Exploring support for autistic females in mainstream high school

A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of Doctor of Educational and Child Psychology in the Faculty of Humanities

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School of Environment, Education and Development (SEED)
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### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APA</td>
<td>American Psychological Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASC</td>
<td>Autism Spectrum Condition</td>
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<td>ASD</td>
<td>Autism Spectrum Disorder</td>
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<td>CYP</td>
<td>Children and Young People</td>
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<tr>
<td>DfE</td>
<td>Department for Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>DoH</td>
<td>Department of Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSM</td>
<td>Diagnostic and Statistical Manual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DECP</td>
<td>Division of Educational and Child Psychology</td>
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<tr>
<td>EHCPs</td>
<td>Education, Health and Care Plans</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPs</td>
<td>Educational Psychologists</td>
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<tr>
<td>EDs</td>
<td>Emotional Disorders</td>
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<tr>
<td>EBP</td>
<td>Evidence-Based Practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>HCPC</td>
<td>Health Care and Professions Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>IJSEP</td>
<td>International Journal of School and Educational Psychology</td>
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<tr>
<td>IPA</td>
<td>Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JORSEN</td>
<td>Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>Local Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAT</td>
<td>Multi-Academy Trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>NASEN</td>
<td>National Association for Special Educational Needs</td>
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<td>NASP</td>
<td>National Association of School Psychologists</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCB</td>
<td>National Children’s Bureau</td>
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<tr>
<td>PBE</td>
<td>Practice-Based Evidence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRISMA</td>
<td>Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSHEE</td>
<td>Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCTs</td>
<td>Randomised Control Trials</td>
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<tr>
<td>RCUK</td>
<td>Research Council United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>RQs</td>
<td>Research Questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPs</td>
<td>School Psychologists</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEND</td>
<td>Special Educational Needs and Disability</td>
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<td>SENDCos</td>
<td>Special Educational Needs and Disability Coordinators</td>
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<tr>
<td>SRE</td>
<td>Sex and Relationship Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLR</td>
<td>Systematic Literature Review</td>
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<td>TA</td>
<td>Thematic Analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>TEP</td>
<td>Trainee Educational Psychologist</td>
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<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
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<tr>
<td>UoM</td>
<td>University of Manchester</td>
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<tr>
<td>WoE</td>
<td>Weight of Evidence</td>
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<tr>
<td>YP</td>
<td>Young people</td>
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<tr>
<td>YSU</td>
<td>Youngstown State University</td>
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Abstract

Autistic females face a distinct set of educational challenges when compared to their male counterparts. The evidence-base surrounding support for autistic females within mainstream high school education is emerging and attempts have been made to adapt pre-existing models to meet need. However, there is still a dearth of literature pertaining to specific support required by autistic females.

Paper One is a SLR that sought to explore what could be considered as helpful for supporting autistic females in mainstream high school education. Twelve eligible papers were identified and critically appraised following the PRISMA framework. Paper Two, an empirical study, adopted an in-depth exploratory survey design, investigating SPs’ views on the utility and implementability of a proposed model of support for autistic females. Focus groups were conducted with EPs from the UK and SPs from the US, allowing for an international comparison.

The SLR revealed, through thematic synthesis, seven main themes pertaining to support for autistic females in mainstream high school. Paper Two elucidated the perceived strengths and areas of development of a proposed model of support for autistic females in high school, as well as the perceived facilitators and barriers to implementing the model in practice. Data were thematically analysed.

Strategies to support autistic females in high school are outlined, along with implications for future research and practice. A model of support for autistic females in mainstream high school is presented - the ‘champions model’. Paper Three discusses a dissemination plan for sharing the findings of Papers One and Two, and considers wider professional practice implications.
Declaration Statement

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification at this or any other university or other institute of learning.
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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my husband, Ces, and children, Leo and Eva. Without your love and support, there would be no thesis.

“Nobody but us is going to change our story”

Here’s to our next chapter.
Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my co-researchers in the US, Professor Richard VanVoorhis and school psychology intern Abby Holloway, for their assistance with this thesis. Our Zoom meetings and NASP convention collaboration are memories I will treasure forever.

I want to thank colleagues – past and present – who have supported my dream. Also, my placement supervisors – old and new – who provided endless support, and words of encouragement - Kia Kaha became my mantra. And, to my fellow TEPs – it’s been an absolute thesis paradise – I would have been lost without you.

To all of my family and friends – you may not realise it, but your care and words of encouragement got me through when the going got tough. Thank you for also giving me the time and space I needed to write this thesis. Special mention to my sister, Aimee, who, despite experiencing the most difficult three years, always found ways to support me. You have taught me so much.

Finally, to my supervisor Dr George Thomas. You have offered endless practical and emotional support, conveyed unwavering enthusiasm and, above all, made the journey enjoyable. Thank you for everything.

The Author

The author holds a BSc (Hons) degree in Psychology and Health Sciences from The University of Liverpool and a PGCE in Social Science from Manchester Metropolitan University. The author held previous teaching and leadership roles in a diverse comprehensive high school and sixth form college. The author became passionate about improving support and provision for autistic females after a successful collaboration with speech and language therapists, supporting autistic girls in Year 6 with their transition to high school.
Introduction

Preliminary work
In order to contextualise this thesis, this section will briefly summarise preliminary research undertaken in 2021. The pilot research aimed to explore the development of a specific model of support for autistic females (Ayirebi, 2021). An exploratory, qualitative case study design, utilising semi-structured interviews and TA was adopted (Yin, 2018). Professionals involved in developing support for autistic females at a large, academically selective, all-girls secondary grammar school and sixth form were interviewed. An inductive-deductive hybrid approach of TA was adopted where themes were identified from the raw data, facilitating inductive coding, and previous literature and RQs were integral to the process of deductive coding (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The data generated by the interviews were analysed using an adapted version of Braun and Clarke’s (2006; 2019) approach to TA, with reflexivity remaining as the underlying philosophy (Braun & Clarke, 2019; 2020). Ninety-two codes emerged from the two interview transcripts; fourteen of which were deductive codes generated a priori from the existing literature with seventy-eight codes generated inductively from the data. An iterative process resulted in the development of nine main themes. Synthesising previous models, research pertaining to autism in women and girls, and the findings from the preliminary study, a contemporary model, the ‘champions model’, was presented (see Appendix A for a link to the preliminary research study).

Aims of the study and research strategy
This research was part of the commissioning model established within the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology at the UoM. In early 2020, SPs from YSU, Ohio, US, visited UoM and a MAT in the Northwest of England where EPs had been involved in developing support for autistic females. This resulted in EPs from the MAT in the UK and YSU in the US jointly commissioning the research project with the aim of creating a model of support for autistic females at high school (the pilot research). The research commission also aimed to further explore support for autistic girls in high school (Paper One) and investigate the international applicability and implementability of the model (Paper Two). As part of the commissioning process, consideration was given to planning an empirical study to implement the proposed model of support, developed during the preliminary study, within a high school setting. However, as the model was developed within a MAT, the researcher
decided that, before implementation, it would be important to gather data in order to refine and investigate the potential utility and applicability of the champions model within other contexts. Initially, it was agreed between the researcher and commissioners that an empirical study would collect the views of autistic females on the proposed model of support, as well as EPs. Unfortunately, due to difficulties recruiting autistic females, which may in part have been due to the restrictions relating to the COVID-19 global pandemic, it was decided to change the focus of Paper Two. A decision was made to focus on gathering the views of EPs in the UK and SPs in the US, potentially resulting in refinement to the model created via the pilot research. There were two RQs in Paper Two:

- **RQ1:** What do school psychologists in the UK and US perceive to be the utility of the proposed champions model of support for autistic females in terms of strengths and areas for development?
- **RQ2:** How might school psychologists in the UK and US implement the proposed champions model of support for autistic females, with reference to potential barriers and facilitators?

The focus of Paper One linked closely to Paper Two. The aim was to explore what support autistic females may require during their secondary phase of education. The RQ employed within the systematic literature review was: *What could be considered as helpful for supporting the needs of autistic females in mainstream high school?*

Findings from both papers yielded important implications for educational professionals and school systems when supporting autistic females, including specific implications for the EP role. Paper Three explores the dissemination of evidence to a range of key stakeholders, including EPs and school staff, translating academic research into practical, evidence-based strategies and interventions in schools. Paper One and Paper Two are presented in accordance with journal guidelines (See Appendices B and C).

**Researcher’s professional background and relevant experience**

The researcher has previous experience in different roles within the secondary education system, having worked as a key stage three social science teacher, and GCSE and A level psychology teacher, within diverse comprehensive high schools and sixth form colleges. Prior to undertaking the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology, the researcher trained as
an Elklan Champion\(^1\). It was during this role that the researcher became aware of the more subtle social communication differences experienced by autistic females, potentially leading to issues with gaining a formal autism diagnosis. The researcher subsequently supported autistic females in year six with their transition from primary school to high school, and delivered staff training to increase awareness of the specific needs of autistic females. This initiated the researcher’s interest in exploring mainstream high school support for this cohort of CYP.

**Rationale for engagement**
The evidence-base surrounding support for autistic females during their secondary phase of education is emerging and attempts have been made to adapt pre-existing models to meet need (Morewood et al., 2019). However, there is still a dearth of literature pertaining to specific support for autistic females (Tomlinson et al., 2019). Existing research has focussed on support for a specific group of autistic females such as those who have reached a crisis point and are therefore displaying externalising behaviour, leading to school exclusion or emotionally based school avoidance (O’Hagan et al., 2022). Thus, Paper One aimed to explore high school support for adolescent autistic females more broadly.

As aforementioned, Paper Two was jointly commissioned by EPs within a MAT in the Northwest of England, and a SP from YSU in the US. As the champions model was developed according to practice within a high-achieving girls’ grammar school within a MAT, the rationale for engagement was to explore the potential utility and implementability of the model from an international perspective, drawing upon the views of EPs working in a LA context in the UK, as well as SPs working in a public school district in the Midwestern US. Upon completion of the doctorate, the researcher hopes they would be able to apply the findings of both Paper One and Paper Two to their practice. This would include supporting LA-wide initiatives to improve support at the systemic level for autistic females.

**Positioning for data access**
The empirical research described in Paper Two gathered data from an EPS located within the Northwest of England and a SP team located within the Midwestern US. The UK-based

\(^1\) Elklan offer training delivered by speech and language therapists to equip practitioners with the knowledge and skills to support communication and language needs of CYP at an individual and organisational level.
service was familiar to the TEP, and it is therefore possible that the existing professional relationship between the researcher and the EPs impacted upon the research findings. For example, the participants may have wanted to give 'desirable' answers to the questions, preventing them from answering truthfully.

Axiology

Braun and Clarke (2021) suggest that reflexive researchers reflect on how their beliefs and values shape their research, rather than perceive this influence as 'contamination' (para. 12). Indeed, axiology relates to how an individual’s values may influence decision making and interpretations during the research process (Cohen et al., 2018).

The researcher holds a number of values and beliefs that have inevitably impacted upon the research process. Firstly, the researcher holds strong feminist principles, which will have likely contributed to their interest in researching support for autistic females and influenced the way the research evolved. Indeed, Gomez de la Cuesta and Mason (2010) state that autistic women in work encounter a double-glazed glass ceiling; if females are not supported appropriately, it has major implications for their access to education and life chances (Muggleton et al., 2019). Adolescence also brings additional difficulties related to being female, with a recent review highlighting that females may experience more adaptive functioning difficulties and social challenges at adolescence than autistic males (Lai & Sztrmari, 2020). In addition, autism research has historically used all-male samples or a very small number of female participants (Gould, 2017). Cascio et al. (2021) state that the lack of representation of autistic females within the literature can perpetuate the stereotype that females can not be autistic. This may also mean there are fewer resources and interventions designed with the female autism phenotype in mind. The original plan for Paper Two was to reach and represent the voices of autistic females, driven by the researcher’s feminist values (Chown et al., 2017). Whilst this was not possible, Paper One went some way to capture the lived experiences and direct voices of autistic females and their families.

Throughout their career in secondary and sixth form education, the researcher has supported young people from diverse backgrounds with varying needs. Consequently, in addition to their feminist viewpoint, the researcher also strongly believes in an educational system based upon equity, equality and inclusivity. However, autistic females in school are ‘flying under the radar’ (NASEN, 2016) and are at risk of being under diagnosed, mis-
diagnosed and diagnosed much later than autistic males (Bargiela et al., 2016; Duvekot et al., 2017). A recent analysis of diagnostic trends in autism in the UK found the average age of diagnosis for females to be 14.9 years, with females, on average, diagnosed at older ages than males at almost every time point across a 20-year period (Russell et al., 2021). Late diagnosis can lead to a difficult transition to high school, resulting in school avoidance, and limiting future life chances. Thus, this influenced the focus of this research as exploring support for adolescent autistic females in high school.

Whilst believing that there is a need for school-based support specifically for autistic females, the researcher also acknowledges the issue of framing the model presented in Paper Two as ‘female-specific’. The rationale for this label is that the model is intended for use by practitioners, rather than autistic young people themselves. However, a high number of autistic young people experience gender dysphoria (Glidden et al., 2016) and the researcher feels strongly about the proposed model dismantling cisnormative structures and policies within schools, rather than perpetuating them (Allen-Bidell & Bond, 2022). These beliefs will have undoubtedly influenced the analysis and findings within Paper Two.

Throughout the process, the researcher continually reflected upon their axiology to consider the impact this may have on decision-making and the interpretation of the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Despite embracing how their beliefs and values shaped the research, the researcher utilised inter-rater reliability checks and member checking to increase the trustworthiness of the findings. For instance, in Paper One, coding of the research papers and the subsequent iterative development of analytical themes involved collaboration and discussion between the researcher and research supervisor. In Paper Two, aspects of the researcher and research supervisor’s coding of transcripts were compared for consistency and the associated thematic maps were emailed to participants to ensure they were a trustworthy reflection of the focus group discussions.

**Ontology and epistemology**

Ontology is concerned with the nature of realities, and how these are constructed, whereas epistemology is concerned with the methods and limits of human knowledge (Robson & McCarten, 2016).

A positivist paradigm posits that there is an objective, observable reality which exists independent of the individual. In contrast, social constructivism argues that there is no
ultimate objective reality, since all knowledge is socially constructed; there are no universal laws to be tested (Cohen at al., 2018).

This research adopts a critical realist position, described as a balanced and integrative stance between the two aforementioned paradigms (Archer et al., 2016; Sayer, 2000). Critical realism combines realist ontology with constructivist epistemology (Maxwell, 2011). Thus, this research adopted the following beliefs:

- There is a real world that exists independently of our constructions.
- Knowledge, and ways of discovering it, are subjective.

Research paradigms are concerned with much broader philosophical considerations than simply methodology (Cohen et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the methods adopted during research are influenced by the underpinning philosophical assumptions. Indeed, critical realism supports aspects of both qualitative and quantitative approaches, which is congruous with the inclusion of qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods papers within the SLR described in Paper One (Maxwell, 2011). Furthermore, focus groups, utilised in Paper Two, have been described as compatible with the stance of critical realism. For instance, the role of the real world could be conceptualised as the researcher formulating the research questions; choosing the research sites; adopting certain sampling methods and the transference of knowledge through dissemination (Maxwell, 2011). In terms of knowledge, the data for the research were gained from participants’ perspectives, which in turn was potentially influenced by events and underlying mechanisms such as the group interaction (Maxwell, 2011). Paper Two took place across two countries, with participants bringing different meanings, realities and constructions dependent on their experiences. In addition, focus groups explore how meaning is constructed and this was captured through an analysis of patterns of interactions within the findings of Paper Two (Kitzinger, 1994).

The topic area of this thesis – exploring support for autistic females – can also be applied to a critical realist position. Norms are socially constructed; thus, the notion of children having a disorder by virtue of having difficulty conforming to social norms is, in itself, a social construction. In addition, in Paper One, the views and experiences of autistic females, their parents and the professionals supporting them were analysed to find commonalities upon which to make generalisable observations about what could be deemed as helpful to support this cohort of young people within the systems of mainstream high school environments. Similarly in Paper Two, the professional opinions of EPs and SPs were applied
to develop assumptions about the perceived utility and implementability of a model of support for autistic females.

**Specific ethical issues**
In terms of specific ethical issues that arose during the empirical research described in Paper Two, ethical approval was initially granted for a focus group with autistic females, but only one participant gave consent and they had upcoming GCSE examinations. Thus, special consideration was given to psychological harm and a decision was made not to consult autistic female students and to focus upon EP and SP views instead. In terms of the EP and SP participants, the researcher was particularly mindful of maintaining their confidentiality and anonymity. Indeed, the researcher liaised with SPs in the US to develop an agreed statement describing the recruitment of participants from the US: “SPs were recruited from an urban public school district in the Midwestern United States”.

**Rationale for the SLR**
Paper One, an investigative SLR, predominantly adopted a configurative approach in order to interpret the information contained within the yielded paper and develop new ways of conceptualising support for autistic females in mainstream high school (Gough et al., 2012). Nevertheless, the SLR adopted a robust, systematic search strategy and quality assurance procedures, perhaps more typically aligned with aggregative reviews (Gough et al., 2012). A broad search strategy allowed for the acquisition of a diverse range of studies and thematic synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008) resulted in the identification of meaningful patterns within the data.

Previous SLRs have gone some way to make recommendations on the support required by autistic girls and adolescents in school, synthesising findings on the challenges autistic girls encounter (Tomlinson et al., 2019). The present review endeavoured to extend these findings in order to provide a more specific account of support that could be considered as beneficial for autistic females attending mainstream high school settings. Consequently, all papers included in the present review involved autistic females (and/or the parents and professionals supporting them) within the adolescent age range. This allowed for the development of novel findings, specifically for supporting the needs of autistic adolescent females, such as the use of social stories to teach puberty and menstruation (Klett & Turan, 2020).
2012) and social skills and self-care programmes designed to address unique social needs (Jamison & Schuttler, 2017).
References


Kitzinger J. (1994) ‘The methodology of focus groups: the importance of interaction between research participants’. *Sociology of Health, 16*(1), 103-21.


Paper 1: What could be considered as helpful for supporting autistic females in mainstream high school? A systematic literature review

Prepared for in accordance with the author guidelines for submission to the Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs (Appendix A)

Word Count: 6,818 (including tables and figures)
Abstract

It could be argued that autistic females, attending mainstream high school, have a distinct set of needs when compared to their male counterparts. The purpose of this thematic review is to synthesise reported findings on what could be considered as helpful for supporting the needs of autistic females in mainstream high school settings.

The review adhered to PRISMA guidelines. Searches identified 12 papers that included direct perspectives of autistic females, their families and the professionals supporting them. Data were analysed using thematic synthesis.

The findings indicate seven main themes for support related to: autistic females’ specific needs with reference to mental health and identification; self, peer and staff advocacy, and sense of belonging; psychological and physical safety within the school environment; relationships between home and school; transitions between levels of education; universal, targeted and individualised strategies; and friendships. Social and emotional experiences of autistic females in mainstream high school are key areas to target in ensuring successful mainstream education. Findings are discussed in relation to integrated, inclusive practices that high schools may adopt to support this cohort of students. Implications for professional practice, policy and research are discussed, which will be of interest to educators and helping professionals alike.
Introduction

Female autism phenotype
The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) criteria for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) includes difficulties relating to two main criteria: ‘social communication and interaction’ and ‘restricted and repetitive behaviours and interests’ (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). However, there is evidence that the female presentation of autism is different; thus, autistic females are susceptible to being under diagnosed, mis-diagnosed and diagnosed much later than autistic males (Bargiela et al., 2016; Duvekot et al., 2017). Although there is currently no definitive account of the female autism phenotype, evidence is emerging that indicates qualitative differences in females when compared to males. For instance, Hull et al. (2020) highlighted differences with social relationships, with females appearing more socially motivated, and – in terms of special interests – autistic females reportedly focus more on topics with relational purposes rather than mechanical purposes. In addition, it was reported that autistic females have a greater tendency to mask social challenges and internalise behaviours, resulting in emotional difficulties (Hull et al., 2020).

Current models of school support have not been developed with the female phenotype in mind and it is becoming more widely accepted that female support may need to be different from generic autism intervention in ensuring their access to education and promoting their life chances (Muggleton et al., 2019; O’Hagan & Bond, 2019).

Support for autistic girls in mainstream high school settings
Mainstream high school settings can be unpredictable and difficult for autistic students to tolerate, with research identifying a number of potential challenges to inclusion (Horgan et al., 2023). For autistic females, the relational aspects of education appear to be particularly important (Goodall & Mackenzie, 2019), whereby Sproston et al. (2017) suggest that schools should be proactive in developing inclusive environments where autistic girls can develop positive relationships. Honeybourne (2015) identified friendships as the most common issue in school for autistic females and made several recommendations, such as: allowing choice over classroom seating; providing access to a quiet space during unstructured times; supporting communication with the use of creative method and technology, such as videos; and, delivering interventions targeting social communication skills and the development of...
coping strategies. Furthermore, Hyde (2017) found that girls’ group interventions help promote belonging and protect autistic girls from peer rejection.

It is also seen as important to support autistic females’ anxiety within school, which can be particularly difficult due to masking, in that staff may not be aware students are feeling anxious and are thus less able to provide support when it is required (Costley et al., 2021). It has been recommended that schools should do more to routinely manage triggers of anxiety and pre-empt difficulties that may arise in a preventative manner, utilising strategies such as Social Stories™ (e.g. Gray & Garand, 1993), buddy systems, printed timetables, extended transition phases and advanced warning of any changes in routine (Costley et al., 2021).

Furthermore, partnership working between school and parents is seen as integral to providing holistic and tailored support for autistic females (Critchley, 2019), with emphasis placed on the transition to high school and ongoing support throughout high school (Peters & Brooks, 2016).

**Rationale and aims**
A recent SLR conducted by Tomlinson et al. (2019) provided a comprehensive overview of the school experiences of autistic females, with implications for practice focussed around training and social skills interventions. The current SLR endeavours to extend these findings in order to provide an account of support that could be considered as beneficial for autistic females attending mainstream high school settings.

This SLR forms part of a wider research project commissioned by an English high school, in which stakeholders were interested in exploring a model of support for autistic females. As such, this SLR focussed upon investigating support for autistic females in mainstream high school settings.

**Research question**
The primary aim of this SLR is to provide a contemporary review of peer-reviewed evidence to address the following research question: What could be considered as helpful for supporting the needs of autistic females in mainstream high school?
Method

Review process
The review adhered to PRISMA guidelines (Moher et al., 2009). Please see Figure 1 for an outline of the PRISMA process for this review. Searches were first carried out between August 2021 and January 2022. Systematic searches of the following databases were undertaken: British Index of Education (BIE); British Library e-theses online service (EThOS); Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC); Google Scholar; PsychInfo; and, Web of Science. An updated search was conducted in November 2022 to check for any recent publications.

The search terms employed with Boolean OR/AND connectors were: Autism OR autis* AND girls OR females AND education OR school AND support OR intervention. The term autis* was selected as it was decided that this would be more likely to yield studies with an autistic female sample. In addition, ‘all fields’ and ‘full-text’ searches mitigated the likelihood of excluding papers with ASC or ASD in the title during the searches.

Eligibility criteria
To ensure relevance to the review question, papers were filtered according to the agreed inclusion criteria described below:
1) Peer-reviewed studies written in the English language;
2) Research conducted between 2012-2022;
3) Empirical research, derived from primary data sources (not SLRs or meta-analyses);
4) Studies which make reference to potential support for autistic females which could be applied in a mainstream setting;
5) Interventions/support strategies would be applicable to and practicable within a school;
6) Where participants were children and young people, 50% or more must be:
   • Diagnosed as autistic;
   • Female;
   • 11-19 years (or mean age within 11-19 age range);
   • Attending a mainstream setting;
7) Where participants were parents/carers, 50% or more must provide data about:
   • Their daughters;
- Aged 11- to 19-years (or mean age within 11-19 age range);
- Who are diagnosed as autistic;
- Who attend a mainstream setting.

**Figure 1: PRISMA framework**

**Evaluation frameworks**

Twelve papers were assessed for methodological quality according to Gough’s (2007) WoE-A (see Appendix D for studies excluded during screening). Current versions of the Woods’ qualitative and quantitative critical appraisal frameworks (Woods, 2020a; 2020b) were utilised by the researcher (see Appendices E & F). These checklists were employed to
provide a robust, evaluative tool, having been widely used in other SLRs published by practicing psychologists (e.g. Tomlinson et al., 2019). Evaluative quantitative studies could score a maximum of 28 and were mathematically categorised as low (0-9), medium (10-19) or high (20-28) quality. Investigative quantitative studies could score a maximum of 20 and were mathematically categorised as low (0-6), medium (7-13) or high (14-20) quality. Qualitative studies could score a maximum of 20 and were mathematically categorised as low (0-6), medium (7-13) or high (14-20) quality. Appraisal of the mixed method article involved using both the qualitative and quantitative frameworks, with the higher score accepted by the review. The researcher and research supervisor independently evaluated 25% of the papers (n=3) to allow inter-rater agreement to be checked. Reliability was 85% pre-moderation, moving to 100% post-moderation (see Appendix G for ratings and inter-rater agreement). The researcher then evaluated the remaining papers.

The studies were further evaluated for their methodological appropriateness (WoE-B; Gough, 2007) using bespoke criteria displayed in Table 1. Again, the researcher and research supervisor independently evaluated 25% of the papers (n=3) to allow inter-rater agreement to be checked, whereby reliability was 100% without the need for moderation (see Appendix H for ratings and inter-rater agreement).

**Table 1: WoE- B Methodological appropriateness**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categorisation</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>• Methodology gathers views/ voice of autistic females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>• Methodology gathers primary data from autistic females but does not obtain their views/ voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>• Methodology does not gather views/ voice or primary data from autistic females</td>
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WoE-C (Gough, 2007) – appropriateness of methodological focus – was determined not to be necessary due to the configurative approach being taken to data extraction and synthesis.
WoE A and B assessment indicated that all studies scored medium or high for methodological quality and appropriateness (see Table 2 for summary), reflecting positively upon the work conducted in this area.

**Data extraction and synthesis**

A configurative approach was adopted to synthesise the literature in order to interpret the information and develop new ways of conceptualising support for autistic females in mainstream high school (Gough et al., 2012). Data analysis followed the three stages of thematic synthesis outlined by Thomas and Harden (2008).

Stage one involved the researcher completing a line-by-line analysis of the findings and discussions of each paper, including primary data gained from participants and secondary analysis of the papers’ authors. As each paper was coded, references were added to the bank of codes and new codes generated where required. Due to the analysis of discussion sections, a code for ‘not relevant’ was deemed necessary to ensure all data had a code assigned. This was utilised to code data provided by researchers other than the papers’ authors. Once codes had been generated, the researcher refined them both independently and collaboratively with the research supervisor, after sharing a cross-section of the process (see Appendix I). This involved the researcher sharing codes and sample extracts from the papers to ensure agreement. During stage two, the researcher synthesised codes into initial themes and subsequent descriptive themes (see Appendix J for initial theme development across papers and Appendix K for refined themes). Stages one and two were facilitated by QSR International’s NVIVO 12 (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). Finally, stage three allowed for further analysis of descriptive themes in order to develop a number of analytical themes based upon the researcher’s interpretation of findings (see Appendices L & M). These themes were developed by the researcher and discussed with the research supervisor in an iterative process of analysis, ensuring rigour.
Table 2: Characteristics of included studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s) &amp; Location</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Participants/Recruitment Method</th>
<th>Method/Design</th>
<th>Summary of Findings</th>
<th>WoE-A</th>
<th>WoE-B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cook et al. (2018) UK</td>
<td>Comparison of autistic girls in mainstream and special provision, investigating challenges, motivation and masking</td>
<td>Eleven autistic girls (aged 11-17 years) and parents</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews; Qualitative</td>
<td>Three themes: ‘motivation to have friends’, ‘challenges’, ‘masking’.</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cridland et al. (2014) Australia</td>
<td>Explored the experiences of adolescent autistic girls with three mother–daughter dyads</td>
<td>Three mother-daughter dyads and two additional mothers; autistic participants aged 12-17 years</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews; Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)</td>
<td>Seven themes: ‘diagnostic issues’, ‘being surrounded by boys’, ‘experiences of high school’, ‘complexity of relationships’,</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essex &amp; Melham (2019) UK</td>
<td>Investigated the transition of girls diagnosed with ‘high functioning autism’ (HFA) from high school to college</td>
<td>Four autistic girls in final year of high school or first year of college (aged 15 to 17) Four staff members (Purposive sampling)</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews; Phenomenological psychological approach</td>
<td>Management of educational transition is inconsistent and frequently inadequate, relying too heavily on individuals. There is a need for consistent processes when planning transition.</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
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There is a need to reconceptualise success for autistic women.

| Jacobs et al. (2021) Australia | Investigated factors that ‘help’ and ‘hinder’ the learning and academic success of autistic girls | Five autistic girls (12-14 years) | Mixed-method; IPA | Findings related to: academic progress at school; feelings about school; facilitators and barriers to learning. | Medium | High |

<p>| Jamison &amp; Schuttler (2017) USA | Investigated a social skills and self-care curriculum for autistic girls: The Girls Night Out Model | Combined sample of autistic girls (n=34; 14-19 years) - focus on self and parent respondent measures | Quantitative analysis of data from five intervention groups over 4 years Self and parent respondent measures in social competence, self- | Statistically significant/ near significant improvements reported in all areas; significant decreases in self-reported | Medium | Medium |
| Klett &amp; Turan (2012) USA | Evaluated the use of social stories with task analysis to teach menstrual care to autistic girls | Three autistic female adolescents (Aged 9-12 years) | Quantitative analysis of observational data, checklists and post-intervention parent satisfaction measure | Participants increased their self-care skills. Parents reported positive outcomes for their child one year later. Parents in this study reported high levels of satisfaction because the | Medium | Medium |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mademtzi et al. (2018) UK</td>
<td>Explored the challenges of autistic girls with parental perspective</td>
<td>Parents of 40 autistic girls (mean age 15.9 years) Focus Group</td>
<td>Two categories emerged: ‘challenges’ and ‘services’. Identified a number of helpful group-based interventions such as life skills training, art, technology and physical education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myles et al. (2019) UK</td>
<td>Explored the social experiences and sense of belonging in adolescent</td>
<td>Eight autistic female adolescents (aged 12-17 years) Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>Four themes: ‘reciprocal friendships’, ‘feeling safe and supported’, ‘encouragement’</td>
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<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Findings</td>
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<tr>
<td>O’Hagan et al. (2022) UK</td>
<td>Three autistic girls (aged 13-15 years), their mothers and a staff member</td>
<td>Qualitative exploratory multiple case study, using interviews</td>
<td>Eight themes: relationships (staff, peers, external agencies); belonging; diagnosis; individual approach; parent advocacy and student voice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Findings</td>
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<td>Pickup (2021) UK</td>
<td>Explored what autistic adolescent girls say helps them successfully navigate the social aspects of mainstream schooling</td>
<td>Five autistic female participants (aged 11-13 years)</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews/journal; Participatory research</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ryan et al. (2021)</strong>&lt;br&gt;Ireland</td>
<td>Explored perceptions of friendship of autistic girls</td>
<td>Ten autistic girls (aged 12-15 years)</td>
<td>Focus groups</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tomlinson et al. (2022)</strong>&lt;br&gt;UK</td>
<td>Explored how autistic adolescent girls experience mainstream high school</td>
<td>Three autistic girls (aged 14-16 years), their mothers and school psychotherapist</td>
<td>Multiple case study design, using semi-structured interviews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings

Overview of the included studies
Of the 12 papers included in the review, all were peer-reviewed journal articles aside from one unpublished doctoral thesis (Pickup, 2021). Eleven papers included autistic females in their research, with sample sizes ranging from three to 34, and age ranges between nine to 19 years old. Whilst all explored high school support, challenges and experiences, two papers were focussed on specific interventions (Jamison & Schuttler, 2017; Klett & Turan, 2012) and one analysed transition experiences and support (Essex & Melham, 2019).

Themes
In seeking to describe what could be considered as helpful for supporting the needs of autistic girls in mainstream high school, seven analytical themes were developed and are reported below (see Appendix N for illustrative examples of data linked to themes).

Illuminating autistic females' specific needs: Mental health and identification
Difficulties pertaining to mental health were apparent within 11 out of the 12 papers. Challenges were cited as low self-esteem, anger, anxiety and depression due to apparent lack of teacher understanding of the difficulties faced by autistic females (Jacobs et al., 2021; O’Hagan et al., 2022; Pickup, 2021; Tomlinson et al., 2022). Other contributory factors were identified as peer relationship difficulties and social isolation (Cridland et al., 2014; Mademtzi et al., 2018; Myles et al., 2019; Ryan et al., 2021), transition (e.g., from high school to college; Essex & Melham, 2019), and general school demands leading to masking (Cook et al., 2018).

In terms of protective factors, friendships were purported to support the emotional needs of autistic females (Myles et al., 2019; Pickup, 2021; Ryan et al., 2021), as were positive relationships with school staff (Essex & Melham, 2019; Jacobs et al., 2021; Myles et al., 2019; O’Hagan et al., 2022; Pickup, 2021; Tomlinson et al., 2022). For example, a girls’ group called ‘The Girls Night Out Model’ (Jamison & Schuttler, 2017), which targets the unique needs of adolescent autistic females, was found to improve social and emotional health, and reduce internalising behaviours.

Pickup (2021) highlighted the importance of high school staff exploring contextually appropriate coping strategies with autistic females. For example, autistic females in this study reflected that although helpful in reducing anxiety, strategies such as fidget toys and talking to friends in lessons were not feasible at high school. Pickup (2021) also
recommended the use of informal clubs to support transition at the start and the end of the school day as a way to reduce stress. Furthermore, O’Hagan et al. (2022) and Tomlinson et al. (2022) reported that access to on-site support teams, such as psychotherapy services, were successful in supporting autistic females’ mental health, facilitating school re-integration following a prolonged period of absence and enabling access to external mental health support services, whereby Pickup (2021) posited that school psychologists have a pivotal role in supporting autistic females.

The challenges of late diagnosis were described in a number of studies (Cook et al., 2018; Cridland et al., 2014; Mademtzi et al., 2018). Parents in Mademtzi et al.’s (2018) study raised concerns about how this prevented autistic females accessing external services they need. In addition, findings indicated that parents worry about staff understanding the female autism phenotype, thus highlighting the need to improve staff knowledge and awareness to facilitate the identification of autistic females (Cook et al., 2018; Mademtzi et al., 2018; Tomlison et al., 2022). These findings were evident in Cridland et al.’s (2014) study, where parents explained the challenges their daughters faced in coping with diagnosis, suggesting schools could offer guidance post-diagnosis.

Promoting self, peer and staff advocacy in order to raise awareness and understanding of the female autism phenotype and foster a sense of belonging

Many papers discussed the importance of gaining the voice of autistic females to raise awareness, increase staff and peer understanding of their needs and plan provision (Mademtzi et al., 2018; O’Hagan et al., 2022; Pickup et al., 2021; Ryan et al., 2021; Tomlinson et al., 2022). Indeed, participants in Jacobs et al.’s (2021) study utilised their voice to advocate for other autistic girls starting high school: “Gabrielle said, ‘Don’t worry if people don’t like you or think you are weird. You just think differently to them and you are not alone.’” (Jacobs et al., 2022, p. 201)

In addition, fostering a sense of belonging pervaded many of the studies, suggesting it is a key aspect when considering mainstream high school support for autistic females (e.g. Pickup, 2021). The findings from Myles et al. (2019) revealed that perceived peer acceptance, friendship and social competence have been reported to have a significant impact on sense of belonging. Conversely, parental data highlighted how a lack of peer understanding can result in social exclusion (Cook et al., 2018; Cridland et al., 2014). Moreover, participants described how teachers’ and peers’ limited understanding of the
needs of autistic females could lead to negative experiences and isolation (Cook et al., 2018; Cridland et al., 2014; Essex & Melham, 2019; Myles et al., 2019).

**Preventative strategies to ensure psychological and physical safety within the school environment**

Professional and parental participants suggested that autistic females in mainstream high school may benefit from interventions tailored around the particular difficulties and risk-factors they may encounter, such as bullying, online exploitation, sexual manipulation and unplanned pregnancy (Cook et al., 2018; Cridland et al., 2014; Essex & Melham, 2019; Jamison & Schuttler, 2017; Klett & Turan, 2012; Mademtzi et al., 2018). Parental participants raised concerns around their daughters’ vulnerability, citing reasons related to not understanding hidden social rules (Cridland et al., 2014). This corroborated with reports from autistic girls who recognised the challenges they faced around understanding the hidden social rules within the high school environment (Jacobs et al., 2021; Myles et al., 2019).

Whilst often identified as a source of difficulty, peer relationships were also identified as a protective factor when promoting emotional safety in school (Jacobs et al., 2021; Myles et al., 2019; O’Hagan et al., 2022; Pickup, 2021; Tomlinson et al., 2022). Unstructured times were valued as an opportunity to reconnect with friends, particularly at lunchtime clubs away from the busier areas of school (Myles et al., 2019; Pickup, 2021).

Furthermore, safety could be attributed to support with navigating the school environment. Examples included strategies to enable autistic females to communicate their needs and enhance their understanding of school and social rules (Myles et al., 2019; Pickup, 2021). In addition, methods to communicate changes to the routine, such as a room change or supply teachers, were welcomed by autistic females (Jacobs et al., 2021; Pickup, 2021; Tomlinson et al., 2022). Participants frequently identified noise within high schools as an exacerbating factor for stress and anxiety, indicating a preference for calm, quiet areas of school (Cook et al., 2018; Jacobs et al., 2021; Myles et al., 2019; Pickup, 2021; Tomlinson et al., 2022).

Positively, over half of the autistic female participants in Essex and Melham’s (2019) research described how they received some support around personal safety when transitioning from high school to college. However, the authors go on to suggest that transition support should also include guidance around independent travel, as autistic females can be anxious about
travelling to and from their educational settings (Cridland et al., 2014; Essex & Melham, 2019).

**The importance of supportive relationships between home and school**

The importance of a positive connection between home and school was evident within eight papers (Cook et al., 2018; Cridland et al., 2014; Essex & Melham, 2019; Jacobs et al., 2021; Jamison & Schuttler, 2017; Klett & Turan, 2012; O’Hagan et al., 2022; Pickup, 2021). A central tenet of this theme related to close communication and collaboration between home and school (O’Hagan et al., 2022; Pickup, 2021). Cridland et al. (2014) found that mothers of autistic females required help from school for various reasons, including developing their daughter’s independence and reducing their social isolation. In addition, the parents in Cook et al.’s (2018) research described the detrimental impact of school absenteeism on the family, with O’Hagan et al. (2022) indicating the importance of school staff involving parents as a supportive factor for the re-integration of autistic girls with emotionally based school avoidance: “Collaborative home-school communication enabled parents and staff to share concerns and suggestions and the mothers praised the flexibility of staff.” (p. 9)

Autistic participants in Jacobs et al.’s (2021) research highlighted the value of their parents communicating with school to inform them when they were becoming overwhelmed with workload. Furthermore, involving parents in specific interventions, such as self-care and social skills, was reported to have positive outcomes for the whole family (Jamison & Schuttler, 2017; Klett & Turan, 2012).

**Coordinated support and processes for transitions between levels of education and preparing for adulthood**

Transition from primary to high school was identified as a particularly challenging time by both autistic females and their mothers (Cridland et al., 2014; O’Hagan et al., 2022; Pickup, 2021; Ryan et al., 2021). Autistic females also reported feeling vulnerable and worried about the transition from high school to college (Essex & Melham, 2019; Tomlinson et al., 2022). Various reasons were cited for these difficulties, including friendship loss; the change in environment; travel; and, the increased number of lessons and teachers at high school (Cridland et al., 2014; Ryan et al., 2021). Whilst transition processes and planning were found to be inadequate in four papers (Cridland et al., 2014; Essex & Melham, 2019; Mademtzi et al., 2018; Myles et al., 2019), there were several suggestions around how to support autistic females’ transitions between levels of education. Pickup’s (2021)
participants identified the following supportive strategies: being given time to refocus during the school day during transition; home being distinctly utilised as a safe place to recharge; and staff support for personal concerns. Ryan et al. (2021) also suggested that interventions supporting friendships, prior to transitions, could be helpful for autistic females: “Support for the continuation of friendships beyond school change, could provide a useful intervention; if friendships could receive a higher level of support before key transition stages, this may enable adolescents with ASD to maintain friendships more successfully.” (Ryan et al., 2021, p. 403)

Additionally, attending extra open evenings and taster days were cited by stakeholders as supportive factors when preparing for setting changes (Essex & Melham, 2019; Pickup, 2021; Tomlinson et al., 2022). In order to support the transition process, stakeholders recommended a named member of staff responsible for coordinating an extended transition plan, primarily focussing on social and safety needs, and incorporating the voice of autistic females and their family (Essex & Melham, 2019).

**The use of universal, targeted and individualised strategies to meet needs**

Autistic participants described how whole-class pedagogical approaches had the potential to support or exacerbate their needs (Essex & Melham, 2019; Pickup, 2021). These strategies, such as slowing the pace of the lesson, were reported as successful in ensuring autistic girls felt included (Pickup, 2021). However, it was acknowledged that targeted and individualised support was also required to facilitate learning in the classroom, such as visual resources or demonstrations, to reduce cognitive load (Jacobs et al., 2021; O’Hagan et al., 2022; Pickup, 2021; Tomlinson et al., 2022). Furthermore, group-based interventions providing academic, social and therapeutic intervention were suggested to be helpful by autistic girls and their parents (Cook et al., 2018; Cridland et al., 2014; Mademtzi et al., 2018; O’Hagan et al., 2022; Ryan et al., 2021; Tomlinson et al., 2022). The participants in Pickup’s (2021) study highlighted the value of having regular emotional check-ins throughout the day with a named member of pastoral or teaching staff. Furthermore, Tomlinson et al. (2022) found that autism-friendly strategies were reported to be helpful, particularly if used flexibly and personalised to meet individual need: “The autism-friendly strategies offered by the school provided a broad framework; however, given the heterogeneity of autism this needed to be individualised further by school staff and the girls themselves.” (Tomlinson et al., 2022, p. 21)
Finally, Klett and Turan (2012) described how personalised Social Stories™ (Gray & Garand, 1993) can be utilised with adolescent autistic girls to teach skills and concepts related to puberty and menstruation. In addition, Essex and Melham’s (2019) paper highlighted the need for transition and induction support strategies to be tailored to individuals to ensure flexibility.

The importance of promoting and facilitating friendships and relationships through skill development and technology

The importance of the social experiences of autistic females in mainstream settings was apparent in the majority of the studies (Cook et al., 2018; Cridland et al., 2014; Jacobs et al., 2021; Jamison & Schuttler, 2017; Myles et al., 2019; O’Hagan et al., 2022; Pickup, 2021; Ryan et al., 2021; Tomlinson et al., 2022). Data from autistic girls suggested they were socially motivated, with some girls identifying a smaller group of friends or one key friendship as easier to navigate (Jacobs et al., 2021; Myles et al., 2019; O’Hagan et al., 2022; Ryan et al., 2021). However, these findings were not congruent with parental accounts, with mothers in Mademtzi et al.’s (2018) study reporting their daughters to have a lack of motivation to socialise.

Participants valued external support in facilitating friendships at school, such as activities developed by form tutors to encourage conversation and regular opportunities to meet with others throughout the school day (Pickup, 2021; Ryan et al., 2021). Girls’ groups may also be a successful method for supporting social competence (Jamison & Schuttler, 2017). In addition, skill development within the high school setting was identified as a method of promoting friendships (Ryan et al., 2021).

It was evident in the research that technology was considered an important method of communication for autistic females. Ryan et al. (2021) reported that autistic females showed a preference for online friendships, explaining that whilst mobile phones can encourage friendships, autistic females find communicating via texting challenging. Parental reports also evidenced this finding, highlighting how their daughters find communicating on social media easier than in person, but raising concerns about them accessing inappropriate content (Mademtzi et al., 2018). Further, autistic girls in Tomlinson et al.’s (2022) research reported that social media exacerbated social communication difficulties, leading to misunderstandings and relationship challenges. Indeed, research recommended that autistic
females would benefit from being explicitly taught how to communicate via texting (Ryan et al., 2021).
Discussion and Implications

The present systematic literature review synthesised findings from 12 papers, exploring what could be helpful in supporting autistic females in mainstream high school settings. Seven analytical themes were elucidated across the research which will be discussed within the context of pre-existing literature within the field, along with implications for practice.

Previous literature has identified how EPs and wider professionals can support the mental health of autistic females in mainstream high schools (Critchley, 2019). Internalising anxiety has been purported as being more typical of autistic females than autistic males (Mandy et al., 2012). In addition, research has found that by masking challenges, girls may go unnoticed by school staff, decreasing opportunities for appropriate intervention and reducing access to further support, thus potentially increasing susceptibility to mental health difficulties (Dean et al., 2017). The current review mirrors these findings, with parents raising concerns about late diagnosis as a barrier to accessing external services. In addition, it highlighted the need for proactive practice, which has implications for how to screen for and identify autistic females in schools, and how to develop support at a systemic level (O'Hagan & Bond, 2019).

Current findings also identified the value of school-based and external agency support in promoting good mental health for autistic females, once they had been identified or diagnosed. These findings are synonymous with previous reviews which suggested that autistic girls require inter-disciplinary collaboration to address mental health needs such as anxiety, depression and self-harm (Tomlinson et al., 2019).

The present review highlighted the importance of encouraging self, peer and staff advocacy in order to raise awareness and understanding of the female autism phenotype and foster a sense of belonging for autistic females in mainstream high school settings. This is congruous with previous studies in which feeling accepted and included was found to underpin a successful educational experience (Goodall & Mackenzie, 2019; Sproston et al., 2017). Indeed, a previous review identified bullying as a predominant reason for parents deciding to home school their autistic children (O'Hagan et al., 2021).

