

# Identifying the Role of the Special School Learning Support Assistant: A Case Study Evaluation

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## List of Abbreviations

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<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Definition</b>
AFA	Achievement For All
ASD	Autistic Spectrum Disorder
ASSIA	Applied and Social Sciences Index and Abstracts
BJSE	British Journal of Special Education
BPS	British Psychological Society
CoP	Code of Practice
CT	Class Teacher
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DES	Department for Education and Science
DfE	Department for Education
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DISS	Deployment and Impact of Support Staff
ECM	Every Child Matters
ERIC	Educational Resources Index Catalogue
EP	Educational Psychologist
EPiP	Educational Psychology in Practice
EPS	Educational Psychology Service
HLTA	Higher Level Teaching Assistant
HT	Head Teacher
HPC	Health Professions Council
IEP	Individual Education Plan
IPA	Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis
LA	Local Authority
LSA	Learning Support Assistant
OfSTED	Office for Standards in Education
PMLD	Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SLD	Severe Learning Difficulties
TEP	Trainee Educational Psychologist
TA	Teaching Assistant

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## **Abstract**

**University of Manchester**

**Edward Chilton, 2012**

### **Identifying the Role of the Special School Learning Support Assistant**

*Educational Support and Inclusion RTG, the School of Education*

Underpinned by a recognised training pathway, the number of Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) deployed across ancillary and integral roles within British schools have significantly increased since 2003. Consequently, research has aimed to shed light on the impact of the LSA role, highlighting the counter-intuitive possibility that the LSA role may not be beneficial to the learning of young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN). Relevant research, however, has been predominantly situated within mainstream settings, with little research on the LSA role in supporting children with SLD and PMLD or specifically within a special school. This research explores the role of the LSA across a range of domains including teaching and learning, assessment, multi-agency working, care, and community liaison. The current and potential impact of the LSA role in a special school is identified. 11 LSAs and four teaching staff from a Primary aged special school took part in the research. The research design was a single exploratory embedded case study design (Yin, 2009) and data was gathered using semi-structured interviews and semi-structured observations. A rich picture of the LSA role was created through the triangulation of emerging themes from a hybrid thematic analysis alongside the observation data. Stand out findings include a 'high-density' approach to supporting teaching and learning that is unique within a cohesive special school as well as the finding that LSAs operate in a 'general practitioner' capacity by completing an expansive range of roles. A final model of LSA practice is defined highlighting the key areas of responsibility embraced by LSAs across an expansive range of roles from specialised care to direct instruction. The findings highlighted that the majority of the LSAs' focus and responsibility fell within the domain of teaching and learning, leading the researcher to suggest that the term 'Assistant Teacher' may be more befitting for the 'Teaching Assistant'. Implications for the theory of LSA deployment and practice are discussed as well as implications for practice and future research.

## **Declaration**

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

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# 1 Introduction

The following thesis is presented by a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP), currently studying on the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology at the University of Manchester. The researcher began the second year of the three year Doctorate by embarking on fieldwork employment with Skytown<sup>1</sup> City Council Educational Psychology Service (EPS) in September 2010. During the induction into the service he became aware of a recent development in a cluster of schools all of which were part of the Achievement For All (AFA) initiative<sup>2</sup>. These developments were in the form of an evidence based workshop during which research was presented to schools on the effectiveness of teaching assistant (TA) deployment in schools (Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Martin, Russell & Webster, 2009b). A key finding of this research was that there was a consistent negative relationship between the amount of support a pupil received and the progress they made in English, mathematics, and science, even after controlling for pupil characteristics like prior attainment and SEN (Special Educational Needs) status. Although many findings emerged showing the positive supportive impact LSAs had towards teachers' workload and job satisfaction, as well as pupil outcomes in areas such as confidence and motivation, the more support pupils received, the less academic progress they made (Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Koutsoubou, Martin, Russell, et al. 2009a). This led the TEP to reflect further on his experience of working as a TA and upon the varying roles of support staff in schools.

In subsequent weeks the author made a visit to Summerville Special School within his role as a TEP. Summerville School is a school providing educational provision for Primary aged children with Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD) and Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD). At the time of writing, the school catered for 36 pupils across four classes (three Primary aged classes and an Early Years class). The school has an OfSTED rating of 'Good' and is also recognised across the LA as providing quality provision for young people. As the 'link EP' for the school the TEP worked through a time allocation model to deliver psychological support through a consultation framework. Depending on the school's current needs, this may have involved specific case work, helping staff to problem solve and strategise for individual

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<sup>1</sup> Skytown is a pseudonym used to protect the identity of the local authority in which the research took place

<sup>2</sup> Achievement for All is a whole-school approach to school improvement which has had demonstrable success in improving rates of progress for pupils with SEN and disabled pupils (SEND) in English and maths.

pupils causing concern, or through staff training in areas such as Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or engaging parents, as well as more systemic developments.

During his time in this role, it became apparent that the Head Teacher (HT) was keen to explore the possibility of working with the TEP on development work within the school. After discussions between the researcher and the HT a proposal emerged which would focus on identifying and defining the role of the Learning Support Assistant (LSA) in Summerville Special School and examining the impact of their role. This proposal was formulated based on the researcher's interest in, and background as, a TA, the knowledge he had recently acquired from the AFA workshops (the negative impacts that TAs were having on the progress of pupils with SEN in mainstream settings), the open invitation from the school and support of the EPS, and most importantly the researcher felt that the role of LSAs in special schools has been neglected within the academic literature.

In addition to the negative press ascribed to LSAs as a consequence of Blatchford et al's (2009a) research (BBC, 2009 and The Guardian: James, 2011), Giangreco, (2009) and Webster, Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Martin and Russell (2010) highlight current trends in a reliance on one-to-one proliferation of teaching assistants. They describe this trend as an example of 'double standards' whereby the least qualified are responsible for the education of those with the highest levels of need. When considering the impact of this research in the current National context of austerity and public spending cuts, more research into the role of the LSA is required in order to ensure rash decisions are not made.

The number of LSAs working across the country has more than trebled in the last 10 years (DCSF, 2009). Despite this, and the wealth of research into the mainstream roles (Blatchford et al., 2009a; Causton-Theoharis, Giangreco, Doyle & Vadasy, 2007; Dunne, Goddard & Woolhouse, 2008; Farrell, Alborz, Howes & Pearson, 2010; Giangreco, 2003, 2009, 2010; Logan, 2006; Mujis & Reynolds, 2003; Savage & Carless, 2005; Tucker, 2009 and Webster et al., 2010) a detailed examination of the special school LSA has not been explored. Blatchford et al. (2009a), Farrell, Balshaw and Polat (1999) and Lacey (2001), have all previously examined the role of the LSA in supporting children with SEN, however all three pieces of research produced findings based on a hybrid model of mainstream support and special school support. The researcher would argue that there is a fundamental difference of 'type' of LSA support across the two settings and to formulate models and assumptions based on a

hybrid research technique has arrived at vague descriptions of special school LSA duties. Through a revelatory, embedded single case study design the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the LSAs individually and within their class teams as well as completing classroom based observations of the LSAs in their role. These findings will provide answers to the following research questions:

***RQ1. How does the special school LSA role operate across the following domains; teaching and learning, assessment, care, multi-agency working and community liaison?***

***RQ2. What is the current or potential effectiveness of the special school LSA role?***

The recent Government Green paper entitled *Support and aspiration: a new approach to special educational needs and disability* (2011) clearly outlines a radical shift in the assessment and provision for children with SEN. It proposes a move away from the recent drive towards inclusion and alludes to the importance of recognising excellence and expertise in special schools. This research responds to this shift by identifying the role of the LSA within a special school in anticipation of identifying unique features of the support that can be shared with other special or mainstream provisions. This research also intends to take another step in a direction away from the 'mum's army' (Watkinson, 2002) and 'dog's body' (Hammersley-Fletcher & Lowe, 2011) discourse that can often be associated with the role. LSA contributions are regarded as valuable and integral by teachers (Blatchford et al., 2009a), pupils (Fraser & Meadows, 2008) and parents, and this research aims to identify and celebrate these contributions.

This thesis begins with a literature review focusing on the various taxonomies of the LSA role, the history of special school education and their current position within the educational landscape. This is then followed by an in-depth examination of the literature pertaining to mainstream LSAs and special school LSAs. The methodology then begins by discussing the epistemological and ontological position of Critical Realism (Bhaskar, 1978) as well as the research design, followed by a presentation of the data gathering and analysis tools. The findings are introduced through a pen portrait of the school, followed by the whole school observation data. The themes emerging from the LSA interviews, group interviews and HT interviews are presented next. Finally the discussion will answer both research questions as well as discuss

comparisons between the mainstream LSA and the special school LSA. Implications for theory, practice and future research are also discussed.



## **2 Literature Review**

The following literature review starts by outlining the numerous taxonomies associated with support staff and terminology relating to special education. Following this the review will then focus on a short historical background of the role of special educational institutions in the United Kingdom (UK). It will then discuss the current position of the special school in a climate that has been framed by an inclusive ideology, and an ideology which has recently been questioned by education policy. The literature review will then focus on an analysis of the LSA's role within mainstream schools. Finally the researcher will examine existing research pertaining to the role of the LSA in special schools, how this literature has failed to provide a coherent picture of the LSA role and how it may contrast to the fundamentally different role of the mainstream LSA.

The researcher conducted a systematic literature review of special school education and the role of LSAs across three relevant databases: Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC), Science Direct and the Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA). The researcher also searched the following journals between the years of 1990 and the present day: Educational Psychology in Practice (EPIP) and the British Journal of Special Educational (BJSE). In conducting this systematic review, the term "special school" was used when reviewing the special school education literature and the terms "learning support\*", "classroom support", "teaching assistant", "classroom assistant" and "paraprofessional" were used when reviewing the literature surrounding the role of the LSA. The search criteria for the topic of 'special school education' were later changed to remove the 'date' criteria in order to gain a historical perspective. For a more in-depth breakdown of terms used, inclusion and exclusion criteria and the use of reference harvesting, refer to appendix A. Refer to appendix B for the table of articles that were returned through the search criteria.

### **2.1 Definitions**

Before beginning the literature review it is important to describe the necessary definitions relating to support staff in schools and the varying special educational contexts. When referring to specific published research the researcher will describe the member of support staff by the taxonomy used in that piece of research. For example: TA (Blatchford et al., 2009a); Paraprofessional (Giangreco, 2003) and LSA

(Lacey, 2001). When making a general reference to a member of support staff, the researcher has elected to use the term Learning Support Assistant (LSA) as he feels this title encompasses the extensive range of roles and responsibilities held by support staff in schools. It is also the terminology used by Lacey (2001) in what is perceived to be the closest piece of research that currently exists in relation to the current study. Lacey uses the following definition...

*"LSAs work in the classroom alongside teachers and pupils. They support individual pupils with SLD (severe learning difficulties) enabling them to be educated with their more able peers either within the special school or in the mainstream."*

(Lacey, 2001, pg 158)

When referring to schools that specifically provide an educational provision for children with special educational needs, a professional may come across a number of terms: special school, special educational needs school, broad spectrum school, SLD (severe learning difficulties) school and PMLD (profound and multiple learning difficulties) school. For consistency and ease of reference, the researcher will refer to all such provisions as 'special schools'.

## **2.2 Special School Education**

### **2.2.1 A Recent History of Special School Education**

Before 1970, special schools were merely an aspiration. Children were categorised and grouped according to the medical descriptions of their disabilities. Children classified as 'severely subnormal', 'idiot', or 'imbecile' were deemed to be uneducable and were provided for by the National Health Services that existed at the time (Male & Raynor, 2009). It was not until the 1970 Education Act when enactments were repealed in order to allow children with disabilities to attend school. With this law passed, no child could now be deemed to be uneducable and subsequently a large number of junior training centres soon became schools for children with severe learning difficulties (Baker, 2009). In 1978 the Warnock report was published which paved the way for the 1981 Education Act. These two publications saw the emergence of a mainstream educational option for children with SEN. Various

Education acts emerged in following years, but it was the 1993 Education Act which placed a duty on the Secretary of State to issue the first 'Code of Practice' (CoP) which came into effect in 1994 and reinforced the right of children to be educated in a mainstream school (subject to conditions). This CoP was later replaced with the 2001 CoP which retained most of the 1994 CoP's guidance but also included new rights and duties introduced by the *SEN and Disability Act 2001* (DfES 2001). It was the *SEN and Disabilities Act* (DfES, 2001) that introduced legislation on disability discrimination (Baker 2009), reinforcing the rights of children with SEN even further.

In 2004 the Labour government published *Removing Barriers to Achievement: The Government's Strategy for SEN* (DfES, 2004b), which, building on 'Every Child Matters: Change for Children' (2004a), outlines a strategy for *early intervention, removing barriers to learning, raising expectations and achievements and delivering improvement in partnership*. This publication reaffirmed the waves of legislative change that flowed from the Warnock report into a progressive sea of inclusion and stated that 'the proportion of children educated in special schools should fall over time' (DfES, 2004b, pg 37). The position statement that now existed was a far cry from the health service provisions and stigmatising pathologies used before 1970.

### **2.2.2 Integration and Inclusion**

One of the major turning points in special school education came before the 2001 SEN and Disabilities act, in the form of the United Nations, Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation *Salamanca Statement* (UNESCO 1994). The Salamanca Statement laid out a clear philosophy promoting the inclusion of all children, including those with SEN into mainstream educational environments.

*"Those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child centred pedagogy capable of meeting these needs."*

(UNESCO, 1994, pg viii)

It could be argued that the publication of the Salamanca statement and other significant publications (e.g. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 and The UN Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for

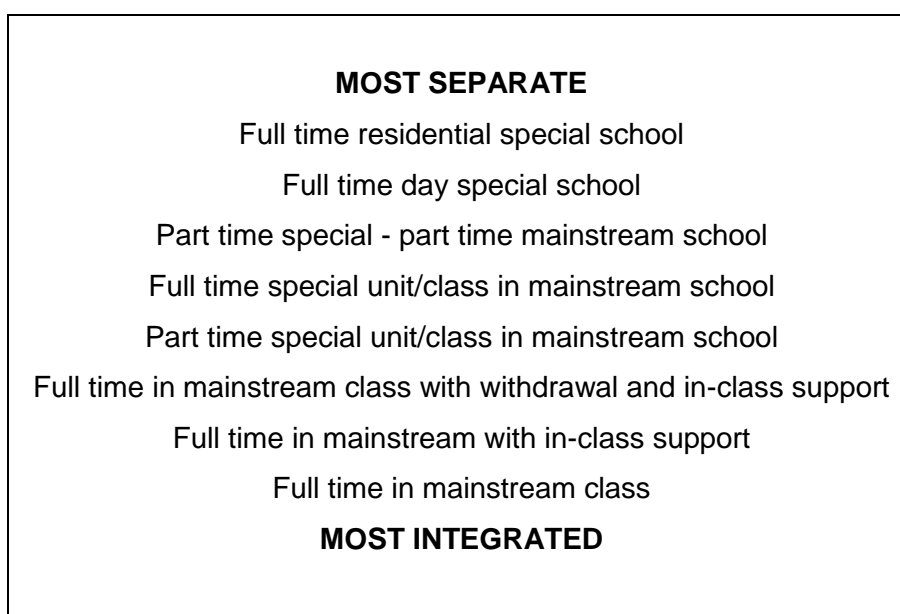
Persons with Disabilities, 1993) initiated a fundamental shift in attitude towards the education of children with SEN, from a segregated and excluded position, to an integrated and included position.

At this stage it is worth picking apart the conceptualised meanings of integration and inclusion. They are not one and the same, and they represent two different processes within education. Integration can be regarded as the simple act of placing children with SEN into mainstream schools, however, this concept can still sometimes separate children with SEN from their mainstream peers. Inclusion on the other hand represents a more complex process and supports the notion that all schools should be able to meet the needs of their children without needing to identify them as being in separate category.

The Salamanca statement laid out a clear philosophy promoting the inclusion of all children, including those with SEN, into mainstream educational environments. In reality it could be argued that this led in a direction away from the education of children with SEN in special schools towards inclusion within mainstream schools. However, the inclusion agenda did not result in a complete shift from segregation to integration. The 1981 Education Act resulted in a decrease of 0.57% of children attending special schools (Norwich, 2002). After the Salamanca Statement was published this percentage shrunk throughout the 1990s and since the year 2000 the numbers appear to have remained the same (Norwich, 2008). In addition to this, in 2003, the government published a paper outlining how an inclusion philosophy and practice could still be adopted within a special school environment entitled '*Report of the Special Schools Working Group*' (DfES, 2003a). This led to an empowerment of segregated providers and provided a platform to argue an inclusive position within a segregated environment. It has been argued that one of the reasons special schools have been able to survive and adapt within the inclusion agenda is the lack of agreement about SEN and special school definition (Booth, 1998; Rix, 2010). As such, inclusion has been the catalyst for change in the way that special schools have presented themselves. Special schools have incorporated inclusive discourses within their settings, whilst still maintaining their original practices and therefore reducing any existing threat to their existence (Rix, 2010). Champions of the special school will have been reassured even further with the publication of *Removing Barriers to Achievement: The Government's Strategy for SEN* (DfES 2004b), which highlighted the important role that special schools have to play in supporting the inclusion of

pupils into mainstream settings whilst also providing education for those with more complex and severe needs (Baker, 2007; 2009).

The drive for inclusion may not have resulted in a dramatic reduction in the number of children being educated in special schools, but it has led to an increasing variety of educational institutions and what can commonly be referred to as the continuum of provision (Norwich, 2008). This continuum highlights the range of educational placements available from the most segregated to the most integrated.



**Figure 2-1: Continuum of provision as proposed by Norwich (2008)**

This continuum has previously been recognised internationally as being an important resource in providing provision in order to meet the continuum of SEN (Ireland, 1995) and what is more, the ‘special school’ end of this continuum should continue to play a vital role (Warnock, 2005). It can be argued that this diverse and wide ranging spectrum of provision has emerged due to the similarly diverse and wide ranging level of educational and special educational needs across the country. Both poles of the continuum (segregated and inclusive settings) arguably play a vital role in the provision of quality education for children in the UK, yet they exist as opposing educational ideologies (Baker, 2007). With this in mind the statement, “the Government’s position on inclusion seems confused and there is need for

clarification” (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee 2006, pg 12) may never have seemed more true.

### **2.2.3 Assessment in special schools**

As the question of accountability in education became of ever increasing importance, special schools began to encounter a problem when it came to demonstrating accountability for pupil progress against the National Curriculum. In 1997 the government announced its intention for schools to increase their responsibility and accountability by publishing and setting annual pupil performance targets in the core areas of the National Curriculum (DfES, 2007). This paper saw the emergence of SMART targets (Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-related). This particular method of targeting poses challenges for special schools as it is important that they measured what is considered valuable for their pupils and not just what is easy to measure (Muncey & McGinty, 1998). This challenge was later recognised and the possibility that it would not be feasible to measure performance and progress for pupils in special schools in the same way as it is for pupils in mainstream schools was acknowledged. Consequently a small-steps approach was considered as an appropriate alternative (Muncey & McGinty, 1998). This later emerged in 1998 as the P-Level or P-scale system. These P-Levels were subject to many revisions and in 2007 schools were required to submit data using the P-Levels for pupils aged between 5 and 16 with SEN who were performing below National Curriculum levels (DfES, 2007). Despite the existence of P-Levels, measuring the progress and achievement of pupils in special schools is often still perceived as a challenge.

### **2.2.4 Current Position**

Regardless of multiple legislative changes, philosophical positions and educational trends, there has been no clear-cut support for the academic or social advantages of inclusion of children with SEN in either special or mainstream schools in the past 30 years (Lindsay, 2007; DfE, 2011a). Could it then be argued that if there is a lack of evidence for the positive effects of inclusion, then the inclusion agenda is built only upon the rights of children to access mainstream schooling (Lindsay, 2007) and the stigma and devaluation (Norwich, 2008) surrounding special school education? Whatever the reasons may have been for promoting integration over the last few decades, all may be about to change.

Male and Raynor (2009) suggested that the government at the time had become content with the population of special schools that existed in the country. Commissioned evidence given to the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee in 2007 by Professor Lord Adonis (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools and Learners in the Department of Education and Skills) indicated that the number of special schools in the country had reached a plateau, that the government were in fact content with this trend and there was no agenda encouraging Local Authorities to close further special schools (Male & Raynor, 2009).

Recent government legislation has pointed towards an impending swing away from the 'inclusion ideology'. The 2011 Green Paper entitled *Support and aspiration: a new approach to special educational needs and disability* outlines radical proposed changes to the way in which special educational needs are assessed, supported and viewed across the country.

*"We will remove the bias towards inclusion and propose to strengthen parental choice by improving the range and diversity of schools from which parents can choose..."*

(DfE, 2011a, pg 7)

In addition to statements such as this, there are further indicators within the green paper that suggest a fundamental rethink in not only the process surrounding SEN identification and support but also in what the national SEN and education philosophy should become. This new philosophy appears to be more complex than a clear cut dichotomy of inclusion vs. segregation, but if placed on a spectrum, the swing may be significantly noticeable. The paper draws to attention, the importance and expertise of the special school skills and knowledge base and hints at previous mistakes of "unnecessary closure of special schools" (DfE, 2011, pg 51). Although at the time of writing, the green paper is still under consultation, it is clear that special schools, and special school expertise, remain not only safe but highly supported and favoured in future government legislation. One thing that is not so clear, however, is how the proposed education, health and social care plans<sup>3</sup> will affect the way in which special schools are funded and staffed in the

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<sup>3</sup> These are the proposed documents to replace the current 'statement of SEN' (DfE, 2011)

future. It may even be the case that the profile of pupils attending such schools may be affected.

The most recent evaluation of SEN provision (DfE, 2010) identified that 38.1% of children with a statement of special educational needs attend a special school, which in terms of percentages, represents the largest proportion of provision for statemented children<sup>4</sup> (DfE, 2010). As an indicator of the continued importance of special school provision, this increase came at a time when the number of requests and issues of statements of special educational needs was declining. Between 2006 and 2011, the number of children with a statement of special educational need reduced from 236,730 to 224,210 (DfE, 2011b). Over the last decade, the number of special schools in the UK has decreased from 1,161 in 2002, to 1,054 in 2010. In light of this decrease the number of children on role in maintained or non-maintained mainstream schools with SEN has increased from 89,390 in 2006 to 90,760 in 2010. Consequently this led to human resourcing implications in the number and type of staff required in mainstream schools in order to help meet the needs of the growing number of children with SEN in the mainstream setting (this is referred in section 2.3.1 in more depth). As the availability of provision was reduced, special schools were put under increasing pressure as the number of children identified as requiring special school placements increased. Increasing the pressure even further is the argument that many maintained special schools remain in poor accommodation as a result of the reorganisation that has either been put into place (Ashdown & Darlington, 2007), is planned to be put into place or is in fact put on hold, or withdrawn as a result of the discontinuation of the *Building Schools For the Future* initiative (DfES, 2003b). However, regardless of the pressures induced by legislative change, increasing demand for places, initial inclusive agendas and the suggestion that schools are located in poor accommodations, special schools remain an integral fixture within special educational needs provision, with an increasing recognition of the skills and expertise held in such institutions. In the current climate of radical educational reform, special schools may now be well placed to finally reap some rewards.

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<sup>4</sup> Other provisions are listed as maintained nursery (0.1%), maintained primary (25.9%), state funded secondary (28.8%), pupil referral units (0.8%), independent schools (4.3%) and non-maintained special schools (2.0%).



## **2.3 The Learning Support Assistant (LSA)**

### **2.3.1 Mainstream Learning Support Assistants**

The Learning Support Assistant is now regarded as both vital and a common-place cog within the wider school machine. The variety of professionals working in classrooms across educational settings in the modern day is as vast as it has ever been: there are teachers, specialist teachers, teaching assistants, classroom assistants, learning mentors, teachers in training, volunteer workers, etc. As previously mentioned in section 2.1, those members of staff who are not the lead teacher and who act in a supportive capacity will be referred to in this paper as Learning Support Assistants (LSAs). The number of LSAs in schools across the United Kingdom has increased dramatically in the latter stages of the inclusion ideology. The number increased from 61,300 in 1997 to 148,500 in 2005 (Tucker, 2009). This increase has been attributed in part to the Government's workforce reform (DfES, 2003c). In collaboration with teaching unions in 2003, the government published *Raising Standards and Tackling Workload: A National Agreement* (DfES, 2003c). This publication aimed to address workload issues for teachers as well as raise pupil achievement and well-being through the training of teaching assistants as Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs) (TTA, 2005). Alongside this increase in the number of LSAs in schools, was an increase in the responsibilities that they were assigned. Burgess and Shelton Mayes (2009) highlighted a shift that occurred in the working practices of TAs from supporting individual pupils, to work encompassing whole class or group work in varying forms and to promote inclusion (Burgess & Shelton Mayes, 2009 and Groom, 2006). This shift in role should not have been unexpected however, and even before the workforce remodelling had impacted so heavily on the role of the LSA, Moyles and Suschitzky (1997), had identified a shift away from an ancillary role towards a more teaching focused role.

Despite both these shifts in focus, however, LSAs are still perceived to play a vital role in supporting children with SEN in schools (Blatchford et al., 2009a; Lacey, 2001 & Groom, 2006). The range, style and function of this support has been demonstrated to be hugely varied and also to vary between countries and counties (Rose & O'Neill, 2009). Cremin, Thomas and Vincent (2005) highlight the link between LSA

deployment and its associations with improvements in teaching and learning (Cremin et al., 2005) and similarly in raising attainment (Black-Hawkins, Florian & Rouse, 2007). Support staff have been considered to be utilised in the following ways, as targets for attachment behaviours in young people (De Schipper & De Schuengel, 2010) and enablers for the multiply disabled and personal carers (Takala, 2007). They have been deployed outside of the school context in behaviour support teams and across Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) (Groom, 2006), as facilitators for the (re)integration of pupils from a special school into a mainstream school or similarly for pupils who have previously been excluded from school (Groom, 2006), supporting aspects of a pupil's personal and social development (Groom, 2006) and playing a role in the extended schools agenda (DfES, 2002). Foreman, Bourke and Mishra (2001) claim that the wide variety of supportive roles required by children with SEN can be condensed into three areas, physical, learning and social skills, whereas Minodo, Mayer and Xin (2001) propose that there are five major role components to the LSA role in inclusive education, instruction, school support, liaison, personal support and one-to-one support.

Prior to, and during, the workforce reform (2003 – 2005), it was suggested that there was a greater need for an increased focus on the quality and availability of training for LSAs (Groom, 2006). In 2005, the Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) award was launched which would prove to provide the LSA with a greater standard of professional autonomy. In 2009, Burgess and Shelton Mayes highlighted that over 21,000 support staff had so far been awarded the qualification (Burgess & Shelton Mayes, 2009). This highlights the drive that LSAs and schools had to increase the profile and professional recognition that the role demands. The scope of this paper does not permit the researcher to complete an extensive review of the history and considerations of LSA training, however, it is worth reflecting on the impact that the HLTA introduction had upon the workforce and the perception of LSAs as a whole. Arguably, the HLTA qualification did indeed raise the profile and responsibilities of LSAs with some HLTAs now having to cover whole class lessons with no apparent limits to the duration and frequency of this being applied in some cases (Graves, 2011). A move in this direction certainly begins to undermine the 'mum's army' tag that LSAs have deprecatingly been identified with in the past. This leads Graves (2011) to suggest that the HLTA qualification resulted in the creation of a hybrid role somewhere between the LSA and the teacher. The HLTA role shortly after conception remained confused and was not easily understood across a national context (Dunne, Goddard & Woolhouse 2008). Even after five years of HLTA staff being employed in

schools across the country, the role still remains ambiguous (Graves 2011) and some still may engage with the notion that the HLTA scheme is simply the 'mums army' with certificates (Campbell & Fairbairn 2005). In light of the current government's review of SEN, the researcher concurs with Graves (2011) in that there may be some significant changes to the workforce in the near future, especially if it still remains unclear as to whether LSAs have managed to achieve their goal of building positive relationships for learning (Groom, 2006).

### **2.3.2 Impact of LSAs**

#### **2.3.2.1 Positive Outcomes**

Regardless of the existing research into the positive and negative outcomes that an LSA can contribute towards, the anecdotal dialogue surrounding their roles and their potential contribution is generally positive (Cremin, Thomas & Vincent, 2007). By providing in-class support, LSAs are perceived to play the single most important role in enabling the inclusion of pupils with SEN into the mainstream classroom environment (Clarke, Dyson, Millward & Robson 1999).

Wasik and Slavin (1993) reviewed five programmes used in schools to help prevent 'reading failure'. A key element of the programmes found to be effective was the one-to-one tutoring involved in the intervention. Although the findings suggest that the positive gains achieved through the programmes are more marked when delivered by teachers as opposed to paraprofessionals, there were still positive gains in either case. Wasik and Slavin's (1993) research is an example of the positive effects that LSAs can have towards pupil progress. It is important to recognise that in their research, LSAs worked through a structured curriculum based intervention. Blatchford, Russell, Bassett, Brown and Martin (2004) suggest that there is a strong link between this sort of LSA practice (highly structured and curriculum based) and positive effects of LSAs on pupil outcomes (Blatchford et al., 2004).

Blatchford, Russell, Bassett, Brown and Martin (2004), identified that LSAs can demonstrate a number of positive secondary outcomes for pupils. They found that TAs had a number of indirect effects on pupils, such as, pupils had a more active form of interaction with the teacher and there was more individualised teacher attention (Blatchford et al., 2007). These indirect findings may suggest that if LSAs are helping

to promote attention then they may simultaneously be playing a vital role in promoting an essential pre-requisite to learning, i.e. pupil participation (Rose & O'Neill, 2009).

Additional to measurable outcomes, it is worth considering the perceptions of those who the LSAs are employed to support. Fraser and Meadows (2008) gathered data on children's views of their TAs across three primary schools and found that children agreed that TAs were useful and helpful and that they were important members of the school community (Fraser & Meadows, 2008). Interestingly, pupils were still able to distinguish between the role of the teacher and the TA indicating that the 'switch' towards a more pedagogical role referred to in the previous section (Burgess & Shelton-Mayes, 2009 and Moyles & Suschitzky 1997) has not eclipsed the gap in professional roles.

#### **2.3.2.2 Less Positive Outcomes**

The increase in LSAs across the country between 1997 and 2005 was viewed by some as being a positive step towards ensuring inclusive schooling in the UK (Lacey, 2001), however the rapid rate with which these numbers increased was conversely viewed in a more negative light by those that feared a lack of evaluated deployment methods and LSA roles had been employed (Rose and O'Neill, 2009). Ainscow (2000) suggests that without careful management and skilled practice, one-to-one support may in fact work as an anti-inclusion measure and may create a barrier between the young person and his/her classmates (Ainscow, 2000). The argument or assumption that an 'extra body' in the room will be of benefit for children can be undermined upon further reflection. Cremin et al. (2007) suggest that, in addition to careful management, it is important to take into account the highly complex set of interpersonal and professional uncertainties that may exist in environments when there a number of professionals working together. Having a higher number of adults in the room has not shown to increase the amount of time that the class teacher spends directly with pupils, but in actual fact it results in the teacher spending more time without pupils (Thomas, 1992 and Cremin et al., 2007). Conversely, however, it could be argued that both Thomas (1992) and Cremin et al., (2007) may have failed to rule out that this time spent "without" pupils may indeed have more significant and positive secondary impacts. Teacher time may be more appropriately spent developing the curriculum, planning higher quality lessons or in fact teaching to the whole class.

In their quantitative analysis of the impacts of LSAs on pupil's educational progress, Blatchford, Martin, Moriarty, Bassett and Goldstein (2002) found there to be no clear evidence of the benefits of classroom support. However, they argue that the use and effectiveness of LSAs varied inevitably between classes and, as such, could be the main reason for the lack of evidence. It may then be the case that there are effective and ineffective LSA practices in relation to supporting educational progress. If so, the key question is then, what are the conditions for a positive model of LSA deployment and effectiveness? Blatchford et al. (2002) suggest an inextricable link between effective pedagogy and effective LSA support. They then go on to suggest that an increased importance should be placed on examining what kinds of pedagogy are most effective and would be most relevant to inform LSA training (Blatchford et al., 2002). In later research, Blatchford et al. (2007) similarly found: "*There was no evidence that the presence of TAs, or any characteristic of TAs, had a measurable effect on pupil attainment*" (Blatchford et al., 2007)

In 2009 Blatchford et al. published the final piece of the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project jigsaw (Blatchford et al., 2009b). The DISS project was a large scale research project exploring the characteristics, working conditions, job satisfaction and impact of the LSA in schools. Although the research identified some positive aspects of the LSA role, it also shed some untimely negative light on the impacts that an LSA can have on pupil outcomes. This project was so extensive that it warrants more reflection within the current study and will be discussed later within the literature review which can be found in section 2.3.5.

Blatchford and his colleagues found that the current trend of deployment is one which leads to pupils with SEN becoming separated from the teacher and resulting in them missing out on aspects of the day-to-day curriculum (Webster et al., 2010). As such, the role that LSAs play for pupils has been described more as an 'alternative' teacher as opposed to an 'additional' mode of support (Webster et al., 2010). Webster et al. (2010) also argue that this is a prima facie example of the 'double standards' alluded to by Giangreco (2009) whereby paraprofessionals are becoming the primary educators for children with SEN (Webster et al., 2010).

### **2.3.3 Models of Effective Practice**

Many models of LSA deployment have emerged in response to the workforce reform. They are varied and there is a lack of supporting evidence and critical scrutiny applied to the vast majority of these models (Rose & O'Neill, 2009).

Thomas, Walker and Webb (1998) suggest that the successful and effective practice of the LSA is dependent upon skilled coordination and management, without which, effective inclusive practices are less likely to be achieved (Thomas et al., 1998). Rose (2000) also highlights the importance of careful consideration when making decisions about the provision of classroom support, and goes a step further by offering some initial guiding principles for the effective deployment of LSAs in the classroom. These guidelines are based around the following, effective LSA management on an individual level, ongoing and consistent collaboration between teachers and LSAs and deploying allocations of LSAs to teachers as opposed to individual pupils (in an attempt to avoid dependency) (Rose, 2000). This last point is worth reflecting on in the context of the special school. For LSAs, teachers and managers in special schools, the consistency of having an LSA supporting one particular child may be considered essential in formulating relationships of trust, essential to pupil well-being and academic progression. This reinforces the dichotomy of LSAs in the mainstream and special school environment.

In targeting the building of positive relationships for learning, Groom (2006) provides a proposal of the key elements required in order to build successful relationships, the key skills required in the role and the areas in which LSAs have focused their work.

