenting "*they stay quite late here to sort out the work*"., The TA's role was described as "*to help people when they get stuck and talk about how they're doing*". However, the children also described TAs' helping the teacher including to "*print off stuff*" and "*give out the computers*" as a core element of their role.

When comparing their CT and TAs, the children spoke mainly of personal characteristics for their similarities "*they're both happy, cheerful and like helps me.*" whereas their differences were based more on their knowledge, "*the teachers are a bit more [aware of his learning]*", and teaching strategies "*they have different ways of explaining stuff*".

### **Personality Traits**

The interviewees spoke highly about the personality traits of their classroom adults, describing CTs as *“kind, caring and ... very nice”* and TAs as *“nice, helpful and kind”*. Both CTs and TAs were also described as cheerful or smiley, with Dan adding that his CT is *“happy and she’s funny”* and Jess stating that her CT *“is really smiley”*. Although the discussion of personality traits was predominantly positive, Jess explained how both her CT and TA could sometimes be angry *“she’s got two emotions ... she’s sometimes ... a bit smiley, and then sometimes ... she gets a bit angry and shouts at some people”*. While her CT’s reasons for being angry were justified in Jess’ opinion, *“she only shouts when anybody isn’t listening to her”*, Jess was less understanding of her TA’s anger. Anger is considered one of her TA’s key characteristics, with Jess describing how *“she gets a bit angry and shouts at some people”* and *“in the evening she gets a bit angry”*. Jess found it difficult to identify possible causes; however, with prompting, she identified that the reasons were similar to why her CT gets angry and included children *“not listening to her”* and *“not putting their hand up”* when stuck.

#### **3.4.4 Theme Three: Relationships**

##### **Quality and Length of Relationship**

When talking about their positive relationships, all three interviewees mentioned the length of their relationships. Dan had known his TAs for a long time *“I had her for like every year apart from year one I think.”*, and Jess previously received emotional literacy support from her TA *“I’ve known her for quite a long time now, and I used to do ELSA [emotional literacy support assistant] with her”*, both of which were discussed as contributing factors to their positive relationships. Theo spoke about how meeting his CT before the new academic year was helpful for their relationship *“because I met her in year three before I went into year four”* which he gave as a reason for preferring his CT to his TA, with whom he had only recently started working. Jess stated she prefers her CT *“because she’s pretty much always there for [her]”*, while Dan reflected that he prefers his TA because she is easier to talk to than his CT.

Jess spoke a lot about the importance of trust for her relationships, sharing that she feels uncomfortable working with adults whom she does not yet know well *“some other teachers I don’t really trust, so I don’t really like them coming over to me, so I just go a bit silent”*. She reflected that she trusts her TA because she has *“known her for quite a long time”* and she does not trust some classroom adults because she has not *“really talked to them that much”*. Jess mentioned that she would like her CT to talk to her more, as she enjoys having informal conversations with her *“talk to me a bit more, like when we have a chat normally before break I*

*like to do that a bit more*". She also mentioned it would be helpful *"for them [classroom adults] to know how you're feeling a bit with the work, and if you're finding it hard or not"*, indicating it is important to Jess to have depth to her relationships with her classroom adults in order to feel understood and supported.

### ***How Adults Make Them Feel***

All three interviewees reported that both their CT and TA make them feel *"good"* and *"a bit happy"*. Reasons for this included classroom adults showing recognition for achievements *"happy because yesterday she told me that I was the first one to reply back to her"* and pride *"she's been very proud of me"*; helping them with work, or simply *"just from smiling"*. However, the children also communicated some negative emotions regarding their classroom adults, specifically feelings of stress. For example, Jess expressed that her CT could make her feel stressed when she does not support verbal instructions with visuals, e.g., presentation slides. She also commented, *"some teaching assistants make me feel a bit stressed"* and went on to explain this happens when *"they do something wrong, and they're not really helping me out, they just tell you the question again and they didn't actually help you out"*. When asked what Jess would change about how her TA works with her, she replied *"maybe for her to be a bit more nicer and that, and to understand a bit more"*. Theo also identified his TA's support methods and explanations as a source of stress *"Miss TA usually just fills my brain up so quickly"*.

## **3.5 Results Summary**

It was found that children with SEN experience lower SB, attend fewer extracurricular clubs, have more TA support and have weaker relationships with their CT than their non-SEN peers. SB was correlated with the warmth, conflict, and overall relationship scores of both CTs and TAs and the number of extracurricular clubs attended; however, it was not correlated with the amount of TA support received. In addition, TA support was not significantly correlated with any of the measured variables. There was no interaction between a child's relationship with their TA, CT, and their SB. Based on the analyses conducted for this study, it was found that a strong TA relationship did not compensate for the lack of one with their CT. The qualitative results shed light on some of these findings, which will be explored in the discussion.

The importance of longstanding relationships with classroom adults that have depth was emphasised in the interviews. Overall, interviewees reported good relationships with all classroom adults and spoke positively of their support. However, they reflected that although the personal characteristics of their CTs and TAs were similar, their knowledge base and job roles differed slightly, as did the logistics of the support they provided.

## 3.6 Discussion

### 3.6.1 Findings in Relation to Wider Literature and Research Questions

This study examined the relationships children with and without SEN have with their classroom adults, how these impact their SB, and whether the amount of TA support influences this. In line with previous research, children with SEN were found to have lower SB (Cullinane, 2020), more TA support (Webster & Blatchford, 2013a, 2013b), attend fewer extracurricular activities (Malcoci, 2015) and have less positive relationships with their CTs (Freire et al., 2020) than their non-SEN peers. Statistically significant differences in the SB of SEN and non-SEN participants and a positive correlation between SB and overall CT and TA relationships provided supporting evidence for the first, fourth and fifth hypotheses. However, no evidence was found for H2 and H3 that greater amounts of TA support would lead to a stronger relationship with a child's TA and a weaker one with their CT. In addition, there was no evidence for H6 to suggest a positive relationship with their TA, but a negative relationship with their CT would result in a strong sense of SB.

There was no significant difference between those with and without SEN when exploring the overall TA relationship or the warmth and conflict scores of CT and TA relationships. The absence of a significant difference between groups in their overall relationships with their TA was surprising, especially when considering the significantly greater amount of time children with SEN spend with a TA. The lack of difference might have arisen from how TAs are used within the classroom. As some children with SEN require significant amounts of 1:1 or small group support, they might have a TA who spends the majority of their time with one child, which was the case for Theo, whereas other TAs might be used primarily for interventions, as described by Dan, and some might be classroom-based, supporting the whole class (Skipp & Hopwood, 2019). As data regarding how TAs are utilised in each of the participating schools was not collected, it is not possible to determine whether this was a contributory factor.

As expected, children with SEN had lower SB than their peers. Previous research has found that less involvement in extracurricular activities contributes to this (Cullinane, 2020), which is supported by the findings that children with SEN participated in significantly fewer extracurricular activities than their peers and that SB was positively correlated with the number of extracurricular activities. The positive impact of extracurricular activities on SB is likely the result of increased opportunities to socialise with peers with similar interests (Shulruf, 2010). However, access can be limited for CYP with SEN, especially if they require a high level of adult support, making it harder for schools to supply due to cost and availability of staff.

Cullinane's (2020) study, along with other research (Allen et al., 2018) also concludes that positive relationships with teachers are crucial for SB. Considering this, alongside the results of this study that showed good relationships with CTs and TAs were positively correlated with SB and that participants with SEN had less positive relationships with their CTs, offers insight into one reason why children with SEN have lower SB. However, Cullinane's interviews with children found that good relationships are not just the result of positive interactions or the avoidance of negative ones but, instead, need to be ones in which children "perceive that their teachers are interested in them, not just as learners, but also as individuals" (p8.). The theme of 'relationships', specifically the sub-theme 'quality and length of relationship' derived from this research's qualitative component, adds depth to Cullinane's conclusion and suggests such perceptions might not yet be achieved by those interviewed. Jess shared her desire for classroom adults to know and understand her better, both as a person, i.e., her interests and her emotions in certain situations. Two of the children also spoke fondly of classroom adults recognising their achievements, demonstrating understanding of their ability, effort and personal goals. It was interesting that the comments regarding feeling understood and the importance of trust came from Jess. Out of the three interviewees, Jess is in the classroom the most and spoke most highly of her CT, making it possible that those who spend more time away from their CT feel even less understood. Arguably, this need might be met by their TA, which to some extent is supported by Dan's comments referring to his preference for TA assistance due to the ease with which he can talk to them and how he values the consistency of their support. However, as children with SEN did not have significantly more positive relationships with their TAs than their peers, it is possible the time spent with TAs is not enough to form relationships that are considerably stronger than those of children not receiving 1:1 or small group support. This hypothesis would explain why a child's TA relationship does not compensate for a weak CT relationship in terms of SB, as indicated by the lack of interaction effect. Another possible explanation is that children with SEN often strive to be treated the same as their non-SEN peers (Konecni-Upton, 2021); therefore, if they are aware of their peers' relationships with their CT, they may desire the same. Such desire could be difficult to replace with more TA support, especially considering that CTs are the primary classroom adult, which the children demonstrated an awareness of when reflecting on the job role differences.

Similarly, although the time away from their CT does not result in increased conflict or reduced warmth, it might prevent it from developing to the depth required to be meaningful to the child and boost their SB. Previous research highlights how teachers add depth to their relationships with children using whole-class techniques that children who receive TA support outside of the classroom might miss. For example, sharing information about themselves; being fun, playful and using humour; interacting with the class by helping children, offering praise and

rewards, e.g., stickers; and giving children special jobs (Alesech & Nayar, 2021; McLaughlin et al., 2015). In addition, through the nature of the CTs' role, they are in the position to create an "atmosphere of commonality and belonging" (Uslu & Gizir, 2017, p.75). Therefore, as theorised by Fredrickson's (1998) broaden-and-build theory, it is possible that feeling they belong within the classroom, when supported by their CT and an inclusive environment, might cause children to be more alert to further opportunities, such as interacting with peers on the playground. In turn, this might result in positive peer relationships, which is also a significant contributor to SB (Allen et al., 2018).

In line with the importance of feeling understood by classroom adults, the warmth and overall relationships with CT and TA were positively correlated with SB, and conflict was negatively correlated. When examining the strengths of these relationships, TA conflict had the largest correlation and a more considerable impact on children's SB than CT conflict, which might be due to the differences in their job roles. A large part of the TA role is offering social-emotional support to children with their social development (Pinkard, 2021; Saddler, 2014). Although this is also part of the CT's job, the CT has other, often more pertinent, demands, including teaching the class, marking and planning. The sub-theme 'job roles' indicated children were aware to some extent of the difference between the roles and viewed the CT's primary roles as planning, teaching and marking. In contrast, TAs were seen as a source of help when they were stuck, suggesting the TA role was viewed as more of a nurturing one, echoing previous research findings (Pinkard, 2021). As the personal characteristics were described as being very similar, differences between TAs and CTs likely arise from differences in their job roles as opposed to personality or behavioural traits.

In addition to supporting in the classroom, TAs often support children at lunchtime (Baines & Blatchford, 2019), which can be challenging due to the unstructured nature, resulting in children needing social support to make and maintain friendships and resolve conflicts (Chu, 2016). Therefore, conflict with a TA could have a far-reaching impact on SB beyond the classroom. For example, if they did not feel supported or perceived TAs to favour other children, conflict with the TA could also impact their peer relations, which previous research has shown as a significant contributory factor to SB (Allen et al., 2018). Another possible factor could be the increased time spent with the TA. In the UK, teachers are entitled to spend a minimum of 10% of their teaching time per week on planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) work (DfE, 2021a), during which TAs often cover the class (Skipp & Hopwood, 2019). As TAs often also supervise children at lunchtime, children may spend a large proportion of the school week with their TA. In turn, children may be especially attuned to conflict and alert to threats in this relationship, and conflict may be more likely due to increased opportunities, especially at lunchtime when poor social

## Chapter 3

behaviour is one of the challenges (Baines & Blatchford, 2019). Similarly, some TAs move through the school with the children, which was the case for at least some of the TAs in three of the participating schools, possibly resulting in children being more vulnerable to threats to longer-lasting relationships.

It could also be argued that primary school children value the social aspect of school more than the academic aspects. Therefore, if TAs are considered to facilitate the social element more than the teachers, a strong relationship with them might be more important to children at that point in their education. However, despite TA conflict having the strongest correlation with SB, the overall relationship with the CT was more strongly correlated with SB than the overall relationship with the TA. These findings support previous research in that relationship with the CT is a prime contributor to SB (Allen et al., 2018). However, they add that the TA relationship also has a significant impact and that conflict with their TA can make a child particularly vulnerable to a lower sense of SB. Future research might like to explore whether children view school's academic or social elements as the primary purpose and whether this impacts the importance of different relationships on their SB. In other words, if they value the social element more, are they more alert to TA conflict if they view TAs to help more in social situations?

The amount of TA support was not significantly correlated with either the CT or the TA relationships. Although it is possible that the sample was too small to identify any relationship, the qualitative findings offer insight as to why there might not be a relationship between the variables. It was hypothesised that the more TA support a child receives, the less time they spend with their CT and, therefore, the weaker the child-CT relationship and the stronger the child-TA relationship. However, the insights provided by the interviewees suggest there are more influencing factors to a child's relationships than the quantity of support. The children showed an awareness of why they receive more adult support than their peers and overall spoke positively about their support, appearing to, if anything, want more than what they are currently receiving rather than less. However, very little else was mentioned in the interviews regarding the amount of support and how it influenced their relationships with their classroom adults. Instead, the focus was given to the quality of their relationships which was impacted by factors such as how adults make them feel, how long they have known the person and how known they felt by the adult, as discussed earlier.

When discussing the amount and availability of support, the children communicated that support is not always readily accessible from their preferred adult, resulting in the child either waiting or needing to seek support from elsewhere. Given the research into how children with SEN can develop an over-reliance or dependency (Blatchford et al., 2012; Giangreco, 2010;



Glazzard, 2011; Moyles & Suschitzky, 1997) on particular adults who support them, it is possible that certain adults being unavailable at points throughout the day might be intentionally planned. For example, research has recommended that TAs should not replace CTs for children with SEN (Blatchford et al., 2012), meaning children with SEN should spend sufficient time in class and with their CT. Therefore, encouraging the child to seek help from the other classroom adult could be one way of intentionally reducing over-reliance. On the other hand, the unavailability of adults could result from genuine strategic demands. For the CT, this might result from needing to share their time equally amongst other class members; and for the TA, their role could be to help the whole class, rather than specific children when not running interventions. Various reasons for children's preferences for certain adults were given, ranging from personality traits to teaching strategies. However, one pertinent explanation was the consistency of support. As discussed, forming good and trusting relationships is crucial for successful teaching. However, if strategic demands pose a barrier to children utilising such relationships (i.e., if the adult is busy), the potential positive impact is greatly reduced.