A further finding of the review was the value of preventative strategies in ensuring the psychological and physical safety of autistic females within the high school environment. For instance, ensuring autistic females are supported with unexpected changes and providing
trainee teachers and supply staff with ‘student passports’ in advance was found to enhance feelings of safety. Corresponding ideas were demonstrated in previous research which suggested that schools must work in a preventative manner in order to support the anxiety of autistic students, caused by unpredictability in the school environment (Costley et al., 2021; Peter & Brooks, 2016). Within this theme it was found that vulnerabilities could be exacerbated by the hidden curriculum; indeed, autistic females have previously been reported to experience difficulties understanding the implicit rules, norms and expectations within schools, perhaps due to differences with social intuition (Moyse & Porter, 2015).

Furthermore, the present review highlighted the importance of supportive relationships between home and school, congruous with previous research which has highlighted the need for positive partnerships with the families of autistic females (Critchley, 2019). Within the current review, regular communication with home was found to be key to supporting the emotional needs of autistic females.

The findings of this review complement previous research in suggesting the importance of coordinated support and processes for transitions between levels of education, to reduce the emotional impact. Indeed, Peter and Brooks (2016) reported a preponderance of internalising behaviours exhibited predominantly by autistic females during transition, specifically self-harm and depressive symptoms. Consequently, transitions must be pre-planned and carried out for an extended period (Costley et al., 2021; Peters & Brooks, 2016). The current review extends previous literature in also proposing the importance of preparing for the transition to adulthood. A recent review identified the need for more individualised support, inclusivity and collaboration when planning the transition to adulthood for autistic young people (Crompton & Bond, 2022).

Existing research revealed that tiered models of support are successful in supporting autistic students with co-occurring EDs and behavioural issues (Magyar & Pandolfi, 2012). The present review highlighted the importance of universal, targeted and individualised strategies in supporting autistic females in mainstream high school education. For example, the benefits of girls’ groups were demonstrated, mirroring findings from Hyde (2017) who highlighted how these types of interventions can increase sense of belonging and reduce the need for masking.
A final prominent finding of the review related to promoting and facilitating friendships and relationships through skill development and technology. The majority of the included studies highlighted the importance of the social experiences of autistic females in mainstream high school, perhaps suggesting that these are pivotal to a successful mainstream education. Indeed, autistic women have previously identified friendship as the greatest challenge they encountered at high school, with women retrospectively reporting that improving their skills and knowledge of friendships would have been helpful (Honeybourne, 2015). Peer interactions may become increasingly difficult for autistic females during adolescence, as friendships and social networks become more complex (Moyse & Porter, 2015). Although the development of skills was found to be an important feature of facilitating friendships, increasing peer knowledge and awareness must also be considered and has been found to be efficacious (Ranson & Byrne, 2014).

These findings provide further support for adopting an integrated approach to understanding the educational support required by autistic females and can be seen to promote an eco-systemic way of working within the contexts that they operate within (Hebron & Bond, 2019). In addition, the themes within this paper overlap to provide novel ideas for how mainstream high schools can organise their support for autistic females. Please refer to Figure 2 for an example of how preventative support for the safety and vulnerability needs of autistic females could be mapped onto tiered support.
Limitations
This systematic literature review has a number of limitations. Firstly, as the field is within its relative infancy, the number of papers obtained is small and so the breadth of this topic requires further exploration. For example, despite employing search criteria to attract a broad range of papers, three of the papers focussed specifically on the friendship and social challenges faced by autistic girls (Myles et al., 2019; Pickup, 2021; Ryan et al., 2021). Whilst highlighting that this is a fundamental area of need for autistic females in mainstream high school settings, future research would benefit from exploring support from a more holistic perspective.
In addition, whilst the majority of papers included the perspectives of autistic females as a previously under-represented group, sample sizes were small, and the majority of girls had good language and cognitive ability. Consequently, this may not be representative of the broader population of autistic females in mainstream settings, who may not be able to engage positively in the planning of support. Further, whilst Mademtzi et al. (2018) and Cook et al. (2018) went some way to incorporate the voice of fathers, parental participants were mainly those of mothers (Cridland et al., 2014). As fathers have been found to make important contributions to the lives of their autistic children, it would be beneficial for future research to attract their participation (Rankin et al., 2019).

**Implications for practice**
The present review highlighted several implications for future practice in closing the gap in support for autistic females, or those suspected of being autistic.

Findings suggest that schools and settings developing their policies and practices in support of this cohort of students should place relational approaches at the centre. For instance, this review – synonymous with findings of previous reviews (e.g. Tomlinson et al., 2019) – highlighted the unique social needs of autistic females and the importance of interventions which promote emotional well-being and foster a sense of belonging. Autistic females require access to regular opportunities to encourage friendship development, particularly during educational transition phases. Informal breakfast clubs, lunchtime clubs and after school clubs can serve to meet emotional, social and sensory needs, as well as supporting daily transitions. In addition, social skills interventions, supporting in-person and online methods of communication, should be considered and preferably delivered through group-based approaches. Promoting peer awareness of the female autism phenotype through anti-stigma programmes has also been found to have some success in fostering inclusivity (Ranson & Byrne, 2014).

Furthermore, in research which obtained the voice of autistic females, it was evident that professionals’ understanding of their needs was paramount to reducing anxiety and facilitating learning. A perceived lack of teacher understanding was purported to result in girls remaining unidentified as autistic, leading to unmet needs. Consequently, ongoing training for professionals, to increase knowledge and awareness of the female autism phenotype, is warranted to facilitate identification and ensure appropriate intervention.
School psychologists can facilitate the development of organisational approaches, developing staff and peer training to raise awareness of the female autism phenotype, promoting equality for neurodiversity. Moreover, findings prompt the consideration of applying tiered support systems, incorporating universal, targeted and individualised intervention, as a framework for graduated support within mainstream settings (Magyar & Pandolfi, 2012). Universal strategies may involve differentiated, high-quality teaching as part of general planning and delivery. Targeted interventions are also required, focussed around the unique risk-factors autistic girls may encounter, such as late-diagnosis, bullying, online exploitation, sexual manipulation and unplanned pregnancy. Some of the needs identified, such as risk of unplanned pregnancy, will involve targeted interventions for autistic YP who were assigned female at birth. However, it is important that professionals and schools developing support for autistic YP, ensure that practice is trans-inclusionary (Allen-Bidell & Bond, 2022). This could involve professionals working directly with autistic females, post-diagnosis, to provide psychoeducation and support identity development. In addition, schools could offer ‘girl-oriented’, social skills groups to meet the needs of the autistic female population within their community (Gould & Ashton-Smith, 2012; O’Hagan, 2020). When considering individualised intervention, it is important to consider that autistic females do not present as a homogeneous group. As such, flexible and personalised educational provision is needed to suit individuals (Morewood et al., 2019). Individualised approaches can be employed to teach skills and concepts related to puberty (Steward et al., 2018). Personalised support which could be considered by high schools include time out passes, the opportunity to leave lessons early or take rest breaks in a safe space, the use of visuals to communicate feelings, access to well-being animals and an on-site therapist or key members of staff. In addition, the findings suggest the need to consider a broader curriculum and experiential opportunities such as gardening. Autistic females also require personalised support for transitions between levels of education, including extended pre-transitional preparation and ongoing support once they are attending the new environment (Peter & Brooks, 2016).

Conclusion
This thematic synthesis revealed that supporting the social, emotional and mental health needs of autistic girls is paramount. Autistic females and their families request that schools intervene and encourage skills development in order to facilitate social experiences, through
targeted support such as girls’ groups. However, the onus must also fall on the wider school context, with a need for mainstream settings to train and educate their staff and students on the female autism phenotype to ensure timely identification and support. Indeed, relational approaches are pivotal to the mainstream educational success of autistic females. Staff and peer acceptance and subsequent behavioural modification could be vital in supporting inclusive policy and practice, increasing the sense of belonging of autistic female students.


Paper 2: School psychologists’ views on a proposed model of support for autistic females in high school: an international perspective

Prepared for in accordance with the author guidelines for submission to the International Journal of School & Educational Psychology (Appendix B)

Word Count: 7,059 (including tables and figures)
Abstract
Although many of the core features of autism are reported to be equally present in both males and females, there are subtle differences in the profile of autistic females. It is argued, therefore, that a female specific model of support is required to meet the needs of autistic females in mainstream high school.

Applying an in-depth exploratory survey design, the present study gained an international perspective on the perceived utility and implementability of a proposed champions model of support for autistic females in mainstream high schools. Focus groups took place with school psychologists from the Northwest of England and from the Midwestern United States.

Accounts were analysed using thematic analysis in which three themes were derived: inclusivity for autistic females; relationships as change drivers; and procedures, processes and practicalities. Participants felt that the champions model promoted inclusivity through relational approaches, yet also acknowledged areas for development, which led to a refined model being presented. Further, a number of practical facilitators and barriers were identified relative to the implementation of the model. The findings are discussed in relation to pre-existing literature and contextual similarities and differences between the two participant groups are analysed. Implications for practice are discussed, along with directions for future research.

Keywords: ASD; autistic girls; high school; intervention; international; school psychology
Introduction

Presentation of autism in females

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition defined by difficulties related to social-communication, flexibility, and sensory processing (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Historically, in the 1980s, ASD was considered a mainly male condition with the male-to-female predominance ratio estimated to be 4:1 (Happé & Frith, 2020). However, more recently, this ratio has been reported as more likely to be 3:1 (Loomes et al., 2017). Although many of the core features of autism, such as sensory difficulties, are reported to be equally present in both males and females, there appears to be subtle differences in the profile of autistic females, potentially leading to under diagnosis in girls and women (Duvekot et al., 2017). Indeed, evidence is emerging to suggest qualitative differences pertaining to social skills, behavioral and emotional presentation, and flexibility of thought (Muggleton et al., 2019). Autistic females are more likely to copy others, masking their social difficulties, demonstrating more surface level social skills (Dean et al., 2017). In addition, females are more likely to receive a mental health diagnosis, such as an eating disorder, rather than an autism diagnosis, due to higher levels of internalised coping strategies (Bargiela et al., 2016). Although autistic females may present with more subtle challenges when compared to their male counterparts, the underlying difficulties appear to be comparable, which has implications for their educational experiences and quality of life (Muggleton et al., 2019).

Meeting the needs of autistic females in mainstream high schools

Research into the school experiences of autistic females suggests that they not only experience difficulties encountered by the whole autistic school population, such as coping with the sensory demands of the school environment, but they also experience additional difficulties related to being female, such as late diagnosis, mental health difficulties and feminine issues around puberty (Bargiela et al., 2016; Duvekot et al., 2017; Steward et al., 2018; Tomlinson et al., 2019). For example, Steward et al. (2018) found that autistic females report increased sensory and emotional difficulties in relation to menarche (the first occurrence of menstruation). It has also been reported that autistic females may be at more risk of social rejection from their peer group and more subtle forms of bullying, leading to

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2 Identity-first language is used throughout this paper as it is strongly supported by the autistic community within the UK context (Kenny et al., 2016).
isolation (Hebron, 2019). Furthermore, Bargiela et al. (2016) found that autistic females were vulnerable to exploitation, requiring specific interventions promoting safety. Group interventions to teach self-care, social skills and provide peer and emotional support have been found to be somewhat successful for adolescent autistic girls (Jamison & Schuttler, 2017; Sproston et al., 2017).

Researchers have suggested the need for screening and assessment measures that are more sensitive to the female presentation of autism (O’Hagan & Bond, 2019). A recent review of the literature revealed the importance of training and educating staff on the female autism phenotype, to ensure timely identification and access to social, emotional and mental health support (Ayirebi, 2023). In addition, staff and peer acceptance was found to be fundamental in encouraging a sense of belonging (Ayirebi, 2023).

Consequently, there is a clear need for a female specific model of support, with literature (e.g., Tomlinson et al., 2019) recommending an ‘extra layer’ of support specifically for autistic females in mainstream education. Misdiagnosis, late diagnosis and puberty can result in a number of additional needs presenting during adolescence (Bargiela et al., 2016; Duvekot et al., 2017; Steward et al., 2018); thus, a model of support for autistic females in the high school age range is warranted.

**Current models of support for autistic children and young people**

There are a number of models pertaining to the ways in which schools can, and should, look to support the needs of autistic students. One such model popular in the UK is that of Morewood et al.’s (2011) ‘saturation model’, displayed in Figure 3 below, which recommends that autism awareness should permeate every aspect of school life. This model puts an ‘agent of change’ at the centre; for example, a member of school-based staff who can facilitate inclusivity through policy development, inspiring others to implement ideas.
A further approach developed in the US by Magyar and Pandolfi (2012; see Figure 4) suggests a multi-tiered problem-solving model of support for the early identification of co-occurring EDs and behavioural issues in autistic students. Adopting a tiered approach with early screening procedures was reported to help schools intervene in a preventative manner and promote inclusivity.
Although many aspects of these models may be relevant and applicable to autistic females, they have not been developed in consideration of the female autism phenotype.

A recent preliminary investigation applied these previous models to explore good autism practice with school professionals involved in developing provision for autistic females (Ayirebi, 2021). A contemporary model, the champions model, was proposed, as presented in Figure 5 below (Ayirebi, 2021).
There are similarities between the proposed champions model and the saturation model; however, one aspect of additional support in the champions model is increasing parent and guardian education and awareness, as they may not fully understand the female presentation and may be exposed to behaviours at home that provide significant evidence towards the identification of autism in their daughters. For example, autistic females are more likely to mask their difficulties in school, resulting in parents/guardians experiencing their daughters’ autistic traits to a much greater extent than staff in school (Dean et al., 2017; Tomlinson et al., 2019). A further addition is the identification of external agencies to support the needs of autistic females. This includes the role of school psychologists and other external agencies, such as mental health teams, particularly as anxiety is a significant factor in the female presentation of autism (Ayirebi, 2021).

The champions model also recommends developing tiered, autism-friendly provision, based upon screening and identification information (Magyar & Pandolfi, 2012). This would involve developing an evidence-informed bank of resources specific to the needs of adolescent...
autistic females, such as accepting diagnosis or supporting puberty and relationships (Ayirebi, 2021). A final additional aspect of the champions model is the importance of involving autistic females in the planning and implementation of interventions and support strategies (Morewood et al., 2019).

The role of school psychologists
In the US, school psychologists are considered applied practitioners, following standards set out in the NASP Practice Model (NASP, 2020; see Figure 6 below).

Figure 6: NASP practice model
(Figure used with permission of the publisher)
The model suggests 10 domains of practice that can reasonably be expected from school psychologists, including providing direct services at the individual levels, as well as indirect services at a systems level. Moreover, six broader, systemic principles frame the model, linking to the wider organisational factors of effective education. This is congruent with depictions of the role in the UK, where school psychologists\(^3\) are described as scientist-practitioners who apply their psychological skills and knowledge to support children and young people at organisational, group and individual levels (Fallon et al., 2010).

Thus, school psychologists, both in the US and UK, are well-placed to work systemically and preventatively with schools, and to look holistically at their provision for autistic females, supporting them to implement models of support.

**Rationale**

The present study aimed to gather the views of UK and US school psychologists on the perceived utility and implementability of the champions model of support for autistic females in mainstream high school (Ayirebi, 2021), and to make subsequent refinements to the proposed model. The researchers reasoned that international perspectives would enhance the development of new knowledge pertaining to the proposed champions model and thus increase the international generalisability of the findings (Bond et al., 2021). The RQs were as follows:

- **RQ1:** What do school psychologists in the UK and US perceive to be the utility of the proposed champions model of support for autistic females in terms of strengths and areas for development?
- **RQ2:** How might school psychologists in the UK and US implement the proposed champions model of support for autistic females, with reference to potential barriers and facilitators?

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\(^3\) Although school psychologists in the UK are typically called educational psychologists, the general term “school psychologists” will be used throughout this paper to describe practice in both countries.
Methodology

Design
This study utilised an in-depth exploratory survey design (Willig, 2008) for the purpose of gathering rich, qualitative data around the perceived utility and implementability of a proposed model of support for autistic girls in mainstream high schools, whereby qualitative surveys offer researchers the potential to gain new and nuanced understandings around a given topic (Braun et al., 2021).

Participants and sampling
A convenience-purposive sampling method was utilised to directly target school psychologists with experience of working with autistic females. School psychologists were recruited through teams where the researcher and research supervisor had established working relationships. Six school psychologists were recruited from an urban public school district in the Midwestern United States and five school psychologists were recruited from a local authority (akin to a public school district) within the Northwest of England. Whilst it was desirable for participants to have some experience of working either directly or systemically to support autistic females, participants were selected primarily on the context within which they worked, in order that the utility and applicability of the champions model could be explored outside of a MAT. Demographic and background information were obtained for each participant using a Qualtrics form which revealed that all the school psychologists had recent experience of working with autistic females (see Appendix O). All school psychologists identified as female.

Ethics
Ethical approval for this research project was granted by the University of Manchester in August 2021 (Reference: 2021-12753-20295 and 2022-12573-23154) (see Appendices P & Q for confirmation of ethical approval) and formal consent was obtained from all participants (see Appendices R, S, T & U for ethical documentation).

Data gathering
Focus groups were chosen as the means of data gathering due to their close alignment with the methodological design (Bryman, 2012). For instance, they arguably lead to more nuanced understandings, synonymous with a qualitative survey (Willig, 2008). In addition, they are purported to encourage more active participation than semi-structured interviews (Bryman, 2012).
Prior to the focus groups, the researcher and research supervisor presented the proposed champions model at the 2022 annual NASP convention (see Appendix V for presentation and script). Delegate feedback helped to inform the focus group moderator script as the first and second authors were keen to avoid the use of Anglocentric language.

Two online focus groups were conducted via Google Meet: one with the five UK school psychologists and, one with the six US school psychologists. Whilst the online nature of the focus group may not have met the communication needs of all participants, it facilitated the international collaboration of the research. The focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The focus groups were one hour and 30 minutes long, with the first 30- minutes involving a presentation of the champions model (see Figure 5) and an opportunity for questions and reflections, with one hour set aside for the focus group discussion. To ensure consistency, the same script and presentation slides were utilised for both groups. The RQs were explored through the moderator script, focusing upon the strengths and areas for development, and barriers to/ facilitators of implementation (see Appendix W for presentation, script and moderator script). The researcher acknowledges that a limitation of facilitating the focus groups in this manner is that it resulted in a limited amount of time for the participants to process and synthesise the information presented. Indeed, consideration was given to providing participants with a pre-recorded presentation of the champions model or conducting two online meetings with each set of participants; one for presenting the model and one for the focus group. However, by conducting it in the format described above, the researcher could be certain that all participants had been presented with the model, increasing the reliability and trustworthiness of the findings. In addition, conducting two online focus groups for each group could have resulted in participants dropping out between meetings, which was considered a particular risk due to the international sample.

**Data analysis**

Braun and Clarke’s (2006; 2020) approach to thematic analysis was utilised to analyse the data, with reflexivity remaining as the underlying philosophy. A hybrid coding approach was adopted, whereby the features of the proposed model and the RQs were used as a deductive coding framework, with inductive coding used to identify meaning at the level of the raw data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).
Analysis of the data was conducted in stages with each focus group transcript analysed individually using NVIVO-12 (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013) (see Appendix X for sample coding & Appendix Y for initial N-VIVO codes), which initially allowed for intra-group analysis (Fox, 2017) (see Appendix Z for analysis of codes). To increase reliability during this stage, elements of the researcher and research supervisor’s coding were compared for similarity, demonstrating a good level of inter-coder reliability, with 100% agreement after discussion and reflection. Although not usually recommended within reflexive TA, which places value on the subjective skills of the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2020), the inter-rater reliability checks were congruous with the critical realist theoretical framework adopted by this research. Inter-rater reliability of the deductive codes is perhaps more aligned with a positivist paradigm whereas the inductive, iterative process of theme development is synonymous with social constructivism. Thus, the data analysis process reflects the integrative stance of critical realism (Archer et al., 2016). Next, inter-group analysis was conducted to explore the similarities and differences between the UK and US school psychology services (Fox, 2017) (see Appendix Z for analysis of codes). An iterative process of repeated reading and reflection on coded extracts allowed the researcher to develop codes into initial themes (Braun & Clarke, 2020) (see Appendix AA for theme development). The intra and inter-group analysis and associated initial thematic maps were emailed to participants to ensure they accurately and meaningfully captured what each group intended to convey, with participants given the opportunity to offer their reflections (see Appendix BB). Through discussion, the researcher and research supervisor then reconceptualised initial themes, discovering meaningful patterns across the two sets of data (see Appendix CC).
Findings

Thematic analysis of the two focus group transcripts generated a total of 64 codes which were subsequently organised into three salient themes: inclusivity for autistic females; relationships as a change driver; and procedures, processes and practicalities (see Figure 7). All of the data was included in these three predominant themes. Data extracts are provided as exemplary individual quotes, or as sequences of interaction between participants, to demonstrate consensus or dispute (Bryman, 2012; Kitzinger, 1994).

Figure 7: Thematic Map

‘This is an inclusion movement’: Inclusivity for autistic females

The first theme captured the importance of providing autistic females with equitable access to opportunities and resources within mainstream high schools. UK SPs described the champions model as ‘systemic collaboration’, capable of ‘reducing statutory demand’ as a part of an ‘inclusion movement’ (SP5 UK).

The champions model was perceived as supporting inclusive practice by placing value on gaining the voices of autistic females and their families through specific strands on the model. The inclusion of parents through parent support groups was also considered a key strength by the US sample. In addition, the champions model was discussed as being able to encourage settings to develop preventative, personalised support for autistic females, through the identification of need.

SPs in the UK and US discussed how the model has the potential to foster inclusion by expanding knowledge, awareness and understanding of the female autism phenotype within mainstream high school environments. SP3 (UK) explained, ‘I believe, from the information
that you’ve shared, it will broaden… and deepen actually, our knowledge and understanding of autistic females given their presentation can look quite different’, with consensus from SP2 (UK), ‘it means a lot more people have that knowledge and therefore can… understand the girls a lot more’. Similar agreement was observed within the discussion from the US focus group, ‘As...the awareness comes out...of how it presents differently in females...the teachers will feel... by being able to have more resources at their disposal, they’re going to feel better able to handle some of these girls’ (SP4 US). Both groups commented on the holistic, collaborative features of the model, such as screening, external agency support and tiered approaches, suggesting the champions model would promote inclusive practice for settings to aspire towards.

However, discussion within both focus groups illuminated the possible exclusion of young people at the intersection of gender diversity and autism. An illustrative example from the US focus group was captured in a comment from SP6: ‘I think the focus on females is good…but I was wondering that question too, what happens in this world of... non-binary or children identifying with the opposite gender...because I’m sure that will come up too’. Within the UK, discussion centered around asking ‘the young people themselves’ and ensuring they have a ‘safe space’ in order to discuss ‘transgender difference and culture’ (SP2 UK).

The UK focus group also felt that the autistic female community, and their parents and guardians, should be consulted to ensure the model adopts inclusive language. Analysis of the patterns within the focus group demonstrated emerging consensus:

SP1 UK: ‘I’m just reflecting on the word ‘awareness’ so where it says ‘staff, peer and parent education and awareness’. Now, I may be wrong, but my understanding is that the autistic community have not been asking for awareness, but they have been asking for acceptance.’

This encouraged deeper reflection from SP2 UK, who agreed but brought in the concept of cultural sensitivity, ‘Do they actually want it to be culturally sensitive? Or do they just want to be treated as...people, young people with autism?’

Identifying a key facilitator to implementing the model within this theme, SPs considered the model to be accessible to those with background knowledge in this area. Conversely, barriers to implementing the champions model related to equity of service, with UK SPs
discussing the traded model of service of delivery and how this might prevent some schools being able to implement such a model. Concerns related to inclusion, raised within the US focus group, were around some parents and guardians having the knowledge and ability to access support services for their children, while others do not. SP4 US felt that if this was left to teachers, it could pose a barrier to implementing the external agency support aspect of the model.

The autism champions, represented within the centre of the model, were considered a salient method of promoting inclusion through relationships, ‘I think, to have some of those other people involved. I think they could be complete... game-changers on the way some people see...and perceive kids with disabilities, with autism, girls with [autism]’ (SP2 US). This will be discussed further within the next theme.

‘There’s so many different staff members, different people involved in the school that would be participating... and supporting kids’: Relationships as a change driver

This theme suggests that the relational approaches, central to the champions model, are pivotal to systemic change for autistic females in mainstream high schools. Within this theme, a sub-theme was generated, ‘autism champions’ as this was considered a particularly salient feature, reflected within many extracts. Extracts revealed that the autism champions were considered not only as a method of facilitating interpersonal relationships within the high school environment, but also between home and school, between families in the school community, between different schools within a community and between schools and external agencies. For instance, SP4 US explained, ‘I love that idea as well [autism champions] because it gives those... other people...like our cafeteria workers or secretaries a way...another way to connect with the school and be on a team that I don’t always think they get a say in or get to be a part of, and it gives them that next level of connection to the students and to the staff as well’.

Commentary from the US focus group demonstrated broad consensus:

SP1 US: ‘I’m in the high school and I really like the part from the autism champions...there’s so many different staff members, different people involved in the school that would be participating in that and supporting kids...’.
SP2 US: ‘And I would second that as well......working together in tandem to create the best plan of action, not only for their educational day but their daily living as well... I like the embodiment of all of that within the autism champions’ plan.’

SP4 US: ‘I agree with that... I love that idea as well....’

Similar patterns were identified in the focus group from the UK sample, illuminated by the following interaction:

SP1 UK: ‘Whereas actually...you know, even the language, ‘autism champion,’ I think it’s kind of phrased in a really nice, positive way...that’s one thing that I liked.’

SP3 UK: ‘Yeah, promoting inclusivity that way as well, isn’t it?’

SP1 UK: ‘Yeah, definitely.’

The autism champions were also discussed as a key facilitator when implementing the champions model. SPs in the US discussed how they could perceive staff being motivated to become an autism champion:

SP5 US: ‘There are already people I envision that would really take on that role...and do a really good job with it...’

With subsequent agreement from SP1 US:

‘They’re not necessarily an educator, they’re a staff member but maybe not a teacher or school psychologist or whatever. But...they have a different perspective, they have a different role in the school, and I think they...I think you will find a lot of people jumping into it and wanting to be...involved in it as an autism champion and willing to hear that information and I think really bringing a lot to the table...to the educators’.

Comparable discussion took place in the UK focus group, ‘I think you will absolutely have some schools that will be...you know, 100% ready to go and wanting to engage’ (SP1 UK).

In addition, both samples considered inter-agency relationships to be an important factor in facilitating the implementation of the model. SPs in the UK discussed the value of other agencies within local authorities having a role in implementation, as well as schools collaborating with each other in supportive cluster networks. The nature of the role of SPs in
the US as ‘regular employees within the building’ (SP4 US) was identified as a salient feature of implementation within this context.

However, the model was perceived to require ‘parent buy-in’ (SP4 US) and staff motivation to change with SP3 UK, stating ‘and whether or not staff...would buy into some of that, would be the only other thing to consider’. Thus, relational approaches were considered a key strength and facilitator but also a potential barrier, if school staff and parents were unable to engage and contribute with implementing the champions model.

‘It would require some additionality in our time and...to be carefully costed out’:

Procedures, processes and practicalities

The final theme considered the strengths, utility and implementation of the champions model in terms of day-to-day, school-wide and district-wide procedures, processes and practicalities. Both samples discussed how they perceived the champions model to strengthen existing models and successfully represent the needs of autistic females, through the additional strands such as tiered support. Additionally, US SPs suggested it could increase the capacity and resources available within schools, to the benefit of their autistic female population. The champions model was also perceived to be a useful framework for reviewing school support. This was captured by the following interaction in the UK focus group:

SP2 UK: ‘Thinking of schools having that framework and being able to sort of go step by step...to support...and see what areas they’re lacking in and which areas they’re stronger in...it’s... then using that as...a template to do an audit on their... provision.’

SP3 UK: ‘I think it could definitely work well...I’m reflecting on what [SP2] said earlier on about...almost using it as an audit because I do think it will need to be one of those things that’s revisited quite frequently, just for schools to be able to have the opportunity to reflect and monitor what they’re doing’.

Similar to the findings in the UK, SPs in the US felt the structure of the model would allow settings to implement it, ‘component by component’ (SP6 US), depending on their priorities.

The non-linear approach was discussed as a facilitatory factor in implementing the champions model within high schools, as it was perceived to offer flexibility to schools to
prioritise the order of implementation dependent on their own contextual factors. This was discussed as a way of ensuring implementation was more manageable, whilst also enabling the process to be personalised for each setting. Relevant to this, the UK group identified piloting the model as a key facilitatory strategy:

SP4 UK: ‘There are some settings that would buy into exploring it and trying it and trialing it and... the main thing that is needed is for some to be enthusiastic and then spread the word’.

However, SPs in the UK highlighted that settings may require more details for implementation. Also, they indicated that several domains of the model required clarification, particularly around post high school transitional support and external agency collaboration.

A number of perceived barriers to implementing the champions model were captured within this theme, represented in the data from both focus groups. For instance, whilst acknowledging the benefits of identifying autistic females through screening, SPs from both samples highlighted a number of potential concerns with this, such as autistic females presenting differently at home compared to school, which screening tools would be appropriate to use and an inability to meet an increase in demand for SP support. SPs in the UK also discussed how much time it could take to map the screening information onto tiered approaches.

Many barriers to implementing the model within this theme were linked to the wider political and legislative landscape. For instance, financial cost was perceived as a potential barrier to SP capacity. For example, in the UK, the cost of the external support from SPs for implementation and training were discussed:

SP1 UK: ‘Thinking about schools at the moment, they obviously want something that’s either cheaper or free! So, I’m just thinking kind of, you know, going forwards if this was to be developed into, let’s say a national framework, for example, I think that a barrier could be money if there was a charge to the intervention or accessing it’.

SP3 UK: ‘I guess it just depends on which interventions are identified in terms of the universal and then the more targeted supported and whether or not there’s a cost for those or if
training is required and whether or not staff...would buy into some of that, would be the only other thing to consider’.

A similar narrative relating to time was depicted in the discussion from the US:

SP3 US: ‘I would say just like any type of change we’re trying to implement in schools, it comes down to a time barrier, you know, of finding the time to train staff members and implement and...you know, taking away from other job duties, this would definitely be like...and it would take a lot of time...that many of us don’t have out here’.

Closely linked to this, discussions also centred around wider school and district priorities as barriers to implementing the model, particularly within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, SP2 US reflected that some schools find it challenging to plan and deliver ‘general intervention ideas for any child on the spectrum’, suggesting that they could find it difficult to implement the additional layer of support required for autistic females. A barrier illuminated in the data from the UK focus group related to the statutory work (i.e., state-mandated assessment of students) of UK psychologists:

SP5 UK: ‘Building on what [SP3] shared, it’s actually the [SP] time allocation...to progressing...such a useful...thing...given that the country is...awash with education, health, care needs assessment, it would require some additionality in our time and...to be carefully costed out.’
Discussion
This in-depth exploratory survey aimed to investigate the perceived utility and implementability of a proposed model of support for autistic females in mainstream high schools by consulting two groups of school psychologists and, in doing so, provide an international perspective. Key findings are discussed with reference to each RQ and in relation to pre-existing literature, before a refined version of the champions model is presented. Consideration is given to the limitations of the study. Finally, RQ2 is discussed in further detail, specifically around how the model could be implemented with the support of school psychologists, through a reflection on implications for practice and directions for further research.

RQ1: What do school psychologists in the UK and US perceive to be the utility of the proposed champions model of support for autistic females in terms of strengths and areas for development?

A main strength identified by school psychologists related to the ‘autism champions’ strand of the model which was identified as a relational approach to foster an inclusive mainstream high school environment for autistic females (Morewood et al., 2011). Congruent with previous research, school psychologists in the present study felt that gaining the views of autistic females and involving their parents were important aspects of the model (Morewood et al., 2019; Tomlinson et al., 2019). School psychologists also suggested that increasing knowledge and awareness of autism in females, in order to promote inclusion, was another key strength of the champions model, synonymous with existing literature which has demonstrated the need for training of school staff to recognise autism in females, challenging the idea that females cannot be autistic (Gray et al., 2021). Drawing upon their knowledge and experience, participants in the present study considered the model to accurately capture the needs of autistic females, providing further evidence that an extra layer of support is required for this population (O’Hagan et al., 2022; Tomlinson et al., 2019). School psychologists within the current research also identified screening procedures and tiered provision as key strengths of the proposed model (Magyar & Pandolfi, 2012).

However, whilst professionals acknowledged the necessity of a female-specific model of support, they were sensitive to the possible exclusion of autistic young people at the intersection of autism and gender. Recent reviews suggest there is a higher prevalence of
gender dysphoria amongst autistic young people than within the general population (Glidden et al., 2016). Previous research highlights the importance of improving access to tailored support to reduce the potential educational injustice experienced by this cohort (Horton, 2022; Warrier et al., 2020); hence, cisnormative language around the model of support for autistic ‘females’ may be deemed unhelpful and exclusionary by some, and may risk the erasure and silencing of trans identities (Allen-Bidell & Bond, 2022).

Moreover, school psychologists in the UK suggested that the model should be informed by the autistic female community and their parents and guardians. This could be explained by legislation in the UK, which places emphasis on involving children and their families in decision-making (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2014). School psychologists within the UK also reflected on the use of the word ‘awareness’ within the model, suggesting the autistic community may prefer the term ‘acceptance’. This issue was not raised by US school psychologists which could potentially be explained by cultural differences. The neurodiversity paradigm, driven by the autistic community, promotes inclusive, non-judgmental language, such as identity first language (Baumer & Frueh, 2021). Whilst there are advocates for this movement both within the UK and US, there are likely intra- and inter-contextual differences in the use of identity-first language (Kenny et al., 2016).

RQ2: How might school psychologists in the UK and US implement the proposed champions model of support for autistic females, with reference to potential barriers and facilitators?

Exploration of school psychologists’ views resulted in the identification of various perceived facilitators and barriers. Congruent with previous research, facilitators related to the core processes of implementation such as selecting engaged staff to lead on the initiative, training from external agencies, and step-by-step planning (Education Endowment Foundation, 2019; Fixsen et al., 2009). Perceived practical barriers pertaining to time and cost have also previously been identified as legitimate obstacles to implementation (Education Endowment Foundation, 2019). Furthermore, the impact of contextual factors on implementation were also found to be relevant in this paper such as funding, work climate, coordination with agencies, program champions and training and technical assistance
(Durlak & DuPre, 2008). For instance, school psychologists in the UK referred to the pressures of statutory work as a barrier to engaging in systemic work such as supporting schools to implement models of support at the organisational level, whereas school psychologists in the US referred to the contextual factors within settings as a more pertinent barrier for them, such as schools finding it challenging to develop general autism-friendly support.

Finally, this paper presents an international perspective, illuminating the importance of international research in extending knowledge and understanding of the role of the school psychologist. Similarities between UK and US school psychologists provided tentative evidence that a model of support for autistic females is internationally applicable. For example, school psychologists from both countries perceived the champions model as particularly useful for meeting the needs of autistic females, perhaps indicating that knowledge around supporting autistic females is consistent across both countries.

Furthermore, consideration of social, cultural and legislative factors can be applied to the analysis of inter-group differences. Participants from the UK emphasised the potential of the champions model in reducing the statutory demands of the school psychologist role, which may be related to the current socio-legislative climate in this country. In terms of areas of development, school psychologists from the UK emphasised the importance of the champions model being informed by the autistic community, as well using language preferred by the autistic community. This may relate to cultural differences in the application of the neurodiversity paradigm across the two countries. Qualitative analysis revealed similar responses across the two samples around the facilitators and barriers of implementing the champions model in high school settings, perhaps highlighting similarities in the school psychologist role in the UK and US. However, whereas US school psychologists emphasised time as a potential barrier, UK school psychologists referred to financial cost, which may be related to the current socio-political climate in the UK.

Synthesising the aforementioned findings from this study, a refined version of the champions model is presented below.
The refinement of the model was informed by the key findings from the present research and in consideration of existing literature. In agreement with the consulted professionals, ‘clear ethos and policies’ was updated to ‘rights-respecting ethos and policies’ to ensure greater inclusivity of autistic transgender young people. Furthermore, to ensure the model is congruent with the neurodiversity paradigm, ‘staff, peer and parent education and awareness’ was changed to ‘education to encourage staff, peer and parent acceptance’ (Baumer & Frueh, 2021). Finally, ‘post high school support and transition to adulthood’ was added to the domains as school psychologists highlighted this area as requiring greater prominence and clarity.

**Limitations**
Perhaps due to contextual factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, this research was unable to recruit adolescent autistic females to gather their viewpoints on the proposed model of support, in spite of this being part of the original ethics application (see Appendix DD for documentation). This is incongruent with the researcher’s epistemological and axiological
stance that, where possible, research such as this should be carried out with autistic individuals (Chown, 2017). Whilst professionals, such as school psychologists, are well placed to offer perspectives on the needs and subsequent support for autistic females, it is important to consult those with lived experience.

Despite gathering an international perspective, this study details an in-depth exploratory survey, resulting in highly contextualised data from each setting. In addition, while the school psychology demographic is considered to be disproportionately female, a limitation of this research is that it only gathered the views of female school psychologists, adding to the contextualised nature of the findings.

Finally, although focus groups can purportedly capture the diversity of perspectives within a group, some people find disagreement challenging, making it difficult for them to offer their differing opinions within the group situation, thus affecting the validity of the data provided (Bryman, 2012). This factor may have been exacerbated for the UK participants due to the researcher having a professional relationship with the school psychology team. Moreover, the online nature of the focus groups may have further reduced the validity of the data due to participants’ inability to naturally interject during the conversation.

**Implications for practice**
The current, small-scale study offers tentative evidence to support understanding of the potential facilitators and barriers to implementing a whole-school model of support specifically for autistic females.

School psychologists are well-placed to support schools in developing their provision, with findings from the present research suggesting that the champions model could be used as a framework in schools to audit, implement and review aspects of practice. The non-linear structure of the model was identified as facilitating a step-by-step approach to implementation, where schools could prioritise and implement one component at a time, depending on their needs. Although ultimately intended to be holistic, implementing the model in stages could promote engagement with the process, whilst somewhat mitigating financial and time barriers of immediately attempting to implement multiple domains. It is recommended that school psychologists provide professional development for school staff to facilitate the model’s implementation through the central domain of autism champions.
Once the autism champions are trained, they will be well-placed to develop a plan, prioritising the implementation of the particular strands of the champions model required for their context.

School psychologists could use their knowledge and skills to support schools in developing an appropriate assessment protocol for identifying the needs of autistic females. Furthermore, they could work with school staff to map assessment data on to tiered support through the application of universal, targeted and personalised interventions for female-specific needs. For instance, screening could indicate the need for tier two support such as targeted group intervention for emotional regulation (Magyar & Pandolfi, 2012). Finally, school psychologists have a role in supporting the evaluation and monitoring of the implementation process.

When implementing the model, contextual factors must be taken into consideration, at the school, local, national and international levels, pertaining to school and wider district priorities, as well as legislation (e.g., Department for Education & Department of Health, 2014). In addition, this research has highlighted that the capacity of a service or school would need to be taken into consideration prior to the implementation of some, or all, of the components of the model. It is recommended that school psychologists follow a framework to support implementation such as that presented by Chidley and Stringer (2020).

Finally, findings suggest that this model requires implementing alongside clear, trans-inclusive school policies, to support anti-discriminatory practice for young people at the intersection of autism and gender (Horton, 2022).

**Directions for future research**

There are several implications for future research.

Firstly, this research is unique in that it captured the views of school psychologists in the UK and US, demonstrating that international research is both feasible and worthwhile. The benefits of international collaboration in educational research have been found to outweigh the barriers, with two of the most important reasons for conducting international research cited as the opportunity to network with and learn from others (Bond et al., 2021). The use of online platforms to carry out qualitative research has increased the opportunity for
international collaboration. The evidence-base is growing on the benefits of real-time, online focus groups as a method of data collection (Fox, 2017). Further international research collaboration is recommended as a way of exploring the role and function of the SP within a transnational context.

Indeed, findings from this paper would be applicable to an action research project, piloting the implementation of the model within high school settings in the UK and/or US. This would allow for the development of clearer descriptions of the domains of the model, as well as providing detailed implementation guidance, highlighted as areas of development within the current paper.

Findings from the present study also identified the potential generalisability of this model to autistic girls and women in primary school and workplace settings, which could also be a possible future direction for research.

**Conclusion**

The findings of this research provide tentative empirical evidence for the utility and implementability of a specific model of support for autistic females in mainstream high schools both within the UK and US. The paper also demonstrates the feasibility of international collaboration for research through the use of online communication methods.
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Paper 3: The Dissemination of Evidence to Professional Practice

Word Count: 5,370 (including tables and figures)
The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the concepts of EBP and related issues such as practice-based research and transferability, including their role within educational psychology and the thesis topic area of autism. Furthermore, a discussion of dissemination and reflection upon effective dissemination strategies will be provided. Finally, the implications for practice and a strategy for disseminating the findings of Papers One and Two will be discussed.

**Section A: Evidence-based Practice and Related Issues**

**Psychologists as scientist-practitioners**

EPs are considered scientist-practitioners, providing a distinct contribution to children, families and services, bridging the gap between research and practice (Fallon et al., 2010; Fredrickson & Cline, 2002; Lane & Corrie, 2006). Lane and Corrie (2006) identified four main elements of modern scientific practice: the ability to think effectively, weave gathered data into a formulation, act effectively and critique work systematically. The scientist-practitioner model of training within applied psychology is an important concept relevant to EBP. The HCPC Standards of Proficiency (HCPC, 2015) for practitioner psychologists state the requirement for EPs to demonstrate the use of “professional and research skills in work with service users based on a scientist-practitioner and reflective-practitioner model” (Standard of Proficiency 14.30). Furthermore, Topping and Lauchlan (2013) argue that the development of research skills, and their application to practice, are a pivotal aspect of the doctoral educational psychology training programme.

Lane and Corrie (2006) describe the scientist-practitioner model as “an approach to professional practice that encompasses rigour, science, artistry and ingenuity” (p.3). However, one could argue that artistry and ingenuity require a degree of personal creativity and instinct which is seemingly incompatible with the objectivity and control of traditional science. In addition, Lillenfield et al. (2012) emphasised the fallible nature of scientific thinking, highlighting the discrepancy between the ideals of the scientist-practitioner and practice within educational psychology. This will be discussed further in the next section of this paper, with reference to EBP and PBE.
Evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence in the field of educational psychology

EBP originated from a clinical model, which advocated for the application of research evidence to inform practice to make the best decision about an individual’s medical care, thus leading to improved patient outcomes (Sackett et al., 1996). EBP evolved within the UK and US due to concerns around inconsistencies and inequalities within health service provision (Fox, 2003). The central tenet of EBP is congruence between professional practice and research. Consequently, practitioner psychologists are not immune from such ideology. Indeed, the APA defines EBP as “the integration of the best available research with clinical expertise in the context of patient characteristics, culture and preferences” (APA, 2006; p.273). This definition, with its consideration of wider, contextual factors, appears to conceptualise the link between the scientist-practitioner role and EBP in educational psychology.

However, central to the idea of EBP is that research can be evaluated against a hierarchy, with the ‘gold standard’ of systematic reviews of RCTs at the peak and qualitative methodologies, including individual opinion, at the bottom, in terms of scientific rigour (Scott et al., 2001) (see Table 3 below).

**Table 3: Hierarchy of research evidence (Scott et al., 2001)**

| 1. Several systematic reviews of RCTs |
| 2. Systematic review of RCTs |
| 3. RCTs |
| 4. Quasi-experimental trials |
| 5. Case control and cohort studies |
| 6. Expert consensus opinion |
| 7. Individual opinion |

Kennedy and Monsen (2016) posit that this interpretation of the EBP model may contribute to widening the gap between research and practice in school and child psychology. For instance, prioritising particular types of scientific knowledge over contextual practitioner knowledge poses difficulties in the application of EBP (Kennedy & Monsen, 2016). RCTs arguably favour rigour over meaning, which can be problematic for EPs, particularly when
educational research is often characterised by ‘messy, ill-structured real-world problems’ (Miller & Frederickson, 2006). Indeed, Fox (2003) reports that some EPs think the hierarchical approach is not relevant for the profession.

Further issues for practicing EPs in implementing EBP have been highlighted within the literature (Fox, 2003; 2011; Kratochwill & Shernoff, 2004; Kratochwill & Stoiber, 2000; Pagoto et al., 2007; Shernoff et al., 2003), pertaining to:

- The researcher’s epistemological position, with EPs reportedly espousing a constructional view of decision-making but reverting to a positivist view during times of challenge.
- Practitioner psychologists’ difficulty in accessing empirical research to apply evidence into practice.
- Demands of the practitioner psychologist role resulting in practical and logistical barriers.
- Training needs of practitioner psychologists.
- Differing axiological positions between researchers, practitioners and service users.
- The potential to neglect ecological systems approaches when implementing EBP.

Moreover, EPs’ involvement in the statutory assessment process for EHCPs within the UK raises further concerns around the application of EBP within the field of educational psychology, particularly as this results in the distribution of financial resources. Consequently, the application of EBP would ensure that service users receive a consistent service throughout the UK, as well as contributing towards distributive justice, where there is an equitable distribution of limited resources between members of society (Prilleltensky, 2013). Fox (2011) suggests that EBP has “become a politically astute way of managing scarce resources” (p. 326). Indeed, within a traded model of service delivery, the drive for accountability also implicates that EPs are under increasing pressure to demonstrate the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of the services they provide (Gibbs & Papps, 2017).

Whilst there is a need for EPs to remain accountable through the application of credible interventions (Dunsmuir et al., 2009; Frederickson, 2002), the literature highlights the importance of EPs’ professional experience, relational skills and contextual knowledge during decision making (Fox, 2002). Thus, some authors have called for an inductive,
bottom-up approach of PBE as a more appropriate method for applied psychological practitioners (Frederickson, 2002). EPs often work within messy, complex, and unpredictable environments (Miller & Frederickson, 2006), requiring a certain degree of artistry during decision making (Fox, 2011). Thus, the role of the applied psychologist as practitioner-researchers involves an active and distinctive contribution to the psychology knowledge base (Birch et al., 2015).