Key Elements of Practice	Key Skills (identified by teachers)	Areas of work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A sense of humour</li> <li>- Not jumping to judgement</li> <li>- Demonstrating interest and enthusiasm</li> <li>- Calmness under pressure</li> <li>- Talking <i>to</i> pupils and not <i>at</i> them</li> <li>- Active listening</li> <li>- Understanding of the social background and home life of pupils</li> <li>- Modelling expected behaviour</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nurturing skills</li> <li>- Listening skills</li> <li>- Ability to work under pressure/work on own</li> <li>- Understanding and awareness of pupils needs</li> <li>- Ability to work as a member of a team – willingness to learn</li> <li>- Adaptability</li> <li>- Patience and sense of fairness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Circle time</li> <li>- Nurture groups</li> <li>- Anger and conflict management</li> <li>- Emotional literacy programmes</li> <li>- Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL)</li> <li>- Mentoring</li> <li>- Lunchtime support</li> <li>- Peer support/befriending programmes</li> <li>- Self-esteem and social skills programme.</li> </ul>

**Figure 2-2: Skills, attributes and areas of work for LSAs as highlighted by Groom (2006).**

Figure 4-2 provides an adapted presentation of the assertions made by Groom (2006) of the ‘key skills’ required by LSAs and also the ‘areas of work’ that are listed above based on teacher views of the Key Stage 2 provision across a two year period and in one Local Education Authority (Groom & Rose, 2005). However, he fails to provide the source or evidence base upon which he draws conclusions regarding the ‘key elements of practice’ required by LSAs in order to build relationships. Groom (2006) also fails to clarify what he is referring to by the term ‘elements’, as the researcher would argue that the elements and key skills that Groom highlights are in fact very similar and there is considerable overlap between the two. Personal assumptions and observations (assuming that this is what these are) are valuable from professionals and academics but when claimed as a general or valid reality without offering a source of evidence, one must take caution when assessing their validity.

It has been argued that there are three key areas to nurture in young people in order to help promote successful learning. These three areas are part of Powell and Tod’s (2004) conceptual framework of ‘behaviour for learning’ and are, *relationship with self*,

*relationship with others* and *relationship with the curriculum* (Powell & Tod, 2004). Groom (2006) suggests that by focusing their skills and attributes in areas similar to those suggested above, then LSAs can help to target these three areas that make up the 'behaviour for learning' principle.

Cremin et al. (2007) completed research into the effectiveness of three different models of LSA deployment and practice. These models were, *Room Management* (Hart & Risley, 1976) which focuses on dividing specific tasks and attributing roles to people working within the classroom, *Zoning* (LeLaurin & Risely, 1972), which involves 'geography' and classroom position led role allocation, and finally, *Reflective Teamwork* which focused on discussion and reflection-led practice between teachers and TAs. The findings indicated that, overall, *Room Management* appeared to affect the most significant increases in pupil engagement, despite the reported concerns about the time in which the model took to plan and to implement (this may not be desirable to settings challenged by financial restrictions and which strive to increase grade output in response to government targets). Cremin et al. (2007) propose that a conflation of the three models may be an avenue of future development in terms of creating more effective models of LSA deployment and practice (Cremin et al., 2007).

Based on Cremin et al. (2007) and Wasik and Slavin's (1993) research we can begin to formulate a conception of what an effective LSA role may look like. It may involve delivering structured and curriculum based interventions (e.g. *paired reading*, *reading recover*, *precision teaching*, etc) within a well managed and organised system such as Room Management.

Farrell et al., (1999), conducted a large scale study exploring the role, management and training of LSAs across both mainstream and special school settings. The research included interviews, questionnaires, observations and focus groups across a variety of settings. In relation to the LSA role, they identified that there was no clear consistency between types of practice both within and between mainstream and special school settings. Similarly they found no clear distinction between the work carried out to support pupils with SEN and pupils without SEN (Farrell et al., 1999). Their findings also led them to suggest that effective LSA support involves contributions that, *foster the participation of pupils in the social and academic processes of school, seek to enable pupils to become more independent learners and help to raise the achievement of all pupils*. To ensure that these positive contributions are met, Farrell et al. (1999) suggest that the role of the LSA should be evaluated



against four levels which are shown in the table below. These four areas will be discussed within the methodology as a starting point for the development of the units of analysis.

<b>Framework for Evaluating Practice (Level A: LSA role)</b>	
A1.	LSAs work co-operatively with teachers to support the learning and participation of pupil
A2.	LSAs work with teachers to prepare lesson plans and material
A3.	LSAs contribute to the evaluation of the outcomes of lessons
A4.	LSAs make relevant contributions to wider school activities

**Table 2-1: Evaluation of the LSA role has been suggested to take place across four levels.**  
Table adapted from Farrell et al. (1999).

### **2.3.4 Teacher and LSA Working Together**

It has been suggested that if there is a cohesive working relationship between a teacher and their supporting LSA then an atmosphere and classroom ethos is created that is favourable for positive student learning (Devlin, 2008). Further to this observation, Devlin (2008) offers 20 research-based ‘tips’ to support the nurturing of the teacher-LSA relationship, for example, discovering each other’s interests, communicating that you are a team being aware of how you communicate and giving constructive feedback (Devlin, 2008).

Another area of research which touched on this working relationship was Blatchford et al.’s recent DISS project (2006 -2009). It is a piece of research worth exploring in more depth because of its breadth, the important and extensive findings that emerged and its potential implications.

### **2.3.5 Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS)**

The roles, responsibilities and deployment characteristics of LSAs vary greatly between and within the countries, Local Authorities and schools of the UK (Rose & O’Neill, 2009). These numerous variations make defining and evaluating the role of the LSA extremely difficult. One such attempt was recently made by Blatchford et al. (2009b), in the form of the extensive DISS project, tracking the changes from 2003-

2008 following the national workforce reform. The project was designed to obtain reliable data on the deployment and characteristics of support staff and the impact of support staff on pupil outcomes and teacher workload within the five year period (Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Martin, Russell, Webster, et al., 2008). The scope of this literature review is insufficient to enable a critical breakdown of each stage of the DISS project, but the researcher feels that the final findings of the project are of significant importance.

#### **2.3.5.1 Characteristics, Working Conditions, Job Satisfaction and Impact of Workforce Remodelling**

The number of LSAs across the schools in the DISS project had increased dramatically over its course. This was in part due to the rising number of pupils with SEN in mainstream settings (Blatchford et al. 2009a). Certain characteristics of LSAs prevailed during the study: LSAs were mainly female and over the age of 36 with over a third having qualifications above GCSE level. As there appeared to be a decrease in the amount of extra paid work available, over two thirds continued to work additional voluntary hours. There was a lack of allocated planning time between LSAs and teachers and when planning time was made available, it was more likely to occur within a special school setting. In terms of job satisfaction, support staff in secondary schools were generally less satisfied than support staff in primary and special schools.

#### **2.3.5.2 Impact upon teachers and teaching**

The evidence from the DISS project was collected and presented over a five year period and in 'waves'. As the project moved through waves one to three, the data indicated that more of the clerical and routine jobs previously completed by teachers were now being completed by support staff (Blatchford et al., 2009b). The project also reports that just over half of the teachers reported a perceived decrease in their workload as a result of the work carried out by support staff. Support staff also had a positive effect on the level of the teacher's job satisfaction and reduction in levels of teacher stress (Blatchford et al., 2009b). The project outlined that these positive findings were as a result of many factors including, specialist help, allowing more teaching time, affecting what is on offer, removing administrative tasks and allowing

more time for planning and preparation (Blatchford et al., 2009b). It would seem then that the findings from the DISS project suggest that one of the primary goals of the workforce reform has been met by increasing the number of support staff working in schools, teacher's time has been freed up in order to allow them more opportunity to perform their core role of teaching.

### **2.3.5.3 Impact upon Pupil Outcomes**

In 2010, Webster, Blatchford and Russell published a paper summarising and reflecting on a specific finding that emerged from the DISS project:

*“Those who received the most support from TAs made less progress than similar pupils with less TA support.”*

(Webster, Blatchford and Russell, 2010, pg 1)

The implications for such findings in a time of financial austerity are potentially anxiety provoking for both LSAs and teaching staff. Although LSAs are widely perceived to play an invaluable role in supporting teaching staff in the classroom, as well as having a key role to play in the development of soft skills such as motivation and self-esteem (Webster et al., 2010), this negative impact is concerning. Potentially more concerning are the findings that this in-effective support highlighted by Blatchford et al. (2009b) is amplified when supporting those pupils with the highest level of SEN (Webster, Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Martin & Russell, 2010). The commentary within the research does insist that this impact is by no means the responsibility of the LSAs, but rather the responsibility lies with the decision makers regarding their deployment and their preparedness (Webster et al., 2010).

These reflections on Webster et al.'s (2010) paper may, however, be too hasty when applying a more critical eye to the research presentation. Webster et al. (2010) use the term “similar” in the above quote, but there is no explanation within his paper as to what factors the term “similar” is based upon. It is arguable that a critical eye is not required to predict that children with more LSA support would make less progress as it is likely that they are receiving LSA support for a reason that pre-disposes them to make less progress. It could also be argued that despite the fact that “less progress” is reported as being a consequence of increased LSA support, a complete absence of

LSA support may have led to even less desirable outcomes. When examining correlational results such as these, Coolican (2009) suggest that it is important to remind oneself of the “ABBA Gambit” (Coolican, 2009, pg 452). When variable A (increased LSA support) is assumed to cause variable B (decreased academic progress), it is important to test the reverse of this and to ensure that a type 1 error has not occurred. Webster et al. (2010) omit this essential step in the presentation of the DISS project’s data (Blatchford et al., 2004 – 2009).

To examine whether or not Webster et al.’s (2010) claim holds any weight, one must return to the original DISS project (Blatchford et al., 2009b). It is reported within their research that multiple models of regression were used to control for such variables that might result in a type 1 error. The research reported that in wave 1 of the data gathering process, teachers offered ratings of the percentage support they offered to pupils. Blatchford et al. (2009b) focused on the different outcomes for pupils who were supported for either 11% -50% of their time and for groups support beyond 51% of the time. They then compared these groups to the progress made by those supported for the smallest amount of time (under 11%). Their outcomes are presented as attainment estimates in relation to this latter group. They propose that, for example, in English and maths children who were supported more than 50% of the time achieved significantly lower attainments than those who were supported for less of the time. The DISS project is truly comprehensive and presents the reader with a complex negotiation of statistics. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that despite the in depth analysis of the paper, small details are easily over looked. However, the researcher would offer a number of criticisms at this point. When reporting the findings in their more easily understandable prose form, Blatchford et al. (2009b) reports the terminology “*significant effect of support on pupils attainment*” (Blatchford et al., 2009b, pp. 44). In reality, these findings are estimates with a 95% confidence interval. In addition to this, the researcher can draw on his own experiences as a TA in confirming that when supporting a class, it is common that a TA’s support is directed towards those who are most needy either through classification of learning or behavioural difficulties. It could be argued that if a child is willingly or unwillingly receiving TA support as a result of a behavioural issue or a learning issue then they are displaying pre-disposing characteristics which may result in lower attainment. When considering this and reflecting upon the fact that the results are estimates, it removes validity and weight from the researcher’s findings.

Despite this response to Blatchford et al.'s (2009b) finding, the DISS project more than adequately confirms that the TA or LSA role is not as effective as it should be and it does not appear to justify the huge sums of money that the government invested, if there was an expectation that by decreasing teacher workload, there would be a simultaneous rise in attainment. Although as Lacey (2001) reflects upon, this may not have been the primary goal of schools when engaging in discourse around raising standards:

*“Many schools, in their efforts to raise standards, seem to have little interest in pupils who have the most severe learning difficulties (SLD), fearing that their presence will depress test and examination scores.”*

(Lacey 2001, pp.1)

One could also loosely speculate that this same mantra may apply to children with less severe SEN and/or behavioural issues. It is this population who are likely to be included in the sample who were receiving 51% or more of their time being supported in Blatchford et al.'s (2009b) research.

As previously referred to in section 2.3.2.2, Blatchford et al. identified additional negative outcomes such as pupils with SEN becoming separated from the teacher and the curriculum and missing out on aspects of the day-to-day curriculum (Webster, Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Martin and Russell, 2010). As argued by Webster et al. (2010) and Giangreco (2003), this one-to-one proliferation of LSAs supporting children with SEN is evidence of a 'double standard' (Giangreco, 2003). Regardless of experience, knowledge of the child or any other factors, LSAs are less qualified as teachers when it boils down to the task of teaching. Since it may be the case that children with higher levels of SEN may have the most complex needs, to remove the most qualified adult from being the primary educator of those children does not seem logical.

Although the DISS project (2006, 2007a, 2008, 2009a, 2009b) clearly states that the term 'support staff' includes a wide variety of professionals from administrative staff to caretakers. It is the researcher's opinion that the findings can easily be misinterpreted. The researcher suggests that for those who work on the ground in education settings, the term 'support staff' is more commonly used for staff working as LSAs, TAs or equivalent. It would be less likely that this audience would include administrative and clerical staff within the same contextual bracket. In addition to this, the workforce

reform that took place post 2003, saw a reported majority rise in the number of TAs, and there is less evidence to suggest that the number of administrative and clerical staff increased at anywhere near the same rate. The researcher would therefore suggest that the DISS findings should be reported more precisely throughout the report and not under the umbrella term of 'support staff'.

In response to Webster et al.'s. (2010) paper highlighting the negative impacts of the LSA, Fletcher-Campbell (2010) argues that this summary paper of the DISS project leaves the reader with the view that pupils with SEN do not fit the norm and are consequently an inconvenience to the system. Following this Fletcher-Campbell (2010) points out that:

*"At no time do we have any reference to alternative ways of classroom organisation or teacher behaviour which focus on the conditions for positive communities of practice... we have no discussion about what is (or could be) valued knowledge in different contexts and how this affects a perspective on the efficacy of teaching assistants."*

(Fletcher-Campbell, 2010 pg 339-340)

The concluding comments made in Webster's (2010) research are bold and suggest that a fundamental re-evaluation of the LSA role must take place. Webster introduces (or re-visits) the proposal of whether or not LSAs should in fact have a pedagogical role at all. Fletcher-Campbell's comments certainly ring true in the sense that when offering this proposal, Webster and his colleagues fail to suggest an alternative role that the LSA may adopt in the future.

### **2.3.6 LSA supporting Children with Severe or Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties**

When searching the literature for what Fletcher-Campbell refers to as 'valued knowledge in different contexts', one paper provides us with insights into the role of the LSA across multiple contexts. Lacey (2001) argued that there was very little research about LSAs and pupils with SLD and PMLD and so set about identifying the role played by LSAs in the inclusion of pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties. The findings indicated that the most effective LSAs supported groups of pupils rather than individuals; they offered just the right amount of support; they had

time for planning and reporting back to teachers and felt a valued part of the staff team. At face value these would be useful findings to consider when responding to Webster et al.'s (2010) summary of the DISS project and the amplified negative impact of TAs upon the progress of pupils with SEN. However, Lacey's (2001) research is almost 10 years old and since then the education system has undergone legislative change (DfES, 2001; DfES, 2004a; DfES, 2004b; DfES, 2008 and DCSF, 2010) and is currently being remodelled in a time of great financial austerity. Lacey's (2001) research into the role of LSAs also uses a methodology of telephone interviews across multiple settings (mainstream and special) and it does not provide a clear model of practice, or role, for each type of setting.

### **2.3.7 Special School Learning Support Assistants**

As with most educational institutions, changes in government and legislation ultimately influence the structure, resources and staffing levels that special schools can fund in order to meet the needs of the school's population. The Department of Education and Science in 1990 issued guidance through Circular 11/90 advising on certain considerations which should be made by schools when determining staffing levels for pupils with SEN (DES 1990). The circular outlined a model for staffing special schools which is related to the particular learning difficulties of children on roll. Numbers of teaching staff and LSAs are derived directly from an assessment of staff time needed to fulfil each child's educational and special educational needs outlined in their individual statement of SEN. This was and remains a contributing factor to the differences between LSA deployment in special and mainstream schools.

Farrell et al. (1999) conducted research into the role of the special school LSA. However, this research also investigated, predominantly, the LSA role in mainstream settings. Within Farrell's research, only three of the 21 sites within the participating schools were classed as special schools. What is more, the findings presented within the research do not distinguish between the roles of the LSAs in the different settings. Farrell's findings are interesting and valuable to the researcher as they provide the framework for the research's units of analysis (discussed in section 3.3), however these findings arguably should not be generalised across such distinctly differing roles.

Lacey's (2001) research offers some insights into the role of the special school LSA, however, these insights are not exclusive to the special school and have been formulated by grouping data relating to 'role' from special and mainstream sources. Not only did Lacey's data come from two fundamentally different settings but there was a nine point scale of varying setting structure, ranging from LSAs supporting pupils in a specialist unit/class within a special school to LSAs supporting children who were included in the mainstream school on a full time basis. Lacey's research was ground-breaking in shedding light on the role that LSAs play in supporting children with SLD and PMLD but it fails to offer us a clear picture of the LSA role within the special school alone. What transpired in both Farrell's and Lacey's research was an evaluation of the LSA role as a hybrid model between distinctly different educational settings.

## **2.4 Summary of Literature Review**

This literature review began by outlining historical changes to perceptions and attitudes, and resourcing allocations for the education of children with SEN. The impact of legislative changes such as the Salamanca statement (UNESCO 1994) and how they impacted upon the recent 'inclusion' agenda were also discussed. The position of special schools in the modern context was reflected upon in light of its historical context and considerations about their future position were also discussed. Following this the literature explored the rise of the LSA in line with the workforce reform (DFES 2003c), the literature pertaining to the positive and negative outcomes of the LSA and varying models of practice and deployment. The review then focused more specifically on the DISS project and the negative effects that the LSA was found to have in contributing to a lack of progress for children with SEN. Finally, the role of the LSA in supporting children with PMLD and SLD in both the mainstream and the special school was shown to have been over looked amongst the dizzying volumes of research into the mainstream classroom LSA. There appears then to be a gap in the literature pertaining to the role of the LSA specifically in special schools.

The wide range of roles identified within the literature review of the LSA role lead the reader's conceptualisation of the LSA's duties and responsibilities into a vast field that will need to be reduced in order to be manageable within this study. Chapter 2.3.1 highlights some of these responsibilities as does the discussion regarding the LSA's role in supporting SLD and PMLD children. The researcher draws on this



literature and condenses his conceptualisation into the domains of teaching and learning, assessment, care, multi-agency working and community liaison. It is recognised that it is not possible to know the exact roles of the LSAs within Summerville School before the research even begins, however he feels that these domains cover the wide variety of roles discussed in the literature. Any additional roles that emerge in the research that do not sit comfortably within these domains will not be ignored in the final descriptions of the role.

As highlighted by Balshaw (1998), Fox (1998), Lacey (2001) and Lorenz (1998), the defining of roles is very important if teams are to work well together. By identifying the LSA's holistic role within the school we aim to help improve role clarity for LSAs. Despite teachers traditionally having the responsibility for the planning and reviewing of pupils' progress, Farrell et al. (1999) emphasise the importance of consulting with LSAs around these issues. By identifying how LSAs contribute to areas such as the assessment process we can help promote their involvement in it.

From the data, it is hoped that qualitative evidence of tangible and credible examples of effective LSA practice will be highlighted. The researcher will also hope to identify any additional, potential areas in which the SEN LSA can achieve effectiveness within or across specific domains. It remains to be seen whether or not the LSA role within Summerville School will be similar in character to the structured and targeted mainstream roles identified to be successful by Wasik and Slavin (1993) and Blatchford et al. (2004). There may even be comparisons to be drawn with findings from Blatchford et al. (2007) and Rose and O'Neill (2009), in that LSAs indirectly impact upon increased pupil attention time and increased participation.

Included within this literature review is research suggestive of an 'effective model of practice'. The findings emerging from the research may reflect, or at the least, be comparable to the frameworks proposed by Farrell et al. (1999), Rose (2000), Groom (2006) or they may even appear to have features similar to the models explored by Cremin et al. (2007). The researcher predicts, however, that taking into account the mainstream LSA research bias and the absence of an in depth case study into the special school LSA, the findings for both the following research questions will demonstrate a unique LSA role operating in single special school. The current research offers the following research questions:

***RQ1. How does the special school LSA role operate across the following domains: teaching and learning, assessment, care, multi-agency working and community liaison?***

***RQ2. What is the current or potential effectiveness of the special school LSA role?***

In addition to answering the research questions, the research will also discuss how the abundance of investigation into the role of the TA within the mainstream setting (Blatchford et al., 2009; Causton-Theoharis, Giangreco, Doyle and Vadasy, 2007; Dunne, Goddard and Woolhouse, 2008; Farrell, Alborz, Howes and Pearson, 2010; Giangreco, 2003, 2009, 2010; Logan, 2006; Mujis and Reynolds, 2003; Savage and Carless, 2005; Tucker, 2009; and Webster et al., 2010) compares with the findings from RQ1 and RQ2. It is the researcher's hope that future mainstream LSA development can also benefit from the identification of effective LSA support in the special school environment.

## **3 Methodology**

### **3.1 Rationale and Aim**

The current study emerged as three important elements came together during the researcher's placement as a Trainee Educational Psychologist in the Local Authority of Skytown. The first element is the researcher's interest and experience with the role of the Learning Support Assistant (LSA). The second was the interest shown by a special needs school for children with severe learning difficulties (SLD) in helping to define the role that LSAs play in the children's experience at the school. And the third element was the co-occurring high profile research published by Blatchford et al. (2009b) regarding the deployment and impact of support staff across the country. The aims of the current study are to identify how the special school SEN LSA role operates across the following domains: teaching and learning, assessment, care, multi-agency working and community liaison and to explore the current or potential effectiveness of the special school SEN LSA role.

### **3.2 Critical Realism: Bringing Together Epistemology and Ontology**

Research in Education has to consider the context in which it is framed. Governments come and go, agendas fall in and out of fashion, legislations are passed and guidelines are written, all with increasing frequency. For a researcher to capture a true and contextually accurate picture of a phenomenon then he would be mistaken to adopt a positivist or conversely, even a social constructivist approach to social research. Alternatively, critical realism is seen as providing a particularly appropriate framework for real world research (Singleton Jr, Straits & Straits 1993).

A critical realist approach (Archer, Bhaskar, Collier, Lawson & Norrie, 1998) will be adopted from the outset and it is the researcher's belief that a theoretical position such as critical realism can be well applied within a case study design and the methodology chosen. Indeed, individual perceptions and reflections of 'role' within a school are being sought whilst simultaneously recognising and taking into account the influence of social structure (Houston, 2001).

Critical Realism is a progressive and forward thinking position within social sciences research that encompasses many of its preceding epistemological developments (Patomaki & White, 2000). It is an approach to social sciences research first conceived by Roy Bhaskar in 1975 and it emanates from his attempts to combine his dominant interest of scientific realism with a more recently acquired interest of the socially based philosophy of dialectics (Bhaskar & Norrie, 1998). Critical realism rejects the more traditional positivistic and purely relativistic scientific approaches which tend to consider only one of many accounts of explanation or theory (Singleton Jr, Straits & Straits, 1993). In modern day social research, the rejection of positivism that critical realism offers may even appear unnecessary as it is a common perception held by social scientists that Positivism is becoming increasingly outdated: "Positivism is dead. By now it has gone off and is beginning to smell" (Byrne, 1998, pg. 37). A researcher adopting a critical realist approach recognises that a theory of knowledge (epistemology) gathered through data, observations or learning, is different from a theory of being (ontology) and there are unobservable events which cause the observable ones (Lyubimov, 2009). A critical realist therefore adopts an ordered, but shared ontology and epistemology, with a theory of 'being' coming before a theory of knowledge about that 'being' (Bergin, Wells & Owen, 2008), as such that they cannot exist separately (Sayer, 1992). When applying this theory to the current research, the researcher suggests that there will be numerous 'units of knowledge' emerging from the LSA interviews, group interviews and the observations, however, this data does not exist as a standalone observable form and in fact it is influenced heavily by its environmental milieu and varying social pressures. It is also important to recognise that whatever researchers claim to 'see' in their research, it is not characterised purely by the features of the thing observed but it is also heavily influenced by the characteristics, perceptions and approaches of the observer (Singleton Jr, Straits & Straits, 1993). Hence, to adopt a positivist approach to this research would ultimately be ignoring these all important and influential factors.

To help develop our conceptualisation of critical realism even further, Patomaki and White (2000) go on to explain that our world is constructed of events, experiences and discourses but in addition to this there are underlying powers or structures which may remain undetected but still impact upon our experience of experiences (Patomaki & White, 2000). Houston (2001) makes reference to the potential importance of critical realism in the field of social work. He suggests that the approach "addresses the 'structures' which determine, constrain and oppress our activities" (Houston, 2001 pp. 846). This perspective should be considered in the current research, information

about LSA's thoughts, perceptions and actions are being gathered and as a researcher, one has to consider and acknowledge the structures that underpin these.

The following paragraph provided by Patomaki and White (2000) provides an accessible summary of the stance adopted by a critical realist research and also helps the reader to understand the perspectives underpinning the research methodology and subsequent discussions:

*"The critical realist "problem-field" we advocate can be said to be committed to ontological realism (that there is a reality, which is differentiated, structured and layered, and independent of mind), epistemological relativism (that all beliefs are socially produced and hence potentially fallible), and judgemental rationalism (that despite epistemological relativism, it is still possible in principle, to provide justifiable grounds for preferring one theory over another)."*

(Patomaki and White, 2000, pg 224)

Sayer (2000) offers further insights to help us to establish a firm understanding of the importance of adopting a critical realist stance. Sayer proposes that gender relations are often informed by the belief that gender is a purely biological and a natural concept (it could also be argued that this would be a positivist assumption) and as such, any associations that the differing genders invoke is also naturally occurring. When explaining these gender characteristics, one would be very uncritical and short sighted to assume that biology is the sole contributor. Alternatively, one must be aware of the assumptions of the viewer, the socially constructed concept of gender that the viewer holds, historical events and many other factors that contribute to our constructs. A critical realist would adopt this holistic approach and would aim to identify any false beliefs in order to ignite a positive change (Sayer, 2000).

### **3.3 Design of Study**

The provision of classroom support is an intervention that demands effective and searching evaluation (Thomas, 1990). Thomas (1990) also argues that large scale evaluation becomes problematic when investigating support in the classroom because it fails to capture the impact of particular circumstances in the individual settings. Thomas suggests that it is important for researchers or research schools to share their findings with colleagues regionally and nationally to enable a more informed

cross fertilisation of information leading to better practice (Thomas, 1990). For this to be possible, Singleton Jr, Straits and Straits (1993) propose that despite the common misconception that qualitative research is not scientific, a set of principles have to be adopted which they refer to as a 'scientific attitude', research has to be conducted *systematically*, *sceptically* and *ethically* (Singleton Jr, Straits & Straits, 1993). When endeavouring to carry out a *systematic* study, the researcher will ensure that his review of the literature, study design, methodology and reflections are all carried out with thought and frequent recording. By being *sceptical*, the researcher can offer a well reasoned, considered and balanced approach to any claims or theories proposed. Finally, in all fields of study, research should be *ethically* minded and the researcher has taken steps to ensure the ethical integrity of his study in line with the University ethical guidelines and the principles of his practicing regulatory body (HPC, 2008 and 2009).

The research is that of a revelatory, embedded single case study design (Yin, 2003) informed by a range of readings around the concept of evaluation and aligning itself, in part, with the principles of *illuminative evaluation* (Parlett & Dearden, 1977). It is possible to parse the research into formative and summative design strands. The summative strand of the research will be based around an illuminative evaluation of the LSA role and a more formative approach will be adopted when making judgements on the data and formulating opinions of the impact of the role. The need for this dual strand approach (summative and formative) comes from the fact that considerations may need to be made of the observed and perceived impact of the LSA role against its generally anticipated and widely expected impact, e.g. 'increased attention and support for learning, increased teaching effectiveness, etc' (Blatchford et al., 2009). A true illuminative evaluation would not allow for such challenges within the analysis and a dual approach allows for the underlying critical realist principles of natural sciences and social pressures to be explored in parallel.

By identifying and evaluating the current role of the LSA within a special school, the researcher will be conducting a piece of work that will contribute to a significant gap in the academic literature. Once the LSA role has been identified, the research sponsor will then be in a position to build on this information and the researcher may have the opportunity to facilitate this development outside of the thesis design. Elements of a *responsive evaluation* (Stake, 1976) will also inform the researcher's methodology. As highlighted in conversations between Tineke and Stake (2001), *responsive evaluation* involves the evaluator (researcher) knowing the circumstances and values well, then

using “professional talent” and discipline to carry out the research (Tineke & Stake, 2001). The blend of a case study design, *illuminative* and *responsive evaluation* allow for methodological flexibility, which in turn will allow the research to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

The ‘revelatory’ aspect of the case study design is also based on Yin’s (2009) descriptions of case study research. Yin argues that there are five rationales for single case study designs. These are, *critical case* (for testing well-formulated theories), *unique or extreme case* (for studying ‘one-off’ or unique situations), typical or representative case (capturing features and characteristics of every day or common place situations), longitudinal case (for studying a single case at two or three different points in time) and the revelatory case (Yin, 2009). The revelatory case is described by Yin as providing the opportunity to “observe and analyse a phenomenon previously inaccessible to social science enquiry” (Yin, 2009, pg 48). The exploration of the LSA role is by no means a phenomenon, however, it is an area of social importance that has not been rigorously examined and as such, a revelatory design with typical or representative elements is argued by the researcher to be an appropriate case study rationale. A potential pitfall of the case study design is the possibility that the case being studied may not end up being the case it was thought to be (Yin, 2009). In this instance, the researcher is confident that the single, revelatory, embedded case study design is firmly focusing on the role of the LSA in the context of Summerville School and within the bounds of current legislation.

Within the case study design will be four embedded data sites examined through three data sources, each exploring three units of analysis. The special needs school and its related context exists as the case in this study, the four classrooms of children were chosen as the data sites and the data gathering tools of a semi-structured interview, group interview and observations provided the multiple data sources. Within these sources, the three areas of investigation (or units of analysis) were, the LSA working with the child, LSAs working with staff and the impact of the LSA role. These three units of analysis have been drawn from the research by Farrell et al. (1999) outlining four levels at which the LSA can be evaluated; *LSAs work co-operatively with teachers to support the learning and participation of pupil; LSAs work with teachers to prepare lesson plans and material; LSAs contribute to the evaluation of the outcomes of lessons and LSAs make relevant contributions to wider school activities* (see table 2-1). The researcher believes that by merging these four levels

into three simplified but encompassing units of analysis, the role of the LSA can be fully explored.

The flexibility of this sort of research design allows the researcher to embark on a data driven investigation with predetermined units of analysis and propositions, and yet still be able to maintain an awareness of, and be able to adapt to, contextual and organisational influences.

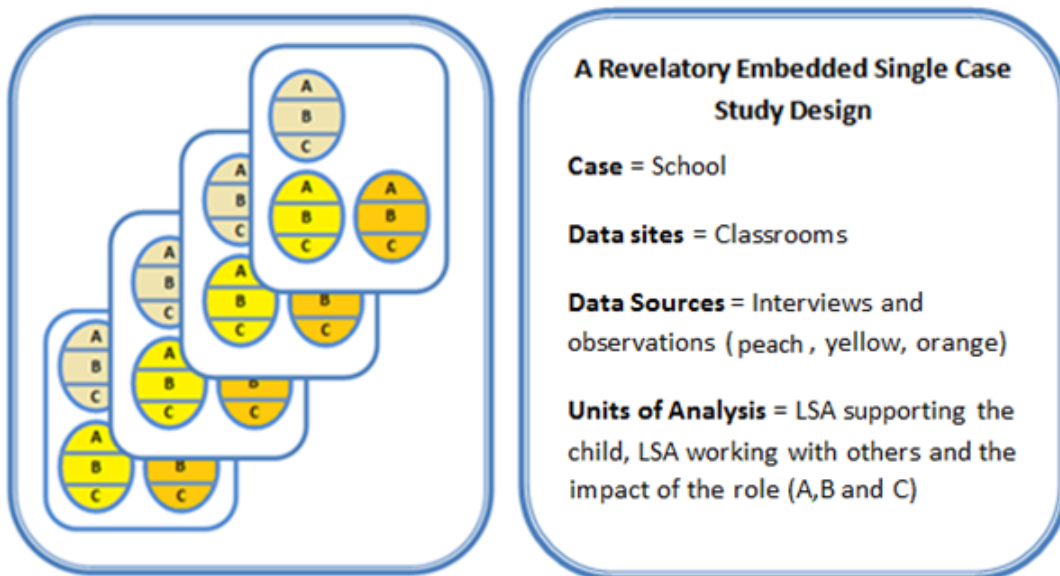


Figure 3-1: Visual depiction of the current revelatory, embedded single case study design, based on Yin's (2009) visual representations of case study designs.

An alternative to the embedded case study design is the holistic case study design (Yin 2009). To use the current research as an example, a holistic case study would use the whole school as a unit of analysis as opposed to the individual classes. One of the potential problems that may arise during this sort of design is that the research may be intending to explore the role of the LSA in the school by treating the school as a single unit and consequently ignoring the nuances that may arise in the different classes. The researcher would ultimately arrive with conclusions of an LSA role within that school that is made up from multiple units of practice from individual classes. The researcher hopes that by electing to use an embedded design, he is overcoming this potential pitfall. Further to this, Yin (2009) recommends that when designing case study research, it is often favourable to adopt a multiple-case study design. This type of design allows for greater analytic conclusions to be drawn (Yin, 2009). The researcher is aware of the advantage gained by carrying out a multiple case study design but maintains that a single case design offers an opportunity to research a



richer picture of an individual case when taking into account the restrictions of a doctoral thesis. It is also not the intention of the researcher to explore the LSA role across two settings (or cases); instead, the researcher aims to gather sufficient data to present a model of LSA practice true to Summerville School and to answer the research questions posed.

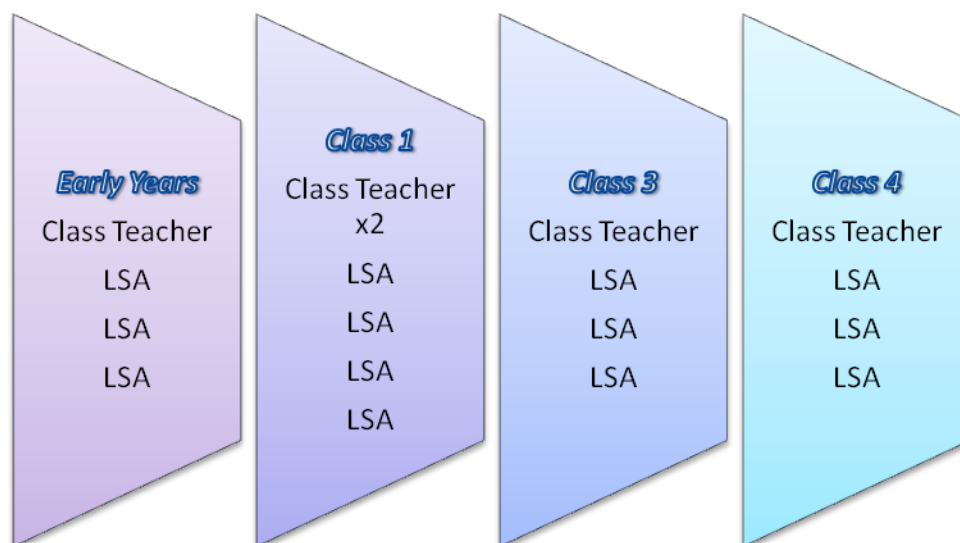
It is recognised by the researcher that the observations (to be discussed later) will involve an element of quantitative analysis, however, this carries a small weighting within the final analysis and the researcher is therefore reluctant to refer to the research as being 'mixed methods'.