Although the quantity of support did not significantly impact children's relationships with their classroom adults, the qualitative results suggest the type of support did - specifically the techniques used. Given TAs do not receive the same pedagogical training as CTs, it perhaps explains why two of the children reflected that some teaching strategies used by TAs were unhelpful and sometimes overwhelming. This finding supports the results from the DISS study, which found the quality of instruction to be lower than that of CTs and that TAs tend to promote task completion over learning (Blatchford et al., 2009). In addition, Stevens et al. (2007) found that CYP in classes where CTs emphasised the importance of learning instead of performance had a greater SB, which, when considered alongside the findings from the DISS (Blatchford et al., 2009), offers a further explanation as to why CTs have more influence over a CYP's SB. Similarly, the different techniques used by classroom adults were also described as confusing; the difference in training could partly explain this. However, given that one child favoured the methods of his TA and another suggested an improvement that her CT could make, whether or not classroom adults know the child's preferences of how to be taught and their individual strengths and areas of need is likely also to be a prominent contributory factor. The children in this study demonstrated the ability to identify and reflect on strategies that are helpful and those that are not, which varied between individuals. Not only does this emphasise the importance of child's voice in discovering how they learn best, which has been identified as largely absent from the literature (Giangreco, 2021), but it highlights the need for this to be used to make decisions made about their education and used for future planning. Given the demands on school staff throughout the day, there is not always time for preparation or feedback conversations between

the CT and TA (Blatchford et al., 2012; Webster & Blatchford, 2013b). TAs are often given a lesson plan of what needs to be covered (Webster & Blatchford, 2013b) with little or no time to provide feedback to CTs about what worked or did not work, therefore limiting the opportunities to make changes that would benefit the child. The suggestions made in Sharples et al.'s (2015) guidance report would not only benefit the TAs in feeling more prepared for their work, but they have the potential to increase the effectiveness of support for each individual. The results of this research suggest this would likely have a positive impact on the child's relationships with their classroom adults and, in turn, their SB.

The interviewees also reflected on how they prefer to be supported by TAs outside of the classroom. This finding is in direct contrast to the guidance in the SEND Code of Practice that emphasises the importance of children with SEN being included in their class alongside their peers as much as possible (DfE & DfH, 2014). Despite children stating their preference to be outside of the classroom and acknowledging the significant benefits of their voice in decisions about their education (Halsey et al., 2006), these findings do not warrant cause to re-think the recommendations, but rather think about the reasons behind their preferences. The children mainly spoke of the physical environment and how it helps them feel calm and easier to concentrate. Therefore, rather than concluding that children who require additional support should always receive it away from busy classrooms, school staff should consider ways to replicate the calming environment within the classroom or whether they can be supported outside of the classroom only for short, targeted interventions.

Given children's ability to reflect on the success of their learning and teaching strategies, they might benefit from some autonomy over whether they feel able to focus within the classroom or would benefit from being elsewhere. Remaining in the class would likely contribute to a feeling of relatedness to their peers, and if a child chose to receive support in class rather than out, they would be demonstrating a belief in their competence to focus and access their learning. Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) proposes three conditions required for intrinsic motivation: autonomy, relatedness and competence. With these three conditions at least partially met, it is possible that giving children choices of where they receive TA support could result in multiple benefits. Although some children might request to be supported outside of the class each day, they would be in control of this, making them active in their decisions regarding their education. Given the result of previous research (Ghasemi, 2021), autonomy would likely contribute to stronger relationships with classroom adults, which is associated with greater SB. In addition, if the child chooses to remain in class, even just on some occasions, they will have increased opportunities to interact with peers and the CT and access incidental learning opportunities and learning from peers. However, more important than the location, school staff

should first consider whether or not TA support should continue to be used as the default in fostering inclusion and supporting those with SEN. Giangreco (2021) argues that relying on TA support to help children with SEN in mainstream settings is problematic and presents suggestions of alternatives, one of which refers to curricular inclusion. Giangreco (2021) reasons that having individual learning outcomes within a shared learning experience and assigning TAs to teachers rather than individuals are some ways that children with SEN can remain in class and be taught by the more qualified professional. He also suggests that careful consideration should be given to the most appropriate form of support for individual needs, as in many cases, the need could be met in a more inclusive manner or through other means such as peer support.

### **3.6.2 Limitations**

A limitation of this study is the small sample size; not only did this limit the suitability of statistical tests for analysis, but it is possible that one or more null hypothesis was erroneously accepted. An example of how the small sample could have resulted in a significant outcome being missed is that the children's relationships with their CT were overwhelmingly positive. Had the sample been larger and included a more diverse variety of schools, this result might have been different. The design of some aspects of the questionnaire could also be considered limitations. For example, children were asked to consider each statement for their CT and then their TA on the measures of relationships. As they were answering the statements one after another, the survey may prompt children to think about the relative differences between their relationships in a way that they typically do not, i.e., they might need to feel considerably different about their CT and TA to warrant different answers. The questionnaire was initially designed just for CTs, not for comparing two relationships or validated for TAs, which should be considered when interpreting the results. Researchers using a similar measure in the future may prefer to obtain all responses for one relationship before considering another relationship; however, this would likely increase the time required. Similarly, future research may wish to focus on identifying the differences in TA and CT relationships and develop or validate an existing measure for specific use with TAs.

The choice of using semantic themes was made to ensure the child's voice remained at the centre during the analysis process. However, as with all research of this kind, it is possible that some level of interpretation may have inadvertently occurred, resulting in some latent codes being present. However, the use of an inductive approach greatly reduces this likelihood. Similarly, although using inductive analysis, it cannot be guaranteed that the themes are entirely free from the researcher's own analytic preconceptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Finally, although the researcher collected and analysed the data, they did not transcribe it, which is viewed as a critical element of analysis by some (Bird, 2005). Therefore, to counteract any loss of interpretive

opportunity as best possible, the researcher spent additional time familiarising themselves with the data and checking the transcripts with the audio, as Braun and Clarke (2006) recommended.

**3.6.3 Finally, as this study had a quantitative component, it was necessary for participants to be grouped into those with SEN and those without, which, despite mirroring the way in which provision and resources are often allocated within the national context (Algraigray & Boyle, 2017), could be considered to endorse an essentialist view of SEN. The author chose to use the terminology currently in use in the latest Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2014, p. 11), which refers to “children and young people with special educational needs or disabilities”. As noted earlier, this terminology is vulnerable to endorsing the medical model of SEN by implying that it is an essential feature of a learner rather than an element that is revealed through that learner's interaction with their environment. Although it is outside the scope of this paper to reflect in detail on how SEN is defined and the environmental factors that result in some children needing additional support within a school, it is important to note that the researcher does not subscribe to an essentialist view of SEN. For this reason, the researcher strived to counteract the inevitable degree of essentialism by grouping the participants on whether parents considered their child to have SEN, and primarily focusing on the environmental factors, i.e. the support they received and their relationships with the classroom adults, rather than within-child factors.**

**Future Research**

Given the limitations of this study due to the small sample size, it would be beneficial for future researchers to obtain a sample large enough to allow separate analyses for those with and without SEN to explore further the factors that influence SB and how these differ between the two groups. Including a more diverse sample in terms of age, the severity of SEN and school location would also be valuable as the results of this study lack generalisability due to the specific sample used. However, given that the subgroups would need to be sizeable to be sufficiently powered, it might be more feasible for multiple separate studies to focus on different populations. Information regarding the distribution of TAs in terms of how they are used throughout the school day would be advantageous, as would additional information regarding decisions about support, e.g., location and availability, so that it can be determined whether these factors play a role in the strength of relationships. Given that the length of relationships was a pertinent theme, it would be interesting to explore whether the influencing factors vary for children who have just transitioned to new schools, as they will not have long standing relationships with school staff. Finally, future researchers might also like to interview those

without SEN to consider the similarities and differences in their responses to their SEN peers, perhaps with a specific focus on how understood children feel by their classroom adults.

### **3.6.4 Implications for Practice**

Given the significant impact of relationship variables on SB and the emphasis on relationship quality, education professionals should prioritise building strong and trusting relationships with all children in their class, especially those who are vulnerable to having a lower sense of SB, e.g., those with SEN. Not only is this important for their relationships and SB, but also for the success of support they receive. In addition to the children's reflections about their support in this study, previous research has demonstrated how critical relationships are to successful learning (Roorda et al., 2011). Therefore, adequate time and attention must be given to fostering positive relationships with depth; otherwise, there is a risk that even the most effective support or teaching will be limited. Transitions into new staff members, e.g., when starting a new academic year, should be planned to ensure ample opportunities for children with SEN to get to know their new classroom adults (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). Supporting a CYP transitioning out of a relationship should also be scheduled. For example, if a member of staff leaves suddenly, it may be difficult for the child to trust the replacement adult, in fear they will also leave. Therefore, attention should be given to making the end of their support clear and expected for the child. The researcher acknowledges that logistical demands often make these recommendations challenging within busy classrooms. Therefore, they encourage senior staff members to consider ways to reduce the CT's workload to increase the number of natural interactions that enhance relationships. This reduced workload could be achieved by offering CTs more than the minimum required 10% PPA time per week. Delivering TA support to children in class where possible will also increase their opportunities to be involved in the more spontaneous and naturalistic relationship-building during whole-class discussions. Finally, whole-class classroom practices and activities that promote sharing information and building trust, e.g., journaling, circle time and play-based learning, should also be considered.

In line with Blatchford and colleagues' (2012) recommendations, time should be built into the day for TAs to discuss work and give feedback to the CT to ensure the most appropriate teaching strategies are being utilised. The CT should also work closely with the children with SEN as much as they do with their peers. Where possible, CYP's views should influence the support they receive, and once effective strategies are identified, all classroom adults should consistently use these strategies. As the results highlighted that children are vulnerable to conflict with their TAs, schools might like to consider using restorative practice methods (Weber & Vereenoghe, 2020) to repair relationships when conflict occurs. Many schools typically use restorative practice

for peer-to-peer conflict; however, research has also shown positive results when used in child-adult conflict situations (Gomez et al., 2021).

### **3.7 Conclusion**

The results of this study support previous research in the finding that children with SEN have lower SB than their non-SEN peers and have weaker relationships with their CTs. Given the amount of time that many children with SEN spend with their TAs, it was hypothesised that the more TA support a child receives, the stronger their relationship with their TA would be and the weaker their relationship with their CT. It was also thought that strong relationships with their TAs might compensate for weaker relationships with CTs in those receiving a lot of support. The results did not support these hypotheses. Although the quantity of support was not a predictor of relationships, several pertinent factors were shared by participants through the qualitative data. Children with SEN shared how the quality of the relationship, such as how well their classroom adults know them as individuals, how they make them feel and the support they offer, as well as the length of their relationships, were more important than the amount of support they receive. In addition, it was found that conflict, especially with TAs, was a barrier to SB. For this reason, building strong and trusting relationships with children should be a priority for school staff. Senior leaders should give attention to how time can be made for classroom adults to form and maintain these relationships to ensure all children benefit from the multitude of benefits that a strong sense of SB brings.

## Appendix A Search Strategy

The following search was conducted in PsycINFO, Web of Science and ERIC. PsycINFO was searched for 'abstracts' and 'titles'; Web of Science for 'topic'; and ERIC for 'all'. One additional article that was not included in any of the databases was identified from prior reading. Asterisks were used to ensure the inclusion of plurals and words with alternative endings, e.g., 'child\*' provided the retrieval of child, children, childhood, child's etc. Speech marks were also used to group words to ensure relevance, e.g., 'special educational need\*'. The synonyms for each key term were searched using the command 'OR', and the key terms (and their synonyms) were searched together using 'AND'. No filters were applied to restrict any of the searches. Once duplicates had been removed, 140 articles remained.

Search with OR	Search with OR	Search with OR
"special educational need*"	<b>Search with AND</b>	child*
SEN		pupil*
"special need*"		student*
"learning difficult*"		"young person*"
"learning disabilit*"		"young people*"
"additional need*"		adolescen*
"learning need*"		teenage*
"special education"		
"educational need*"		
SEND		





## Appendix B Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

	Inclusion	Exclusion
<b>Population</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CYP with SEN</li> <li>• CYP aged 4-16 years old.</li> <li>• CYP attending mainstream provision.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CYP who are in low-ability groups but do not have a specific SEN</li> <li>• Studies where the mean ages of the participants are outside of the 4-16 criteria.</li> <li>• CYP attending a mainstream school with a specialist provision where the majority of their time is not in the mainstream part of the school.</li> <li>• CYP attending a specialist provision for the majority of the school week e.g., a special needs school or a pupil referral unit.</li> </ul>
<b>Area of focus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Studies which focussed on factors which influenced school belonging.</li> <li>• Studies where school belonging (or equivalent) is one of the outcome variables being measured.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Studies which did not focus on factors that influence school belonging e.g., qualitative studies which explore how school belonging impacts other variables.</li> <li>• Studies where school belonging (or equivalent) is the independent variable.</li> </ul>
<b>Methodology and types of paper</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Original/primary quantitative or qualitative research.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secondary research, e.g., opinion pieces, discussions, review articles.</li> </ul>
<b>Other</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Studies from all countries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Papers which are not written or accessible in English.</li> <li>• Papers for which full access cannot be obtained.</li> </ul>