The APA Task Force (2006) explicitly highlights that utilising the research evidence-base involves elements of professional expertise, also recommending that practitioner psychologists remain open-minded about the efficacy of interventions for which there are no published controlled trials.

Fox (2003) suggests that PBE centres upon three key propositions:

1. The pursuit of knowledge should be a context-dependent process driven by local issues.

2. Research activity should acknowledge the limitations of seeking universal rules via nomothetic methods.

3. Theory-building should have direct relevance to practice settings.

Kratochwill et al. (2012) recommend that traditional experimental research is complemented with information developed from PBE. In addition, it has been suggested that contextual information, and the demonstration of effectiveness within practice, should be sufficient for an intervention to be classed as evidence-based (Kratochwill & Shernoff, 2004).

In sum, it is important for EPs to strengthen their own evidence base through PBE and, thus, turn their own experience into professional expertise. The concept of PBE not only challenges the traditional view of evidence, but also empowers EPs to become further involved in developing a relevant and usable evidence-base, both as trainees and throughout their careers. Ultimately, EBP and PBE can be seen as two complementary approaches, with the same aim of enhancing the evidence base and improving practice (Barkham et al., 2010).

**Evidence-based practice and autism**
Department for Education (DfE) data indicates that over 70% of autistic CYP attend mainstream schools, with autism indicated to be the most common type of need for those
with an EHCP (Department for Education, 2022). The number of children receiving a diagnosis is increasing, and it is estimated that 1.8% of all pupils in England now have an autism diagnosis. Unfortunately, research has revealed that autistic CYP are having negative experiences within school, unable to meet their potential, and experiencing difficulties when transitioning to adulthood (Department for Health and Social Care and Department for Education, 2021). With similar patterns highlighted in the US (Maenner et al., 2021), the increase of diagnosed autistic children in mainstream schools has resulted in a rise in demand for research to inform practice.

Recent reviews have identified a number of evidence-based practices in autism education (Bond et al., 2016; Wong et al., 2015). The preponderance of experimental designs within said reviews, including RCTs, suggests that quantifiable research is the ‘gold standard’ for EBP for autism research (Guldberg, 2017). However, Parsons and Kasari (2013) argue that quantitative, laboratory-based research contributes to a prolonged gap between research and practice in autism education, calling for interventions to be tested within school-based settings. Furthermore, Wong et al. (2015) highlighted that practitioners’ expertise plays a pivotal aspect in selecting effective interventions for autistic young people. Indeed, in a survey exploring EPs’ intervention practices for autistic students, Robinson et al. (2018) identified individual context, school context and best available evidence as prominent factors employed by practitioners when selecting strategies for autistic young people, congruent with the aforementioned definition from the APA (2006). Magyar and Pandolfi (2012) suggest that children with autism have complex and varied needs, which often requires individualised planning. Thus, the development of PBE may be beneficial to schools as they will be able to create and evaluate feasible interventions suited to their pupils and the school context. Guldberg (2017) purports that there is a need for multiple methodologies, equating the knowledge base of practitioners with the knowledge base of researchers, drawing on the evidence-base from the classroom itself, and bringing in the perspectives and views of individuals with autism, their families, and the practitioners who work with them.

In addition, autism research has historically used male samples or a very small number of females, leading to androcentric bias, making it difficult to evaluate how applicable existing interventions would be in supporting autistic females (Bargiela et al., 2016). Indeed, Paper
One, which explored what could be helpful for autistic females in high school, highlighted the emerging nature of the research. The number of papers obtained for the SLR was relatively small and, despite search criteria being broad, three of the papers focussed specifically on the social challenges faced by autistic females. Whilst highlighting that this is a fundamental area of need for autistic females in mainstream high school settings, future research is required to explore support holistically. Given the gap between autism research and practice in schools (Guldberg, 2017; Kasari & Smith, 2012), EPs have an important role in helping schools look holistically at their provision, connecting evidence and practice (Magyar & Pandolfi, 2012; O’Hagan & Bond, 2019).

Section B: Evidence on Effective Dissemination of Research and Notions of Research Impact

Evidence on effective dissemination of research
Due to the gap between research and practice, the dissemination of research-based knowledge is on the international agenda (World Health Organisation, 2004). Resources are limited; therefore, it is important that cost-effective interventions are implemented to the benefit of service users, requiring the effective transfer of research evidence to professional practice (Wilson et al., 2010). Various terminology has been utilised to define the concept of translating research to practice, such as diffusion, dissemination, implementation and knowledge transfer (Wilson et al., 2010). Wilson et al. (2010) define dissemination as “a planned process that involves consideration of target audiences and the settings in which research findings are to be received and, where appropriate, communicating and interacting with wider policy and health service audiences in ways that will facilitate research uptake in decision-making processes and practice” (p.2).

The importance of communication within dissemination of research is discussed in Mari´n-Gonza´lez et al.’s (2016) paper, defined as “the process of interpreting or translating complex research findings into a language, format, and context that non-experts can understand” (p.259). Traditional methods for communication of research include peer-reviewed articles, conferences, workshops, or seminars (Mari´n-Gonza´lez et al., 2016). In a review of the literature, a key finding of Oliver and Cairney’s (2019) paper was for academics to clearly and coherently synthesise research findings into readable and accessible formats. Moreover, it is argued that researchers employ a range of creative tools and approaches, to actively engage
with a wider (even worldwide) target audience, ensuring the greatest social, political and/or economical impact for their research (Brownson et al., 2018; Mari’n-Gonza’lez et al., 2016; Oliver & Cairney, 2019).

In a scoping review of the literature, 33 frameworks of dissemination were identified, 28 of which had a theoretical foundation in persuasive communication, diffusion of innovations and/or social marketing, recommending that researchers adopt a theoretically informed approach to their research dissemination (Wilson et al., 2010). Brownson et al. (2018) suggest that ineffective dissemination is a contributory factor to the research to practice gap, recommending that creative methods are required to reach practitioners and policy makers, through means such as social media, workshops and seminars. It is recommended that to facilitate effective dissemination, stakeholders should be involved in creating a strategy from the outset of the research process (Brownson et al., 2018). Oliver and Cairney (2019) also highlight the media, including social media, as effective methods for communicating and transferring research evidence. Findings also suggest the importance of academics conducting high quality research, accounting for dissemination and knowledge-transfer within the design (Oliver & Cairney, 2019). Mari’n-Gonza’lez et al. (2016) highlight the importance of a specific strategy for dissemination, adopting a multi-channel approach of online platforms, such as Twitter, and offline or face-to-face methods.

Dissemination of research within education
In terms of dissemination within the educational field, Harmsworth et al. (2001) propose a three-level process for dissemination, claiming that research which achieves all three levels may encounter each stage in a linear process. Dissemination for awareness is the first level, aiming to raise awareness of the research and outcomes amongst a target audience. The second level, dissemination for understanding, involves targeting specific populations who would benefit from a deeper understanding of the project. Finally, dissemination for action, which focuses on populations within organisations who have the capacity to influence change, perhaps leading to policy development through the implementation of the research findings (Ashcraft et al., 2020). However, the process of dissemination within the educational arena has not been found to be as simple or linear, with data collected by the National Children’s Bureau (NCB; 2017) highlighting a number of variables impacting upon effective dissemination and implementation within schools, such as teacher attitude, school ethos.
and school leadership support (NCB, 2017). Furthermore, dissemination for awareness was reported to be the most frequently utilised approach within educational settings, whilst dissemination for understanding was identified as the method reported to be the most effective in influencing teacher practice (NCB, 2017), perhaps contributing to the research-to-practice gap in education.

The aim of dissemination should be to achieve impact, yet measuring this can be challenging (Brownson et al., 2018). This section will now consider the evaluation of the impact of dissemination more specifically.

**Notions of research impact**

Research impact is reported to occur at two levels: academic impact and economic and societal impact (RCUK, 2010). The RCUK ‘Pathways to Impact’ document (RCUK, 2010), compiled in consultation with academic and research user representatives, stresses the importance of a clear vision of intended impact from the outset, along with a coherent strategy of dissemination activities to be deployed during the research cycle. In addition, Oliver and Cairney (2019) identify the need for researchers to understand the policy processes which they seek to influence. Furthermore, it is recommended that researchers apply relational and reflective skills to facilitate the mobilisation of findings with those who can bring about change (Oliver & Cairney, 2019).

With regards to the evaluation of the impact of dissemination, traditional measurements included citation analysis of journal articles, with the assumption that the importance of the research correlated with higher number of citations (Henricksen & Mishra, 2019). However, measuring impact is reported to be more complex than this, with research suggesting that almost all of the overall articles published within journals are never cited, and at least half of papers are never read by anyone other than the authors, referees or journal editors (Meho, 2007). Perhaps a more contemporary and reliable measurement of impact, particularly for online research dissemination, are social media metrics, which can indicate the impact of communication efforts. As indicated by Mari´n-González et al. (2016), this can include the number of followers, the number of people reached (people who have seen the online message, etc.), or the engagement (number of people who have clicked, commented on, or shared the message, etc.).
Section C: Implications of the Current Research

Summary of research findings
The findings from Paper One, the systematic literature review, revealed that autistic females require various means of support in order to improve their mainstream high school experience. Themes formed in this paper illuminated that supporting the social, emotional and mental health needs of autistic females is paramount. Fundamental to this is the training and education of staff and students on the female autism phenotype to ensure timely identification and support. Indeed, staff and peer acceptance were found to be vital in supporting inclusive policy and practice, increasing the sense of belonging of autistic female students.

Paper Two was an empirical study which captured an international perspective on the perceived utility and implementability of a proposed model of support specifically for autistic females in mainstream high school. Inter- and intra-group analysis of the data revealed that the proposed model was considered to be a useful framework for developing and reviewing aspects of policy and practice. In addition, results provided further evidence and justification for female-specific models of support. School and wider district capacity, and legislation, were identified as potential barriers to implementation, as well as school buy-in. Multi-agency collaboration was identified as a facilitatory factor to implementation, highlighting the role of EPs in developing policy and practice for autistic females. The potential engagement of school staff and non-linear structure of the model were also considered to be facilitators to implementation. It was anticipated that the outcomes of the research would be of interest to educators, EPs, EP services, and also other organisations and practitioners who work directly with autistic CYP, including within LAs and policymakers. Findings also revealed similarities and differences in transnational SP practices.

This section will now consider how the aforementioned findings translate into implications at the research site, organisational and professional levels.

Research site level: the participants
With reference to Paper Two and regarding the UK sample, only one out of five participants indicated that they had experience of working systemically to support autistic females, despite four having experience of providing systems-level support to CYP with SEND. Within
the US sample, none of the six SPs had experience of working systemically to support autistic females, despite five having experience of supporting CYP from an organisational perspective.

Presentation of the model during the focus group raised awareness of how to work systemically to support this cohort. Findings revealed that the EPs could relate to the rationale and psychological theory underpinning the model. The EPs indicated that they have the opportunity to work systemically with CYP within their practice. Participation in this research may subsequently lead them to seek opportunities to develop practice for autistic females in the schools they serve. Indeed, one EP from the UK vocalised how they could envisage utilising the model with the manager of a resource provision, suggesting that participating in the research would influence their practice. This may encourage the development of wider policy within their services. For instance, the EPs in the UK discussed how it would be useful to collaborate with other professionals within their wider district, such as autism teams.

Organisational level: mainstream high schools and local authorities
At the level of the organisation, the findings from both papers have implications for policy and practice both in the UK and US.

Paper One has important implications for school practice because the findings offer specific insight into the additional support required by autistic females in mainstream high school education. The vulnerability of autistic females was apparent; thus, schools need to apply preventative strategies to ensure psychological and physical safety within the school environment. The paper also highlighted the unique social needs of autistic females and the importance of interventions which promote emotional well-being and foster a sense of belonging. Overall, schools must adopt inclusive policies and practices, placing relational approaches at the centre. Schools need to develop and apply autism-friendly strategies to meet emotional, social and sensory needs, and support daily transitions. There is also a need for coordinated support and processes for transitions between levels of education and preparing for adulthood, as well as supportive relationships between home and school.

Moreover, findings from both Paper One and Paper Two prompt schools to consider how they organise support for autistic females. Tiered support systems, incorporating universal,
targeted and individualised intervention, as a framework for a graduated response were found to be successful.

Paper Two also offers implications at the organisational level for schools by presenting a model which they could implement, strand-by-strand. The non-linear structure of the model was identified as facilitating a step-by-step approach to implementation, where schools could prioritise and implement one component at a time, depending on their needs. A pivotal aspect of the model, and its implementation, is gaining the views of autistic females and their parents in identification of need and the development of provision. This has implications for how the model is embedded in practice.

In the UK, the onus is also on local authorities to appropriately fund schools to enable professionals to have the time to provide autistic females with the complex support they need. Paper Two also highlighted the importance of collaboration between teams within local authorities. For instance, collaboration between the EP service and autism teams.

Professional level: educational psychologists

Paper One has implications for the ways in which educational psychology services work with schools. A key finding was around illuminating autistic females’ specific needs, namely mental health and identification. A further key finding was around promoting self, peer and staff advocacy in order to raise awareness and understanding of the female autism phenotype and foster a sense of belonging. The implication here is for EPs to develop staff and peer training to raise awareness of the female autism phenotype, leading to autism acceptance. In addition, supporting schools to develop targeted interventions, focussed around the unique risk factors autistic girls may encounter, such as late-diagnosis, bullying, online exploitation, sexual manipulation and unplanned pregnancy. This could involve EPs working directly with autistic females, post-diagnosis, to provide psychoeducation and support identity development. In sum, school staff require further training on the female autism phenotype, alongside practical support on how strategies can be developed and implemented.

Paper Two raises important implications for educational psychology services by evidencing that multi-agency collaboration is paramount to implementing a model of support for autistic females. EPs are well-placed to support schools in developing their provision, with
results from Paper Two suggesting that the proposed model could be used as a framework in schools to audit, implement and review aspects of practice. EPs could use their knowledge and skills to support schools in selecting and developing an appropriate assessment protocol for identifying the needs of autistic females. Furthermore, exploring with schools how the identification of need can be mapped on to tiered support through the application of universal, targeted and personalised interventions. There is also scope for EPs to provide professional development for school staff to facilitate the model’s implementation through the central domain of autism champions. Finally, EPs have a role in supporting the evaluation and monitoring of the implementation process.

Paper Two involved a qualitative exploration of an EP service in the UK and a SP service in the US. Analysis of the similarities between both contexts provided evidence that a model of support for autistic females is internationally applicable. In addition, inter-group analysis revealed interesting findings pertaining to international cultural, legislative and SP practice differences. Thus, Paper Two has demonstrated the value and feasibility of transnational collaboration when conducting research (Bond et al., 2021). The increased use of technology, such as online platforms (Fox, 2017), has expanded the potential for investigating EP practice internationally and EPs are encouraged to consider recruiting participants beyond the local and national levels in future research.

**Section D: Promoting and Evaluating the Research Dissemination**

Application of the dissemination research base allowed the researcher to develop a dissemination strategy as a means of impacting practice at the local (regional), national and international level.

As discussed previously, effective dissemination is a challenge within education where there is an identified gap between research and practice (Wilson, 2017). Consequently, EPs within the UK and US have a fundamental role to play in bridging the gap between research findings and practice within the education sector, contributing to impact. Indeed, stakeholders and collaborators within the US will be involved in supporting the dissemination of the research strategy to allow for wider reach to local, national and international audiences. During the process, the researcher considered ‘what’ to disseminate and to ‘whom’, which is presented in Table 4 below (Harmsworth et al., 2001).
### Table 4: Stakeholder interest table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AUDIENCES</th>
<th>WHAT TO DISSEMINATE?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General findings about what could be helpful for autistic females in mainstream high school (Paper One)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autistic females</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents/carers of autistic females</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SENDCos/ School staff/ Educational Settings</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational psychologists (including trainee/intern and assistants)</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other services in SEND/ wider district (autism teams)</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wider policy makers</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The strategy for ‘how’ to disseminate the research is structured in accordance with Harmsworth et al.’s (2001) three stages of dissemination.

**Dissemination for awareness**

This method of dissemination involves the sharing of research activities and findings more generally to raise awareness of the research. It is important to consider this aspect of dissemination from the beginning of the research process to highlight to relevant audiences...
that your research exists alongside an idea of what the intended aims are (Harmsworth et al., 2001).

The proposed model was presented at the 2022 NASP annual convention in Boston (US) through a practitioner conversation session. These sessions promote sharing of the real-world experiences of EPs who are implementing evidence-based practices. The researcher and research supervisor presented the model for 15-minutes and then facilitated a structured discussion of participants’ experiences with the topic. NASP recommend for practitioner conversations to have a maximum of 30 attendees. However, approximately 60 practitioners attended, perhaps indicating the international interest in the topic area. The primary aim of the session was to refine the focus group moderator script for the Paper Two research. Nevertheless, this session also raised awareness of the research and the attendees were observed to receive the session well. Four of the EPs who attended the session shared their email address with the researcher and research supervisor, requesting further communication once the thesis was written. Feedback forms completed by EPs in attendance indicated that the model was perceived as relating well to their current practice, as well as having many strengths for supporting autistic females.

In addition, the researcher has a professional social media presence on Twitter, which hosts an active EP community. The research will be shared through this medium which, through “word of mouth”, may lead to additional opportunities to raise awareness, such as contributing to blogs or podcasts, leading to dissemination for understanding and action (Harmsworth et al., 2001; p.3).

**Dissemination for understanding**
The second stage of dissemination involves targeting audiences which may benefit from a more detailed understanding of the research findings in terms of the potential impact on their practice.

Papers One and Two will be submitted to academic journals with a suitable readership base. Paper One has been submitted to JORSEN. This journal, a publication of NASEN, was selected as it offers an international forum for the dissemination of research amongst an audience of SEND professionals (see appendix A aims). The researcher has also requested that the paper is considered for inclusion in an inter-disciplinary, multi-journal special issue on
neurodiversity and inclusivity, involving journals from education, health, and community, 
counselling, and neuro- psychology.

The researcher plans to submit Paper Two to IJSEP as the paper is congruous with the aims 
and scope of the journal (see Appendix B for aims). Citation metrics and readership were 
also taken into consideration. The primary purpose of IJSEP is to communicate broad, 
interdisciplinary issues of professional importance in SP. Furthermore, this journal 
disseminates transnational research.

Paper Two involved collaboration with US researchers, hence, there will be international 
interest in the findings. The researcher is making an application to present the Paper Two 
research findings at the 2024 NASP annual convention in New Orleans (US). This will involve 
a paper presentation that is designed to address topics relevant to the profession and inform 
practice. Thus, this is appropriate for sharing Paper Two research findings at a level that will 
enhance understanding. Moreover, the researcher plans to apply to present Paper One and 
Paper Two findings at regional and national conferences within the UK. An example of this 
could be the DECP annual conference to reach a national audience in the UK, encouraging 
colleagues to consider how to support autistic females within their own services.

Dissemination for action
The third stage of dissemination focuses on those audiences with the capacity to effect 
change within the organisations in which they are based through the adoption of practices 
highlighted as effective by the research findings (Harmsworth et al., 2001). In consultation 
with the principal EP, the researcher plans to disseminate findings by delivering training 
within the researcher’s host EP service with a focus upon the findings and implications from 
Papers One and Two. The researcher also plans to collaborate with the autism team within 
the wider LA, with a focus on promoting service-level change. In addition, the researcher will 
apply to present findings from Paper Two at the LA SENDCos conference in order to promote 
best practice within schools within the borough. The findings and implications of the 
research will also be shared directly through the researcher’s work within schools as a 
practitioner EP. The researcher would also like to deliver a presentation for the 
commissioning EP service and school setting where the model was initially developed as the 
refined model would offer a helpful framework to enhance their practice.
Finally, the researcher will discuss the possibility of commissioning further research to implement the model of practice for autistic females, through the doctoral training programme at the UoM.

**Evaluating the impact**
In addition to achieving the above outcomes, the researcher has created a ResearchGate profile in order to monitor the interest in the papers and facilitate reader requests for full-text articles (Henricksen & Mishra, 2019). This method will allow the researcher to evaluate whether a wider audience has accessed the papers. However, as aforementioned, measuring impact is purported to be more complex than citation analysis of academic articles (Meho, 2007). This approach will be utilised alongside more contemporary methods such as social media metrics (Marín-González et al., 2016; Oliver & Cairney, 2019).

**Conclusion**
This paper has provided an overview of the role of EBP and PBE within educational psychology and autism, highlighting the unique role EPs have in bridging the gap between evidence and practice. A strategy for ‘how’ to disseminate the findings of Papers One and Two has been presented, including consideration of ‘what’ to disseminate to ‘whom’, in order to raise awareness, increase knowledge and encourage action, at regional, national and international levels (Harmsworth et al., 2001).
References


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Appendices

Appendix A: A1 Preliminary Research Study

Assignment 1 (A1)

Exploring a model of support for autistic females in a high school setting: A Thematic Analysis

Author: Katie Ayirebi

Please note, all names of people and places have been anonymised.
1. Abstract

Whilst some attempts have been made to tailor models to meet the needs of autistic females (e.g. Morewood et al., 2019) it has been purported that there is still limited guidance available for schools as well as a limited evidence-base for interventions to address some of the challenges specifically faced by autistic females (O’Hagan & Bond, 2019; Tomlinson et al., 2019). The present study aimed to broaden the knowledge base and explore the development of specific models of support by gathering the views of professionals involved in developing provision for autistic females in the North-West of England. The methodology employed an exploratory, qualitative case study design (Yin, 2018) utilising semi-structured interviews to explore the research questions. Inductive-deductive thematic analysis was adopted to identify the main global and organising themes. The findings are discussed in relation to pre-existing literature pertaining to school support for autistic young people. An updated model of support relating to the specific needs of autistic females is proposed, along with future implications for educational psychology practice and directions for further research.

Keywords: autism spectrum condition; autistic females; models of support; provision
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Implications for professional practice

Implications for future research

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Appendix 7.1 E-mail to participants

Appendix 7.2 Participant Information Sheet

Appendix 7.3 Consent Form

Appendix 7.4 Interview Schedule

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Appendix 7.6 EP Example Coded Extracts

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Appendix 7.9 Coding Framework and Supporting Evidence

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2. Introduction

Rationale
Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) has been reconceptualised many times, with the most recent definition describing it as “a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition with a spectrum of manifestations and high rates of cooccurring mental health difficulties” (Happé & Frith, 2020, p.1). Historically, autism was considered as a ‘male condition’ with male predominance estimated to be 4:1 in terms of male-to-female ratio (Happé & Frith, 2020). However, recently the actual ratio of autism diagnoses has been reported as more likely to be 2:1 (Dworzynski et al., 2012). Thus, research is needed to investigate how schools can specifically recognise and support autistic females.

The current preliminary study was developed in collaboration with the research supervisor, as part of the University of Manchester’s DEdChPsychol Thesis Research Commissioning process. The trainee educational psychologist (TEP) had held previous teaching and leadership roles in a diverse comprehensive high school, also training as the ‘Elklan Champion’ to support pupils with speech, communication and language needs. During this training, the TEP became passionate about improving support and provision for autistic females, resulting in a successful collaboration with North-West speech and language therapists (SALT) to support autistic girls in Year 6 with their transition to high school.

Although gradually improving, there is still a dearth of literature pertaining to the support of autistic females in school settings. Current models of support are not specific to the needs of females (e.g. Morewood et al., 2011), or they focus on a specific group of autistic females such as those who have reached a crisis point and are therefore displaying externalising behaviour, leading to school exclusion or Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA; e.g. O’Hagan, 2020; Sproston et al., 2017).

Consequently, this research aimed to explore and elicit current practice considered as effective for supporting autistic females in one high school in the North-West of England. It also aimed to explore what professionals considered as gaps and areas for further development in supporting autistic females in one high school in the North-West of England.
Structure of Literature Review

This chapter synthesises and reviews pertinent literature that has informed the current study. Firstly, current models of support for pupils with ASC are summarised and critically analysed with reference to the female phenotype of autism. Factors that may need to be included in support models for autistic girls are then analysed, including identification; staff awareness and training; support with internalising anxiety and interventions thought to be pertinent for girls around puberty and the hidden curriculum. Finally, current models of support for autistic females are critically analysed with reference to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the role of Educational Psychologists (EP). Relevant literature was obtained through searching three databases: ERIC, Springer and Psych INFO. Peer-reviewed papers were obtained through using the following search terms: ‘Support’ AND ‘Autistic Girls’ and ‘School’ and ‘School Support’ AND ‘Autistic Girls.’ Google Scholar searches and reference harvesting allowed the identification of further relevant literature. Relevant grey literature such as government publications, book chapters, and university seminars relating to supporting autistic females were reviewed and included.

Current Generic Models of Support

There are a number of models that have been developed and implemented to support autistic students at school. Morewood et al. (2011) suggested the ‘saturation model’, recommending that ‘autism understanding and awareness’ should permeate every aspect of school life. This model puts ‘the agent of change’ at the centre; someone who can facilitate inclusivity through policy development and inspire others to implement ideas. ‘ Autism-friendly’ strategies such as adapting the physical environment and promoting a positive ethos are promoted, as well as a need for flexibility in the support and intervention that is offered.

A further approach recommends a multi-tiered problem-solving model of support for early identification of co-occurring emotional disorders (ED) and behavioural issues in autistic students (Magyar & Pandolfi, 2012). Adopting a tiered approach with early screening procedures was reported to help schools intervene in a preventative manner to develop intervention, monitor progress and promote inclusivity. Tier one support adopts whole-school approaches and is focussed on the prevention of behaviours that interfere with learning. Tier two and tier three support becomes increasingly more intensive and individualised and are designed to address ASD and ED needs (Magyar & Pandolfi, 2012).
This tiered model was successfully implemented in an elementary school (equivalent to primary provision in the UK) in the state of New York in the United States of America (USA). Using a working party responsible for implementing the model, developing an assessment protocol and ‘toolbox’ of evidence-based interventions for each tier, the model was found to be accepted by school staff who reported high levels of satisfaction with its utility. Although many aspects of these models are relevant and applicable to females, they have not been developed with the female phenotype in mind (O’Hagan & Bond, 2019). In addition, it is difficult to evaluate how applicable interventions would be in meeting the needs of autistic females, as research has historically used male samples or a very small number of females, leading to androcentric bias.

In a recent review, it was found that the school experiences of autistic females can be similar to their autistic male peers, thus, a small number of strategies can be effective for many autistic young people (Tomlinson et al., 2019). However, key differences were acknowledged such as disparities between staff and parent accounts, with staff reporting girls as appearing to cope and parents reporting that their daughters were experiencing significant challenges, demonstrating that autistic girls are more likely to mask their difficulties. The following section will consider factors for female-specific support outlined in current emerging literature.

**Diagnosis and Identification**
Currently, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) criteria for ASC includes difficulties relating to two main criteria: ‘social communication and interaction’ and ‘restricted and repetitive behaviours and interests’ (APA, 2013). However, there is evidence that autistic females are being under diagnosed, mis-diagnosed and diagnosed much later than autistic males (Bargiela et al., 2016; Duvekot et al., 2017). It is becoming apparent that there is a female-specific presentation of autism, a female phenotype, which does not fit with the current male-biased definitions and diagnostic criteria (APA, 2013; Happé & Frith, 2020). One of the DSM criteria for diagnosis refers to difficulties with ‘social communication and interaction’ (APA, 2013). However, it has been found that by using ‘camouflaging’ to mask social challenges, girls can go unnoticed by school staff, increasing their vulnerability and decreasing the likelihood they will receive appropriate intervention (Dean et al., 2017). ‘Restricted and repetitive behaviours and interests’ is a second difficulty outlined by DSM,
informing a diagnosis of ASC (APA, 2013). One issue is that the special interest topics of autistic females may be similar to the interests of neurotypical female peers making them challenging to identify (NASEN, 2016). Gould and Ashton-Smith (2012) suggest the importance of careful questioning to ascertain the intensity of the interest. The need for screening and assessment which is more sensitive to the female presentation of autism has been suggested to reduce the ascertainment bias against autistic females (O’Hagan & Bond, 2019). O’Hagan and Bond (2019) also recommend a collaborative process, utilising careful observation over time for screening and identifying the female presentation of ASC.

Staff Awareness and Training
It has been suggested that due to the subtle differences in the female phenotype, professionals may not have the knowledge of how females with autism present, leading to issues with the identification of ASC in girls. Indeed, research has found primary school staff were more likely to identify ASC in males than females and were less sensitive to a female phenotype in comparison to a male phenotype of ASC, suggesting that the female phenotype is under-recognised (Whitlock et al., 2020). In addition, it has been found that Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCos) across early years, primary and secondary contexts lack confidence in identifying and supporting autistic girls, perhaps having a more male- based understanding of the condition (Gray et al., 2021). One finding was that a high proportion of SENCos rated their confidence as high in terms of support provided for autistic girls, but stated they were taking the same approach for both males and females, suggesting that girls were not getting provision tailored to their specific needs. SENCos are well-placed to play a vital role in identifying and supporting autistic girls, thus training for staff to recognise autism in girls, and dispel the stereotype that females cannot have autism, seems crucial (NASEN, 2016; Tomlinson et al., 2019). Furthermore, O’Hagan (2020) found that a diagnosis was not necessarily enough to guarantee support for autistic female school-refusers who were re-integrating back into the school environment, again highlighting the need to increase teacher knowledge and understanding of how to support autism in girls. Specialised training for staff to increase their knowledge of how autism can present in females and the specific type of support they require, may lead to more effective levels of personalised support (Tomlinson et al, 2019).
Internalising Anxiety

Autistic females have been viewed as more likely to utilise internalising coping responses, as being more socially motivated and less likely to show restricted and repetitive behaviours than their autistic male counterparts (Muggleton et al., 2019). Internalising anxiety is purported as being more typical of autistic females than autistic males (Mandy et al., 2012). If females are not supported appropriately, it has major implications for their access to education and life chances (Muggleton et al., 2019); Gomez de la Cuesta and Mason (2010) state that autistic women in work, experience ‘a glass ceiling that is double-glazed’. It is becoming increasingly apparent that autistic girls would benefit from individual and whole school approaches to promoting good mental health and inter-disciplinary collaboration to address mental health needs such as anxiety, depression and self-harm (Tomlinson et al., 2019).

Interventions

Autistic females may be at risk of social rejection from their peer group and more subtle forms of bullying leading to isolation (Hebron, 2019). Raising awareness of autism in the peer group has been found to be invaluable, especially due to the potential late diagnosis for autistic females (Morewood et al., 2019). Whole-school approaches such as assemblies and specific lessons raising awareness of ASC amongst peer groups have been found to facilitate understanding and encourage positive social interactions (Morewood et al., 2019). Furthermore, perceived peer acceptance, friendship and social competence have been reported to have a significant impact on the sense of belonging experienced by females with autism in mainstream secondary schools, suggesting that increasing peer awareness of autism could be beneficial in promoting inclusivity (Myles et al., 2019).

Group interventions to teach self-care, social skills and provide peer and emotional support have been found to be somewhat successful for adolescent girls; perhaps encouraging a positive sense of ‘self’ (Jamieson & Schuttler, 2017; Sproston et al., 2017). It has been suggested that schools develop social interaction through peer group interventions planned around shared interests and the facilitation of clubs during unstructured times (Bond et al., 2016).

A recent survey found that autistic females report increased difficulties in relation to menarche pertaining to sensory, emotional and behavioural issues, which placed extra strain
on their lives (Steward et al., 2018). Cummins et al. (2020) suggest the importance of promoting dignity and respect and identifying specific ways to support autistic girls through puberty, particularly those with limited spoken communication and intellectual disabilities. In addition, parents and educators also emphasised the need for personalised support with puberty due to the range of individual experiences and needs in girls.

Hidden Curriculum
The hidden curriculum could be viewed as the implicit rules, norms and expectations within schools. Neurotypical children may use social intuition to work out how a school operates at this level, however, autistic children do not learn intuitively and find the implicit process of communication difficult. Four key areas of difficulty for autistic girls have been reported as: class rules; working collaboratively; completing tasks; and other interactions with peers (Moyse & Porter, 2015). These may become increasingly difficult for females with ASC during adolescence, as friendships and social networks become more complex (Moyse & Porter, 2015). Indeed, explicit and consistent rules and expectations have been found to support autistic girls in the school environment and Gould and Ashton-Smith (2011) recommend teaching social skills in realistic settings. Schools could offer ‘girl-oriented’, social skills groups during lunchtimes to meet the needs of the autistic female population within their community and support them to access the hidden curriculum (O’Hagan, 2020).

Despite the well-documented need for whole school, group and individual interventions to support feminine issues and the socialisation and well-being of girls, research has found that these areas are somewhat neglected in school support plans (O’Hagan, 2020).

Female Specific Models
In sum, adolescent autistic girls not only experience difficulties encountered by the whole autistic school population, such as issues with social relationships and coping with the sensory demands of the physical school environment, they also experience additional difficulties related to being a female such as a higher risk of being mis-diagnosed or receiving a late diagnosis due to internalising and camouflaging and also feminine issues around puberty (Bargiela et al., 2016; Duvekot et al., 2017; Tomlinson et al., 2019; Steward et al., 2018). Therefore, there is a clear need for a female specific model of support and there is emerging literature recommending an ‘extra layer’ of support, specifically for autistic females (Tomlinson et al., 2019).
Morewood et al. (2019) tailored the ‘saturation model’ to meet the needs of autistic girls; utilising the model as a framework for whole-school good practice and personalising it further at an individual level. Offering flexible, personalised intervention around timetabling, access to a safe space and specialist support were found to be effective at an individual level. At a group level, increasing girls’ understanding of the hidden curriculum through social skills support groups was found to be particularly useful. Finally, at a systemic level the importance of raising awareness of the female presentation in staff and the peer group were identified as successful in ensuring autistic girls get the correct support and in preventing isolation (Morewood et al., 2019). Despite offering this range of helpful strategies, researchers acknowledged that more research is required to support schools in developing effective approaches specifically for autistic females, as well as incorporating the voices of autistic females to capture what they themselves believe to be effective in terms of the support they are offered at high school.

Research gaining the perspective of autistic females and their families is emerging. Sproston et al. (2017) interviewed parent-child dyads of autistic girls who had experienced exclusion from mainstream secondary school. Contributory factors were reported as issues with school environments, school relationships and staff responses, thus highlighting the importance of autism-friendly school environments, positive relationships and increasing staff awareness of the female presentation of autism (Sproston et al., 2017). O’Hagan (2020) also found a number of important factors to support autistic girls with EBSA to manage school life and to re-engage with education. Positive relationships with a key adult, with peers and between school and home were found to be protective factors. In addition, the girls benefited from ongoing support with social skills and friendship development as well as a flexible approach both at an individual level, such as individualised timetables, and a whole-school level where ‘meltdowns’ were handled compassionately due to an awareness and understanding of why they occur. Access to safe spaces and a school ethos of acceptance, encouraging a sense of belonging in the school community were also indicators of good autism practice (O’Hagan, 2020).

**UNCRC**

One of the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is Article 23 which protects children and young people with a disability and suggests children
should be taught at school in a way that reflects an understanding of their disability (United Nations, 1989). Gould and Ashton-Smith (2012) suggest schools need to be more ‘girl friendly’ with a focus on the ‘hidden curriculum’ to explicitly teach autistic females the skills that their neurotypical counterparts learn implicitly.

The Role of Educational Psychologists
Educational Psychologists (EPs) are scientist-practitioners who apply their psychological skills and knowledge at organisational, group or individual levels to support children and young people (Fallon et al., 2010). Guldberg (2017) highlights the gap between autism research and practice in schools, recommending closer collaboration between researchers and practitioners. EPs can play an important role in helping schools look holistically at their provision for autistic females using models which focus on school ethos and tiered levels of provision (Bond & Hebron, 2016; Magyar & Pandolfi, 2012; O’Hagan & Bond, 2019). Traded services may mean autistic girls, who internalise their anxiety and follow behavioural expectations within the classroom, are not referred for EP support until they present with extreme behaviour (O’Hagan & Bond, 2019). This has implications for how we screen and identify girls with ASC in schools, as well creating models of preventative support at a systemic level.

Current Study: Aim and Research Questions
As discussed, there are various models relating to supporting autistic young people in school, however, at present, the majority are not specific to the needs of females (e.g. Morewood et al., 2011). Whilst some attempts have been made to tailor models to meet the needs of autistic females (e.g. Morewood et al., 2019) it has been purported that there is still limited guidance available for schools as well as a limited evidence-base for interventions to address some of the challenges specifically faced by autistic females (O’Hagan & Bond, 2019; Tomlinson et al., 2019). Therefore, the present study aims to explore the development of specific models of support for autistic females. In particular, the project aims to broaden the knowledge base by gathering the views of professionals involved in developing provision for autistic females in the North-West of England in relation to the following research questions (RQs):

- RQ1: What provision do professionals consider to be effective in supporting autistic females in one high school in the North-West of England?
• RQ2: What do professionals consider to be areas for further development in supporting autistic females in one high school in the North-West of England?
3. Methodology

Epistemological Position
This exploratory investigation adopted the epistemological stance of critical realism. Critical realism situates itself as an alternative paradigm to positivism and interpretivism; a balanced and integrative stance between the two paradigms (Archer et al., 2016; Sayer, 2000). In adopting an integrative position, critical realism recognises that individual perspectives of reality will be influenced by personal experiences, beliefs and values; whilst also acknowledging that there is an external reality, which exists independently from our constructions. Braun and Clarke (2006, p.81) defined critical realism as a stance that “acknowledges the ways individuals make meaning of their experience, and, in turn, the ways the broader social context impinges on those meanings, while retaining focus on the material and other limits of ‘reality’”. This epistemological position was relevant to the aims of the study as the research gathered qualitative data in the form of participants’ views and opinions on their experiences of supporting autistic females, which were subjective and based on perspectives, whilst also establishing some tenants of objective reality (Robson, 2011). Overall, key themes and commonalities were utilised in conjunction with subjective and contextual findings to inform a proposed model of support.

Design of the Study
The objective of this research was to gain the perspectives of professionals involved in developing provision for autistic girls within an academically selective all-girls secondary grammar school and sixth form in the North-West of England; eliciting current practice considered as effective for supporting autistic girls and possible future developments for a model of support. Therefore, an exploratory, qualitative case study design utilising semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis (TA) was adopted (Yin, 2018). The researcher felt this approach would successfully address the RQs, leading to rich, qualitative data and a greater understanding of factors relating to supporting autistic females at high school.

Sampling and Participant Recruitment
Gulberg (2017) suggests that research should “take into account the concerns and experiences of individuals with autism, their families and the practitioners who work with them”. This small-scale study employed a convenience-purposive sampling method to recruit one school staff member (Vice Principle; VP) and one EP who had been involved in
developing provision for supporting autistic females. The high school was a large, academically selective all-girls secondary grammar school and sixth form in the North-West of England. Participants were identified by the EP commissioning the work as they already had a professional relationship due to being employed by the same wider multi-academy trust. Participants were invited to participate via e-mail (Appendix 1) and were subsequently sent a ‘participant information sheet’ (Appendix 2), a consent form (Appendix 3), and the interview schedule (Appendix 4) in advance of data collection. This allowed participants to consider whether they wanted to take part in the research.

Data Gathering Methods
As this research was exploratory in nature, semi-structured interviews were used to gather rich, qualitative data for both RQ1 and RQ2. Semi-structured interviews allowed for the views of stakeholders who had been involved in developing a support model for autistic females to be explored. This data gathering method permitted additional, unplanned questions to be asked and for modification of initial questions depending on the participant’s responses. The interviews were conducted over an online communication platform, recorded using the platform software. During the interviews, the interviewer made notes around general thoughts and feelings surrounding the responses given by participants and these were included in the reflective journal. Written consent was obtained for audio recording and recordings were transcribed using an approved transcriber to begin the process of TA (Appendices 5 and 6).

The interview schedule was developed with consideration of the research questions, relevant literature and guidance on how to conduct an interview (Cohen et al., 2019; see Appendix 4). It allowed for key questions to be addressed consistently across both participants, whilst also allowing for the exploration of topics which arose independently. On reflection, a ‘positioning’ interview with other staff or EPs involved in supporting autistic females may have given the schedule face validity. Also, due to the small sample size, paired depth interviews may have elicited more detailed information within a collaborative dyad. Nevertheless, individual semi-structured interviews were found to be flexible and adaptable and allowed for “rich and highly illuminating material” to be gathered (Robson & McCarten, 2016, p. 286).
Data Analysis Methods

The interviews were recorded through an online platform and transcribed verbatim. An inductive-deductive hybrid approach of TA was adopted where themes were identified from the raw data, facilitating inductive coding, and previous literature and RQs were integral to the process of deductive coding (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The data generated by the interviews was analysed using an adapted version of Braun and Clarke’s (2006; 2019) six-phase framework; a method referred to as ‘codebook TA’, with ‘reflexive TA’ remaining as the underlying philosophy (Braun, Clarke, Hayfield & Terry, 2019). The analysis applied the data-driven inductive approach from Boyatzis (1998) and the deductive method outlined by Crabtree and Miller (1999) (see Figure 1).

Semantic analysis, rather than latent analysis, was also utilised as the researcher was not looking for anything beyond what a participant said; patterns were identified explicitly from the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006; 2019).

Figure 1: Stages undertaken to code the data (adapted from Boyatzis, 1998, and Crabtree & Miller, 1999).

Stage 1: Developing the RQs to inform the coding process

A coding template was developed a priori based on the RQs and existing literature. A rough content analysis of pre-existing models allowed the generation of RQs and subsequent interview questions and prompts (see Appendix 7 for deductive codes). The RQs were used to inform categorisation of themes during data analysis.

Stage 2: Testing the reliability of RQs

The research supervisor was invited to look over the codes generated from the literature and reliability was agreed with no modifications required.
Stage 3: Summarising the data and identifying initial themes

The researcher immersed themselves in the data by checking transcripts for accuracy against the original audio recordings and with ‘repeated reading’ of the transcripts before preliminary, summative descriptions were made (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 87). The written data was then conceptualised line by line, subsequently allowing for several themes to materialise (see Appendices 5 and 6).

Stage 4: Applying the template of RQs and additional codes

The analysis of text was guided by the RQs and the original deductive codes with the intent of grouping meaningful units of text (Crabtree & Miller, 1999; appendix 7). In addition, inductive codes were assigned to segments of data that described a new theme, adding greater depth to the exploration of the RQs (Boyatzis, 1998; appendix 7).

Stage 5: Connecting the codes and identifying themes

This involved discovering themes and patterns across the two sets of data, clustered under headings that directly related to the RQs. Codes were continuously modified until they demonstrated homogeneity and initial thematic maps were created (see Appendix 8).

Stage 6: Corroborating and legitimising coded themes

In order to corroborate themes, the previous stages were revisited and closely scrutinised to ensure that they were representative of the initial data. This helped to reduce subjectivity, controlling for any unintentional “seeing” of data that the researcher might have expected to find (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). This iterative process of further reviewing the themes (see Appendix 9), allowed five global themes to be identified for RQ1 and four for RQ2; displayed visually through finalised thematic maps (Appendix 10). Thematic maps were legitimised further by the participants themselves who were invited to carry out member- checking. Applying reflexive TA, the researcher viewed the phase of writing up the findings as the final stage of analysis, thus, revisions were made to the contents of themes and the names of sub-themes (Braun et al., 2019).
Robson and McCarten (2016) state the benefits of keeping a research journal, thus, a reflective journal was used to document thoughts and feelings. Although this was not documented within the findings of the study, the researcher found this invaluable in terms of facilitating the reflexive process. An example of a reflection was in terms of qualitative approaches to analysis, such as TA versus interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). The particularly subjective phenomenological and idiographic stance of IPA was considered less suited to the exploratory aims of the current research study; thus, TA was adopted which also linked well with the epistemological standpoint of critical realism (Braun and Clarke, 2019; 2020).

Quality Assurance
Thematic maps were returned to participants by email to check for accuracy and ensure they reflected their experiences, reducing subjectivity and increasing the validity of the coded themes.

In addition, inter-coder reliability checks of codes were performed whereby the research supervisor was provided with a random sample containing 25% of each transcript. The absence or presence of deductive codes within the transcripts were checked between the researcher and supervisor to ensure consistency. In the first instance, the percentage agreement between colleagues was calculated at 66%. This was viewed within a critical realist perspective where differences in coding were deemed as evidence that numerous realities are possible. Post- moderation, the coding agreement was 100% with the researcher applying this process to further refine codes throughout the transcripts during the next phase of data analysis.

Inter-coder checking of themes was also conducted by the research supervisor via on online platform. A sample of the researcher’s initial thematic analysis was shared on the screen and discussed with the supervisor who either agreed with the themes or made suggestions for amendments. For example, the sub-theme of ‘provision’ was deemed to be more appropriately labelled as ‘tiered provision’ in order to encapsulate the meaning of the codes. Reflexivity was adopted throughout the research process to avoid potential bias; the researcher kept a reflective account to record modifications from earlier intentions and the reasons behind decisions made. This process also allowed for reflections related to how the
researcher may have influenced results at each stage including the design phase, conducting of interviews and data analysis and interpretation (Robson & McCarten, 2016).

Critique of Method
One limitation of the methodology was the limited sample-size of just two participants obtained through convenience-purposive sampling. The EP worked in a multi-academy trust so the breadth of support offered to schools may not be representative of EPs working in a local authority, for example. The VP worked in an academically selective all-girls grammar school, thus findings of effective support related to autistic girls within this context may not extrapolate to mixed-sex mainstream comprehensive schools. Bias could have been reduced in the sampling method if all staff at the school had been given an equal chance of participating.

A common criticism of qualitative methodology such as this is that the researchers’ subjective views could compromise the validity of the interview and TA process. Attempts to avoid this involved careful consideration of the interview schedule; checks were carried out by the thesis supervisor to consider whether the questions were suitably addressing the research questions. Furthermore, the TA method in the present research utilised a coding template which has been criticised as potentially limiting the flexibility and engagement central to the practice of qualitative research (Braun et al., 2019). However, a hybrid approach allowed for inductive coding and reflexivity underpinned the whole process with themes also generated from the data.