### **3.4 Case Selection and Participant Recruitment**

The sampling and recruitment of participants in qualitative research differs from the quantitative, nomothetic research in that it is idiographic (Coolican, 2009). Ideographic research seeks to identify the unique and in-depth experiences of individuals or groups (Coolican, 2009). In consideration of this, the sampling method frequently used in this qualitative research is often opportunistic in its approach. The researcher is not aiming for a representative sample of a wider population by which he can generalise his findings and find a new 'truth', the researcher instead is aiming to gain a unique insight into a socially constructed role or system. The portrayal of these constructs can help the reader to build upon, modify or generate their own constructs pertaining to such findings. The researcher is in favour of the term 'case-selection', however, if forced into discussing the term 'sampling' the researcher would argue that opportunistic sampling was used in order to select the school or 'case' presented within the research, in the sense that the researcher was placed in the school for differing reasons at the time the research proposal emerged (this will be discussed later on in this section). There were exclusionary and inclusionary criteria applied in addition to this 'opportunity'. Before confirming the research, it was important to ensure that Summerville School was not in special measures and that it was the most appropriate school to complete the research when taking into account the research questions. Numerous special schools exist within the researcher's working Local Authority that provide special education for primary aged children. One of the schools was a newly established school and was thus excluded in anticipation that there had been insufficient time for a 'model of practice' to be established within the school. One of the schools provided education for children assessed to have social and emotional

behavioural difficulties (SEBD) and thus did not qualify based on the research questions. Two other schools catered for secondary aged pupils and did not meet the target population age. Another school offered provision primarily for children with physical difficulties as opposed to children with SLD or PMLD. Summerville School had been awarded a rating of 'Good' by Ofsted and in addition, the researcher had already been granted access to the school as part of his professional role as a Trainee Educational Psychologist. With these factors in mind, Summerville School was selected with confidence by the researcher as the case school.

Summerville School is a one form entry special school, within a small local authority and with less than 50 pupils on role. The school provides full time or part time education for children with severe learning difficulties who have a statement of special educational needs or who are undergoing statutory assessment. Classes within the school are split into three developmental and chronological classes (class 1, class 3 and class 4) and an early years class. The common skeletal model of deployment within the school can be represented by the diagram below.



**Figure 3-2: Representation of LSA and teacher deployment across the teaching classes within the school.<sup>5</sup>**

Summerville was the link school in which the researcher practised as a TEP. It was during a visit to the school in a practitioner capacity that the researcher became aware of the school's interest in exploring the role of the LSA. From this point forward,

<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that this structure is the intended structure outlined by the senior leadership team in the school, however, it is not exempt from temporary changes when the situation demands. For clarification, class 2 does not operate as a 'class' and instead operates as a treatment/physiotherapy room.

the researcher continued his practitioner work with the school but also began a distinctly separate research role at Summerville School. After informal conversations with the HT the researcher received an official invitation to complete some research at the school. Following this, the researcher presented his proposal to staff during a full team meeting and allowed a period of two full weeks before revisiting the school and distributing consent forms and information letters (outlining the research and frequently asked questions). These consent forms were then collected in after another two week period. There were a total of 15 LSAs working in the school and 11 agreed to participate in the research. One member of teaching staff from each classroom also agreed to participate in the study. This resulted in 11 LSAs and four teachers giving their full and informed consent to participate, in the knowledge that they were able to withdraw from the research at any point and they were also able to withdraw their contributing data up until the point of anonymisation. Of these participants, 13 are female and one is male.

As previously mentioned, the researcher is not completing nomothetic research and thus there is reduced emphasis on finding a representative population sample. However, the researcher had to consider whether 11 out of 15 LSAs was a sufficient sample size in order to represent the current case. The researcher considered this to be the case as at least two LSAs from each teaching class agreed to participate in the research. The class teacher's views were also sought during the group interview and when combined with at least two LSA interviews, this represented the majority within each class (if not the complete class team).

### **3.5 Data Gathering Methods**

The data from LSAs was collected via a semi-structured interview format (see appendix C) from 11 participants and from the HT (see appendix D). The data from the teaching staff was recorded in a semi-structured group interview (see appendix E). Observations were also made of the LSAs in context using an observation framework (see appendix F). These three forms of data collection drew information from the three units of analysis identified earlier.

A semi-structured interview was chosen as one method of data collection because of the greater depth that it allows in participant response (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007) and the fact that interviews allow for clarification of ambiguous responses

(Drever, 1995). In aiming to control reliability, the researcher will endeavour to use the same questions and prompts for each interviewee (Silverman, 1985). As a further measure to enhance the reliability of the interviews, the researcher will pilot both schedules with the research sponsor. Despite both these measures, controlling the wording is no guarantee of controlling the interview (Cohen et al., 2007) and it will be inevitable that both the interviewer and interviewee will have an influence on the responses elicited. After all, it is argued that the concept of 'interviewer neutrality' is a research chimera (Denscombe, 1995). Interviews can also be wildly unpredictable (Rubin and Rubin, 1995) and each interview is likely to be unique, therefore according to Rubin and Rubin, a skilled interviewer needs to be able to adapt quickly to unexpected deviations in the interview. The researcher's background as a TEP involves gathering multiple sources of data in an interview format and in contexts of varying sensitivity. In addition to this, the researcher has experience of completing semi-structured interviews in previous qualitative research. This provides a good basis for claiming a level of competence and confidence in interviewing and adapting to unexpected events. When it came to designing the semi-structured interview the researcher relied on a number of theoretical propositions (Yin, 2009) to inform the questions asked (such as Farrell et al.'s (1999) framework for TA evaluation and the literature review of the LSA completed previously).

The second method of data gathering will be through semi-structured observations using a momentary time sampling method (Salvia, Ysseldyke & Bolt 2006). This form of data gathering will help the researcher to understand the situation that is being described (Patton, 1990). By using a semi-structured observation as opposed to a structured (preferred by quantitative research) or an unstructured observation (appropriate when propositions are yet to be formed), the researcher aims to catch the dynamic nature of the LSA role, the intentionality of actions and to seek trends and patterns within the role (Cohen et al., 2007). By using a momentary time sampling approach to the observations, the researcher is able to gain an unbiased estimate of the proportion of time spent engaging in a particular activity, unlike a whole-interval or partial interval techniques (Salvia, Ysseldyke & Bolt, 2006).

Three observation frameworks were used and they are adapted from the observation frameworks used by Blatchford et al. (2006) in the DISS project. As the themes examined in this research are similar in vain to threads within the DISS project, the frameworks were an appropriate tool. These were then adapted to reflect the three units of analysis in the study: LSA working with the child, LSA working with staff and

the impact of the role. Each observation lasted for 30 minutes and all LSAs interviewed were observed. Using a time sampling approach, at the end of each minute observations were made in relation to the deployment of the staff, the autonomy of their deployment and their communications with each other as well as observations about the target group they supported, the autonomous nature of the support they were offering and the domain in which the support was delivered. The third framework, impact, was recorded immediately after the observation. This was a decision made after reflection with the research supervisor regarding the cognitive demands being placed upon the researcher in the one minute observation window. Making a decision as to which area LSAs' contributions had most impact was not an immediate decision and it required cognitive space. Following the observations, reflections were made on each recorded observation item and the associated annotations recorded on the observation sheet (tasks, activities, events and behaviours). A decision was then made as to which outcome measure each contribution impacted upon most prominently. The outcome measures used to gauge observed impact were the Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes outlined in the DfES 'Every Child Matters: Change for Children' (2004b). These outcomes were designed to draw a focus towards achieving well-being in children and young people through more integrated services (DfES, 2004b). It was felt that the five outcomes of be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic well-being would be an appropriate tool with which to measure the impact of the LSA role. As referred to in section 2.2.3, Muncey and McGinty (1998) found that National Curriculum linked targets proved problematic for special schools as they did not measure what was considered valuable for their pupils. The ECM outcomes are considered valuable objectives for any child regardless of their ability or of the curriculum being taught.

The third method of data gathering was to conduct four semi-structured group interviews with the four class teams. This method was chosen in order to offer a qualitatively different type of data. It offered opportunity for the researcher to clarify any ambiguities or confusion that may have arisen during the semi-structured observations, provided an opportunity for group reflection of the LSA, also allowing an opportunity for the class teacher to contribute on reflections of the LSA role and finally it provided an opportunity for the LSAs to raise any comments that they forgot to raise in the individual interviews. Bauer and Gaskell (2005) suggest that interviewing with a group offers an opportunity for the researcher to witness the minimal social unit in operation which promotes conversations or feedback about the role that is influenced

by the social nature of the group itself (Bauer & Gaskell, 2005). In relation to the group interview, Bauer and Gaskell (2005) propose that the following three key features exist:

- “1. A synergy emerges out of the social interaction.*
- 2. It is possible to observe the group process, the dynamics of attitude and opinion change and opinion leadership.*
- 3. In a group there can sometimes be a level of emotional involvement that is seldom seen in one-to-one interviews.”*

(Bauer and Gaskell, 2005, pg 47)

In discussion with the research sponsor, it was agreed that the time available for these group interviews was unfortunately limited due to teaching priorities and the limited time in which the LSAs and teachers were able to be released simultaneously without impacting on the children in the school. This meant that that group interviews ranged between 15 and 25 minutes in total.

Full consent was given by the research sponsor (HT) of Summerville School on the 16.12.2010. The researcher also gained the full consent from individuals via the consent form attached as appendix G, alongside an information sheet and frequently asked questions document (appendix H). All those involved were made fully aware that any contributions recorded within the audio recording and during observations would be completely anonymised within the presented research.

The research sponsor offered two full days of available time for back-to-back interviews with the school's LSAs, two full days for the observations to take place, sufficient time before and after lessons for the group interviews as well as two additional half days as a contingency.

### **3.6 Data Analysis Methods**

The researcher completed a full transcription of the audio data from all the support staff interviews and the group interviews. These transcriptions were then analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006 and Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006) on the *NVivo 8* software. Two types of distinct thematic analysis are presented by Braun and Clarke, the first being theoretical or ‘top-down’ thematic analysis. This methodology dictates that the analysis will be driven by the researcher’s theoretical

interest (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The second method is an inductive or 'bottom-up' analysis which could be compared to the alternative analytical method referred to as content analysis (Graneheim & Lundheim, 2004). The researcher considers there to be an element of risk with both these methods when adopted in isolation. A top-down or theoretical approach may exclude strong and important themes that do not sit comfortably within the theory driving the research. Alternatively, a bottom up or inductive approach may generate data deemed irrelevant to the research focus. The researcher chose an integrative thematic analysis using a guiding theoretical framework when coding the data, but still actively including any emerging themes akin to a bottom up approach. In reality, the researcher used the three units of analysis (LSA working with the child, LSA working with staff and the impact of the role) and the analytical framework of LSA roles identified in section 2.4 (assessment, care, community liaison, multi-agency work and teaching and learning) as a theoretical guide when coding and other prominent codes/themes that emerged were also included in the coding and theming process. This dual-approach has been coined by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) as a 'hybrid approach' that allows the researcher to demonstrate rigour when identifying the important messages, stories and phenomenon in qualitative data sets (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Their hybrid method draws upon the research of Boyatzis' (1998) data-driven inductive approach and the deductive a-priori approach advocated by Crabtree and Miller (1999). The researcher found a particular heuristic identified by Boyatzis (1998) to be of particular use when coding and theming the data set:

*"[a theme is] a pattern in the information that at minimum describes and organises the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon."*

(Boyatzis 1998, pp 161)

Thematic analysis is considered by the researcher to be an appropriate methodological tool and is regarded as a foundational method for qualitative analysis as it is a flexible tool which has the potential to provide a rich, detailed and complex account of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) and Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) provide a procedural template for conducting thematic analysis, thus providing a set of rules and procedures that are transparent, explicit and public (Mayring, 2004) adding validity to the data analysis.

Varying analytical methodologies such as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith and Osborn, 2003 and Smith and Eatough, 2007), were also considered. IPA can be parsed in two lights: it should be possible to learn something about any existing generic themes that exist within a group but the ideographic mode of enquiry also allows us to learn from each individual narrative (Smith and Eatough, 2007). Despite this dual focus, IPA would be an inappropriate tool considering that the researcher will be looking for commonalities from the very early stages of the research and not as an afterthought or complimentary to deep personal experience. Content analysis was also considered but its often quantitative nature, lack of universal definition and the necessary time commitments (Tesch, 1990) leave thematic analysis as the most appropriate tool for data analysis.

### **3.7 Conducting the Thematic Analysis**

Typically, each group interview was composed of at least two LSAs and the class teacher. All the interviews were audio-recorded and fully transcribed using an *RCA* audio recorder and the *Microsoft Word* word processing software. Following the full transcriptions of the data, the names of the participants were removed and transcriptions were grouped according to the class from which they were collected. Using the coding software *NVIVO 8*, the researcher then proceeded to code the transcripts by class using a hybrid coding method adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006) and Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) as described above.

<b>Step by Step Guide to Thematic Analysis Adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006) and Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006)</b>	
1. Developing a coding manual	Coding framework developed a priori and based upon the research questions.
2. Familiarise yourself with your data	Immersion into the data: transcribing, reading, re-reading and note taking.
3. Generating initial codes	Systematic coding of interesting features
4. Searching for initial themes	Collating codes into initial themes
5. Reviewing themes	Checking that the themes 'fit' and creating a thematic map
6. Defining and naming themes	Refine specifics of the theme and define theme names
7. Producing the report	Inclusion of vivid and compelling extracts from



	the data set
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**Table 3-1: Step by step guide to thematic analysis adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006) and Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006)**

### **3.7.1 Coding and Theming**

As referred to in section 3.6, the researcher used a hybrid thematic analysis combining a theoretical and inductive approach. Outlined below is the coding and theming process completed in this research in accordance with the suggested hybrid of methods ascribed by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006).

#### **3.7.1.1 Step1 - Developing a Coding Manual**

The coding manual applied throughout the familiarisation, coding and theming process drew upon the three units of analysis used in the study (adapted from Farrell et al., 1999) and the five areas of LSA input synthesised from the literature review by the researcher (see section 2.4) . The coding manual acted as a tool for organising segments or similar features of the data (Crabtree and Miller, 1999). In light of this the units of analysis: *LSA working with the child*; *LSA working with staff* and *impact of the role* were assigned as organising themes from the outset. The five areas of role and responsibility (*teaching and learning, assessment, care, multi-agency and community liaison*) were also assigned as themes within the organising theme of *working with the child*.

#### **3.7.1.2 Step 2 - Familiarising Oneself with the Data**

Before beginning the coding process, the researcher read through all the transcripts as an additional step to ensure the meaning of the participants' responses was fully absorbed (having already absorbed the data during the interviews and during the full transcription process as advocated by Reissman [1993]). Whilst doing so, the coding manual was considered and initial ideas regarding possible codes and themes were also considered and noted down by the researcher.

#### **3.7.1.3 Step 3 - Generating Initial Codes**

Following the transcription, reading and re-reading of the data set, the researcher then began coding the transcripts in the *NVIVO 8* software to produce a substantial

list of codes. Coding was carried out systematically class by class (a class typically contained transcripts from at least two LSAs and one group interview) and using a semantic coding approach (explicit or surface structures). Codes were created either through application of the coding manual or through a semantic and data driven approach.

The coding process produced a total of 1559 coded extracts which made up a total of 283 codes. These 283 codes were spread across the four classes and were then merged as part of the final analysis to leave a total of 71 codes. These 71 codes represent the collective coding of the LSA role across all four classes. Appendix I outlines the coding method and provides visual screen shots in order to help the reader conceptualise his/her understanding of the process.

#### **3.7.1.4 Step 4 - Searching for Themes**

In this research the following labelling system was used to describe the themes as they emerge, code, sub-theme, organising theme. Three organising themes were self-evident from the start as they existed as part of the coding manual. Within one of these organising themes (LSA working with the child) five sub-themes also helped to guide the coding as part of the coding manual (assessment, care, community and parent contact, multi-agency working and teaching and learning). As the researcher chose to adopt a mixed method approach to thematic analysis, additional codes emerged through an inductive approach. Both the theoretical (coding manual) and inductive approach involved closely examining the codes then collating, merging, comparing and sorting them into broader themes. Themes that sat in isolation and had fewer, self-contained themes were identified as organising themes. Themes that encompassed collections of broader codes within an organising code were identified as sub-themes. The transition from coding to theming only became possible by switching to a manual and more visual approach (refer to appendix I for specific details) as advocated by Braun and Clarke (2008).

Themes were initially constructed using multiple notes and pieces of paper linked to the individual class coding maps (*NVivo 8* hierarchy print offs), these are described as candidate themes. At this stage, the researcher is left with four classes, each class having a set of candidate themes representing the LSA role for that class. The next step was to cross reference the themes in order to ascertain whether or not these themes were still valid when representing the whole LSA role.

### **3.7.1.5 Step 5 - Reviewing the Themes**

This stage involves reviewing the themes at the level of the coded data and at the level of the whole data set. This was more easily completed by merging the four classes onto a piece of A1 paper (shown in appendix I). This was an opportunity to review all the codes that represented each candidate theme. Whilst doing this it was possible to establish whether or not the candidate themes could be merged to become either organising or sub-themes or whether it was instead necessary to discard the candidate themes all together. Once this process was complete, an electronic representation of the thematic map was produced, taking inspiration from Braun and Wilkinson's (2003) visual map of themes relating to women's discourse of the vagina. The final thematic map is shown in figure 4-2 below.

### **3.7.1.6 Step 6 – Defining and Naming the Themes**

This penultimate step involved analysing each theme in isolation and ensuring that a narrative description of the theme appropriately encompassed the codes contained within the theme and whether the name of the organising theme appropriately represented the picture being portrayed. The narratives produced were the tools with which the researcher has presented and analysed the data in the forthcoming discussion section.

### **3.7.1.7 Step 7 – Producing the Report**

Section 4 presents a detailed and rich descriptive account of the findings from the thematic process. The results are presented in diagrammatical and prose form in order to allow the reader further opportunity to understand the data. The implications of the data and how the data answers the research questions can be found in section 5 as the final discussion of the report.

## **3.8 Critical Realist Methodology**

The data gathering methods and analysis highlighted in sections 3.5 and 3.6 are both informed by the critical realist epistemological position adopted by the researcher. By exploring individual perceptions, group perceptions and objective observational data the researcher is acknowledging that a reality of LSA role exists within the school but

also acknowledges that the role will be subject to the influence of the environmental milieu within which the role exists.

By adopting a mixed methods approach, using quantitative observation data and qualitative interview data, the researcher is also venturing into a cross disciplinary methodology incorporating the multi-layered systems approach advocated by Bhaskar (2012). With a focus on a traditional co-occurring positivist approach (flat, observational data) and multi-layered systems approach (multiple interviews and thematic analysis), the researcher can hope to achieve 'emergence' (Bhaskar, 2010) which Bhaskar (2012) argues is the only true understanding of the structures and layers underpinning a process or object of study.

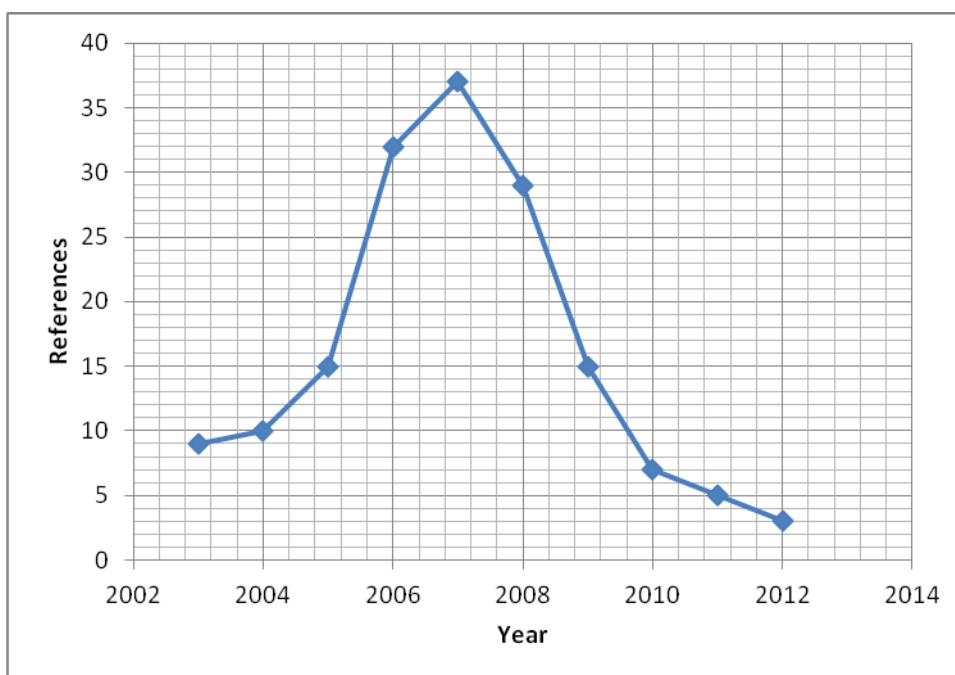
### **3.9 Reliability and Validity**

This research is predominantly qualitative in nature and approached from a critical realist epistemological position as opposed to positions of a more extreme realist orientation. Therefore, we are not looking to state that there is a single separate reality that exists regardless of context. With this in mind, the concept of validity will not be pursued within the research. What is important, however, is the reliability and credibility of the research. Coolican (2009) outlines a number of ways with which the trustworthiness of the research can be improved to enhance reliability and credibility. These are demonstrated in the following ways. The researcher confirmed the quality of the emerging themes and findings with his research supervisor and with the HT at Summerville School before progressing with further analysis. The researcher's analytical sensitivity is informed by his professional experience within the field of special school education, by having conducted a systematic review of the literature (see section 2 and appendices A and B), by being guided by the research questions and through interactions with colleagues, tutors and supervisors. The trustworthiness of the research is also further enhanced by ensuring a systematic and transparent process and audit trail throughout the data collection (see appendices A through to I) and analysis (see section 3.5, 3.6 and 3.7 above), and by triangulating numerous data sources (individual interviews, group interviews, LSA observations, HT interviews and the School prospectus). In the current study, the degree of confidence in the analytical generalisability of the findings will be in direct proportion to the robustness of the analysis.

### **3.10 Critique of Methodology**

Completing the observations demanded close concentration and deep reflection for 30 minutes at a time and across two observation sheets. With this in mind, and after reflections with the research supervisor, the researcher decided that it would not be possible to engage in the complex reflections as to which ECM outcome the LSAs were contributing to at each interval. These observations were instead carried out immediately after the observations were completed. This allowed the researcher to negotiate across all five outcomes before judging which one was most supported. During the process of confirming the findings with the research sponsor concerns were raised that the actual contributions to ECM outcomes were not truly reflected as an LSAs' engagement with a pupil or activity is likely to meet the criteria for multiple ECM outcomes. This was an accurate critique and the researcher returned to consider how to respond to these observations. Returning to the raw data and re-assessing observation items was an unenviable task and the researcher considered a re-assessment to be an unrealistic option as the immediacy of the observations had been lost and any further reassessment would be inaccurate. With this in mind the researcher felt that the most valid way to remediate the participants concern was to clearly state that the observation data pertaining to the ECM outcomes highlights which specific outcomes were the primary or main outcome which were most benefitted by LSAs activities. In addition to this it is also important that the reader recognises that in actuality, multiple ECM outcomes may have been met on each observation item and this is not reflected in the final data.

A decision was made that it would only be justifiable to include this data if the researcher made the intricacies of the ECM outcome observations as explicit as possible. This was done by emphasising this point when the data was introduced. In addition to this there is also a valid concern that the ECM outcomes could be considered outdated as eight years have passed since their conception and internet links to the corresponding DfES publishing have been decommissioned. When searching the 'education' section of *The Guardian* newspaper's website, references for "Every Child Matters" have reduced dramatically since the peak of its use as a reference in 2007.



**Figure 3-3: Number of references made to 'ECM outcomes: change for children' (2004b) on *The Guardian* newspaper's website**

Despite the concerns highlighted by the research sponsor regarding their contributions to the ECM outcomes and lack of saliency of the ECM outcomes in the current educational context, the researcher feels that both the way in which the data was reported and the use of the outcomes as a measure of impact, are valid for the following reasons. Although it is very likely that one LSA action may target multiple ECM outcomes, the data is still accurate as what is reported is the ECM outcome judged by the researcher to be most impacted by the action. The results will be discussed with this consideration in mind. Secondly, the ECM outcomes, although arguably less favourable in current educational contexts, are one of the only existing outcome measures that are recognised in schools which are not explicitly linked to National Curriculum targets. They are also transferable as targets between mainstream and special schools and can be used to guide provision and intervention for pupils of all ages and abilities. It is also possible to make judgements regarding contributions to ECM outcomes whereas to identify progress through P-Levels using an assessment package, such as the B-Squared<sup>6</sup> system from a short observation, is a much harder task requiring baseline information and longitudinal involvement.

<sup>6</sup> B-Squared is a marketed assessment package linked into the National Curriculum and can be used to help assess a child's progress through the pre-National Curriculum levels (P-Levels). Other examples include PIVATS, PCAE and BARE.

Completing time sampling systematic observations initially appeared to be a consistent and reflective way of recording the activities and communications of the LSAs. However, when reflecting upon the data gathering process, the researcher feels that these sorts of observations did prove challenging at times. The unpredictable nature of a 'typical day' in the special school in question meant that a number of the observations had to be delayed for short or extended periods of time to allow for unexpected events, slow lesson starts, and other extenuating circumstances. On one occasion, the observation had to be cut short due to the LSA having to leave the site in order to continue providing their support. Event sampling observations may have yielded slightly different data.

Similarly there were instances where a variation was recorded between classes in the observation data, forcing the researcher to present individual class data as well as the whole class data. The likely explanation for this variance is that each classroom operates in a responsive and flexible way, with LSAs having to perform a variety of tasks at differing times in the day in order to meet the children's needs. It is possible that when only observing LSAs for 30 minutes each, a considerable amount of that time may be spent providing a particular type of support as a reactive response that would not represent a typical half an hour, lesson or day. These reflections of the observation process help to highlight the differing structures and unpredictable events that take place day in and day out within a special school such as Summerville School.

The data analysis method of thematic analysis has been referred to as a "poorly branded method" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp 79) in the sense that it does not exist as rigidly as other named qualitative methods. The varying published descriptions of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2006 and Tuckett, 2005,) also advocate that they are simply guidelines and that a flexible approach must be adopted (Braun and Clarke 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that criticisms may be presented with regards to their first proposed step in the theming process (this is the second step in the current research). They suggest that one may take the position that to become too absorbed in the data set before beginning coding may result in the researcher developing a narrow analytical field of vision, therefore resulting in a biased emphasis on some aspects of the phenomenon thus disregarding other crucial aspects (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Despite this viewpoint, Braun and Clarke (2006) amongst others (Boyatzis, 1998, Crabtree & Miller, 1999 and Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006) also recognise the advantages of

immersion into the data set and developing a comprehensive understanding rather than performing a more mechanical coding process absent of meaning (Lapadat and Lindsay, 1999). The decision to become as immersed in the transcripts and interviews as possible ultimately benefitted the researcher as it allowed him to build a rich conceptualisation of the LSA role and also ensured that one-off, yet key comments were not overlooked.

The researcher encountered an intellectual hurdle when considering his epistemological position in relation to the method for which the data would be coded. Braun and Clarke (2006) refer to two opposing epistemological methods when coding. They argue that to code with latent meaning would be more favourable to a constructivist approach, whereas to code with semantic meaning would be the choice method of a researcher adopting a realist or essentialist perspective. As referred to in section 3.2, and throughout the research, a critical realist position has been adopted from the outset which locates itself neither within an essentialist/realist or constructivist epistemological position. Borrell (2008) would in fact argue that critical realism lies between the poles of essentialism and constructivism (Borrell, 2008, pp.198). This made the decision of whether to choose a semantic or latent approach a complex one for the researcher. After consideration, the researcher decided that a semantic approach would be the most appropriate method of coding. Multiple participants were interviewed and in order to establish a common perception of the role, the researcher was required to focus more on the explicit reflections of the LSAs as opposed to attempting to unpick the psychologies of 11 individuals and further, to infer a common conception.

Intellectual demands were somewhat reduced by following the three 'tips' offered by Braun and Clarke (2008) whilst coding. They propose that by coding as many extracts as possible (1559 were coded in this instance), coding inclusively (keeping surrounding extracts within the code helped to remind the researcher of context during later viewing) and by coding extracts more than once (reducing coding debates), the researcher felt more immersed in the data.

Beyond reflections of the style with which the thematic analysis was carried out are considerations that had to be made regarding the composition and structure of the data set. The data set could have been composed in two ways: the first way would have been to analyse the 14 data items together (11 LSA interviews and four group interviews) and the second and chosen way was to analyse the data items as four



grouped data sites (the four classes). This preferred method allowed the TEP to develop a class by class conceptualisation of the themes and it also allowed the researcher to recognise any links between comments made in the group interviews and the individual interviews for that class. Without grouping the classes in this way, these links may have been overlooked and the process of teasing out meaning from the data would have been significantly harder. In addition to this, the huge task of coding and theming all the data was regarded by the researcher to be psychologically preferable when attempted in smaller sections as it allowed him to organise the work conceptually and avoid the daunting task of coding one enormous data set.

The authenticity of the researcher's data analysis and interpretation may have been enhanced through respondent validation. The process of member-checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Holt & Dunn, 2004) in this instance would lack purpose however. This is because the transcriptions were completed in full and the data recorded came directly from the participant, therefore there was a reduced need to check its authenticity. It may have also proved problematic to engage in a member-checking process once the thematic analysis had been completed because the themes will ultimately be identified across the whole school data site and therefore individuals may disagree with an emergent theme regardless of its prominence amongst the staff members. A member-checking procedure would also pose ethical concerns in this instance. If the researcher had presented the themes to the team there would have been a risk that within these themes, dissonant views were presented. This may then have placed the participants in an uncomfortable position when trying to establish if an individual's response was indeed authentic in presentation. The data was then triangulated with the previous observations made in the classroom to achieve a sense of completeness with regards to the data analysis.

One final critique of the research methodology relates to the research design. Yin (2009) argues that an important component of case study design is the 'study propositions', as these propositions direct attention to something that should be examined. Yin also suggests that these propositions need not always be stated in the example of more exploratory research (Yin, 2009 pp. 28). In the current research the author draws a 'direction of focus' from the coding manual outlined in section 3.7.1.1. The coding manual consists of two frameworks derived from a literature search of the LSA role and from Farrell et al.'s (1999) research into the role, management and training of TAs. Although the researcher does not explicitly specify propositions within

the research, these frameworks and the coding manual serve the same function in allowing the researcher to establish a focus within the data gathering process.

Within the research, the author has provided detailed step by step descriptions of the research process, for example: the criteria specified for the systematic literature review and the detailed and annotated description of the thematic analysis methodology. In hindsight and in order to assist replicability and increase reliability, the research would have benefited from the inclusion of a 'design protocol' (Yin, 2009). This would have also have had the advantage of assisting future research in utilising the methodology and the design of the current study when researching differing educational contexts.

### **3.11 Operational Risk Analysis, Budget and Timeline**

The researcher has identified three main risks within the current study. These risks are as follows:

1. **Risk:** Low staff take-up

**Contingency:** The researcher was aware of the risk posed by low staff take-up. Within the school there were 15 LSAs. It was agreed that if some of the LSAs did not want to participate in the research then a minimum number of staff to obtain a representative sample was set to 10 participants. Failing this, the researcher would offer another opportunity for staff to ask questions of the researcher before the research began in order to alleviate any anxieties. If this contingency also failed to interest more than 10 staff members, the researcher was prepared to re-consider the research design and objectives.

2. **Risk:** Whole school withdrawal

**Contingency:** Participants and the research sponsor at the school (HT) were informed as to their right to withdraw from the research at any point. If this had happened the researcher would have re-evaluated his options and considered approaching another special school. This would also have meant that the research questions and design would also have to have been reconceived within the context of a new case (school). An additional contingency measure for this was the timing with which the research began. By gathering the data a year before the required submission date, the researcher allowed himself adequate time to formulate a new thesis plan.

3. **Risk:** Time constraints, staff absences, underestimation of time required for transcription and theming of data

**Contingency:** There were a number of risks within the research relating to time. The researcher ensured that there were contingency data gathering days scheduled into the process in addition to a wide time frame for data collation and analysis.

Additional risks and the proposed time line for the research can be found in comprehensive detail in appendix J.

There would be minimum budgetary requirements within the research. Interviews would be conducted using the researcher's own audio recorder and the time that the staff spent in interviews had been guaranteed by the research sponsor at no additional cost. The Researcher did anticipate a small cost for hospitality on these occasions, and this would come out of personal funds.

### **3.12 Statement of Ethical Good Practice**

Throughout the research the TEP would endeavour to maintain the highest ethical standards of practice in line with the Health Professions Council (HPC): Standards of conduct, performance and ethics (2008); the British Psychology Society (BPS): Code of Ethics and Conduct (2009) and the HPC: Practitioner Psychologists Standards of Proficiency (2009). Alongside this the TEP had completed the sponsoring Universities Ethics form (Research Risks and Ethics Assessment) as well as the more comprehensive UREC form (University Committee on the Ethics of Research on Human Beings). Ethical approval was given on the 22.06.11 (see appendix K for ethical approval letter). By adhering to the aforementioned standards and after completing the University ethical requirements, the TEP was confident that he could carry out the research underpinned by the highest standards of ethical good practice. Appendix L demonstrates the ethical considerations that had already been made.

The researcher was also aware of the potential that the research had to uncover findings, opinions or judgements that may not have been desirable for the research sponsor. If this had occurred, the sensitive manner with which the researcher presented the information with the research sponsor would have helped to look for positive ways forward. The HT of the sponsoring school and the researcher's line

manager within the EPS were both aware of the neutrality adopted by the researcher and the risk that undesirable findings may have emerged. If this did occur then the findings would have been discussed in confidence with the sponsor and line manager and with a priority placed upon using the information positively and protecting those involved in the research. The anonymity of the data went some way to ensure this. In addition to this, the research findings may be of interest both positively and/or negatively to the Local Authority in which the researcher works as an EP. Various scenarios such as information requests from other special schools and/or mainstream schools, parental interest in findings and the EPS's interest in taking the research to a different level were considered and discussed with the researcher's supervisor.

## 4 Findings

Results were collated across two levels; themes identified across all four data sites (4 classrooms) and collated whole school observations data. In addition to this a single semi-structured interview was held with the HT of the school in order to get a detailed pen picture of the school and the HT's perspective across the three units of analysis. This section starts by presenting a pen portrait and details about the Summerville School prospectus. This will help the reader to conceptualise the school context before progressing further. Following this the whole-school collated observation totals are presented and discussed to show how the LSAs were observed to operate across the three units of analysis (*LSA working with the child*, *LSA working with others* and the *impact of the role*). After this, the final thematic map of the LSA role is presented, followed by a breakdown of each organising theme and/or sub-theme (including codes and extracts). This process is then repeated for the HT's interview data. Throughout the sections describing the organising themes, the researcher has included figures of text to integrate the observation data with the themes (see figures 4-4 and 4-6 for examples). As the observations only covered the three units of analysis these 'integration figures' are not included for some of the organising themes (such as *challenges* and *ideas for change*). Finally, a summary of the findings is presented.

### 4.1 Pen Portrait

A 40 minute semi-structured interview was completed with the HT of Summerville School in order to establish two data points. The first was a pen portrait of the school (figure 4-1) which helped the researcher to refine and confirm his perceptions of Summerville School. The second purpose of the semi-structured interview was also to gather a brief perception of the LSA role from the HT which allowed the researcher to draw comparisons between LSAs perceptions and also to confirm and fill in any possible gaps that did not emerge through the bulk of the data gathering process. The pen portrait will be presented now and the additional information pertaining to the units of analysis, LSA working with the child, LSA working with staff and impact of the role, will be reported in section 4.5. The pen portrait offered below is a summary of the salient points offered by the HT when describing Summerville School.