## Appendix C      Details of exclusions

Article	Reason(s) for exclusion
<p>Blair, D. V. (2009). Nurturing music learners in Mrs Miller’s “family room”: a secondary classroom for students with special needs. <i>Research Studies in Music Education</i>, 31(1), 20–36. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/1321103X09103628">https://doi.org/10.1177/1321103X09103628</a></p>	<p>Participants were educated in a ‘self-contained classroom’ rather than in the mainstream part of the school.</p>
<p>Castro Rubilar, F. I., &amp; Alarcon Araya, V. (2018). El liderazgo escolar hacia el modelamiento de una cultura escolar inclusiva y de altas expectativas [School leadership towards the modelling of an inclusive school culture and high expectations]. <i>Revista de Investigación Escuela de Graduados en Education [Educational Research Journal of the School of Graduates in Education]</i>, 8(16), 62–70.</p>	<p>Main text unavailable in English – written in Spanish.</p>
<p>Coots, J. J., Bishop, K. D., &amp; Grenot-Scheyer, M. (1998). Supporting elementary age students with significant disabilities in general education classrooms: personal perspectives on inclusion. <i>Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities</i>, 33(4), 317–330.</p>	<p>The focus is on the adaptations needed to educate children with SEN in mainstream classes, not the factors which influence school belonging.</p>
<p>Crede, J., Wirthwein, L., Steinmayr, R., &amp; Bergold, S. (2019). Schülerinnen und schüler mit sonderpädagogischem förderbedarf im bereich emotionale und soziale entwicklung und ihre peers im gemeinsamen lernen: unterschiede im selbstkonzept, klassenklima und sozialer integration [Students with special educational needs indicating difficulties in emotional and social development and their peers in the inclusive classroom: differences in social participation, attitude towards school and ability self-concept]. <i>Zeitschrift für Pädagogische Psychologie [Magazine for Pedagogical Psychology]</i>, 33(3–4), 207–221. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1024/1010-0652/a000244">https://doi.org/10.1024/1010-0652/a000244</a></p>	<p>Main text unavailable in English – written in German.</p>
<p>Dixon, J. A. (2008). <i>Predicting student perceptions of school connectedness: the contributions of parent attachment and peer attachment</i> [Doctoral dissertation, University of Miami]. ProQuest Information and Learning; Vol. 68. <a href="http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&amp;db=psyh&amp;AN=2008-99111-086&amp;site=ehost-live">http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&amp;db=psyh&amp;AN=2008-99111-086&amp;site=ehost-live</a></p>	<p>Mean age of participants outside the required age range.</p>
<p>Dubayova, T., Chovanova, E., &amp; Majherova, M. (2018). <i>Motivation to learn, attitude towards school, and stress coping strategies among pupils with ADHD and pupils from standard population</i>. In L. G. Chova, A. L. Martinez, &amp; I. C. Torres (Eds.), <i>EDULEARN18: 10th international conference on education and new learning technologies</i> (pp. 3160–3164).</p>	<p>Full text not available.</p>
<p>Hebron, J. S. (2018). School connectedness and the primary to secondary school transition for young people with autism spectrum</p>	<p>Not possible to distinguish between participants who attended a mainstream school and those who</p>

<p>conditions. <i>British Journal of Educational Psychology</i>, 88(3), 396–409. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12190">https://doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12190</a></p>	<p>attended a specialist provision. The focus is also on the pattern of school belonging over a transition period rather than the factors which influence it.</p>
<p>Hoffman, E. M. (2011). <i>Relationships between inclusion teachers and their students: perspectives from a middle school</i> [Doctoral dissertation, Indiana University]. ProQuest Information and Learning; Vol. 71. <a href="http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&amp;db=psyh&amp;AN=2011-99010-255&amp;site=ehost-live">http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&amp;db=psyh&amp;AN=2011-99010-255&amp;site=ehost-live</a></p>	<p>Focus is on factors that influence student-teacher relationships rather than school belonging.</p>
<p>King-Sears, M. E., &amp; Strogilos, V. (2020). An exploratory study of self-efficacy, school belongingness, and co-teaching perspectives from middle school students and teachers in a mathematics co-taught classroom. <i>International Journal of Inclusive Education</i>, 24(2), 162–180. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2018.1453553">https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2018.1453553</a></p>	<p>Compared the sense of school belonging of students with disabilities and students without disabilities in a co-taught classroom but did not explore the factors influencing school belonging.</p>
<p>Kizzie, K. T. (2010). <i>“It’s just a disability” or is it?: stigma, psychological needs, and educational outcomes in African American adolescents with learning-related disabilities</i> [Doctoral dissertation, The University of Michigan]. ProQuest Information and Learning; Vol. 71. <a href="http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&amp;db=psyh&amp;AN=2010-99150-179&amp;site=ehost-live">http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&amp;db=psyh&amp;AN=2010-99150-179&amp;site=ehost-live</a></p>	<p>Relatedness was used as a moderator variable rather than an outcome variable, and the focus was on race rather than belonging/relatedness. One of the participants also attended a specialist classroom.</p>
<p>Mamas, C., Daly, A. J., &amp; Schaelli, G. H. (2019). Socially responsive classrooms for students with special educational needs and disabilities. <i>Learning Culture and Social Interaction</i>, 23, 1-12. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2019.100334">https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2019.100334</a></p>	<p>The focus is on the social position of children with SEN within their class, and how socially responsive classes are rather than school belonging.</p>
<p>Midgen, T., Theodoratou, T., Newbury, K., &amp; Leonard, M. (2019). ‘School for everyone’: an exploration of children and young people’s perceptions of belonging. <i>Educational and Child Psychology</i>, 36(2), 9–22. <a href="http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&amp;db=psyh&amp;AN=2019-28588-001&amp;site=ehost-live">http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&amp;db=psyh&amp;AN=2019-28588-001&amp;site=ehost-live</a></p>	<p>Not possible to distinguish between participants who attended a mainstream school and those who attended a specialist provision.</p>
<p>Moulton, E. E. (2020). <i>Effects of teacher attitudes on academic growth and connectedness for students with learning disabilities: a quantitative case study</i>. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Northern Colorado]. ProQuest Information and Learning; Vol. 81. <a href="http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&amp;db=psyh&amp;AN=2020-31097-102&amp;site=ehost-live">http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&amp;db=psyh&amp;AN=2020-31097-102&amp;site=ehost-live</a></p>	<p>Many of the schools had a “center-based special education program” within their school, and it is not possible to determine the difference between the connectedness of pupils with SEN who attended mainstream school and those who attended an SEN program.</p>
<p>Page, A., Charteris, J., Anderson, J., &amp; Boyle, C. (2021). Fostering school connectedness online for students with diverse learning needs: inclusive education in Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic. <i>European Journal of Special Needs Education</i>, 36(1), 142–156. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2021.1872842">https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2021.1872842</a></p>	<p>Explored school connectedness during online learning rather than when attending school, and participants discussed the connectedness of children with SEN</p>

	in both mainstream and specialist classes.
Svavarsdottir, E. K. (2008). Connectedness, belonging and feelings about school among healthy and chronically ill Icelandic schoolchildren. <i>Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences</i> , 22(3), 463–471. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6712.2007.00553.x">https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6712.2007.00553.x</a>	The focus was on chronic illnesses, with the majority of participants having a physical disability rather than SEN. It was also not possible to distinguish between participants with SEN and those with mental health disabilities.
Thornton, B. E. (2021). <i>The impact of internalized, anticipated, and structural stigma on psychological and school outcomes for high school students with learning disabilities: A pilot study</i> [Doctoral dissertation, University of California]. ProQuest Information and Learning; Vol. 82. <a href="http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&amp;db=psyh&amp;AN=2020-58780-152&amp;site=ehost-live">http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&amp;db=psyh&amp;AN=2020-58780-152&amp;site=ehost-live</a>	Mean age of participants outside the required age range.
Turney, V. L. (2018). <i>Using positive discipline to connect students with an emotional disturbance to their school</i> [Educational specialist degree thesis, California State University]. ProQuest Information and Learning; Vol. 79. <a href="http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&amp;db=psyh&amp;AN=2018-26095-195&amp;site=ehost-live">http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&amp;db=psyh&amp;AN=2018-26095-195&amp;site=ehost-live</a>	Participants attended ‘self-contained classrooms’ ‘away from their home school’.

## Appendix D Data Extraction Table

Author / date of publication / title/ geographical context	Participant characteristics	Aims/ objectives	Methodology	Measures/ outcomes related to school belonging / questions asked in qualitative studies	Key findings in relation to review question
<b>Quantitative studies</b>					
<p>Dimitrellou &amp; Hurry (2019).</p> <p>School belonging among young adolescents with SEMH and MLD: the link with their social relations and school inclusivity.</p> <p>England Published</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1440 participants</li> <li>• 7th to 10th grades (11-15).</li> <li>• Gender not specified.</li> <li>• Attending 3 mainstream secondary schools</li> <li>• Pupils with SEMH (36), MLD (99) and a combination of the two or another category of SEN (147) and their classmates.</li> </ul>	<p>To examine 'whether the sense of school belonging and social relations of pupils with SEMH and MLD vary according to the level of inclusiveness of the school ethos at the institution they attend' (p. 316).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classification of inclusivity from School Census.</li> <li>• Teacher identification of SEN.</li> <li>• Self-reported questionnaires.</li> <li>• T-tests and correlation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level of school inclusivity was based on School Census statistics.</li> <li>• Strengths and difficulties questionnaire – self-report version (Goodman, 1997).</li> <li>• School belonging and Social Relations Scales developed specifically for this study.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No significant difference in SB between pupils with SEMH or MLD needs as identified by the school.</li> <li>• Pupils with MLD who had not self-reported as having behavioural difficulties scored higher on SB than pupils with MLD who had self-reported as having behavioural difficulties.</li> <li>• Pupils who self-reported externalising difficulties had lower (although not significant) SB than those with internalising difficulties.</li> <li>• Social relations with teachers was positively correlated with SB in pupils with SEN (with a medium correlation <math>r = .475</math>), accounting for 23% of the variance. Social relations with TAs accounted for 13% of the variance with a medium correlation (<math>r = .367</math>)</li> </ul>

					<p>positive correlation. Perceived relations with peers was also positively correlated with a small correlation (<math>r = .269</math>), accounting for 7% of the variance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceived ethos of pupils with SEN accounted for 33% of the variance in SB with a strong positive correlation (<math>r = .575</math>).</li> <li>• The pupils with SEN in the school determined as 'very inclusive' had significantly higher SB than the school rated 'less inclusive'. No significant difference was found for the 'just inclusive' school with either of the other two.</li> </ul>
<p>Nepi et al. (2013)</p> <p>Evidence from full-inclusion model: the social position and sense of belonging of students with special educational needs and their peers in Italian primary school.</p> <p>Italy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 418 pupils (193 female and 225 male) – 122 with SEN</li> <li>• Ages 8-11 years old (grades 3-5).</li> <li>• Pupils attended one of three 'ordinary Italian primary schools'.</li> <li>• SEN pupils were categorised as either SEN-A (those with a Statement of</li> </ul>	<p>'To describe the social position and the sense of belonging to their school of SEN students, included full time in ordinary school, compared to the social position and the sense of belonging of their</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-report questionnaires</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Like to Work', and 'Like to Play' questionnaires from The Social Inclusion Survey (Frederickson et al. 2007).</li> <li>• The Belonging Scale (Frederickson et al. 2007) – translated into Italian.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'On both study and play, SEN-a were overall more accepted (45.6%) and less rejected (6.6%) than both SEN-b (accepted: 26.2%; rejected: 10.7%) and SEN-c pupils' (p.8).</li> <li>• SB – SEN-a pupils scored the lowest, followed by SEN-c and then SEN-b.</li> </ul>

Published	Disability for a cognitive or sensory-motor disability), SEN-B (those with learning and/or behavioural difficulties), or SEN-C (those considered to have a sociocultural and/or socio-economic disadvantage).	TD classmates' (p. 4).			
Osborne & Reed, (2011)  School factors associated with mainstream progress in secondary education for included pupils with Autism Spectrum Disorders.  UK Published	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 105 pupils (87 boys and 18 girls).</li> <li>• Mean age = 13.2 and ages ranged from 11-16.</li> <li>• Children with a diagnosis of ASD and a statement of SEN referencing ASD.</li> </ul>	To examine the factors promoting inclusion in CYP with ASD in mainstream secondary schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-report belonging questionnaire completed with parental assistance.</li> <li>• Teacher questionnaire on school environment.</li> <li>• ANOVA.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (Goodenow, 1993).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SB increased with age.</li> <li>• There was a statistically significant difference in SB for school size in the entire sample with a correlation effect of .203 (<math>p &lt; .05</math>). A significant correlation was also found for children with Asperger's (<math>= .299, P &lt; .05</math>), however there was not a significant correlation for children with autism.</li> <li>• Class size had a significant negative effect on children with Asperger's (<math>= -.292, p &lt; .05</math>).</li> <li>• For children with autism, the number of other children with SEN (<math>= .319</math>) and the number of support staff (<math>= .312</math>) were significantly positively correlated with belonging (<math>p &lt; .05</math>). However, more significantly (<math>p</math></li> </ul>



					<p>&lt; .01) the number of children with SEN (= -.415) and the number of support staff (= -.366) were negatively correlated with belonging for children with Asperger's.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-rated teacher-training was associated with a significant (<math>p &lt; .001</math>) increase in perceived SB.</li> </ul>
<b>Mixed-method studies</b>					
<p>Brosnan (1998).</p> <p>The social acceptance of children with disabilities in a fully included school district</p> <p>USA</p> <p>Doctoral dissertation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 810 students in grades 3-6.</li> <li>• 158 of participants had a disability, e.g., speech and language impairment, behaviour disorders and developmental delays.</li> <li>• Boys represented 53% of the total sample but 74% of the SEN group.</li> </ul>	<p>"To examine the social acceptance of children with disabilities in comparison to their nondisabled classmates." (p.4).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sociometric scale completed in class.</li> <li>• Parent interviews with children with severe SEN.</li> <li>• ATIES measure was sent to teachers' homes.</li> <li>• Multiple regression.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sociometric scales – how often they choose to play with their peers measured on a Likert scale.</li> <li>• Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education Scale (ATIES) – measured teachers attitudes towards the placement of children with SEN – 6-point Likert scale.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social acceptance was negatively correlated with all disability groups. This was significant for children with behavioural disorders (-.12, <math>P &lt; .001</math>) and learning disabilities (-.07, <math>P &lt; .05</math>).</li> <li>• Using chi-square analysis, it was found that "children with behaviour disorders and developmental delays were found to be represented significantly more frequently than expected in the below-average acceptance group" (79).</li> <li>• Children with low incidence developmental delay (e.g., moderate to severe cognitive disabilities, Down Syndrome, autism) scored significantly higher than the low incidence children (mild cognitive delay – physically indistinguishable) on social</li> </ul>

					<p>acceptance. (<math>X^2 [3, N = 9] = 26.35, p &lt; .000</math>).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No significant differences in gender were found.</li> <li>• ATIES scores had no apparent impact on their student's social acceptance.</li> <li>• One teacher commented that "In her experience, general education students were less accepting of children whose disabilities were not physically distinguishable." (p.105).</li> <li>• "Both parents said that they have observed that their children have become more socially isolated as the children become older. Social expectations that their children were able to meet when young are no longer as easily attainable for these youngsters, and the differences between what children with significant disabilities can and cannot do becomes more apparent" (p.120).</li> </ul>
<p>Porter &amp; Ingram (2021).</p> <p>Changing the exclusionary practices of</p>	<p>108 girls ages 12-14 (in years 8 and 9) with self-disclosed SEN.</p>	<p>"to investigate pupils' experiences of barriers and supports in their school and look at the relationship</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-report questionnaire.</li> <li>• Qualitative data analysed using an iterative approach using</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (Goodenow, 1993) – with</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mean SB scores were negatively correlated with barriers and supports for girls with SEN (<math>r = -.757, P &lt; .001</math>) – the lower their experience across the school settings the lower their SB.</li> </ul>