It is possible that the author’s previous role supporting autistic females in a mainstream setting is reflected in the interpretation of the data. Although attempts were made to enhance the objectivity of the analysis, as coded data themes were subjected to reliability checks with the supervisor, perspectives from others with differing expertise were not obtained.
## Table 1: Time-line and time budget

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Completed By</th>
<th>Time Budget</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preparation</strong></td>
<td>Discuss Assignment 1 with fieldwork supervisor</td>
<td>8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; December 2020</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discuss interview schedule with fieldwork supervisor</td>
<td>17&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; December 2020</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion with link EP and fieldwork supervisor: participant recruitment, data collection</td>
<td>January 2021</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion with fieldwork supervisor and school</td>
<td>January 2021</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complete and Submit A1P</td>
<td>25&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; January 2021</td>
<td>3 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complete and submit ethics application</td>
<td>12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; February 2021</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Send invitation email to prospective participants with the research information sheet, informed consent forms and the interview discussion points attached (after ethical approval granted)</td>
<td>February 2021</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participants return consent forms</td>
<td>February 2021</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arrange convenient date for interviews</td>
<td>February 2021</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data Collection</strong></td>
<td>Conduct interview with participants (online)</td>
<td>February - March 2021</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data Analysis</strong></td>
<td>Send interviews to university approved transcription service / researcher transcribe interviews</td>
<td>March – April 2021</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Operational Risk Analysis

#### Table 2: Operational risk analysis of the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk</th>
<th>Level of risk</th>
<th>Contingency Plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties in recruiting and gaining informed consent from participants.</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>It is intended that two interviews will take place, one with an EP and one with a staff member at a school. This is a small-scale study so one interview would be appropriate if recruitment difficulties arise. An alternative EP and staff member could be recruited; time has been allocated in case this situation arises.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants could potentially withdraw consent before or during the data collection process; or retrospectively.</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>By using purposive sampling, it is hoped that the participants will be motivated to take part. Participants will also be provided with materials before the interviews, so they are clear on what the research is about and the expectations of their participation. As the interview will be online, it should be easier to find a convenient time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology issues during the online interviews.</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Interviews will take place on Zoom but a Google Teams link will also be created as a back-up. Contingency time will be allocated in case the first scheduled interview experiences problems with technology. In addition to the above, the interviews will be recorded both through the online platform (voice recording</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Non-attendance to interview due to illness or work commitments changing (in light of C19).

Low

Interviews will be scheduled early to allow time for them to be rearranged.

**Ethics**

This study was submitted for approval by the UoM Ethical Review Manager (ERM) system and ethical approval was granted with the research being considered low risk (see Appendix 11). This research study adhered to guidelines outlined in the British Psychological Society’s ‘Code of Human Research Ethics’ (2014), supplemented by ‘Ethics Guidelines for Internet-mediated Research’ (BPS, 2017) and the University of Manchester Guidance on Research Activity in the COVID-19 Environment (2020).

Once approval was granted, participants were provided with a participant information sheet containing a clear overview about the nature and the purpose of the research (Appendix 2). Despite the research being conducted remotely, participants were required to sign and return a consent form (Appendix 3). Participants were regularly reminded of their right to withdraw, during the interviews and retrospectively.

Confidentiality was assured both in the information sheets and at the start of the interview. Names were removed from the transcribed data and the final research paper, with quotes referred to as relating to the VP (Vice Principle) or EP (Educational Psychologist), to ensure anonymity.
4. Findings

Overview
Ninety-two codes emerged from the two interview transcripts; fourteen of which were deductive codes generated *a priori* from the existing literature with seventy-eight codes generated inductively from the data (see appendix 7). Following an iterative process, codes were organised into five themes with thirteen subthemes for RQ1 and four themes with ten subthemes for RQ2. To avoid merely describing the data, findings will be presented as analytic narratives with embedded extracts to present arguments in relation to the RQs; with the interpretation of the data also represented visually in thematic maps (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Summary of the findings

Figure 2: Thematic Map of Themes and Sub-themes for RQ1

**Autism-Friendly Approaches**

This global theme discusses whole-school pedagogical and environmental approaches that are evidence-informed and adapted to meet the needs of autistic young people. Three subthemes were identified within this theme: ‘tiered provision’, ‘physical environment’ and ‘flexibility and adaptability’.
Tiered Provision

Both participants discussed the effectiveness of universal and individualised provision already in place to support autistic females. Utilising universal strategies was considered as important by the Educational Psychologist (EP) who said, “it’s often the case, isn’t it, you put things in place to help…autistic pupils, but then it’s beneficial for everybody.” Referring to a specific example of a universal pedagogical strategy used to support autistic females the Vice Principal (VP) explained, “...our approach to questioning in school is a hands-down approach, so we don’t encourage students to put their hands up and we moved to that a few years ago... as direct questioning... causes them a great deal of anxiety”.

The VP explained that individualised approaches can help autistic females to “flourish”:

“...with one student...we actually took her to each of the rooms... we went and then escorted her to her next room...we had a map made for her that showed her the quickest way to get to the toilets because that was an issue for her...from each classroom...it just worked really well for her...”

In addition, the VP reported that the school trials personalised strategies such as a “timed time-out”, explaining, “The timer gets set for fifteen minutes, the student has fifteen minutes...to...remove themselves from the noise and the light and everything else...” This was deemed to be effective in supporting sensory overload and supporting girls with high anxiety particularly within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Physical Environment

A further sub-theme related to autism-friendly approaches was the adapted physical environment. For example, quiet spaces had been developed to support autistic females when feeling overwhelmed. The VP said, “I think the wellbeing spaces are really appreciated by the students... they can have these time out cards...and... they can come and use these spaces...when they need to.”

Furthermore, where the environment could not be adapted, such as busy corridors during lesson transitions, the girls were permitted to use approaches that worked for them. The VP explained, “...we’ve got students who will wear... ear defenders... as they’re walking round the corridors because the noise levels...it’s too much for them.”
Flexibility and Adaptability

The importance of flexibility and adaptability of autism-friendly provision was very apparent for individualised provision. For example, the use of time out cards, well-being spaces, the use of ear defenders in corridors and check-ins with a key person. The VP said, “...because what works for one doesn’t necessarily work for another (student)”. The EP also stated, “we might have general approaches that we know are effective for people with autism, but they might need tweaking, they might need adapting...”.

Furthermore, at an organisational level the EP highlighted the importance of “flexibility of school staff” and “having a clear strategy and model that’s... evidence informed but we adapt it for our context...”.

Whole-School Buy-in

This global theme refers to whole-school engagement with three sub-themes identified as: ‘ethos and policies’, ‘collaboration’ and ‘advocacy’.

The VP spoke about staff engagement, “...they want to get it right... They don’t want to be letting young people down or making young people feel worse...if they’re struggling at school.”

Ethos and Policies

One aspect of ethos and policies that was considered as particularly effective was the trust-wide strategy and ‘minimum offer of support’. This was described by the EP to include four main areas of provision including “an access to learning plan”. The EP said, “every student with a diagnosis should have...somebody in school... named as their key person to go to.” In addition, “options of alternative provision at unstructured times...” and, “…a time-out pass or to have access to a quiet or safe space...” were explained to be successful aspects of the policy.

The VP explained:

“... they have time out cards that they can show to their teacher...and then they just come out and they come down to the pastoral room and they know that...they can get a cup of tea, they can sit quietly, they can do some colouring in, they can do a jigsaw.”
Collaboration

It was clear from the interview data that collaboration was seen as key in order to develop effective strategies for autistic females; this involved the EP and staff working together as well as working with the young person and their parent/carers. This was evident at an organisational level where the VP explained, “we’ve just started a staff working group around autism...So we’ve got a team of about...I’d say about twenty-seven staff and that’s really good because it’s a mixture of teaching staff and associate staff...”. Furthermore, the EP said, “…we had teachers, we had a librarian, we had admin staff and I think that’s really important as well... making sure...everybody is involved across an organisation...is key.” The EP noted the importance of listening and obtaining the views of others, “I think it’s important to listen and not just impose our own agenda on things all the time”.

The EP also highlighted the importance of collaboration at an individual and group level where the school have “case conferences” or “group feedback” where “everyone that teaches that young person is invited” leading to a “discussion around what’s working in different classes and...drawing out ideas and strategies.”

Finally, collaboration with the family was echoed in the narrative of the VP, “I think it is important to liaise with the child and the parents about...what is going to best meet their needs whilst they’re in school.”

Advocacy

A final sub-theme related to whole-school buy-in was advocacy; one aspect of this was advocacy from a senior leader. The EP said, “… I think there’s something about buy-in from SLT...and from the head or principal in a school...I think it’s absolutely essential that they are on board with it, and they understand why it’s important…” and, “having that buy-in right from the top of the school just makes it easier…”

The VP referred to a specific example of advocacy from the principal through home communication, “...[principal] wrote home about the autism screening that we were getting involved in and why she felt that was important and why as a school we thought that was important...”
Awareness Raising

The global theme of awareness raising included three sub-themes: ‘staff training and awareness’, ‘peer awareness raising’ and ‘parent/ carer awareness raising’.

Data revealed that the benefits of raising awareness of autism in girls were twofold; equipping people with skills to recognise and support autistic females whilst also promoting an inclusive ethos.

Staff Training and Awareness

The training delivered by EPs was considered as effective as it targeted all staff members and ensured teaching and non-teaching staff were equipped to support autistic females. This was demonstrated in an extract from the EP:

“...we do whole staff...awareness raising and training... we will try and train every single member of staff, whether it’s teaching staff, learning mentors, office staff... the cooks, lunchtime organisers...we try and get them to a... basic level of awareness around autism...”

The EP continued to explain, “...and then we’d further train other... key members of staff...in more depth.” An illustrative example of this was given as pastoral staff, “...there’s a head of year and other pastoral staff who are linked and...they’ve all had training around autism in girls, what it looks like, how to support...”, with pastoral support being described as “hugely important” by the EP.

A narrative from the VP also revealed the importance of training and raising awareness of non-teaching staff within the school:

“Obviously associate staff we’ve slightly tweaked (the training) because of course they wouldn’t...necessarily come across the same issues as we would in the classroom, but they would come across the issues... if somebody’s upset at reception and can’t... articulate what’s the problem... how do they manage that? Or somebody in the lunchtime queue is really struggling with the noise and is getting quite upset and anxious, how do they manage that?”
Peer Awareness Raising

Respondents discussed the benefits of peer awareness raising as a method of encouraging a sense of belonging. Psychoeducation, delivered through assemblies, was considered as important and complimentary to enhancing the knowledge of staff, with the VP stating:

“I did an assembly ...to give a bit more knowledge to students because I think those are the two things, aren’t they, we need to...make sure that our staff are knowledgeable so that they can respond appropriately. But we also need to make sure our student body is knowledgeable so that they can understand and respond appropriately...”.

This was also captured by the EP who described the “skilling up and increasing the knowledge of the peer group” as a “helpful tool” to ensure autistic girls “feel included”.

Parent/ Carer Awareness Raising

Finally, within this theme, the VP felt that ‘masking’ caused many issues for parents/carers saying, “...we often find that students cope...they get home and then at home is where their difficulties really present and their parents struggle...”. Due to this, the VP felt that it was important to educate parents in how autism presents in females and to reduce the stigma of a diagnosis. The VP described a letter that was sent home to parent/carers to explain the benefits of a diagnosis, “...we’re trying to say, ‘Nothing will happen, except your child will have better support...in school and will probably come home and be better able to cope.’”

Identification and Screening

Two sub-themes were identified within this theme: ‘approaches to identification and screening’ and ‘pre-diagnosis support’.

Approaches to Identification and Screening

Both participants described a screening tool developed by EPs as a successful method of identifying autism in girls, to inform appropriate provision. The VP explained that they used the tool for considering whether a young person needed a referral to the EPs, explaining, “...that would be our starting point really...the autism screening to see if...they do meet any of those thresholds...”
The EP also referred to the success of the screening protocol, as “autistic girls weren’t getting picked up”. The EP reported, “…we’ve trained up all staff on what to look for and we’ve got… a really clear… step-by-step guide where all pastoral staff have been trained in… what to look for…how to use it…”

In addition, the EP explained that a self-referral system for the EP service introduced for young people able to give consent, was leading to diagnosis and thus, more suitable strategies:

“…we’ve had quite a lot of referrals in, and it tends to…initially look like it’s going to be a piece of therapeutic casework around…mental health, emotional wellbeing but then as we get to know those…young people and we’re… working with them, we start noticing trends and patterns and…quite frequently that’s led to referral onto the autism pathway and a subsequent diagnosis.”

Pre-diagnosis Support

A further sub-theme within identification and screening was pre-diagnosis support. Through the narratives of the VP, it became apparent that due to the screening protocol, those with suspected undiagnosed autism could be supported well at school. The VP said, “…I think we’ve got some young people who… get strategies put in place…before they have a diagnosis which is absolutely fine because… we want to prevent the escalation to mental health difficulties when they’re older…”. The VP also gave an illustrative example of how the school supported potentially undiagnosed girls through the Covid-19 lockdowns, “…we said to them all… ‘You don’t meet the definition as supplied by the DfE for vulnerable, however, in our…definition, you are very welcome to come into school to maintain some kind of routine and structure’.”

External Agency Support

The global theme of external agency support encompassed two sub-themes, ‘EP support’ and ‘other agencies’.

EP Support

It was clear from the narratives provided by both respondents that the EPs were able to offer invaluable support across individual, group and systemic levels.
At a systemic, preventative level the EP explained the usefulness of having “our own model” and “being able to regularly revisit that as a group”. In addition, the EP discussed “…a cluster model where…there’s…our little team in the middle which is… me as an EP, X as the specialist outreach teacher…and then we’ve got loads and loads of autism champions…”. The VP also discussed organisational support, saying, “…the…educational psychologists delivered training and they put together this screening pack that we could use for students…and they deliver training to all the heads of year and the pastoral team.”

Where more targeted and individualised support was required, the VP stated:

“where we find that strategies aren’t working…we’d do an anonymised…drop-in… and explain, ‘This is the situation we’re in, these are the strategies we’ve tried, is there anything else you could suggest?’ You know and get some more kind of expertise or input on that and that’s one way that we use the educational psychologist.”

The EP also referred to individual “casework” and “case conferences” which involved a group working together to “support staff with strategies” for specific students.

Other Agencies

In terms of other agencies, the VP discussed local and national mental health support available for supporting autistic girls such as “Kooth” and “Shout”. Although considered as effective for supporting the mental health challenges often faced by autistic females, more specific external support around autism was seen as a gap in provision and as such, is discussed later in this chapter.
Develop Group Interventions

The main gap in provision highlighted by both participants was pertaining to a lack of group interventions; three sub-themes were identified as: ‘group interventions’, ‘peer group networks’ and ‘parent/carer support groups’.

Group Interventions

The EP provided many narratives relating to the future development of targeted support for autistic girls, such as group interventions. The EP reflected, “I think there’s something around group interventions... I think they’d be really powerful... tool and... support mechanism for schools to bring in...”. It was felt that groups to support “social skills”, “the hidden curriculum” and “managing periods and feminine hygiene” would be the most useful.

The EP also felt that if girls had particular ‘special interests’, this could be fostered by the school, “... having space to talk about... these things they’re really passionate about (special interests) in a safe way with other... both autistic, non-autistic... peers and maybe with staff, I think could be really, really great.”
Peer Group Networks

In terms of developing a sense of belonging and promoting inclusivity the EP stated that “peer group networks” with autistic girls “having a space to support each other” without the pressures of trying to blend in with others was a potential further development. The EP said:

“...that group intervention where these autistic girls can know that other people are finding the same things tricky and having the similar experiences, I think can be so...powerful because a lot of the autistic girls I’ve worked with feel like they’re the only one going through that.”

Parent/Carer Support Groups

Creating parent/ carer support groups was also identified as a potential future development with the EP explaining: “I know in one of the primary schools, the SENCO led on...a parent group for parents of children with autism and... they came together and talked about their experiences and it was...I think it was just helpful to know...other people are experiencing similar situations.”

Continue to Develop Autism-Friendly Approaches

Participants referred to a main area for development as continuing to develop autism-friendly approaches. Four sub-themes were identified within this global theme: ‘tiered provision’, ‘gaining the views of autistic females’, ‘primary to secondary transition’ and ‘external agencies’.

Tiered Provision

Developing a tiered model of provision was seen as an important future development to support girls in school in the hope that it would “improve what happens when they get home” (VP). The EP also felt tiered support could be developed, “…being really clear about...what good universal provision is for autistic females and also, looking at that more targeted or specialist support when it’s needed”. One main area relating to this was creating resources applicable to the high achieving cohort within this context. The EP said, “…developing... a bank of appropriate resources and materials... for different situations...would be helpful”, with an example given around “accepting diagnosis”.

The staff working group was seen as a potential mechanism for developing universal strategies, with the EP stating, “...one of the main aims of that working party is to... come up with general approaches and looking at really positive support and provision that can be done...day-to-day...”

**Gaining the Views of Autistic Females**
A second sub-theme related to developing autism-friendly approaches was involving autistic girls in the planning and decisions around the support they are offered, gaining their views on tiered provision. Also, ensuring autistic representation within student groups such as the school council. The VP said, “I think there’s more we could do with our student body. Our students are the greatest asset...” and “...we need students to come forward to that (working party)... I think they’d be brilliant...”.

To corroborate this further, the EP stated:

“I think that’s something we need to develop more...involving autistic students...more in these interventions and these decisions. And maybe looking at how we can bring in their views and all their strengths and skills into different aspects of school life that are...ongoing, so things like school council, you know, is there an autistic representative there? Or do they have a voice?”

This was seen as having the potential to be extremely successful in supporting autistic females with the EP saying, “...if we can get the views of... autistic people and make sure that’s then informing what we do, then it’s going to have a positive impact on more autistic...girls at the school...”

**Primary to Secondary Transition**
A further sub-theme for developing provision was highlighted by the VP who felt that more could be done to support autistic girls with the transition from primary school:

“...we haven’t done much with our feeder primaries, but it is an area we need to look at. We’ve got fifty-three feeder primary schools, so it’s quite a big piece of work, but it is certainly something, you know, that we...it’s in our minds about what...how do we do that?”
External Agencies

Finally, within this theme, the VP felt that more support from external agencies, other than the EP could be an area for development saying, “we have lots of links to different...agencies around mental health but not specifically around autism.” She explained that support from other agencies might ensure more individualised EP time, “…if we could...get some more advice elsewhere as well... so that we ensure that more students are getting one-to-one support...”.

Further Awareness Raising

Within this global theme, the VP felt that further awareness raising could lead to reduced stigma, stating, “…that’s why we want students, parents and teachers to... have the knowledge to understand how to best support that (autism in girls).” Thus, related codes were grouped into three sub-themes: ‘staff training and awareness’, ‘peer awareness raising’ and ‘parent/carer awareness raising’.

Staff Training and Awareness

Although staff were considered to be at a basic level of awareness, training was an area that was identified as having the potential to become more sophisticated with the EP advocating for a workshop style approach describing it as, “facilitatory... (a) process for sharing knowledge and problem-solving.” The EP also felt that it was important to offer peer support to teachers saying a potential role was, “…keeping them (teachers) up to speed with developments and research...”. In addition, the VP stated, “I think there’s definitely a need for more training... we’re looking at having some autism champions in school, so staff autism champions and they would go on to have... further training because they would be our ‘go to’ people.”

Peer Awareness Raising

With reference to peer awareness raising, both the VP and EP stated that a powerful future development could be if autistic girls were given the opportunity to share their lived experiences with their peers. The VP said, “…this one student said she would contribute to assemblies and I just think what is more powerful than one of your peers talking to you about their own experiences?”. Furthermore, the EP stated, “… the actual experience of somebody who’s lived it...there’s nothing better than that, in my mind anyway”.

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Parent/ Carer Awareness Raising

The VP suggested that more awareness raising with parents/ carers could be beneficial, “...I think that’s another piece of work still for us to keep working on...with our parents as well that actually, having a diagnosis...is not an issue...”. It was felt that EPs could contribute to this through systemic work:

“...at the start of every year, we have an... information evening... we’ve got a whole talk from...[EP]... he does a whole talk around wellbeing and what parents can do to support young people’s wellbeing in school and I think we need to put stuff in around autism in that ...so the notion that we are...that’s part of our ethos and we’re an autism friendly school is shared with parents...”(VP).

Earlier Identification and Screening

The final global theme related to the importance of embedding and evaluating the screening protocol to ensure earlier identification and support for autistic females. The EP explained, “... I think the other thing, the big thing, is embedding that screening and identification protocol and...seeing how it works, reviewing it, thinking...what do we need to do differently?” The pandemic was identified as a reason for being unable to evaluate the effectiveness of the measure; nevertheless, earlier identification of autism in girls was considered a key area of systemic support offered by the EPs to enable students to access support.
5. Discussion
This research explored professionals’ views of effective provision for autistic females developed at a high school in the North-West of England. It also set out to explore professionals’ ideas about how the support for autistic females could be developed further.

The findings presented above will now be interpreted and discussed in relation to the study’s research questions and previously outlined, extant literature. A new model of support is tentatively recommended following a synthesis of pre-existing models, research and the findings from the present study. This chapter will further consider the study’s implications for professional practice, its limitations, and possible directions for further research.

A pertinent finding in relation to the first research question (What provision do professionals consider to be effective in supporting autistic females in one high school in the North-West of England?) suggested the importance of adopting flexible, autism-friendly strategies at universal, targeted and individualised levels. Tiered levels of provision, with early screening procedures, were identified as effective in supporting autistic females within narratives obtained from both respondents. Professionals in the present study also identified a school working party with responsibility for developing and reviewing strategies as a successful mechanism. Corresponding findings were demonstrated in previous research by Magyar and Pandolfi (2012) who successfully implemented a tiered model of support for autistic students with co-occurring emotional disorders (ED) and behavioural issues, in an elementary school in the USA. Reflecting current findings, Magyar and Pandolfi (2012) also reported the success of having a working party responsible for implementing and developing the model.

A further prominent finding related to developing ethos, policy and provision though a cluster model of autism champions consisting of professionals and staff who represented all areas of the school community. This corresponds to the ‘saturation model’ of support proposed by Morewood et al. (2011) which places an ‘agent of change’ at the centre who is responsible for embedding autism understanding and provision into policy and practice. Other aspects of the ‘saturation model’ were also mirrored in the present findings, namely around the flexible, personalised provision highlighted within the ‘minimum offer’ policy. For example, an individualised learning plan, access to a ‘time-out pass’, ‘safe space’ and ‘key person’. This is consistent with the literature suggesting that some aspects of provision developed for all young people with autism, can be supportive for autistic females (Tomlinson et al., 2019).
Existing literature has demonstrated the need for training of school staff to recognise autism in girls, challenging the idea that females cannot have ASC (Gray et al., 2021; NASEN, 2016). Furthermore, other research has recommended that specialised training for staff may lead to more effective levels of personalised support (Tomlinson et al., 2019). This is congruent with the current study which found that training and raising the awareness of all staff within the school community ensured that autistic females were supported in all areas of the school. For example, narratives from respondents referred to staff being able to support autistic females in the school reception, on corridors and in the dining hall at lunchtime. Closely linked to this was the importance of raising awareness of how autism presents in females with the peer group. The present study identified psychoeducation through assemblies as particularly effective methods. Previous research purports that increasing peer understanding can improve social interactions and perceived sense of belonging, thus promoting inclusivity (Myles et al., 2019). This has been found to be particularly important in secondary mainstream settings where relationships become more complex; particularly where females may have undiagnosed autism (Morewood et al., 2019).

In addition, previous literature has suggested the need for a collaborative, sensitive screening process for identifying the female presentation of ASC (O’Hagan & Bond, 2019). This concurs with the present study which found that utilising a self-referral system to the EP service and adopting a screening protocol sensitive to identifying autism in females can be very effective approaches. Other research has also found that autistic girls can go unnoticed by school staff, increasing their vulnerability and decreasing the likelihood they will receive appropriate intervention (Dean et al., 2017). The present study highlighted the importance of implementing strategies for girls with suspected undiagnosed autism.

Existing research revealed that autistic girls would benefit from individual and whole school approaches to promoting good mental health and inter-disciplinary collaboration to address mental health needs (Tomlinson et al., 2019). This was exemplified as effective provision within current findings; both internally through student well-being ambassadors and through local and national external agency support, including the EPs.

The most prominent finding relating to the second research question (What do professionals consider to be areas for further development in supporting autistic females in one high school in the North-West of England?) was the need to develop group interventions, ensuring there
is an autistic voice in the development and reviewing of future provision. This corresponds with findings from previous research into group interventions for autistic females. For example, O’Hagan (2020) reported that schools often fail to incorporate group interventions for autistic girls into their support plans. Present literature recommends that schools should develop specific support around puberty for autistic adolescents (Cummins et al., 2020; Steward et al., 2018), as well as interventions around gender identity, emotional well-being and staying safe (Morewood et al., 2019) and navigating the hidden curriculum (Gould and Ashton-Smith, 2011; O’Hagan, 2020). The EP discussed groups pertaining to these examples, explaining what a powerful mechanism they could be for supporting autistic girls at high school. Further, the importance of involving autistic females in the planning and implementation of any future interventions and support strategies was unanimously reported by both professionals. Indeed, Morewood et al. (2019) adapted the ‘saturation model’ to tailor it to the specific needs of autistic girls in mainstream high school, acknowledging that incorporating the voice of autistic females was an area for future focus.

Moreover, both professionals in this research reported that parents/carers are likely to experience significant challenges with their daughters at home, perhaps due to autistic girls masking their difficulties all day at school; a finding consistent with the literature (Tomlinson et al., 2019). As such, a further area for development was identified by the EP as parent/carers support groups where they can share experiences and offer each other practical advice; perhaps leading to improved emotional well-being.

The need for more staff training and staff, peer and parent awareness raising was clearly stated by both respondents in the findings. This is congruent with findings from other studies where it has been found that a diagnosis was not necessarily enough to guarantee support for autistic female school-refusers who were re-integrating back into the school environment, perhaps highlighting a need to increase teacher understanding of how to support autism in girls (O’Hagan, 2020). In addition, Morewood et al. (2019) state that peer awareness raising can reduce the risk of isolation in autistic females with staff training promoting the likelihood of autistic females obtaining appropriate support. In the ‘saturation model’, ‘autism awareness and understanding’ is said to ‘saturate’ and ‘permeate’ every aspect of the school community (Morewood et al., 2011).
Developing tiered support further so it specifically meets the needs of autistic females, as well as embedding the screening and identification protocol were other important findings within the present study. For example, the EP felt that developing an evidence-informed bank of resources, accessible for autistic females would be beneficial for supporting needs such as accepting a diagnosis. This corresponds to existing literature from the USA which has demonstrated that a multi-tiered problem-solving model of support involving an early screening measure and a ‘toolbox’ of evidence-based interventions for each tier can support autistic young people with emotional disorders in elementary schools (Magyar and Pandolfi, 2012).

In sum, aforementioned pre-existing models were developed for both males and females (e.g. Morewood et al., 2011; Magyar & Pandolfi, 2012), or for autistic girls facing school exclusion or EBSA (O’Hagan, 2020; Sproston et al., 2017). As discussed previously, whilst some elements of these models would be successful at supporting some of the needs of females with autism, there is a necessity for female specific models with an ‘extra layer’ of support (Morewood et al., 2019; Tomlinson et al., 2019). Synthesising previous models and research pertaining to autism in women in girls, and the findings from this study, an updated model for supporting autistic females in high school is presented below.
Limitations of the Current Research

Regarding limitations to the current study, reliability and validity was compromised by a number of factors. Firstly, the study had a small sample size making it difficult to triangulate some of the themes in the TA. However, if this is viewed within reflexive TA, Braun and Clarke (2021) argue that theme frequency counts should be avoided, as reflexive TA does not equate frequency with importance. In addition, this can be viewed within the epistemological position of critical realism; the different realities of the participants resulted in some differing perspectives. Nevertheless, a larger sample size would have potentially increased the amount of evidence for the themes, thus increasing validity. A further factor relates to the context of the research being an academically selective, all-girls school containing a very able and articulate cohort of students. The EPs who had developed the provision for autistic females worked within a multi-academy trust where there may be more opportunity for systemic, preventative work. As such, findings may not generalise to a mixed-sex, mainstream setting, supported by a local authority educational psychology service.
Implications for Professional Practice

Despite the aforementioned limitations, the present study highlighted several implications for professional practice. Magyar and Pandolfi (2012) described how empirically-based autism-specific assessment can be embedded within a multi-tiered support model. Further, the move to traded services may mean autistic girls are not referred for EP support until they present with externalising behaviour (O’Hagan & Bond, 2019). The current research would suggest that EPs are well placed to work systemically and preventatively with schools to support them with screening for autism in girls and developing tiered provision which is specific to their needs. Furthermore, professionals within this research suggested that parent/carer support groups and awareness raising for parents can be successful in supporting autistic girls; this could be explored and developed within EP practice.

Implications for Future Research

In terms of implications for future research, this study highlighted a methodological knowledge gap pertaining to the involvement of autistic female students in the development of models of autism support. Furthermore, as this research was conducted in a high achieving girls’ secondary grammar school, a contextual knowledge gap exists and it would be beneficial to explore the applicability and utility of the proposed model within other local authorities within the UK, as well as international settings such as the USA. Consequently, future participatory action research with autistic females, incorporating the views of other stakeholders from different settings would be recommended to address the methodological and contextual knowledge gaps within the research.
6. References


Exploring a Model of Support for Autistic Females

Email for participant recruitment

Dear ........

My name is Katie Ayirebi. I am first year trainee Educational Psychologist on the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology at Manchester University. I am hoping to carry out a small-scale research project that aims to explore your views and experiences around supporting autistic females in a high school setting. The main research questions, which will form our discussion are:

- What provision do professionals consider to be effective in supporting autistic females in one high school in the North-West of England?
- What do professionals consider to be areas for further development in supporting autistic females in one high school in the North-West of England?

I intend to conduct an individual meeting with yourself, and a separate interview with another participant (EP/ staff member), over an online communication platform, such as Zoom, at a mutually convenient time. Interviews will be audio recorded and transcripts will be analysed using thematic analysis to identify themes. All data will be anonymised and some of your anonymised quotations may be used in a report I submit to the university as part of my course work.

Please also find attached to this e-mail, the following documentation:

- Participant Information Sheet
- Consent form
- Provisional interview questions.

Many thanks for taking the time to read this email.

Best wishes,
Katie Ayirebi

(Trainee Educational Psychologist- University of Manchester)
Appendix 7.2 Participant Information Sheet

Exploring a Model of Support for Autistic Females: A Thematic Analysis

Participant Information Sheet (PIS)

You are being invited to take part in a research study exploring your views on supporting autistic females in a high school setting, which will inform my professional doctorate thesis. Before you decide whether to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully before deciding whether to take part and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Thank you for taking the time to read this.

About the research

➢ Who will conduct the research?
Katie Ayirebi (Trainee Educational Psychologist)
School of Environment, Education and Development (SEED)
Ellen Wilkinson Building,
Oxford Road,
Manchester,
M13 9PL.

➢ What is the purpose of the research?
To gather your views and experiences on supporting autistic females in a high school setting. This will hopefully help me to generate some possible themes that will inform my thesis research.

I am interested in developing a model of support for autistic females and would value your views, specifically around current practice and the potential for any future developments. You have been purposively selected because of your valuable involvement in, and experience of, supporting autistic girls in schools. Your participation will hopefully provide me with a greater understanding of individual, group and whole-school approaches. I am hoping to recruit one EP and one staff member to take part in this study.

➢ Will the outcomes of the research be published?
A 10,000-word summary will be submitted to the University of Manchester as part of the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology assessment requirements. Findings may be used in future research and could contribute to research submitted for publication in a peer reviewed journal.

➢ Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Check
The researcher has undergone an appropriate level of DBS check (as determined by their School and obtained via The University of Manchester).

➢ Who has reviewed the research project?

This project has been reviewed by The University of Manchester Research Ethics Committee.

➢ Who is funding the research project?

Funding has been provided from the DfE Initial Training for Educational Psychologists bid 2020-2023 £15,950 pa bursary.

What would my involvement be?

➢ What would I be asked to do if I took part?

Once you have completed the relevant forms, you will be asked to partake in an individual interview, over an online communication platform such as Zoom. The interview will last for approximately one hour and will be prompted by stimulus material that will be sent to you a week in advance, should you choose to participate. The interview will explore your experiences of supporting autistic females, in relation to the research aims. Participants will be asked to provide consent for taking part and will have the right to withdraw at any point during the interview. The session will be recorded both online and using an encrypted audio device and stored securely.

➢ What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide that you would no longer like to participate in the study, then you can speak to the researcher at any point to inform them of your decision. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to yourself. However, it will not be possible to remove your data from the project once it has been anonymised as we will not be able to identify your specific data. This does not affect your data protection rights. If you decide not to take part you do not need to do anything further.

Audio recordings are an essential requirement to your participation in the study. Should you feel uncomfortable with the recording process at any point during the interview, you are able to request that the researcher stops recording at any time.

Data Protection and Confidentiality

➢ What information will you collect about me?

In order to participate in this research project we will need to collect information that could identify you, called "personal identifiable information". Specifically we will need to collect:

➢ Names and signatures on written consent forms
➢ Role and job title will also be collected

For audio recordings:
➢ Recordings will consist of voice only and will be obtained through individual interviews.

Your participation in this research will be recorded in Zoom and your personal data will be processed by Zoom. This may mean that your personal data is transferred to a country outside of the European Economic Area, some of which have not yet been determined by the European Commission to have an adequate level of data protection. Appropriate legal mechanisms to ensure these transfers are compliant with the UK General Data Protection Regulation are in place. The recordings will be removed from the above third party platform and stored on University of Manchester managed file storage as soon as possible following the completion of data collection.

➢ Under what legal basis are you collecting this information?

We are collecting and storing this personal identifiable information in accordance with UK data protection law which protect your rights. These state that we must have a legal basis (specific reason) for collecting your data. For this study, the specific reason is that it is “a public interest task” and “a process necessary for research purposes”.

➢ What are my rights in relation to the information you will collect about me?

You have a number of rights under data protection law regarding your personal information. For example, you can request a copy of the information we hold about you, including audio recordings.

If you would like to know more about your different rights or the way we use your personal information to ensure we follow the law, please consult our Privacy Notice for Research.

➢ Will my participation in the study be confidential and my personal identifiable information be protected?

In accordance with data protection law, The University of Manchester is the Data Controller for this project. This means that we are responsible for making sure your personal information is kept secure, confidential and used only in the way you have been told it will be used. All researchers are trained with this in mind, and your data will be looked after in the following way:

Only the study team at The University of Manchester will have access to your personal information, but they will pseudonymise it as soon as possible. Your name and any other identifying information will be removed and replaced with a random ID number. Only the research team will have access to the key that links this ID number to your personal information. In line with The University of Manchester retention policy, data will be stored for a period of five years in secure locations on the researcher’s P Drive.

As mentioned above, due to Covid-19 restrictions, your participation in this research will be recorded in Zoom and your personal data will be processed by Zoom. The recordings will be removed from the above third party platform and stored on University of Manchester managed file storage as soon as possible following the completion of data collection.

For audio recordings:

- The researcher, or a UoM third party approved transcriber, will be responsible for transcription of interview data.
- All personal identifiable information will be pseudonymised in the final transcript.
The pseudonymised transcription will be archived securely at the University of Manchester for a period of five years and then destroyed.

Only the researcher will have access to the recordings.

Please also note that individuals from The University of Manchester or regulatory authorities may need to look at the data collected for this study to make sure the project is being carried out as planned. This may involve looking at identifiable data. All individuals involved in auditing and monitoring the study will have a strict duty of confidentiality to you as a research participant.

**Potential disclosures:**

- If, during the study, we have concerns about your safety or the safety of others, we will inform your GP/care team/family member.
- If, during the study, you disclose information about misconduct/poor practice, we have a professional obligation to report this and will therefore need to inform your employer/professional body.
- If, during the study, you disclose information about any current or future illegal activities, we have a legal obligation to report this and will therefore need to inform the relevant authorities.
- Individuals from the University, the site where the research is taking place and regulatory authorities may need to review the study information for auditing and monitoring purposes or in the event of an incident.

Please also note that individuals from The University of Manchester or regulatory authorities may need to look at the data collected for this study to make sure the project is being carried out as planned. This may involve looking at identifiable data. All individuals involved in auditing and monitoring the study will have a strict duty of confidentiality to you as a research participant.

**What if I have a complaint?**

➢ **Contact details for complaints**

If you have a complaint that you wish to direct to members of the research team, please contact:

**Dr George Thomas**
Academic and Professional Tutor, Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology.
School of Environment, Education and Development (SEED),
Ellen Wilkinson Building,
The University of Manchester,
Oxford Road,
Manchester, M13 9PL.
george.thomas@manchester.ac.uk
Tel: 0161 275 3511
If you wish to make a formal complaint to someone independent of the research team or if you are not satisfied with the response you have gained from the researchers in the first instance then please contact

The Research Ethics Manager, Research Office, Christie Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL, by emailing: research.complaints@manchester.ac.uk or by telephoning 0161 275 2674.

If you wish to contact us about your data protection rights, please email dataprotection@manchester.ac.uk or write to The Information Governance Office, Christie Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, M13 9PL at the University and we will guide you through the process of exercising your rights.

You also have a right to complain to the Information Commissioner’s Office about complaints relating to your personal identifiable information Tel 0303 123 1113

Contact Details

If you have any queries about the study or if you are interested in taking part then please contact the researcher:

KATIE AYIREBI (Trainee Educational Psychologist)
School of Environment, Education and Development (SEED),
Ellen Wilkinson Building,
Oxford Road,
Manchester,
M13 9PL.

katie.ayirebi@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk
Appendix 7.3 Consent Form

Exploring a Model of Support for Autistic Females: A Thematic Analysis

Consent Form

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Initials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet <em>(Version 2, Date 11/02/2021)</em> for the above study and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to myself. I understand that it will not be possible to remove my data from the project once it has been anonymised and forms part of the data set.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I agree to take part on this basis.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 I agree to the interviews being audio recorded.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 I agree that any data collected may be included in anonymous form in publications.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 I understand that data collected during the study may be looked at by individuals from The University of Manchester or regulatory authorities, where it is relevant to my taking part in this research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my data.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 I understand that there may be instances where during the course of the research information is revealed which means the researchers will be obliged to break confidentiality and this has been explained in more detail in the information sheet.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 I consent to the personal information collected as part of this study being transferred and processed in the UK. This processing will be subject to UK data protection law.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 I agree to take part in this study.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following activities are optional, you may participate in the research without agreeing to the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Initials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9 I agree that any anonymised data collected may be made available to other researchers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I agree that the researchers may contact me in future about other research projects.

I agree that the researchers may retain my contact details in order to provide me with a summary of the findings for this study.

Data Protection

The personal information we collect and use to conduct this research will be processed in accordance with UK data protection law as explained in the Participant Information Sheet and the Privacy Notice for Research Participants.

Name of Participant   Signature   Date

Name of the person taking consent   Signature   Date

[1 copy for the participant, 1 copy for the research team (original)]
Appendix 7.4 Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule

Semi-structured interview schedule for EP and school staff

Before each interview I will introduce myself and explain the purpose of the research. I will assure confidentiality and it will be reiterated that the interviewee has the right to withdraw from the interview. The participant will be asked for their permission for the interview to be recorded. Understanding will be checked with an opportunity to ask questions.

CONTEXT/WARM-UP

1. What is your current role?
2. What is your experience so far in supporting autistic females in a high school setting?

MAIN BODY- CURRENT PRACTICE

Other terms: good practice/ best practice; what do you ‘feel’?

3. What do you think are the individual approaches that are (currently) effective for supporting autistic females at high school?
4. What do you think are the group approaches that are (currently) effective for supporting autistic females at high school?
5. What do you think are the systemic approaches that are (currently) effective for supporting autistic females at high school?

• MAIN BODY- FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

6. Are there any other areas of support that you are hoping to develop for autistic females in the high school?
7. What do you feel is missing from the current model of support for autistic females in the high school setting?
8. What do you think are the areas for development for supporting autistic females at an individual level?
9. What do you think are the areas for development for supporting autistic females at a group level?
10. What do you think are the areas for development for supporting autistic females at a systemic level?

Is there anything you would like to add?

CLOSURE- Remind of GDPR and right to withdraw.

“Thank you, I will now stop the recording.”
Appendix 7.5 VP Example Coded Extracts

Extract 1

Participant 1: Well, there’s lots of strategies we use... we’ve got students who will wear headphones, but they’re not generally the kind of... you plug them in, they defend themselves and they’re not setting off any... they’re walking around the corridors because the noise levels. It’s too much for them. We’re piloting a strategy with a student who struggles, and particularly has struggled after the first lockdown. Where you imagine they’ve been at home in their bedroom working and then they come back into school and having kind of sensory overload and we’re having the same issue now... rather than just coming for time-out, which is what is happening more and more frequently, it’s... we’re having a time-out, but it’s so... there won’t be any questions asked, nobody will say... ‘you are safe?’

But we’ll always be there and a pen, there’ll be a quiet room, there’s a timer in there. The timer gets set for fifteen minutes, the student has fifteen minutes, to kind of remove themselves from the noise and the light and everything else and then after fifteen minutes, the student will return back to their lesson... without necessarily somebody going to say to them, ‘are you OK? Do you want to tell me what’s happened?’ Because of course, in that moment where they’re overloaded, they can’t... they can’t then have that dialogue with you... And other things that we do quite frequently, so our approach to questioning in school is a hands-on approach, so we don’t encourage students to put their hands up and we moved to that a few years ago... probably because we can have... we’ve got very, what’s the word? ‘They’re very good, their behaviour!’ Is exemplary, but we can... you know, that also leads to passivity in the classroom because they’re not doing anything wrong, but actually how engaged are they? So, we’ve moved to a more of a hands-on approach. I mean you know, we do have hands up, but as a general approach, hands down. But it did mean for some students, they were having to manage that direct questioning, and for students here on the autism spectrum, they really struggle with that so where we know that either a student is being assessed or we have done a screening that actually would indicate that if they were assessed, they would have a diagnosis, we’ve said to the staff, ‘Please do not use direct questioning with them because it’s something that they just really struggle with, and it causes them a great deal of anxiety.’