## **4.2 Summerville School Prospectus**

In addition to the pen portrait offered by the HT the researcher was given a Summerville school prospectus<sup>7</sup> at the beginning of the research which provided an extra source of information regarding the context of the school and the established systems. There were a number of features within this prospectus that did not emerge during the data gathering process and thus are reported here in order to help provide a complete picture of the school.

One important aspect referred to in the prospectus is the approach adopted by the school when planning for, assessing and reporting learning. This is referred to as PARRC (Planning, Assessment, Recording, Reporting and Celebrating) and it explains the importance of achieving success through methodical, detailed small steps. The approach advocates the importance of ensuring children contribute to the recording of their achievement whenever possible and photographs, videos and examples of work are used to celebrate success in assemblies and through parent feedback. The prospectus then goes on to highlight the importance of the collaborative IEP process and how individual targets are developed which are most important to the needs of the child. Numerous aspects of the PARRC approach are reflected throughout the data and findings in the research, however, interestingly, at no point is the acronym referred to.

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<sup>7</sup> As part of the confidentiality process, the researcher has not referenced the prospectus. All enquiries related to the prospectus should be made to the researcher directly.

*“Summerville School is a Primary School for children with SLD and children can start with us from the age of three and they stay with us until they are 11. There are 36 children currently in school. We have capacity for 42, that currently is broken down into 26 boys and 10 girls and all the children here do have a statement of SEN stating that they have either severe or profound learning difficulties. There are very high staffing ratios and intense multidisciplinary teams inputting physiotherapy, SALT [Speech and Language Therapy] and OT [Occupational Therapy].*

*The catchment area for this school is half of the city so most of the children are transported into school on a mini bus paid for by the LA. We have had in the past some children here on an assessment placement and they tend to be for an emergency use, for children who have just arrived into the country for example. Children will start with an induction process which is very much needs led. Some children will start straight away, some children will start on a more gradual basis but it’s all about children and family need. Transition on the other end for children moving on, we start that almost in the autumn term preceding so that the children have access to visiting their new school. Parents have opportunities to visit, coffee mornings information giving mornings and we do what we can.*

*The school has five areas to work on within the school improvement plan. The first is around assessment for children. Our second priority is to use the outdoor environment to support teaching and learning throughout the day. We have a target around developing the curriculum into creating a more semantic approach and we are developing our courtyard area into a soft play. The final thing that we are working towards is about how we can share info in the school electronically”*

**Figure 4-1: Pen Portrait of Summerville School offered by the HT<sup>8</sup>**

### **4.3 Classroom Observations of LSAs**

Observations were completed for all 11 LSAs and lasted for 30 minutes each<sup>9</sup>. Each observation involved systematic time sampling across two of the units of analysis, supporting in the classroom and working with staff. The third unit of analysis, impact of the role, was completed post-hoc, immediately after the observation as it was felt that the reflections involved in this process required additional time. Data is displayed as a combined, whole-school data site in the tables below. Individual class results can be found within appendix M. Each results table is defined by the unit of analysis being investigated.

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<sup>8</sup> The pen portrait is verbatim commentary offered by the Head Teacher, however it has been summarised to present a concise account.

<sup>9</sup> All observations lasted for 30 minutes with the exception of one LSA’s observation which lasted for only 15 minutes as a result of an irregularity in the school day which could not be otherwise avoided.

### 4.3.1 Whole School Total

The observation data reported here is the collation of all four classes, providing an overall, whole school picture. The observation data is reported as the total minutes in which the specific activity was observed and the total percentage of time which that activity made up the total observation. In total 315 minutes of observations were completed.

#### 4.3.1.1 LSA supporting the Pupil

	<b>Combined</b>	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
	<b>observations</b>	
<b>Supporting</b>		
<i>Pupils outside the classroom</i>		
<i>Individual</i>	44	14.97
<i>Group</i>	9	2.86
<i>Pupils inside the classroom</i>		
<i>Individual</i>	118	37.46
<i>Group</i>	108	34.29
<i>Anyone needing help</i>	38	12.06
<i>Degree of autonomy</i>		
Scripted	59	18.73
Some	103	32.70
Full	149	47.30
<b>Domain</b>		
<i>Teaching and learning</i>	151	47.94
Assessment	16	5.08
Care	71	22.54
<i>Organisation/Housekeeping</i>	41	13.02
Other	48	15.24

**Table 4-1: Whole school observation data for 'LSA supporting the pupil' framework.**

Roughly 18% of the LSAs' activities were spent supporting a child or group of children outside of the classroom. Of this support, the LSAs' efforts were predominantly focused towards supporting an individual. When reflecting back on the



observations and scanning the notes and commentary recorded by the researcher, support outside of the classroom tended to be helping children with toileting, returning children to class on the occasions when they have slipped out the classroom or helping children to make transitions at the beginning or end of the lesson.

Inside the classroom, LSAs support was evenly distributed between individual children (37.46%) and a group of children (34.29%). A more reactive or un-planned style of support comprised only 12.06% of the observations. These activities often involved responding and reacting to the individual actions of children requiring instant adult intervention or contact.

When supporting a child or a group of children the LSAs were observed by the researcher to display fully autonomous instincts or actions for 47.30% of the time, partially scripted actions for 32.70% of the time and the remaining 18.73% of their support was fully scripted.

The majority of the LSAs support was in the field of teaching and learning (47.94%). This might have been in supporting a child to access learning, completing a piece of work or staying focused. The LSAs supported a child in the domain of 'care' for 22.54% and supporting the lesson or the teacher with organisational or housekeeping duties for 13.02%. A smaller percentage of the LSAs time was spent involved in assessment (5.08%) whilst other duties completed by the LSAs such as behaviour management comprised 15.24% of the total observations.

#### **4.3.1.2 LSA Working with Others**

	<b>Combined</b>	
	<b>Total Observations</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Deployment in the classroom</b>		
<i>Pupil Orientated</i>		
<i>Individual</i>	141	44.76
<i>Group</i>	122	38.73
<i>Hover/move</i>	51	16.19
<i>Task orientated</i>	176	55.87

<i>Passive/listening</i>	85	26.98
<i>Degree of autonomy</i>		
Scripted	67	21.27
Some	101	32.06
Full	143	45.40
<b>Communication</b>		
<i>Initiated by</i>		
Teacher	36	11.43
LSA	50	15.87
<i>Purpose</i>		
Task focused	39	12.38
Pupil focused	34	10.79
Social	11	3.49
Other	14	4.44

**Table 4-2: Whole school observation data for 'working with staff' framework.**

The direction with which the LSAs were deployed focused primarily towards a target individual child (44.76%) and a target group of children (38.73%). Time spent completing more reactive or non-targeted roles (defined as hovering and moving) comprised 16.19% of the observations. Of these observations, 55.87% were specifically task orientated and 26.98% were deliberate passive or listening roles such as sitting next to a child during whole class instruction.

The degree of autonomy with which LSAs were deployed was 45.40% fully autonomous, 32.06% partially scripted and 21.27% fully scripted. This ratio is very similar to that with which the LSAs displayed autonomy in the type of support they provided pupils as well as the way in which they were deployed.

Observed communications across the total 315 minutes of observations totalled 86 (roughly 27% of the observations). The majority of the communications were initiated by the LSA (50 occasions). Of these communications 39 were task focused, 34 were pupil focused, 11 were regarding social aspects and 14 were regarding other issues.

### 4.3.1.3 Impact

	<b>Combined</b>	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
	<b>Observations</b>	
<b>ECM outcome</b>		
<i>Be healthy</i>	54	17.14
<i>Stay safe</i>	59	18.73
<i>Enjoy and achieve</i>	214	67.94
<i>Make a positive contribution</i>	18	5.71
<i>Achieve economic well-being</i>	0	0
<b>Benefactor</b>		
<i>Target individual</i>	160	50.79
<i>Other individual</i>	28	8.88
<i>Target group</i>	118	37.46
<i>Other group</i>	9	2.86
<i>Whole class</i>	0	0

**Table 4-3: Whole school observation data for 'impact' framework.**

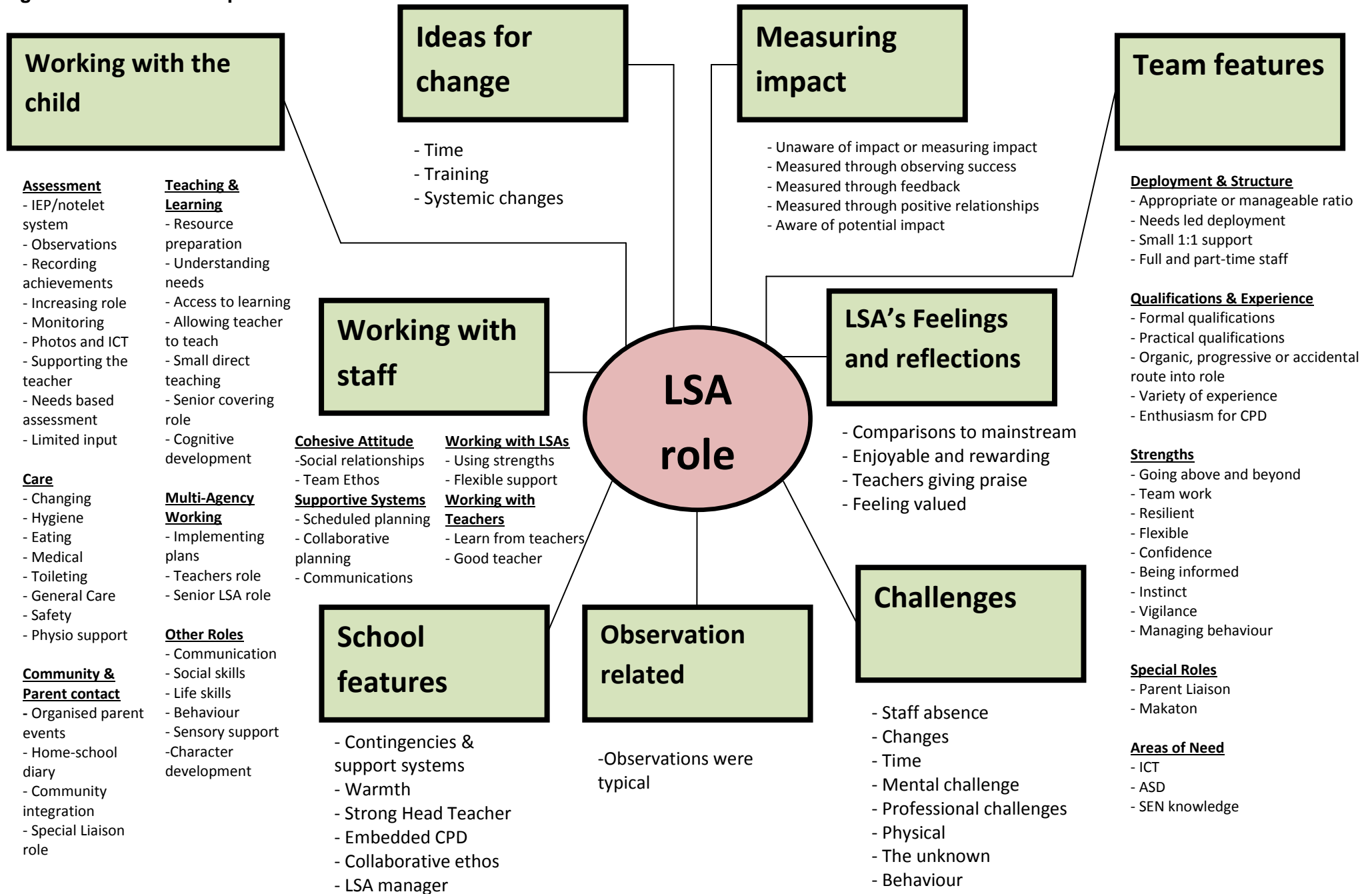
When the observations were focused on the impact of the LSAs role, the researcher observed the primary impact of their actions to contribute towards 'enjoying and achieving' (67.94%), 'staying safe (18.73%), 'being healthy' (17.14%) and 'making a positive contribution' (5.71%). As a primary benefactor of LSAs support, the ECM outcome of 'achieving economic well-being' was judged by the researcher to be absent. Of these contributions towards ECM outcomes, the target child was observed to be the main benefactor on 50.79% of occasions and a target group was observed to be the main benefactor on 37.46% of occasions. Non-target individuals or groups received roughly 9% of LSAs contributions towards ECM outcomes. These observations are further integrated into the emerging themes within figures 4-4, 4-6, 4-8, 4-14 and 4-18.

## 4.4 Semi-Structured Interviews with LSAs and Final Themes

Each participant engaged in a 30-40 minute semi-structured interview based around the three units of analysis, the LSA supporting the child, the LSA working with staff and the impact of the role. In addition to this, four semi-structured group interviews

were completed for each class in the school. These were then merged to create a thematic map of the LSA representing the whole of Summerville School, shown in the figure below. The reader may benefit from studying this map before progressing through to the extrapolated accounts of the results which follow. Each organising theme is reported individually within a diagram outlining the organising theme, subsumed sub-themes and codes. Following each diagram is a description unpicking the organising theme as well as referenced figures integrating the systematic observations. Finally, a thematic map portraying the more concise perceptions of the LSA role offered by the HT will also be discussed in cross analysis with the whole data corpus. Within this section the descriptions of each code will be paired with supporting extracts from the LSA, group or HT interviews.

Figure 4-2: Thematic map of LSA role



#### 4.4.1 Working with the Child

The first organising theme was present from the start of the thematic analysis as part of the coding manual. **Working with the child** comprised the majority of the codes and extracts from the LSA and group interviews, which reflects the anticipated position of the child within the LSAs' role. The sub-themes identified within this organising theme are also part of the coding manual and are identified as: **assessment; care; community and parent contact; multi-agency working** and **teaching and learning**. In addition to this another sub-theme emerged from the coding process that is not part of the coding manual. This is defined as **other roles**.

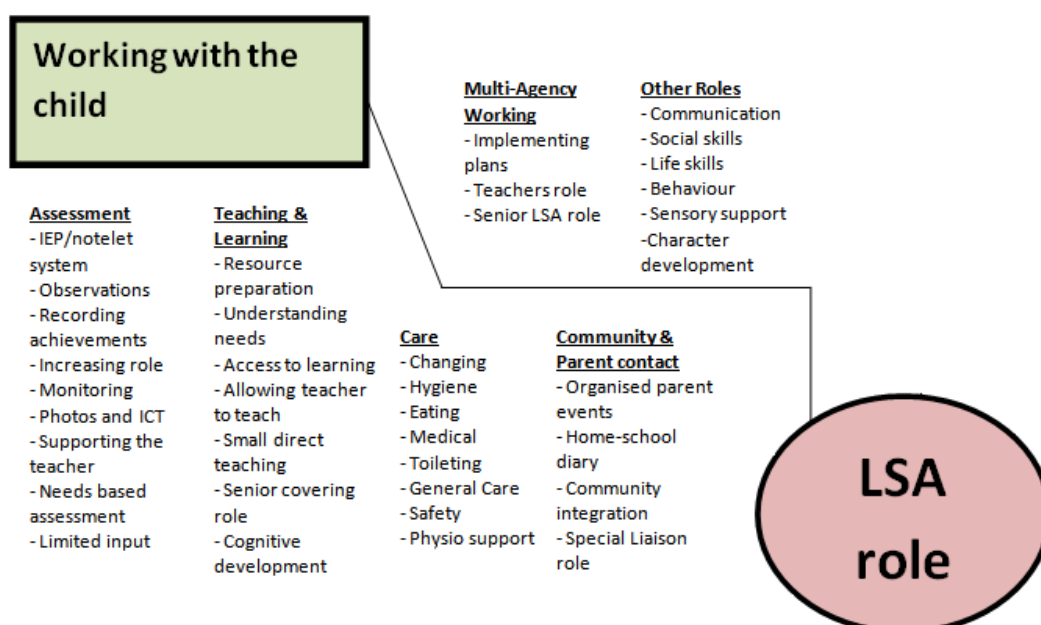


Figure 4-3: Arm of thematic map representing the theme 'working with the child'.

##### 4.4.1.1 Assessment

Within the sub-theme of **assessment** nine codes are finalised. The first was **IEP/notelet system** which represents the ongoing method that the LSAs and the class teacher have of recording pupil's progress:

*"Some days you haven't got time to being saying to the Teacher, 'Oh by the way this has happened.' So whatever you've worked on, if there's a piece of work it would have an annotation. There's always like little flips [pads] in the room and you just jot down things that you know that have*

*worked really well, so that the Teacher's got that record of post-it's"*  
(C1LSA4<sup>10</sup>)

All children's IEPs are displayed on the wall of the classroom with their targets clearly laid out. With this in place, LSAs are fully aware of each child's individual targets and any progress that a child makes (whether it is during a targeted piece of work or observed during a less specific group activity) is recorded on a post-it or notelet and pinned to the child's IEP for updating at an appropriate stage. This is not the assessment framework used by the school, however it is the method within which assessment is completed. It maximises the potential contribution from staff towards the assessment process as targets are clearly marked and commentary on pupils' progress towards these targets is encouraged through an open notelet recording system. This method is embedded amongst all the staff as part of the school's PARRC approach to learning (this is discussed in section 4.2). This is an important revelation of the LSA role as there is little evidence of LSAs playing such a key role in the assessment process (Farrell, 1999). Minodo, Mayer and Xin, (2001), propose five major role components in the role of the mainstream TA, none of which are linked to assessment: instructional, school support, liaison, personal support and one-to-one support (Minodo, et al., 2001). Views offered in Farrell et al.'s (1999) research also highlight the perception that involvement in assessment is a challenging role for LSAs and one which distinguishes their role from that of the teacher. Farrell et al. (1999) also found that within a school for pupils with SLD, the lead teacher had a pivotal role in pupil assessment and the supporting LSAs had less opportunity to engage in this process. One of the suggestions emerging from their research was that LSAs are well placed to provide evidence of pupils' interactions and responses as part of a significant contribution towards the ongoing assessment of pupil progress (Farrell et al., 1999). The example of the ways in which the LSAs use the **IEP and notelet system** is a fine example of this in practice.

The next coding contributing was **observations**:

*"We do try and get observations in as well and sometimes we say, 'Oh, no we haven't done a log for \*\*\*\*', so we'll do an observation."* (C1LSA1)

The observations referred to by the LSAs link directly with the **IEP and notelet**

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<sup>10</sup> C1LSA4 is a code used to identify the LSA. 'C1' represents class 1 and 'LSA4' represents LSA number 4 within that class. This code helps the reader to identify the distribution of extracts throughout the research.

**system** highlighted above. These observations are ongoing and take place throughout the day, however, as highlighted by the second quote, lessons and days in any school can be unpredictable and on occasions, planned observations may have to be scheduled in order to ensure that all children's IEP targets are being addressed. This system of planned and organic observations also helps to support the next code identified in the data which is **recording achievements**:

*"In our Base we've got like a Golden Moments Book; so if we see a child doing something that's special to them, or it's an achievement to them, then we write it down in the book" (C4LSA1)*

This code is a reflection of the importance of a needs-based and wide-scope approach to recording achievements. The second code highlights the process of LSAs recording all achievements made by pupils whether they are one of the three or four targets from their IEPs or whether they are important life skills beginning to emerge such as fastening a button on a jacket. Again, this approach is integral to the PARRC approach to assessment and learning as highlighted in the Summerville prospectus. This broad spectrum approach to assessment could arguably be an example of the distinct role that LSAs play in assessment within special schools.

What appears to be emerging from the data and codes in relation to the LSAs role in assessment is that the structures and process are bespoke, organic and distinctive of the school. As highlighted by Lewis, Lindsay and Phillips (2010), there is a dearth of evidence regarding systematic assessment processes in special schools (Lewis et al., 2010). What appears to emerge as a result is a specific and distinct type of assessment unique to the special school and reflective of a multi-agency approach (Lewis, Lindsay & Phillips, 2010). This unique approach to assessment and the absence of generic assessment process follows the trend away from SEN-specific pedagogies as identified by Lewis and Norwich (2000). In their research into the different pedagogies prescribed for teaching SEN, they identify multiple and non-distinct teaching methods for children with SEN. One common factor that they did observe was a term they coined 'high-density teaching'<sup>11</sup> (Lewis & Norwich, 2000). In a similar vein, the assessment process adopted by LSAs at Summerville School could indeed be defined as 'high-density assessment'. LSAs and teaching staff in a mainstream school are likely to make observations of academic achievements, non-academic achievements and will also display pupil work and discuss pupil progress.

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<sup>11</sup> 'High-density' teaching is defined by Lewis and Norwich (2000) as specialised adaptation to common teaching approaches.



However, the approach identified in the current research appears to be a constant and high-density approach with an increased focus on all achievements as opposed to top down legislatively driven targets.

The code defined as **monitoring** is another example of this ongoing, tight and 'high density' approach to assessment:

*"The Teacher will have advised what they want the child to achieve for that particular session. We sort of monitor it and work with them."  
(C3LSA1)*

*"Yes, they can do their buttons up now, or laces or whatever. It's all monitored." (C2LSA2)*

This code and the corresponding extracts are linked more to the semantic concept of monitoring that the LSAs refer to. It suggests an ongoing and constant approach to assessment which takes place throughout the day, in targeted and untargeted sessions, by linked and non-linked staff and through a variety of tools (observations, videos, photographs and notelets). Here is another example of 'high-density assessment' which may be less likely to occur in the roles of mainstream LSAs. This code appears to represent less of an actual process of LSA engagement, as it doesn't tell us anything additional about the tangible role of the LSA, however, it does offer us an insight into the LSAs mind-set and perspective regarding the way assessment should take place.

As well as being ongoing, the LSAs' role in assessment is increasing. The code defined as **increasing involvement** is a direct reflection of one of the schools' five areas of development identified in the pen portrait of the school as developing assessment of children (section 4.1):

*"Yes, well since \*\*\*\* and \*\*\*\* [HT] have been in the School they've implemented that support staff have a big say in bits and bobs throughout." [Following on from comments about assessment and the B-Squared method] (C1LSA2)*

This code is evidence of the growing role that LSAs play in contributing to the assessment process. By involving LSAs, Summerville School is adopting the approach suggested by Farrell et al. (2009) in that by pooling resources, schools can create a more comprehensive resource for assessment planning and provision. Despite this increased role, there was still limited reference to the more formal

aspects of assessment utilising P-Levels and completing the B-Squared method. Although a number of LSAs mentioned the method of B-Squared (see discussions related to the code: **limited input**) there was little explanation of what it entailed. Later in the results section, the themes emerging from the HT offer further insight into the developing role that LSAs have in being involved with the P-Level assessment process.

The use of **photos and ICT** in the assessment process was the next code identified. Whilst one of the previous codes, **monitoring**, may be considered more of a mentality or philosophy of assessment, this code more clearly outlines a tangible method:

*“Support them in areas like, we need photographic evidence so we make sure we’ve got the photographic evidence” (C4LSA1)*

*“Every Tuesday we will do IT jobs which probably get passed down a little bit, like emptying the camera and putting the photographs into files, things like that” (C1LSA2)*

Using photographic evidence and then processing this via ICT methods is integral to recording the achievements of the children and young people at Summerville School. When visiting the school, there is evidence from the proficiency of this approach as photos of pupils engaging in learning activities or reaching personal achievements are peppered throughout the school, the school’s website and the school’s prospectus. This method of recording assessment was made even more efficient by having a camera in each classroom. An area in which this style of assessment became less proficient is when it came to processing these images and organising them using ICT software. This will be discussed in more depth within the theme of **team features** and **school features**.

An interesting use of photographic evidence is highlighted by one LSA:

*“Taking pictures off a camera; putting pictures into folders; on a Friday we have an Assembly – putting pictures ready for our Assembly into different files” (C1LSA3)*

This strategy is not without difficulty and will be discussed later (section 4.4.8.5); however, it does serve a number of beneficial purposes. By displaying photos to pupils on a weekly basis, the LSAs and the school are helping to involve pupils in their own self-assessment. They are able to recognise and validate their experiences

and it could be argued that it helps the children to consolidate their learning. Williams (2005) suggests that the use of cameras and photography can have a number of benefits in the classroom. In Williams' study, cameras were used to document process such as cooking and crafts, and photographs were also used as cues and reminders for children suffering from memory difficulties. Whether staff are using photographs and camera equipment for this purpose or not, it is likely to have the same effect for the children in terms of helping them to recall previous experiences and re-live their achievements.

**Supporting the teacher** identifies actions, perceptions and thoughts that reflected the LSA role as a specifically supportive role for the Class Teacher when it came to assessment of children's progress:

*"Obviously we have some input because we write what we see up there and we verbally say to the Teacher, 'Oh, I saw so and so doing this today.'" (C2LSA2)*

*"The Teacher collates all the bits of paper and puts it all against and they'll move onto new IAP's. It's the Teacher's really who do the P-Levels and the B-Squared." (C1LSA3)*

The LSAs in the school take a very active (high-density) role in the recording of information towards assessment, as well as knowing the targets, and milestones that the children are aiming for. Where the LSAs appear to have less of a role (although it is growing) is with the more formal P-Level and B-Squared assessment process, as well as in planning for future targets and formally establishing the baseline of the child's performance. The support being offered to teachers in the assessment process is an element that was distinctly lacking in the findings from the DISS project (Blatchford et al., 2009a). LSAs played a significant role in providing positive support for teachers within the DISS project, however, when it came to supporting the assessment process the only contributions that the LSAs were judged to make were in freeing up time for teachers to engage in assessment. This finding did not go unnoticed and Blatchford et al. (2009a) identified a number of 'issues' in relation to the training and preparedness of support staff. One of these issues was that important pupil information provided by support staff was underused in teachers' wider planning, assessment and classroom interactions (Blatchford et al., 2009a). In contrast to these findings, the contribution that LSAs in Summerville School make towards supporting the teacher in the assessment process and with the assessment

process in general are significant and central to the role.

The penultimate code identified within this sub-theme is that of a **needs based assessment**. This may be confused with a previous code identified as **recording all achievements** and there may well be some overlap between extracts. The difference between the two codes is that not all achievements being recorded will be in relation to the primary or current needs of the child. This code highlights that the focus of LSAs observations, photographs and notelet recording is directed towards the current needs of a child:

*“And you have to think that it is small steps; tiny, tiny little things some days. Like just this morning one little girl, she was just clapping to it [a song] but before she was trying to bite the child. it’s just so lovely. If you were not in there week in, week out, you wouldn’t notice – you’d think, ‘What’s so good about that?’ Even choosing their picture and not throwing it and wandering off.” (C1LSA2)*

Extracts like these indicate the recognition that LSAs have that small achievements for some children are very large steps based on their needs. With this knowledge it is possible for the LSAs to make specific assessments of their progress based on the individual’s needs. This is an important aspect of the LSAs role as it would suggest that what is most important to an effective role in assessing the children’s needs is getting to know the child and understanding their individual differences. This focus on a relationship and understanding needs is touched on in more depth in the sub-theme of **teaching and learning**.

The final theme **limited input** emerged as a contrasting code. Within the sub-theme of assessment there is a dense population of extracts all highlighting the frequent contributions made by LSAs to the assessment process (conscious and unconsciously made). This code emerged and was included within the final analysis to show that differing perceptions of role did exist:

*“We really don’t get involved that much in it [assessment]” (C2LSA1)*

*“It’s the Teacher’s really who do the P Levels and the B-Squared” (C1LSA2)*

This may only be a 'perception' and not a reality. It is evident from the interviews and codes that the notelet system and evidence gathering processes are uniform across the role of the LSA. For some LSAs this may not be perceived as contributing to the assessment process and it may be regarded as 'part of the job' without a conscious link being made to the fact that their work is an integral part of the assessment. What is also likely is that when referring to the term assessment, some of the LSAs may revert to the terms P-Level or B-Squared, which we have identified is teacher led.

Farrell et al. (1999) suggest that LSAs' observations, in conjunction with the skills offered by a teacher, allow for the pooling of resources in order to contribute maximally to the assessment of pupils' progress. Although we are not at the stage to discuss the ways in which LSAs and teachers communicate at Summerville School, the extent of LSAs high-density contribution to assessment and the multiple roles they play within the assessment process is a key aspect to the fulfilment of this combined potential. It also sets out a contrasting example for the LSA role from historical perspectives. Kennedy and Duthie (1975) clearly laid out guidelines for LSAs (previously referred to as auxiliaries) in that LSAs duties should not include the planning of teaching strategies, organisation and management of classrooms and the assessment of individual needs, amongst other things. Although this perspective is offered in relation to mainstream primary schools and is set very much in a time when inclusion was more of a daydream than a reality, this is still a highly removed position from that being described in relation to assessment in the current research.

#### **4.4.1.2 Care**

The sub-theme of **care** comprised eight codes: **changing; hygiene; eating; medical; toileting; general care; safety** and **physiotherapy support**. As with the previous sub-theme, a large number of extracts were coded that represented the role that LSAs have in providing a level of **care** for the children.

The first code identified was **changing** and this describes the role that LSAs have in helping support children in changing their clothes for the different weather and temperatures at lunch and break time, when children need changing after having accidents or spillages and helping children when their clothes become loose or are removed:

*“If they’ve been out playing, taking off their clothes and changing” (C1LSA4)*

Many of the children at Summerville School will experience difficulty with changing for various reasons such as: motor coordination difficulties, sensory difficulties or a lack of awareness regarding expectations. As many children will bring an additional change of clothes to school with them, this type of support is often frequently occurring.

The next code was identified as LSAs supporting with issues related to **hygiene**. Support in this domain involves helping children to wash their hands, cleaning faces, blowing noses, etc:

*“Cleaning them up when they have done messy play, keeping them tidy and looking nice.” (C4LSA2)*

As well as the numerous health benefits to support such as this, this last quote highlights that LSAs are aware of helping children to retain dignity at times when personal hygiene may be lacking. As reported in section 2.2.1., attitudes towards the education of children with SEN shifted dramatically between the mid-to-late 1900’s, moving away from labels such as ‘severely subnormal’, ‘idiot’ and ‘mentally retarded’. The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) first introduced the term dignity into the vocabulary of provision for children with SEN, insisting that inclusion and participation are essential to human dignity (UNESCO, 1994). Since this point, the term ‘dignity’ is less prevalent in the discourse of education, however, as with the example of the attitudes of the LSAs at Summerville School, it is likely to be embedded into the culture of the provision.

The next code was defined as **eating**. This code includes extracts demonstrating the support that LSAs offer to children when supporting the way that they consume food at lunch and break times. This may be in the form of physically feeding children, supporting children to develop their own eating skills, monitoring appropriate dietary needs or monitoring the quantity of food that children are consuming:

*“I’ve a little boy at the moment that I’m working alongside with. He’s been here a few months; he hasn’t had a drink since he’s been here and, obviously, with the weather changing that was really concerning me. Apparently he drinks at home so we couldn’t get a grasp of why he wasn’t drinking at school. So this week I made it a point that he will, hopefully, have a drink. So on my one-to-one with him at snack time*

*and at dinner time, managed to get him to drink a whole cup of juice and which was fab.” (C1LSA2)*

As well as supporting the physical aspects of eating, LSAs use dinner and snack time as an opportunity to help develop choice making by showing the children a number of photographs of lunch/dinner options and encouraging children to make a choice:

*“Snack time, we know we show symbols, the children can make a choice.” (C2LSA1)*

Supporting children’s **medical** needs was the next code identified within the sub-theme of care:

*“We’ve got one child who’s on medication in the morning so making sure they have it in a drink and making sure only they have that drink.” (C1LSA2)*

The extracts within this code suggest that LSAs do have a role in supporting children’s medical needs; however, it is common that these are limited to administering medication. As highlighted later on in the data from the HT, LSAs do complete competencies in providing medical support which is led by the school nurses. These competencies are generally only required when on external trips:

*“School has to give [medical support] when we’re off the school premises we can’t take a Nurse with us because we’re not insured to do that.” (C3LSA1)*

This is an example of the ‘assistant’ or ‘supportive’ role of the LSA in that their main role with medication is to be competent in lower level medical duties but ultimate medical responsibility lies with the on-site school nurse. Offering medical support is an area that some LSAs feel less competent with and may even create anxieties:

*“If we go on a trip we have to take out certain medicines that they may need if their epileptic or ... I feel ok with that but I don’t think I’d take on that responsibility again, it was a lot.” (C2LSA2)*

Despite these anxieties, this element of the LSA role is an example of the huge variety of skills and responsibilities expected of the LSA in Summerville School. With so many varying responsibilities, one may wish to represent the role using the literal analogy of the ‘general practitioner’.

LSAs also support children throughout the day with **toileting**. Little detail and embellishment was given to the role of supporting toileting or toileting training. This may indicate that it is a routine and habitual aspect of the role which is performed at a very autonomous level.

Offering **general care** was the next code identified. This code does not reflect tangible examples of responsibilities related to care; instead it represents an attitude to the over-arching role that LSAs play in supporting children through the responsibility of care:

*“With care we would make sure all their needs are met.” (C1LSA4)*

A historical perspective of SEN provision may have focused more upon the general care role of the LSA in the special school setting as highlighted by one LSA:

*“You can’t say that I don’t think you can actually say that I make sure that I toilet them, that was years ago and I just think that it’s moved on.” (C1LSA3)*

As reported in the following sub-themes within the organising theme of **working with the child**, there are a vast number of roles that LSAs report as responsibilities. Roles relating to care make up only a percentage of a more balanced role than may have been anticipated historically.

**Safety** was the penultimate code identified within this sub-theme and this covers a number of expectations that the LSAs have of themselves in terms of keeping the children safe at all times:

*“I don’t know if you’ve noticed but we’ve got panic buttons just in case anything serious happens. It’s not only just for that sort of situation but also for medical; if one of the children are in trouble then we hit that and everybody comes running.” (C3LSA2)*

Safety measures are evident throughout the school, including panic alarms, secured entrance and exits and as stipulated in the school prospectus, Summerville School embrace the ECM outcome of staying safe (along with the remaining outcomes) within the school policy and procedures. In addition to this the school outline a clear and pro-active stance in relation to child safeguarding which is also outlined in the prospectus.

The remaining code was defined as **physiotherapy support**:



*“Physio’s we can work with them if there’s a specific programme they want for the children.” (C4LSA2)*

Within the school, one of the classrooms is reserved specifically for interventions such as physiotherapy. During the mornings small groups of children with PMLD needs will be supported in this intervention room by multi-disciplinary professionals and two LSAs. The first quote highlighted here is an example of the way in which the LSAs link up with other professionals in a multi-agency capacity. This is highlighted again within the sub-theme of ***multi-agency working***.

Since the 1970 Education Act and the emergence of a strong special school identity in the UK, the importance of providing all children with an education has been without question. What may have changed more in recent years is the shift in the role that LSAs play in contributing to that education. As with the change in role of the mainstream LSA described by Hammersly-Fletcher and Lowe (2011) as “from general dogsbody to whole-class delivery”, LSAs perceive a similarly changing role in relation to the LSAs’ duties and responsibilities with the special school environment. Hammersly-Fletcher and Lowe’s suggestion of the changing LSA role was conceived of the mainstream LSA, however, similar shifts have been made for the LSA within the special school: Brennan (1982) suggested that the role of the LSA when supporting children with physical and sensory difficulties is to be their eyes, ears or mobility aid. It is unquestionable that responsibilities that can be categorised as care make up a large percentage of the LSA role, but it is now a lesser role than that of the support offered for teaching and learning. This is highlighted in the codes above and also within the observation data. When examining the total whole school observation data, the LSAs contributions amount to 22.54% towards the area of care, representing almost a quarter of their actions and duties. When examining this at a finer, individual class level, the figures suggest a wider variance around this figure ranging from 8% of LSA input to 35% of LSA input.