<p>mainstream secondary schools: the experience of girls with SEN. 'I have some quirky bits about me that I mostly hide from the world'.</p> <p>UK Published</p>		<p>between these and pupils' sense of belonging or being connected to the school" (p.63).</p>	<p>both indicative and deductive approaches informed by previously identified supports and barriers and belonging frameworks.</p>	<p>added questions about what helps and hinders them feeling part of the school and a question asking them to talk about feeling safe in school.</p>	<p>Identified themes of what helps them feel part of the school:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Extracurricular</li> <li>- Being part of a friendship group</li> <li>- Feeling supported and respected – references made to both teachers and friends</li> <li>- Having their effort and achievement recognised e.g., trying things independently</li> <li>- School uniform and representing the school</li> </ul> <p>Identified themes that prevent them feeling part of the school:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not feeling supported and respected e.g., peers being rude and unkind to them</li> <li>- Feeling unliked or misunderstood by teachers e.g., not being picked by them</li> </ul> <p>Identified themes about feeling safe in school:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Relationships with peers (11) e.g., being bullied and being able to be themselves</li> <li>- Relationships with teachers (3)</li> <li>- Space systems (6)</li> <li>- Individual identity (7)</li> </ul>
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					- Curriculum (3)
<b>Qualitative studies</b>					
<p>Alesech &amp; Nayar (2021).</p> <p>Teacher strategies for promoting acceptance and belonging in the classroom: a New Zealand study.</p> <p>New Zealand Published</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 children aged 8.5-15.4 years with a range of SEN needs</li> <li>• 3 boys, 3 girls</li> <li>• Parents, classroom/ form teacher, teacher aide and other professionals (e.g., supplementary learning support teacher) of the participating pupils</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do New Zealand school settings help or hinder a sense of acceptance and belonging in children identified as having special education needs?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Descriptive case study</li> <li>• Interviews with all participants</li> <li>• Observations of child in classroom environment</li> <li>• School reports and mission statements for comparisons of outcomes</li> <li>• Thematic analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview questions were informed by previous belonging research</li> <li>• Parent interviews – Questions included: ‘what do you think helps (child’s name) feel like he/she belongs in school?’</li> <li>• Child interview – questions included: “‘tell me about a time when you did something really well and it felt really good’</li> <li>• Children were invited to draw during their interview to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher communication</li> <li>• Scaffolding and repetition</li> <li>• Fun learning</li> <li>• Enabling success and incentives</li> <li>• Inclusive classroom</li> </ul>

				<p>assist answers and relax.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• School reports and mission statements</li> </ul>	
<p>Alesech, J., &amp; Nayar, S (2020).</p> <p>Acceptance and belonging in New Zealand: understanding inclusion for children with special education needs.</p> <p>New Zealand Published</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As above</li> </ul>	As above	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As above</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As above</li> </ul>	<p>Five themes were identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attitude of others</li> <li>• Individualised approach</li> <li>• Teacher characteristics</li> <li>• Teaching techniques</li> <li>• Law</li> </ul>
<p>Konecni-Upton (2010).</p> <p>A descriptive analysis of students with disabilities' experiences in an inclusive setting: A phenomenological</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 from Grades 9 – 12 who identified with SEN who had received consultant teacher services in their ELA class for the past 2 years and participated in the general education</li> </ul>	<p>Relevant research question - How do students with disabilities describe their sense of belonging within their consultant teacher ELA class?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative phenomenology research</li> <li>• Interviewed using open-ended questions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview questions were based on concepts of belonging and classroom community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The majority of students in this study felt accepted by their peers and teachers and did not voice difficulties with making and maintaining friendships.</li> <li>• SB was defined by participants as - inclusiveness, positive relationships with teachers, positive peer relationships, and sameness.</li> </ul>

<p>study of belonging and self-esteem.</p> <p>USA</p> <p>Doctoral dissertation</p>	<p>program for at least 80% of the day.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 males, 3 females</li> </ul>				
<p>Palmgren et al., (2017).</p> <p>Students' engaging school experiences: A precondition for functional inclusive practice.</p> <p>Finland</p> <p>Published</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7th grade (age 12-14)</li> <li>• SEN group all had minor learning difficulties.</li> <li>• 95 mainstream students</li> <li>• 24 SEN students</li> <li>• (boys=55%; girls=45%)</li> </ul>	<p>“To understand school engagement by exploring the positive and negative school experiences of seventh graders.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open-ended written questions</li> <li>• Content-analysis</li> </ul>	<p>A semi-structured qualitative instrument that contained the following questions:</p> <p><i>Describe a positive school experience. Write what happened. What was the situation about? What were you thinking and feeling at that time?</i></p> <p><i>Describe a negative school experience. Write what happened. What was the situation about? What were you thinking and feeling at that time?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotionally engaging experiences with peers accounted for 80% of positive events in children with SEN. Positive engaging student-teacher interaction and cognitively engaging studying, each accounted for 10 % of positive responses.</li> <li>• Emotionally disengaging experiences with peers accounted for 74% of negative experiences and cognitively disengaging episodes and disengaging student-teacher relationships were each 13% of responses.</li> </ul>

<p>Shogren, Gross, Forber-Pratt, Francis, Satter, Blue-Banning &amp; Hill (2015)</p> <p>The perspectives of students with and without disabilities on inclusive schools.</p> <p>USA Published</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children with and without SEN attending schools considered to be “exemplars of successful inclusive” education.</li> <li>• 86 children in total, 53 without SEN and 33 with SEN in first to eighth grade.</li> <li>• 38% of the students with disabilities were female</li> </ul>	<p>“to examine the experiences of students with and without disabilities being educated in inclusive schools, documenting their perceptions of the culture of their school, inclusion, and the practices that were implemented to support all students”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus groups</li> <li>• “A facilitator and note-taker jointly conducted each focus group and interview and audio-recorded the sessions for later transcription.”</li> <li>• Analysis - constant comparative method</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A topic guide was used for all focus groups. Examples of questions – <i>“Tell us about the teachers you have. How do your teachers help you learn?”</i></li> <li>• Facilitators followed-up with individual questions to expand on ideas, and re-worded questions where necessary.</li> </ul>	<p>Factors contributing to SB: high expectations, feeling supported to meet those expectations, feeling connected to teachers and peers and a sense of safety. Ways in which all of these are achieved were discussed.</p>
<p>Myles, Boyle &amp; Richards (2019).</p> <p>The social experiences and sense of belonging in adolescent females with autism in mainstream school.</p>	<p>Eight female adolescents (12-17) with a diagnosis of autism or Asperger syndrome who attended a mainstream secondary or middle school.</p>	<p>To explore “the social experiences and sense of belonging of adolescent females with autism in mainstream schooling.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Semi-structured</li> <li>• interviews</li> <li>• Participants were interviewed twice, each lasting between 30-45 minutes to build trust and rapport, with a one-</li> </ul>	<p>“The broad themes explored by the questions were as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Importance and understanding of belonging.</li> <li>• Views and experiences around ‘fitting in’:</li> </ul>	<p>Themes regarding ways they feel they belong:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reciprocal friendships (e.g., feeling comfortable, accepting of their difficulties, offering support and companionship)</li> <li>• Feeling safe and supported (e.g., through peer relationships and the school environment)</li> <li>• Encouragement and inclusion (e.g., feeling included and valued by peers)</li> </ul>

<p>South West of England. Published</p>			<p>week gap between the two interviews.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thematic analysis of data.</li> </ul>	<p>— identification with others; — barriers and support around ‘fitting in’.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Views and experiences around ‘valued involvement’: — nature of peer relationships; — social acceptance, exclusion and bullying; — relationships and support from school staff.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing and adhering to social expectations (e.g., complying with social norms and adapting behaviour to meet social expectations).</li> </ul> <p>Themes regarding ways they feel excluded:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being on the periphery – e.g., feeling that no one would notice if they left a social interaction, being told directly that they didn’t need to join in the conversation and feeling unable to join in conversations due to different interests.</li> <li>• Feeling devalued – e.g., not feeling listened to or that their contribution was valued, the conversations always being about other people’s interests rather than theirs, being treated like a younger child – especially teachers when they find out about their diagnosis or being treated like they are weird. It was also mentioned that some feel their teachers hate them or don’t understand them.</li> </ul>
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## Appendix E Quality Assessment - MMAT Summary Table

The MMAT is a comprehensive appraisal tool that was revised in 2018 as a result of a doctoral research project that examined the usefulness and validity of the resource and enlisted experts in the different methodological fields included in the tool to determine the necessary criteria for each research design (Hong, 2018).

Category of study designs	Methodological quality criteria											
		Alesech, & Nayar (2021).	Alesech, & Nayar (2020).	Brosnan (1998).	Dimitrellou & Hurry (2019).	Konecni-Upton (2010).	Myles et al. (2019).	Nepi et al. (2013).	Osborne & Reed (2011).	Palmgren et al. (2017).	Porter & Ingram (2021).	Shogren et al., (2015)
Screening questions	Are there clear research questions?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Do the collected data allow to address the research questions?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Is the qualitative approach appropriate to answer the research question?	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes
	Are the qualitative data collection methods adequate to address the research question?	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Can't tell			Can't tell	Yes	Yes

	Are the findings adequately derived from the data?	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Can't tell			Yes	Yes	Yes
	Is the interpretation of results sufficiently substantiated by data?	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes			No	Yes	Yes
	Is there coherence between qualitative data sources, collection, analysis and interpretation?	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes
Quantitative descriptive	Is the sampling strategy relevant to address the research question?			Can't tell	Yes			Can't tell	Yes		Can't tell	
	Is the sample representative of the target population?			Yes	Can't tell			Can't tell	Can't tell		Can't tell	
	Are the measurements appropriate?			Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes		Yes	
	Is the risk of nonresponse bias low?			No	Can't tell			Can't tell	Can't tell		Can't tell	
	Is the statistical analysis appropriate to answer the research question?			Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes		Yes	
	Is there an adequate rationale for using a mixed methods design to address the research question?			Yes							Yes	

Mixed methods	Are the different components of the study effectively integrated to answer the research question?			No							Yes	
	Are the outputs of the integration of qualitative and quantitative components adequately interpreted?			No							Yes	
	Are divergences and inconsistencies between quantitative and qualitative results adequately addressed?			Yes							Yes	
	Do the different components of the study adhere to the quality criteria of each tradition of the methods involved?			Yes							Can't tell	

## Appendix F Quality Assessment - CASP Summary Table

Similarly to the MMAT, experts in the field of quality assessment contributed to the creation of the CASP to ensure its usefulness and relevance in assessing the quality of qualitative research.

	Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?	Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	Is there a clear statement of findings?
Alesech & Nayar (2021)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can't tell	Can't tell	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Alesech & Nayar (2020)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can't tell	Can't tell	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Konecni-Upton (2010)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Palmgren et al. (2017).	Yes	Yes	Can't tell	Can't tell	Can't tell	No	Can't tell	Yes	Yes
Shogren et al. (2015)	Yes	Yes	Can't tell	Can't tell	Yes	Can't tell	Can't tell	Yes	Yes

Myles et al. (2019).	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can't tell	Can't tell	Can't tell	Can't tell	Can't tell	Yes
Brosnan et al. (1998)	Yes	Yes	Can't tell	Can't tell	Yes	Can't tell	Can't tell	Yes	Yes
Porter & Ingram (2021)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can't tell	Can't tell	Can't tell	Can't tell	Yes	Yes

## Appendix G Summary of Quality Assessment

On the whole, the quality of the qualitative research methodology, including the qualitative components of the two mixed-methods studies, is high. There was consistency across data collection, analysis and interpretation of results, and all but one study provided enough information about the analysis process to determine that they were sufficiently rigorous. However, the intricacies of the design of the studies were more varied. For example, it was only evident that the researchers' relationship between the researcher and participants was adequately considered in one study (Konecni-Upton, 2010) in which the researcher made it clear that they had identified and continually examined their assumptions and biases to ensure they did not influence the results. Similarly to the quantitative studies, it was not possible to determine whether the recruitment strategy was appropriate for all but one (Konecni-Upton, 2010) of the qualitative studies due to limited available information. Nor was it possible to assess whether the data was collected in an appropriate manner in the majority of studies for reasons such as the inclusion of questions that could be considered leading; no mention of data saturation; and a lack of information regarding interview schedules or the procedure of data collection such as who conducted the interviews and the location.

In contrast, the quality of the studies that consisted solely or partly of quantitative data appeared less rigorous. In four of the five studies that used quantitative data, it was not possible to tell whether the sample was representative of the target population, nor was it possible to determine whether their sampling strategy was relevant to their research question in three of the studies. Some of the reasons this was not possible included: limited information regarding why and how certain schools or individuals were chosen; lack of clarity over the source population; or the sample was not representative of the source population in variables that could be confounders, e.g., socioeconomic status or percentage of SEN children on roll. Despite these limitations, they did all use appropriate statistical analysis methods for their aim and type of data they had. All but one provided an estimate of the random variability of the data, e.g., standard deviation and confidence intervals. Similarly, four of the five studies reported the actual probability values for the primary outcomes and none of the studies based any of their results on data dredging.

## Appendix H Interview Schedule

This interview schedule has been adapted from Pinkard, H. (2021). *The perspectives and experiences of children with special educational needs in mainstream primary schools regarding their individual teaching assistant support*. [Unpublished doctoral thesis]. University of Southampton.

The child will be welcomed into the interview, and the first 5-10 minutes will be spent engaging in informal conversation and building rapport.

The child will be thanked for completing the questionnaire already and will be talked through the information sheet about the interview (please see 'child information sheet qualitative'). The child will be told they are free to stop the interview at any time and that anything they say won't be judged or get them in trouble. These two messages will be reiterated using a police officer figurine and stop sign props (please see Appendix). They will also be reassured that their answers are confidential.

The child will be told that the meeting is going to be audio recorded. If the child is happy to continue and provides verbal consent, the recording will be started.

### Questions about school

- Tell me a little bit about your school
- Do you like school?
- Tell me (more) about some of the things you like about school.
- Tell me (more) about some of the things you don't like about school.
- How do you find the work in lessons?
- Do all the children in your class do the same work?
- Do some children have more or less help than others with their work? Why do you think that might be?

### Adults in school questions

- Which adults help you in school?