Extract 2

Participant 1: I’m not entirely certain actually. I think there’s... there’s definitely a need for more training without a shadow of a doubt and... you know, we’re looking at having some autism champions in school, so staff autism champions and they would go on to have obviously further training because they would be our go-to people. I think... at the start of every year, we have a kind of information evening for Year 8 9...10...12s and then we’ve got a whole talk from... (EP 1) is involved in this, he does a whole talk around wellbeing and what parents can do to support young people’s wellbeing in school and I think we need to put staff in around autism in that kind of... so that... so the notion that we are... that’s part of our ethos and we’re an autism-friendly school, is shared with parents. I think there’s more we could do with our student body. Our students are the greatest asset, they’re just fabulous, so... but I’m not sure how we would go about having some kind of working group of students who... you know, like we’ve got one student who’s willing to feedback, but how do we expand that... without kind of asking students like... ‘students... we need students to come forward to that but I think they’d be brilliant and you know, this one student said she would contribute to assemblies and I just think what is more powerful than one of your peers talking to you about their own experiences? (EP) I think there’s more work we can do on that and I think the other point that you touched upon is around, you know, what external services are there for families and students that we could tap into, specifically around autism as opposed to just around their mental health?
Appendix 7.6 EP Example Coded Extracts

Extract 1

Participant 2: Yeah, with this, I suppose it’s interesting because when I was thinking... I need your questions in advance, I’ve got a few little notes here as well... so when I was thinking about it, I was thinking about the individual level, and what my own work was as an E: like in casework, but then I was also thinking there’s a need to think about the individual level for young people just in school, almost regardless of whether we’re involved or not, and I suppose, I’ll try and separate them as I talk, but I suppose... broadly one of the things that we’ve done... this came through that initial autism strategy and model that we developed for the whole trust, but then it kind of... it relates to that particularly with young people, it’s all girls. They’ve developed like a minimum offer of support for autistic students, so across the trust, all of the autism champions... as we call them in our little group... have kind of contributed to and agreed to this minimum offer, and it does need reviewing because it’s a few years ago we pushed it together, but what we... what’s in that is every autistic student, so obviously including autistic females, should have an access to learning plan or equivalent, so that might be like a pupil passport or something... they’re called different things... it’s different settings, but we call them access to learning plans, you know, about the student needs, what they like, what will help them, all that kind of thing... so we sort of said every student with autism should have one of those and it should be developed ideally with them, with school and with parents and then that should be shared with all staff, so everybody has some knowledge of them. Another part of the minimum offer is that every student with a diagnosis should have... somebody in school who’s kind of named as their key person to go to, so it’s not necessarily saying that every autistic person has to have a mentor or a one-to-one worker, it’s just that they should know who they can go to as and when they need to check in, so both for them and for... parents, you know, knowing who to go to in terms of home-school liaison and also offering that check-in time. What we thought was having a check-in... whether it’s like personal tutorial or something like that... at least once per term seemed to fit... all of these things is with the caveat that it will look different for different young people, some might need it much more regularly, but we just thought if there’s an opportunity to check in at least once per term to check that... things are going OK, to see if there’s anything that needs... you know, tweaking? So there’s those two things in this... sort of minimum offer... but the third part of the minimum offer is... options of alternative provision at unstructured times and I think that’s... again, different in different schools. In some schools it’s like lunchtime clubs or games clubs where it’s like a quiet place to socialise in a safe way. It might be more structured activities that’s led by a member of staff... I think one of our schools has like a manga club, stuff like that. So where there’s... you know, you can key into those interests... so there’s that and then the fourth thing is consideration for like a time-out pass or to have access to a quiet or safe space, so again... you know, not every autistic young person would need it, but it should be at least considered. So I think those four things in our minimum offer are helpful, at the individual level. Although that was like an organisational piece of work, it kind of... feeds into... and then thinking about autistic females at high school, I think pastoral support has been hugely important. Looking at where, you know, autistic young people have done well and have made good progress or have...
Participant 2: Yeah, I think possibly bringing together like peer group networks or something like that where... I don’t know how... like the ethical kind of... implications of this, but possibly, you know, the autistic students knowing the other autistic students and having a place to support each other and talk about it because I think... I’ve spoken to a few autistic girls and they’re kind of said socially and everything is so much easier with other autistic people because they just get it. they understand kind of the difficulties, you haven’t got to try and mask and you haven’t got to try and do all of these little social cues that’s expected from the general population but maybe not from autistic people so it’s... it’s a place where they can maybe interact in a less demanding environment and can just completely be themselves and take their mask off, as it were, and just... I think that could be an interesting development, so looking at that. But obviously... some autistic girls... don’t want all of their peers to know and... there’s kind of barriers that would need to be overcome. And then I think... there’s something around group interventions as well. I think they’d be really powerful tool and sort of support mechanism for schools to bring in and that might be related to things like... social skills or you know, navigating like that... they call it like a hidden curriculum, don’t they? All these things that we expect... all children and young people to do but it’s kind of not explicit anywhere, they’re not ever taught it. So it might be that there’s a group intervention around that hidden curriculum and, strategies and too try to try and navigate it and things like that. Then I’m also aware that it can be, you know, sort of managing periods and feminine hygiene, stuff like that, can be difficult for some autistic girls because of, you know, sensory issues and stuff like that so... particularly in the all-girls school, that might be something that’s appropriate and necessary, it’s not something we’ve talked about it lonely... but it’s not something that’s embedded or... you know, anything that’s actually been done. So there’s things like that that are in my mind that could be helpful... and I think, you know, that group intervention where these autistic girls can kind of other people are finding the same things tricky and having the similar experiences, I think can be so powerful because a lot of the autistic girls I’ve worked with feel like they’re the only one going through that.
## Appendix 7.7: List of codes from analysis

| Access to learning plan/ pupil passport (inductive) | Increasing parent/carer understanding through home communication (inductive) |
| Adaptable strategies and support (inductive) | Keep staff informed of up-to-date with research (inductive) |
| All staff at a basic level of awareness (inductive) | Liaise with the child/young person (inductive) |
| Alternative provision at unstructured times (inductive) | Local and national external agency support for mental health (inductive) |
| Autism friendly school/practice (inductive) | Mental health support (deductive) |
| Awareness-raising assemblies (inductive) | Minimum offer of support for autistic students (inductive) |
| Buy-in from SLT (inductive) | More structured peer group support (inductive) |
| Case conferences and group feedback for sharing good practice (inductive) | Named key person (inductive) |
| Cluster model of support (inductive) | Nurture special interests (inductive) |
| Collaborating with feeder primary schools (inductive) | Opportunities for self-advocacy (inductive) |
| Collaborating with parents/carer s (inductive) | Parents/carers knowledge and understanding (inductive) |
| Collaborating with students/young people (inductive) | Parent/carer information evening on autism (inductive) |
| Collaborating with staff/teachers/SENCo (inductive) | Pastoral Support (inductive) |
| Context specific training (inductive) | Peer groups: psychoeducation/awareness raising (deductive) |
| Creating a sense of belonging (deductive) | Peer group support (inductive) |
| Develop a bank of appropriate resources (inductive) | Personal advocacy (inductive) |
| Develop positive support and provision (inductive) | Personalised provision (deductive) |
| Develop support and intervention across tiers: universal, targeted and specialist (inductive) | Physical environment (deductive) |
| Develop training into facilitatory/workshop approach for problem-solving (inductive) | Policy/ethos (deductive) |
| Different training for associate and teaching staff (inductive) | Pre-diagnosis support (inductive) |
| Draw on staff knowledge/autism champions (inductive) | Reducing stigma of diagnosis with parents (inductive) |
| Drop-ins with the EP (inductive) | Relational approaches/Agent of Change/Autism Champion/Advocate (deductive) |
| Ensure interventions are specific to autistic girls (inductive) | Reviewing and revising practice (inductive) |
| Ensure representation for autistic young people (inductive) | School-specific working party (inductive) |
| Ensure EP practice is autism friendly at every level (inductive) | Screening and identification protocol (inductive) |
| EPs listen and do not impose own agenda (inductive) | Self-referral system to EP service (inductive) |
| EPs work applying five functions with systemic (preventative) work first, feeding into casework (inductive) | SENCo support (inductive) |
| External agency support (deductive) | Senior Leader Influence (inductive) |
| External services support specifically for autism (inductive) | Sensory adaptations for the corridors (inductive) |
| Evidence-based targeted support and interventions (inductive) | Solution circle approach for peer support (inductive) |
| Evidence-informed, Trust-wide autism strategy and model (inductive) | Staff Awareness (inductive) |
| Family engagement (deductive) | Staff Training (deductive) |
| Flexible staff (inductive) | Staff knowledge and understanding (Inductive) |
| Flexible strategies (inductive) | Strategies put in place before diagnosis (Inductive) |
| Further development and embedding of model and screening protocol (inductive) | Student knowledge and understanding (Inductive) |
| Gaining the voice of autistic young people (inductive) | Support for suspected undiagnosed autism (Inductive) |
| Group intervention (deductive) | Support for undiagnosed students coming from primary school (Inductive) |
| Identification and Screening (deductive) | Support groups for parents/carers (inductive) |
| Inclusive practice (inductive) | Support schools with earlier identification of autism in girls (Inductive) |
List of codes continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Category</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support with transition: Covid-19 lockdown support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support with transition: during the school day</td>
<td>Deductive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support with transition: key stages</td>
<td>Deductive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching and non-teaching staff represented on working party</td>
<td>Inductive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Termly check-in</td>
<td>Inductive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Timed ‘time-out’ sessions</td>
<td>Inductive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time-out pass and quiet space</td>
<td>Inductive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training delivered by EPs</td>
<td>Inductive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Universal provision/ teaching strategies</td>
<td>Inductive</td>
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<td>Visual map of the school provided</td>
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<tr>
<td>Well-being spaces</td>
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<tr>
<td>Whole school/ general pedagogical approach</td>
<td>Inductive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Whole school awareness and understanding</td>
<td>Inductive</td>
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Deductive codes written in blue
Appendix 7.8 Initial Thematic Maps

Whole School Buy-in
- Ethos and Policies
- Collaboration
- Advocacy

Autism-friendly approaches
- Provision
- Physical environment

RQ1: What provision do professionals consider to be effective in supporting autistic females in one high school in the North West of England?

Awareness-Raising
- Staff training and awareness
- Peer awareness-raising
- Parent/carer awareness-raising

Identification and Screening
- Identification and screening of autism in female students
- Pre-diagnosis support

External Agency Support

Flexibility and Adaptability
Lack of Group Interventions

- Group interventions
- Peer group networks
- Parent/carer support groups

Further Awareness-Raising

- Staff training and awareness
- Peer awareness-raising
- Parent/carer awareness-raising

Greater Whole School Buy-in

- Advocacy

Earlier Identification and Screening

- Provision
- Support with primary to secondary transition
- Support from external agencies

Continue to develop autism-friendly approaches
Appendix 7.9 Coding Framework and Supporting Evidence

RQ1 – Effective support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whole-school buy-in</td>
<td>• Ethos and policies</td>
<td>• Ethos and Policies</td>
<td>VP: “... they have time out cards that they can show to their teacher...and then they just come out and they come down to the pastoral room and they know that...they can get a cup of tea, they can sit quietly, they can do some colouring in, they can do a jigsaw. So we have all of that set up for them...” Interview 1; Pg. 12; lines 459-461.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Evidence-informed, Trust wide strategy and model</td>
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<td>• Minimum offer of support for all autistic students</td>
<td>VP: “so before lockdown, well it was before Christmas when we thought just the vulnerable students were coming back in, we...all the heads of year contacted...all the students where we suspect there may be undiagnosed autism or where they’ve had difficulties that present in that way and we said to them all, you know, 'You don’t meet the definition as supplied by the DfE for vulnerable, however, in our...you know, in our definition, you are very welcome to come into school to maintain some kind of routine and structure.’” Interview 1, Pg. 7, lines 250-255.</td>
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<td>• Autism friendly school/ practice</td>
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<td>• School-specific working party</td>
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<td>• Whole school approach/ awareness/ understanding</td>
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<td>• Inclusive practice</td>
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<td>• Creating a sense of belonging</td>
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<td>• Pastoral Support</td>
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<td>• Buy-in from SLT</td>
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<td>• Support with transition: Covid-19 lockdown support</td>
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<td>• Support with transition: Covid-19 lockdown support</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Pastoral Support</td>
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EP: “we’ve developed like a minimum offer of support for autistic students, so across the trust, all of the autism champions – as we call them in our little group – have kind of contributed to and agreed to this minimum offer...” Interview 2; Pg. 2; lines 48-50.

EP: “Another part of the minimum offer is that every student with a diagnosis should have...somebody in school who’s kind of named as their key person to go with, so it’s not necessarily saying that every autistic person has to have a...a mentor or a one-to-one worker, it’s just that...they should know who they can go to as and when they need to check in...” Interview 2; Pg. 2; lines 58-61.

EP: “...the third part of the minimum offer is...options of alternative provision at unstructured times and I think that’s...again, different in different schools. In some schools it’s...like lunch time clubs or games clubs where it’s like a quiet place to socialise in a safe way. It might be more structured activities that’s led by a member of staff...I think one of our schools has like a Manga club, stuff like that.” Interview 2; Pg. 2; lines 68-72.

EP: “and then the fourth thing is consideration for like a time-out pass or to have access to a quiet or safe space, so again...you know, not every autistic...”
| **Collaboration** | **External agency support**  
|                  | Case conferences and group feedback for sharing good practice  
|                  | Collaborating with teachers  
|                  | EPs listen and do not impose own agenda  

Young person would need it, but it should be at least considered.” Interview 2; Pg. 2; lines 73-75.

EP: “What’s in that (minimum offer) is every autistic student, so obviously including autistic females, should have an access to learning plan or equivalent, so that might be like a pupil passport or a...something...they’re called different things, aren’t they, in different settings, but we call them access to learning plans, you know, about the student needs, what they like, what will help them, all that kind of thing.” Interview 2; Pg. 2; lines 51-55.

EP: “I think pastoral support has been hugely important...looking at where, you know, autistic young people have done well and have made good progress or have, you know, overcome difficulties...having...good pastoral support has been key, so it kind of links to that...knowing who to talk to.” Interview 2; Pg. 2; lines 77-80.

EP: “We envisage it (Agent of Change) as kind of like a...almost like a cluster model where...there’s...us...our little team in the middle which is kind of me as an EP, X as the specialist outreach teacher...and then we’ve got loads and loads of autism champions so there’s autism champions for each school who all come together and go back out and...trickle it into...into their individual schools and I think them being...an agent of change who can facilitate...stuff like that...is really, really important...yeah, I think that’s one of the biggest...sort of systemic things that can be in place.” Interview 2; Pg. 7; lines 263-268.

EP: “So you know, regardless of who that autistic young person might be talking to or interacting with, they know how to interact back, and they know kind of...what to do, what not to do. So I think that...that whole school...approach, whole school understanding is really, really important...” Interview 2; Pg. 6; lines 243-246.

VP “I think it is important to liaise with the child and the parents about...what is going to best meet their needs whilst they’re in school. You know, because what works for one doesn’t necessarily work for another.” Interview 1; Pg 2, lines 90-92.

VP: “Although we’ve just started a staff working group around autism...so we’ve got a team of about...I’d say about twenty-seven staff and that’s really good because it’s a mixture of teaching staff and associate staff, we’ve got some heads of year, some non-heads of year...and I think that’s a really good mix.” Interview 1; Pg 3, lines 148-151.
**Collaborating with feeder primary schools**
- Collaborating with students
- Collaborating with parents/carers
- Cluster model of support
- SENCo Support
- Draw on staff knowledge/autism champions to inform practice

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**Advocacy**
- Staff advocacy
- Opportunities for self-advocacy
- Senior leader influence
- Personal advocacy
- Relational/Relationships/Autism Champions
- Teaching and non-teaching staff represented on the working party
- Student representation in the working party
- Named key person
- Liaise with the child/young person

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**Awareness-raising**
- Staff training and awareness
- Staff training and staff awareness
- Whole school awareness and understanding

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EP: “We have case conferences so once we’ve done…that’s just a fancy word for like group feedback…” Interview 2; Pg. 3; lines 100-101.

“So everyone that teaches that young person is invited and we tend to get quite high turnout…and we kind of sit round…they’re only twenty or twenty-five minutes, so they’re relatively short, over kind of part of break or lunch often. But it means everybody can understand that young person a bit better and we can have a kind of discussion around what’s working in different classes and…drawing out ideas and strategies.” Interview 2; Pg. 3; lines 104-108.

VP: “So [principal] wrote about the autism screening that we were getting involved in and why she felt that was important and why as a school we thought that was important, just because we do have parents who are reluctant to have a diagnosis, to put a label on something because I think they think…you know, something will happen and we’re trying to say, ‘Nothing will happen, except your child will have better support…in school and will probably come home and be better able to cope.’” Interview 1; Pg. 8; lines 317-322.

EP: “…and then I think there’s something about buy-in…yeah, buy-in from SLT…and from the head or principal in a school…I think it’s absolutely essential that they are on board with it, and they understand why it’s important because otherwise you’ve got…or…it’s either that or having whoever’s involved with managing it…they need to have enough clout to make the changes in school. Because there’s no use it being a teacher who isn’t on SLT for example…if the head isn’t on board, you know…it’s fine to have…because our autism champions range from like learning mentors up to SLT…but whoever they are, they’ve got, you know, a link with their heads or principal where they can…talk about these things and make sure they’re embedded. So having that buy-in right from the top of the school just makes it easier because it then kind of trickles…trickles down.” Interview 2; Pg.6; lines 246-255.

VP: “I think the other thing that we’ve done quite…we’ve done…a bit of, but we need to go back and we need to do more of it is the training of all staff. So...again, we used our educational psychologist to come in and deliver sessions to teaching staff and to associate staff so they’ve both got the same session…Obviously associate staff we’ve slightly tweaked because of course they wouldn’t…necessarily come across the same issues as we would in the..."
• All staff are at a basic level of awareness
• Different training for teaching and associate staff
• Staff knowledge and understanding

classroom, but they would come across the issues, you know, if somebody’s upset at reception and can’t...can’t articulate what’s the problem, you know, how do they manage that? Or somebody in the lunchtime queue is really struggling with the noise and is getting quite upset and anxious, how do they manage that? So it was slightly tweaked to kind of be more appropriate to their role...” Interview 1; Pg. 6; lines 214-223.

EP: “But in the all-girls school that I’m sort of particularly thinking of, there’s a head of year and other pastoral staff who are linked and...they’ve all had training around autism in girls, what it looks like, how to support, things like that. And I just think it’s been really beneficial because they regularly check-in, they kind of liaise with other teachers on behalf of the young person, they’re just there to talk through...you know, various issues and difficulties, particularly around emotional wellbeing – I think that pastoral support has been key.” Interview 2; Pg. 2; lines 80-85.

EP: “And that links (working party) to one of the things that we do with all of our schools, is we do whole staff...awareness raising and training...so we will try and train every single member of staff, whether it’s teaching staff, learning mentors, office staff...you know, the cooks, lunchtime organisers...we try and get them to a kind of basic level of awareness around autism and then we’d further train other kind of key members of staff...in more depth.” Interview 2; Pg. 6; lines 239-243.

• Peer awareness-raising

Peer-groups: psychoeducation and awareness raising
• Peer group support/ peer support
• Creating a sense of belonging
• Solution circle approach for peer support
• Awareness- raising assemblies
• Whole school awareness and understanding

VP: “so in lockdown I did an assembly, it wasn’t autism awareness week, but I just did it anyway just to kind of...to give a bit more knowledge to students because I think those are the two things, aren't they, we need to...make sure that our staff are knowledgeable so that they can respond appropriately. But we also need to make sure our student body is knowledgeable so that they can understand and respond appropriately...” Interview 1; Pg. 6; lines 223- 237.

EP: “...we’ve got kind of a model where we work to where there’s an autism champion or champions at the centre and then there’s different kind of strands that we might focus on and try and develop and one of those strands is...peer awareness and peer support. So I think by skilling up and increasing the knowledge of the peer group in general, then you know, I think that’s been a helpful tool where there’s more understanding, people are taking more steps where they know someone might be autistic to kind of have them feel included and things like that.” Interview 2; Pg.4; lines 136-142.
| Identification and screening | Identification and screening protocol | VP: “So we often find that students cope...they get home and then at home is where their difficulties really present and their parents struggle because, you know, they’ve masked all day and then they’re exhausted and they can’t...they can’t do that when they get home. So...it’s also...the more we can put in school, hopefully will improve what happens when they get home. So just trying to kind of educate parents and...get parents on board with it a little bit as well.” Interview 1, Pg. 9; lines 339-343. |
| --- | --- | EP: “it’s just that...they should know who they can go to as and when they need to check in, so both for them and for...parents, you know, knowing who to go to in terms of home-school liaison and also offering that check-in time.” Interview 2; Pg. 2; lines 60-62. |
| Approaches to identification and screening | • Approaches to identification and screening | VP: “the...educational psychologist delivered training and they put together this screening pack that we could use for students...and they deliver training to all the heads of year and the pastoral team. So now...when we...either through...sometimes it’s through discussions with teachers or...it’s ongoing, you know, if we’ve got ongoing concerns about a young person or just the way in which they’re responding to situations and we think, you know, this doesn’t quite...they’re not responding in the way that you might expect. Or sometimes parents will get in touch and say, you know, 'We think this...she might be...autistic...is there anything you can do?' So that would be our starting point really...is the autism screening to see if...they do meet any of those thresholds.” Interview 1; Pg. 3; lines 111-119. |
| • Approaches to identification and screening | • Identification and screening | EP: “We’ve got...a self-referral system where students are kind of Gillick competent, they can refer into our service. It tends to be targeted more at the sixth form...so for post-16 students where they can refer in if they need help and support. And what we find is often...we’ve had quite a lot of referrals in, and it tends to...initially look like it’s going to be a piece of therapeutic casework around...mental health, emotional wellbeing but then as we get to know those...young people and we’re kind of working with them, we start noticing trends and patterns and...quite frequently that’s led to referral onto the autism pathway and a subsequent diagnosis.” Interview 2; Pg. 3, lines 88-94. |
| Pre-diagnosis support | • Pre-diagnosis support | VP: “And I suppose it’s through those meetings that we have started to really think about our provision for autistic students within the school...and not only our provision once they’re identified, but how do we go about identifying them? Because...that is also...we find that’s the greatest challenge, is actually...getting them onto a pathway for referral with such long waiting lists, which there would before COVID and they’ve just got even worse because of COVID. So we’ve often...you know, identified students and I think the other issue for us particularly is we’ve got high achieving girls who are very good at...” |
| • Pre-diagnosis support | • Strategies put in place before diagnosis | • Support for suspected undiagnosed autism |
masking their difficulties and what we have seen over probably the last five or six years is that we have picked up students later on in their school career, so probably...Year 10, Year 11, 12 and 13...and they present with mental health difficulties and...actually it’s not around their mental health, it’s perhaps around undiagnosed autism. “ Interview 1; Pg. 1; lines 20-26.

VP: “Where we know that either a student is being assessed or we have done a screening that actually would indicate that if they were assessed, they would...have a diagnosis, we’ve said to the staff, ‘Please do not...use direct questioning with them because...it’s something that they just really struggle with and...it causes them a great deal of anxiety.’” Interview 1; Pg. 2; lines 75-79.

VP: “If they weren’t already on a waiting list to see the educational psychologist for one-to-one work, we would then have a...drop-in with either [EP 1] or [EP 2] and we would go through the results and we would talk through...and we’d talk through what we know about that young person in school and then we would put strategies together and so I think we’ve got some young people who...who get strategies put in place...before they have a diagnosis which is absolutely fine because...actually, we want to prevent the escalation to mental health difficulties when they’re older, if we can...” Interview 1; Pg. 3- 4; lines 120-126.

VP: “...all the heads of year contacted...all the students where we suspect there may be undiagnosed autism or where they’ve had difficulties that present in that way and we said to them all, you know, ‘You don’t meet the definition as supplied by the DfE for vulnerable, however, in our...you know, in our definition, you are very welcome to come into school to maintain some kind of routine and structure...” Interview 1; Pg. 7; lines 251-255.

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<tr>
<th>Autism-friendly approaches</th>
<th>Tiered Provision</th>
<th>Personalised provision</th>
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<td>Universal teaching strategies</td>
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<td>Access to learning plan/pupil passport</td>
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<td>Named key person</td>
<td>Pastoral Support</td>
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<td>Termly check-in</td>
<td>Solution circle approach for peer support</td>
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VP: “And other things that we do quite frequently, so our approach to questioning in school is a hands-down approach, so we don’t encourage students to put their hands up and we moved to that a few years ago...” Interview 1; Pg. 2; lines 67-69.

VP: “So we have a team of wellbeing ambassadors, so that’s students...and they...they deliver assemblies to every year group, sort of half-termly...they have done...mentally healthy schools questionnaire...so the students...it’s a bit like a, you know, a...an old-fashioned magazine quiz...you know, are you a, b or c on this and it’s got things like sleep questions, diet questions, exercise, mood questions and then it says things like, ‘If you’re mostly A...this means this about your mental health. If you’re mostly B...but if you’re mostly C...we suggest you get some advice and here’s the advice and support in school.’” Interview 1; Pg. 4; lines 134-140.

VP: “We’re piloting a strategy with a student who struggles, and particularly has struggled after the first lockdown where you imagine they’ve been at home in...”
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Physical environment</th>
<th>Transition support: key stages and during the school day</th>
<th>Mental health support</th>
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<tr>
<td>Physical environment</td>
<td>Physical environment</td>
<td>their bedroom working and then they come back into school and having kind of sensory overload and we’re having the same issue now...so rather than just coming for time-out, which is what is happening more and more frequently, it’s...we’re trying a timed time-out as it were...so there won’t be any questions asked, nobody will say, ‘How are you?’ But there’ll always be paper and a pen, there’ll be a quiet room, there’s a timer in there.” Interview 1; Pg. 2; lines 56-62.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical environment</td>
<td>Sensory adaptations for the corridors</td>
<td>VP: “…we did this particularly with one student in Year 7 and Year 8 and Year 9...is we...we actually took her to each of the rooms, so on each day of that ten day timetable, we went and then escorted her to her next room...and...we had a map made for her that showed her the quickest way to get to the toilets because that was an issue for her...from each classroom. So she could...she could work out...so if she was on one corridor and she was in room four, she know where to...how to get to the toilets, but if she was on the same corridor but in room one, she couldn’t work out how to get round to the toilets...so we had to do it for every room...but it just worked really well for her…” Interview 1; Pg. 13; lines 505-512</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical environment</td>
<td>Alternative provision at unstructured times</td>
<td>EP: “what we’ve done is we’ve taken the Saturation Model by...Gareth Morewood and colleagues and then we’ve also looked at other sort of tier-based models like...Magyar and Pandolfi.” Interview 2; Pg. 6; lines 226-227.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical environment</td>
<td>Timed ‘time-out’ sessions</td>
<td>EP: “…and then the fourth thing is consideration for like a time-out pass or to have access to a quiet or safe space, so again...you know, not every autistic young person would need it, but it should be at least considered.” Interview 2; Pg. 2; lines 73-75.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical environment</td>
<td>Time-out pass and quiet space</td>
<td>VP: “I think the wellbeing spaces are really appreciated by the students, that they can have these time out cards...and that they can come and use these spaces...when they need to. So one of our students in Year 10...she uses one of the spaces every morning...so to kind of set her up for the day...that’s where she starts...almost like to give her a bit of space before she then goes into her form room and that’s fine, you know, we can accommodate that...that works really well for them.” Interview 1, Pg. 12; line 465-470</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical environment</td>
<td>Support with transition: Covid-19 lockdown support</td>
<td>VP: “…we’re trying a timed time-out as it were...so there won’t be any questions asked, nobody will say, ‘How are you?’ But there’ll always be paper and a pen, there’ll be a quiet room, there’s a timer in there. The timer gets set for fifteen minutes, the student has fifteen minutes...to kind of remove themselves from the noise and the light and everything else and then after fifteen minutes, the student will return back to their lessons...without necessarily somebody going to say to them, ‘Are you Ok? Do you want to tell me what’s happened?’ Because of course, in that moment where they’re overloaded, they can’t...they can’t then have that dialogue with you…” Interview 1; Pg. 2; lines 60-67.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visual map of the school provided</td>
<td>VP: “So we’ve got students who will wear headphones, not headphones but kind of…ear plugs or you know, ear defender type things as they’re walking round the corridors because the noise levels…it’s too much for them.” Interview 1; Pg. 2; lines 54-56.</td>
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<td>Mental health support</td>
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<td>Well-being spaces</td>
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<td>External agency support</td>
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<td>External agencies</td>
<td>VP: “Where we find that strategies aren’t working, so the student I talked about with the…the timer…you know, we’ve really struggled after each lockdown to find something that helps support that student…who just becomes so anxious and she gets so upset and of course, she can’t articulate what’s happened or what’s going on for her…and she’s gone home several times. Well, that’s not really a long-term and effective strategy for her, so we would then liaise with the ed psych and get some kind of…we’d do an anonymised…drop-in, we call it and explain, ‘This is the situation we’re in, these are the strategies we’ve tried, is there anything else you could suggest?’ You know and get some more kind of expertise or input on that and that’s one way that we use the educational psychologist.” Interview 1; Pg. 3; lines 97-105.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ensure EP practice is autism friendly at every level</td>
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<td>Drop-ins with the EPs</td>
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<td>EPs listen and do not impose own agenda</td>
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<td>EPs work applying five functions with systemic (preventative) work first, feeding in to casework</td>
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<td>Self-referral system to EP service</td>
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<td>Training delivered by EPs</td>
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<td>Other agencies</td>
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<td>Local and national external agency support for mental health</td>
<td>VP: “So yeah, so at the moment we don’t really have many links with any organisations...externally for autism except our educational psychologist...but we do have, so we buy in a service from 42nd Street into school and we buy in a service from Talk Listen Change…and we direct students to things, local things like Kooth and, you know, national things, Shout...all of that stuff and we have some local...there’s [local authority] Psychological Services for the sixth form, so we have lots of links to different...agencies around mental health but not specifically around autism.” Interview 1; Pg. 10; lines 369-374.</td>
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<td>Mental health support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flexibility and adaptability</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reviewing and revising practice</td>
<td>EP: “And...although there’s these kind of general...strategies and you know, there are kind of themes of things that will be effective, it’s not necessarily a one-size fits all, so we try and make sure staff are really aware of that and it’s kind of trickled through into all of these different bits of support, you know, we...”</td>
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<td>Context specific training</td>
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67
Flexible staff
Flexible strategies
Adaptable strategies and support
Ensure EP practice is autism friendly at every level

might have general approaches that we know are effective for people with autism, but they might need tweaking, they might need adapting or you know, some of them just might not be appropriate. And I think that knowledge and that flexibility of school staff has been really, really important.” Interview 2; Pg. 3; lines 121-127.

EP: “So I feel like the...the approach that we take kind of as a whole trust but then also in that particular school...works well, so having a clear strategy and model that’s based...you know, it’s evidence informed but we adapt it for our context...I feel like having that to go back to has been really, really useful because it means we...look at kind of key strands that are important.: Interview 2; Pg. 6; lines 223-225.

RQ2 – Further developments for provision

Themes | Sub-themes | Codes | Evidence
--- | --- | --- | ---
Develop group interventions | Group Interventions | Group intervention: social skills; Hidden curriculum; puberty and therapeutic support | VP “So that’s kind of the only group thing we’ve got around wellbeing, we haven’t really got anything specific around autism although we’ve just started a staff working group around autism...” Interview 1, Pg 4; lines 147-149.

EP: “I think possibly bringing together like peer group networks or something like that where...I don’t know how...like the ethical kind of...implications of this, but possibly you know, the autistic students knowing the other autistic students and having a space to support each other and talk about it because I think...I’ve spoken to a few autistic...girls and women and they’ve kind of said socially and everything is so much easier with other autistic people because they just get it, they understand kind of the difficulties, you haven’t got to try and mask and you haven’t got to try and do all of these little social...cues that’s expected from the general population but maybe not from autistic people so it’s...it’s a place where they can maybe interact in a less...demanding environment and can just completely be themselves and...take their mask off, as it were...” Interview 2; Pg. 4; lines 164-169.

EP: “And then I think there’s something around group interventions as well, I think they’d be really powerful...tool and sort of support mechanism for schools to bring in...and that might be related to things like...social skills or you know,
<table>
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<th>Peer group networks</th>
<th>More structured peer group support</th>
<th>Creating a sense of belonging</th>
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EP: “I think possibly bringing together like peer group networks or something like that where...I don’t know how...like the ethical kind of...implications of this, but possibly, you know, the autistic students knowing the other autistic students and having a space to support each other and talk about it because I think...I’ve spoken to a few autistic...girls and women and they’ve kind of said socially and everything is so much easier with other autistic people because they just get it, they understand kind of the difficulties, you haven’t got to try and mask and you haven’t got to try and do all of these little social...cues that’s expected from the general population but maybe not from autistic people so it’s...it’s a place where they can maybe interact in a less...demanding environment and can just completely be themselves and...take their mask off, as it were, and just...I think that could be an interesting development, so looking at that.” Interview 2; Pg. 4; lines 161-170.

EP: “And similarly, we’ve developed like a solution circle approach where students are trained in using solution circles which is like a...solution...focused, problem-solving...approach and the idea is that the students themselves, like the girls at that school, can support each other as a peer group. But I don’t think...any of the facilitators who were trained up in how to use it...were autistic, so again, kind of just making sure we’ve got that representation...I think would be really, really important.” Interview 2; Pg.8; lines 339-343.
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<tr>
<th>Parent/ carer support groups</th>
<th>Support groups for parents/ carers</th>
<th>EP: “I think maybe support for parents and carers is the other thing that’s lacking at the moment in that particular school. It falls on like pastoral staff to kind of have those conversations and to offer support but there’s nothing more structured or formal that’s in place – not that you want it to be, you know, formal and stuffy but something that’s maybe arranged. I know in one of the primary schools, the SENCO led on...like a parent group for parents of children with autism and you know, they came together and talked about their experiences and it was just...I think it was just helpful to know...other people are experiencing similar situations. So possibly looking at parent/carer support would be something in the future as well.” Interview 2; Pg. 8; 345-352.</th>
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<td>Further awareness-raising</td>
<td>Peer awareness-raising</td>
<td>VP: “…this one student said she would contribute to assemblies and I just think what is more powerful than one of your peers talking to you about their own experiences?” Interview 1, Pg. 11; lines 420-422.</td>
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<td>Parent/ carer awareness-raising</td>
<td>Parent/ carer awareness-raising</td>
<td>VP: “Yeah and I think that’s another piece of work still for us to keep working on...with our parents as well that actually, having a diagnosis...is not an issue or you know, we want to be an autism friendly school, so [principal] wrote home about the autism screening that we were getting involved in and why she felt that was important and why as a school we thought that was important, just because we do have parents who are reluctant to have a diagnosis, to put a label on something because I think they think...you know, something will happen and we’re trying to say, ‘Nothing will happen, except your child will have better support...in school and will probably come home and be better able to cope.’” Interview 1; Pg. 8; lines 315-322.</td>
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<td>Parent awareness</td>
<td>Parent awareness</td>
<td>VP: “at the start of every year, we have a kind of information evening for Year 8, 9...10...12s and then we’ve got a whole talk from...[EP 1] is involved in this, he does a whole talk around wellbeing and what parents can do to support young people’s wellbeing in school and I think we need to put stuff in around autism in that and kind of...so that...so the notion that we are...that’s part of our ethos and we’re an autism friendly school is shared with parents.” Interview 1; Pg. 11; lines 411-416.</td>
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<td>Family engagement</td>
<td>Family engagement</td>
<td>VP: “I think there’s...there’s definitely a need for more training without a shadow of a doubt and...you know, we’re looking at having some autism champions in school, so staff autism champions and they would go on to have obviously further training because they would be our go to people.” Interview 1; Pg. 11; lines 408-411.</td>
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<td>Parent/ carer information evening on autism</td>
<td>Parent/ carer information evening on autism</td>
<td>EP: “I think...ongoing training and development is probably...it’s something that is both...a strength at the moment but also something to develop further, like with a lot of these things, you know, there’s...bits of it going well but you can...”</td>
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<td>Parents/ carers knowledge and understanding</td>
<td>Parents/ carers knowledge and understanding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increasing parent/ carer understanding through home communication</td>
<td>Increasing parent/ carer understanding through home communication</td>
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<td>Student knowledge and understanding</td>
<td>Student knowledge and understanding</td>
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<td>Peer awareness</td>
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<td>Peer/ staff training and awareness</td>
<td>Peer/ staff training and awareness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Develop training into facilitatory/ workshop approach for problem-solving</td>
<td>Develop training into facilitatory/ workshop approach for problem-solving</td>
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| Earlier identification and screening | N/A | • Identification and screening  
• Further development and embedding of model and screening protocol  
• Screening and identification protocol  
• Primary students undiagnosed  
• Increasing parent/carers understanding through home communication (inductive)  
• Support schools with earlier identification of autism in girls | Always make it better. So as I say, we currently have like that aim to bring everybody up to a basic level of awareness and we did...develop like a specific package for this school around autism in women and girls.” Interview 2; Pg. 10; lines 411-415.  
EP: “So as I say, we currently have like that aim to bring everybody up to a basic level of awareness and we did...develop like a specific package for this school around autism in women and girls. It was based on, you know...it was about three years ago so it probably does need updating but it was...based on...the modules that the National Autistic Society developed around autism in women and girls...and other bits of research that...had been coming out and we sort of made it...context specific.” Interview 2; Pg. 10; lines 413-418 |
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<th>Continue to develop autism-friendly approaches</th>
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<th>• Personalised provision</th>
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<td>• Whole-school/General pedagogical approaches</td>
<td>• Whole-school/General pedagogical approaches</td>
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<td>• Develop positive support and provision</td>
<td>• Develop support and intervention across tiers: universal, targeted and specialist</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Develop support and intervention across tiers: universal, targeted and specialist</td>
<td>• Develop a bank of appropriate resources</td>
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<td>• Develop a bank of appropriate resources</td>
<td>• Ensure interventions are specific to autistic girls</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Ensure interventions are specific to autistic girls</td>
<td>VP: “...we often find that students cope...they get home and then at home is where their difficulties really present and their parents struggle because, you know, they’ve masked all day and then they’re exhausted and they can’t...they can’t do that when they get home. So...it’s also...the more we can put in school, hopefully will improve what happens when they get home.” Interview 1; Pg. 9; lines 339-343.</td>
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EP “But then we’re also going to look at evidence-based approaches for other things, so more targeted support and interventions. So we’re going to take some time to look at what’s out there and look at what might be feasible...to implement at the school, depending on the needs that are generally presenting...so that’s kind of...I think they’ve generally got good practice anyway, but we’re just looking at...really building our knowledge of what’s out there...and at the minute...it’s seeming like a lot of things are...generic interventions and strategies, they’re not specific to girls, so that’s something that maybe we need to...think about and develop a little bit more.” Interview 2, Pg. 7; lines 300-307

EP: “For this particular school, it’s...a grammar school so the girls are all very...able and generally quite articulate, so we need to make sure that they’re (bank of resources) appropriate for that level.” Interview 2; Pg. 8; lines 313-315.

EP: “So...one of the big things is...being really clear about like what good universal provision is for autistic females and also, looking at that more targeted or specialist support when it’s needed.” Interview 2; Pg. 7; lines 294-296.

EP: “(but we’re just looking at...really building our knowledge of what’s out there...and at the minute...it’s seeming like a lot of things are...generic interventions and strategies, they’re not specific to girls, so that’s something that maybe we need to...think about and develop a little bit more. So we’ll be looking at kind of how different...levels of support and intervention fit at different tiers, you know, universal provision, targeted provision, things like that.” Interview 2; Pg. 7; lines 304-308.

EP: “But things like accepting your diagnosis I guess...you know, what kind of books are out there? What kind of...materials, videos? Just building up a really good bank...so that...we can support them in that journey because sometimes it might come through the diagnostic pathway, they’ve come through but...sort of anecdotally, the feedback we’ve got from parents and young people after being diagnosed is that...the information they get isn’t always that...in-depth or helpful...or...tailored for them.” Interview 2; Pg. 8; lines 315-320
| 1 | • Gaining the views of autistic females |
| 2 | • Opportunities for self-advocacy |
| 3 | • Gaining the voice of autistic people |
| 4 | • Reducing stigma |
| 5 | • Collaborating with students |
| 6 | • Ensure representation for autistic young people |

VP: “So...but we've also got a student who...who wants to get involved, so they've got a diagnosis and they want to be involved so we've asked them if they would want to contribute in some way to the staff working party, not...I mean I think it would be too intimidating for them to be on a meeting with us twenty-seven staff...but...we have said that, you know, she could either meet with a small number of us or...she could just contribute her ideas to a key member of staff and they could contribute them on her behalf. So she's very keen to get involved with that and hopefully that will expand, so we get more student voices being involved.” Interview 1; Pg. 4-5; lines 161-168.

VP: “I think there’s more we could do with our student body. Our students are the greatest asset, they're just fabulous, so...but I'm not sure how we would go about having some kind of working group of students who...you know, like we've got one student who's willing to feedback, but how do we expand that...without kind of picking students? Like...students...we need students to come forward to that but I think they'd be brilliant and you know, this one student said she would contribute to assemblies and I just think what is more powerful than one of your peers talking to you about their own experiences?” Interview 1, Pg. 11; lines 416-422.

EP: “And I think, thinking about working at the individual level as an EP...possibly more, you know, going back to the resources we regularly...use...and just thinking, you know, knowing what we know about autism, for example, thinking about language and like...you know, more literal interpretation of language and things like that, are we kind of approaching assessment tasks and you know, the way we introduce things, are we...doing it in a way that is accessible for...autistic girls? And is it meaningful to them? Do we need more visuals? Do we need more adaptations? Are the current sort of...things that we're using appropriate and accessible? Would be...yeah...but then that would kind of follow into things like report-writing and feedback, you know, thinking about how we give information and feedback and stuff...and I think it'd be really important and getting...the views of those autistic young people we've worked with and saying...you know, was it helpful? Was it not helpful? Could we have done anything differently? I think...that's really...important.” Interview 2; Pg. 9; lines 369-380.

EP: “I think maybe having something...more of like a workshop type approach or...you know, they can come and discuss...students that maybe they've been supporting and we can draw on the knowledge of the group. So I think...maybe bringing in...sort of a facilitatory...process for sharing knowledge and problem-solving. I think that will develop naturally...as part of that working party, but something to keep on...skilling up staff and keep developing their knowledge and understanding.” Interview 2; Pg. 10; 422-427.
EP: “(the next steps of the working party, one of the things we did in the first meeting was talk about what everybody sort of would like to get out of it, so we have got...the views of where people think the group should go...which is good and so we can always go back to that and make sure...we’re covering, you know, what staff’s needs are. And I think it’s important to listen and not just impose our own agenda on things all the time.” Interview 2; Pg. 12; lines 502-506.

EP: “And on that note, I think that’s something we need to develop more...involving autistic students...more in these interventions and these decisions. And maybe looking at how we can bring in their views and all their strengths and skills into different aspects of school life that are...ongoing, so things like school council, you know, is there an autistic representative there? Or do they have a voice? Things like...we’ve got wellbeing ambassadors in that particular school, which works really well, but is there an autistic perspective? I don’t think there is. So I think, you know, recruiting some autistic students who are happy to do it and contribute would be amazing because I think that’s often something that comes out of the research, is there’s a lot of things being done about autistic people, but without actively involving them. So I think that’s something we’d want to develop more.” Interview 2, Pg. 8; lines 330-338.

EP: “And finding a way of bringing that voice of the young person into those...discussions, I think, is something...I know I talked about that at an individual level, but that will have a big impact at the systemic level. You know, if we can get the views of those autistic people and make sure that’s then informing what we do, then it’s going to have a positive impact on more autistic...girls at the school.” Interview 2; Pg. 10; lines 427-431.

• Support with primary to secondary transition
• Support with transition: key stages
• Collaborating with feeder primary schools
• Support for undiagnosed students coming from primary school

VP: “So we haven’t done much with our feeder primaries, but it is an area we need to look at. We’ve got fifty-three feeder primary schools, so it’s quite a big piece of work, but it is certainly something, you know, that we...it’s in our minds about what...how do we do that?” Interview 1, Pg. 7, lines 276-278.

VP: “If they were already diagnosed then we’ll arrange a separate visit for them, you know, at a time when it’s quiet and we’ll meet with their parents. So that is in place, but I suppose for me, we know that that’s in place because we’ve been doing that...but it’s what about those children who are perhaps undiagnosed or perhaps...you know...where teachers might think... ‘This child should go for an assessment,’ but parents don’t want it and how do we capture that information?” Interview 1; Pg. 8; lines 297-301.

• Support from External Agencies
• External agency support
• External services support—specifically for autism

VP: “I think there’s more work we can do on that (student body) and I think the other point that you touched upon is around, you know, what external services are there for families and students that we could tap into, specifically around autism as oppose to just around their mental health?” Interview 1; Pg. 11; lines 422-425.
VP: "...at the moment we don't really have many links with any organisations...externally for autism except our educational psychologist..." 
Interview 1; Pg. 10, lines 369-370.
Appendix 7.10 Refined Thematic Maps

RQ1: What provision do professionals consider to be effective in supporting autistic females in one high school in the North West of England?

- Autism Friendly Approaches
  - Tiered Provision
  - Physical Environment
  - Flexibility and Adaptability
- Whole School Buy-in
  - Policies and Procedures
  - Collaboration
  - Advocacy
- Awareness Raising
  - Staff training and awareness
  - Peer awareness-raising
  - Parent/carer awareness-raising
- Identification and Screening
  - Approaches to identification and screening
  - Pre-diagnostic support
  - Other Agencies
- External agency support

RQ2: What do professionals consider to be areas for further development in supporting autistic females in one high school in the North West of England?

- Develop Group Interventions
  - Group Interventions
  - Peer group networks
  - Parent/carer support groups
- Continue to develop autism-friendliness approaches
  - Tiered Provision
  - Gaining the views of autistic females
  - Primary to secondary transition
- Further Awareness Raising
  - Staff training and awareness
  - Peer awareness-raising
  - Parent/carer awareness-raising
- Earlier identification and screening

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Appendix 7.11 Ethical Approval

Ref: 2021-11218-17844

01/03/2021

Dear Mrs Kasia Ayiobii, Prof Kevin Woods

Study Title: Exploring a model of support for autistic females in a high school setting: A Thematic Analysis

Environment, Education and Development School Panel PGR

I write to thank you for submitting the final version of your documents for your project to the Committee on 12/02/2021 10:00. I am pleased to confirm a favourable ethical opinion for the above research on the basis described in the application form and supporting documentation as submitted and approved by the Committee.

COVID-19 Important Note

Please ensure you read the information on the Research Ethics website in relation to data collection in the COVID environment as well as the guidance issued by the University in relation to face-to-face (in person) data collection both on-and-off campus.

A word document version of this guidance is also available.

Please see below for a table of the titles, version numbers and dates of all the final approved documents for your project.

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This approval is effective for a period of five years and is on delegated authority of the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) however please note that it is only valid for the specifications of the research project as outlined in the approved documentation set. If the project continues beyond the 5 year period or if you wish to propose any changes to the methodology or any other specifics within the project an application to seek an amendment must be submitted for review. Failure to do so could invalidate the insurance and constitute research misconduct.

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4. **Data breaches**

We wish you every success with the research.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Dr Kate Rawlunds

Environment, Education and Development School Panel PGK
Appendix B: Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs Aims, Scope and Author Guidelines

Aims and Scope

Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs (JORSEN) is an established online forum for the dissemination of international research on special educational needs. JORSEN aims to:

- Publish original research, literature reviews and theoretical papers on meeting special educational needs
- Create an international forum for researchers to reflect on, and share ideas regarding, issues of particular importance to them such as methodology, research design and ethical issues
- Reach a wide multi-disciplinary national and international audience through online publication

Authors are invited to submit reports of original research, reviews of research and scholarly papers on methodology, research design and ethical issues.

Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs will provide essential reading for those working in the special educational needs field wherever that work takes place around the world. It will be of particular interest to those working in:

- Research
- Teaching and learning support
- Policymaking
- Administration and supervision
- Educational psychology
- Advocacy

Call for Papers – Neurodiversity Special Edition

We are publishing an interdisciplinary multi-journal special issue on Neurodiversity. This issue will include contributions from 38 participating journals and will be the second special issue in a wider Wiley series on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

The term Neurodiversity is commonly used to describe diversity and variance in brain function and cognition. There has been a significant paradigm shift in recent years. Current approaches focus on understanding, leveraging and embracing neurological difference. According to Dr Nicole Baumer from Harvard Medical School: “Neurodiversity describes the idea that people experience and interact with the world around them in many different ways; there is no one "right" way of thinking, learning, and behaving, and differences are not viewed as deficits”.

We welcome global submissions on all aspects of neurodiversity. We intentionally seek to explore neurodiversity within a global context, through a diverse authorship, and a variety of intersectional perspectives. We especially welcome research that addresses one or more of the following areas:
• The conceptualisation and evolution of neurodiversity as a social movement.
• Current processes and experiences of diagnosis globally and across different social identities (including gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status), such as barriers to diagnosis, inequalities in diagnosis, and the benefits and challenges of formal diagnosis for individuals today.
• Neurodivergent conditions such as Autism Spectrum Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD), Epilepsy, Tourettes and Tic Disorders, and learning differences such as Dyslexia, Dyscalculia and Dyspraxia.
• Efforts to build neurodiversity awareness through education and public campaigns.
• Fostering inclusive environments through support and interventions, particularly in education, workplaces, healthcare, policing and carceral systems.
• Important challenges, including the impact of neurodivergence, and perceptions of neurodivergence on individual mental health, the availability of appropriate support services, the removal of stigma, and the historical and current impact of the pathologizing of some neurological differences.
• The future of research on neurodiversity and how research programs are working to improve the lived experiences of those with diagnoses.
• Ongoing and future endeavours in experimental investigation of the molecular, cellular and behavioural substrates of the “neurodivergent brain” in animal models and human subjects.