#### **4.4.1.3 Community and Parent Contact**

Within the sub-theme of ***community and parent contact***, four codes are finalised, ***organised parent events, home-school diary, community integration*** and ***special liaison role***. This sub-theme comprises all the LSAs’ views and perspectives

relating to contact with children's parents<sup>12</sup> and contact that the children will have with the wider community. The first code, **organised parent events**, represents the numerous occasions that LSAs have contact with parents through events or situations that have been arranged or scheduled as part of the school year:

*"We have coffee mornings so that we meet them then. We have parents evenings; we have an Assembly on a Friday which parents are very welcome to come to; we have a Christmas play which they all come to; Easter Fair; we've got a fete on Friday." (C2LSA1)*

As well as the informal or responsive methods with which LSAs and parents make contact, there are a number of regularly scheduled events that parents are encouraged to attend and at which LSAs play an important role. There are regular cycles of organised coffee mornings during which parents are invited to come into school and meet with other parents, teachers or LSAs and discuss issues relating to their child's progress or simply to make the most of an opportunity to talk with other adults sharing similar experiences. LSAs also have an opportunity to meet with parents during parent's evenings in addition to parents discussing progress with the class teacher. Some LSAs feel that parents value the communication they have with them in an equal capacity to the communications with the class teacher:

*"I think it's because of the nature of our role and with it being the whole child, you know, the caring side, the toileting side of things it's quite a personal thing and you can't write things in a book about things like that. Parents want to talk to you face-to-face." (C3LSA1)*

A more unique and school specific opportunity for LSAs to meet with parents is through the weekly Friday assemblies and seasonal events such as fetes and barbeques.

The second code identified within this sub-theme was **home-school diary**. This code represents the manner with which Summerville School ensure regular and detailed feedback with parents. It is a mechanism which relies heavily on the involvement of the LSAs:

*"We have a home schooling book, so the communication goes backward and forward." (C3LSA2)*

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<sup>12</sup> The term 'parents' is used in reference to the primary care giver for any given child, this may also include, extended family members, adopted parents or foster carers

The importance of this system is highlighted by comments from one LSA who reflects upon her own experience of being provided with a home-school diary to record the daily achievements of her own son with special educational needs:

*"I have to say from my own experience with my son, the book is the first thing, because he's non-verbal, so the book is the first thing I grab out of the bag, because that tells me about his day so I like to make sure that we do write our books and write things that I would want to know."*  
(C2LSA2)

These two codes highlight the differing ways with which LSAs play a role in communicating with children's parents at Summerville School. Dobbins and Abbott (2010), in their research into parental views of the partnerships they had with their child's special schools revealed three key areas which needed to be in place in order to achieve full parental satisfaction. These areas were 'communication', 'parental involvement' and 'developing partnerships'. When examining the areas with which Summerville School LSAs contribute to the school-parent partnership, Dobbins and Abbott's three areas offer a good comparative guide. The first area of 'communication' is demonstrated well by the home-school diaries, coffee mornings and reactive or responsive approach to parents' needs offered by LSAs. The second area identified by Dobbins and Abbott was 'parental involvement' and this is also demonstrated at Summerville School by the invitation offered to parents to engage with the assemblies held on Fridays (of which LSAs play a vital role in preparing resources and displaying the children's progress through the use of ICT and projected presentations). The final area suggested by Dobbins and Abbott is 'developing partnerships'. It could be argued that utilising a reciprocal tool such as the home-school diaries is a good example of a partnership in action, however, the researcher offers the view that this final area is less well developed based on the views and comments offered by LSAs.

**Community integration** represents the comments made by LSAs in relation to helping support children to become more integrated within their community and/or to develop the links they have with their wider social environment:

*"With the group that we've got at the moment - I support a child, like I've said before, to go to integration. He goes to another school every Tuesday morning so I support him on a one-to-one."* (C4LSA1)

The focus of the quotes within this code was towards contact with the wider social

domain through integration with mainstream schools. This integration process was supported by the LSAs to provide consistency and support for the children upon their visits to different settings.

The final code identified was **special liaison role** representing the role of one senior LSA who has the additional responsibility to liaise with the families of children attending the school:

*“I organise coffee mornings with different agencies that would benefit families. So, obviously, we’ve got the Family Fund; we’ve got a charity called Cerebra, we’ve got really close links with their Area Managers now so it’s really good.” (C1LSA4)*

This role is a specially designated role for one senior LSA and it is in place to bridge the gap between school and parents. In this instance the role is similar to that of the family support worker (commonplace within Local Authorities across the UK at the time of writing) whereby pro-active contact is made with parents and families in order to provide additional support through signposting, providing supportive relationships, linking with charities and sourcing funding.

This sub-theme stemmed from the coding manual and was originally conceived to be defined as community liaison. As the codes were generated the researcher felt that by combining the codes and extracts relating to community and parent contact, a better reflection of the LSAs role with society and families could be portrayed. Although evidence for community contact emerged through extracts relating to external trips and empowering children to access the social world, the researcher did not receive the level of comment anticipated regarding LSAs role in supporting children to integrate with their wider community.

#### **4.4.1.4 Multi-agency Working**

**Multi-agency working** is another sub-theme identified from the coding manual and this comprised three codes: **implementing plans**, **teachers’ role** and **senior LSA role**. The first code defined as **implementing plans** describes the main role that LSAs have in working with professionals from other disciplines in a multi-agency capacity:

*“Sometimes, if there was a new programme that needed to be worked*

*on a child then they'd show us how to do it so that we could continue it when they were not there.” (C4LSA1)*

When asked about the contact or role that LSAs had in working in a multi-agency capacity, the most common response was that of a responsive role in implementing plans recommended by professionals such as Speech and Language Therapists, Physiotherapists, Educational Psychologists (EPs), Nutritionists, health professionals and behaviour specialists amongst others. LSAs are in an ideal position to implement such plans as they have a good knowledge of individual pupils' needs, whether they are pedagogical, emotional or pastoral (Abbot, McConkey & Dobbins, 2011).

The second code to emerge within this sub-theme was that multi-agency working is very much the **teacher's role**:

*“It is through the Teacher but on the odd occasion, like last week, we had to have a whole Base Meeting with the Behaviour Team.” (C3LSA2)*

LSAs comments regarding multi-agency work revealed limited direct contact with other professionals and their input was described as being through verbal comments made to the teacher prior to multi-agency or multi-disciplinary working:

*“Nine times out of 10, if there's a meeting with a lot of support agencies and it's our chance to tell the Teacher, then we'll give the input, we'll give the information that she needs but then it tends to be the Teacher that attends the meetings.” (C4LSA1)*

As highlighted later when discussing the HT's perceptions, this secondary role was in a period of transition at the time and plans were being implemented to increase the role that LSAs had at the input level and not just at the output level.

The final code for this sub-theme was the perception held by LSAs that multi-agency working was predominantly a **senior LSA role**:

*“Yes. I mean they come into class but if anything needs referring it's done with \*\*\*\* [senior LSA] and things like that.” (C2LSA1)*

If the class teacher role is predominantly linked with multi-agency working and the LSA role has less direct involvement at the input level then the senior LSAs in the school would appear to have a level of involvement somewhere between the two. In the case of the two extracts above, direct reference is made to one particular senior

LSA who has a special additional responsibility to liaise with families and parents (referred to in section 4.4.1.3.)

LSAs would appear to have a definite role at the early input level in the way that they refer concerns to class teachers prior to multi-disciplinary meetings. In addition to this they have a more significant role at the output level in the way they place trust in a professional's advice and implement strategies and plans in order to target specific areas of development for young people. The absent component in this involvement is an engagement at the point at which multiple agencies and disciplines come to together. This is likely to be the 'decision making' level and the stage at which important decisions are made about the direction of pupil support. This may have implications in the feelings of empowerment that the LSAs have with the strategies that they are expected to implement. The common practice of the Educational Psychologist in consultation meetings can help to expand on this point. As highlighted by Cherniss (1997), there is significant value in 'participation' when planning for interventions and additional support, and this value lies in the feelings of empowerment and ownership of ideas within the individual. Future LSA involvement at the planning stage of multi-agency work is likely to incorporate increased involvement and therefore also increased feelings of empowerment and ownership by the schools' LSAs.

#### **4.4.1.5 Teaching and Learning**

Within the sub-theme of ***teaching and learning***, eight codes are identified, ***resource preparation, understanding needs, access to learning, allowing teacher to teach, small direct teaching, senior covering role*** and ***cognitive development***.

***Resource preparation*** reflects the number of duties and responsibilities that LSAs perform in preparing resources and materials for the lesson as well as making displays and responding to organisational needs within the classroom:

*“Now we do passports, place mats. For leavers we've got to do a photo story, so it's getting the photo story ready to pass on. I know it's simple little things but...” (C4LSA2)*

LSAs have a very active role in supporting the production and management of

resources and this could be compared to the more traditional role of the LSA highlighted within the literature (Clayton, 2006 and Kolvin et al., 1981). The LSAs role goes beyond the role of simply following instructions and LSAs at Summerville School are invited to play an active role in generating ideas and direction:

*“We have meetings and you try and put any ideas together, the different themes coming up; you bounce ideas off each other, try and include the whole staff.” (C3LSA1)*

The second code was defined as **understanding needs** and is arguably one of the most important roles of the LSA in the special school environment. Lacey (2001) used the concept of ‘understanding needs’ as a first line of enquiry when exploring the role of the LSA in supporting SLD and PMLD pupils in the mainstream environment. Lacey found that LSAs’ frustrations lay in other members of staff not being *“in tune with the needs of such pupils”* (Lacey, 2001, pp. 164). The extract below offer great examples of the similar recognition that LSAs have about the importance of *understanding needs*:

*“I mean, we’re all supposed to be very familiar with the IEP so the focus on those two children, what their working on throughout the day during Circle Time, during the Hello Time, during Snack Time they are working on choosing symbols or pointing or saying or signing.” (C1LSA3)*

Being able to understand the children’s varying needs is only made possible through the consistent and highly specific way that the children’s IEPs are maintained and displayed in each classroom. The **IEP/notelet system** referred to in section 4.4.1.1 results in IEPs being up-to-date and LSAs are not only able to view them whilst on display, but they become immersed in them as they play the integral role within the **IEP/notelet system**. LSAs also have to be able to build relationships with children in order to establish the nuances of meaning in every child’s actions. This is something that some LSAs pride themselves in and is discussed in section 4.4.8.

The next code is **access to learning** and this comprises the extracts highlighting the different roles that LSAs perform in order to ensure that children are able to access the learning opportunities being provided throughout the day:

*“You’ve got to be very patient and you’ve got to keep drip-feeding it in; repetitively doing the same thing and you think they’ll never get it.”*

(C2LSA1)

*“It’s all introduced in a simple way anyway so that, therefore, children are learning in some way. I mean, you could just sit down there and say do, do, do. You’ve got to make it exciting, you’ve got to make it interactive.” (C2LSA1)*

This is a good example of how far the role of the LSA has developed. LSAs at Summerville School are not only aware of the importance of differentiation but the comments offered by LSAs suggest they are going beyond this by engaging in this differentiation process. This is not uncommon within recent literature, Butt and Lowe (2011) highlighted that despite not having to have any formal qualifications, LSAs are sometimes expected to perform complex tasks such as differentiation and curriculum modification. This is certainly evident at Summerville School.

**Allowing the teacher to teach** describes the actions taken by the LSAs which allow the teacher to continue to teach the lesson:

*“We set all the paperwork up so that she can just come in and find whatever she wants.” (C4LSA2)*

LSAs complete a number of roles that ultimately help the teacher to teach the lesson, these can range from small instances of support such as helping a child to remain seated during teacher instruction, to more significant tasks such as preparing paperwork and resources to increase the amount of time that teachers can spend teaching. Blatchford et al. (2009b) found that teachers generally judged that the presence of LSAs had led to a decrease in their workload and an increase in the time they spent teaching. When observing the LSAs in their role within the classrooms, it is the researcher’s opinion that the most valuable role in allowing the teacher to teach was the smaller instances of support such as sitting with children to help reduce their anxiety or to prevent disruptive behaviours from escalating.

**Small direct teaching** was the next code within the sub-theme and represents the occasions when LSAs adopt a teaching role for individuals or smaller groups of children:

*“The teaching, for instance, today I was with \*\*\*\* with his reading and he’s not vocal in his reading at all but he does know his words. So I get some words out to see if he can match the sentences in his book and he is very, very good.” (C4LSA3)*



As has been demonstrated up until this point, LSAs at Summerville School adopt a plethora of roles extending into direct teaching. LSAs deliver direct teaching at either the one-to-one level or for smaller groups and this tends to take place once the class teacher has delivered a period of whole class teaching at the beginning of each lesson. The concerning trends referred to by Giangreco (2003) as the 'training trap' (where LSAs become sufficiently trained to the point where the school transfers primary teaching responsibility of children with SEN to the LSA) and 'double standards' (whereby the least qualified members of staff are given the responsibility for educating those with the most need) arguably do not apply in this case, as all the children have a high level of special educational need. As we have previously seen, LSAs play an important role in helping children to remain on task or to remain focused throughout the lesson. Without this support, it would be likely that progress would be significantly impeded. There is then a necessity for LSAs to frequently work with smaller groups or with individual children and this lends itself to simultaneously offering direct instruction in order to help children progress. Issues may arise in how this teaching is delivered in light of the absence of teacher training, although, as highlighted by Bedford, Goddard, Obadan and Mowatt (2006), staff do not necessarily need a teaching qualification to make a real difference to learning and behaviour. Recent research has also demonstrated that LSAs often share with teachers a common pedagogical understanding of teaching practices (Watkinson, 2002).

The next code was defined as **senior covering role** and it includes LSA extracts referring to the responsibility that senior LSAs have in covering lessons when teaching staff are absent or otherwise engaged:

*"Also, if the Teacher's are having time out or someone is off sick, would you mind 'stepping up', which means you actually take over. That's what my job would be." (C2LSA1)*

The term 'senior LSA' is used exclusively for LSAs who have the Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) qualification. One of the responsibilities and expectations of the senior LSAs at Summerville School is to occasionally cover the responsibility of teaching the class when the class teacher is absent or unavailable (this is restricted to a 'covering' role only and is never a permanent arrangement). One of the recognised impacts of the HLTA qualification is a major shift in responsibilities towards teaching at the whole class level (Burgess & Shelton

Mayes, 2009). This shift, if consistent outside of Burgess and Shelton Mayes research, is not in balance with the HLTA training program and expectations, and the insistence on a teaching role being only 'temporary' or for 'cover' is open to abuse. Although this is not evident in Summerville School, frustration was voiced by one senior LSA in relation to the added 'cover' pressures that arise through staff absence. Senior LSA frustration may be a reflection of this occasional imbalance that may occur when staff are absent for extended periods:

*"And not having a teacher it's damned awkward. We've had a hard year. Yes, we've had a very hard year." (C3LSA2)*

The final code was almost not included within the presentation of findings as it is a code comprising only one extract. However, the researcher felt the code of **cognitive development** was an important one to include within the findings as it highlights a specific knowledge base within the LSA as a team:

*"To know that they can even touch a switch and noises come out of it; I mean that's helping them in that way as well with cause and effect and cognitive things." (C4LSA1)*

This demonstrates the specific skills and knowledge bases that the LSAs in Summerville School demonstrate through differing contributions. Having an understanding of child development and specifically cognitive development is an asset in any educational environment and a cause to promote the sharing of knowledge and skills within class teams and across the school.

LSAs have a significant input in the domain of **teaching and learning** and this is reflected in Lacey's (2001) research into the role of LSAs when supporting pupils with SLD and PMLD across mainstream and special school settings. Lacey found that engaging in activities described as learning and teaching was most frequently referred to when asked what they did in class.

#### **4.4.1.6 Other**

The final sub-theme emerging as part of the inductive analysis is **other roles** and this comprises seven codes, **communication, social skills, life skills, behaviour, sensory support** and **character development**. These codes represent the roles of the LSA that could not be incorporated into the themes provided by the coding manual. The eight codes represent a wide spectrum of areas with which the LSA

supports the child, however, these areas are validated by few codes in comparison to the organising themes of **teaching and learning** and **care** for example.

The first code was defined as **communication**, and represents the ambitions held by LSAs and the actions they engage in that help support children's developing communication skills:

*"We teach them to be able to make us understand and we help them understand by communicating through Makaton language." (C2LSA1)*

The level of support that a child receives in the area of communication will depend on their needs and this code is linked directly to the code of **needs based assessment** discussed in section 4.4.1.1. It is likely that all the children in the school benefit from the communication aids used throughout the school such as the visual systems based on the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), the embedded use of *Makaton* and the clear and concise approach to language used by staff.

The next code grouped within the sub-theme of **other**, was **social skills**. This code represents an area of development often targeted by the LSAs in a formal and informal capacity:

*"Which area of a young person's development do you think you have most impact on? I'd like to think social skills to be honest." (C1LSA2)*

*"It might be about taking turns or being a good friend." (C1LSA3)*

A code defined as **life skills** also emerged:

*"The impact of them being able to have the life skills I think we do that very much so." (C2LSA1)*

This code describes the input that LSAs have in developing children's self help and self care skills such as supporting them to wash their hands, make choices, use the toilet, use cutlery, etc.

Supporting **behaviour** is another code included within the sub-theme of **other**. This code includes extracts from the LSA interviews where there is either a perception of

a behaviour support role or there are instances described whereby LSAs support the behaviour of children:

*“Well because I work so much with this one specific child, it’s her behaviour and we’ve had lovely feedback from outside agencies that have come in and can’t believe she’s the same girl.” (C4LSA2)*

This code was the only code within the sub-theme of **other** that was represented by a significant number of codes. The coding manual applied within the organising theme of **working with the child** covered the significant majority of the data, however, the researcher admits that issues pertaining to behaviour were not covered by the manual’s breadth.

The next code emerged as **sensory support**. This code describes the provisions offered by the school, and supported by the LSAs, in relation to providing children with an appropriate ‘sensory diet’ in order to calm anxieties, promote access or encourage communication.

*“Then another morning, if we were going to do a sensory session with another child who has real sensory issues, we would take him away and do a sensory diet.” (C3LSA1)*

The code of **character development** was also included within the domain of **other** roles as the researcher felt that it highlighted a rounded approach to supporting the developing child:

*“I really think that we actually developed the children’s personalities and sense of fun and feeling safe.” (C1LSA4)*

As portrayed in the sub-themes above, the organising theme of **working with the child** is a vast theme encompassing a wide range of duties and responsibilities. With a role that is so vast, it was often a struggle for LSAs to initially generate answers to questions regarding their general duties. A clear picture of the ways in which LSAs engage with working with children at Summerville School finally emerged only after completing the thematic analysis process.

### **Integrating the Observations: Working with the child**

With so many roles being required of the LSA, a certain level of autonomy must be expected. Across the whole school, the researcher observed LSAs to be directing their actions and engaging in roles at a predominantly autonomous level (45% of all the observations). However there is a variance across the classes ranging from 26% of observations in one class to 68% in another. What is consistent throughout all the classrooms is that observations of LSAs engaging in a fully scripted role were recorded least with consistently higher percentages in completing partially scripted or fully autonomous roles. This level of autonomy would suggest that LSAs do indeed rely on *instinct* (code identified in section 4.4.8.3).

The domain in which the majority of LSA focus was directed was *teaching and learning* (highlighted throughout the sub-theme of *teaching and learning*). Across the whole school site roughly 50% of observations were of actions targeting this domain. Again, when examining the classes at the individual level, the variance of the results is large, ranging from 67% to 28% of all observations having a focus on *teaching and learning*.

Figure 4-4: Integrating observation data for the unit of analysis: 'working with the child'

#### **4.4.2 Working with Staff**

The second organising theme is also from the coding manual and is defined as *working with staff*. Unlike the organising theme *working with the child* this organising theme contains sub-themes that have emerged from the data set through an inductive thematic analysis. These sub-themes were, *cohesive attitude*, *supportive systems*, *working with LSAs* and *working with teachers*.

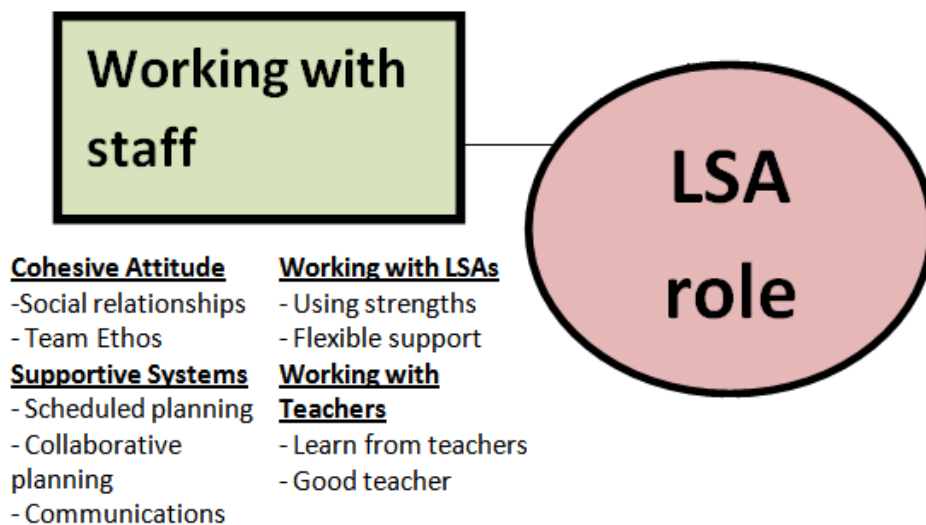


Figure 4-5: Arm of thematic map representing the theme 'working with staff'.

#### 4.4.2.1 Cohesive Attitude

The first subtheme that emerged is **cohesive attitude** comprising the two codes, **social relationships** and **team ethos**. The first of these codes, **team ethos**, represents the perception held across all classes that LSAs work well as a team and that the importance of the 'team' is recognised throughout the school.

*"I think we're a very good team in this school, very good. We all work together and we work together for the children which is, let's face it, the main reason why we're here." (C1LSA3)*

During the interview process (and prior to it) the LSAs commented frequently and earnestly about the cohesive nature of the relationships between the staff. So much so that it emerged as one of the strongest sub-themes within this organising theme. A crucial factor determining the success of the LSA teacher partnership is the strength of the relationship (Lacey 2001).

The second and final code within this theme is **social relationships**. There are multiple extracts within this code that validate the social closeness of members of the LSA team.

*“There are all sorts of social gatherings for one reason or another.”*  
(C4LSA3)

*“The girls are all coming round to my house tomorrow for curry and cocktails.”* (C2CT<sup>13</sup>)

*“There are good friendships here.”* (C2LSA2)

In most schools across the country there will be pockets of negative and positive interaction and feeling amongst staff. This may indeed be the case at Summerville School, but the data represents a highly positive collegiate attitude. Positive social or working relationships were found to be key factors when influencing staff morale and job satisfaction in the mainstream primary school environment (Evans, 1992). It would be a mistake to assume that commenting on social relationships would suggest a blasé attitude to their role, as communications regarding social aspects only occurred across 3.5% of the total 315 minutes of observation. These reports help to paint a picture of an LSA team who, despite experiencing multiple challenges, find a deep satisfaction in their role and undeniably, positive relationships breed positive working environments. This can only have a favourable influence in relation to the impact that the LSAs have within their role.

#### **4.4.2.2 Supportive Systems**

The second sub-theme of ***supportive systems*** comprises three codes, ***scheduled planning, collaborative planning*** and ***communications***. The first code was defined as ***scheduled planning*** and this represents the planned or scheduled opportunities that LSAs and class teams have to meet together in order to plan work.

*“Usually Wednesday morning we get together to so we know what we’re doing for the rest of the week.”* (C4LSA3)

*“We probably have one session where we all get together, when we look at like a Themed Week or a Themed Fortnight.”* (C3LSA1)

Typical planning schedules are evident throughout all of the LSA interview data, however, discourse using the words “usually”, “generally”, “probably” and “often” would suggest that these opportunities do not always occur. As discussed in section 4.4.7, one of the common concerns voiced by LSAs is a lack of planning time and

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<sup>13</sup> ‘CT’ represents a class teacher’s comment emerging through the group interviews

reflection time in order to discuss children's needs.

If the previous code represents the scheduling of planning, the next code represents the nature of the planning. **Collaborative planning** represents the team-focused planning that occurs at scheduled or un-scheduled times throughout the school week:

*"We try to put into place what we think as a group, as a team because we work as a team." (C3LSA2)*

Collaboration between teacher's and LSAs is pivotal in the planning of effective pupil support (Devecchi & Rouse, 2010) and this is clearly a feature of the planning at Summerville School. There is also no doubt that the relationships and the support offered between LSAs and class teachers is strong within the school (this is evident in the codes, **teachers give praise, good teacher communication** and **team ethos**). What is less evident is the strictly scheduled opportunities to plan collaboratively and with sufficient time being allocated. Collaboration offers an opportunity for the sharing of more technical knowledge as well as the personal and experiential knowledge acquired by all staff members in their day-in, day-out interactions with children (Devecchi & Rouse 2010). By increasing the opportunities for collaboration, teachers and LSAs can increase the efficacy of their supportive strategies.

The final code is **communications**. This code describes the perception that communication is an important tool in working effectively with one another:

*"It can be a nod, it can be just a little sign without it being too much – obviously with the challenging class that we've got, it works very well I think." (C4LSA3)*

One LSA describes the way in which her team interact; through subtle nuances in body language and suggestive facial expression. For these types of communication to become consistently effective and explicit within the team (as they are suggested to be in the above quote) then a team needs to have experience of working together and relationships need to be established. A common concern amongst LSAs is that they are frequently moved between teams at the end of each year (see section 4.4.7). Regardless of this concern, LSAs are able to quickly develop relationships and begin to recognise each other's subtle communications.



#### **4.4.2.3 Working with LSAs**

The fourth sub-theme within this organising theme is **working with LSAs** which is made up of two codes, **using strengths** and **flexible support**. The first code, **using strengths**, describes the perceptions that LSAs have of being able to draw upon the individual and collective strengths within the team.

*“So I think it’s about recognising each other’s strengths and then giving everyone chances to develop and improve.” (C1LSA1)*

*“And observing people that know that child already, watching how they work with that child and then you come back – you wouldn’t walk in and say, ‘right’, as the child would probably go ‘bang’. So I do tend to really take notice of other people before I would say anything.” (C1LSA4)*

There was an acute awareness amongst the LSAs that each member of the LSA staff had strengths that could be drawn upon. LSAs were aware of the benefits of observing experienced LSAs when interacting with challenging pupils as well as discussing issues with LSAs who have had previous success in similar areas. The success of being able to draw upon others’ strengths is another outcome that depends on the cohesiveness of the team and strong interpersonal relationships between LSAs.

The second code within the sub-theme of **working with LSAs** was **flexible support**. This code represents an essential aspect of the LSAs role. As each minute, lesson and day at the school is regarded as unpredictable, LSAs have to be flexible in supporting others or in switching roles and responsibilities when necessary;

*“Toileting, [for example] if someone’s busy we just say ‘send them in’ we’ll deal with it, you don’t say ‘they’re not mine this week they’re yours, you need to deal with it’.” (C2LSA2)*

*“No, with Support Staff we just share the roles, don’t we.” (C4CT)*

**Flexible support** is a code which represents the flexible and interchangeable ways that LSAs support and work with each other. This style of cross responsibility support is referred to by Lacey (2001) as being an important factor in helping to provide effective support for pupils. Lacey argues that this level of flexibility should not, however, eclipse role clarity. In this instance this does not appear to be the case, the

LSAs are very aware of the roles they are providing during periods when flexible and inter-changeable support is taking place.

#### **4.4.2.4 Working with Teachers**

The final sub-theme is **working with teachers** and this sub-theme is also made up of two codes, **learn from teachers** and **good teacher**. The first of these two codes was defined as **learn from teachers** and this emerged to encompass the views of LSAs that the class teacher provides opportunities of learning for the team;

*“That was the biggest thing now and again and you learn from \*\*\*\*\*, who’s my teacher, little tips – be aware of this, be aware of that – and it does, after a while, it just starts sticking.” (C4LSA3)*

Praise was frequently given by the LSAs for the class teachers and there was recognition of the learning that can be gained from either watching teachers carry out their roles or by actively seeking advice. In their research into collaborative LSA and teacher working, Devecchi and Rouse (2010) found that one of the most valued ways in which teachers can support LSAs is through teachers sharing their knowledge, skills and understanding with LSAs. If this element of support for LSAs is considered so valuable, those LSAs experiencing frequent cover supervisor support are likely to miss out on such a valuable opportunity:

*“The supply will go at 3.30 pm.” (C3LSA1)*

*“Or they don’t particularly want to. Yes, they’re just here for the money, Just sit there and expect us to do everything.” (C3LSA2)*

These often unavoidable situations are part and parcel of the school year, however, the reduced opportunities to learn from a consistent class teacher should be recognised.

**Good teacher** includes comments made by LSAs that highlight their appreciation of the class teacher:

*“Our Teacher’s brilliant, she’s just so organised and very good.” (C1LSA1)*

As highlighted in section 4.4.5., reciprocal praise is also offered by the teachers

towards the role and commitment of LSAs. This reciprocal enthusiasm for each other's professional role is a pivotal factor in developing effective working relationships and in ensuring job satisfaction (Evans, 1992).

This organising theme describes the perceptions held by LSAs regarding the ways in which they work with one another, and with teaching staff in the school. Carrington (1999) emphasises the importance of creating a school culture and ethos that builds a collective sense of belonging and participation. The strength of the code **team ethos** highlights this participation in abundance and discussed in section 4.4.4 are the feelings of warmth in the school that also help to foster that sense of belonging. Devecchi and Rouse (2010) also stress important factors for successful collaboration. In their research, teachers reiterated the need for LSAs to have access to relevant knowledge, and to participate in the decision-making process. There are many positive examples of this collaborative working, strength sharing, flexible support and social cohesion. LSAs were also aware of the areas of working with other staff that could be improved. Suggestions for ways in which this can be done, were limited to allowing extra time as highlighted in section 4.4.6.

#### **Integrating the Observations: Working with staff**

The observations examined communications between LSAs and teachers in terms of the direction of the communication and the focus of that communication. Of the 315 minutes of observation time, there were only 74 communications made. These were predominantly focused either towards a particular pupil or a particular task. A significantly lower number of communications were made relating to social factors. There was a strong sense of a social bond between LSAs (identified in the code **social relationships**) and the researcher feels that this was not represented by the small number of communications observed that would suggest this bond (occurring in only 11 of the 315 minutes). This may suggest a high level of professionalism from the staff, ensuring that personal or social conversation is kept outside of the classroom, or it may be one of the impacts of being observed by the researcher.

The small number of communications initiated by the teacher (occurring in 36 of the 315 minutes) supports the observed level of autonomy experienced by the LSAs in both their deployment and the types of support that they offer. It also reflects the way LSAs operate with **instinct**.

**Figure 4-6: Integrating observation data for the unit of analysis 'working with staff'.**

#### 4.4.3 Measuring Impact

The last organising theme included in the coding manual is that of **measuring impact**. This organising theme contains no sub-themes and is represented by five codes, **unaware of measuring impact**, **measured through observing success**, **measured through feedback**, **measured through positive relationships** and **aware of potential impact**.

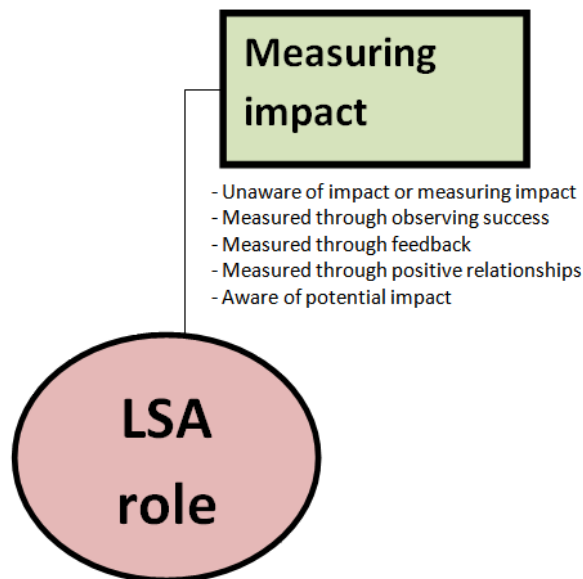


Figure 4-7: Arm of thematic map representing the theme 'measuring impact'.

The first code to emerge was **unaware of impact** or measuring impact. This code represents a common response from LSAs. When initially asked what their impact may be and how they measured their impact, LSAs frequently drew blanks and offered a limited response:

*"I definitely wouldn't know, not something I think about." (C1LSA3)*

*"Mmmh – I don't know." (C4LSA3)*

As highlighted in the literature review of special school assessment (section 2.2.3), Muncey and McGinty (1998) identified the challenges of measuring impact and progress in special schools. Following the emergence of pre-National Curriculum based assessment in 1998 and its revision in 2007, the P-Level system has been widely adopted as the primary measure of progress and impact in special schools.

Section 4.4.1.1, highlights the limited knowledge that LSAs have of the P-Level system, as this is regarded as an area that is teacher led. It is not surprising then, that LSAs were less detailed and informed about the ways in which their impact was measured and also with regards to the areas in which they have most impact. Contrastingly, throughout the interviews, the LSAs offered a plethora of ways in which they support young people and often in combination with recent examples (see section 4.4.1.). It may well be that LSAs initial lack of response to this questions was more to do with the formal language ('impact') used in the wording of the question asked by the researcher. The Summerville School prospectus makes reference to the way in which the ECM outcomes are embedded throughout the school: "*Embrace the outcomes of Every Child Matters within the school policy and practice*". This would be an ideal framework for LSAs to judge and measure their impact and then reflect upon the ways in which they support children. During the interviews there was no mention of the outcomes and until an alternative 'wider outcomes' measure is devised by government, LSAs may benefit from incorporating these outcomes into the way in which they operate. There is no doubt that the quality of provision is vast and targeted, however, it would be beneficial for LSAs to conceive this support within a framework such as the ECM outcomes. Rees (2010) argues that traditional concepts of impact focus on the end point of pupil learning as demonstrated in assessment tests. Locating LSAs' contributions within a qualitative framework such as the ECM outcomes would be a middle ground between more quantitative measures and simple perceptions of impact. This would also take into account experience and the role of the person supporting that learning, which Rees suggests cannot be ignored.

The next code was the first of four codes outlining the ways in which LSAs measure their impact. ***Measured through observing success*** describes the ways in which LSAs are able to gauge the success of their impact by observing the individual or collective success of the young people they are supporting:

*"For me, it's when you see an improvement in the children."* (C4LSA2)

LSAs are well placed to observe this success as they work with children with the high-density approach discussed in section 4.4.1. Their knowledge of the children's IEPs and their needs combined with the high-density approach to assessment provides numerous opportunities to observe success in small or larger steps.

The second way in which LSA's measure their impact is defined by the code

**measured through feedback:**

*“I could go on the reviews I’ve had and, obviously, what \*\*\*\* and \*\*\*\* have come out with in my reviews but I can only echo what they say. As \*\*\*\* said that she really appreciates my role in the School.” (C4LSA3)*

*“Parents. Like one Parent, when I was in the class with a specific child, he was brilliant; and then he moved on and when she heard that I was going to be in the classroom with him again she was so pleased and you think, ‘well that’s lovely’..” (C4LSA2)*

This feedback is offered to LSAs by parents, fellow staff or more formally through LSA evaluation which is completed by the HT and the Senior LSA Manager.