***If the child has not yet mentioned their teaching assistant/equivalent paraprofessional, discuss that there is an extra adult(s) in their class, including Miss/Mr X, check that they know who is being referred to. The name or language the child uses to discuss their teaching assistant/equivalent paraprofessional will be used in place of 'your teaching assistant' in the remaining questions.***

- What sort of things do you do with your teaching assistant?
- How does your teaching assistant help you?
- How much time/how often do you spend with your teaching assistant? (*possible prompts might include: do you spend time with them every day/lesson? How many times a week/day? How much of each lesson do you spend with them?*)
- Does your teaching assistant help you in the classroom or somewhere else? What's that like?
- How do you feel about your teaching assistant helping you? Why?
- If you didn't have your teaching assistant helping you, how would you get on? Have you done any work without them this or last week? How did you find it?
- What do the other children in the classroom think about the teaching assistant do you think?
- If you need help, would you ask your teaching assistant or teacher? Why?

### **GoGo questions**

***Children will be presented with 10 GoGos (please see 'GoGo pictures') and will be asked to pick one that reminds them of their teaching assistant and one that reminds them of their class teacher.***

- What is your teaching assistant's job?
  - Why is that one like your teaching assistant?
  - Do you like your teaching assistant?
  - Can you describe them in three words?
  - What does your teaching assistant think of you?
  - How does your teaching assistant make you feel?
  - Is there anything you would like to change about the way that your TA works with you?
- 
- What is your teacher's job?
  - Why is that one like your teacher?
  - Do you like your teacher?
  - Can you describe them in three words?
  - What does your teacher think of you?
  - How does your teacher make you feel?
  - Is there anything you would like to change about the way that your teacher works with you?



The child will then be asked to put the GoGos next to each other.

- Is there anything that is the same about your teacher and teaching assistant?
- How are these people different?
- Do you like one more than the other? Why?

### Wrapping up

- Is there anything else you would like to tell me about school?

The child will be thanked for taking part in the interview. The audio recording will be stopped, and the child will be offered the opportunity to play a short game with the researcher before returning to class.

*Possible prompts might include: why? Can you tell me more about that? Why do you think that is? Is that a helpful/good thing?*

### Appendix

Stop sign.



Police officer figurine.



## Appendix I Coding Manual

Cluster	Code	Description	Example extract	Negative/opposite example extract
Location of support	Receives support inside the classroom	The child remains in the classroom when receiving support from their classroom adults.	"They help me in class." I2 L329	"We like go out and practise spellings, and I go out to *** and to help me read and stuff." I3 L133
Location of support	Prefers being supported outside of classroom	Prefers being supported by the TA away from the classroom due to the environments being calmer and less distracting.	"I like going in those rooms 'cos they're less like noisy and stuff." I3 L179	
Amount and availability of support	Receives TA support all day, every day	The child is support by TA all day, every day of the week.	"I would say all day." I2 L493	"I do go out every morning but not on Fridays" I3 L227
Amount and availability of support	Needs more help than other children	The child needs more help from classroom adults than their peers because they do not understand as much or know as much as others.	"the people that get less help know a bit more" I1 L122	
Amount and availability of support	Help is not always available	Sometimes when the child needs help it is not always available either from their preferred adults or at all, which might be because the adults is busy helping other children, marking work or the TA is not there.	"the teacher is normally marking other people's work and stuff." I3 L246	"My teacher helps me and the LSAs." I3 L120 "the teacher is pretty much always there" I1 L366

Amount and availability of support	Would ask the CT if they needed help	The child would most likely ask the CT to help them if needed in class rather than the TA.	"I would go to ask mostly my teacher." I2 L378	"LSA 'cos the teacher is normally marking other people's work and stuff." I3 L246
Amount and availability of support	CTs help the most	CT's help children more than TA's when they need help in class.	"It's mostly Miss CT" I1 L142	Researcher: "who helps you the most in class would you say?" ... Child: "I think Miss TA1 and Miss TA2"
Type of support	Receives help at lunchtime	TA supports the child during lunchtimes with their social interactions coping with the unstructured time.	"she picks me up at lunchtime." I2 L440	
Type of support	Receives academic support	The child receives help with learning tasks such as reading, spelling and understanding the task or question.	"She and he helps me by like helping me with spellings and stuff if I – like if I'm struggling on a word they help me with that." I3 L147	
Type of support	Classroom adults provide helpful support	Classroom adults help the children using strategies such as showing them examples using a whiteboard to write on, teaching new methods and helping them spell things out.	"Miss CT showed me a way of completing the maths." I2 L186	"I get kind of confused when they say like how about try this one, and then try this one." I3 L442  "Miss TA2 usually just fills my brain up so quickly." I2 L382
Views on support	Wouldn't change anything about how they are supported	The child could not think of any way that they would prefer to be supported by their classroom adults.	Researcher: "And is there anything that you would change about the way that your teacher works with you?" Child: "No." I2 L602	"she just sometimes tells the work and doesn't show the slide, because I don't really understand" I1 L409

Views on support	Likes receiving support from TA	The child feels good about the support they receive as they feel they would find tasks a lot harder without it.	Researcher: "And if you didn't have your teaching assistant helping you how do you think you'd find the work?" Child: "Well just fill my brain up and I wouldn't know how to do it." I2 L356	
Job roles	TA's role is to help children with work and the teacher	The TA's role in the class is to help children they are stuck on work and to help the teachers with things such as printing and handing out resources.	"to help people when they get stuck and talk about how they're doing." I1 L266 "Help the teacher too, like go and print off stuff for the teacher." I3 L328	
Job roles	CT's job is to teach and help children	The CT's job is to teach the class, tell them what to do, make sure they all understand the learning and help children when needed.	"to help people out, but also to teach everyone, and to make sure that they understand" I1 L362 "she usually tells the class what they need to do for science and other classes." I2 L549	
Job roles	TA's and CT's jobs are the same	The CT and TA have similar roles within the classroom – they both help children with their work.	Researcher: "what do you think your teacher's job is?" Child: "To like help you in work, like the LSAs." I3 L398	Researcher: "are their jobs a little bit the same at all or are they different?" Child: "A little bit different". Researcher: "... how are they different do you think?" Child: "I don't know." I2 L620

Personality traits	Classroom adults are smiley	Both the CT and the TA usually smile a lot at the children.	"she always – pretty much all the time she has a smile on her face." I1 L404	"She sometimes ... a bit smiley, and then sometimes she's a bit – she gets a bit angry and shouts at some people." I1 L248
Personality traits	TA can be angry.	The TA often gets angry with children if they are not listening or when they need help with their work but do not ask for it which can make her shout at people.	"she gets a bit angry and shouts at some people." I1 L248	
Personality traits	Classroom adults are nice, caring and kind.	Both the CT and the TA are recognised as having lots of positive characteristics traits such as being nice, caring, kind and helpful towards the children in their classes.	"Kind, caring and she's just very nice." I1 L376 "nice, helpful and kind." I2 L503	
How adults make them feel	Feels uncomfortable with adults that they do not trust	The child does not trust adults that they do not know well which can make them feel uncomfortable when they are supported by those adults.	"some other teachers I don't really trust, so I don't really like them coming over to me, so I just go a bit silent" I1 L189	
How adults make them feel	TAs make the children feel happy.	TAs make the children feel happy, and they value their support.	Researcher: "And how does Miss TA make you feel?" Child: "Happy." Researcher: "Happy, why does she make you feel happy?" Child: "Because just there's lots of thoughts into one whole"	"Some teaching assistants make me feel a bit stressed" I1 L313  "they're not really helping me out, they just tell you the question again and they didn't actually help you out." I1 L322

			<p>thought together, and then makes my brain not go [makes squashed sound].”</p> <p>Researcher : ... “she helps you collect all your thoughts, is that what you’re saying?”</p> <p>Child: “Yeah.” I2 L514</p>	<p>“Miss TA2 usually just fills my brain up so quickly.” I2 L382</p>
How adults make them feel	CTs make children feel good.	The children like their CTs as they make them feel happy and good.	<p>“She makes me feel a bit happy” I1 L396</p> <p>“I like Miss, the teachers that work here” I1 L29</p>	<p>Researcher: “when does she make you feel stressed?”</p> <p>Child: Probably when she just sometimes tells the work and doesn’t show the slide, because I don’t really understand and some other people do.” I1 L406</p>
Quality and length of relationship	The length of relationship contributes to positive relationships.	Children tend to have positive relationships with the classroom adults they have had longer relationships with.	<p>Researcher: “What do you think makes Miss – you trust Miss TA?”</p> <p>Child: “I’ve known her for quite a long time now” I1 L197</p>	
Quality and length of relationship	It would be better if the classroom adults knew the child more personally.	The child would like it if their classroom adults knew more about them as a person and how they feel, which could be achieved through informal chats.	<p>“talk to me a bit more, like when we have a chat normally before break I like to do that a bit more.” I1 L420</p> <p>“For them to know how you’re feeling a bit with the work, and if</p>	

			you're finding it hard or not" I1 L328	
Quality and length of relationship	Trust is important for relationships.	Trust is important in making the child feel comfortable with the supporting adult.	"some other teachers I don't really trust, so I don't really like them coming over to me, so I just go a bit silent" I1 L189	
Quality and length of relationship	Children prefer their CT to TA	Children prefer their CT to their TA for reasons such as the CT is always there, they have known them longer, and the CT is always smiling.	"I like Miss CT a bit more, because she's pretty much always there for me, and again most of the time she's smiling." I1 L451	"I think maybe like LSA, because they like help me every morning and stuff." I3 L451

## Appendix J Child Information Sheet

### Would you like to take part in a study?

#### **What is a study?**

A research study is what you do when you want to learn about something or find out something new.



#### **Why is this study being done?**

We are doing this study to find out about what you think about the adults in your school.

#### **What will I have to do?**

You will be asked a few questions about the adults who work with you at school. We will talk about how they help you and what they can do to help you even more! Once we have been through all the questions, you can choose if you want to play a game before going back to class.

#### **Who will I be talking to?**

You will be talking to Charlotte. Charlotte is a trainee educational psychologist whose job is to make school as good as possible. She is very friendly and easy to talk to!



#### **Do I have to say yes?**

No – not at all. It's up to you! Just say if you don't want to join in. Nobody will mind. If you change your mind, that's ok as well.

If you decide that you would like to take part, please let your parents or carers know, and they will tell us about it. Even if you choose to take part, you can stop at any time.



## Appendix K GoGo Pictures

GoGos being used in the interviews.



# Appendix L Education Setting Information Sheet

## Education Setting Letter

**Study Title:** Understanding the impact of teaching assistant support on school belonging.

**Researcher:** Charlotte Finnegan, Trainee Educational Psychologist doctoral student, [C.Finnegan@soton.ac.uk](mailto:C.Finnegan@soton.ac.uk)

**Research Supervisors:** Tim Cooke Academic and Professional Tutor, [T.Cooke@soton.ac.uk](mailto:T.Cooke@soton.ac.uk), and Rob Webster, Associate Professor, UCL Institute of Education.

**ERGO number:** 63860

I am a trainee Educational Psychologist from the University of Southampton. I am conducting a thesis research study exploring the factors that impact a child's sense of school belonging. The research will focus on children's relationships with their class teacher and teaching assistant/equivalent paraprofessional, and whether these differ between children with special educational needs and those without special educational needs. I am contacting you because I would like to ask some of the staff and children in your school to participate in my research.

This letter outlines information about the research that will help you make an informed decision about whether you give consent for it to take place in your educational setting.

### What is the research about?

Positive student-teacher relationships have been found to foster school belonging. However, until now, no research has been conducted into whether a strong student-teaching assistant relationship can replicate this effect in children who receive a lot of teaching assistant support and may spend significant time away from their teacher and classroom. Those children may have fewer opportunities to build a strong student-teacher relationship but have increased opportunities to build a strong relationship with their TA. It is expected that a strong relationship with a teaching assistant will offer similar benefits to those derived from a strong relationship with a class teacher.

The research will take the form of an online questionnaire to be completed by children together with their parents. A member of school staff (class teacher, LSA/TA or SENCo) will then need to answer one question for each participating child about the amount of support a they receive from their class TA/LSA. Two of the children from your school will also be invited to participate in a short individual interview about their relationships with school staff and their sense of school belonging.

### What does the research involve?

If you, and your headteacher, are happy for your school to be involved, you will be provided with an email to send to parents and carers of children in year groups 4,5 and 6. The email will invite parents and carers to answer some questions with their child about the child's sense of school belonging and their relationships with their classroom adults. You will also be provided with a reminder email to send to parents and carers two weeks later. A member of school staff (someone who knows about the amount of teaching assistant/equivalent paraprofessional support a child receives approximately per week) will be asked to indicate how much support

each participating child in their class receives using an online form. This will take 5 minutes or less per class.

When completing the questionnaire, parents will have been asked if they are happy to be contacted for further consent to allow their child to be involved in an individual interview. I will only be interviewing two children, who are considered to have special educational needs, from each school, and the interviews will take around 20-30 minutes each. The interviews will either happen in school or virtually via a Zoom call, depending on your school's policy and the COVID-19 restrictions at the time of the interview. The interview will be audio-recorded and later transcribed. If in-person, the child will also be offered the opportunity to play a short game after the interview as a thank-you for taking part. The parental consent form will need to be emailed to the researcher before the interview day. Additional verbal consent will also be gained at the time of the interview.

### **Are there any benefits in your school taking part?**

You will be offered an information pack on school belonging in return for your involvement. This will be provided regardless of how many children and staff from your school participate. Your school will also have the opportunity to win some money for your PTA. One entry will be entered into a prize draw for every participating child to win one of three monetary prizes for the school PTA: £75, £50, £25.

### **Are there any risks?**

There are no significant risks involved for participants of this research.

### **What data will be collected?**

Parents will be asked to enter their child's name, age and class. Their child will then be asked to answer questions about their sense of school belonging and relationships with their classroom adults. A member of school staff will then indicate how much teaching assistant/equivalent paraprofessional support each child receives. Once all data has been collected, it will be anonymised, meaning all names and other personal details will be deleted.

Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed by a transcription service approved and accredited by the university. A confidential agreement form will be signed and returned to the researcher before the recordings are sent to the service for transcription. Once transcription has been completed and returned to the researcher, audio files will be destroyed.

### **Will participation be confidential?**

Participation and the information collected during the research will be kept strictly confidential.

Only members of the research team and responsible members of the University of Southampton may be given access to data for monitoring purposes and/or to carry out an audit of the study to ensure that the research complies with applicable regulations. Individuals from regulatory authorities (people who check that we are carrying out the study correctly) may require access to the data. All of these people have a duty to keep the information strictly confidential.

Data will be securely stored on the University of Southampton's server and not accessible to people not associated with the research. Data will be archived and maintained for a minimum of 10 years, as stated in the University Research Data Management Policy.

### **What will happen to the results of the research?**

All personal details will remain strictly confidential. Research findings made available in any reports or publications will not include information that can directly identify individuals without their specific consent. Once the data has been collected and analysed, you will be provided with a summary of the findings, along with a child friendly version.