The following journals are participating in the special issue:

- Autism Research
- Brain and Behaviour
- British Journal of Learning Disabilities
- Campbell Systematic Reviews
- Child & Family Social Work
- Children & Society
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- Criminal Behaviour and Mental Health
- Developmental Neurobiology
- Developmental Science
- Dyslexia
- European Journal of Neuroscience
- Family Relations
- Human Resource Management
- Infant and Child Development
- International Journal of Developmental Neuroscience
- International Journal of Eating Disorders
- International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders
- International Journal of Social Welfare
- JCPP Advances
- Journal of Addictions and Offender Counseling
- Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities
- Journal of Community Psychology
- Journal of Creative Behaviour
• Journal of Employment Counseling
• Journal of Family Therapy
• Journal of Intellectual Disability Research
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• Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs
• Mental Health Science
• Psychology & Marketing
• Sociology Compass
• Sociology Lens
• Sociology of Health & Illness
• Symbolic Interaction

Our aim is to produce a really valuable resource that will be helpful to a wide range of professionals. If you would like to submit an article for inclusion in this issue simply submit your paper to the journal that is most relevant to your research. If your paper is accepted for publication, it will be published in a regular issue of the journal. It will also be published in this special virtual issue, scheduled for publication in 2023. The collection will be promoted via Wiley social media channels.

**Deadline for Submission: April 30, 2023.**

**Author Guidelines**

The *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs* publishes scholarly papers based on original research as well as critical reviews and theoretical essays. This includes submissions from a range of colleagues within the SEN field and across the disability community. Authors are asked to be sensitive to the diverse international audience of the *Journal* and explain the use of terms that might be meaningful or have a specific meaning in a particular national context. The use of jargon should be avoided and technical terms defined. Standard stylistic conventions based on British spelling and form should be followed.

References should be listed in full at the end of the paper in alphabetical order of authors’ names, set out as below:

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Illustrations, tables and figures should be numbered consecutively (e.g. Figure 1, Table 1, Table 2, etc.) and submitted on separate sheets. The approximate position of tables and figures should be indicated in the manuscript.

An electronic copy of manuscripts (Word files preferred) of 6,000-8,000 words including references and appendices should be sent to the Editor at the address provided at the end of these Guidelines. If electronic submission is not possible, three hard copies should be sent by regular mail. Each article should be accompanied by a 150-250 word abstract and a list of keywords on a separate sheet.

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Appendix C: International Journal of School and Educational Psychology Aims, Scope and Author Guidelines

Aims and scope

The International Journal of School & Educational Psychology (IJSEP) is the official journal of The International School Psychology Association (ISPA). IJSEP is a refereed journal published quarterly by the association. The primary purpose is to communicate broad-based, interdisciplinary issues of professional importance to the success of children, youth, and families in school and educational psychology. The journal is unique in that its aim is to disseminate diverse perspectives that bridge the gap between research and practice and advance social justice and equity for all students through transnational research.

IJSEP follows a rigorous and double-blind anonymous peer review process and requires authors to meet all stylistic and ethical guidelines put forth in the most recent APA Publication Manual. The journal emphasizes original empirical papers using quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method methodologies. Emphasizing the publication of outstanding research articles, IJSEP also considers literature reviews, methodological or theoretical manuscripts related to teaching, learning, schooling, cross-cultural psychology, school psychological services, applied educational psychology, educational research, prevention, intervention, assessment, and other school-related areas.

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- About the Journal
- Open Access
- Peer Review and Ethics
- Preparing Your Paper
International Journal of School & Educational Psychology is an international, peer-reviewed journal publishing high-quality, original research. Please see the journal's Aims & Scope for information about its focus and peer-review policy.

Please note that this journal only publishes manuscripts in English.

International Journal of School & Educational Psychology accepts the following types of article: original articles.

Researchers and practitioners alike are invited to contribute papers to the International Journal of School & Educational Psychology. IJSEP asks authors to follow the most recent APA Style Manual (i.e., 7th edition) including meeting all ethical style guidelines. The journal seeks to bridge the gap between Eastern and Western psychological practice. The journal accepts empirical papers that contribute to the knowledge base of teaching, learning, schooling, cross cultural psychology, school psychological services, applied educational psychology, assessment, special education, new models of instruction, and other related international areas. All forms of research are acceptable including quantitative and qualitative research such as case reports, single-subject designs, and empirical and longitudinal studies. The editorial board is made up of individuals from around the world and includes senior scientists and practitioners, and a group of student reviewers. The journal reviewers look for the practical implications of all work submitted. All papers are masked and then peer-reviewed. The journal has set a goal of providing publication decisions to authors within 60 days of submission of their work. This journal is timely given the interrelationship of teaching and psychology around the world. The journal seeks to represent empirical work from authors from a variety of global
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Please use double quotation marks, except where “a quotation is ‘within’ a quotation”. Please note that long quotations should be indented without quotation marks.

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Queries

Should you have any queries, please visit our Author Services website or contact us here.
# Appendix D: Excluded Studies Following Screening for Eligibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Reason for exclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Halsall, J., Clarke, C., &amp; Crane, L. Camouflaging by adolescent autistic girls who attend both mainstream and specialist resource classes: Perspectives of girls, their mothers and their educators</td>
<td>Closer inspection- Resource provision attached to mainstream – participants not actually attending a mainstream environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morewood et al. Book chapter on meeting the needs of autistic girls</td>
<td>Opinion piece- not empirical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O’Hagan and Bond- book chapter on the role of EPs supporting autistic girls</td>
<td>Not relevant to the review question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura Gray, Ella Bownas, Lucy Hicks, Emma Hutcheson-Galbraith &amp; Sandra Harrison (2021) Towards a better understanding of girls on the Autism spectrum: educational support and parental perspectives, Educational Psychology in Practice, 37:1, 74-93, DOI: 10.1080/02667363.2020.1863188</td>
<td>The girls’ ages ranged from 7 to 12 years only 3 in the study and did not meet 50% age criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anderson, L (2020) Schooling for Pupils with Autism Spectrum Disorder: Parents’ Perspectives</td>
<td>Only 11% mainstream, secondary aged pupils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campbell, JM; Caldwell, EA; Railey, KS; Lochner, O; Jacob, R; Kerwin, S Educating Students About Autism Spectrum Disorder Using the Kit for Kids Curriculum: Effects on Knowledge and Attitudes</td>
<td>Fourth and fifth graders (not within age-range)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent Expectations and Preparatory Activities as Adolescents with ASD Transition to Adulthood</td>
<td>No mention of school support on closer inspection of findings. Study investigated how parental expectations prepare autistic young people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonnsen, BL; Hahn, ER Middle School Students’ Attitudes Toward a Peer With Autism Spectrum Disorder: Effects of Social Acceptance and Physical Inclusion Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities 2016, Vol. 31(4) 262–274</td>
<td>Not relevant to the review question- asking typically developing CYP their perception of an autistic male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moyse, R; Porter, J R. Moyse &amp; J. Porter (2015) The experience of the hidden curriculum for autistic girls at mainstream primary schools, European Journal</td>
<td>Primary School (not within age range)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Authors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>The peer relationships of girls with ASD at school: Comparison to boys and girls with and without ASD.</td>
<td>Dean et al</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How narrative difficulties build peer rejection: A discourse analysis of a girl with autism and her female peers</td>
<td>Dean, M; Adams, GF; Kasari, C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental perspectives on the transition to secondary school for students with Asperger syndrome and high-functioning autism: a pilot survey study</td>
<td>Rachel Peters and Rob Brooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting the needs of college students with autism spectrum disorder</td>
<td>Tara Chandrasekhar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Qualitative Exploration of the Female Experience of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)</td>
<td>Victoria Milner1 · Hollie McIntosh1 · Emma Colvert1 · Francesca Happé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effects of Participation in Inclusive Physical Activity on Social Skills of Individuals With Autism Spectrum Disorder Sibel Nalbant</td>
<td>Correspondence: Assist. Prof. Dr. Sibel Nalbant, Alanya Alaaddin Keykubat University, Faculty of Sport Sciences, Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autistic girls and school exclusion: Perspectives of students and their parents Autism &amp; Developmental Language Impairments Volume 2: 1–14</td>
<td>Kelda Sproston and Felicity Sedgewick (Crane)</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Anxiety Caused by Secondary Schools for Autistic Adolescents: In Their Own Words Debra Costley 1,*</td>
<td>Ranson, NJ; Byrne, MK 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intervention carried out on neurotypical females, not autistic CYP</td>
<td>Ranson, NJ; Byrne, MK 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Less than half girls with ASC (not within 50% criteria)</td>
<td>Ranson, NJ; Byrne, MK 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>externalizing symptoms in adolescent females with and without autism spectrum disorder: a quantitative design including between-groups and correlational analyses T. Rene Jamison* and Jessica Oeth Schuttler (2015)</td>
<td>Also, aims not relevant on closer inspection: This study examined similarities and differences in selected indicators of social-emotional health (social competence, self-perception, quality of life) and problematic behaviours such as externalizing and internalizing symptoms for adolescent females with and without ASD.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E: Review Framework for Qualitative Research Evaluation

Educational and Psychology Research Group
Critical Appraisal Review Frameworks

Qualitative Research Framework

The University of Manchester Educational Psychology Critical Appraisal Review Frameworks were first developed in 2011 (Woods, Bond, Humphrey, Symes & Green, 2011). Since then the frameworks have been developed and extended as flexible tools for the critical appraisal of a wide range of qualitative and quantitative research that may be drawn upon by practising psychologists. This 2020 version of the qualitative research framework is designed to support critical appraisal of qualitative research, whether broadly an evaluation or investigation study.

The frameworks have been widely used and adapted in many published systematic reviews of evidence. Recent versions of the qualitative research framework have been used, or adapted for use, in evidence reviews by Akbar & Woods, (2019); Tomlinson, Bond and Hebron (2020); Simpson and Atkinson (2019); and Tyrell and Woods (2018).

If using, or adapting, the current version of this checklist for your own review, cite as:

References


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<tr>
<th>Criterion/ score</th>
<th>R1</th>
<th>R2</th>
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<th>R2</th>
<th>Agree %</th>
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<td>e.g. aim/ goal/ question of the research clearly stated, importance/ utility justified</td>
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<td>e.g. rationale vis-à-vis aims, links to previous approaches, limitations</td>
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<td>Well executed data collection</td>
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<td>e.g. clear details of who, what, where, how; intended/ actual (if modified) effect of execution on data quality; data saturation considered</td>
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<td>Negative case analysis, e.g. e.g. contrasts/ contradictions/ outliers</td>
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<td>within data; categories/themes as dimensional; diversity of perspectives.</td>
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<td>Evidence of researcher-participant negotiation of meanings, <em>e.g.</em> member checking, methods to empower participants.</td>
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<td>Valid conclusions drawn <em>e.g.</em> data presented support the findings which in turn support the conclusions</td>
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<td>Emergent theory related to the problem, <em>e.g.</em> links to previous findings/explanation of changes or differences/abstraction from categories/themes to model/explanation.</td>
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<td>Transferable conclusions <em>e.g.</em> contextualised findings; limitations of scope identified.</td>
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<td>Comprehensiveness of documentation <em>e.g.</em> schedules, transcripts, thematic maps, paper trail for external audit</td>
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<td>Clarity and coherence of the reporting <em>e.g.</em> clear structure, clear account linked to aims, key points highlighted</td>
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<td><strong>Mean % agree</strong></td>
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</table>

Kevin Woods, 23.4.20
Appendix F: Review Framework for Quantitative Research

Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology
Critical Appraisal Review Frameworks

Quantitative Research Framework

The University of Manchester Educational Psychology Critical Appraisal Review Frameworks were first developed in 2011 (Woods, Bond, Humphrey, Symes & Green, 2011). Since then the frameworks have been developed and extended as flexible tools for the critical appraisal of a wide range of qualitative and quantitative research that may be drawn upon by practising psychologists. This 2020 version of the quantitative research framework amalgamates previous quantitative frameworks to support critical appraisal of quantitative research, whether broadly an evaluation or investigation study.

The frameworks have been widely used and adapted in many published systematic reviews of evidence. Recent versions of the quantitative research frameworks have been used, or adapted for use, in evidence reviews by Flitcroft and Woods (2018); Simpson and Atkinson (2019); Tomlinson, Bond, & Hebron (2020); Tyrell & Woods (2018).

If using, or adapting, the current version of this checklist for your own review, cite as:

References


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<th><strong>Criterion</strong></th>
<th><strong>Score</strong></th>
<th><strong>R 1</strong></th>
<th><strong>R 2</strong></th>
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<th><strong>R 1</strong></th>
<th><strong>R 2</strong></th>
<th><strong>Agree %</strong></th>
<th><strong>Comment</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Design (evaluation studies only)</strong></td>
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<td>Use of a randomised group design</td>
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<tr>
<td>(i) Comparison with treatment-as-usual or placebo, OR</td>
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<td>(ii) Comparison with standard control group/ single case experiment design</td>
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<td>Use of manuals/ protocols for intervention/ training for intervention</td>
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<td>Fidelity checking/ supervision of intervention</td>
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<td>Clear research question or hypothesis e.g. well-defined, measureable constituent elements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appropriate participant sampling e.g. fit to research question, representativeness.</td>
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<td>Use of multiple measures</td>
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<td>Appropriate data gathering method used e.g. soundness of administration</td>
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<td>Reduction of bias within participant recruitment/ instrumentation/ administration e.g. harder-to-reach facilitation; accessibility of instrumentation</td>
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<td>Response rate/ completion maximised e.g. response rate specified; piloting; access options</td>
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<td>Population subgroup data collected e.g. participant gender; age; location</td>
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<td><em>e.g. Level and treatment specified</em></td>
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<td><em>e.g. year on year changes</em></td>
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<td><em>e.g. regional or subgroup analyses</em></td>
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<td><em>e.g. coherent approach specified; sample size justification/ sample size adequacy</em></td>
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<td>Multi-level or inter-group analyses present</td>
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<td><em>e.g. comparison between participant groups by relevant location or characteristics</em></td>
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<td><em>e.g. benchmarked/ justified evaluation of found quantitative facts</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>e.g. critique of method; generalizability estimate</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications of findings linked to rationale of research question</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>e.g. implications for theory, practice or future research</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total score</th>
<th>Mean % agree</th>
<th>Mean % agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total (investigation studies) (max=20)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total (evaluation studies) (max=28)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix G: Weight of Evidence A Final Scores

Key:

High quality highlighted in green
Medium quality highlighted in orange

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paper</th>
<th>WoE A Rating Qualitative- 20 max score</th>
<th>WoE A Rating Quantitative- 20 max score for investigative studies and 28 max score for evaluative studies</th>
<th>Inter-rater Agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cook et al. (2018)</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cridland et al. (2014)</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essex &amp; Melham (2019)</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacobs et al. (2021)</td>
<td>10 (accepted higher score)</td>
<td>Investigative- 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamison &amp; Schuttler (2017)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Evaluative- 18</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mademtzi et al. (2018)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myles et al. (2019)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O'Hagan et al. (2022)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pickup (2021)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan et al. (2021)</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomlinson et al. (2022)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix H: Weight of Evidence B Final Scores

Key:

High quality highlighted in green
Medium quality highlighted in orange

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paper</th>
<th>WoE B Rating</th>
<th>Inter-rater Agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Cook et al. (2018)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cridland et al. (2014)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essex &amp; Melham (2019)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacobs et al. (2021)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamison &amp; Schuttler (2017)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klett &amp; Turan (2012)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mademtzi et al. (2018)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myles et al. (2019)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O’Hagan et al. (2022)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pickup (2021)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan et al. (2021)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomlinson et al. (2022)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix I: Initial and Refined Codes

Initial Codes from N-Vivo 12

Please note that the colours relate to codes grouped together as themes (which can be found in the initial themes table in Appendix I).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accessing Services</th>
<th>Family coping strategies</th>
<th>Not Relevant (Findings not from current study)</th>
<th>Self-awareness and insight</th>
<th>Transition Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appearance</td>
<td>Feeling different</td>
<td>Not understanding school rules</td>
<td>Sense of belonging</td>
<td>Transition times within the school day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness Raising</td>
<td>Follow-up after diagnosis</td>
<td>One Key Friendship</td>
<td>Sensory</td>
<td>Travel to and from school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>Gaining Autistic girls' voices</td>
<td>Online opportunities for social interaction</td>
<td>Sex Education</td>
<td>Tutor time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>Gender-specific Interventions</td>
<td>Own coping strategies at school</td>
<td>Similar Interests</td>
<td>Unstructured times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career advice and support</td>
<td>BLANK</td>
<td>Own coping strategies used at home</td>
<td>Social Exclusion and Isolation</td>
<td>Varied methods of support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication of Needs</td>
<td>Group Based Intervention</td>
<td>Parent carer advocacy</td>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td>Vulnerability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Skills</td>
<td>Hidden social rules</td>
<td>Pastoral and Learning Support</td>
<td>Social Motivation</td>
<td>Whole-class approaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-morbid conditions and difficulties</td>
<td>Homework</td>
<td>Peer and friend acceptance and understanding</td>
<td>Social Skills</td>
<td>BLANK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping with change</td>
<td>Inclusive environments</td>
<td>Peer interactions</td>
<td>Social Stories</td>
<td>BLANK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Arts</td>
<td>Increased opportunities for friendships</td>
<td>Personal Holistic Development</td>
<td>Social Support</td>
<td>BLANK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnostic Issues</td>
<td>Increasing self-esteem</td>
<td>Personalised approach</td>
<td>Social Understanding</td>
<td>BLANK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiated support</td>
<td>Independence Skills</td>
<td>Physical Environment</td>
<td>Staff relationships and advocacy</td>
<td>BLANK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties with learning</td>
<td>Interests</td>
<td>Physical Health and Hygiene</td>
<td>Staff training</td>
<td>BLANK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLANK</td>
<td>Intimate relationships</td>
<td>Positive friendships and relationships with peers</td>
<td>Stress and distress</td>
<td>BLANK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinction between home and school</td>
<td>Issues at home</td>
<td>Post 16 Transition</td>
<td>Subject Choices</td>
<td>BLANK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EBSA</td>
<td>Issues with teaching</td>
<td>Prior knowledge and familiarity</td>
<td>Subtle difficulties</td>
<td>BLANK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Support</td>
<td>Key Worker Support</td>
<td>Puberty</td>
<td>Support in lessons</td>
<td>BLANK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Understanding</td>
<td>Masking</td>
<td>Reciprocal friendships</td>
<td>Talking to maintain friendships</td>
<td>BLANK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of the Day</td>
<td>Menstruation</td>
<td>Relationship difficulties</td>
<td>Taster Days and Open Evenings</td>
<td>BLANK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging lessons</td>
<td>Mental health difficulties</td>
<td>Rest breaks</td>
<td>Teacher lack of understanding of ASC in girls</td>
<td>BLANK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Fit</td>
<td>Mixed experiences</td>
<td>Role of EP</td>
<td>Teacher support and understanding</td>
<td>BLANK</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Refined Codes – after quality checks and iterative process

Please note that the colours relate to codes grouped together as themes (which can be found in the refined themes table in Appendix J).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accessing Services</th>
<th>Family coping strategies</th>
<th>Not Relevant (Findings not from current study)</th>
<th>Self-awareness and insight</th>
<th>Transition Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appearance</td>
<td>Feeling different</td>
<td>Not understanding school rules</td>
<td>Sense of belonging</td>
<td>Transition times within the school day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness Raising</td>
<td>Follow-up after diagnosis</td>
<td>One Key Friendship</td>
<td>Sensory</td>
<td>Travel to and from school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>Gaining Autistic girls' voices</td>
<td>Online opportunities for social interaction</td>
<td>Sex Education</td>
<td>Tutor time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>Female-specific interventions</td>
<td>Own coping strategies at school</td>
<td>Similar Interests</td>
<td>Unstructured times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career advice and support</td>
<td>Teacher lack of understanding leading to unmet needs</td>
<td>Own coping strategies used at home</td>
<td>Social Exclusion and Isolation</td>
<td>BLANK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication of Needs</td>
<td>Group Based Intervention</td>
<td>Parent carer advocacy</td>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td>Vulnerability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Skills</td>
<td>Hidden social rules</td>
<td>Pastoral and Learning Support</td>
<td>Social Motivation</td>
<td>Whole-class approaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-morbid conditions and difficulties</td>
<td>Homework</td>
<td>Peer and friend acceptance and understanding</td>
<td>Social Skills</td>
<td>Autism Friendly Strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping with change</td>
<td>Inclusive environments</td>
<td>Peer interactions</td>
<td>Social Stories</td>
<td>BLANK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Arts</td>
<td>Increased opportunities for friendships</td>
<td>Personal Holistic Development</td>
<td>Social Support</td>
<td>BLANK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnostic Issues</td>
<td>Increasing self-esteem</td>
<td>Personalised approach</td>
<td>Social Understanding</td>
<td>BLANK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiated support</td>
<td>Independence Skills</td>
<td>Physical Environment</td>
<td>Staff relationships and advocacy</td>
<td>BLANK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties with learning</td>
<td>Specific Interests</td>
<td>Physical Health and Hygiene</td>
<td>Staff training</td>
<td>BLANK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLANK</td>
<td>Intimate relationships</td>
<td>Positive friendships and relationships with peers</td>
<td>Stress and distress</td>
<td>BLANK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinction between home and school</td>
<td>Issues at home</td>
<td>Post 16 Transition</td>
<td>Subject Choices</td>
<td>BLANK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EBSA</td>
<td>Issues with teaching</td>
<td>Prior knowledge and familiarity</td>
<td>Subtle difficulties</td>
<td>BLANK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Support</td>
<td>Key Worker Support</td>
<td>Puberty</td>
<td>Pedagogical Techniques</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
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<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Understanding</td>
<td>Masking</td>
<td>Reciprocal friendships</td>
<td>Talking to maintain friendships</td>
<td>BLANK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of the Day</td>
<td>Menstruation</td>
<td>Relationship difficulties</td>
<td>Taster Days and Open Evenings</td>
<td>BLANK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging lessons</td>
<td>Mental health difficulties</td>
<td>Rest breaks</td>
<td>Teacher lack of understanding leading to barriers with identification and diagnosis</td>
<td>Teacher lack of understanding leading to unmet needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Fit</td>
<td>BLANK</td>
<td>Role of EP</td>
<td>Teacher support and understanding</td>
<td>BLANK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam access and support</td>
<td>Mobile Phone</td>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>Transition Framework and Processes</td>
<td>BLANK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Agency Support</td>
<td>Named Staff for Supporting Transition</td>
<td>School and home link</td>
<td>Transition from Primary to Secondary School</td>
<td>BLANK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External support for friendships</td>
<td>BLANK</td>
<td>School transition support inadequate</td>
<td>Transition Meetings</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix J: Initial Theme Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Themes</th>
<th>Corresponding Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>Career advice and support; Named staff for supporting transition; Post 16 Transition; School transition support inadequate; Taster Days and Open Evenings; Transition Framework and Processes; Transition from Primary to Secondary School; Transition Meetings; Transition support; Transition times within the school day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnosis</td>
<td>Co-morbid conditions and difficulties; Diagnostic Issues; Follow-up after diagnosis; Teacher lack of understanding of ASC in girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender-specific Needs</td>
<td>Appearance; Gender-specific Interventions; Intimate relationships; Menstruation; Physical Health and Hygiene; Puberty; Sex Education; Vulnerability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health and Emotional Support</td>
<td>EBSA; Emotional Support; Family coping strategies; Mental health difficulties; Increasing self-esteem; Own coping strategies at school; Own coping strategies used at home; Personal Holistic Development; Social Support; Stress and distress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Online opportunities for social interaction; Social Media; Mobile Phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Support</td>
<td>Accessing Services; External Agency Support; Role of EP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendships</td>
<td>External support for friendships; Increased opportunities for friendships; One Key Friendship; Peer interactions; Positive friendships and relationships with peers; Reciprocal friendships; Similar Interests; Social Motivation; Talking to maintain friendships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and Emotional Understanding</td>
<td>Bullying; Emotional Understanding; Feeling different; Hidden social rules; Relationship difficulties; Social Understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>Communication Skills; Independence Skills; Social Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigating the school day</td>
<td>Communication of Needs; Coping with change; Difficulties with learning; End of the Day; Homework; Issues with teaching; Maktung; Mixed experiences; Noise; Not understanding school rules; Physical Environment; Prior knowledge and familiarity; Safety; Sensory; Subtle difficulties; Travel to and from school; Tutor time; Unstructured times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day-to-day Support and Intervention</td>
<td>Books; Creative Arts; Differentiated support; Engaging lessons; Exam access and support; Group Based Intervention; Interests; Key Worker Support; Pastoral and Learning Support; Personalised approach; Rest breaks; Social Stories; Subject Choices; Support in lessons; Teacher support and understanding; Varied methods of support; Whole-class approaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Through Home School Partnership</td>
<td>Distinction between home and school; Issues at home; School and home link</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>Awareness Raising; Gaining Autistic girls’ voices; Parent carer advocacy; Peer and friend acceptance and understanding; Self-awareness and insight; Staff relationships and advocacy; Staff training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td>Environmental Fit; Inclusive environments; Sense of belonging; Social Exclusion and Isolation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix K: Refined Codes and Themes Across Papers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cook et al. (2018)</td>
<td>Awareness raising, Bullying, Communication of needs, Communication skills, Diagnostic Issues, EBSA, Emotional Understanding, Female-specific Interventions, Feeling Different, Group Based Intervention, Issues at home, Issues with teaching, Masking, Mental health difficulties, Mobile Phone, Not Relevant (Findings not from current study), Peer and friend acceptance and understanding, Reciprocal friendships, Relationship difficulties, Sense of belonging, Social Exclusion and Isolation, Social Media, Social Motivation, Social Skills, Social Understanding, Staff training, Teacher lack of understanding leading to unmet needs, Vulnerability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cridland et al. (2014)</td>
<td>Accessing services, Appearance, Diagnostic Issues, Difficulties with learning, Emotional Understanding, Environmental Fit, External agency support, Family coping strategies, Feeling Different, Female-specific Interventions, Follow-up after diagnosis, Group Based Intervention, Hidden social rules, Intimate relationships, Issues at home, Masking, Mental Health Difficulties, Menstruation, Not Relevant (Findings not from current study), Parent/carer advocacy, Peer and friend acceptance and understanding, Peer interactions, Physical Environment, Physical Health and Hygiene, Positive friendships and relationships with peers, Puberty, Relationship difficulties, School and home link, School transition support inadequate, Sense of belonging, Social Motivation, Social Understanding, Specific Interests, Subject Choices, Teacher lack of understanding leading to unmet needs, Transition from primary to secondary school, Transition Support, Travel to and from school, Vulnerability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essex &amp; Melham (2019)</td>
<td>Career advice and support, Communication of needs, Difficulties with learning, Emotional Support, Emotional Understanding, Exam access and support, Female-specific Interventions, Gaining Autistic girls’ voices, Key Worker Support, Mental Health Difficulties, Named staff for supporting transition, Not Relevant (Findings not from current study), Parent/carer advocacy, Pastoral Support, Pedagogical Technique, Personal Holistic Development, Personalised approach, Physical Environment, Physical Health and Hygiene, Positive friendships and relationships with peers, Puberty, Relationship difficulties, School and home link, Social Support, School transition support inadequate, Social Understanding, Subject choices, Staff relationships and advocacy, Subject choices, Taster and Open Evenings, Teacher lack of understanding leading to unmet needs, Teacher support and understanding, Transition Framework and Processes, Transition meetings, Transition Support, Travel to and from school, Vulnerability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacobs et al. (2021)</td>
<td>Bullying, Communication of needs, Communication Skills, Coping with change, Differentiated support, Difficulties with learning, EBSA, Exam access and support, Gaining autistic girls’ voices, Hidden social rules, Inclusive environments, Issues with teaching, Key Worker Support, Mental Health Difficulties, Not Relevant (Findings not from current study), One key friendship, Own coping strategies at school, Pedagogical Techniques, Peer and friend acceptance and understanding, Peer interactions, Personalised approach, Physical Environment, Physical Health and Hygiene, Relationship difficulties, School and home link, Self-awareness and insight, Social exclusion and isolation, Sensory Sensitivities, Social Skills, Social Support, Social Understanding, Staff relationships and advocacy, Stress and Distress, Subject Choices, Teacher lack of understanding leading to unmet needs, Teacher support and understanding, Transition Framework and Processes, Transition meetings, Transition Support, Travel to and from school, Vulnerability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamison &amp; Schuttler (2017)</td>
<td>Communication skills, Co-morbid conditions and difficulties, Coping with change, Emotional Support, Emotional understanding, Family coping strategies, Female-specific Interventions, Gaining Autistic girls’ voices, Increasing self-esteem, Independence skills, Mental Health Difficulties, Not Relevant (Findings not from current study), Personalised approach, Physical Health and Hygiene, Positive friendships and relationships with peers, Social Skills, Social Understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klett &amp; Turan (2012)</td>
<td>Family coping strategies, Female-specific Interventions, Menstruation, Not Relevant (Findings not from current study), Personalised Approaches, Puberty, Sex Education, Social Stories, Female-specific Interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mademtzi et al. (2018)</td>
<td>Accessing services, Appearance, Books, Bullying, Communication skills, Co-morbid conditions and difficulties, Creative Arts, Diagnostic Issues, Difficulties with learning, Emotional Understanding, Female-specific Interventions, Gaining Autistic girls’ voices, Group Based Intervention, Independence skills, Masking, Mental Health Difficulties, Menstruation, Not Relevant (Findings not from current study), Parent/carer advocacy, Physical Health and Hygiene, Puberty, Relationship difficulties, School and home link, School transition support inadequate, Sensory Sensitivities, Sex Education, Social Exclusion and Isolation, Social Media, Social Motivation, Social Skills, Social Understanding, Specific Interests, Talking to maintain friendships, Transition times within the school day, Vulnerability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Key themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miles et al. (2019)</td>
<td>Communication skills, Emotional Support, Hidden social rules, Inclusive environments, Masking, Mental Health Difficulties, Not Relevant (Findings not from current study), One key friendship, Peer and friend acceptance and understanding, Physical Environment, Positive friendships and relationships with peers, Reciprocal friendships, Safety, School transition support inadequate, Sense of belonging, Social exclusion and isolation, Social skills, Social understanding, Teacher lack of understanding leading to barriers with identification and diagnosis, Teacher lack of understanding leading to unmet needs, Teacher support and understanding, Transition from primary to secondary school, Unstructured times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O’Hagan et al. (2022)</td>
<td>Autism Friendly Strategies, Awareness Raising, Diagnostic issues, EBSA, Emotional Support, External Agency Support, Follow-up after diagnosis, Gaining Autistic girls’ voices, Group-based intervention, Inclusive environments, Increased opportunities for friendships, Increasing self-esteem, Independence skills, Key Worker Support, Not Relevant (Findings not from current study), One Key Friendship, Parent/carer advocacy, Pastoral and learning support, Peer interactions, Personal Holistic Development, Personalised approach, Positive friendships and relationships with peers, Relationship difficulties, Safety, School and home link, Self-awareness and insight, Sense of belonging, Social exclusion and isolation, Social motivation, Social skills, Social understanding, Staff relationships and advocacy, Stress and distress, Teacher lack of understanding leading to unmet needs, Teacher support and understanding, Transition from primary to secondary school, Travel to and from school, Unstructured times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pickup (2021)</td>
<td>Communication of needs, Coping with change, Creative Arts, Differentiated support, Difficulties with learning, Distinction between home and school, Emotional Support, Emotional understanding, End of the day, Engaging lessons, Environmental fit, External support for friendships, Gaining Autistic girls’ voices, Homework, Inclusive environments, Increased opportunities for friendship, Increasing self-esteem, Issues at home, Issues with teaching, Key Worker Support, Masking, Mental Health Difficulties, Mobile Phone, Not Relevant (Findings not from current study), Not understanding school rules, Online opportunities for social interaction, Own coping strategies at home, Own coping strategies at school, Pastoral support, Pedagogical techniques, Peer and friend acceptance and understanding, Peer interactions, Personalised approach, Physical Environment, Positive friendships and relationships with peers, Prior knowledge and familiarity, Reciprocal friendships, Relationship difficulties, Rest breaks, Role of EP, Safety, School and home link, Self-awareness and insight, Sense of belonging, Sensory sensitivities, Social media, Social motivation, Social Support, Social understanding, Staff relationships and advocacy, Stress and distress, Subtle difficulties, Taster and open evenings, Talking to maintain friendships, Teacher support and understanding, Transition support, Transition times within the school day, Tutor time, Unstructured times, Whole-class approaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan et al. (2021)</td>
<td>Emotional Support, Emotional understanding, External support for friendships, Female-specific interventions, Gaining Autistic girls’ voices, Group-Based Intervention, Mental Health Difficulties, Mobile Phone, Not Relevant (Findings not from current study), One key friendship, Online opportunities for social interaction, Physical Environment, Positive friendships and relationships with peers, Post-16 Transition, Relationship difficulties, Safety, Similar interests, Social exclusion and isolation, Social media, Stress and distress, Transition from primary to secondary school, Transition support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomlinson et al. (2022)</td>
<td>Autism Friendly Strategies, Awareness Raising, Communication Skills, Coping with change, Diagnostic issues, Difficulties with learning, Emotional Support, Exam Access and Support, External support for friendships, Follow-up after diagnosis, Gaining Autistic girls’ voices, Group-based intervention, Homework, Inclusive environments, Masking, Mental Health Difficulties, Not Relevant (Findings not from current study), Own coping strategies at school, Pastoral and learning support, Peer and friend acceptance and understanding, Peer interactions, Personalised approach, Physical Environment, Positive friendships and relationships with peers, Post-16 Transition, Relationship Difficulties, Rest breaks, Safety, Self-awareness and insight, Sense of belonging, Sensory sensitivities, Social exclusion and isolation, Social media, Social skills, Social understanding, Staff relationships and advocacy, Staff training, Stress and distress, Subject choices, Taster days and open evenings, Teacher lack of understanding leading to barriers with identification and diagnosis, Teacher lack of understanding leading to unmet needs, Teacher support and understanding, Transition times within the school day, Unstructured times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refined Themes</td>
<td>Corresponding Codes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>Career advice and support; Named staff for supporting transition; Post 16 Transition; School transition support inadequate; Taster Days and Open Evenings; Transition Framework and Processes; Transition from Primary to Secondary School; Transition Meetings; Transition support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification and Diagnosis</td>
<td>Co-morbid conditions and difficulties; Diagnostic Issues; Follow-up after diagnosis; Teacher lack of understanding leading to barriers with identification and diagnosis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female-specific Needs</td>
<td>Appearance; Female-specific Interventions; Intimate relationships; Menstruation; Physical Health and Hygiene; Puberty; Sex Education; Specific Interests; Subtle difficulties; Vulnerability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health and Emotional Needs</td>
<td>EBSA; Emotional Support; Emotional Understanding; Mental health difficulties; Increasing self-esteem; Own coping strategies at school; Stress and distress</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Online opportunities for social interaction; Social Media; Mobile Phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Support</td>
<td>Accessing Services; External Agency Support; Role of EP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendships</td>
<td>External support for friendships; Increased opportunities for friendships; One Key Friendship; Peer interactions; Positive friendships and relationships with peers; Reciprocal friendships; Similar Interests; Social Motivation; Social Support; Talking to maintain friendships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Needs</td>
<td>Bullying; Feeling different; Hidden social rules; Masking; Relationship difficulties; Stress and distress; Social Understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills Development</td>
<td>Communication Skills; Independence Skills; Social Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigating the school day</td>
<td>Communication of Needs; Coping with change; Difficulties with learning; End of the Day; Homework; Issues with teaching; Not understanding school rules; Physical Environment; Prior knowledge and familiarity; Safety; Sensory Sensitivities; Transition times within the school day; Travel to and from school; Tutor time; Unstructured times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day-to-day Support and Intervention</td>
<td>Autism Friendly Strategies; Books; Creative Arts; Differentiated support; Engaging lessons; Exam access and support; Group Based Intervention; Inclusive environments; Key Worker Support; Pastoral and Learning Support; Personalised approach; Personal Holistic Development; Rest breaks; Social Stories; Subject Choices; Pedagogical Techniques; Staff training; Teacher lack of understanding leading to unmet needs; Teacher support and understanding; Whole-class approaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interplay between home and school</td>
<td>Distinction between home and school; Family coping strategies; Issues at home; Own coping strategies used at home; School and home link</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>Awareness Raising; Gaining Autistic girls’ voices; Parent carer advocacy; Peer and friend acceptance and understanding; Self-awareness and insight; Staff relationships and advocacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td>Environmental Fit; Sense of belonging; Social Exclusion and Isolation</td>
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### Appendix L: Analytical Theme Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptive Themes</th>
<th>Analytical Themes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Link between home and school</td>
<td>The importance of supportive relationships between home and school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key stage transitions</td>
<td>Coordinated support and processes for key stage transitions and preparing for adulthood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for female-specific needs, including social, emotional and mental health needs and barriers to identification and diagnosis</td>
<td>Illuminating autistic females’ specific needs: Mental health and identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support friendships and relationships through skills development and technology</td>
<td>The importance of promoting and facilitating friendships and relationships through skills development and technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raising awareness and understanding of the autistic female phenotype through advocacy</td>
<td>Promoting self, peer and staff advocacy in order to raise awareness and understanding of the female autism phenotype and foster a sense of belonging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies related to the school environment</td>
<td>Preventative strategies to ensure psychological and physical safety within the school environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiered support</td>
<td>The use of universal, targeted and individualised strategies to meet needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix M: Illustrative Examples of Analytical Theme Development

As a demonstration of the iterative process of theme development undertaken by the researchers, the theme, ‘The importance of promoting and facilitating friendships and relationships through skills development and technology’ will be briefly discussed. The concept of friendships was apparent throughout the data, linking to many initial themes such as female-specific needs, mental health and emotional needs, technology, social needs, skills development, navigating the school day, day-to-day support and intervention, advocacy and belonging. The overlap of friendships within these initial themes, highlighted to the researchers the importance of the social experiences of autistic females when considering support in mainstream settings. Further exploration of the data allowed for the integration of several initial themes in order to form a conceptual theme for supporting autistic girls. It was apparent that technology was considered as a means of facilitating friendships and increasing opportunities for relationship building. Similarly, skills development, identified across much of the data, tended to link to social interactions. Thus, facilitating friendships via these means became a key aspect of potential support for autistic females in high school settings.

As a further demonstration of the iterative process of theme development undertaken by the researchers, the first author presents a brief discussion of the theme, ‘Promoting self, peer and staff advocacy in order to raise awareness and understanding of the female autism phenotype and foster a sense of belonging’. The concept of advocacy was apparent throughout the data, linking to many initial themes such as transition, diagnosis, external support, navigating the school day, day to day support, interplay between home and school and belonging. Advocacy was first construed as a means of gaining the voice of autistic girls to raise awareness and understanding of the autistic female phenotype. However, additional examination of the data highlighted that advocacy also spanned to peer and school staff awareness raising. In addition, the researchers began to acknowledge that advocacy, as an act of promoting inclusivity, was used as a means of fostering a sense of belonging. This was considered to be a key aspect of supporting autistic girls in high school settings.
## Appendix N: Illustrative Examples of Data Linked to Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Participant Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The importance of supportive relationships between home and school</td>
<td>Cridland et al. (2014), p. 1,272</td>
<td>“The most efficacious sexual education and support will be provided collaboratively between parents, clinicians, and teachers.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pickup (2021), p. 81</td>
<td>“These descriptions suggest that close communication between home and school, with shared knowledge of their needs, is beneficial for participants.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Essex and Melham (2019), p. 103</td>
<td>“The other two school staff reported that they initiate conversations with parents about future placements when the young women are in year nine (that is, aged 13 to 14 years old) and transition activities continue from that point on.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>O’Hagan et al. (2022), p. 9</td>
<td>“Collaborative home-school communication enabled parents and staff to share concerns and suggestions and the mothers praised the flexibility of staff. The mothers all had a difficult journey navigating the systems for diagnosis and SEN support and so it was a relief to eventually feel supported by school staff.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinated support and processes for key stage transitions and preparing for adulthood</td>
<td>Essex and Melham (2019), p. 97</td>
<td>“The findings point to the need for transition to be managed strategically over an extended time period and in a way that incorporates the views of all key stakeholders. The timely transfer of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan et al., (2021), p. 403</td>
<td>accurate information about a student is a key element of transition management. Without exception, the young women wanted their new teachers to know about their HFA.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Support for the continuation of friendships beyond school change, could provide a useful intervention; if friendships could receive a higher level of support before key transition stages, this may enable adolescents with ASD to maintain friendships more successfully.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Within-school and external agency support for female-specific needs, including social, emotional and mental health needs and identification

Jamison & Schuttler (2017), p. 119

“Results from related samples t tests show significant improvements in the perceived (i.e., self-report measures) social-emotional health of adolescent females with ASD following the completion of the GNO program.”

“Participants also experienced significant decreases in self-reported internalizing symptoms following intervention (t(18) = 3.19, p = .003; ES = 0.45).”

Pickup (2021), p. 92

“Molly described a fidget toy that she had made for herself to aid feeling calm but recognised that it was not appropriate to use this in school due to other people’s perceptions.”

Mademzi et al. (2018), p. 1,305

“The importance of promoting and facilitating friendships and relationships through skills development and technology

“Additionally, parents commented that bullying behaviours started mostly later on: “major victimization started in 5th grade”. Other parents also made reference to cyberbullying and the need

P. 110

“For some participants there was suggestion that transitioning between home and school required cognitive adjustment and the facilitation of separating home and school also helped with reducing stress and anxiety. Suggestions comprised less formal transition periods at either end of the school day or homework clubs.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Citation</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ryan et al. (2021), p. 403</td>
<td>to educate their daughters about social media.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O’Hagan et al. (2022), p. 7</td>
<td>“Likewise, further exploration of the significance and distribution of difficulty with texting among girls with ASD is warranted and may suggest a role for teaching appropriate texting behaviour, along with other social media safety skills, to potentially enhance the friendship skills of girls with ASD.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting self, peer and staff advocacy in order to raise awareness and understanding of the autistic female phenotype and foster a sense of belonging through inclusivity</td>
<td>“A lack of friendship and feelings of loneliness and isolation were risk factors to low attendance, Jasmine’s mother explained: ‘It’s all about friendships really not feeling isolated and alone because that feeds into the negativity and the depression.’”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook et al. (2018), p. 313</td>
<td>“There is a need for greater awareness in schools of their needs – both academic and social. This could lead to the possibility of a better school experience, reduced absenteeism and reduced need for masking behaviours, so that girls can be diagnosed and supported from an earlier age, and also accepted by their peers without the need to make personal adjustments.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myles et al. (2019), p. 10</td>
<td>“Participants saw friendship as an important basis for belonging and as beneficial for their school experience.”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Quote</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------</td>
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<tr>
<td>O’Hagan et al. (2022), p. 8</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Over time, Jasmine became integrated within the school community by taking part in extracurricular clubs: ‘I run a LGBT club with my friend. For the younger students who are struggling...We normally just sit and talk and it’s like a safe place for anyone to come and talk about their issues and stuff’ (Jasmine).”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacobs et al. (2021), p. 201</td>
<td></td>
<td>“All girls agreed that tasks presented in sections or chunks were easier to manage, while most girls also recognised the benefits of verbal explanations and instructions being coupled with written formats and vice versa. Reducing the demand on working memory by presenting work in smaller units as well as providing multiple means of sensory information helped the girls to understand more clearly the expectations related to schoolwork and processes associated with assignments. As Charlee commented, ‘I really like plans . . . It’s really helpful and I just get everything done at the right time, and it’s not finished too late’.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myles et al. (2019), p. 11</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Pupils discussed particular areas in school where they feel safe and are able to check in with staff or peers. For Ella, this was a lunchtime club, where she...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The use of universal, targeted and individualised strategies to meet needs</td>
<td>Klett &amp; Turan (2012) P.329</td>
<td>“One parent indicated that “it is a great starting point and really helped ... did not know how to address specific ideas” and that she recommended this to other parents because her daughter made progress and this intervention was “thoroughly personalized” for her child.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mademtzi et al. (2018), p. 1,308</td>
<td></td>
<td>“The most predominant services and interventions parents suggested and found most helpful throughout the years were, life skills training, art programs, technology and physical education, especially when delivered in a group-based form.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pickup, 2021, p. 76</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Teachers making adjustments in their interactions with the whole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomlinson et al. (2022), p. 332</td>
<td>class in response to participants’ needs was also welcomed, for example Zelda Hyrule appreciated a whole class approach in response to her distress during food technology lessons: ‘...and what they did is, they stopped urging people to be quicker...’ (Zelda Hyrule, line 200-201)&quot;. “The autism-friendly strategies offered by the school provided a broad framework; however, given the heterogeneity of autism this needed to be individualised further by school staff and the girls themselves.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix O: Demographic and Background Data of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of SPs with recent experience of working with at least one autistic female</th>
<th>Number of SPs with recent experience of working with a number of autistic females</th>
<th>Number of SPs with experience of working systemically to support autistic females</th>
<th>Number of SPs with experience of working systemically to support pupils with SEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>UK</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(n = 5 SPs, all female)</em></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualified 1-20 years</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>USA</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(n = 6 SPs, all female)</em></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualified 1-18 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix P: Ethical Approval Letter

Environment, Education and Development School Panel PGR
School for Environment, Education and Development
Humanities Bridgeford Street 1.17
The University of Manchester
Manchester
M13 9PL
Email: PGR.ethics.seed@manchester.ac.uk

Ref: 2021-127/1-202D95

23/08/2021

Dear Mrs Kacie Ayienbi, Dr George Thomas

Study Title: "Stakeholder views on the utility of a proposed model of high school support for autistic females."