A third method which LSAs use to measure their impact is defined by the code **measured through positive relationships:**

*“Working with other members of the staff, with parents – you know if you can build a relationship with the parents it’s brilliant. You can phone up and it’s lovely.” (C4LSA2)*

*“It’s just knowing the children and being able to work as a team.” (C3LSA1)*

LSAs view the positive relationships that they are able to build with both parents and children as evidence of the positive impact of their role. Positive relationships could indicate that both parties within the relationships are happy with the contributions that LSAs are making, however, this is limiting in terms of providing us with information about where the impact lies and the extent of the impact.

The final code was **aware of potential impact** and this describes the awareness that LSAs have of the wide and potential impact of their role, despite experiencing difficulty in defining the impact:

*“I was going to say, it covers a vast area, right from personal hygiene to changing.” (C1LSA2)*

The positive impacts of LSA support in the mainstream classroom has been highlighted by Blatchford et al. (2009b) as being the increased gains in pupils positive approaches to learning (PAL). These include: pupil motivation, engagement, confidence and following instructions. From the interview data, a number of sub-themes emerged outlining the areas that LSAs perceived they had an impact (see

organising theme: **working with the child**). A number of these are comparable with the PALs described by Blatchford et al. Although there were no measures within the study to formally assess these areas, the positive contributions offered by LSAs and teachers, as well as the observed contributions to ECM outcomes (such as *enjoying and achieving* and *making a positive contribution*) would suggest that LSAs do indeed have a positive impact in those areas comparable to Blatchford et al.'s PALs. This code suggests a number of things. Firstly, LSAs sometimes find it difficult to directly attribute their actions to an impact. Secondly, LSAs are aware of the varying areas with which they can have a significant impact. Thirdly LSAs are able to give examples of times when their actions have had an impact in areas comparable to Blatchford et al.'s PALs, however, LSAs are not able to link these examples to a measure of impact such as the ECM outcomes or P-Level data. Finally, LSAs were able to measure their impact by being able to build relationships, through others feedback and through observing pupil's success.

#### **Integrating the Observations: Measuring Impact**

The final observation framework focused upon **Impact**. As already highlighted, LSAs found it difficult to explain and discuss how they measured their impact (see code **unaware of impact** or **measuring impact**) and they did not make reference to ECM outcomes or P-Level data. The observations give us an insight into how the LSAs' contributions can be measured. Across the 11 observations, the researcher judged roughly 68% of LSAs' actions to contribute primarily to the ECM outcome of *enjoying and achieving*. LSAs **observing pupils' success** would be a way of measuring impact that would be likely to fall within this outcome. *Being healthy* and *staying safe* were also primary outcomes receiving LSA support for 17% and 19% of their contributions. These may incorporate the LSAs' views of **positive relationships and feedback from parents** as *being safe* and *being healthy* are likely to be high priorities for parents. The observations also suggest that children receive the benefits of LSA impact more readily as an individual as opposed to when in a group situation.

**Figure 4-8: Integrating observation data for the unit of analysis 'measuring impact'.**

#### **4.4.4 School Features**

Following the three main organising themes that stemmed from the coding manual are six inductive organising themes emerging more organically from the data set. The first of which is the organising theme of **school features**. There are six codes that

make up this organising theme, **contingencies, warmth, strong HT, embedded CPD** (continued professional development), **collaborative ethos** and **LSA manager**.

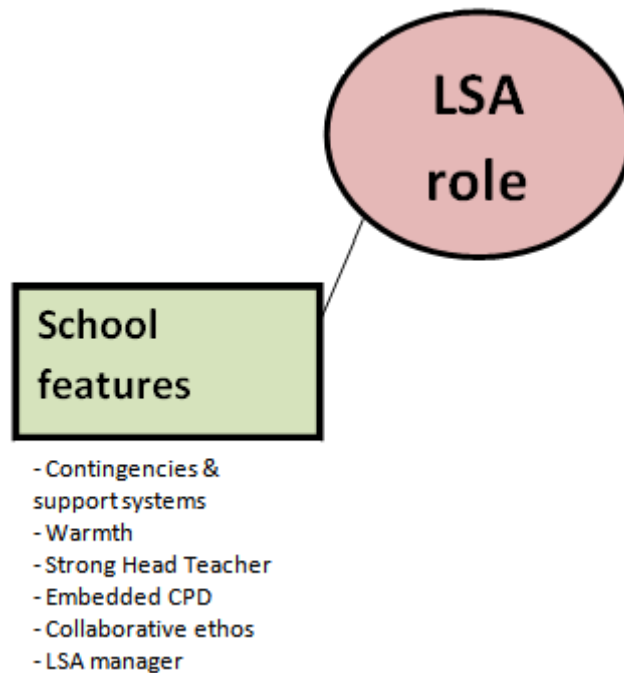


Figure 4-9: Arm of thematic map representing the theme 'school features'.

The first code within the organising theme of **school features** was **contingencies and support systems**. This represents the contingencies in place within the school to cover for unexpected eventualities and the systems embedded within the school to provide support for staff.

*"If \*\*\*\*s not in then she has it written down for the next teacher to take over." (C4LSA2)*

*"Everything's up on the wall for us, timetables and things." (C4LSA3)*

*"We've got a brilliant 'xxxx' that works here [ICT support]. You just say '\*\*\*\*' and she'll come and help you." (C4LSA2)*

Many of the LSAs expressed concerns about their confidence using ICT (see section 4.4.8). Similarly they expressed gratitude in equal measure for the ICT support provided throughout the school by an ICT technician. This demonstrates how the school has systems in place to support the needs of the LSAs within the school. The SEN environment has changed greatly in recent years (Williams, 2005). Quality ICT support and internal ICT training for staff is a pivotal factor if children's progress is to be effectively evidenced. As highlighted by Williams in his research



into the use of ICT in schools, there are often unusual challenges posed by students' unpredictable and non-linear intellectual progression. Managing and recording this progression can be testing within a staff team who have varying levels of ICT competency and thus ICT support is crucial. One LSA reported an efficient system for providing guidance to the covering teacher when there is a teaching absence. The success with which this is effective ultimately depends on the incoming supply teacher, and as noted by one LSA, this system does not always prevail;

*“[They] just sit there and expect us to do everything.” (C3LSA1)*

The second code was defined as **warmth** and this describes the school-wide feeling of warmth that staff, parents and visitors experience when visiting the school (this was confirmed by the reflections of the researcher in the first few days of data gathering):

*“And I suppose when you get new parents in, or even old parents, they always feel this warmth when they come in.” (C1LSA3)*

*“That’s what I noticed when I first came here. I did a year of voluntary service because I met \*\*\*\* in the swimming pool and she said, ‘come and work at our school’ and it was the warmth from everybody and the kids I met that made me stay here.” (C2LSA2)*

There was an unequivocal perception amongst the LSAs of a feeling of warmth that exists within the school. The feeling appears to be prevalent not only with the LSAs themselves but also it is reported by parents and visitors alike. Feelings of warmth are conducive to developing a school-wide nurturing approach to education and this is an essential element for children whose development is a cause for concern (Lyndon, 1992).

The next code to emerge was the LSAs' feelings that they had a **strong HT**:

*“She’s like one of these ones who can do anything with the children, run the school, so you know I think that’s really good because she obviously keeps it all together.” (C2LSA2)*

Reference was made to the HT's skills base and organisational skills. Offering such a high regard for the senior leadership team within the school suggests an effective working team with strong relationships. Such high regard also indicates a level of

trust held by the LSAs in the decisions and actions taken by the HT. This is an important factor in ensuring effective take-up of new initiatives rolled out across the school.

The fourth code was defined as **embedded CPD** and it reflects the LSA commentary describing the level of CPD that takes place within the school:

*“Yes, at school we have different things happening once the children have gone home so, for instance, on a Tuesday night it’s IT training.”*  
(C1LSA2)

*“We’re doing ongoing courses all the time.”* (C1LSA1)

It is important that in any educational setting, staff training, pedagogy, curriculum and resources reflect the changing staff and pupil population (Farrell, 2006). The biennial system of LSA reviews and questionnaires is a step towards ensuring these training needs are met. The LSA manager position in the school also offers an alternative route for LSAs to communicate their needs to the senior management team. Burgess and Shelton Mayes (2007) also suggest that school based staff development can be enhanced by a mentoring model for LSAs. The feasibility of such a scheme in Summerville School cannot be assessed in the current research.

**Collaborative ethos** is the penultimate code within this organising theme and this code mirrors the code of **team ethos** found within the organising theme of *working with staff*.

*“As a school, we also have class meetings but as a school we all sat down and we all go through it with each other, help each other and give our opinions.”* (C4LSA3)

Having a collaborative ethos running through the school helps LSAs to feel valued and insists that their unique skills base is recognised. The feelings of family and collaboration are also a step to ensuring that the wide ranging skills base and varying levels of experience across multiple classes is shared and utilised fully. The extent of the collaboration in the school is such that if one was to enter the school during a team meeting, whole school meeting, sports day, or midway through a lesson, one would be hard pressed to identify who was the teacher and who was the teaching assistant.

The final code was **LSA manager**;

*“I’m the Support Staff Manager. I work with \*\*\*\* and we’ll do Professional Reviews”. (C1LSA4)*

This unique role is considered by the HT to be essential in helping LSAs to feel valued in their role. Having an explicit management structure like this and providing LSAs with their special additional roles are fine examples of the two key contributing factors to effective LSA practice highlighted by Mistry, Burton and Brundrett (2004). They propose that a lack of clear line management structure and issues of ownership concerning the tasks that LSAs perform are the key barriers to improving the effectiveness of LSAs in primary schools. There is significant investment into the LSA role within Summerville School in the form of the embedded and ongoing CPD; the specific LSA line manager and the individual responsibilities offered to staff. LSA’s effectiveness depends on the willingness of schools to build roles that facilitate them in fulfilling their potential (Rees, 2010). If this statement is correct, the value placed on the LSAs and the structures in place to support them at Summerville School is sufficient to suggest a high level of efficacy amongst the LSAs.

#### **4.4.5 LSAs’ Feelings and Reflections**

Within the organising theme of ***feelings and reflections*** are four representative codes, ***comparisons to mainstream, enjoyable and rewarding, teachers give praise*** and ***feeling valued***.

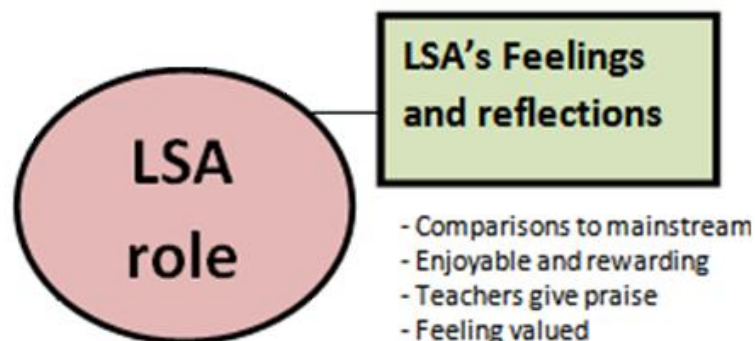


Figure 4-10: Arm of thematic map representing the theme 'LSA's feelings and reflections'.

The first code to emerge was **comparisons to mainstream**. This code includes all the comments made by LSAs that make a direct comparison to mainstream education:

*“Sometimes you go on courses and it’s not actually particular to our children, normally gets aimed at mainstream children more than special, like, hiding under the table how do you get them out and it’s nowhere near like the challenging behaviour that we experience.” (C3LSA1)*

*“Also, being in a special school we’re all the same. I think sometimes if you’re a support TA in a mainstream and you’ve got a child with special needs, from what I’ve observed before, because a lot of people don’t have that special needs training then they don’t actually understand that child, so that child tends to be removed from the class and they don’t get the support that they need.” (C4LSA1)*

LSAs’ comparisons were focused on the biased nature of training provision for LSAs and the differing levels of SEN experience which are perceived to exist between mainstream and special school LSAs. LSAs suggest that the external training options offered to them are geared towards the lower levels of SEN support, more likely to be experienced by mainstream LSAs. This code shows that LSAs not only have a meta-awareness of their role but also knowledge of the different educational provisions. One LSA then goes on to suggest that the level of expertise in providing support for children with SEN is limited in mainstream schools and thus results in a withdrawal approach which is not meeting the child’s need for social inclusion. LSAs also recognise the differing type of support offered in mainstream schools;

*“And also in mainstream it’s more educational support, whereas here it’s the whole thing – you know you’ve got to support them with everything that you do.” (C4LSA1)*

The distinctions made between the mainstream and LSA roles are discussed in more depth in section 5.4.

The next code was defined as **enjoyable and rewarding** and describes the views that LSAs hold regarding the positive way with which they view their role and experience within the school;

*“...and when they get it, it’s fabulous. Such a good feeling.” (C2LSA1)*

*“I get so much pleasure out of seeing their little faces when they’re digging the potatoes up and you’ve got a child saying, ‘Tay-ta, tay-ta’.”*  
(C2LSA1)

There was an unequivocal voicing of enjoyment and satisfaction from the LSAs when reflecting on their role. This feeling of enjoyment and personal reward was echoed despite recognition of the personal, physical and mental challenges that exist throughout a typical year. The level of equality and respect for LSAs is likely to be a contributing factor to the job satisfaction experienced by the LSAs (Hughes and Valle-Riestra, 2008).

The code **teachers give praise** represents the direct praise offered for LSAs by their class teacher, (this emerged during the group interviews);

*“You guys came up with the idea about \*\*\*\* using the swing outside and that was brilliant.”* (C4CT)

*“They’re just brilliant – and I’m not just saying that because they’re here.”* (C1CT)

As highlighted in the second extract for this code, the class teachers and LSAs were interviewed together and as such this may have prompted positive reflection from the teachers regarding the LSAs role. Regardless of this circumstance, teachers were able to offer examples of the contributions that LSAs made in order to justify their “*brilliance*”.

The final code was **feeling valued** and the extracts within demonstrate the perceptions that LSAs have that their contribution and role is valued.

*“I do think the hierarchy in the school has to be right for support staff to feel, ‘Yes, I’m appreciated, I do make a difference’.”* (C1LSA4)

Demonstrating that LSAs are valued members of the school team is critical (Hughes & Valle-Hiestre, 2008) and there are a number of methods that have been highlighted so far which help to ensure this remains, these are, LSA manager feeding back LSAs’ concerns to senior leadership, biennial reviews utilising LSA input, positive feedback from staff and parents and positive feedback from other LSAs.

#### 4.4.6 Ideas for Change

***Ideas for change*** is another inductive organising theme that emerged from the data set. This contains three representative codes, ***time***, ***training*** and ***systemic changes***.

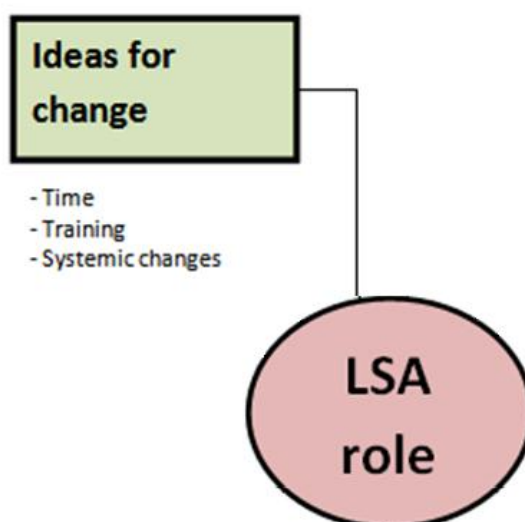


Figure 4-11: Arm of thematic map representing the theme 'Ideas for change'.

The first code in this instance was ***time***. LSAs frequently commented on the lack of time available for them, and others, to get together and reflect upon what is going well and what needs to improve.

*“Have more time to talk about strategies that we could put into place for the children.” (C1LSA2)*

*“Discussing the children and where she wants us to go with a specific programme, work she wants us to do with children, anything to do with the school really.” (C4LSA2)*

LSAs felt that time was a big pressure for them and there were a number of factors which increased this pressure. These were highlighted as, additional courses and whole-school meetings after school, limited time available to those LSAs who worked up until 3.30, completing assessment, recording and administrative tasks, and tidying away or cleaning up the classroom. Although there were frequent comments expressing a wish for more time, LSAs had only one expressed intention

if this time were available, and this was to spend more time discussing the children and their current plans.

**Training** highlights the fact that LSAs recognised the need for ongoing training. They also highlighted the areas with which they would appreciate this input.

*"I've always wanted to do a little bit more on Autism." (C1LSA3)*

*"A bit more about the disabilities that some of our children have got. It's nice to have a bit more training." (C4LSA1)*

*"I would like to find out more about the mental health." (C4LSA2)*

LSAs offered a wide range of areas that they would like additional training in order to improve their skills and knowledge base. These included ASD, specific SEN, mental health, Makaton, ICT, reaching "hard to reach parents" and challenging behaviour. The most common expression of interest was in the area of ASD. Parsons, Guldborg, MacLeod, Jones, Prunty & Balfe (2009) highlight an increase in the numbers of students with ASD in mainstream schools and link this increase to the rise in prevalence rates of identified ASD. This shift in pupil population and pupil needs within schools is also observed in special schools (Porter, Lacey, Benjamin, Miller, Miller et al., 2002). The LSAs' wishes for additional ASD input would certainly support this suggestion. Whether the needs of the pupil population make marked shifts over-time, or whether new staff enter the school, the training needs of all the LSAs will be forever changing. For a school to become an effective learning community, it must comprise individuals who have opportunities for learning alongside the work tasks they perform, and therefore helping to bridge theory and practice for both teachers and teaching assistants (Burgess & Shelton Mayes, 2007).

The final code within this organising theme was **systemic change**. This code describes changes suggested by LSAs that reflect more systemic changes:

*"I have half an hour at the end of a Thursday night, when we can get together but that's not working particularly well in our base at the moment simply because the other two ladies are doing the clubs at night." (C2LSA2)*

Providing opportunities for extra-curricular activities is an essential component of the whole school provision and it is also an integral part of the extended schools

agenda (DfES, 2002). In this instance, the provision is impacting upon the opportunities that LSAs have to reflect upon pupil progress and outcomes.

*“Sometimes you go on courses and it’s not actually particular to our children, normally gets aimed at mainstream children more than special.”*  
(C3LSA1)

A number of LSAs observed that recent external courses they had attended were more geared towards mainstream support and did not meet their needs of supporting children with more complex difficulties.

*“If we heard from the SEN Office a lot earlier as to who was coming we could establish much better transition, a much more effective transition.”*  
(C1LSA2)

One LSA highlighted the difficulties experienced in receiving information about new children too late, thus not allowing for effective transition planning and support. Although the blame appears to be directed towards the SEN Officers in this instance, there are likely to be additional factors that impact upon the delay of communication between the officers and Summerville School. For example, SEN Officers spoken to in Evangelou, Taggart, Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons and Siraj-Blatchford’s (2008) study claimed that a major hindrance to a smooth transition process was the lack of understanding that parents had of the admissions process, or their intentional manipulation of the process in order to secure a specific school placement. These factors may also play a role at Summerville School, however, it is unlikely that LSAs would be informed that these factors may attribute to the delay in communicating vital information about a child’s needs.

Although there were concerns voiced by LSAs regarding the yearly team changes and staff moving between classes, there was also recognition of the debate between the advantages and disadvantages of this approach.

*“But it is also good to move up as well to get an insight of what’s going on throughout the School.”* (C1LSA2)

LSAs’ thoughts and feelings regarding this issue were prevalent throughout the data indicating that there remains an uncertainty and a level of speculation as to the reasons behind the yearly team changes.



#### 4.4.7 Challenges

The sub-theme of **challenges** contains eight codes, **staff absence**, **changes**, **time**, **mental challenge**, **professional challenges**, **physical**, **the unknown** and **behaviour**.

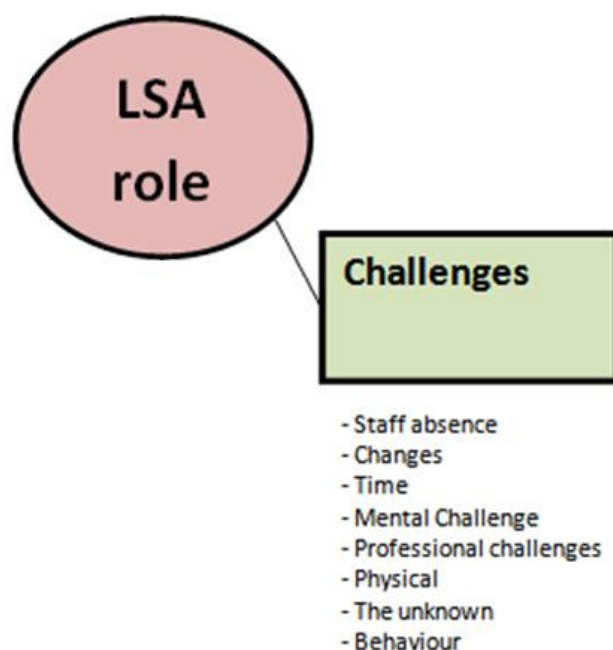


Figure 4-12: Arm of thematic map representing the theme 'challenges'.

The first code representing **challenges** was the pressure of **staff absence**, which describes the pressures and frustrations experienced by staff as a result of short term or long term staff absence.

*"I've had supply teachers in and out, which has a knock-on effect with the planning and resourcing." (C3LSA1)*

Staff absences and staff shortages has been found to be a common stressor in the special school environment (Williams, 2005). Absences for short or extended periods are not uncommon in schools, however, what is likely to differ is the ways in which these absences are managed. For LSAs working in classes with prolonged teacher absence, significant impacts upon the planning and resourcing that is in place have been noticed. This is likely to have a number of knock on effects such as LSA morale and workload pressure. As previously mentioned in section 4.4.2.4, LSAs in this position are also likely to miss out on the incidental learning that occurs through teacher-LSA communication and modelling.

The second code to emerge was defined as **changes** describing the changes to either systems or staffing teams within the school.

*“I don’t like change I’ll be honest. After you’ve been with a class for a year then we sometimes have a move around. I’m one of those people who doesn’t like change so it takes me a little while to get my head round it.” (C2LSA1)*

Many of the LSAs expressed concerns, or at least a lack of enthusiasm, about the changes to staffing teams that are made every year. LSAs within the school are re-located to a different classroom each year depending on the differing needs within the class groups. LSAs offered the view that they either did not like change or that they did not like moving away from an established team. Despite these shuffles, LSAs were also not moved alongside the children they were supporting. For example, an LSA from class 3 did not move with the children as they went into class 4, but instead, the LSA may have moved to class 1. Evans (2000) suggests that LSAs who are able to get to know a child over a prolonged period of time (often over the whole of child’s stay at the school) were at a considerable advantage in supporting that child and meeting their needs. If Summerville School were to adopt this approach then it would counter the LSAs’ concerns about moving teams. This approach may theoretically be sound, however, in practice, supporting a single child or a group of children with extremely challenging behaviour can be a huge pressure on staff, physically and cognitively, and although doubt may be expressed by LSAs regarding team changes, at the end of the year, many LSAs may appreciate a fresh challenge with new pupils.

The third challenge to emerge from the data was the challenge of **time**. This describes LSAs’ views that time was a significant pressure on their role, specifically on being able to communicate and reflect as a team.

*“It is difficult to fit time in, especially me personally because there are times when I would like to stay a bit later but there are jobs which need doing as well.” (C4LSA3)*

Working collaboratively often creates spaces for reflecting on children’s and staff’s needs and can enable them to consider other people’s viewpoints, to think about

their practice, solve problems together and to find ways in which they could make a difference and re-imagine their input (Devecchi & Rouse, 2010). There was an observed dedication amongst the staff towards working hard and meeting children's needs. When striving to complete resources, record progress, tidy classrooms and contact parents, it could be possible to bypass what some may see as a bureaucratic meeting for 'pupil reflection'. However, the importance of such occasions is paramount as highlighted by Devecchi and Rouse (2010).

The code defined as **mental challenges** describes the pressures experienced by LSAs that impact their thoughts or cognitive state.

*"So the whole team were emotionally kind of – yeah – it was very, very difficult and we kind of tried to support each other, so you were going home really feeling mindful of what you were going to come into the next day and worried about the safety of the rest of us, so that was a difficult time [when discussing a particularly challenging pupil]". (C1LSA4)*

*"...and it's quite hard, I suppose to be animated every day, all day."  
(C2LSA2)*

When faced with challenges and difficult periods, it is important to have a supportive staff network in place. This is clearly evident in Summerville School as the LSAs have good social relationships and expressed views on the supportive and collaborative nature of the LSAs relationships. Taking mental challenges and worries home is potentially dangerous for staff well-being and LSAs may benefit from having an opportunity to reflect upon challenging days with their supportive networks before leaving the school to return home.

**Professional challenges** highlights the barriers and challenges that LSAs face in relation to their professional role, for example performance, career path, role clarity, etc.

*"If there's a job available but I know there are a few of them [senior LSAs] here that have got their NVQ 3 but there are no positions available for them here." (C4LSA2)*

*"Sometimes when you're asked to (having said that I'm getting better at it), you know when everything's going on and you have to take hold of*

*the situation and if people are watching me at the same time, I lack confidence, I just think, 'Oh, don't watch me'.*” (C1LSA2)

One of the difficulties that LSAs are likely to experience is with role clarity. The LSA role has emerged to be vast and wide reaching, involving all levels of the child's education from formal assessment to personal hygiene. This is likely to result in an ever changing perception of the LSAs' main duties and roles and as such may lead to confusion over the clarity of their role (Clayton 2006). Role clarity is also discussed later on in section 4.4.8.4.

**Physical** describes the often physically demanding nature of the special school LSA role.

*“I'm not getting any younger and I do suffer with a bad back, so children dropping to the floor and sometimes it is quite physical and demanding. If they are quite a heavy child, to actually get them up is tough work.”*  
(C2LSA1)

*“Some days last year I did work with a particular child and I did have to go home on a couple of occasions – chairs on my head and spoons in my eye.”* (C1LSA1)

Physically challenging behaviour is likely to impact many LSAs and teachers at Summerville School as children with SLD or PMLD have a wide range of needs, often incorporating physical needs. These can be functional physical demands, such as using a hoist or helping children to move. They can also be the physical challenges that are not expected such as being hit or kicked by a child presenting with challenging behaviour. Being able to cope with these challenges is a core part of the LSA role and requires patience and resilience (as demonstrated by LSAs in section 4.4.8.3).

Coping with **the unknown** was also identified and it describes the challenges of 'not knowing'.

*“Some of the children come in from no establishment at all so you have no baselines, no ideas of what levels they're at. We have to give them quite a lot of time for child initiated learning so that we get them to show*

*us what they like.” (C1LSA2)*

LSAs spoke about the challenges they faced in relation to being uninformed or ‘not knowing’ about something before it happens. In this respect LSAs may have very limited ‘control’ over important aspects of their role such as supporting transition, managing temperamental behaviour and coping with changing needs. It is worth reflecting upon this in relation to the theory of ‘locus of control’ (Rotter, 1966). If an LSA attributes an external controlling factor when coping with their role, they are significantly more likely to respond less effectively than those who are able to operate an internal locus of control (Halpin, Harris & Halpin, 1985). This may have a knock on effect upon LSA stress levels. Any measures that can help to remove any obvious external controlling factors (such as delaying the communication of information from previous settings or the LA) would help to reduce this possibility.

The final code within this organising theme was **behaviour**. As expected, this code has strong links with the codes **the unknown** and **physical** and it describes how LSAs report finding the varying levels of behaviour demonstrated by children to be challenging.

*“I think that some days when you know there’s a reason for that child’s behaviour but there’s nothing that you can do about it at the time, that’s very demanding.” (C1LSA4)*

*“If they’ve got challenging behaviour that’s quite a challenge.” (C4LSA1)*

Behaviour management in the classroom is predominantly managed by the class teacher, however, LSAs play an important role in ensuring individual children’s behaviour is managed appropriately. With a vast range of needs, these behaviours were observed by the researcher to range from running off or hiding behind objects to throwing items and hitting out at others. As with many aspects of the role, staff coming into the role of a special school LSA will have an expectation of being presented with difficult behaviour, but this does not deny the impact that this challenging behaviour can have. Extremely challenging behaviour is recognised by the senior management team and thus LSAs who have had a very challenging year supporting specific pupils will have the option to explore supporting different pupils in the following year. In addition to this, some classrooms have been assigned extra staff in order to meet these behavioural needs (this is explored further in section 4.4.8.1.).

This section describes the organising theme of **challenges**. These could be observed across many roles, job or careers (for example **time, the unknown, professional challenges**, etc), however, each code relates to very specific examples reported by LSAs in Summerville School.

#### 4.4.8 Team Features

The largest inductive organising theme is defined as **team features** and it contains five distinct sub-themes **deployment and structure, qualifications and experience, strengths, special roles** and **areas of need**.

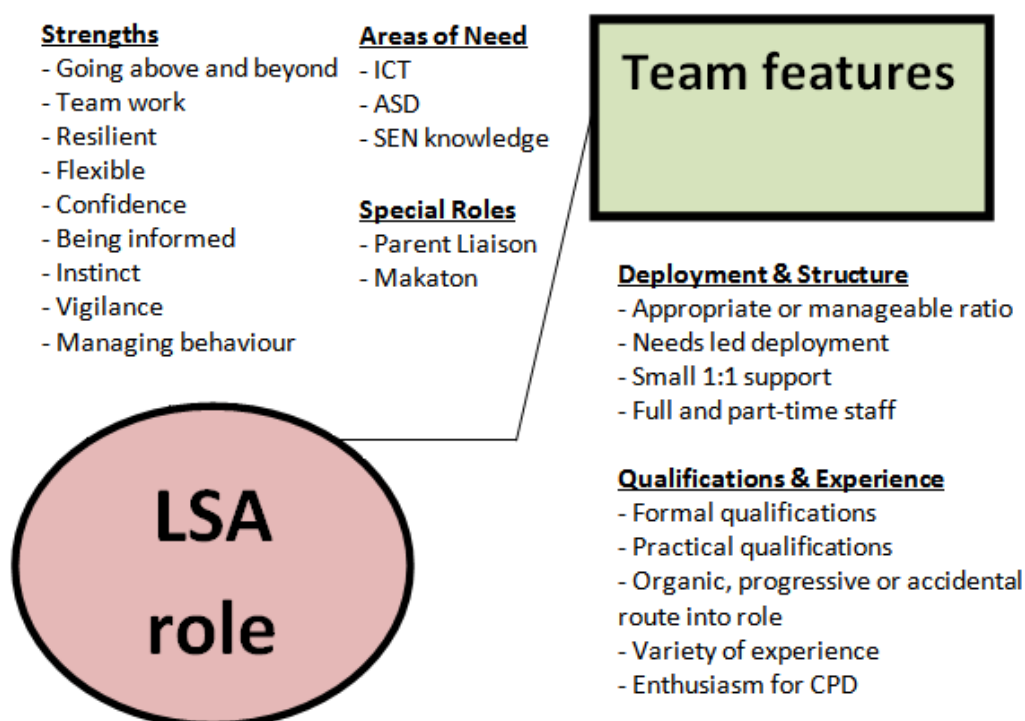


Figure 4-13: Arm of thematic map representing the theme ‘team features’

##### 4.4.8.1 Deployment and structure

This is composed of five sub-themes, the first of which is **deployment and structure**. Within this sub-theme are the five codes: **appropriate ratio; needs led; small 1:1 support; constants and routines** and **full and part-time staff**.

The first code was defined as **appropriate or manageable ratio** and it highlights the LSAs' perception that the child-to-staff ratio in the school is appropriate and manageable:

*"I think the amount that we've got [staff in the classroom] is quite nice because we can allow for the two each." (C2LSA2)*

LSAs did comment on how, in an ideal world, all the classes would have more staff, however, they recognised that there are limits to staffing within schools and 10 out of the 11 LSAs said that the ratio was either good or appropriate. One LSA commented on how she thought the ratio was not enough and more staff are required in order to meet the children's needs. The first extract above refers to a specific type of support offered in one classroom whereby LSAs support two specific children which rotates on a fortnightly basis. In this particular class there are eight pupils and four members of staff resulting in a pupil-to-adult ratio of 2:1. A DCFS statistical report released in 2009 found that the average pupil-to-adult ratio in special schools across the UK was 2:1 (DCSF, 2009), in line with the ratio found in this specific classroom and throughout the rest of Summerville School (with minor deviations and fluctuations throughout the year).

**Needs led deployment** describes the ways in which LSAs are deployed based on the current level of needs across the school.

*"To be fair it would be unusual to have two Senior Support Staff in the same class but the combination of our children this year, that's why they've done it together and it will be the same next year." (C4CT)*

This needs based approach to deployment is an example of the pupil focused approach to staff deployment and resourcing within the school. LSAs reported that this ultimately leads to a yearly reshuffling of staff which is not favoured by the LSA teams.

The next code was **small 1:1 support** which describes the perception of staff that structured 1:1 support occurs less often than structured small group support.

*"Sometimes it's one-to-one."*

*"No, I'd have to say no. Oh sorry, we do have a child with very challenging behaviour so I would actually take my time with her throughout the day - so I do work one-to-one because we tend to have a*

*rota with the little girl.” (C1LSA4)*

The views offered by the LSAs indicate that they can support children at the individual, small group or whole class level, although 1:1 support occurs less frequently and is more likely if the child has challenging behavioural needs.

The fourth code to describe aspects of deployment and structure was **full and part time staff** which offers little information to the reader other than providing the knowledge that there is a mixture of full and part time staff in the school.

The organising theme of **deployment and structure** helps to provide a picture of the context within which the LSAs role is performed.

#### **Integrating the Observations: Working with Child**

The LSAs’ perceptions that they provide **small 1:1 support** across the school are not reflected by the researcher’s observations of LSA deployment. Across the 11 observations, the researcher observed the LSAs to be specifically supporting an individual for roughly 45% of the time and small groups for 39% (this balance was consistent throughout the classes). This discrepancy between observation and perception is likely to be explained by the fact that although the LSA is supporting an individual child through an activity, they may be less explicitly aware of this as throughout the lesson their efforts may have been spread across more than one pupil, thus leaving an impression of small group support. Individual pupil deployment was judged by the researcher to be when LSAs were within the affective proximity of one child, not of two or more children. It could then be argued that the difference is explained as a matter of differing conceptualisations of what group support is.

**Figure 4-14: Integrating observation data for the theme ‘working with the child’.**



#### **4.4.8.2 Qualifications and Experience**

The second sub-theme of **qualifications and experience** also contains five codes, **formal qualifications, practical qualifications, organic, progressive or accidental route into the role, variety of experience** and **enthusiasm for CPD**.

The first two codes from this theme were **formal qualifications** and **practical qualifications**. The LSAs ranged from well qualified, NVQ 3 (National Vocational Qualification), diploma and NNEB (National Nursery Education Board) qualifications, to staff with no formal qualifications. All LSAs gave examples of the practical courses that they had completed either externally or in-house including ASD, Makaton, BSL (British Sign Language), team-teach, behaviour, medical, first aid and hoist training courses. All of the LSAs had received some in-house training since working at the school. With at least one senior LSA in each class, almost 50% of the LSAs have the HLTA qualification which has associated responsibilities within the class room such as covering teaching duties.