### **Where can you get more information?**

If you have any further questions, please contact the researcher Charlotte Finnegan (Trainee Educational Psychologist) at [c.finnegan@soton.ac.uk](mailto:c.finnegan@soton.ac.uk).

### **What happens if there is a problem?**

If you are concerned about any aspect of this study, you should speak to the researchers who will do their best to answer your questions.

If you remain unhappy or have a complaint about any aspect of this study, please contact the University of Southampton Research Integrity and Governance Manager (023 8059 5058, [rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk](mailto:rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk)).

### **Data Protection Privacy Notice**

The University of Southampton conducts research to the highest standards of research integrity. As a publicly-funded organisation, the University has to ensure that it is in the public interest when we use personally-identifiable information about people who have agreed to take part in the research. This means that when participants agree to take part in a research study, we will use information about them in the ways needed and for the purposes specified to conduct and complete the research project. Under data protection law, 'Personal data' means any information that relates to and is capable of identifying a living individual. The University's data protection policy governing the use of personal data by the University can be found on its website (<https://www.southampton.ac.uk/legalservices/what-we-do/data-protection-and-foi.page>).

This Information Sheet tells you what data will be collected for this project and whether this includes any personal data. Please ask the research team if you have any questions or are unclear what data is being collected.

Our privacy notice for research participants provides more information on how the University of Southampton collects and uses personal data when taking part in one of our research projects and can be found at <http://www.southampton.ac.uk/assets/sharepoint/intranet/Is/Public/Research%20and%20Integrity%20Privacy%20Notice/Privacy%20Notice%20for%20Research%20Participants.pdf>

Any personal data we collect in this study will be used only for the purposes of carrying out our research and will be handled according to the University's policies in line with data protection law. If any personal data is used from which participants can be identified directly, it will not be disclosed to anyone else without their consent unless the University of Southampton is required by law to disclose it.

Data protection law requires us to have a valid legal reason ('lawful basis') to process and use personal data. The lawful basis for processing personal information in this research study is for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest. Personal data collected for research will not be used for any other purpose.

For the purposes of data protection law, the University of Southampton is the 'Data Controller' for this study, which means that we are responsible for looking after personal information and using it properly. The University of Southampton will keep identifiable information for one month after the data has been collected, after which time any link between the participant and their information will be removed.

To safeguard participant rights, we will use the minimum personal data necessary to achieve our research study objectives. Participant data protection rights – such as to access, change, or transfer such information - may be limited, however, in order for the research output to be reliable and accurate. The University will not do anything with personal data that you would not reasonably expect.

If you have any questions about how personal data is used, or wish to exercise any of your rights, please consult the University's data protection webpage (<https://www.southampton.ac.uk/legalservices/what-we-do/data-protection-and-foi.page>) where you can make a request using our online form. If you need further assistance, please contact the University's Data Protection Officer ([data.protection@soton.ac.uk](mailto:data.protection@soton.ac.uk)).

**Thank you.**

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and considering taking part in this research.

# Appendix M School Consent Form

## Consent form

**Study title:** Understanding the impact of teaching assistant support on school belonging.

**Researcher:** Charlotte Finnegan, Trainee Educational Psychologist doctoral student,  
[C.Finnegan@soton.ac.uk](mailto:C.Finnegan@soton.ac.uk)

**Research Supervisors:** Tim Cooke Academic and Professional Tutor, [T.Cooke@soton.ac.uk](mailto:T.Cooke@soton.ac.uk), and Rob Webster, Associate Professor, UCL Institute of Education.

**ERGO number:** 63860

**Please initial the boxes if you agree with the statements:**

I have read and understood the information sheet (27.07.2021 version 2) and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.	
I confirm that the school's headteacher agrees for children attending their school to take part in this research project, with the consent of their parents, and agrees for their data to be used for the purpose of this study.	
I understand the children's participation is voluntary, and they/their parents may withdraw at any time for any reason without their participation rights being affected.	
I confirm that in the event that neither a class teacher nor teaching assistant wishes, or is able, to provide information regarding the amount of teaching assistant/equivalent paraprofessional support each participating child receives, I will provide such information to ensure that complete data for all participating children is obtained.	

Name:

Signature:

Date:

# Appendix N Parent Information Sheet – Survey

## Parent Information Sheet

**Study Title:** Understanding the impact of teaching assistant support on school belonging.

**Researcher:** Charlotte Finnegan, Trainee Educational Psychologist doctoral student, [C.Finnegan@soton.ac.uk](mailto:C.Finnegan@soton.ac.uk)

**Research Supervisors:** Tim Cooke Academic and Professional Tutor, [T.Cooke@soton.ac.uk](mailto:T.Cooke@soton.ac.uk), and Rob Webster, Associate Professor, UCL Institute of Education.

**ERGO number:** 63860

You are being invited for your child to take part in the above research study. To help you decide whether you would like your child to take part or not, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the information below carefully and ask questions if anything is not clear or you would like more information before you decide for your child to take part in this research. You may want to discuss it with others, but it is up to you and your child to decide whether or not they take part. If you consent to your child taking part, you can complete the questionnaire now using the following link: **QUESTIONNAIRE LINK**

**Your child must be aged eight or over to participate.**

### What is the research about?

This is a thesis project being conducted by a final-year doctorate Trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of Southampton. This study will explore the factors that impact a child's sense of school belonging, focusing on a child's relationships with their class teacher and teaching assistant or equivalent paraprofessional, and whether these differ between children with and without special educational needs. Positive student-teacher relationships have been found to foster school belonging. However, until now, no research has been conducted into whether a strong student-teaching assistant relationship can replicate this effect in children who receive a lot of teaching assistant support and may spend significant time away from their teacher and classroom. Those children may have fewer opportunities to build a strong student-teacher relationship, but with increased opportunities to build a strong relationship with their teaching assistant. It is expected that a strong relationship with a teaching assistant will offer similar benefits to those derived from a strong relationship with a class teacher.

### Why have you been asked to participate?

Your child has been invited to participate as their school have agreed to participate in the research.

I am hoping to recruit around 80 children with special educational needs and 80 children without special educational needs who are in years 4-6 across multiple local schools.

### What will happen to you if you take part?

If your child participates in this research, I will ask you and them to complete a questionnaire about their sense of school belonging and relationships with their classroom adults. The questionnaire should take no longer than ten to fifteen minutes and will be completed using a Microsoft Form. Once this has been completed, your child's school will be asked to indicate if, and how much, they receive teaching assistant/equivalent paraprofessional support in school, which will be kept strictly confidential.

You will also be given the option to indicate that you are happy to be contacted for further consent to allow your child to be involved in an individual interview about their relationships with school staff. The number of children being interviewed will be very limited; however, if your child is selected, you will be provided with further information about this part of the study before giving consent. The interviews will either happen in person at the child's school or virtually via Zoom, depending on the COVID-19 restrictions at the time of the interview. The interview will be audio-recorded and later transcribed. If in-person, the child will also be offered the opportunity to play a short game after the interview as a reward for taking part.

#### **Are there any benefits in you taking part?**

Your child's school will have the opportunity to win some money for their PTA. One entry will be entered into a prize draw for every participating child to win one of three monetary prizes for the school PTA: £75, £50, £25.

It is also hoped that the results will contribute to a better understanding of how we can foster a greater sense of school belonging which has been shown to have significant academic, psychological and behavioural outcomes. If your child participates in the interview part of the study, I hope it will be an enjoyable interaction that will end with playing a short game.

#### **Are there any risks involved?**

There are no risks involved for participants of this research. However, it is advised that your child completes the questionnaire with you present in case they become upset while thinking about their sense of school belonging or relationships with their classroom adults.

#### **What data will be collected?**

You will be asked to enter your child's name, age, class, whether they have special educational needs and how many extracurricular activities they are involved in. Your child will then be asked to answer questions about their sense of school belonging and relationships with their classroom adults. Once the data has been collected from your child's school about any support they receive at school, all data will be anonymised, meaning all names and other personal details will be deleted. Your child's personal details will be kept until the interviews have been conducted if you also consented to this part of the study but will be deleted upon completion of these.

Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed by a transcription service approved and accredited by the university. A confidential agreement form will be signed and returned to the researcher before the recordings are sent to the service for transcription. Once transcription has been completed and returned to the researcher, audio files will be destroyed.

#### **Will your participation be confidential?**

Your child's participation and the information we collect about your child during the research will be kept strictly confidential.

Only members of the research team and responsible members of the University of Southampton may be given access to data about your child for monitoring purposes and/or to carry out an audit of the study to ensure that the research is complying with applicable regulations. Individuals from regulatory authorities (people who check that we are carrying out the study correctly) may require access to your child's data. All of these people have a duty to keep your information, as a research participant, strictly confidential.

Data will be securely stored on the University of Southampton's server and not accessible to people not associated with the research. Data will be archived and maintained for a minimum of 10 years, as stated in the University Research Data Management Policy.

#### **Do you have to take part?**



No, it is entirely up to you and your child whether they decide to take part. Please enter their details and your email address on the Microsoft Form if you decide they want to participate.

**What happens if you change your mind?**

You have the right to change your mind and withdraw your child from the study at any time until 20.12.2021 without giving a reason and without your participant rights being affected. If you wish to withdraw from the research, please contact the researcher at [c.finnegan@soton.ac.uk](mailto:c.finnegan@soton.ac.uk). After this time, all personal details will be removed, and data anonymised; therefore, it will no longer be possible to identify and withdraw an individual's data.

**What will happen to the results of the research?**

Your and your child's personal details will remain strictly confidential. Research findings made available in any reports or publications will not include information that can directly identify your child without your specific consent. Once the data has been collected and analysed, your child's school will be provided with a summary of the findings, along with a child friendly version to share with participants.

**Where can you get more information?**

If you have any further questions, please contact the researcher Charlotte Finnegan at [c.finnegan@soton.ac.uk](mailto:c.finnegan@soton.ac.uk).

**What happens if there is a problem?**

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you should speak to the researchers who will do their best to answer your questions.

If you remain unhappy or have a complaint about any aspect of this study, please contact the University of Southampton Research Integrity and Governance Manager (023 8059 5058, [rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk](mailto:rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk)).

**Data Protection Privacy Notice**

The University of Southampton conducts research to the highest standards of research integrity. As a publicly-funded organisation, the University has to ensure that it is in the public interest when we use personally-identifiable information about people who have agreed to take part in research. This means that when you agree for your child to take part in a research study, we will use information about them in the ways needed and for the purposes specified to conduct and complete the research project. Under data protection law, 'Personal data' means any information that relates to and is capable of identifying a living individual. The University's data protection policy governing the use of personal data by the University can be found on its website (<https://www.southampton.ac.uk/legalservices/what-we-do/data-protection-and-foi.page>).

This Participant Information Sheet tells you what data will be collected for this project and whether this includes any personal data. Please ask the research team if you have any questions or are unclear what data is being collected about your child.

Our privacy notice for research participants provides more information on how the University of Southampton collects and uses personal data when participants take part in one of our research projects and can be found at <http://www.southampton.ac.uk/assets/sharepoint/intranet/Is/Public/Research%20and%20Integrity%20Privacy%20Notice/Privacy%20Notice%20for%20Research%20Participants.pdf>

Any personal data we collect in this study will be used only for the purposes of carrying out our research and will be handled according to the University's policies in line with data protection law. If any personal data is used from which your child can be identified directly, it will not be disclosed to anyone else without your consent unless the University of Southampton is required by law to disclose it.

Data protection law requires us to have a valid legal reason ('lawful basis') to process and use your child's personal data. The lawful basis for processing personal information in this research study is for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest. Personal data collected for research will not be used for any other purpose.

For data protection law purposes, the University of Southampton is the 'Data Controller' for this study, which means that we are responsible for looking after your child's information and using it properly. The University of Southampton will keep identifiable information about your child for one month after the data has been collected, after which time any link between your child and their information will be removed.

To safeguard your and your child's rights, we will use the minimum personal data necessary to achieve our research study objectives. Your data protection rights – such as to access, change, or transfer such information - may be limited, however, in order for the research output to be reliable and accurate. The University will not do anything with your child's personal data that you would not reasonably expect.

If you have any questions about how your and your child's personal data is used or wish to exercise any of your rights, please consult the University's data protection webpage (<https://www.southampton.ac.uk/legalservices/what-we-do/data-protection-and-foi.page>) where you can make a request using our online form. If you need further assistance, please contact the University's Data Protection Officer ([data.protection@soton.ac.uk](mailto:data.protection@soton.ac.uk)).

**Thank you.**

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and considering the opportunity for your child to take part in this research.

## Appendix O Parent Information Sheet – Interview

### Parent Information Sheet

**Study Title:** Understanding the impact of teaching assistant support on school belonging.

**Researcher:** Charlotte Finnegan, Trainee Educational Psychologist doctoral student, [C.Finnegan@soton.ac.uk](mailto:C.Finnegan@soton.ac.uk)

**Research Supervisors:** Tim Cooke Academic and Professional Tutor, [T.Cooke@soton.ac.uk](mailto:T.Cooke@soton.ac.uk), and Rob Webster, Associate Professor, UCL Institute of Education.

**ERGO number:** 63860

Thank you for allowing your child to be involved in the first part of this research project. This information sheet will tell you about the interview component of this research and will help you decide whether you would like your child to take part or not. It is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the information below carefully and ask questions if anything is not clear or you would like more information before you decide for your child to take part in this research. You may want to discuss it with others, but it is up to you and your child to decide whether or not your child wants to take part. If you are happy for your child to participate, you will be asked to complete a consent form.

#### **What is the research about?**

The interview component of this research will be exploring the relationships that children with special educational needs have with their class teacher and teaching assistant/equivalent paraprofessional. This qualitative part of the research aims to ensure the views of children with special educational needs have been accurately captured in the earlier questionnaire part of the study and to understand more about how their sense of school belonging can be improved.

#### **Why have you been asked to participate?**

Your child has been invited to participate in this part of the research as they are on the school's special educational needs register, have completed the first part of this research study, and you indicated that you were happy to be contacted with more information about the interviews.

#### **What will happen to you if you take part?**

If you and your child agree for them to be interviewed, I will arrange with the school a time for this to take place, and you will be informed when this is happening. You will also be provided with an information sheet about me (the researcher) to show your child before the interaction. The interview will take place in school and will last between 20-30 minutes. Your child will be asked questions about their relationship with their class teacher and teaching assistant, e.g., how they would describe them and how their classroom adults make them feel. They will also be asked about how they find school, e.g., what their favourite subject is and why. Once the conversation has ended, I will give your child the opportunity to play a short game and will offer them a sticker. They will then be taken back to class. The interview will be audio recorded using a dictaphone.