Environment, Education and Development School Panel PGR

I write to thank you for submitting the final version of your documents for your project to the Committee on 04/08/2021 15:59. I am pleased to confirm a favourable ethical opinion for the above research on the basis described in the application form and supporting documentation as submitted and approved by the Committee.

**COVID-19 Important Note**

Please ensure you read the information on the Research Ethics website in relation to data collection in the COVID environments as well as the guidance issued by the University, in relation to face-to-face (in person) data collection both on and off campus.

A most document version of this guidance is also available.

Please see below for a table of the titles, version numbers and dates of all the final approved documents for your project:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document Type</th>
<th>File Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Version</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Letters of Permission</td>
<td>DBS K Ayienbi</td>
<td>04/08/2021</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consent Form</td>
<td>T2 Consent Form, professionals</td>
<td>19/07/2021</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consent Form</td>
<td>T2 Consent Form, professionals</td>
<td>19/07/2021</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Additional docs</td>
<td>T2 Proposed Focus Group Moderator Prompts, professionals</td>
<td>20/07/2021</td>
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<tr>
<td>Additional docs</td>
<td>T2 Proposed Focus Group Moderator Script, professionals</td>
<td>20/07/2021</td>
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<td>Participant Information Sheet</td>
<td>T2 PIS for 11 and 12 year olds</td>
<td>02/08/2021</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant Information Sheet</td>
<td>T2 PIS for 13 years plus</td>
<td>02/08/2021</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant Information Sheet</td>
<td>T2 Participant Information Sheet, Professionals</td>
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<td>Consent Form</td>
<td>Child Assent form UNDER 12 years</td>
<td>02/08/2021</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Child Assent form 12 years over</td>
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<td>02/08/2021</td>
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<td>Additional docs</td>
<td>T2 Researcher, One Page Profile</td>
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<td>Additional docs</td>
<td>T2 Distress Protocol</td>
<td>02/08/2021</td>
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<td>Additional docs</td>
<td>T2 Child Debrief Form</td>
<td>02/08/2021</td>
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<td>Additional docs</td>
<td>T2 Parent debrief sheet</td>
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<td>Consent Form</td>
<td>Child Assent form 12 years over</td>
<td>02/08/2021</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant Information Sheet</td>
<td>T2 PIS for 11 and 12 year olds</td>
<td>02/08/2021</td>
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<td>Participant Information Sheet</td>
<td>T2 PIS for 13 years plus</td>
<td>02/08/2021</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Information Sheet</td>
<td>T2 Participant Information Sheet, Professionals</td>
<td>02/08/2021</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional docs</td>
<td>T2 Email to Professionals</td>
<td>02/08/2021</td>
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<tr>
<td>Letters of Permission</td>
<td>T2 Email to Gatekeeper</td>
<td>02/08/2021</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This approval is effective for a period of five years and is on delegated authority of the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) however please note that it is only valid for the specifications of the research project as outlined in the approved documentation set. If the project continues beyond the 5 year period or if you wish to propose any changes to the methodology or any other specifics within the project an application to seek an amendment must be submitted for review. Failure to do so could invalidate the insurance and constitute research misconduct.

You are reminded that, in accordance with University policy, any data carrying personal identifiers must be encrypted when not held on a secure university computer or kept securely as a hard copy in a location which is accessible only to those involved with the research.

For those undertaking research requiring a DBS Certificate: As you have now completed your ethical application if required a colleague at the University of Manchester will be in touch for you to undertake a DBS check. Please note that you do not have to DSB approval until you have received a DBS Certificate completed by the University of Manchester, or you are an MA Teach First student who holds a DBS certificate for your current teaching role.

**Reporting Requirements:**

You are required to report to us the following:

1. Amendment: Guidance on what constitutes an amendment
2. Amendment: How to submit an amendment in the ERM system
3. Ethics: Breaches and adverse events
4. Data breaches

We wish you every success with the research.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Dr Kate Rowlands

Environment, Education and Development School Panel PGR
Appendix Q: Ethical Amendment Letter

APPROVED: Amendment Ref: 2022-12753-23154 (Automatic Email from the UoM Ethical Review Manager (ERM) system)

* * *Please ensure you read the contents of this message. This email has been sent via the Ethical Review Manager (ERM) system on behalf of the University of Manchester.* * *

Dear Ms Kate Ayres,

Thank you for submitting your amendment request for project: 2022-12753-23154; entitled: *Understandable issues on the utility of a proposed model of high school support for autistic females:* which has now been approved. Your documentation has been suitably updated to reflect the proposed changes; please ensure you use this documentation.

Please note if you sought an extension to your data collection window as part of this amendment request (the revised expiry date is: This space will be blank if you did not seek an extension as part of this request). If you did not seek an extension as part of this amendment request please refer to your formal letter of ethical approval or previously approved amendment request for your current data collection window. A reminder if you wish to extend this date you must submit a formal amendment before this date or a new ethics application may be required.

Please note that if you have submitted revised supporting documents to accompany your amendment request, the approved versions of these in a table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document Type</th>
<th>File Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Version</th>
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<td>12_email to participants indicating there will be a survey</td>
<td>29/04/2022</td>
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</table>

Please ensure you review the Research Ethics website throughout the duration of your project to keep up to date on current UoM guidance and best practice.

We wish you every success with the research.

Best wishes,

Dr Kate Rowlands

Environment, Education and Development School Panel PGR
Appendix R: Ethical Documentation - Initial Email to Participants

‘Stakeholder views on the utility of a proposed model of high school support for autistic females.’

Email for Professionals

Dear ……

My name is Katie Ayirebi. I am a second-year trainee educational (school) psychologist on the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology at The University of Manchester in the North West of England. I am hoping to carry out a research project that aims to explore your views and perceptions on a proposed model of support for autistic females in a high school setting (aged 11-18 years in the UK). The main research questions, which will form our discussion are:

1. How do stakeholders in the UK and USA perceive the utility of a proposed model of support for autistic females in terms of strengths and areas for development?

2. How might stakeholders in the UK and USA implement a proposed model of support for autistic females, with reference to potential barriers and facilitators?

I intend to conduct a focus group with yourself, which will involve other (Educational Psychologists/ School Psychologists) from your context, over an online communication platform, such as Zoom, at a mutually convenient time. Focus groups will be audio recorded and transcripts will be analysed using thematic analysis to identify themes. All data will be anonymised and some of your anonymised quotations may be used in a report I submit to the university as part of my doctoral thesis.

Please also find attached to this e-mail, the following documentation:

- Participant Information Sheet
- Consent form
- Moderator script for the focus group.

Many thanks for taking the time to read this email.

Best wishes,
Katie Ayirebi

(Trainee Educational Psychologist- University of Manchester)
Appendix S: Follow-up Email to Participants

Stakeholder views on the utility of a proposed model of high school support for autistic females.

Email for Professionals

Dear X,

Thank you for expressing an interest in participating in my doctoral research study on supporting autistic females. It will be great to gather the views of School Psychologists and gain an international perspective.

I have attached the participant information sheet and consent form.

The focus group will take place at X on X over Google Meet. I will present the proposed model of support during the first 15 minutes of the meeting and then facilitate the focus group which will last for one hour.

If you decide you would like to take part, please send me a signed a copy of the consent form (a picture or scanned copy sent via email will be great) and I will email you a Google Meet link for the meeting along with a very short survey to complete prior to the meeting.

If you have any further questions, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Best wishes,

Katie Ayirebi
Trainee Educational Psychologist
(she/ her)
Appendix T: Participant Information Sheet

‘Stakeholder views on the utility of a proposed model of high school support for autistic females.’

Participant Information Sheet (PIS)

You are being invited to take part in a research study exploring your views on a model of support for autistic females in high school settings (sixth grade to twelfth grade in the USA) which will inform my professional doctorate thesis. Before you decide whether to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully before deciding whether to take part and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Thank you for taking the time to read this.

About the research

➢ Who will conduct the research?

Katie Ayirebi, a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) at the University of Manchester, England.

School of Environment, Education and Development (SEED)
Ellen Wilkinson Building,
Oxford Road,
Manchester,
M13 9PL.

➢ What is the purpose of the research?

The purpose of this study is to investigate the utility of a model of support for autistic females aged 11-18 years. The model has been developed by Educational Psychologists and school staff at an all-girls secondary grammar school and sixth form in the North West of England. The study intends to recruit autistic female participants, as an expert reference group, from the grammar school to gather their views to refine the model of support. In addition, to explore the utility of the model in other contexts, the research aims to recruit Educational/School Psychologists in the UK and USA.

Through the use of focus groups, the study wishes to gather the perspectives and experiences of these participants to gain an insight into utility of the model in different contexts. I hope to generate themes from the data that will inform my thesis research project.

You have been purposively selected to participate in this study based on your role within the school in the North West of England or other context in the UK or USA. Your participation and valuable insights will hopefully provide me with a greater understanding of how the model could be implemented, which aims to inform future practice.

➢ Will the outcomes of the research be published?
Findings will be written up into a thesis that will be submitted to the University of Manchester as part of the assessment requirements of the Doctorate of Educational and Child Psychology. The thesis intends to be submitted for publication in a peer reviewed journal and the findings may be used in future research.

➢ Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Check

The researcher has undergone an appropriate level of DBS check (as determined by their School and obtained via The University of Manchester).

➢ Who has reviewed the research project?

This project has been reviewed by The University of Manchester Research Ethics Committee.

➢ Who is funding the research project?

Funding has been provided from the DfE Initial Training for Educational Psychologists bid 2020-2023 £15,950 pa bursary.

**What would my involvement be?**

➢ What would I be asked to do if I took part?

A mutually convenient date and time for a focus group will be organised. There will be 5 or 6 other professionals in the focus group and the researcher will moderate. Before the focus group, you would be asked to sign a consent form providing your informed consent to participate (please see the attached form). You will also be asked to watch a 15 minute video presenting the proposed model of support. The duration of the focus group would be around one hour and will take place over an online communication platform such as Zoom or Google Meet. During the focus group you will be asked a series of questions regarding your perceptions of the proposed model and potential facilitators and barriers of implementing it within your context. You will have the right to withdraw at any point during or after the focus group. The focus group will be recorded using an encrypted audio recorder, both the audio recorder and the recording will be stored securely. Following the research, a summary of the study will be shared with you.

**What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide that you would no longer like to participate in the study, then you can speak to the researcher at any point to inform them of your decision. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to yourself. However, it will not be possible to remove your data from the project once it has been anonymised as we will not be able to identify your specific data. The data will be transcribed 24 hours after the interview takes place. This does not affect your data protection rights. If you decide not to take part you do not need to do anything further.

Audio recordings are an essential requirement to your participation in the study. Should you feel uncomfortable with the recording process at any point during the focus group, you are able to request that the researcher stops recording at any time.
Data Protection and Confidentiality

➢ What information will you collect about me?

In order to participate in this research project we will need to collect information that could identify you, called “personal identifiable information”. Specifically we will need to collect:

- Your full name (on consent form)
- Your signature (on consent form)
- An audio recording of your voice (obtained during the focus groups)

For audio recordings:

➢ Recordings will consist of voice only and will be obtained through focus groups.

Your participation in this research will be recorded in Google Meet and your personal data will be processed by Google Meet. Appropriate legal mechanisms to ensure transfers are compliant with the UK General Data Protection Regulation are in place. The recordings will be removed from the above third party platform and stored on University of Manchester managed file storage as soon as possible following the completion of data collection.

➢ Under what legal basis are you collecting this information?

We are collecting and storing this personal identifiable information in accordance with UK data protection law which protect your rights. These state that we must have a legal basis (specific reason) for collecting your data. For this study, the specific reason is that it is “a public interest task” and “a process necessary for research purposes”.

➢ What are my rights in relation to the information you will collect about me?

You have a number of rights under data protection law regarding your personal information. For example, you can request a copy of the information we hold about you, including audio recordings.

If you would like to know more about your different rights or the way we use your personal information to ensure we follow the law, please consult our Privacy Notice for Research.

➢ Will my participation in the study be confidential and my personal identifiable information be protected?

In accordance with data protection law, The University of Manchester is the Data Controller for this project. This means that we are responsible for making sure your personal information is kept secure, confidential and used only in the way you have been told it will be used. All researchers are trained with this in mind, and your data will be looked after in the following way:

Only the study team at The University of Manchester will have access to your personal information, but they will pseudonymise it as soon as possible. Your name and any other identifying information will be removed and replaced with a random ID number. Only the research team will have access to the key that links this ID number to your personal information. In line with The University of
Manchester retention policy, data will be stored for a period of five years in secure locations on the researcher’s P Drive.

As mentioned above, due to the international element of this study, your participation in this research will be recorded in Google Meet and your personal data will be processed by Google Meet. The recordings will be removed from the above third party platform and stored on University of Manchester managed file storage as soon as possible following the completion of data collection.

**For audio recordings:**

- The researcher, or a UoM third party approved transcriber, will be responsible for transcription of interview data.
- All personal identifiable information will be pseudonymised in the final transcript.
- The pseudonymised transcription will be archived securely at the University of Manchester for a period of five years and then destroyed.
- Only the researcher will have access to the recordings.

Please also note that individuals from The University of Manchester or regulatory authorities may need to look at the data collected for this study to make sure the project is being carried out as planned. This may involve looking at identifiable data. All individuals involved in auditing and monitoring the study will have a strict duty of confidentiality to you as a research participant.

**Potential disclosures:**

- If, during the study, we have concerns about your safety or the safety of others, we will inform your GP/care team/family member.
- If, during the study, you disclose information about misconduct/poor practice, we have a professional obligation to report this and will therefore need to inform your employer/professional body.
- If, during the study, you disclose information about any current or future illegal activities, we have a legal obligation to report this and will therefore need to inform the relevant authorities.
- Individuals from the University, the site where the research is taking place and regulatory authorities may need to review the study information for auditing and monitoring purposes or in the event of an incident.

Please also note that individuals from The University of Manchester or regulatory authorities may need to look at the data collected for this study to make sure the project is being carried out as planned. This may involve looking at identifiable data. All individuals involved in auditing and monitoring the study will have a strict duty of confidentiality to you as a research participant.

**What if I have a complaint?**

➢ **Contact details for complaints**

If you have a complaint that you wish to direct to members of the research team, please contact:

**Dr George Thomas**
Academic and Professional Tutor, Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology.
School of Environment, Education and Development (SEED),
Ellen Wilkinson Building,
The University of Manchester,
Oxford Road,
Manchester, M13 9PL.
george.thomas@manchester.ac.uk
Tel: 0161 275 3511

If you wish to make a formal complaint to someone independent of the research team or if you are not satisfied with the response you have gained from the researchers in the first instance then please contact

The Research Ethics Manager, Research Office, Christie Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL, by emailing: research.complaints@manchester.ac.uk or by telephoning 0161 275 2674.

If you wish to contact us about your data protection rights, please email dataprotection@manchester.ac.uk or write to The Information Governance Office, Christie Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, M13 9PL at the University and we will guide you through the process of exercising your rights.

You also have a right to complain to the Information Commissioner’s Office about complaints relating to your personal identifiable information Tel 0303 123 1113

Contact Details

If you have any queries about the study or if you are interested in taking part then please contact the researcher:

KATIE AYIREBI (Trainee Educational Psychologist)
School of Environment, Education and Development (SEED),
Ellen Wilkinson Building,
Oxford Road,
Manchester,
M13 9PL.

katie.ayirebi@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk
Appendix U: Participant Consent Form

‘Stakeholder views on the utility of a proposed model of high school support for autistic females.’

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Initials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet <em>(Version 1, Date 02/08/2021)</em> for the above study and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to myself. I understand that it will not be possible to remove my data from the project once it has been anonymised and forms part of the data set.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I agree to take part on this basis.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 I agree to the focus groups being audio recorded.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 I agree that any data collected may be included in anonymous form in publications.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 I understand that data collected during the study may be looked at by individuals from The University of Manchester or regulatory authorities, where it is relevant to my taking part in this research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my data.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 I understand that there may be instances where during the course of the research information is revealed which means the researchers will be obliged to break confidentiality and this has been explained in more detail in the information sheet.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 I consent to the personal information collected as part of this study being transferred and processed in the UK. This processing will be subject to UK data protection law.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 I agree to take part in this study.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following activities are optional, you may participate in the research without agreeing to the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Initials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9 I agree that any anonymised data collected may be made available to other researchers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 I agree that the researchers may contact me in future about other research projects.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I agree that the researchers may retain my contact details in order to provide me with a summary of the findings for this study.

Data Protection

The personal information we collect and use to conduct this research will be processed in accordance with UK data protection law as explained in the Participant Information Sheet and the Privacy Notice for Research Participants.

________________________            ________________________
Name of Participant            Signature

Date

________________________            ________________________
Name of the person taking consent            Signature

Date

[1 copy for the participant, 1 copy for the research team (original)
Hello, I’m Katie Ayirebi, a Year 2 Trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of Manchester. In the UK, Educational Psychologists are similar to School Psychologists in America and in America a trainee might be referred to as an intern. The training route to becoming an Educational Psychologist in the UK is a three-year postgraduate training programme that includes a doctorate qualification.

As part of my doctoral research, I have completed a pilot study investigating support for autistic females in high school settings and am being supervised by Dr. George Thomas – a practicing Educational Psychologist and member of faculty on the Manchester programme. Just to explain, high schools in the UK cover the 11-16 age range. Some high schools have a sixth form where young people can opt to study until they are 18, but this is not compulsory.

For my thesis, I am exploring the applicability and utility of a proposed model of support within other local authorities and contexts in the UK, as well as international settings such as the USA.

Therefore, I would like to gather your thoughts on the model in terms of what you think are the strengths of the model and areas of development for it.

During this presentation, I will describe the proposed model to you that resulted from my pilot study, and compare it to models that have been devised without the female presentation of autism specifically in mind. Afterwards, you will have the opportunity to reflect on the proposed model and offer your views around it’s possible utility within the settings that you support. Data from this practitioner conversation will be used to inform the development of the model, within an international context.

This will be facilitated live by our international colleagues Dr Richard Van Voorhis and Abby Holloway.
During Year 1 of my doctoral training programme I interviewed an EP and senior leader within an all-girls high school in the North West of England who had been involved in developing support for autistic females. I conducted an exploratory, qualitative case study and utilised inductive-deductive hybrid thematic analysis (TA) to generate codes and themes. Considering existing research around autism in women in girls and applying the thematic map from the findings of the pilot study I updated the ‘Saturation Model’.

The Saturation Model proposes that in order to be ‘autism friendly’, a school needs to be saturated in autism understanding and awareness. However, this model was not developed with the female autism phenotype in mind, and it is becoming more widely accepted that female support may need to be different from generic autism interventions.
There are similarities between the proposed model and the saturation model, as research suggests that some provision is equally effective for boys and girls. For instance, the need for flexible and adaptable provision – autistic females may share some common characteristics, but just as no two males with autism are not the same, no two females with autism are the same, and as such there needs to be flexible and adaptable practice to accommodate their individual needs. Also, the importance of ethos and for clear policies based upon inclusion.

The proposed model agrees that there is a central process driving and co-ordinating the whole-school response. However, rather than this being just one person- an agent of change - the proposed model recommends a cluster of autism champions consisting of professionals and staff who represent all areas of the school community. These staff members will be trained in identifying and supporting autistic girls and subsequently embed understanding and provision through policy and practice. This can be senior leaders, teachers, teaching support assistants, office staff, kitchen staff, etc.

Finally, the Saturation Model advocates for staff and peer education and awareness raising, as does the proposed model.
However, the extra layer here is parent/carer education and awareness, as they may not fully understand the female presentation and may be exposed to behaviours at home that provide significant evidence towards the identification and screening of autism in their daughters.

I will now outline other extra layers of support within the current proposed model which has been developed with a focus on the autistic female phenotype.

A key factor was found to be the involvement of external agencies to support autistic girls. This included the role of SPs – the pilot study would suggest that SPs are well placed to work systemically and preformatively with schools to support them with screening for autism in girls and developing tiered provision which is specific to their needs. Referring to the NASP model for services by school psychologists, this would link in with systems-level services-school-wide practices to promote learning, preventive and responsive services and family-school collaboration services. For instance, SPs could have a role in facilitating parent/carer support groups and awareness raising for parents mentioned earlier. Other external agencies were also found to be important for autistic females, such as mental health support, particularly as anxiety is a significant factor in the female autism phenotype.

Another aspect is the importance of involving autistic females in the planning and implementation of interventions and support strategies. This was also acknowledged by Morewood et al. (2019) in his adapted ‘saturation model’. To date, much research involves male samples and females have yet to be consulted about what they find helpful.

The next two factors of the model were informed by Magyar & Pandolfi’s (2012) multi-tiered problem-solving model, developed in the USA.
Magyar and Pandolfi implemented a tiered model of support for the early identification of co-occurring EDs and behavioural issues in autistic students in an elementary school in New York. Tier one support adopts whole-school approaches and is focused on the prevention of behaviours that interfere with learning. Tier two and tier three support become increasingly more intensive and individualized and are designed to address ASC and ED needs. They created a working party responsible for implementing the model, developing an assessment protocol and ‘toolbox’ of evidence-based interventions for each tier, the model was found to be accepted by school staff who reported high levels of satisfaction with its utility. My pilot study found this approach to be very supportive in meeting the needs of autistic females and the current model proposes tiered support through the use of AFS in the physical environment, and at the whole-school (universal), targeted and individualized levels. This would involve developing an evidence-informed bank of resources, specific to the needs of autistic females such as accepting a diagnosis or around puberty and relationships.
This model also advocates for the use of early screening procedures to help schools intervene in a preventative manner to develop intervention, monitor progress and promote inclusivity. This is the final aspect of the proposed model and is particularly important for when considering that research has found that autistic females are being under diagnosed, mis-diagnosed and diagnosed much later than autistic males (Bargiela et al., 2016; Duvekot et al., 2017).

Emerging research suggests that the female autism phenotype does not fit with the current male-biased definitions and diagnostic criteria for autism, making it difficult for professionals to identify (APA, 2013; Happé & Frith, 2020). Nonetheless, a small scale study was undertaken by my thesis supervisor (Dr George Thomas) and his colleagues Rumble and Bond from the University of Manchester, which took place at the same site as my pilot study. They piloted the use of two autism screening tools that are proven to be equally sensitive to the female autism phenotype - the Autism Spectrum Screening Questionnaire (or ASSQ) by Ehlers et al. (1999); and, the adolescent version of the Autism Quotient (or AQ) by Baron-Cohen et al. (2006). The findings from this pilot study indicated that the AQ was more sensitive than the ASSQ in identifying autistic females and the authors go on to propose a screening and identification protocol for autistic females. This highlights that there are suitable screening tools out there for use by school staff and professionals. Consequently, this is a pivotal aspect of the extra layer of support which one of my colleagues here at Manchester is researching as a whole other thesis.
Slide 10

Just to end on the visual of the proposed model. The Autism Champions are representative of the whole-school staff body and drive-forward policy and change, then around the outside we have the need for clear ethos and policies, the physical environment and tiered support, all informed by evidence-based autism friendly strategies, identification and screening of the female presentation of autism, the voice of the young person to inform their provision, flexible and adaptable practice to ensure support is personalised, awareness-raising of autism in females with staff (every member of staff - the caretaker, the kitchen staff to the principal), peers and parent/carers who may have a lack of knowledge and understanding of autism and girls and key evidence to help us identify it and get appropriate support in place, and finally the external agencies, where school psychologists have a key role.

Slides 11/12

Group Discussion

- I would like to gather your thoughts on the model in terms of strengths and areas of development.
- Also, what you perceive would be the facilitators and barriers in implementing such a model in your current settings, to support Autistic females.
- Thank you
As mentioned earlier, for my thesis research, I am exploring the applicability and utility of the proposed model within other local authorities and contexts in the UK, as well as international settings such as the USA.

I would like to gather your thoughts on the model in terms of what you think are the strengths of the model and areas of development for it?

Also, what you perceive would be the facilitators and barriers in facilitating the implementation of this model in settings in your current context?

Thank you for listening.

Slides 13/14: References

References


Hello, I’m Katie Ayirebi, a Year 2 Trainee Educational (or School) Psychologist at the University of Manchester.

As part of my doctoral research, I have completed a pilot study investigating support for autistic females in high school settings and I am being supervised by Dr. George Thomas – a practicing Educational Psychologist and member of faculty on the Manchester programme. Just to clarify, by high school I mean the 11-16 or 11-18 age ranges.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group today where I am exploring the applicability and utility of a proposed model of support within your context and setting. This research is investigating the views of Educational Psychologists in the UK and School Psychologists in the USA, therefore from this point, I will use the term School Psychologists. I will also be using identity-first language as research with the autistic community suggests this is the preferred terminology.

I hope you have all had the opportunity to complete the online form gathering demographic data. If not, please could you complete this at a convenient time after this focus group.
In terms of the structure of the session, I’ll start with a presentation of the proposed model that resulted from my pilot study, and compare it to models that have been devised without the female presentation of autism specifically in mind.

**Slide 2**

- What are your views of the utility of a proposed model of support for autistic females at high school?
- I would like to gather your thoughts on the model in terms of strengths and areas of development.
- Also, what you perceive would be the facilitators and barriers in implementing such a model in your current settings, to support Autistic females.
- Thank you

**Script 2**

Afterwards, we will participate in a focus group where you will have the opportunity to reflect on the proposed model and offer your views around its possible utility within the settings that you support. Specifically, I would like to know what you consider to be the strengths of the model and any areas of development. I’d also like us to discuss what you perceive to be the facilitators and barriers of implementing the model within the settings you support.

**Slide 3**
During Year 1 of the doctoral training programme I interviewed an EP and senior leader within an all-girls high school in the North West of England who had been involved in developing support for autistic females. I conducted an exploratory, qualitative case study and utilised inductive-deductive hybrid thematic analysis (TA) to generate codes and themes. Considering existing research around autism in women in girls and applying the thematic map from the findings of the pilot study I updated the ‘Saturation Model’.

The Saturation Model proposes that in order to be ‘autism friendly’, a school needs to be saturated in autism understanding and awareness. However, this model was not developed with the female autism phenotype in mind, and it is becoming more widely accepted that female support may need to be different from generic autism interventions.

The Whole-School Saturation Model was proposed by Morewood, Humphrey and Symes in 2011. This model states that, in order to be ‘autism friendly’, a school needs to be saturated in autism understanding and awareness. The model is therefore a whole-school rolling response, involving supporting, educating and developing the understanding of every member of the school community. However, this model has not been developed with the female phenotype in mind and it is becoming more widely accepted that female support may need to be different from generic autism interventions.
Nevertheless, there are similarities between the proposed model and the saturation model, as research suggests that some provision is equally effective for boys and girls. For instance, the need for flexible and adaptable provision – autistic females may share some common characteristics, but just as no two males with autism are the same, nor are two females with autism the same, and as such there needs to be flexible and adaptable practice to accommodate their individual needs. Also, the importance of ethos and for clear policies based upon inclusion.

The proposed model agrees that there is a central process driving and co-ordinating the whole-school response. However, rather than this being just one person - an agent of change - the proposed model recommends a cluster of autism champions consisting of professionals and staff who represent all areas of the school community. These staff members will be trained in identifying and supporting autistic girls and subsequently embed understanding and provision through policy and practice. This can be senior leaders, teachers, teaching support assistants, office staff, kitchen staff, etc.

Finally, the Saturation Model advocates for staff and peer education and awareness raising, as does the proposed model.
However, the extra layer here is parent/carer education and awareness, as they may not fully understand the female presentation and may be exposed to behaviours at home that provide significant evidence towards the identification and screening of autism in their daughters.

I will now outline other extra layers of support within the current proposed model which has been developed with a focus on the autistic female phenotype.

A key factor was found to be the involvement of external agencies to support autistic girls. This included the role of SPs – the pilot study would suggest that SPs are well placed to work systemically and preventatively with schools to support them with screening for autism in girls and developing tiered provision which is specific to their needs. For instance, SPs could have a role in facilitating parent/carer support groups and awareness raising for parents mentioned earlier. Other external agencies were also found to be important for autistic females, such as mental health support, particularly as anxiety is a significant factor in the female autism phenotype.

Another aspect is the importance of involving autistic females in the planning and implementation of interventions and support strategies. This was also acknowledged by Morewood et al. (2019) is his adapted ‘saturation model’. To date, much research involves male samples and females have yet to be consulted about what they find helpful.
The next two factors of the model were informed by Magyar & Pandolfi’s (2012) multi-tiered problem-solving model, developed in the USA.

**Slide 7**

![Magyar & Pandolfi’s (2012) multi-tiered problem-solving model](image)

**Script 7**

Magyar and Pandolfi implemented a tiered model of support for the early identification of co-occurring EDs and behavioural issues in autistic students in an elementary school New York. Tier one support adopts whole-school approaches and is focussed on the prevention of behaviours that interfere with learning. Tier two and tier three support becomes increasingly more intensive and individualised and are designed to address ASC and ED needs. They created a working party responsible for implementing the model, developing an assessment protocol and ‘toolbox’ of evidence-based interventions for each tier, the model was found to be accepted by school staff who reported high levels of satisfaction with its utility. My pilot study found this approach to be very supportive in meeting the needs of autistic females and the current model proposes tiered support through the use of AFS in the physical environment, and at the whole-school (universal), targeted and individualised levels. This would involve developing an evidence-informed bank of resources, specific to the needs of autistic females such as accepting a diagnosis or around puberty and relationships.
This model also advocates for the use of early screening procedures to help schools intervene in a preventative manner to develop intervention, monitor progress and promote inclusivity. This is the final aspect of the proposed model and is particularly important for when considering that research has found that autistic females are being under diagnosed, mis-diagnosed and diagnosed much later than autistic males (Bargiela et al., 2016; Duvekot et al., 2017).

▶ Autism Spectrum Screening Questionnaire (or ASSQ) by Ehlers et al. (1999)
▶ Adolescent version of the Autism Quotient (or AQ) by Baron-Cohen et al. (2006).
▶ The findings from this pilot study indicated that the AQ was more sensitive than the ASSQ.
Emerging research suggests that the female autism phenotype does not fit with the current male-biased definitions and diagnostic criteria for autism, making it difficult for professionals to identify (APA, 2013; Happé & Frith, 2020). Nonetheless, a small scale study was undertaken by my thesis supervisor (Dr George Thomas) and his colleagues Rumble and Bond from the University of Manchester, which took place at the same site as my pilot study. They piloted the use of two autism screening tools that are proven to be equally sensitive to the female autism phenotype - the Autism Spectrum Screening Questionnaire (or ASSQ) by Ehlers et al. (1999); and, the adolescent version of the Autism Quotient (or AQ) by Baron-Cohen et al. (2006). The findings from this pilot study indicated that the AQ was more sensitive than the ASSQ in identifying autistic females and the authors go on to propose a screening and identification protocol for autistic females. This highlights that there are suitable screening tools out there for use by school staff and professionals.

Just to end on the visual of the proposed model. The Autism Champions are representative of the whole-school staff body and drive-forward policy and change, then around the outside we have the need for clear ethos and policies, the physical environment and tiered support, all informed by evidence-based autism friendly strategies, identification and screening of the female presentation of autism, the voice of the young person to inform...
their provision, flexible and adaptable practice to ensure support is personalised, awareness-raising of autism in females with staff (every member of staff- the caretaker, the kitchen staff to the principal), peers and parent/carers - who may have a lack of knowledge and understanding of autism and girls and key evidence to help us identify it and get appropriate support in place, and finally the external agencies, where school psychologists have a key role.

Any questions?

**Focus Group**

Thank you for listening, we will now start the *focus group.*

Before I begin gathering your views, I’m going to just recap some of the consent form and explain how the focus group will work and then we can get started.

If you have any questions at any point just stop me. The focus group will last approximately one-hour and you are free to opt out or withdraw from the session at any point without detriment to yourself. Audio recording of the focus group is essential to your participation in this study- is this okay? Should you feel uncomfortable with the recording process at any point during the interview, you are able to request that the researcher stops recording at any time. Your participation in the focus group will be kept confidential to the researcher and all personal information will be removed from the final transcript. Once transcribed the recording will be deleted from the researcher’s encrypted device and the university’s encrypted drive. Confidentiality will be ensured through anonymisation of the data and use of pseudonyms so nobody will know your real names. This will ensure that the reporting of
the data is done in such a way that the individuals cannot be readily identified. So, the focus group - What are your views of the utility of a proposed model of support for autistic females at high school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Possible prompts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>So, the first question is what you consider to be the strengths of the proposed model. Who would like to start us off?</td>
<td>Go through each area. Simple? Utility? User-friendly? See it helping autistic girls? See staff ‘buying-in’? Senior leaders ‘buying-in’? Is there anything else anybody wants to add?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you for those contributions. Moving on...</td>
<td>Is there anything missing? Is it too complicated? Gender-binary language? Post high school transition planning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would you consider to be areas for development for the model?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you, we will now move on to the potential facilitators and barriers of implementing the proposed model within your contexts.</td>
<td>Can anyone see it working well within their contexts? Why? Link to strengths above. Others: user-friendly, simple, sufficient time, sufficient funding, internal support/expertise, external support?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are your views on the potential facilitators to implementing this proposed model of support for autistic females within your context?</td>
<td>Can anyone see it not working very well within their contexts? Why? Link to areas for development above. Others: user-friendly, complicated, time, funding, lack of internal support/expertise, lack of external support?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are your views on the potential barriers to implementing this proposed model of support for autistic females within your context?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
So for clarification ....

So [summary].... is that the general consensus?

Before we stop the recording, does anyone want to add anything?

References:


Appendix X: Sample of Coding for Thematic Analysis

Extract from UK Transcript

School Psychologist 5: I echo what the other two psychologists have shared...I really very much like the...inclusion of parents...particularly the voice of the child as well...and young person...but I think what you're giving is that additivity that strengthens the model that you've...initially explored. You're also teasing out those differences.

Facilitator: Thank you. Yeah, and I think that parents can be very much a two-way process because...yeah, we can...you know, perhaps as school psychologists in the school setting can educate parents, but then obviously they are the experts on their child, so that's sort of the thinking around that part.

School Psychologist 5: For me, it gives them a view and it also can be some really good collaborative learning together on ways of recognising, understanding and supporting their child.

Facilitator: Yeah.

School Psychologist 1: Do you mind if I jump in here? So, one thing that I particularly liked, sorry, I'm just looking at a picture of the model because I struggle to remember things, but the one thing that really stuck out to me was the 'autism champions' so the fact that it is a team or a group of people rather than...I think you said the other model was one individual person...and I think that links really nicely actually to the clear ethos and policies and actually how this is...you know, should be systemic, it should be a whole school approach whereby everybody should be supporting these young people and...you know, the ethos and policies of the school is obviously across the whole environment. And so I really like the emphasis on...everyone, not just one person has to deal with these children, you know, that's the way I've seen some schools think about autism. Whereas actually...you know, even the language, 'autism champions,' I think it's kind of phrased in a really nice, positive way...that's one thing that I liked.

School Psychologist 1: Yeah, promoting inclusivity that way as well, isn't it?

School Psychologist 1: Yeah, definitely.
Extract from US Transcript

$P5$: I do, just in listening to your presentation, I work in two different elementary schools and just my mind starts going to like, ‘Oh, so and so would be so great at this,’ you know, like there are already people I envision that would really take on that role... and do a really good job with it, you know... so the thing I think about... think about it from a school based approach, like we’re doing it in this one small elementary school... I think it could be really great. From a bigger vantage point in a high school or whole district, I think it would be... more difficult. High school people, what do you think?

$P1$: Well, I feel I can do the same thing even in terms of thinking of specific people in different roles... like different roles then I ever really think about having involved when I’m working with kids with disabilities in general. So you know, I do think we have... staff members throughout this school who maybe... like you said, for different reasons, maybe they have a family member, you know, that’s on the autism spectrum or whatever, that comes to it and they have... between their different like perspectives because they’re not necessarily an educator, they’re a staff member but maybe not a teacher or school psychologist or whatever. But they have a different perspective, they have a different role in the school, and I think they... I think you will find a lot of people jumping into it and wanting to be involved in it as an autism champion and willing to hear that information and I think really bringing a lot to the table... to the educators, you know what I mean? To everybody. I just think that back and forth between... various types of school personnel and people who might be involved in that... it... really possible in the high school. I can totally think of it and that, I think, is just the most exciting thing like... the idea of that is like... really exciting, the idea of those other people being involved like that and supporting kids, you know what I mean? Like throughout the day like that... I thought that was... I just think that’s the most energizing and exciting thing that I heard.

$P4$: I agree with that. I think I love that idea as well because it gives those... some of those other people... like our cafeteria workers or secretaries a way... another way to connect with the school and be on a team that I don’t always think they get a say in or get to be a part of, and it gives them that next level of connection to the students and to the staff as well.

$P2$: And some of those people have like such a... day to day interaction with, you know, a different type of influence and... yeah, just influence... but like influence on the way people are perceived and stuff. Like I think of our cheer coach, you know what I mean? And if she was... and she would be, like an autism champion or whatever, and just the... the influence that she brings and the way that that would change... potentially people’s interactions with kids... their... perspective of them self like... it’s a really interesting idea. I think, to have some of those other people involved. I think they could be complete like game-changers on the way some people see... and perceive kids with disabilities, with autism... with... you know, so... yeah, I think definitely.

$P5$: And even when you think about autism... the... you know, characteristics and symptoms... are so... they go far outside the classroom, you know... it’s not a learning disability in reading... like... the factors that they need, the most assistance with those social interactions and stuff are not just with the classroom teacher, like they’re with... all those other people in the schools... they can all be part of it, you know, that’s huge for their kids too and especially girls, you know, they’re presenting more as anxious or like worried to go take a letter to their secretary or getting in the lunch line, like all those things that we see... with girls, you know... with higher functioning autism, I think get missed the most... everyone kind of needs to weigh in on and be a support there.
The matter is, is that... kids with autism are in the general education classroom... some of them are in the honours classes... you know, and they're taking higher level courses and those teachers... don't typically have to deal with students with disabilities and so... when they get a student with autism in their classroom, they don't know what to do... at times. Even now, and it always still amazes me that... that they don't feel confident... in working with kids with autism because that's just not their level of expertise so the education and awareness piece... and then that would feed into the... them being those champions and wanting to help and make differences because they would see how it applies to their own personal practice.
Appendix Y: Codes

Please note:

1a relates to deductive coding from RQ1 - strengths.

1b relates to deductive coding from RQ1 - areas for development.

2a relates to deductive coding from RQ2 - facilitators.

2b relates to deductive coding from RQ2 - barriers.
| 1b. Collaboration between settings made more explicit | 1 | 1 |
| 1b Cultural Sensitivity | 1 | 1 |
| 1b Does not consider autistic males | 1 | 1 |
| 1b External agency support strand too simplistic | 1 | 1 |
| 1b Gain views of autistic female community | 1 | 3 |
| 1b Needs to gain parent carer views on the model | 1 | 1 |
| 1b Needs to consider non-binary and transgender CYP | 2 | 2 |
| 1b Post-16 support needs to be clearer | 1 | 2 |
| 1b Preferred language of autistic community needs to be considered | 1 | 2 |
| 1b Requires more details for implementation | 1 | 2 |

| 2a. Accessible for those with an understanding of autism | 1 | 4 |
| 2b Autism Champions possible in high school | 1 | 2 |
| 2a. Breaks a big task into smaller components | 1 | 1 |
| 2a External support | 2 | 2 |
| 2a Inter-agency working would ensure capacity | 1 | 4 |
| 2a Pilot it could facilitate school buy-in | 1 | 3 |
| 2a School engagement | 1 | 1 |
| 2a Schools may already have resources to implement | 1 | 2 |
| 2a Staff motivation | 1 | 4 |
| 2b Concerns around screening and identification | 2 | 9 |
| 2b Equity | 2 | 4 |
| 2b Financial Cost | 2 | 7 |
| 2b High school contexts would find implementation difficult | 1 | 1 |
| 2b Huge piece of work | 1 | 4 |
| 2b Not accessible for those without background in autism | 1 | 3 |
| 2b Potential staff reluctance to adapt practice | 1 | 2 |
| 2b. Requires External Agency Support | 2 | 8 |
| 2b Requires external support for implementation | 2 | 7 |
| 2b Requires further training to implement | 1 | 1 |
| 2b Requires Parent Buy-In | 1 | 1 |
| 2b Resistance to change | 1 | 1 |

1b School Priorities | 2 | 5 |
| 2b Schools may not have resources to implement | 1 | 2 |
| 2b Simple and clear guidance required | 1 | 2 |
| 2b Staff buy-in | 2 | 5 |
| 2b Statutory Pressures of EPs | 1 | 2 |
| 2b Time implications | 2 | 8 |
| 2b Wider organisation priorities | 1 | 2 |
## Appendix Z: Intra- and Inter-group Analysis of Codes

Yellow = inter-group similarities

Green = UK only

Blue = USA only

### 1a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UK</th>
<th>USA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Applicable to other educational and workplace settings</td>
<td>Applicable to other educational and workplace settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism Champions</td>
<td>Autism Champions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthens existing models</td>
<td>Best practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative</td>
<td>Collaborative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourages personalised support</td>
<td>Comprehensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitates identification of needs and support</td>
<td>Holistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fits within settings frame of reference</td>
<td>Increases connections between school staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holistic</td>
<td>Increases knowledge, awareness and understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes voice of autistic females</td>
<td>Increases school resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases knowledge, awareness and understanding</td>
<td>Involves parents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Involves parents</td>
<td>Parent support groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Language</td>
<td>Provides a framework to audit and review provision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-diagnosis support</td>
<td>Reflects autistic female specific need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preventative strategy</td>
<td>Shared responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotes Inclusivity</td>
<td>Supports transitional phases of education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides a framework to audit and review provision</td>
<td>Tiered Approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflects autistic female specific need</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Systems level change</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tiered Approach</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Valuable and impactful</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

### 1b

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UK</th>
<th>USA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration between settings made more explicit</td>
<td>Does not include autistic males*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural sensitivity</td>
<td>Needs to consider non-binary and transgender CYP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External agency support strand too simplistic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs to consider non-binary and transgender CYP</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Need to gain parent carer views on the model</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to gain views of autistic female community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-16 Support needs to be clearer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferred language of autistic community needs to be considered</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requires more details for implementation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 2a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UK</th>
<th>USA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>External support</strong></td>
<td>Autism champions possible in high schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inter-agency working would ensure capacity</strong></td>
<td>Accessible for those with an understanding of autism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Piloting it could facilitate buy-in</strong></td>
<td>Breaks a big task in to smaller components</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School engagement</strong></td>
<td>External support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Schools may already have resources to implement it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staff Motivation</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### 2b

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UK</th>
<th>USA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Concerns around screening and identification</strong></td>
<td>Concerns around screening and identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Equity</strong></td>
<td>Equity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial Cost</strong></td>
<td>Financial cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Potential staff reluctance to adapt practice</strong></td>
<td>High school contexts may find implementation difficult*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Requires external support for implementation</strong></td>
<td>Huge piece of work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Requires further training to implement</strong></td>
<td>Not accessible for those without background in autism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Requires more details to implement</strong></td>
<td>Requires external support for implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Simple and clear guidance required</strong></td>
<td>Requires parent buy-in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Priorities</strong></td>
<td>Schools may not have resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff buy-in</strong></td>
<td>School priorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Statutory pressures of EPs</strong></td>
<td>Time Implications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time implications</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wider organisation priorities</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*said by one SP in USA = refuted by high school specialist SPs
Appendix AA: Theme Development

Inter-group analysis: Ordered to present commonalities (and differences) between cases

Deductive codes represented in blue

Inductive codes represented in green

Codes highlighted when considered as a sub-theme for write-up purposes

RQ: SPs views on the strengths of the proposed model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>USA</th>
<th>Illustrative examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Domains of the model</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism Champions</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>UK: “The one thing that really stuck out to me was the ‘autism champions’ so the fact that it is a team or a group of people rather than...I think you said the other model was one individual person...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involves parents</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>USA: “I’m in the high school and I really like the part from the autism champions...to the...there’s so many different staff members, different people involved in the school that would be participating in that and supporting kids...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflects autistic female specific needs</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>UK: “But I think this is quite niche in that it does...you know, specifically target a population that has been under...represented, so that’s a strength.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiered approach</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>USA: “I think it is a topic of...discussion and presentation but I also understand the need for...focusing on females because so often...the female student or the student who presents or identifies as female...does get underdiagnosed and usually because there’s no outward or externalising behaviour problems, those are typically our SLD kiddos or you know, like somebody else said, you know, the OHI...and...I think the focus on females is good...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourages personalised support</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>USA: “I mean what we would like to see with any of our kids who have significant impairments, you know, there is a plan – a transitional plan – in place is what we consider here...that supports them after this phase of their life. So I don’t know if it’s missing anything per se.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes voice of autistic girls</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>UK: “I’m just looking at it and thinking that this...kind of...it should apply to workplaces as well...you know, this idea of autism champions...well, absolutely, there should be autism champions everywhere, autism friendly approaches...everywhere”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-diagnosis support</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>USA: “I work in two different elementary schools and...just my mind starts going to like, ‘Oh, so and so would be so great at this,’ you know, like there are already people I envision that would really take on that role...and do a really good job with it, you know...so...the thing I think about...think about it from a school based approach, like we’re doing it in this one small elementary school...I think it could be really great.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitates identification of needs and support</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>UK: “I like the framework...thinking of schools having that framework and being able to sort of go step by step...to support...and see what areas they’re lacking in and which areas they’re stronger in.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports transitional phases of education</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Audit and review provision</td>
<td>USA: “Like, I feel like...component by component would be...there’s certain components that would be easier like...to start, like with getting more education and awareness out and stuff and then moving into other areas...of the circle, you know what I mean, over a time...as people became...had more understanding and more awareness and then bringing, you know, bringing it along that way maybe.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increases school resources</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preventative strategy</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Systems level change</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>USA: “There’s so many different staff members, different people involved in the school that would be participating in that and supporting kids because...high school, right of course has so many...different things that kids might get involved in and then just...I really like that that just opens up the doors, it makes that participation – whether it’s sports or...even when you said like the cafeteria workers...I think that’s...that would be amazing to have our staff, our cafeteria workers, the secretaries...have the understanding and ability to support like that. So, I thought that was a huge strength.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adding value</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holistic</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases connections between school staff</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>UK: “I think the fact that you are including...the young person in this is a massive strength because when I’ve worked with young, autistic girls...they feel very unheard, so I think the fact that you’ve got it in there and the fact that you are including everybody that sort of knows them well and is involved with them...obviously meaning the parents as well...is a real strength.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shared responsibility</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Fits within settings’ frame of reference</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive language</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>UK: “I really like the whole ecological model that it’s sat within, and I think you’ve definitely added something to the existing one which is quite exciting.”</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Promotes inclusivity</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best practice</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthens existing models</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>USA: “I think just looking at like the holistic perspective, I mean especially the inclusion of the outside agency, you know, working with the school, like ideally...that’s what we would strive for in an ideal case, is that we have all facets of the child’s life...working together in tandem to create the best plan of action, not only for their educational day but their daily living as well.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Valuable and impactful</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RQ: SPs views on the areas for development of the proposed model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>USA</th>
<th>Illustrative examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clarity and detail (UK sample only)</td>
<td>Collaboration between settings needs to be more explicit</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Absolutely, yes and I’m just reflecting on something that I did in a previous local authority...was absolutely that. We had...you know, people collaborating between settings, and they even had...or they were going to be setting up like a yearly conference where people could get together, not just the professionals, but all people interested in supporting autistic young people to get together and share resources, share practice...so I think that collaboration is really important.” “Yeah, maybe really frame it to partners and stakeholders...that’s a nicer way of putting it.” “Just because high school goes up to 18...in America, versus here...it would potentially only be 16, so...yeah, I guess in that sense, you would be including preparing for adulthood, wouldn’t you? And the post-16 model, I guess, might look differently over here than it would say over there if the child’s no longer in an educational setting once they’re over 16.” “I think that schools may need a little bit more than that to actually understand what are, you know, autism-friendly ethos and policies with clear examples...templates and for example, the external agency support, for example, school psychologists to go in and support them with that.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External agency support strand too simplistic</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Post-16 support needs to be clearer</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>“I think that schools may need a little bit more than that to actually understand what are, you know, autism-friendly ethos and policies with clear examples...templates and for example, the external agency support, for example, school psychologists to go in and support them with that.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Requires more detail for implementation</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs to be informed by the Autistic community (UK sample only)</td>
<td>Need to gain parent/carer views on the model</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>“maybe a working group with parents as well linked to the charities that we have...so we’ve got parents’ voice in collaborating and shaping this piece of work and giving us any pointers on what could be missing from their perspective, parents and/or carers of course.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Need to gain views of autistic female community</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>“So yeah, I only reflected on that when...when sort of you said that maybe the autistic girls don’t...what kind of wording, the language they would use...but I was thinking, have you thought about it that way? But then again, it may be that you would have to sort of...listen to the young people and whether they want that...or not.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preferred language of autistic community needs to be considered</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Capacity</td>
<td>Concerns around screening and identification</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>UK: “And my concern would be that...through identification and screening, that there could be lots of...potentially lots of...young people out there or their families that...believe that their child or that they are autistic, whereas actually they may not be. Equally there may be children out there who are autistic and haven’t been identified...and just kind of concerned around how’s that going to be monitored.” USA: “My other thought was with the identification and screening piece, like...we’ve talked a lot about all the other...pieces of it and I feel like for us, as school psychologists, that would be...especially in our district because we’ve got a lot of layers of administration and programming different...you know...where like the identification and screening...I don’t know that it would be a barrier necessarily...but I certainly couldn’t go out and I...like screen...my 700 females here...”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capacity</td>
<td>Financial cost</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Capacity</td>
<td>Requires external support for implementation</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Capacity</td>
<td>Time implications</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Capacity</td>
<td>Not accessible for those without background in autism</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>Capacity</td>
<td>Schools may not have resources</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capacity</td>
<td>High school contexts may find implementation difficult*</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>USA: “and so...while it’s comprehensive, it’s also...it seems like a big...like it would be a big undertaking, there would be a lot of...like it would be a...obviously a systems level...change that would have to happen...” USA: “I would say just like any type of change we’re trying to implement in schools, it comes down to a time barrier, you know, of finding the time to train staff members and implement and...you know, taking away from other job duties, this would definitely be like...and it would take a lot of time...that many of us don’t have out here.” UK: “So, I think just having some really clear kind of almost like some structure for schools, but not like precise, ‘You have to follow it exactly this way,’ almost like a guide that they can use to make it as simple as possible for them.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity</td>
<td>Simple and clear guidance required</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>USA: “I think it’s immensely important...exciting...and something that we should all be thinking about, engaging with. I think those are the challenges though, aren’t they? It’s the time commitment, it’s the cost, it’s the priority...albeit very essential.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capacity</td>
<td>Huge piece of work</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>UK: “because I had a similar thought around pupil voice and what that might look like because I know for so often so many of my schools and this could be a potential barrier in terms of they’ll say, ‘Oh, well...they refuse to speak to anyone or...they’re not answering any of the questions we ask them,’ and again, it’s just supporting them and...being able to offer that flexibility and...for instance, not just relying on a verbal response” USA: “I think some of it is about resources, some of it is...parent buy-in, some of it is...some of it might be time, but I think...it might just be that people...they don’t know...and so when you don’t know, you don’t do, but not because you don’t want to.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capacity</td>
<td>Requires further training to implement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capacity</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Equity</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>UK: “unless an educational psychology service could potentially do this through the kind of intervention and prevention route, should that be...a kind of non-traded model, for example. I’m just thinking about quality...and obviously...equity of service and so on...” USA: “some...some kids are...you know, it’s a parent thing...their parents are...able to and they’ve already gotten them hooked up with services for post high school. Other parents don’t have, you know...they just haven’t...”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wider landscape</td>
<td>School priorities</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Buy-in</td>
<td>Potential staff reluctance to adapt practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Buy-in</td>
<td>Requires parent buy-in</td>
<td>✓</td>
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UK: “and whether or not staff...would buy into some of that, would be the only other thing to consider, I think, potentially.”