Butt and Lowe (2011) in their research into the differing role perceptions of LSAs and teachers, found that LSAs benefited most from skills-based or practical courses as opposed to theory driven courses. Butt and Lowe also found that these skills helped to increase their confidence and self-esteem as well as developing their confidence in meeting children's needs.

The third code was defined **as organic, progressive or accidental route in to the role**. This code was hard to define and is best explained through an examination of the codes.

*"I had worked as a hairdresser and then had my children and was at home and decided that I would like to get involved in something, saw the paper and went for the job." (C2LSA1)*

*"To be honest, it's five minutes from my house – I was here a week, absolutely loved it and that was it then." (C4LSA2)*

*"Then it was a gradual process of working with children, part-time TA, part-driver then, handyman, TA and then become full-time TA." (C4LSA3)*

*"I was a dinner lady and I used to drive the minibus before this."*

(C1LSA3)

The descriptions of the routes with which the LSAs took in becoming an LSA are varied and the researcher felt that 'organic' was an appropriate term to use to describe this process. One could also argue that the LSA team could be referred to as the 'accidental workforce' as proximity, coincidence, and associated roles all inspired the LSAs to pursue a permanent position at the school. What has emerged is a contextually well informed workforce, with good local knowledge and hands on experience of working with children with SEN. In the absence of formal qualifications the LSAs' pre-employment profiles are experientially ideal. LSAs are commonly parents (predominantly women) who take their first steps in the role as their own children start attending school (Lowe, 2008). A significant proportion of these also start in a voluntary capacity which becomes more formal over time (Hammersley-Fletcher & Lowe, 2011). These findings are reflected in the current research.

The next code was defined as LSAs having a **variety of experience**. When asked what experience of working with SEN the LSAs had gained in the past, the LSAs provided a range of responses which included, working with the hearing impaired, supporting SEN children in mainstream and differing special provisions, nursery nurse, private care work, school escort and mini bus driver. Some LSAs had family members with SEN and most LSAs described having their own children as being good experience for working with children in general. The range of experience within the school also varied greatly from under two years to over 25 years. Farrell et al. (1999) completed research into the role, management and training of LSAs and found that those employing LSAs favoured characteristics such as personality, enthusiasm and experience over formal qualifications. LSAs at Summerville School are wealthy in both experience and qualification and the feelings of warmth and social bond (described in sections 4.4.5 and 4.4.2.1) also reflect the positive personality traits and enthusiasm described by Farrell et al.

The final code to emerge was **enthusiasm for CPD**. LSAs showed great enthusiasm when talking about the CPD they had gained and when discussing the possibilities of future CPD.

*"I see that a child needs that extra something, I research it or I read up or go on the computer, and I'm really interested in helping to guide them in the right direction." (C3LSA1)*

*"I go on most courses that I can." (C4LSA3)*

Extracts like these show a commitment to continuing professional development. What appears distinct about the LSAs' enthusiasm is that the CPD is not for their benefit in terms of developing their own careers, but instead it is for meeting the needs of the children that they support.

#### **4.4.8.3 Strengths**

In the sub-theme **strengths** are a further nine codes **going above and beyond, team work, resilient, flexible, confidence, being informed, instinct, vigilance** and **managing behaviour**.

The first code was defined as **going above and beyond** and it describes LSAs' dedication to the role by outlining the activities and actions that they complete outside of their job specification and beyond working hours.

*"I'm always here first. I'm very enthusiastic. I come in and get the computer out, get everything set up for the children and then I go down the school garden for half an hour." (C2LSA1)*

*"You research out of school, you buy things to bring in." (C3LSA1)*

Examples like these show a complete commitment to the role and it is this sort of commitment that was neglected within the analysis of findings in the DISS project. LSAs perceive the school to be like a family and they also perceive themselves to be part of that family. This encourages LSAs to frequently go above and beyond their job specification, working through their breaks and lunch breaks, staying behind to run after school clubs and researching and preparing resources in the evenings. All of these contributions help provide additional support to the children and young people at Summerville School (although this should never be expected).

The next code identifying a specific LSA strength was **team work**.

*"You find that most classes you go in you get your head round it and you work hard. You are a team player – if you're not it doesn't work. I think I'm a good team player". (C2LSA1)*

This code describes how many of the LSAs view being a 'team player' as an important strength when working in the school. It is integral to the role and this was well described by one LSA;

*“I see it as a big cog and I’m just one of the notches inside that cog that makes the whole school go round in a sense.” (C1LSA2)*

Being **resilient** was another code identified within this organising theme as an LSA strength;

*“You learn to deal with it. Last year we had one particular child who turned everything upside down and didn’t behave so we worked together.” (C1LSA1)*

LSAs experience a number of physical, mental or emotional challenges when working in a special school (as highlighted in section 4.4.7). In order to be able to cope with such challenges and remain emotionally healthy, LSAs at Summerville School draw from their levels of resilience.

Being **flexible** was another code that emerged as an LSA strength. LSAs are regularly required to demonstrate flexibility by covering absence and meeting needs in other classrooms, supporting their colleagues within the classroom when responding to pupil behaviour and generally adopting a flexible approach to pupil support. Additional codes that emerged as strengths and need less explanation were, **confidence** (LSAs believed that having confidence in their role was an asset), **being informed** (some LSAs thought that their strength was keeping up-to-date with pupil needs and knowing about specific types of SEN), **instinct** (LSAs drew upon their instinct when interacting with pupils), **vigilance** (being aware and alert with regards to the children’s actions and behaviours throughout the day was regarded as a key strength) and finally, **managing behaviour** (helping to support the teacher through behaviour management was seen by many LSAs as being a personal strength gained from experience).

Interestingly, when asked what the LSAs perceived their strengths to be, none of the responses were linked to their special or additional responsibilities (discussed in section 4.4.8.4 below). This would further indicate that LSAs may benefit from support in developing their conception of their responsibility as well as reflecting on what it brings to their individual schools and the team.

#### **4.4.8.4 Special Roles**

The next sub-theme is defined as **special roles** and comprises two codes **parent liaison** and **Makaton**. These additional responsibilities are described by the quotes below;

*"I used to work at a placement with children who were hard of hearing so I had it for then and when I came here I did my Makaton Regional Training, so I'm a regional tutor for Makaton as well so I do the Makaton for the staff." (C4LSA1)*

*"I'm the link with the families... so I get to know the personality of the parents and in the end it's lovely because I found I'm the signpost. You're the link that breaks the mould a little bit." (C1LSA4)*

It is apparent from the analysis of the HT interview and from the themes that emerged from the LSA interviews, that each LSA in the school has a 'special responsibility'. These responsibilities did not become clear during all 14 of the semi-structured interviews. The roles that two LSAs had relating to parent and family liaison and 'total communication' (e.g. *Makaton*), emerged with a strong identity, as it was referred to by the link LSA and also by other LSAs. What was surprising was the absence of reference by the LSAs to their other special responsibilities. This raises the question of role clarity as alluded to in the previous section. One of the anticipated secondary outcomes of this research is to help consolidate role clarity for the LSAs and for staff at Summerville School. Lacey (2001) refers to a focus within the literature on the importance of ensuring role clarity in order to ensure effective practice (Balshaw 1998; Fox 1998; Lacey, 2000 and Lorenz, 1998). With so many aspects of the LSAs roles becoming evident in this research it is not unreasonable to suggest that the absence of an important and defining reference such as a 'special responsibility' leaves room for further developing LSA role clarity within the school.

#### **4.4.8.5 Areas of Need**

Finally, the last sub-theme within the organising theme of **team features** is **areas of need** and this is represented by three codes **ASD**, **ICT** (Information and Communication Technologies) and **specific SEN knowledge**.

*"I'd like a bit on the ICT side of things." (C2LSA2)*

*"It's nice to get to know in some depth about Autism." (C4LSA1)*

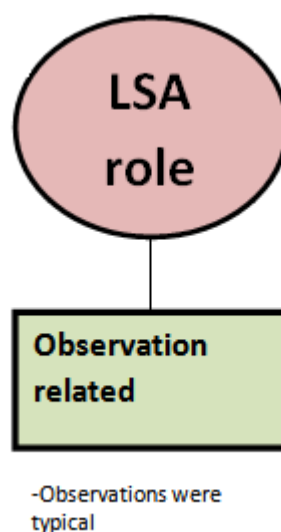
*"A bit more information about the disabilities that some of our children have got. It's nice to have a bit more training." (C4LSA1)*

LSAs frequently commented on how they found the ICT demands of the role to be a struggle at times and training relating to how to manage electronic files, upload and edit photos as well as integrating ICT information would be beneficial. Williams (2005) found that overwhelmingly, staff in schools displayed a preference for additional ICT training, in particular, guidance on ICT administrative procedures (Williams, 2005).

Additional training in ASD also emerged as a popular interest amongst the LSAs. As previously highlighted, Parsons et al. (2009) identify a marked increase in the numbers of students with ASD in mainstream schools and this shift in pupil population and pupil needs was also observed in special schools (Porter et al., 2002). The comments offered by the LSAs in this instance would suggest that supporting children with ASD is a training need across the school.

A need for more training on less commonly occurring but high profile areas of special educational needs including developmental disorders and syndromes was also highlighted. It is likely that sourcing and investing in training catering for very specific areas of SEN will be problematic due to availability and financial restriction. Alternatively the LSAs professional developmental needs could be met by focusing less on the SEN label and more on the need. Establishing a 'needs-based' training format for LSAs may be more pragmatic and is more likely to cover supporting other areas of SEN.

#### **4.4.9 Pertaining to Classroom Observations**

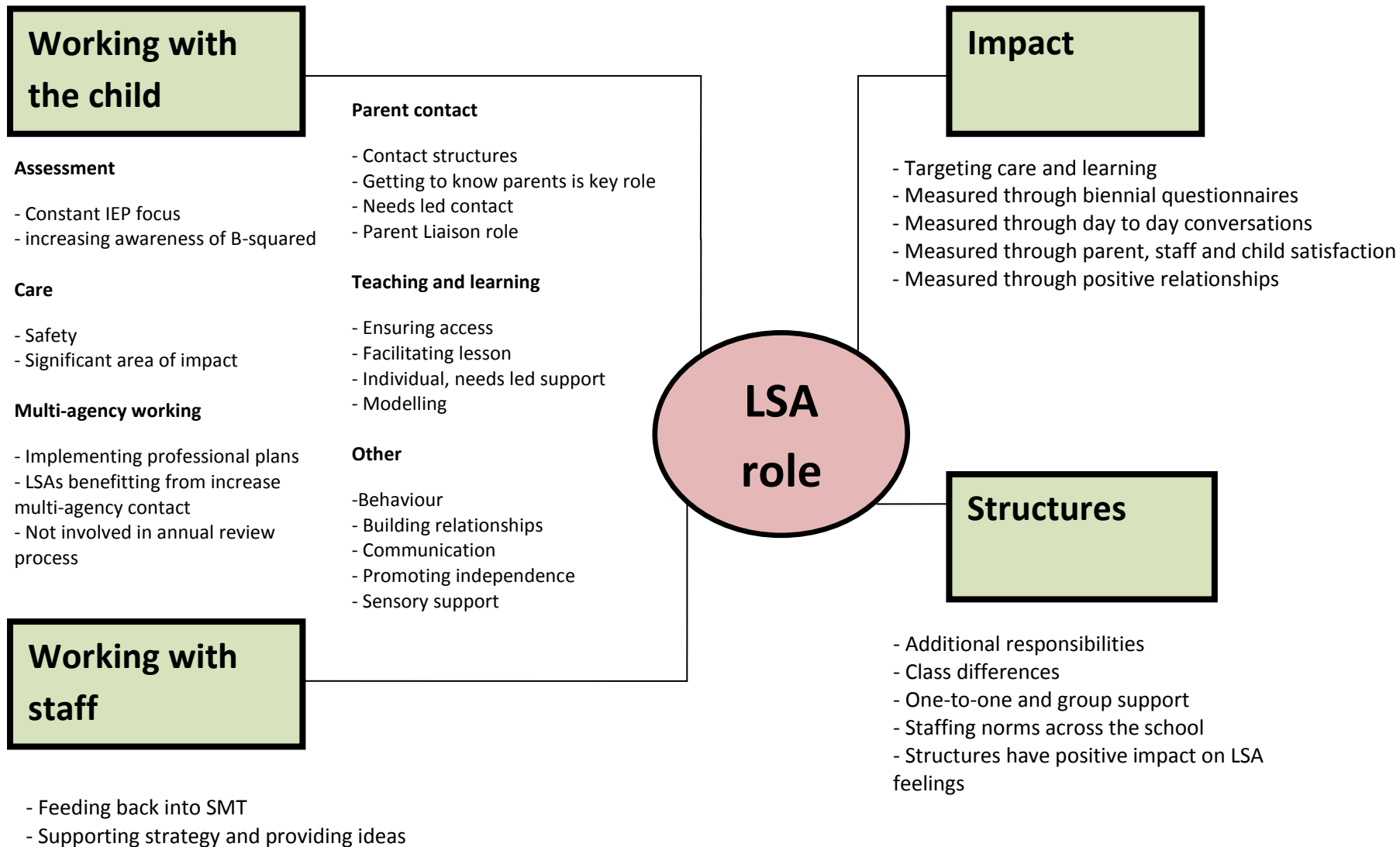


**Figure 4-15: Arm of thematic map representing the theme 'observation related'.**

The final and smallest organising theme within the data is related to the observations that the researcher had completed. This organising theme is defined as **observation related** and contains one code, **observations were typical**. This code describes the significant majority of LSA opinions that the researcher's observations took place during a 'typical' lesson where they were no remarkable or unusual events. This does by no means suggest that day-to-day experiences are predictable and the best way to explain the LSAs comments would be to describe the observed lessons as 'typically unpredictable'.

#### **4.5 Head Teacher Perspective**

Following the pen portrait offered by the HT in section 4.1, the second function of the semi-structured interview was to obtain an analysis of the HT's perceptions across the three units of analysis. The researcher followed the same coding and thematic analysis process highlighted in the previous section. The final thematic map can be seen in figure 4-16 below. In this instance, there were significantly less extracts attributed to each code because there was only one data source. The codes that were defined by the researcher were defined in order to add details that were not offered by LSAs or to provide evidence of contradictory information.



**Figure 4-16: Thematic map of post data gathering semi-structured interview with the Head Teacher of Summerville School.**



#### 4.5.1 Working with the Child

As with the LSA interviews a coding manual existed prior to the analysis which helped the researcher to guide the coding and thematic process. This interview stood alone and was considerably shorter than the combined data sites analysed above. In addition to this, the interview was parsed into two sections, a pen portrait and a summary of the HT's perceptions across the three units of analysis. Consequently only one additional inductive code emerged. The number of extracts representing a code and similarly the number of codes representing an extract were also reduced in this instance, however, the importance of the codes remained.

The first organising theme taken from the coding manual was ***working with the child***. In a similar fashion to the process used for the LSA interviews, the five sub-themes from the coding manual were also applied and an additional sub-theme defined as ***other*** emerged through the data.

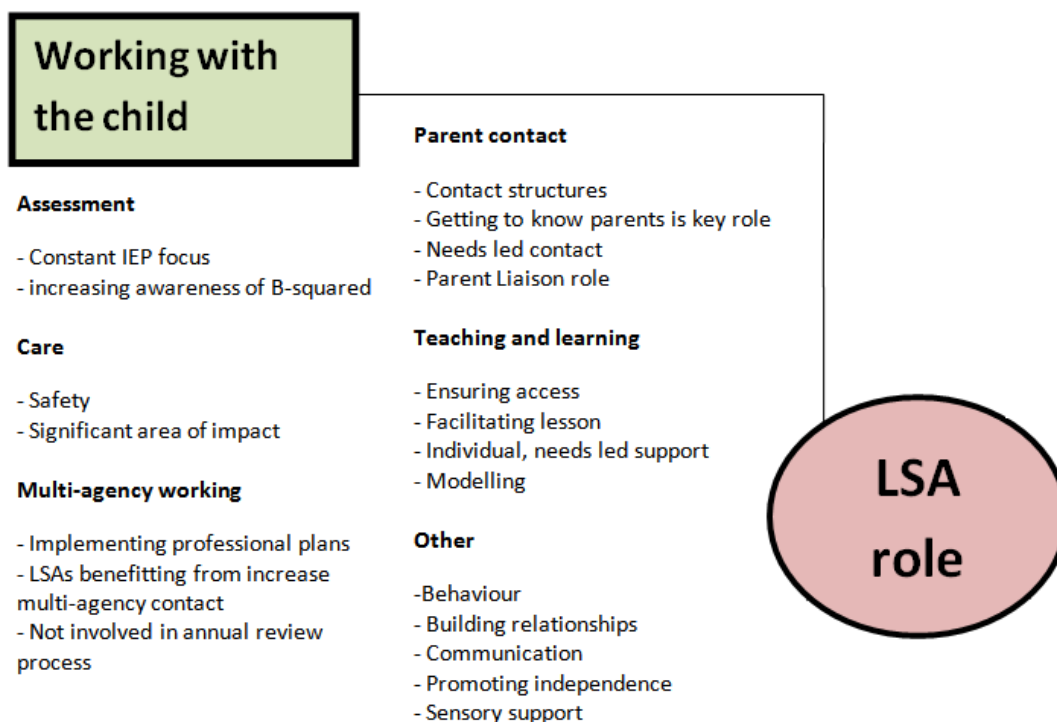


Figure 4-17: Arm of thematic map representing the HT theme 'working with the child'

#### **4.5.1.1 Assessment**

The first sub-theme, **assessment**, contained two codes **constant IEP focus** and **increasing awareness of B-Squared**. The code defined as **constant IEP focus** describes the intense approach towards IEPs:

*“There was a system whereby children went out of the classroom to work on their IEP and actually we have moved on from that to a point where children are doing their IEP all the time.”*

By terminating a previously existing withdrawal approach, the LSAs can accomplish three things; they are ensuring that children are included within their class and amongst their peers whenever possible, they are increasing the time spent working towards IEPs as they are targeted across the day and they are also reducing the organisational difficulties that can often come with withdrawal work. This intense approach to focusing on IEPs was described within the LSA interview data as ‘high-density assessment’. By systemically ensuring that IEPs are a daily target, LSAs can be more creative in how they support these targets and in what context achievements can occur. It helps to provide the LSAs with focus whilst working with the class whereas a withdrawal model would have resulted in LSAs having a less obvious focus for their classroom efforts.

The HT also talked about the direction the school was heading in terms of helping to train LSAs in understanding the B-Squared and P-Level systems;

*“Give support staff their own view of what this information is for so they understand because they have been given training in actually what B-Squared does it gives us a P-Level for our children and I think that now gives them a greater understanding of what that means and what their role is in terms of providing the evidence that children have achieved a certain level.”*

This is not with the intention of the LSA taking over teacher responsibilities but in the hope that through raising awareness of the systems, LSA can be more mindful when engaging in the ‘high-density’ assessment process.

#### **4.5.1.2 Care**

The second sub-theme, **Care**, contained two codes **safety** and **significant area of impact**. The code of **safety** describes the LSAs role in ensuring all children are kept safe. The HT also proposed that LSAs **significant area of impact** was in the areas of care and learning;

*“I would have to say that the greatest area of impact would be on care and learning.”*

This perception is congruent with the data gained from the observations and from the LSA data.

#### **Integrating the Observations: Working with the Child**

The HT’s views that the most **significant area of impact** is in the area of care and learning, is supported in the whole-school observation data (23% and 48% of observations recorded work within these respective domains). By glancing at the spread of codes within the thematic map (figure 6-16), it is also clear that assessment, teaching and learning (judged to fall into the HT’s conception of “learning”) and care consumed the significant majority of the data.

Figure 4-18: Integration observation data for the theme ‘working with the child’

#### **4.5.1.3 Multi-Agency Working**

The third sub-theme was **multi-agency working** and this contained three themes **implementing professional’s plans**, **LSAs benefitting from increased multi-agency working** and **LSAs are not involved in annual review process**.

The first code from this sub-theme was **implementing professional’s plans** and this highlights the involvement that LSAs have at the ‘output’ level when working within a multi-agency capacity.

*“The OT would meet with the teacher and support staff to create a programme for the child. Having done that the support staff are very keen on making that happen.”*

LSAs play the key role in ensuring professional advice is filtered down into practice within the classroom either as part of the children’s IEP or simply as an idea for best practice. The practical skills and advice received by LSAs over a number of years has the potential to be an invaluable asset to the school.

The second code was defined as **LSA benefitting from increased multi-agency working** and this describes the change in the school’s approach to involving LSAs in multi-disciplinary meetings.

*“We do have a multi-disciplinary team meeting which is chaired by our deputy where any staff can raise any issues to be discussed by the wider disciplinary team, to be discussed with physio, SLT nurses. We’re just starting a process as a result from feedback from staff whereby support staff can actually attend those meetings to raise and discuss their concerns. In the past they have been able to add agenda items which have then been discussed, but in the past it has been in their absence and we are now encouraging them to be more involved.”*

As highlighted in section 4.4.1.3, LSAs recognise their contribution to multi-agency working at the input level (adding agenda items through the class teacher) and at the output level (implementing professional advice). There was very limited opportunity to be actively involved in the important middle stage where decision making takes place. The LSA feedback system has been successful in this instance, as the HT has taken pro-active measures to respond to LSAs concerns regarding this level of input. Depending on the uptake of the encouragement to attend multi-agency meetings, LSAs at Summerville School will continue to add strings to their bow in becoming an all-round educational practitioner.

The final code describes the fact that LSAs are not involved in the statutory review process. Whether LSAs should be involved at this stage remains contextually dependant.

#### **4.5.1.4 Parent Contact**

The sub-theme of **parent contact**<sup>14</sup> contained four codes **contact structures**, **getting to know the parents is key role**, **needs led contact** and **parent liaison role**.

**Contact structures** reflects the different processes, systems and scheduled routines that are in place in order to ensure LSAs have frequent and quality contact with parents and carers. Examples given by the HT were the home-school diary systems, regular parent's evenings and making responsive phone calls. The HT then goes on to describe how **getting to know parents is a key role** of the LSA.

*“Staff in the early years are involved in home visits, which is something generally that the other staff don't get involved in, they obviously visit new prospective pupils at home and I think that is a real privilege to get a real picture of children in their home environment which can be really important.”*

LSAs also viewed the contact with parents as being an important part of their role, not only for the parent but also to ensure that a consistent approach to challenging behaviours and pupil needs is adopted at school and at home. Outside of the organised structures, parent contact is needs led and this is described by the code **needs-led contact**.

*“Yesterday one of the support staff met with a parent of a child who had a particularly difficult weekend and she wanted to feed back some information from that and it was a member of support staff who met with her and then the behaviour strategies that are used in home can be discussed to provide some consistency.”*

This is yet another example of how LSAs have to adopt a flexible and reactive role when changing support plans to incorporate parental advice or conversely coming out of their comfort zone to offer parents advice on effective strategies.

The HT commented on the special **parent liaison role** taken on by one senior LSA (LSA manager).

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<sup>14</sup> reduced definition due to that fact that no codes emerged which were representative of community contact

*“The manager has the responsibility of working with the families then she will ensure that classroom staff are fully aware of the things they need to be aware of in the home and I think that is also key and that is why we have such positive relationships with most of our families because it is based on real understanding and the sharing of knowledge.”*

In this quote, the HT clearly outlines the importance of this role in bridging the gap between home and school. For all LSAs to have this level of contact with the families of the groups of children they support would be extremely difficult to manage. Assigning the role to one member of staff allows for consolidation of knowledge and skills to develop in one place, whilst still ensuring that information is communicated between families and schools effectively.

#### **4.5.1.5 Teaching and Learning**

The next sub-theme was that of ***teaching and learning*** which contained four codes ***ensuring access, facilitating lesson, individual, needs-led support*** and ***modelling***.

***Ensuring access, facilitating lesson*** and ***individual, needs-led support***, were three codes that closely matched the perceived contributions of the LSAs during their individual interviews. The code of ***modelling***, however, was not referred to.

*“A key role at that point for LSAs is to provide models and role models so providing question and answer, so teachers might ask LSAs a questions and LSAs can model and answer or model what is expected from the children.”*

In order to seek clarification with regards to LSAs being ‘models’ the researcher informed the HT that the concept of modelling (or descriptions of such actions) were not raised by LSAs. The HT was surprised at this omission and then went on to reflect as to the reasons why;

*“I think it’s something that staff do without knowing that they are doing it and I think it’s something that I do in assemblies. If I am asking*

*questions and it's a new concept, I will ask staff first before asking the children."*

Modelling is regarded as an important role played by LSAs when facilitating learning for children with SEN (Groom 2006; Groom & Rose, 2005 and Mann-Mandelbaum, 1990). It is likely that LSAs engage in this practice very frequently, however, having an explicit awareness of their modelling support is important and LSAs may benefit from reflecting upon this role.

#### **4.5.1.6 Other**

The one inductive sub-theme was defined as **other** and contained five themes **behaviour, building relationships, communication, promoting independence** and **sensory support**.

Within the LSA data the codes of **behaviour, communication** and **sensory support** also emerged. There were two codes that were not directly referred to by LSAs and these were **building relationships,**

*"Because of the number of staff and the number of children means that we can get to know the children really very well and that they can be."*

and **promoting independence,**

*"Becoming as independent as possible, such as taking off their coat, putting their school diaries away and things like that."*

The code **building relationships** is synonymous with the support offered by LSAs defined as **understanding needs** in section 4.4.1.5 and is therefore not considered to be additional information about the role. The code **promoting independence,** however, cannot be directly compared to any of the codes that emerged within the LSA data. As with the code **modelling,** this is also something that LSAs are likely to be engaging in, however, their explicit awareness of this type of support was not evident.

#### 4.5.2 Working with Staff

**Working with staff** was the second organising theme describing this interview. It contained two codes **feeding back to SMT** (Senior Management Team) and **supporting strategy and providing ideas**.

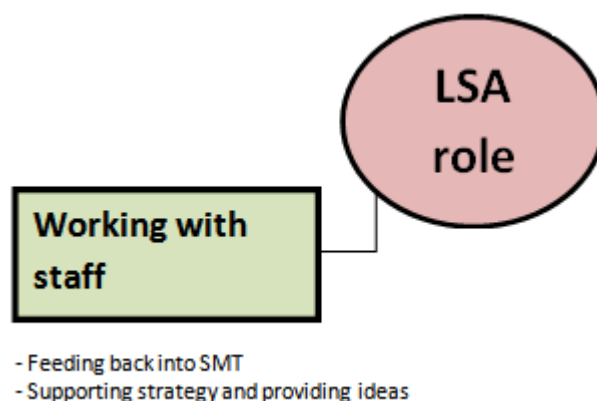


Figure 4-19: Arm of thematic map representing the HT theme ‘working with staff’.

The first code was defined as **feeding back to SMT** and this describes the communications between the LSAs and SMT.

*“Support staff can raise any of their concerns with the support staff manager which will be actioned and there are lots of examples of where that has happened in the past and they can influence the school improvement plan or an action can be taken straight away.”*

The support staff manager provides LSAs with a method by which they can convey their thoughts or concerns to SMT. This has significant advantages because it allows for information to be conveyed anonymously, therefore promoting the likelihood of communications of a more sensitive nature. This system has also been shown to be effective in that as a result of LSAs feedback regarding multi-agency work, LSAs are now promoted to attend (see section 4.5.1.3).

The second code of **supporting strategy and providing ideas** highlights the value that the HT places in LSAs’ input as well as acknowledging the importance of their input. This code is reflected in the LSA data within the codes of **team ethos**, **collaborative planning** and **feeling valued**.



### 4.5.3 Impact

The organisational theme defined as **impact** provided five codes **targeting care and learning, measured through biennial questionnaires, measured through day to day conversations, measured through parent, child and staff satisfaction and measured through positive relationships.**

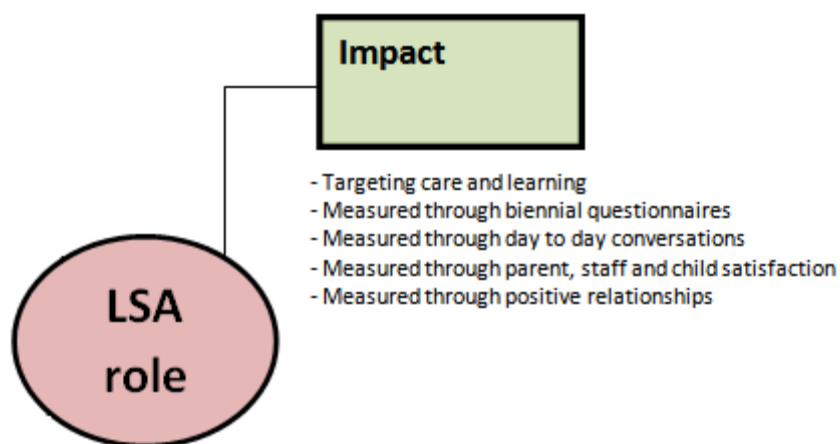


Figure  
Arm

4-20:  
of

thematic map representing the HT theme 'impact'

The first code within this sub-theme was **targeting care and learning**. This code describes the areas with which the HT perceives the LSAs to have the most impact. As described in section 4.5.1.2 the areas of care and learning are considered by the HT to be the most impacted areas as a result of LSA input. This appears to be congruent with the data from the LSA interviews and also the observation data.

The next three codes describe the ways in which this impact is measured by the HT.

#### ***Measured through biennial questionnaires***

*"Secondly every two years we do a staff questionnaire which asks exactly these questions [about impact and successes] and then I summarise this for the whole school."*

#### ***Measured through day to day conversations***

*"The first [method of measuring impact] is through general day by day*

conversations in the corridors.”

**Measured through parent, staff and child satisfaction**

“One of these things [measures of impact] is that staff, children and families enjoy the school, they enjoy coming here and it’s often reported that we are like a big family.”

**Measured through positive relationships**

“It’s also based on relationships, belonging and feeling valued and they also get recognition that they do a good job which is important.”

As reported by the LSAs there are a number of less formal or opportunistic methods for assessing the impact of LSAs at Summerville School. Similarly there is no reference to frameworks such as ECM outcomes or even the more formalised B-Squared when discussing the impact of LSAs.

**4.5.4 Structures**

The final organising theme is defined as **Structures** and also contains five codes **additional responsibilities, class difference, one-to-one support, staffing norms across the school and structures have positive impact on LSAs feelings.**

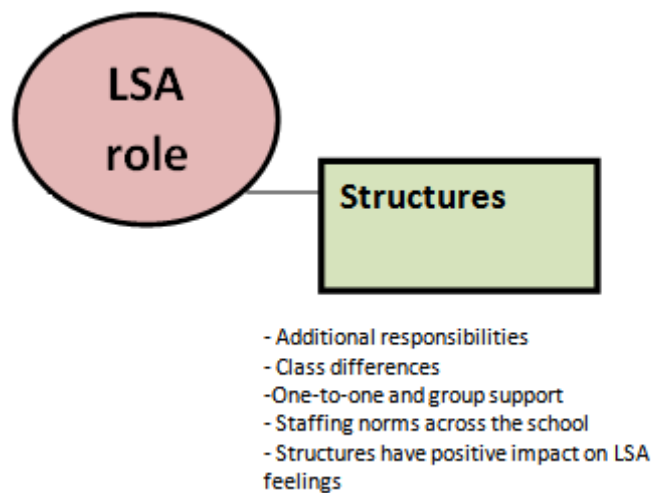


Figure 4-21: Arm of thematic map representing the HT theme ‘structures’.

The first code to emerge was **additional responsibilities**. Equivalent codes were discussed in section 4.4.8.3 (LSA strengths) and section 4.4.8.4 (LSA special roles) and as previously highlighted only two distinct additional responsibilities or special roles arose during the interviews. During the HT interview the following views were offered:

*“Each member of our support staff has an additional responsibility in an area that they are working on. So to give an example one of our support staff takes the lead on total communication which involves the use of symbols and Makaton... so that is an example of how our support staff might be different from the support staff in mainstream schools.”*

Manual handling, resource management, curriculum linked responsibilities (such as organisation in PE), outdoor areas, total communication (Makaton) and parent liaison were also highlighted as additional responsibilities by the HT. One is left unsure as the reasons why individual LSAs made limited reference to these responsibilities as they are portrayed as significant and distinguishing.

**Class differences** describe any significant differences that exist between the four classes in the school. This is an important code as it ensures that the final model of the LSAs' role is accurate and not skewed by unique differences that only occur in one class.

*“I think there is probably a slightly different arrangement in early years because they are working from the early years foundation stage [EYFS], the staff there are more formally involved in the planning and sharing ideas on a weekly basis where as in other classes that is probably less frequent.”*

*“The transition period is different and staff in the early years are involved in home visit. They obviously visit new prospective pupils at home and I think that is a real privilege to get a real picture of children in their home environment which can be really important.”*

There were no other distinct differences highlighted by the HT other than those occurring in the early years classroom which were home visits, extra involvement in planning and a focus on the EYFS. These few differences mean that a final model of

LSA practice can be constructed with the confidence that no significant differences exist between the four classrooms.

The next code was defined as **one-to-one and group support** and accurately reflects the perceptions offered by LSAs in terms of the way that they support a mixture of individual pupils and small groups of pupils. The HT also suggested that,

*“In general, support staff will be working with small groups.”*

As highlighted in figure 4-14, LSAs were observed to be supporting individual pupils more so than small groups of pupils, and this is contradictory to LSAs’ and HT’s views. It is likely that LSAs are deployed with intentions to support small groups, however, as lessons progress, their support is required at the individual level and thus was observed at the individual level.

The penultimate code was **staffing norms across the school**. The extracts within this code describe some of the constants in place across the school, such as having an LSA manager in place. Each class will typically have a Class Teacher, a senior LSA and an LSA and all classes have a good pupil to adult ratio allowing for relationships to be established.

Finally, a code was defined as **structures have positive impact on LSA feelings**.

*“We do have support staff meetings which are just for support staff which the LSA manager will coordinate and because of that they have a real sense of belonging to that group so there a group of support staff in the school who know that they can raise any of their concerns with the support staff manager which will be actioned”.*

Having a sense of belonging and being valued will be vital in ensuring an effective LSA team within a school. The structures in place such as having an LSA manager, having specific LSA meetings, having biennial reviews and encouraging their involvement in multi-agency work will all contribute to helping LSAs feel involved and valued.

Gathering the HT’s perspective on the role of the LSA has been an important step in the triangulation of data. It has allowed the researcher to confirm the model that had emerged in the form of the thematic map (figure 4-2) but also to raise questions

regarding inconclusive issues such as the LSAs' additional responsibilities and the role they have in modelling behaviours.

#### **4.6 Summary of Findings**

Presented above are multiple data sources (namely HT interview, LSA interviews, group semi-structured interviews and systematic observations) that have been analysed to provide a pen portrait of the Summerville School, quantitative data about LSAs' contributions across the three units of analysis, a thematic map outlining the LSA role across the whole school and a thematic map of the HT's perceptions of the LSA role.

The pen portrait provides us with concise information regarding the school context with which the research takes place; a special needs school for pupils with SLD and PMLD currently catering for the needs of 36 children. The School Prospectus adds further information for the researcher to comment on additional contextual information such as statements on policy and practice.