#### **Are there any benefits in you taking part?**

There are no direct benefits or incentives to your child in taking part in this element of the research. However, it is hoped that the results will contribute to an enhanced understanding of how we can foster a greater understanding of school belonging for children with special educational needs, which has been shown to have significant academic, psychological and

behavioural outcomes. I hope it will be an enjoyable interaction that will end with playing a short game.

### **Are there any risks involved?**

There are no risks involved for participants of this research. However, it is possible that your child might feel uncomfortable being asked questions by someone they have not met before. In order to ease any uncomfortable feelings, I will give you a child-friendly sheet about the researcher to show your child before the interview. I will also tell your child at the beginning of the interview that they can stop it at any time.

### **What data will be collected?**

Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed by a transcription service approved and accredited by the university. A confidential agreement form will be signed and returned to the researcher before the recordings are sent to the service for transcription. Once transcription has been completed and returned to the researcher, audio files will be destroyed.

### **Will your participation be confidential?**

Your child's participation and the information we collect about your child during the research will be kept strictly confidential.

Only members of the research team and responsible members of the University of Southampton may be given access to data about your child for monitoring purposes and/or to carry out an audit of the study to ensure that the research is complying with applicable regulations. Individuals from regulatory authorities (people who check that we are carrying out the study correctly) may require access to your child's data. All of these people have a duty to keep your information, as a research participant, strictly confidential.

Data will be securely stored on the University of Southampton's server and not accessible to people not associated with the research. The interview transcription will be archived and maintained for a minimum of 10 years, as stated in the University Research Data Management Policy.

### **Do you have to take part?**

No, it is entirely up to you and your child whether they decide to take part. If you decide they want to take part, please contact the researcher at [c.finnegan@soton.ac.uk](mailto:c.finnegan@soton.ac.uk).

### **What happens if you change my mind?**

You have the right to change your mind and withdraw your child from the study at any time until 20.12.2021 without giving a reason and without your participant rights being affected. If you wish to withdraw from the research, please contact the researcher at [c.finnegan@soton.ac.uk](mailto:c.finnegan@soton.ac.uk). After this time, all personal details will be removed, and data anonymised; therefore, it will no longer be possible to identify and withdraw an individual's data.

### **What will happen to the results of the research?**

You and your child's personal details will remain strictly confidential. Research findings made available in any reports or publications will not include information that can directly identify your child without your specific consent.

### **Where can you get more information?**

If you have any further questions, please contact the researcher Charlotte Finnegan (trainee Educational Psychologist) at [c.finnegan@soton.ac.uk](mailto:c.finnegan@soton.ac.uk).

### **What happens if there is a problem?**

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you should speak to the researchers who will do their best to answer your questions.

If you remain unhappy or have a complaint about any aspect of this study, please contact the University of Southampton Research Integrity and Governance Manager (023 8059 5058, [rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk](mailto:rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk)).

### **Data Protection Privacy Notice**

The University of Southampton conducts research to the highest standards of research integrity. As a publicly-funded organisation, the University has to ensure that it is in the public interest when we use personally-identifiable information about people who have agreed to take part in research. This means that when you agree to take part in a research study, we will use information about you in the ways needed and for the purposes specified to conduct and complete the research project. Under data protection law, 'Personal data' means any information that relates to and is capable of identifying a living individual. The University's data protection policy governing the use of personal data by the University can be found on its website (<https://www.southampton.ac.uk/legalservices/what-we-do/data-protection-and-foi.page>).

This Participant Information Sheet tells you what data will be collected for this project and whether this includes any personal data. Please ask the research team if you have any questions or are unclear what data is being collected about you.

Our privacy notice for research participants provides more information on how the University of Southampton collects and uses your personal data when you take part in one of our research projects and can be found

at <http://www.southampton.ac.uk/assets/sharepoint/intranet/Is/Public/Research%20and%20Integrity%20Privacy%20Notice/Privacy%20Notice%20for%20Research%20Participants.pdf>

Any personal data we collect in this study will be used only for the purposes of carrying out our research and will be handled according to the University's policies in line with data protection law. If any personal data is used from which you can be identified directly, it will not be disclosed to anyone else without your consent unless the University of Southampton is required by law to disclose it.

Data protection law requires us to have a valid legal reason ('lawful basis') to process and use your Personal data. The lawful basis for processing personal information in this research study is for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest. Personal data collected for research will not be used for any other purpose.

For the purposes of data protection law, the University of Southampton is the 'Data Controller' for this study, which means that we are responsible for looking after your information and using it properly. The University of Southampton will keep identifiable information about you for one month after the data has been collected, after which time any link between you and your information will be removed.

To safeguard your rights, we will use the minimum personal data necessary to achieve our research study objectives. Your data protection rights – such as to access, change, or transfer such information - may be limited, however, in order for the research output to be reliable and accurate. The University will not do anything with your personal data that you would not reasonably expect.

If you have any questions about how your personal data is used, or wish to exercise any of your rights, please consult the University's data protection webpage (<https://www.southampton.ac.uk/legalservices/what-we-do/data-protection-and-foi.page>) where

you can make a request using our online form. If you need further assistance, please contact the University's Data Protection Officer ([data.protection@soton.ac.uk](mailto:data.protection@soton.ac.uk)).

**Thank you.**

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and considering the opportunity for your child to take part in this research.

## Appendix P Interview Consent Form

### Consent form

**Study title:** Understanding the impact of teaching assistant support on school belonging.

**Researcher:** Charlotte Finnegan, Trainee Educational Psychologist doctoral student,  
[C.Finnegan@soton.ac.uk](mailto:C.Finnegan@soton.ac.uk)

**Research Supervisors:** Tim Cooke Academic and Professional Tutor, [T.Cooke@soton.ac.uk](mailto:T.Cooke@soton.ac.uk), and Rob Webster, Associate Professor, UCL Institute of Education.

**ERGO number:** 63860

***Please initial the boxes if you agree with the statements:***

I have read and understood the information sheet (27.07.2021 version 2) and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.	
I agree for my child to take part in this research project and agree for their data to be used for the purpose of this study.	
I understand my child's participation is voluntary, and I/they may withdraw at any time for any reason without my participation rights being affected.	
I understand that the interview audio will be recorded, which will be transcribed and then destroyed for the purposes set out in the participation information sheet.	

Child's name:

Your name:

Relationship with child:

Signature:

Date:

# Appendix Q School Staff Information Sheet

## Participant Information Sheet

**Study Title:** Understanding the impact of teaching assistant support on school belonging.

**Researcher:** Charlotte Finnegan, Trainee Educational Psychologist doctoral student,  
[C.Finnegan@soton.ac.uk](mailto:C.Finnegan@soton.ac.uk)

**Research Supervisors:** Tim Cooke Academic and Professional Tutor, [T.Cooke@soton.ac.uk](mailto:T.Cooke@soton.ac.uk), and Rob Webster, Associate Professor, UCL Institute of Education.

**ERGO number:** 63860

You are being invited to take part in the above research study. To help you decide whether you would like to take part or not, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the information below carefully and ask questions if anything is not clear or you would like more information before you decide to take part in this research. You may want to discuss it with others, but it is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you are happy to participate, you will be asked to answer one question for each participating child in your class using a Microsoft Form questionnaire.

### What is the research about?

This is a thesis project being conducted by a Trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of Southampton. This study will explore the factors that impact a child's sense of school belonging, focusing on a child's relationships with their class teacher and teaching assistant/ equivalent paraprofessional, and whether these differ between children with special educational needs and those without special educational needs. Positive student-teacher relationships have been found to foster school belonging. However, until now, no research has been conducted into whether a strong student-teaching assistant relationship can replicate this effect in children who receive a lot of teaching assistant support and may spend significant time away from their teacher and classroom. Those children may have fewer opportunities to build a strong student-teacher relationship but have increased opportunities to build a strong relationship with their teaching assistant. It is expected that a strong relationship with a teaching assistant will offer similar benefits to those that derived from a strong relationship with a class teacher.

### Why have you been asked to participate?

You have been invited to participate as the school you work in, and children within your class have participated in the first stage of the research. The children's parents have consented to have information about their child's support from teaching assistants/equivalent paraprofessionals shared with the researchers.

### What will happen to you if you take part?

You will be asked to select from a multiple-choice list approximately how much support each participating child within your class receives from a teaching assistant/paraprofessional.

The number of questions you will need to answer will depend on the number of participating children within your class; however, it should take no longer than 5 minutes to complete regardless of the number.

### Are there any benefits in you taking part?



Your school will be receiving an information pack on school belonging in return for both staff and children's contribution and will have the opportunity to win some money for your PTA. One entry will be entered into a prize draw for every participating child to win one of three monetary prizes for the school PTA: £75, £50, £25.

It is also hoped that the results will contribute to an enhanced understanding of how we can foster a greater sense of school belonging which has been shown to have significant academic, psychological and behavioural outcomes.

**Are there any risks involved?**

There are no risks involved for participants of this research.

**What data will be collected?**

You will be asked to select your job title and will be asked to indicate how much support each child within your class receives from a teaching assistant/paraprofessional. Once the data has been collected, it will be anonymised, meaning all children's names will be deleted. No personal information other than your job title will be collected.

**Will your participation be confidential?**

Your participation and the information we collect during the research will be kept strictly confidential.

Only members of the research team and responsible members of the University of Southampton may be given access to data about you for monitoring purposes and/or to carry out an audit of the study to ensure that the research complies with applicable regulations. Individuals from regulatory authorities (people who check that we are carrying out the study correctly) may require access to your data. All of these people have a duty to keep your information, as a research participant, strictly confidential.

Data will be securely stored on the University of Southampton's server and not accessible to people not associated with the research. Data will be archived and maintained for a minimum of 10 years, as stated in the University Research Data Management Policy.

**Do you have to take part?**

No, it is entirely up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide you want to take part, please complete the Microsoft Form.

If you feel a particular child is not fully aware of what they are consenting to, please use your professional judgement to ensure that their interests are safeguarded and that they will not be negatively impacted by participating in this research.

**What happens if you change your mind?**

You have the right to change your mind and withdraw at any time until 20.12.2021 without giving a reason and without your participant rights being affected. If you wish to withdraw from the research, please contact the researcher at [c.finnegan@soton.ac.uk](mailto:c.finnegan@soton.ac.uk). After this time, all personal details will be removed, and data anonymised; therefore, it will no longer be possible to identify and withdraw an individual's data.

**What will happen to the results of the research?**

Personal details will remain strictly confidential. Research findings made available in any reports or publications will not include information that can directly identify you without your specific consent. Once the data has been collected and analysed, your school will be provided with a summary of the findings, along with a child friendly version.

**Where can you get more information?**

If you have any further questions, please contact the researcher Charlotte Finnegan (trainee Educational Psychologist) at [c.finnegan@soton.ac.uk](mailto:c.finnegan@soton.ac.uk).

**What happens if there is a problem?**

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you should speak to the researchers who will do their best to answer your questions.

If you remain unhappy or have a complaint about any aspect of this study, please contact the University of Southampton Research Integrity and Governance Manager (023 8059 5058, [rginfo@soton.ac.uk](mailto:rginfo@soton.ac.uk)).

**Data Protection Privacy Notice**

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This Participant Information Sheet tells you what data will be collected for this project and whether this includes any personal data. Please ask the research team if you have any questions or are unclear what data is being collected about you.

Our privacy notice for research participants provides more information on how the University of Southampton collects and uses your personal data when you take part in one of our research projects and can be found at <http://www.southampton.ac.uk/assets/sharepoint/intranet/ls/Public/Research%20and%20Integrity%20Privacy%20Notice/Privacy%20Notice%20for%20Research%20Participants.pdf>

Any personal data we collect in this study will be used only for the purposes of carrying out our research and will be handled according to the University's policies in line with data protection law. If any personal data is used from which you can be identified directly, it will not be disclosed to anyone else without your consent unless the University of Southampton is required by law to disclose it.

Data protection law requires us to have a valid legal reason ('lawful basis') to process and use your Personal data. The lawful basis for processing personal information in this research study is for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest. Personal data collected for research will not be used for any other purpose.

For the purposes of data protection law, the University of Southampton is the 'Data Controller' for this study, which means that we are responsible for looking after your information and using it properly. The University of Southampton will keep identifiable information about you for one month after the data has been collected, after which time any link between you and your information will be removed.

To safeguard your rights, we will use the minimum personal data necessary to achieve our research study objectives. Your data protection rights – such as to access, change, or transfer such information - may be limited, however, in order for the research output to be reliable and accurate. The University will not do anything with your personal data that you would not reasonably expect.

If you have any questions about how your personal data is used, or wish to exercise any of your rights, please consult the University's data protection webpage (<https://www.southampton.ac.uk/legalservices/what-we-do/data-protection-and-foi.page>) where you can make a request using our online form. If you need further assistance, please contact the University's Data Protection Officer ([data.protection@soton.ac.uk](mailto:data.protection@soton.ac.uk)).

**Thank you.**

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and considering taking part in this research.

## Appendix R Parent and Child Questionnaire

### School belonging research study.

Thank you for your interest in allowing your child to participate in this research that will help us have a greater understanding of the factors that impact school belonging. School belonging has been shown to have positive academic, psychological and behavioural outcomes, which is why research of this type is so important!

Before starting, please check with your child that they are happy to take part.

**Please complete section one and then assist your child in completing section two. You can read the questions to them and help them consider their responses, but please ensure that the answers reflect their views.** If needed, you can listen to the question by clicking the audio button next to the question. If you or your child require further assistance in completing this questionnaire, please contact [c.finnegan@soton.ac.uk](mailto:c.finnegan@soton.ac.uk).

One entry will be entered into a **prize draw** for every child who completes this questionnaire for a chance to win one of three monetary prizes for the school PTA: **£75, £50, £25.**



\* Required

#### Adult section.

Parents and carers please complete section one and then ask your child to complete section two.

1

Please tick this box to confirm you have read the parent information sheet (27.07.2021 Version 2) and agree for your child to take part in this research, consent for their data to be used for the purpose of this study and agree to their school supplying information about the amount, if any, of teaching assistant/paraprofessional support they receive. \*

- I confirm I have read the parent information sheet (27.07.2021 Version 2) and agree for my child to take part in this research, consent for their data to be used for the purpose of this study and agree to their school supplying information about the amount, if any, of teaching assistant/paraprofessional support they receive.

2

What is your child's name? \*

Enter your answer

3

How old is your child? \*

- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11

4

What class is your child in? \*

Enter your answer

5

Do you consider your child to have special educational needs? \*

- Yes
- No

6

Please select the option(s) that apply to your child. \*

- Has an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP)
- Is on the SEN register
- Neither of the above

7

How many different extracurricular activities has your child been involved in during the last month? This could include team sports (e.g., football, netball), individual sports (e.g., athletics, swimming), school involvement (e.g., school council, school committee), performance (e.g., school band, drama group), and community (e.g., cadets, brownies). \*

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- More than 10

8

Are you happy to be contacted about the possibility of your child being involved in the interview stage of this research? \*

- Yes
- No

9

If so, what is your email address?