*said by one SP who worked in an elementary school in USA= high school specialist SPs disagreed – purpose of focus group- views were challenged by other members of the group*
Appendix BB: Information for Member Checking

Thematic Analysis for Member Checking

Exploring support for autistic females in mainstream high school

Braun and Clarke’s (2006; 2019) six-phase framework was utilised to analyse the data, with reflexive thematic analysis remaining as the underlying philosophy (Braun & Clarke, 2019; 2020). A hybrid approach was adopted, where codes identified from the raw data were combined with the first researcher’s assumptions, based upon the proposed model, and the RQs (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

Focus group analysis

RQ: SPs views on the strengths of the proposed model

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<td>Domains of the model</td>
<td>Autism Champions</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>UK: “The one thing that really stuck out to me was the ‘autism champions’ so the fact that it is a team or a group of people rather than… I think you said the other model was one individual person…”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involves parents</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>USA: “I’m in the high school and I really like the part from the autism champions… to the… there’s so many different staff members, different people involved in the school that would be participating in that and supporting kids…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reflects autistic female specific needs</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>UK: “But I think this is quite niche in that it does… you know, specifically target a population that has been under-represented, so that’s a strength.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Tiered approach</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>USA: “I think it is a topic of… discussion and presentation but I also understand the need for… focusing on females because so often… the female student or the student who presents or identifies as female… does get underdiagnosed and usually because there’s no outward or externalising behaviour problems, those are typically our SLD kiddos or you know, like somebody else said, you know, the OHI… and… I think the focus on females is good…”</td>
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<td>Pre-diagnosis support</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>USA: “I mean what we would like to see with any of our kids who have significant impairments, you know, there is a plan – a transitional plan – in place is what we consider here… that supports them after this phase of their life. So I don’t know if it’s missing anything per se.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Facilitates identification of needs and support</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>UK: “I’m just looking at it and thinking that this… kind of… it should apply to workplaces as well… you know, this idea of autism champions… well, absolutely, there should be autism champions everywhere, autism friendly approaches… everywhere”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Supports transitional phases of education</td>
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<td>USA: “I work in two different elementary schools and… just my mind starts going to like, ‘Oh, so and so would be so great at this,’ you know, like there are already people I envision that would really take on that role… and do a really good job with it, you know… so… the thing I think about… think about it from a school based approach, like we’re doing it in this one small elementary school… I think it could be really great.”</td>
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<td>Parent support groups</td>
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Utility and Capacity Building

| Theme                          | Applicable to other educational and workplace settings | ✓    | ✓     | USA: “I work in two different elementary schools and… just my mind starts going to like, ‘Oh, so and so would be so great at this,’ you know, like there are already people I envision that would really take on that role… and do a really good job with it, you know… so… the thing I think about… think about it from a school based approach, like we’re doing it in this one small elementary school… I think it could be really great.” |
|                               | Increases knowledge        | ✓    | ✓     | USA: “I work in two different elementary schools and… just my mind starts going to like, ‘Oh, so and so would be so great at this,’ you know, like there are already people I envision that would really take on that role… and do a really good job with it, you know… so… the thing I think about… think about it from a school based approach, like we’re doing it in this one small elementary school… I think it could be really great.” |
UK: “I like the framework...thinking of schools having that framework and being able to sort of go step by step...to support...and see what areas they’re lacking in and which areas they’re stronger in.”
USA: “Like, I feel like...component by component would be...there’s certain components that would be easier like...to start, like with getting more education and awareness out and stuff and then moving into other areas...of the circle, you know what I mean, over a time...as people became...had more understanding and more awareness and then bringing, you know, bringing it along that way maybe.”
USA: “There’s so many different staff members, different people involved in the school that would be participating in that and supporting kids because...high school, right of course has so many...different things that kids might get involved in and then just...I really like that that just opens up the doors, it makes that participation – whether it’s sports or...even when you said like the cafeteria workers...I think that’s...that would be amazing to have our staff, our cafeteria workers, the secretaries...have the understanding and ability to support like that. So, I thought that was a huge strength.”
UK: “I think the fact that you are including...the young person in this is a massive strength because when I’ve worked with young, autistic girls...they feel very unheard, so I think the fact that you’ve got it in there and the fact that you are including everybody that sort of knows them well and is involved with them...obviously meaning the parents as well...is a real strength.”
UK: “I really like the whole ecological model that it’s sat within, and I think you’ve definitely added something to the existing one which is quite exciting.”
USA: “I think just looking at like the holistic perspective, I mean especially the inclusion of the outside agency, you know, working with the school, like ideally...that’s what we would strive for in an ideal case, is that we have all facets of the child’s life...working together in tandem to create the best plan of action, not only for their educational day but their daily living as well.”
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| Clarity and detail (UK sample only)       | Collaboration between settings needs to be more explicit | ✓  |     | All UK: “Absolutely, yes and I’m just reflecting on something that I did in a previous local authority...was absolutely that. We had...you know, people collaborating between settings, and they even had...or they were going to be setting up like a yearly conference where people could get together, not just the professionals, but all people interested in supporting autistic young people to get together and share resources, share practice...so I think that collaboration is really important.”
|                                            | External agency support strand too simplistic | ✓  |     | “Yeah, maybe really frame it to partners and stakeholders...that’s a nicer way of putting it.”
|                                            | Post-16 support needs to be clearer        | ✓  |     | ”just because high school goes up to 18...in America, versus here...it would potentially only be 16, so...yeah, I guess in that sense, you would be including preparing for adulthood, wouldn’t you? And the post-16 model, I guess, might look differently over here than it would say over there if the child’s no longer in an educational setting once they’re over 16.”
|                                            | Requires more detail for implementation     | ✓  |     | “I think that schools may need a little bit more than that to actually understand what are, you know, autism-friendly ethos and policies with clear examples...templates and for example, the external agency support, for example, school psychologists to go in and support them with that.”
| Needs to be informed by the Autistic community (UK sample only) | Need to gain parent/carer views on the model | ✓  |     | All UK: “maybe a working group with parents as well linked to the charities that we have...so we’ve got parents’ voice in collaborating and shaping this piece of work and giving us any pointers on what could be missing from their perspective, parents and/or carers of course.”
|                                            | Need to gain views of autistic female community | ✓  |     | “So yeah, I only reflected on that when...when sort of you said that maybe the autistic girls don’t...what kind of wording, the language they would use...but I was thinking, have you thought about it that way? But then again, it may be that you would have to sort of...listen to the young people and whether they want that...or not.”
|                                            | Preferred language of autistic community needs to be considered | ✓  |     |  |
| Not inclusive of whole Autistic community | Needs to consider non-binary and transgender CYP | ✓  | ✓   | USA: “I think the focus on females is good...but I was wondering that question too, what happens in this world of...you know, non-binary or children identifying with the opposite gender...because I’m sure that will come up too so...I don’t know how that’s addressed, I just know that when we’re talking about male versus female identification, the females do go underdiagnosed and diagnosed a lot later. And we see that every day during our re-evaluations, as these children develop.”
|                                            | Does not include autistic males              | ✓  |     | UK: “what I was thinking but I think you’ve sort of...there was cultural sensitivity but then again, maybe it means you need to have the voice of those girls...”
|                                            | Cultural sensitivity                        | ✓  |     |  |
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### RQ: SPs views on the barriers of implementing a proposed model of support.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>USA</th>
<th>Illustrative examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Capacity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns around screening and identification</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>UK: “And my concern would be that...through identification and screening, that there could be lots of...potentially lots of...young people out there or their families that...believe that their child or that they are autistic, whereas actually they may not be. Equally there may be children out there who are autistic and haven't been identified...and just kind of concerned around how's that going to be monitored.” USA: “My other thought was with the identification and screening piece, like...we've talked a lot about a...the other...pieces of it and I feel like for us, as school psychologists, that would be...especially in our district because we’ve got a lot of layers of administration and programming different...you know...where like the identification and screening...I don't know that it would be a barrier necessarily...but I certainly couldn't go out and...like screen...my 700 females here...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial cost</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requires external support for implementation</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Implications</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not accessible for those without background in autism</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools may not have resources</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>UK: “So, I think just having some really clear kind of almost like some structure for schools, but not like precise, 'You have to follow it exactly this way,' almost like a guide that they can use to make it as simple as possible for them.” USA: “and so...while it’s comprehensive, it’s also...it seems like a big...like it would be a big undertaking, there would be a lot of...like it would be a...obviously a systems level...change that would have to happen...” USA: “I would say just like any type of change we’re trying to implement in schools, it comes down to a time barrier, you know, of finding the time to train staff members and implement and...you know, taking away from other job duties, this would definitely be like...and it would take a lot of time...that many of us don’t have out here.” UK: “I think it’s immensely important...exciting...and something that we should all be thinking about, engaging with. I think those are the challenges though, aren’t they? It’s the time commitment, it’s the cost, it’s the priority...albeit very essential.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school contexts may find implementation difficult</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple and clear guidance required</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huge piece of work</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requires further training to implement</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requires more details to implement</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wider landscape</strong> (political/legislative)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>UK: “unless an educational psychology service could potentially do this through the kind of intervention and prevention route, should that be...a kind of non-traded model, for example. I'm just thinking about quality...and obviously...equity of service and so on...” USA: “some...some kids are...you know...they’ve already gotten them hooked up with services for post high school. Other parents don’t have, you know...they just haven’t...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School priorities</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statutory pressures</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wider organisation priorities</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Buy-in</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential staff reluctance to adapt practice</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>UK: “because I had a similar thought around pupil voice and what that might look like because I know for so often so many of my schools and this could be a potential barrier in terms of they'll say, 'Oh, well...they refuse to speak to anyone or...they're not answering any of the questions we ask them,' and again, it's just supporting them and...being able to offer that flexibility and...for instance, not just relying on a verbal response” “I think some of it is about resources, some of it is...parent buy-in, some of it is...some of it might be time, but I think...it might just be that people...they don’t know...and so when you don’t know, you don’t do, but not because you don’t want to.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff buy-in</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requires parent buy-in</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“and whether or not staff...would buy into some of that, would be the only other thing to consider, I think, potentially.”

Initial Thematic Maps for RQ1 and RQ2

RQ1. How do stakeholders in the UK and USA perceive the utility of a proposed model of support for autistic females in terms of strengths and areas for development?

Strengths
- Domains of the Model
- Adding Value
- Utility and Capacity Building

Areas for Development
- Clarity and detail
- Needs to be informed by the Autistic community
- Not inclusive of whole Autistic community
RQ2. How might stakeholders in the UK and USA implement a proposed model of support for autistic females, with reference to potential barriers and facilitators?

**Facilitators**
- Stepped approach
- Multi-agency collaboration
- Engagement

**Barriers**
- Capacity
- Wider landscape (political/legislative)
- Buy-in
Appendix CC: Refined themes after further analysis

Inclusivity for autistic females

1. Applicable to other educational and workplace settings
2. Encourages personalised support
3. Facilitates identification of needs and support
4. Fits within settings frame of reference
5. Holistic
6. Includes voice of autistic females
7. Increases knowledge, awareness and understanding
8. Involves parents
9. Positive Language
10. Pre-diagnosis support
11. Preventative strategy
12. Promotes Inclusivity
13. Reflects autistic female specific need
14. Systems level change
15. Valuable and Impactful
16. Cultural sensitivity
17. Needs to consider non-binary and transgender CYP
18. Need to gain parent carer views on the model
19. Need to gain views of autistic female community
20. Post-16 Support needs to be clearer
21. Preferred language of autistic community needs to be considered
22. Does not include autistic males
23. Accessible for those with an understanding of autism
24. Equity
25. High school contexts may find implementation difficult
26. Not accessible for those without background in autism

Relationships as change drivers

1. Autism Champions
2. Collaborative
3. Increases connections between school staff
4. Parent support groups
5. Shared responsibility
6. Collaboration between settings made more explicit
7. External agency support strand too simplistic
8. External support
9. Inter-agency working would ensure capacity
10. School engagement
11. Autism champions possible in high schools
12. Staff Motivation
13. Potential staff reluctance to adapt practice
14. Requires parent buy-in
15. Staff buy-in
Procedure, processes and practicalities.

1. Strengthens existing models
2. Provides a framework to audit and review provision
3. Tiered Approach
4. Best practice
5. Comprehensive
6. Increases school resources
7. Supports transitional phases of education
8. Requires more details for implementation
9. Piloting it could facilitate buy-in
10. Breaks a big task in to smaller components
11. Schools may already have resources to implement it
12. Concerns around screening and identification
13. Requires external support for implementation
14. Requires further training to implement
15. Requires more details to implement
16. Simple and clear guidance required
17. School Priorities
18. Statutory pressures of EPs
19. Time implications
20. Wider organisation priorities
21. Financial Cost
22. Huge piece of work
23. Schools may not have resources
Appendix DD: Original Ethics Documentation for Recruiting Autistic Females

Katie Ayirebi
School of Environment, Education and Development
The University of Manchester
Ellen Wilkinson Building
Oxford Road
Manchester M13 9PL

Email: katie.ayirebi@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

‘Stakeholder views on the utility of a proposed model of high school support for autistic females:

School Permission Form

Dear Principal,

I am a trainee educational psychologist at The University of Manchester. I am planning a research study investigating the utility of a model of support for autistic females aged 11-18 years. I would like to recruit autistic female participants from your school to gather their views and refine the model of support.

If you feel that your school will be able to accommodate the study please sign and return the slip below in the envelope provided. Please read the following information which outlines what taking part would involve for your school.

What would taking part involve?

Should you decide to join the study, I would like to invite pupils to take part an online focus group session in November or December 2021, during school hours. The session will take approximately 45 minutes. All children will be free to withdraw from the tasks at any time.

The session will take via an online platform such as Zoom, whilst the girls are in school. The meeting will be arranged by Katie Ayirebi. Please note that we will require a quiet area with an accompanying member of staff.

Participant identification and consent

Parents/carers of potential participants will be given full written information about the study and will be asked to sign consent forms if they are happy for their child to take part and to be audio recorded. A child-friendly assent form will be attached for child participants to sign where the parent/carer feels this is appropriate.

With your permission, we would ask that teachers distribute information sheets to the parents/carers of children they deem eligible according to inclusion criteria provided by us. Participating teachers will also be given full written information about their involvement in the study and will be asked to sign consent forms if they are happy to participate.

Thank you very much for your time considering this request and please do not hesitate to contact me should you require any further information or if you would like to discuss our requirements or your school’s involvement in the study further.
Yours faithfully,

Katie Ayirebi
‘Stakeholder views on the utility of a proposed model of high school support for autistic females.’

Email for Gatekeeper

Dear ……

My name is Katie Ayirebi. I am second year trainee educational psychologist on the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology at The University of Manchester. I am hoping to carry out a research project that aims to explore the views of autistic females on a proposed model of support for autistic females in a high school setting (aged 11-18 years in the UK). The main research question, which will form the discussion within your context is:

3. What do autistic females consider to be the strengths and areas for development of a proposed model of support?

I intend to conduct a focus group with a small number of autistic females from your school, over an online communication platform, such as Zoom, at a convenient time. Focus groups will be audio recorded and transcripts will be analysed using thematic analysis to identify themes. All data will be anonymised and some of the anonymised quotations may be used in a report I submit to the university as part of my doctoral thesis.

Your principal has given consent for the research to take place within the school and I would be extremely grateful if you could support me in identifying potential participants. I would like to recruit females aged 11-18 years with a diagnosis of autism. Due to the nature of the research, please only identify eligible pupils who are not considered to be “highly vulnerable” and who would likely be okay talking about their experiences.

Please also find attached to this e-mail, the following documentation:

- Participant Information Sheet
- Consent/ assent forms
- Moderator script for the focus group.

Many thanks for taking the time to read this email.

Best wishes,

Katie Ayirebi

(Trainee Educational Psychologist- University of Manchester)
‘Stakeholder views on the utility of a proposed model of high school support for autistic females.’

Participant Information Sheet: Parent/ Carer (PIS)

I would like to invite your child to take part in a research study being conducted by a trainee educational psychologist at the University of Manchester.

Before you decide whether you would like your child to take part in the study it is important for you and your child to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve.

Please take the time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with your child and others if you wish. I have also enclosed a simplified information sheet for your child. Please read this information sheet to your child to help explain the study to them. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you would like your child to take part. Thank you for reading this.

About the research

➢ Who will conduct the research?

Katie Ayirebi, a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) at the University of Manchester, England.

School of Environment, Education and Development (SEED)
Ellen Wilkinson Building,
Oxford Road,
Manchester,
M13 9PL.

➢ What is the purpose of the research?

The purpose of this study is to investigate the utility of a model of support for autistic females aged 11-18 years. The model has been developed by Educational Psychologists and school staff at your child’s school. The study intends to recruit autistic female participants from the grammar school to gather their views in order to refine the model of support. In addition, the research will explore the utility of the model in other contexts, the research aims to recruit educational/ school psychologist in the UK and USA.

Through the use of focus groups, the study wishes to gather the perspectives and experiences of these participants to gain an insight into utility of the model in different contexts. I hope to generate themes from the data that will inform my thesis research project.

➢ Will the outcomes of the research be published?

Findings will be written up into a thesis that will be submitted to the University of Manchester as part of the assessment requirements of the Doctorate of Educational and Child Psychology. The thesis intends to be submitted for publication in a peer reviewed journal and the findings may be used in future research.
Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Check

The researcher has undergone an appropriate level of DBS check (as determined by their School and obtained via The University of Manchester).

Who has reviewed the research project?

This project has been reviewed by The University of Manchester Research Ethics Committee.

Who is funding the research project?

Funding has been provided from the DfE Initial Training for Educational Psychologists bid 2020-2023 £15,950 pa bursary.

What would my child’s involvement be?

What would my child be asked to do if they took part?

There will be two online focus group sessions, during which we will carry out various activities. I will obtain your child’s views on the support they receive at high school. The duration of the focus groups would be around forty-five minutes and will take place over an online communication platform such as Zoom. Your child will be at school and there will be a member of staff in the room with them. Your child will have the right to withdraw at any point during or after the focus groups. The focus groups will be recorded using an encrypted audio recorder, both the audio recorder and the recording will be stored securely. Following the research, a summary of the study will be shared with you.

What happens if I do not want my child to take part or if I change my mind?

It is up to you to decide whether or not you would like your child to take part. If you do decide that your child may take part please keep this information sheet and sign the consent form. If you decide that your child may take part you are still free to withdraw them from the study at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to yourself. Your child is also free to withdraw from the study at any time and they will be reminded of this at the beginning of the tasks.

It will not be possible to remove your child’s data from the project once it has been anonymised as we will not be able to identify their specific data. The data will be transcribed 24 hours after the interview takes place. This does not affect your data protection rights. If you decide not to take part you do not need to do anything further.

Audio recordings are an essential requirement to the participation in the study. Should your child feel uncomfortable with the recording process at any point during the focus group, they are able to request that the researcher stops recording at any time.

Data Protection and Confidentiality

What information will you collect about my child?

In order to participate in this research project we will need to collect information that could identify you and your child, called “personal identifiable information”. Specifically we will need to collect:
• Full name (on consent form)
• Your signature (on consent form)
• An audio recording of your child’s voice (obtained during the focus groups)

For audio recordings:

➢ Recordings will consist of voice only and will be obtained through focus groups.

Your child’s participation in this research will be recorded in Zoom and their personal data will be processed by Zoom. This may mean that their personal data is transferred to a country outside of the European Economic Area, some of which have not yet been determined by the European Commission to have an adequate level of data protection. Appropriate legal mechanisms to ensure these transfers are compliant with the UK General Data Protection Regulation are in place. The recordings will be removed from the above third party platform and stored on University of Manchester managed file storage as soon as possible following the completion of data collection.

➢ Under what legal basis are you collecting this information?

We are collecting and storing this personal identifiable information in accordance with UK data protection law which protect your rights. These state that we must have a legal basis (specific reason) for collecting your data. For this study, the specific reason is that it is “a public interest task” and “a process necessary for research purposes”.

➢ What are my rights in relation to the information you will collect about me and my child?

You have a number of rights under data protection law regarding your personal information. For example, you can request a copy of the information we hold about you/ your child, including audio recordings.

If you would like to know more about your different rights or the way we use your personal information to ensure we follow the law, please consult our Privacy Notice for Research.

➢ Will my child’s participation in the study be confidential and their personal identifiable information be protected?

In accordance with data protection law, The University of Manchester is the Data Controller for this project. This means that we are responsible for making sure your personal information is kept secure, confidential and used only in the way you have been told it will be used. All researchers are trained with this in mind, and your data will be looked after in the following way:

Only the study team at The University of Manchester will have access to your personal information, but they will pseudonymise it as soon as possible. Your name and any other identifying information will be removed and replaced with a random ID number. Only the research team will have access to the key that links this ID number to your personal information. In line with The University of Manchester retention policy, data will be stored for a period of five years in secure locations on the researcher’s P Drive.

As mentioned above, due to Covid-19 restrictions, your participation in this research will be recorded in Zoom and your personal data will be processed by Zoom. The recordings will be removed from the
above third party platform and stored on University of Manchester managed file storage as soon as possible following the completion of data collection.

**For audio recordings:**

- The researcher, or a UoM third party approved transcriber, will be responsible for transcription of interview data.
- All personal identifiable information will be pseudonymised in the final transcript.
- The pseudonymised transcription will be archived securely at the University of Manchester for a period of five years and then destroyed.
- Only the researcher will have access to the recordings.

Please also note that individuals from The University of Manchester or regulatory authorities may need to look at the data collected for this study to make sure the project is being carried out as planned. This may involve looking at identifiable data. All individuals involved in auditing and monitoring the study will have a strict duty of confidentiality to your child as a research participant.

**Potential disclosures:**

- If, during the study, we have concerns about your child’s safety or the safety of others, we will inform your GP/care team/family member.
- Individuals from the University, the site where the research is taking place and regulatory authorities may need to review the study information for auditing and monitoring purposes or in the event of an incident.

Please also note that individuals from The University of Manchester or regulatory authorities may need to look at the data collected for this study to make sure the project is being carried out as planned. This may involve looking at identifiable data. All individuals involved in auditing and monitoring the study will have a strict duty of confidentiality to you as a research participant.

**What if I have a complaint?**

➢ Contact details for complaints

If you have a complaint that you wish to direct to members of the research team, please contact:

**Dr George Thomas**

Academic and Professional Tutor, Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology.
School of Environment, Education and Development (SEED),
Ellen Wilkinson Building,
The University of Manchester,
Oxford Road,
Manchester, M13 9PL.
george.thomas@manchester.ac.uk
Tel: 0161 275 3511

If you wish to make a formal complaint to someone independent of the research team or if you are not satisfied with the response you have gained from the researchers in the first instance then please contact
The Research Ethics Manager, Research Office, Christie Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL, by emailing: research.complaints@manchester.ac.uk or by telephoning 0161 275 2674.

If you wish to contact us about your data protection rights, please email dataprotection@manchester.ac.uk or write to The Information Governance Office, Christie Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, M13 9PL at the University and we will guide you through the process of exercising your rights.

You also have a right to complain to the Information Commissioner’s Office about complaints relating to your personal identifiable information Tel 0303 123 1113

**Contact Details**

If you have any queries about the study or if you are interested in taking part then please contact the researcher:

**KATIE AYIREBI (Trainee Educational Psychologist)**
School of Environment, Education and Development (SEED),
Ellen Wilkinson Building,
Oxford Road,
Manchester,
M13 9PL.

katie.ayirebi@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

**Completing the enclosed forms**

If you agree to your child’s participation in this study, please sign and complete the enclosed PINK CONSENT FORM.

I have also enclosed a simplified information sheet for your child. Please read this information sheet to your child to help explain the study to them. If your child agrees to take part they should also sign the enclosed GREEN ASSENT FORM. Please return both forms to Katie Ayirebi on the above e-mail.

Thank you very much for your time in considering this request and please do not hesitate to contact me should you require any further information or if you would like to discuss your child’s participation in the study further. Please keep this INFORMATION SHEET for your reference.
‘Stakeholder views on the utility of a proposed model of high school support for autistic females.’

Parent/Carer Consent form

If you are happy for your child to take part please complete and sign the consent form below

Please initial boxes below:

1. I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above project and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my child’s participation in the study is voluntary and that they are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to any treatment/service.

3. I understand that sessions will be audio-recorded.

4. I agree that any data collected may be passed as anonymous data to other researchers and be stored for use in future studies.

I agree that my child may take part in the above project

_________________________________________   __________________________________________
Child’s name                                      Child’s date of birth

_________________________________________   _____________   _________________________
Name of parent/guardian                          Date                                Signature

_________________________________________   _____________   _________________________
Name of person taking consent                    Date                                Signature
Information sheet for autistic girls aged 11 and 12 years

Your views on support for autistic females at your school

Who we are

Hi, my name is Katie and my job is finding out about schools and pupils like you at the University of Manchester.

Would you like to help me with my work about the support your school puts in place for autistic females? You don’t have to if you don’t want to.

What are we doing?

If you take part, you will be able to give your thoughts on the support you receive at school. There will hopefully be a small group of us, so some of your peers will also be taking part.

The first part of the meeting will be a chance for us to get to know each other and I will introduce some ideas to you. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child says children and young people have the right to express their views. I would like to see what you think of support that staff in your school and wider-academy have developed to help autistic females at high school. We will investigate whether it could be helpful for other autistic females in other schools in the UK and even the USA.

What do you have to do?

If you want to help, I will ask you to:

- Tell me what you think about the support you receive at your school
You can tell me with your words, type your answers during our chat or write your ideas before we meet. Whichever you would prefer.

Would that be ok?

Who gets to see your answers?
I will need to know your name and age. Only I (Katie) will know this.

Your teacher will not.

I will keep your answers safe by making sure that no one else sees them other than me.
I will take your name off your work.

I will keep your answers for 5 years and then I will destroy them.

If you want to know more, please ask your mum, dad or the person who looks after you as I have given them a lot of extra information about this.

What Do you Do Now?

If you have any questions please ask me, your mum, dad or the person that looks after you.

Let me know if you would like to take part.

Thank you for reading this!
Information for autistic girls aged 13 years and above

Views on School Support for Autistic Females

Who is Conducting the Research?

My name is Katie and I work as a researcher at the University of Manchester. I would like to invite you to take part in our research study about the support your school puts in place for autistic females.

Before you decide if you wish to take part, please make sure that you understand:

1. Why the research is being done
2. What your involvement in the project will be

Take your time to read through this information sheet before you decide if you wish to take part. Ask as many questions as you wish.

What is the Purpose of the Research?

If you take part, you will be able to give your thoughts on the support you receive at school. There will hopefully be a small group of us, so some of your peers will also be taking part.

The first part of the meeting will be a chance for us to get to know each other and I will introduce some ideas to you. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child says children and young people have the right to express their views. I would like to see what you think of support that staff in your school and wider-academy have developed to help autistic females at high school.

Why Are We Doing Our Research?

We will investigate whether the support you receive could be helpful for other autistic females in other schools in the UK and even the USA.

Why Have I Been Asked to Take Part?

We have asked you to take part because the support has been developed at your school and we want to make sure that autistic females are consulted and have the opportunity to give their views on the support.

What Would I Be Asked to Do if I Take Part?

If you want to take part, we will ask that you volunteer to take part in the following tasks:
Take part in a focus group with me (Katie) and a small number of other autistic females.

This will take place whilst you are at school, using a school laptop over Zoom.

During the session you can tell me what you think about the support you receive at your school.

You can participate verbally during our meeting, type your answers during our chat or write your ideas down before we meet and I can share them for you. Whichever you would prefer.

**How Long is the Study?**

The study will take place over two sessions, taking approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes to complete.

**Where will the Study Take Place?**

The study will take place in a room in your school, using Zoom through a school laptop.

**Will my Participation in the Study be Confidential?**

In order to take part in the research we will need to know your name and age.

Only I (Katie) will have access to your information and we will ensure it is kept safe and secure.

We are keeping this information safe and following data protection law.

The University of Manchester is the Data Controller, which means that we will protect the information about you. All researchers have received training to do this and we will make sure that they keep your information safe.

We will make sure that no one knows you have chosen to take part in the study and will also not share any information you have given to us. To do this we will use a process called anonymising, which means that we will generate a secret code for you and make sure that your name is stored in a different place to the rest of the information you give us. We will also keep the information you give us for 5 years and then it will be safely destroyed.

You have a number of rights under data protection law, including the right to see any of the information you have shared with us. If you would like to know more about your rights or find out the legal reason we collect and use your information, please read through the Privacy Notice for Research or discuss it with your parent/guardian.

**Do I Have to Take Part?**
It is completely up to you if you wish to take part in the study. Make sure you think carefully and consider all the information contained in this sheet before you decide.

After you have decided you will be asked to sign an assent form that shows you understand and agree to take part in the research. Your parent/guardian will do the same (and sign a consent form) if they also agree for you to take part.

What if I Change my Mind?

You are free to withdraw from the study at any point without having to give a reason. If you decide to withdraw any data already collected will be used in the final analysis. Please remember that your data will be anonymised and you will not be identified in any way.

Just remember that there are no right or wrong answers and we really value your opinion.

Who is Organising and Approving the Research?

The research is being sponsored by the University of Manchester

The research has also been approved by the School of Environment, Education and Development, a group of people who work to protect your safety, rights, wellbeing and dignity.

What Do I Do Now?

If you have any questions relating to the information contained in this sheet, please let me know:

Researcher: KATIE AYIREBI (Trainee Educational Psychologist)
School of Environment, Education and Development (SEED),
Ellen Wilkinson Building,
Oxford Road,
Manchester,
M13 9PL.

katie.ayirebi@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

Research Supervisor: Dr George Thomas
Academic and Professional Tutor, Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology.
School of Environment, Education and Development (SEED),
Ellen Wilkinson Building,
The University of Manchester,
Oxford Road,
Manchester, M13 9PL.
george.thomas@manchester.ac.uk
Tel: 0161 275 3511
Thank you for reading this!
Young Person Assent: Aged 11 and 12 years

‘Stakeholder views on the utility of a proposed model of high school support for autistic females.’

Tell us if you want to take part by circling all that you agree with:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  Do you know what we will be doing today?</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  Do you want to ask me any more questions about it?</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 3  Do you know that you can change your mind if you do not want to take part anymore?  
You do not have to tell me why.                     | Yes/No |
| 4  Are you happy if I write what you tell me in my books and reports? It won’t have your name on. | Yes/No |
| 5  Do you know that the things you tell me might be looked at by people who help to keep you safe? | Yes/No |
| 6  Are you happy if I record what you say?                                | Yes/No |
| 7  Do you know we might have to tell your parents/guardians/teachers things you say? | Yes/No |
| 8  Are you happy to take part in what we talked about?                    | Yes/No |

If you don’t want to take part, don’t sign your name!

If you do want to take part, you can write your name below

________________________            ________________________  
Name of Child  
Signature  
Date

________________________            ________________________  
Name of the person taking assent  
Signature  
Date

1 copy for the participant, 1 copy for the research team (original)
Young Person Assent: Aged 13 years and above

‘Stakeholder views on the utility of a proposed model of high school support for autistic females.’

Tell us if you want to take part by circling all that you agree with:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Do you understand what the study is about?</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Have you asked all the questions you want to ask about the study?</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Did you understand the answers to your questions?</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Do you understand you can stop the study at any time without giving a reason?</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Are you happy that things you tell the researchers, with your name removed, will be used in the books, articles or reports they write, and shared with other researchers?</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Are you happy that things you say in the study will be looked at by people at the University of Manchester or other people who help to make sure that you are kept safe?</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Are you happy for the interviews to be audio recorded?</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Are you happy for researchers or people at other Universities to ask you to help with other studies in the future?</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Do you understand that the researchers may have to tell your parents, guardians or teachers, things you said in the study if they are worried about you?</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Are you happy to take part in the study?</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you don’t want to take part, don’t sign your name!

If you do want to take part, you can write your name below

________________________  ________________________
Name of Child              Signature            Date

________________________  ________________________
Name of the person taking assent  Signature           Date
‘Stakeholder views on the utility of a proposed model of high school support for autistic females.’

Focus Group with Autistic females: Moderator Script/ Questions

Welcome and house keeping

Thank you for taking part in the focus group. It will last around 45-minutes and you are free to opt out or withdraw from the session at any point. As you know we’re here as you’ve agreed to take part in some research that I am carrying out as part of my thesis. I’m going to just recap some of the consent form and explain how the focus group will work and then we can get started. I will record what we say – is that okay? If you feel uncomfortable with this at any point during the conversation, you are able to request that the researcher stops recording at any time. Your participation in the focus group will be kept confidential to the researcher and all personal information will be removed from the final transcript. Once transcribed the recording will be deleted from the researcher’s encrypted device and the university’s encrypted drive. Confidentiality will be ensured through anonymisation of the data and use of pseudonyms (fake names) so nobody will know your real names. This will ensure that the reporting of the data is done in such a way that the individuals cannot be readily identified. So, the focus group - What are your views of a proposed model of support for autistic females at secondary school? You can either say your answers out loud, type them into the chat function or if you have provided me with pre-typed answers, I am happy to read them out for you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Possible prompts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Define the model-aspects of the model.</td>
<td>Ensure understanding- use of visuals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So, the first question is ‘if senior leaders put this model in place in your school, what would be important to you?’</td>
<td>What do we think about the (part of the model)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the good things about this model?</td>
<td>Is there anything else anybody wants to add?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does your school do well to support you?</td>
<td>Diamond 9? Card sort- factors into importance? Priority? Rating scales?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you for those contributions.</td>
<td>Is there anything missing? Provide post-its? Write on pieces of card.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What could make this model even better?</td>
<td>Time/ opportunity to discuss with staff/ involve parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What could your school do to ensure you are supported even better?</td>
<td>So [summary].... Does that sound okay with everyone?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If senior leaders in your school were putting this in place with your support, how could you help? What could they do to ensure you had your say? What could they do to support you to work with them?</td>
<td>Before we stop the recording, does anyone want to add anything?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Distress Protocol

Prior to study

Prior to commencement of the study, the participants will be given a participant information sheet with details of who to contact if they experience distress (i.e. researcher Katie Ayirebi and supervisor Dr George Thomas) and these details will be reiterated again with the participant at the conclusion of the focus group.

The focus group will take place online, within the school setting and the researcher will ensure another member of staff is in the room/building, should the participant need support.

The researcher will ask to introduce themselves to the adult before the focus group commences. Following the study, participants will be offered a debrief and emailed a debrief form containing advice and contact details of organisations that can provide them with support. These details will also be reiterated verbally to the participants at the conclusion of the meeting.

During the study

Should a participant report or show signs of distress and feeling uncomfortable (such as crying) during the meetings/focus group, the following actions will be taken by the researcher:

Step 1

- Researcher offers immediate emotional support.
- Ask the participant how they are feeling, listen with empathy and offer support.
- Suggest that the participant take a break or have a drink of water; ask if they would like to withdraw from the meeting/focus group.

Step 2

- If the participant would like to continue, reiterate that the participant can withdraw at any time or take a break and, throughout the rest of the meeting/focus group, the researcher will regularly check in with the participant regarding how they are feeling.
- If the participant would like to stop or appears highly distressed (such as crying), follow the actions in Step 3.

Step 3

- Pause meeting/focus group and escort individual out of the room.
- **Mild distress**: Encourage the participant to speak to a responsible adult/their supervisor for support OR offer to do so for the participant.
- **Moderate distress**: Immediately inform the young person’s caregiver and head of year at school (by telephoning the school setting) and ask them to come to the participant to support them at an appropriate social distance, and determine next step and how this will be actioned, e.g. allow distress to abate; contact emergency services; contact health service such as GP or family health services.
- **High distress**: Researcher will phone the police/ambulance/mental health services (where appropriate) for assistance and remain on the call with the participant until they arrive. They will inform a member of the senior leadership team of the school setting.
- **In all instances the researcher will seek support from their supervisor/line manager by contacting them on their direct mobile line.**
Follow-up actions

- Provide the participant with a debrief form and offer call them the following day if they consent to this.
- Offer the participant the opportunity to withdraw from the study and for their data to be destroyed.
- Recommend the participant contacts their GP or appropriate mental health services, if they continue to feel distressed.

The researcher will act in accordance with the BPS Professional Practice Guidelines (2008).

Risk: Participant discloses information which implies risk to themselves or to another person.

Should a participant disclose information that implied a risk to the participant or someone else the following steps would be taken:

- If action is felt to be required the researcher will immediately report these concerns to the most appropriate child safeguarding team
- Where possible, any concerns would be discussed with the individual and they will be informed that the researcher will be sharing information to respect confidentiality
- All actions will be completed with priority and done so at the soonest available opportunity.
- The researcher will keep a clear written record of the concern and all steps taken to deal with the matter, for example who the concern has been raised with and on what date.
Child Debrief Sheet

Thank you for working with me!

I hope you have found it interesting.

If you feel upset about anything we have chatted about, or if you want to talk to another adult about it, you could talk to:

- Your parents or the person who takes care of you at home
- School staff: Mr/s XXXX

If you have any more questions for (researcher), please talk to Mr/s XXXX and they can let (researcher) know.

There are also a number of helpful organisations listed here that you can contact:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self Help</strong> (counselling service): <a href="https://www.selfhelpservices.org.uk/">https://www.selfhelpservices.org.uk/</a> 0161 226 3871</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Samaritans:</strong> 116 123 (freephone, 24 hours a day) <a href="http://www.samaritans.org">www.samaritans.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Mix:</strong> 0808 808 4994 (3pm - 12am everyday)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MIND:</strong> 0300 123 3393 (9am - 6pm, Monday - Friday) <a href="mailto:info@mind.org.uk">info@mind.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parent/carer debrief sheet

Stakeholder views on the utility of a proposed model of high school support for autistic females.

Parent/carer Debrief Sheet

Thank you for consenting for your child to take part in the two virtual sessions for this study. We hope that they have found it interesting and have not been upset by any of the topics discussed. However, if you or your child have found any part of this experience to be distressing and you wish to speak to one of the researchers, please contact:

Katie Ayirebi: katie.ayirebi@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

There are also a number of organisations listed below that you can contact.

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</table>
Stakeholder views on the utility of a proposed model of high school support for autistic females.

School staff debrief sheet

Thank you for working with us to complete this research study. We hope the students have found it interesting and have not been upset by any of the topics discussed. However, if they have found any part of this experience to be distressing and you wish to speak to one of the researchers, please contact:

Katie Ayirebi: katie.ayirebi@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

There are also a number of organisations listed below that may offer support.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Self Help** (counselling service):  
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0161 226 3871 | **Samaritans:**  
116 123 (freephone, 24 hours a day)  
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| **The Mix:**  
0808 808 4994  
(3pm – 12am everyday) | **MIND:**  
0300 123 3393  
(9am – 6pm, Monday – Friday)  
info@mind.org.uk |
My Job

I am a ‘Trainee Educational Psychologist’, but you can call me Katie.

I work with children and young people, like you, to find out what they like and don’t like so much. I am doing some research to find out about what is good at supporting autistic females at high school.

We can research this together and hopefully make things better.

I may be wearing a face covering, like the picture above, but I will still smile at you when I meet you, even if you can’t see it!

What is important to me:
- Spending time with my family and friends
- Walks in the countryside
- Chocolate

What I would like to get better at:
- Running
- Baking
- Cooking

People describe me as:
- "Smiley"
- Helpful
- Friendly
- Easy to talk to

What we might do together:

We will meet online over Zoom. You will be in school and a staff member will be with you. When we first meet, I will ask you about yourself and introduce myself. There will be some of your peers there, too. I will explain about some of the things we could do together to carry out some research, and you can ask about anything you’re not sure about.

We might:
- play games together
- do some drawing together
- do questionnaires together

What happens if you don’t want to work with me?

If you don’t want to meet me and work together, you don’t have to. You can leave the research at any stage. But, it is your right to express your views and have them considered (UNCRC, Article 12) so you could give it a go! 😊

Easy Questions?

If you have any questions you can write them down or ask somebody to write them down for you and I will try my best to answer them when we meet. I look forward to meeting you soon!