Enter your answer

Next

\* Required

### Child section.



Hello!  
Thank you so much for agreeing to take part in my study.

What is a study?  
A research study is what you do when you want to learn about something or find out something new.

Why is this study being done?  
I am doing this study to find out how you feel about school. I want to ask you a few questions about how you find school and your relationships with your classroom adults. If you are happy to answer them, you can read the questions yourself; ask an adult to help you, or you can click on the audio button next to the question.

Thank you for helping me!

From Charlotte

10

I feel happy drawing pictures. \*

- No not true
- Not sure
- Yes true

11

I feel really happy at my school. \*

- No not true
- Not sure
- Yes true

12

People at school notice when I'm good at something. \*

- No not true
- Not sure
- Yes true

13

It is hard for people like me to feel happy at school. \*

- No not true
- Not sure
- Yes true

14

Most teachers at my school like me. \*

- No not true
- Not sure
- Yes true

15

Sometimes I feel as if I shouldn't be at my school. \*

- No not true
- Not sure
- Yes true

16

There is an adult in school I can talk to about my problems. \*

- No not true
- Not sure
- Yes true



17

People at my school are friendly to me. \*

- No not true
- Not sure
- Yes true

18

Teachers at school don't like people like me. \*

- No not true
- Not sure
- Yes true

19

I feel very different from most other kids at school. \*

- No not true
- Not sure
- Yes true

20

I wish I were in a different school. \*

- No not true
- Not sure
- Yes true

21

I feel happy being at my school. \*

- No not true
- Not sure
- Yes true

22

Other kids at school like me the way I am. \*

- No not true
- Not sure
- Yes true

23

I feel safe at school. \*

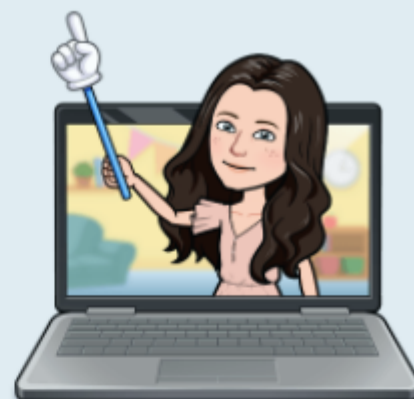
- No not true
- Not sure
- Yes true

Back

Next

\* Required

## Classroom adults.



Please answer yes or no for both your class teacher and teaching assistant for the statements below.

If you have more than one teacher, please answer these questions about the teacher you are closest to. If you have equal relationships with both of your teachers, answer the questions about the one who teaches you the most.

Your teaching assistant might be called something different in your school, such as a learning support assistant - that's okay, answer the questions in the same way. It doesn't matter if they are called something different.

24

This person smiles a lot. \*

	Yes	No
Teacher	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching assistant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

25

This person listens to me. \*

	Yes	No
Teacher	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching assistant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

26

This person likes my family. \*

	Yes	No
Teacher	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching assistant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

27

This person is my friend. \*

	Yes	No
Teacher	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching assistant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

28

This person says nice things about my work. \*

	Yes	No
Teacher	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching assistant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

29

This person tells me I am smart. \*

	Yes	No
Teacher	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching assistant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

30

This person helps me when I do not understand. \*

	Yes	No
Teacher	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching assistant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

31

This person remembers special days for me. \*

	Yes	No
Teacher	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching assistant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

32

This person answers my questions. \*

	Yes	No
Teacher	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching assistant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

33

This person chooses me to be a special helper. \*

	Yes	No
Teacher	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching assistant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

34

This person likes me. \*

	Yes	No
Teacher	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching assistant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

35

This person makes the class fun. \*

	Yes	No
Teacher	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching assistant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

36

This person does activities with me. \*

	Yes	No
Teacher	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching assistant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

37

This person tells good stories. \*

	Yes	No
Teacher	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching assistant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

38

This person tells me I do not listen. \*

	Yes	No
Teacher	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching assistant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

39

This person gets angry with me. \*

	Yes	No
Teacher	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching assistant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

40

This person doesn't pay attention to me. \*

	Yes	No
Teacher	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching assistant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

41

This person tells me that I do not try hard enough. \*

	Yes	No
Teacher	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching assistant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

42

This person tells me I am going to get in trouble a lot. \*

	Yes	No
Teacher	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching assistant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

43

This person tells me I am doing something wrong a lot. \*

	Yes	No
Teacher	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching assistant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

44

This person tells me to do work that is too hard for me. \*

	Yes	No
Teacher	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching assistant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

45

This person is mean. \*

	Yes	No
Teacher	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching assistant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

You can print a copy of your answer after you submit.


<a href="#">Back</a>	<a href="#">Submit</a>
----------------------	------------------------

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## School belonging research study.

 Thanks!

Thank you for your participation in this research.

If you have any questions about the research, please contact the research  
Charlotte Finnegan at [c.finnegan@soton.ac.uk](mailto:c.finnegan@soton.ac.uk).

[Print or get PDF of answers](#)

[Submit another response](#)

[Create my own form](#)

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## Level of teaching assistant/ equivalent paraprofessional support for children in CLASS

Approximately how much of this child's time spent at school does a TA/equivalent paraprofessional support them? 10% equates to half a day per week for a child who attends school full-time.

Hi Charlotte, when you submit this form, the owner will be able to see your name and email address.

\* Required

1. NAME OF CHILD \*

- 0-10%
- 11-20%
- 21-30%
- 31-40%
- 41-50%
- 51-60%
- 61-70%
- 71-80%
- 81-90%
- 91-100%

Level of teaching assistant/ equivalent paraprofessional support for children in CLASS

☑ Thanks!

Thank you for your participation in this research.

If you have any questions about the research, please contact the research Charlotte Finnegan at [c.finnegan@soton.ac.uk](mailto:c.finnegan@soton.ac.uk).

[Submit another response](#)

## Appendix T School Recruitment Email

Hello,

My name is Charlotte, and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of Southampton. I am carrying out a research project in local primary schools exploring the factors that impact a child's sense of school belonging. I will be focusing on a child's relationships with their class teacher and teaching assistant/equivalent paraprofessional and whether these differ between children with special educational needs and those without special educational needs.

The research will take the form of an online questionnaire to be completed by children together with their parents. A member of school staff (class teacher, LSA/TA or SENCo) will then need to answer one question for each participating child about the amount of support a child receives from their class TA/LSA. Two of the children from your school will also be invited to participate in a short individual interview about their relationships with school staff. In return, you will be offered an information pack on school belonging in return for your involvement. Your school will also have the opportunity to win some money for your PTA. One entry will be entered into a prize draw for every participating child to win one of three monetary prizes for the school PTA: **£75, £50, £25.**

I have attached a visual timeline of the research; however, here is a breakdown of what you, or someone else within the school, would need to do:

- Send an email to parents about the research - an email will be supplied, so this will simply need to be forwarded on.
- Send a reminder email two weeks later - this will also be provided.
- Class teachers to indicate how much TA/LSA support each child receives - this will take **5 minutes or less per teacher**. Alternatively, this could be completed by the school SENCo or TA/LSA if they knew how much support each child received.
- Arrange a date for me to come into your school and interview two children with SEN.

Would this be something your school would be interested in taking part in? I have attached an information sheet with further information about the research along with a consent form for you to complete if you are happy for your school to participate. Please also ensure your headteacher consents for your school to participate.

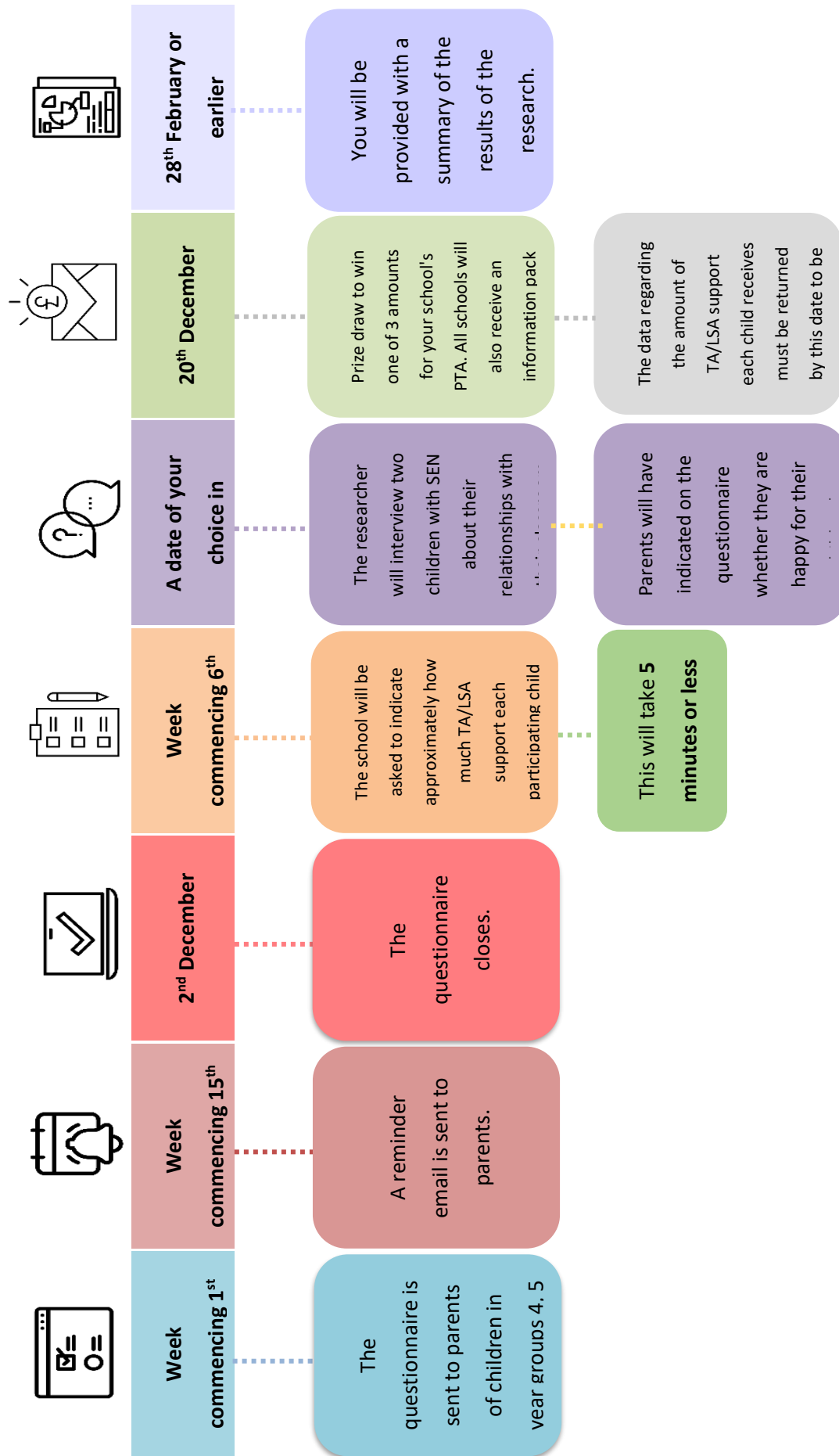
Thank you for considering participating in this research, and please don't hesitate to contact me at [c.finnegan@soton.ac.uk](mailto:c.finnegan@soton.ac.uk) if you would like any further information.

Best wishes,

Charlotte

Charlotte Finnegan  
**Trainee Educational Psychologist**  
**Doctoral Programme in Educational Psychology**  
**University of Southampton**

**Thesis supervisors: Tim Cooke and Rob Webster**  
**ERGO number: 63860**



## Appendix U Parent Recruitment Email

Hello,

My name is Charlotte, and I am a **Trainee Educational Psychologist** at the University of Southampton.

I am carrying out a **research project** in local primary schools exploring the factors that impact a **child's sense of school belonging** and how this differs for children with special educational needs. I am writing to ask if you would be happy **for your child to be involved in this research**.

In return for you and your child's participation, their school will have the opportunity to win some money for the PTA. One entry will be entered into a **prize draw** for every participating child to win one of three **monetary prizes for the school PTA: £75, £50, £25**.

The research involves a **short online questionnaire which you can complete with your child now**, and the school answering one question for each participating child about any support they receive. I will also be holding short individual interviews with a couple of children from each school. You will be able to let me know whether you are happy to be contacted with further information about this additional part of the research when completing the questionnaire.

I have attached an information sheet with more information about this research. **Your child must be aged eight or over to participate**.

If you are happy for your child to be involved in this research, you can **take part using the link below**. The short questionnaire is made up of two parts. You will need to complete the first part, and your child will need to answer the second.  
<https://forms.office.com/r/hKMiy73A30>

If you have any questions or require assistance in completing the questionnaire, please contact me at [c.finnegan@soton.ac.uk](mailto:c.finnegan@soton.ac.uk).

I appreciate your willingness to support this research.

Best wishes,

Charlotte Finnegan

**Trainee Educational Psychologist**  
**Doctoral Programme in Educational Psychology**  
**University of Southampton**

**Thesis supervisors: Tim Cooke and Rob Webster**  
**ERGO number: 63860**

## Appendix V

## Questionnaire Email to School Staff

Dear NAME,

Thank you for all your support already with my thesis. The questionnaire closed on 2nd December, meaning that we can now proceed with the next stage of the research in which a member of school staff will need to report how much teaching assistant/ equivalent paraprofessional support each participating child receives on average per week. This will take no longer than 5 minutes per class.

Ideally, the class teacher would complete this short questionnaire as they will likely have the most accurate understanding of the amount of support each child receives. However, if they do not want to complete the questionnaire, this can be done by another member of staff who is aware of the support children in each class receive, e.g., the class teaching assistant.

I have attached an information sheet for the person completing the questionnaire, with some additional information about the research.

Shortly, I will send you an email via the university's secure file sharing service, SafeSend, which will contain a document with the questionnaire links for each class. Please can you provide the member of staff who will be completing the questionnaire for each class with the relevant link from the table in the document along with the information sheet?

If anyone has any questions or difficulties when completing the questionnaires, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Thank you again for your willingness to support this research.

Best wishes,

Charlotte

Charlotte Finnegan  
**Trainee Educational Psychologist**  
**Doctoral Programme in Educational Psychology**  
**University of Southampton**

**Thesis supervisors: Tim Cooke and Rob Webster**  
**ERGO number: 63860**

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