Collated, whole school observation data<sup>15</sup> provides quantitative information about the LSA role across the three units of analysis (working with the child, working with staff and impact). The data highlighted the following key findings:

- The majority of support (72%) was directed towards the individual (37.46%) and small groups (34.29%).
- LSAs delivered the majority of their support with complete autonomy (47.30%).
- This support was focused towards teaching and learning (47.94%) and care (22.54%).
- The positions with which the LSAs were deployed were consistent with the actual support they delivered to the individual and small groups.
- Communications between LSAs and the teacher occurred in roughly a quarter of the total observations and they were more frequently initiated by the LSA.
- The ECM outcome of *enjoying and achieving* was judged to be met by the majority of LSA actions.
- ECM outcomes for the individual child were most frequent.

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<sup>15</sup> Individual class observation data can be found in appendix J.

The LSA interviews provided a comprehensive thematic map (figure 4-2) of the LSAs' roles and important contextual information. This was derived from a process of thematic analysis described in section 3.7. Three organising themes drawn from the units of analysis and six inductive organising themes emerged from the interviews, highlighting the following key findings:

#### *Working with the Child*

- The LSAs play an integral role in a 'high-density' approach to assessment through the use of an IEP and notelet system.
- LSAs provide a wide ranging level of care for the children from personal hygiene through to medical support.
- Parent contact is led by the LSAs through a home-school diary and a bridge between the school and families is created by a senior LSA's additional responsibility in supporting families.
- LSAs support teaching and learning in wide variety of capacities (resource preparation, direct teaching, facilitating the lesson, etc) all stemming from their awareness of the importance of understanding pupils' needs.
- LSAs' most significant role in multi-agency working is at the output level when implementing professional advice.
- LSAs support children in a number of other vital roles such as well-being, social and communication skills and with behaviour.

#### *Working with Staff*

- LSAs work within a cohesive team with a strong team ethos enhanced by positive social relationships.
- Scheduled planning opportunities and good communication between staff allows for a collaborative approach to planning.
- LSAs draw upon each other's strengths and offer flexible support to their colleagues.
- LSAs see effective communication with the teacher as a good learning opportunity.

### *Measuring Impact*

- Many of the LSAs are unaware of their impact or indeed how it is measured.
- LSAs did report measuring their impact by observing successes, or through feedback and the positive relationships that they have nurtured.

### *School Features*

- Through the leadership of a strong HT, the school has an established feeling of warmth and collaboration with a focus on promoting CPD via the LSA manager (senior LSA).

### *LSAs' Feelings and Reflections*

- LSAs feel valued in a role they also find rewarding and enjoyable.
- Comparisons are made between the increased behavioural challenges facing LSAs in a special school rather than in the mainstream environment.

### *Ideas for Change*

- Time for reflection, increased special school specific training and greater efficiency with information exchange are three areas that LSAs would appreciate change in.

### *Challenges*

- Changes to the class team are viewed as challenging by LSAs as is responding to prolonged teacher absence.
- There is a perception amongst LSAs that there is insufficient time for reflection.
- Managing behaviour is regarded as one of the most challenging aspects of the role.
- Mental, physical and professional challenges also put pressure on LSAs.

### *Team Features*

- LSAs work in similarly structured classroom in ratios of roughly two children to one adult.
- Deployment is needs-led and when need is high LSAs are more likely to engage in 1:1 Support.
- A large variation in experience and qualifications exists in the LSA teams.
- LSAs were able to identify personal strengths in the areas of commitment, team work, resilience, flexibility, using instinct and managing behaviour amongst other strengths.
- Each LSA has been assigned a 'special role', however only the roles of total communication (Makaton) and parent liaison, emerged from the data.
- LSAs identified ASD, ICT and specific SEN knowledge as areas for potential development.

The HT interview confirmed the perceptions of the LSAs adding further strength to the thematic map of the LSA role. A few discrepancies emerged regarding the role that LSAs play in modelling behaviour and the explicit understanding of their additional responsibilities. The HT also discussed the changes that were taking place in the school in response to staff concerns (identified in the biennial review process) such as an increased training in B-Squared and a new approach to encouraging LSAs to partake in multi-agency meetings.



## 5 Discussion

The role and impact of the LSA has historically been a poorly understood phenomenon. Thomas et al. (1998) described the grey areas that exist when attempting to define the role and they suggest the reason for this lack of clarity is that no one has made explicit what it is an LSA is supposed to do. This study does not aim to meet this challenge by providing a 'one-size-fits-all' model of the LSA role. Instead the research aims to identify the role of the LSA within a special school case study and also the real or potential impact of the role. In addition to answering the research questions, the school context within which the findings emerged will also be discussed, as will any philosophical positions regarding the differences between the special school LSA role and the mainstream LSA role. Implications for theory, practice and future research are also discussed.

### 5.1 Research Question 1

**How does the special school LSA role operate across the following domains; teaching and learning, assessment, care, multi-agency working and community liaison?**

LSAs perform a staggering range of duties and responsibilities across the school. This style of 'general practitioner' support that is expected of them was also identified by Abbot et al. (2011) and spans pedagogical, health and medical needs of a much more complex nature. During the initial stages of research, the researcher required a theoretical position from which to begin an investigation into the LSA role. As there is no research into the role of the special school LSA in isolation, the researcher had to draw upon the literature pertaining to hybrid models of LSA practice (Farrell et al., 1999 and Lacey, 2001). Both Farrell and Lacey undertook research into the LSA role across mainstream and special school settings. Farrell et al. (1999) proposed a framework for evaluating practice (table 4-1) comprising four areas with which an LSA can contribute, these are *working cooperatively with teachers to support learning, working with teachers to prepare lesson plans and materials, contributing to the evaluation of outcomes and making relevant contributions to wider school activities*. These four areas were synthesised by the researcher into three more concise yet wider reaching areas used within the research as the unit of analysis, LSA working with the child, LSA working with staff and impact of the LSA role. The researcher felt that these three areas would make a

more appropriate analytical framework for exploring the LSA role as it was anticipated that there would be too much overlap between LSA actions within Farrell et al.'s framework. These three units of analysis were then applied to the data gathering methods (within the structure of the LSA interviews, as framework for observations and also in the HT interview). The units of analysis were also then used when completing thematic analysis on the data by integrating them as a coding manual (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

As highlighted within the literature review, the LSA role is conceptualised globally in a multitude of ways (Rose and O'Neill, 2009), supporting teaching and learning (Cremin et al., 2007), raising attainment (Black-Hawkins et al., 2007), as targets for additional attachment figures (De Schipper & De Schuengel, 2010), as enablers and carers (Takala, 2007), behaviour support within CAHMS services, facilitating integration to and from settings, supporting personal and social development (Groom, 2006) and as part of the extended schools agenda (DfES, 2002). The researcher synthesised this range of areas into five clear and distinct areas of contribution. These were teaching and learning, assessment, care, multi-agency working and community liaison which later applied in the analysis as the second component of the coding manual. Prior to establishing these key areas, other role frameworks were considered, however, these were not specific to the special school LSA and did not satisfy the potential roles that the LSAs engage in (Foreman et al., 2001 and Minodo et al., 2001).

Outlined below are the six domains across which the LSA role operates. The researcher has synthesised the sub-themes and codes from the thematic map of the LSA role (figure 4-2) in order to produce concise 'key areas' of support within each domain. Each key area has been conceptualised to give a more fluent description of the LSAs key roles and links back to the organising themes, sub-themes and codes described in section 4.4. When engaging with this section of the thesis, the researcher would advise making reference to the thematic map of the LSA role (see figure 4-2 above). This will aid the reader in understanding how the researcher has synthesised the roles and drawn upon information from all the organising themes. In addition to this, at the end of each subsection the researcher has listed a number of references to the findings subsections from which the results have been synthesised.

### **5.1.1 Teaching and Learning**

Many of the findings from the current research meet the conceptions highlighted within the literature as well as the five key areas. Supporting ***teaching and learning*** is a significant aspect of LSAs responsibilities, their input in this area was observed to constitute the majority of their contributions within the lesson. By working with a small number of children, LSAs are able to build strong relationship allowing them to develop an acute understanding of their needs. For example understanding the best conditions for their learning, the most effective ways with which the child can communicate, understanding their anxieties, how they arise and how they can be supported in reducing them. As described by Lewis and Norwich (2000), a high-density approach to teaching allows for this understanding to be developed. LSAs' contributions within the area of ***teaching and learning*** can be further synthesised into the following operational roles;

- **Establishing a context for learning**
- **Facilitating a fluent lesson**
- **Providing teacher-led teaching**

#### **Establishing a context for learning**

Through establishing relationships with children and by being involved in a high-density teaching approach LSAs are able to develop an acute understanding of children's needs and the conditions necessary, such as the sensory environment, for effective learning and engagement to take place. As they are also involved in resource preparation they can integrate their knowledge of children's needs in the design and production of resources.

#### **Facilitating a fluent lesson**

By keeping 'bums on chairs', directing children's focus and de-escalating behavioural disruptions, LSAs play a vital role in allowing the teacher to teach. LSAs demonstrate a reactive, flexible and vigilant approach to supporting the teacher and the fluidity of the lesson. In order to do this, LSAs must be allowed to operate with a level of autonomy as demanded by the often unpredictable nature of the behaviour of children with SLD and PMLD.

## **Providing teacher-led teaching**

As one would expect, the vast majority of the teaching to the whole class is completed by the class teacher. The LSAs follow this teaching through by ensuring the message is repeated and reinforced throughout the lesson. This may be in a 1:1 or small group capacity. LSAs use their initiative and understanding of the child to ensure that children can access the lesson content delivered by the teacher. During planning opportunities, LSAs acquire knowledge of the current theme (the school curriculum is delivered through a changing set of themes) or topic being taught which further enhances their ability to ensure children can participate through individualised support.

For the senior LSAs with an HLTA qualification, these three key areas do not cover the responsibilities that they have in teaching and learning. Senior LSAs provide a covering responsibility when the class teacher is absent. They will also take on more responsibility with planning and resource preparation.

(These descriptions of key areas of support in the domain of ***teaching and learning*** were generated from codes and sub-themes within sections 4.4.1.1, 4.4.1.5, 4.4.1.6, 4.4.5, 4.4.8.1, 4.4.8.3, 4.4.8.4 and figure 4-4).

### **5.1.2 Assessment**

As well as providing a key role in the teaching and learning of the children at Summerville School, LSAs are involved in the assessment of children's progress. Both Foreman et al. (2001) and Minodo et al. (2001) proposed role frameworks that were initially considered by the researcher for use as a coding manual and to inform the creation of the semi-structured interviews. Neither of these two frameworks considered the role that LSAs may play in the assessment of children's progress. The researcher acknowledges that these frameworks were proposed for LSAs in the inclusive mainstream setting and it is at this point that an important distinction is made. LSAs at Summerville School engage actively with pupils' assessment, the high-density with which they provide support enables them to be best placed to contribute in this way. The researcher would suggest that a fundamental difference between the mainstream and special school LSA can be identified here and this will be explored later in the discussion. Farrell et al.'s (1999) framework for LSA

evaluation is comprehensive enough to cover the role that LSAs play in assessment. Criteria three of their framework states that “LSAs contribute to the evaluation of the outcomes of lessons” (See table 2-1). What is also desirable about this criteria is that the term ‘outcomes’ is used, allowing for the inclusion of LSA evaluations across multiple settings where outcomes vary greatly from achieving GCSE grades to being able to button up a jacket.

LSAs are actively involved in the assessment process throughout the school day. A strong relationship with the children allows LSAs to establish a context for learning and also means they are well placed to contribute accurately within the assessment process. The findings in the area of **assessment** can be synthesised into the following key roles:

- **Knowledge of pupil goals**
- **High-density noticing, recording and adjusting**
- **Evidencing and celebrating**

### **Knowledge of pupil goals**

LSAs perceive the relationship between themselves and the children as being of the utmost importance. As described above, this allows LSAs to establish a context for learning and also to be fully informed regarding pupil goals. IEPs are used as the main communicative tool with regards to pupil goals and intended outcomes. These goals are established during the annual review process (as part of their statement of educational needs) and are shared with LSAs by the class teacher and through the IEPs. As well as discussing children’s IEPs in planning meetings, they are displayed permanently on the walls of the classroom. This provision helps LSAs to move beyond an understanding of need, to an understanding of formalised pupil goals.

### **High-density noticing, recording and adjusting**

With a good knowledge of children’s IEPs and targets, the LSA engages in a high-density approach to monitoring their progress. Using a notelet system they observe children throughout the day whilst keeping their current targets in mind. No matter how small a step is made by the children, it is noted down by LSAs and pinned to

their IEP for assimilation at the end of the day. This process is ongoing and with new information about how the children are progressing, teachers, with the support of LSAs, can modify and adjust targets in accordance with pupil progress.

### **Evidencing and celebrating**

As well as observing and recording children's progress, LSAs are responsible for evidencing the progress in the form of photographs videos and tangible contributions. Through a developing skills base in ICT and file management, LSAs take photos of small steps, transfer these to the computer and convert them into a variety of ways for celebrating children's success. This can be as a pupil passport or portfolio or as a slideshow during assembly.

Although Farrell et al.'s (1999) framework allows for the inclusion of LSA assessment, views of those interviewed in the research highlighted a perception that involvement in assessment is a challenging role for LSAs and one which distinguishes their role from that of the teacher. The role that LSAs play in the current research is embraced with confidence and autonomy and does not present as a 'challenge'. LSAs are less involved in the setting of targets and also in the reviewing of targets as part of the annual review process, however, their significant role can be located within the 'body' of assessment. This is considered to be a central role of the LSA. Instead of assessment being the distinguishing factor between the teacher and the LSA (as suggested within Farrell et al.'s research), it is instead a distinguishing feature between the mainstream and the special school LSA. As identified by Blatchford et al. (2009a), important pupil information that can be provided by support staff can be underused in teachers' wider planning, assessment and classroom interactions. This is not the case at Summerville School and it could be argued that their contributions to the assessment process are essential and relied upon.

At the time with which the data was gathered, LSAs were completing this role with autonomy but with little knowledge of how it fed into the P-Level or B-Squared system. During the head teacher interview, it emerged that this is an area of priority for future staff training and there is an expectation that the LSAs' future role will involve having a greater understanding of the P-Level system and thus will inform their perceptions of pupils' progress within their high-density approach.

(These descriptions of key areas of support in the domain of **assessment** were generated from codes and sub-themes within sections 4.4.1.1, 4.4.1.3, 4.4.1.5, 4.4.2, 4.4.8.3, 4.4.8.5 and figure 4-8.)

### 5.1.3 **Care**

More traditional perspectives of the LSA role have focused on their primary responsibility for care and physical support for children (Brennan, 1982 and Hammersly-Fletcher & Lowe 2011). Arguably this conception involves less skill and knowledge of education than a more current perspective (Blatchford et al., 2009b, Farrell, et al., 1999; Foreman et al., 2001 and Minodo et al., 2001). Despite being heavily involved in many aspects of teaching and learning, what is evident at Summerville School is the essential role that LSAs still play in supporting children's care. The varying ways that LSAs offer support in the domain of **care** can be described within the following key roles.

- **Staying safe**
- **Keeping healthy**
- **Ensuring dignity**

#### **Staying safe**

Ensuring children's safety is an ongoing responsibility of the LSA and often involves a level of vigilance demonstrated as a strength by the LSAs at Summerville school. This responsibility is also outlined within the school prospectus. LSAs are only able to keep children safe within school by maintaining and understanding their needs, changing behaviours and sensory needs. LSAs are also deployed in a way that reflects these safety needs, for example by having two senior LSAs in one classroom in response to highly demanding behavioural needs that may, at times, put the safety of that pupil and other pupils at risk.

#### **Keeping healthy**

By supporting toileting, hygiene and eating, LSAs are providing a level of care that strives to ensure children stay healthy. All LSAs support children with toileting throughout the day as well as helping children to stay clean and dry. Through the

home-school diary as well as responding to advice from nutritionists and the school nurse, LSAs have an understanding of the dietary requirements needed to maintain a healthy nutritional balance but also to avoid any dietary complications.

### **Ensuring dignity**

This final area of care is more of a philosophy adopted by LSAs either explicitly or implicitly. The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) drew a focus towards dignity for children for all children in education. All children at school go through bumps, scrapes and puddles in a typical school day, this is no different at Summerville School. The difference may be in that children with SLD and PMLD are less able to maintain levels of presentation and appearance at which point the LSAs play a subtle but very important role in supporting a dignified education.

In section 5.4 the differences between the mainstream and the special school LSA that can be observed or speculated upon will be discussed in depth. One of these differences will inevitably be the level of care that LSAs engage in. The LSA role in Summerville School has moved a long way from the traditional care role and into domains like teaching and learning and multi-agency working. However, the role's scope to go beyond the current model of practice is limited without reducing the extent of their care responsibilities.

(These descriptions of key areas of support in the domain of **care** were generated from codes and sub-themes within sections 4.4.1.1, 4.4.1.2, 4.4.1.3, 4.4.1.4, 4.4.1.6, 4.4.5, 4.4.8.1 and 4.4.8.3.)

#### **5.1.4 Multi-agency working**

A developing role for the LSAs within Summerville School is the way in which they work alongside external agencies or other professionals through multi-agency or multi-disciplinary working. Joined up approaches to supporting the child have been a strongly advocated in recent years (DfES, 2004; DfES, 2005; Lamb, 2010 and OfSTED 2010). LSAs are involved in **multi-agency working** primarily at the input and output level.



- **Inputting knowledge**
- **Implementing advice**

### **Inputting knowledge**

Prior to the multi-disciplinary meetings, LSAs share their views and concerns regarding a pupils' current position in the school. This information is then taken to the multi-disciplinary meeting by the Class Teacher and the LSAs' views are fed into the wider conversation. Consultation with LSAs prior to any major decision making should be emphasised as their close proximity with the child means that they have invaluable insights to offer (Abbot, McConkey & Dobbins, 2011 and Farrell, et al., 1999).

### **Implementing advice**

Either directly or indirectly, LSAs will also work through a multi-agency capacity at the output level. Following multi-disciplinary meetings or consultations with other professionals such as Speech and Language Therapists or Educational Psychologist, LSAs will be supported to implement previously agreed advice. Their role at this stage is arguably the most important. Any decisions that are made during child consultation meetings are only effective dependent upon how the LSAs implement them.

This current model of practice for LSAs offers opportunities to learn from other professionals, however their lack of involvement at the decision making stage has risks. Decisions regarding support strategies are often made within a specific context and as a result of the triangulation of a number of different sources of information. Being privy to these conversations adds a wealth of contextual information that is likely to support the implementation of such advice. This situation has fortunately been acknowledged at Summerville School and LSAs are now encouraged to attend the meetings when possible. This change will help increase the feelings of empowerment that emerge through participation (Cherniss, 1997).

One of the concerns voiced by the LSAs was a lack of time for planning and reflection. Although there will inevitably be opportunities for LSAs and Class Teachers to discuss prior to multi-disciplinary meetings. There is a concern that this time might be insufficient to allow effective knowledge sharing and one would want

to ensure that LSAs contributions are not underused as demonstrated in Blatchford et al.'s (2009a) research.

(These descriptions of key areas of support in the domain of *multi-agency working* were generated from codes and sub-themes within sections 4.4.1.3, 4.4.2, 4.4.7 and 4.5.1.3.)

### **5.1.5 Parent and Community Liaison**

As part of the theoretical coding manual (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006) the domain of community liaison was established as an area that the researcher anticipated LSAs would contribute towards. As the research progressed, the definition of this code was changed to incorporate parent contact. The reason for this was that although incidents of community liaison did occur, they were insufficient to justify their own theme. This responsive approach to coding and theming is supported by both Braun and Clarke (2002) and Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006). The LSAs role in respect to *community and parent contact* operates at the following key levels:

- **Engaging and sharing information with parents**
- **Community and mainstream integration**

#### **Engaging and sharing information with parents**

LSAs provide parents with frequently updated information about how their child is 'getting on' through the home-school diary system. This acts as a two-way process whereby parents who wish to, can add their views or information about recent events that may have impacted upon their child. This reciprocal information sharing is crucial in maintaining an accurate understanding of the child's needs. It also constitutes one of three essential components in ensuring parental satisfaction. Dobbins and Abbott (2010), identified that there were three necessary conditions in order to ensure that parents were satisfied with the contact they have with their child's special school, 'communication', 'parental involvement' and 'developing partnerships'. The LSA led home-school diary is an effective method of communication in this respect. The remaining components are met through the

wider school initiatives in which LSAs play a lesser role (e.g. parental invitations to attend the celebratory assemblies as well as organised events such as parents' evenings and coffee mornings)

### **Community and mainstream integration**

Through multiple sources of data (11 LSA interviews, four group interviews, observations, HT interview and the school prospectus) examples of LSAs being involved in community or mainstream school integration were limited to supporting children on external trips (often involving additional training in medical competencies in order to meet the needs of individual children) and in chaperoning children during a weekly integration session to neighbouring special school catering for children with Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD). Involvement in wider or more developed integration schemes was not referenced by LSAs. Despite this, evidenced in the school prospectus, are organised events within the public domain, however, the LSAs role at these events is unclear. Regular perceptions were offered regarding the importance of developing children's life and social skills thereby empowering them to be able to integrate with the community in the future.

(These descriptions of key areas of support in the domain of ***parent and community liaison*** were generated from codes and sub-themes within sections 4.4.1.3, 4.4.1.6, 4.4.8.3 and 4.4.8.4.)

#### **5.1.6 Other Roles**

The key areas within the five domains described above encompass the vast majority of the LSAs' roles and responsibilities. Within the data, an additional sub-theme emerged encompassing roles which, for various reasons could not be conceptualised within the five domains of teaching and learning, assessment, care, multi-agency working and parent and community contact. The roles encompassed within the role of ***other*** can be described by the following three key themes;

- **Developing skills for life**
- **Supporting behaviour**
- **Promoting happiness**

### **Developing skills for life**

LSAs support children in developing key life skills such as social and communication skills and self-help skills. There was an acknowledgement that an important aspect of the LSAs' role is not only to support children's progress at school but to help them develop a range of key life skills that allow them to integrate into society in the future.

### **Supporting behaviour**

As with all the areas of support offered by LSAs, a fundamental requirement is an in-depth knowledge of children's needs. This is also the case when supporting pupils' behaviour. LSAs have an understanding of the sensory requirements of some children and support them in accessing a sensory diet. By providing children with the correct level of sensory stimulation (or sensory deprivation), LSAs can help to reduce children's anxieties and ensure they are more able to access learning and remain happy in the classroom.

### **Promoting happiness**

The final and arguably the most important role that LSAs play is by doing their utmost to ensure the children they support are happy. LSAs recognise the need to have a sense of humour in their role, not only when interacting with each other, but also when interacting with children.

(These descriptions of key areas of support in the domain of **other** were generated from codes and sub-themes within sections 4.4.1.5, 4.4.1.6, and 4.4.8.3.)

Outlined above are the key roles and responsibilities of the LSAs at Summerville School across the five domains explored by the research question, also shown below in figure 5-1. In addition the researcher identified a final domain defined as **other**, in which three additional key roles were identified. This final domain serves the model well in the respect that if the model was applied to another setting there would inevitably be nuances and differences within certain aspects of the role. These subtle differences would be accommodated by the domain of **other**.

Lacey's definition of an LSA was used to conceptualise the role in the early stages of the research;

*"LSAs work in the classroom alongside teachers and pupils. They support individual pupils with SLD (severe learning difficulties) enabling them to be educated with their more able peers either within the special school or in the mainstream"*

(Lacey, 2010, pg 158)

In light of the findings, the researcher would propose the following definition as suited to the role of the special school LSA;

***LSAs work throughout the school alongside teachers and pupils. They support pupils with severe and profound or multiple learning difficulties, either individually, in small groups or at the whole class level as an HLTA. With a deep understanding of individual pupil needs, they focus their support on the facilitation of learning and progression as well as with personal care and well-being.***

## **5.2 Facilitating the Role**

Section 5.1 describes the way in which the LSA role operates across the five domains stipulated in the research questions. It is also important to consider the context and enabling factors that facilitate the way the LSA operates within the model shown in figure 5-1.

With respect to ***working with staff***, the findings suggest that LSAs are only able to fully function in their role through working as a close knit, cohesive team. LSAs have positive social as well as professional relationships from which they are able to draw upon the strengths of others and offer flexible support. LSAs also have scheduled opportunities to work with teachers and their LSA teams in order to plan and prepare work. Teachers offer considerable praise to the hard work and contributions made by the LSAs whom view these opportunities of collaborative working as a chance to learn new skills.

There are numerous ***school-specific features*** which have also facilitated the development of this LSA model of practice (figure 5-1). There is a perception amongst support staff of strong leaderships from the HT and this has resulted in a variety of supportive systems being established for LSAs such as a support staff manager being introduced, LSA orientated training provision (P-Levels and B-Squared) and also LSA led systemic changes (LSAs encouraged to attend multi-disciplinary meetings). The prevailing feeling of warmth experienced by staff and visitors to the school helps promote a level of job satisfaction and unity amongst staff that has also helped to build the positive LSA perceptions of their role.

Outlined in figure 5-1 is a model of practice describing what it is the LSAs at Summerville School do on a daily basis. It is also important to reflect on how this is done in terms of ***LSA deployment*** and the ***skills base*** and ***qualifications*** that they draw upon. LSAs work with children either through a 1:1 capacity or in small groups, the ratio of pupils to staff is roughly 2:1 and this is considered an appropriate ratio by the LSAs. A consistent structure also exists throughout the classes, whereby each team comprises an LSA, a senior LSA and a class teacher. Depending on the level of need within the classroom, there may be more LSAs deployed within the class. The level of qualification amongst the teams is varied, however, all staff have an assortment of practical qualifications or training certificates achieved from in-house CPD. Summerville School places an emphasis on meeting the CPD needs of LSAs through the process of biennial reviews. Some of the personal strengths identified by the LSAs are strengths acquired over time vigilance, instinct, confidence, resilience and fostering relationships. Other strengths that emerged may be more innate within the LSA role, such as commitment and 'going above and beyond' the role.

(The findings drawn upon within this section can be found in sections 4.4.2, 4.4.4, 4.4.5, 4.5.2, 4.4.8.1, 4.4.8.2 and 4.4.8.3.)

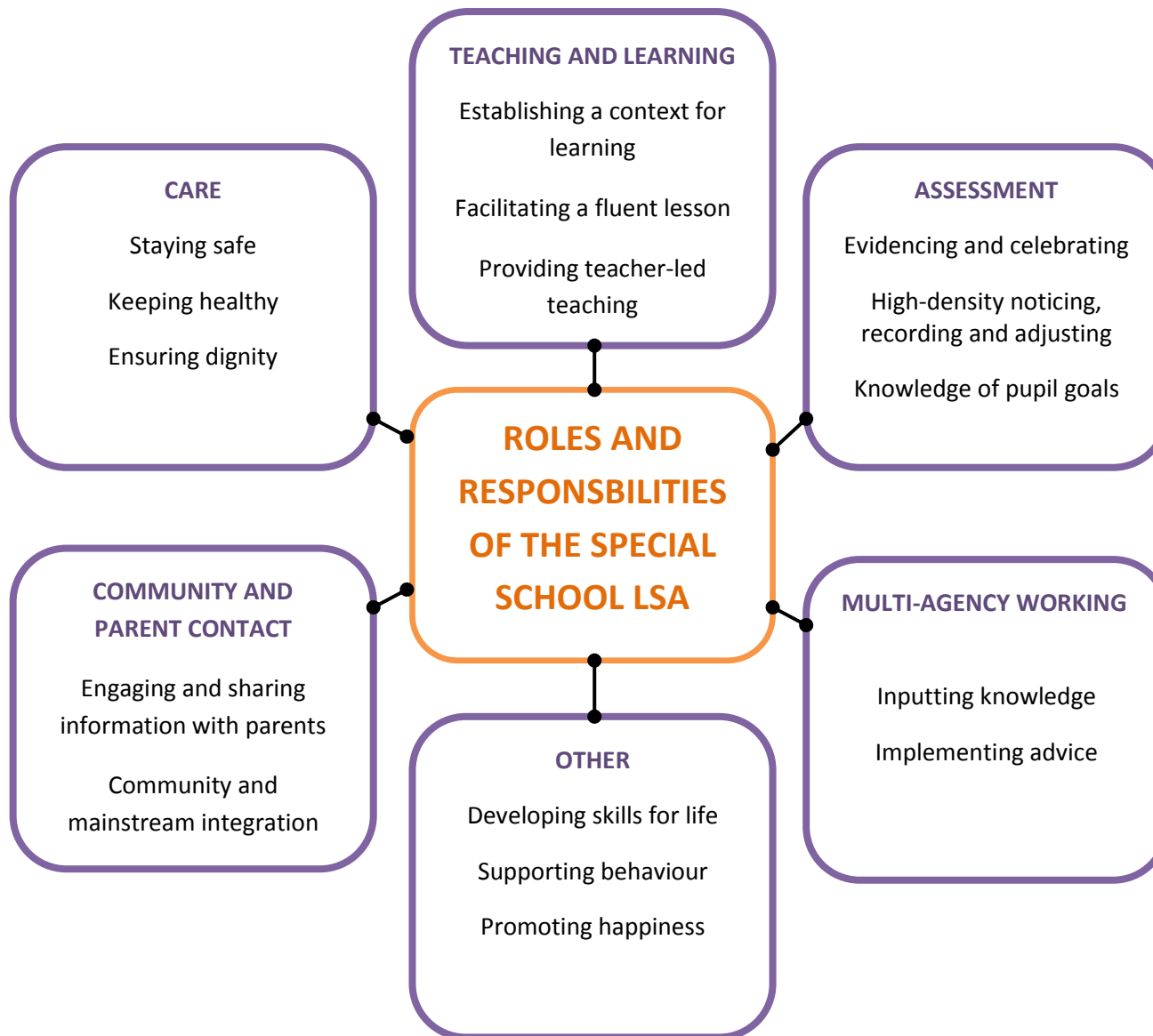


Figure 5-1: Model of special school LSA roles and responsibilities

The picture of the LSA role painted above is an extremely positive one describing a range of roles, responsibilities and skills. What will be examined next is the observed or potential impact of the model of practice outlined in figure 5-1.

### **5.3 Research Question 2**

#### **What is the current or potential effectiveness of the special school LSA role?**

The findings so far have presented us with a clear and detailed picture of the special school LSA role, however, the extent to which we have identified the real or potential impact of the LSA is not yet clear. When examining the data for examples of 'real impact' the researcher will turn first to the observation data gathered from 30 minute observations of all the LSAs. The observations were made using a one minute time sampling methodology. At the end of each new minute, observations were made using a number of frameworks adapted from Blatchford et al. (2006). The three frameworks allowed for systematic data collection across the three units of analysis, LSA working with the child, LSA working with staff and the impact of the LSA role. The 'impact' observation was completed immediately after each observation. Upon each observation sheet, the researcher recording notes regarding the activities, events and incidents that occurred. This allowed an assessment of where the LSA may or may not have had an impact. Each observation was recorded for the outcome that was judged to be most significantly met by the LSAs' contribution. For example an LSA offering mediation to support a child when completing a task set by the teacher was judged to meet the ECM outcome of *enjoying and achieving* regardless of whether it may have met outcomes such as *making a positive contribution* in addition.

Assessing impact was originally perceived by the researcher to be a complex challenge that would require a longitudinal element and as such, initial research proposals contained no inclusion of impact assessment. Following feedback from the sponsoring University thesis panel, however, it was suggested that the researcher use the 'Every Child Matters: Change for Children' (DfES, 2004) outcomes. These outcomes were conceived to apply to all children regardless of their educational context. They are *being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution* and *achieving economic well-being*.



The observations indicated that the majority of the LSAs actions primarily benefitted the outcome of *enjoying and achieving* (68% of contributions). Observations meeting this criterion involved supporting children to make progress with the lesson and learning objectives, recording and feeding back progress and achievements as well as ensuring that children are enjoying the day by introducing humour and offering positive feedback and praise. The ECM outcome of *staying safe* was the second most supported outcome (19% of contributions). These contributions primarily involved managing children's behaviour, ensuring that children remained safely in the classroom (many children would display a tendency to explore the classroom and beyond) and being vigilant to ensure that more vulnerable children were protected from the potentially dangerous behaviours of others. The outcome of *being healthy* was judged to be the most significantly met outcome for 17% of the LSAs' contributions. These observations included LSAs supporting children to eat or drink, with matters of personal hygiene or toileting, in making choices for lunch, supporting physical needs or physiotherapy programmes as well as promoting physical fitness through physical activities.

The remaining contributions were judged to be met less frequently by the LSAs. *Making a positive contribution* was the most significantly met outcome for 6% of LSA contributions. This involved LSAs helping children to contribute during group time, displaying children's contributions in the classroom, supporting children to complete responsibilities within the school such as handing out objects and contributing to the school community through sharing. The researcher acknowledges that this percentage figure would have been likely to increase if overlap between LSA contributions had been considered, for example by helping a child complete a lesson specific task, they may well have supported the outcome *enjoying and achieving* as well as *making a positive contributions*. The outcome of *achieving economic well-being* is summarised in the DfES (2004) publication below;

<b>Achieve economic well-being</b>	Engage in further education, employment or training on leaving school Ready for employment Live in decent homes and sustainable communities Access to transport and material goods Live in households free from low income <i>Parents, carers and families are supported to be economically active</i>
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**Figure 5-2: DfES (2004) summary of progress, actions or achievements assumed within the outcome *achieving economic well-being*.**

The researcher judged that none of the LSAs' contributions over the observation period primarily impacted upon this outcome. Achieving this outcome during the primary aged years whilst in special education may be considered a challenge. Unfortunately, there is a perception held by some that young people with learning disabilities are often discouraged from seeking employment (Snell, 2011). Children with learning disabilities who leave school have been shown to be significantly less likely to acquire paid employment (Hasazi, Gordon & Roe, 1985; National Organisation on disability, 2004 and Test, Mazzoti, Mustian, Folwer, Kotering & Kohler, 2009). For those with SLD and PMLD, achieving paid employment is even more of a challenge (25% and 8% respectively) (La Plante, Kennedy, Kaye & Wenger, 1996). Within this context, it is not unexpected that this fifth ECM outcome is met less than its counterparts. Although not observed, it is likely that contributions focusing on achieving economic wellbeing will occur for pupils in their final year at Summerville School. Beyond this it is also anticipated that the secondary age provision will elevate this outcome within their priorities for pupils.

The descriptions above provide information about the LSAs' impact against a qualitative framework, the observations also recorded who received this input. LSAs were anticipated to be able to contribute at one of five levels, the target individual or target group, a non-target individual or non-target group and at the whole class level. The significant majority of LSA contributions were judged to impact the target individual (50.79% of contributions), with a target group gaining an impact towards an ECM outcome for 37.46% of contributions. There was no observed impact benefitting the whole class, as would be expected. This is not likely to be the case if a senior LSA was observed whilst in a covering role and instructing the whole class.

The third aspect to consider in relation to the impact of LSAs is the areas in which the HT and the LSAs themselves perceive their impact to lie. The HT interview revealed that the key areas in which LSAs have an impact are the broad areas of care and learning. These areas may appear vague and could subjectively include responsibilities geared towards behaviour management, assessment or even multi-agency working. One may also prefer a more specific response from the HT, however, this response reflects the 'general practitioner' role of the LSA identified earlier in section 4.4.1.2. The themes and observations within this study highlight a wide range of roles engaged by LSAs, many of them completed with confidence through learned experience as opposed to specialised training. It is this observation that leads one to define their role as that of 'general practitioner'. All LSAs were asked the question, "Which area of a young person's development do you think you have most impact on?" A code was not generated for this response as the answers were so varied. LSAs perceived their main areas of impact across the following areas, life skills, social skills, care, communication, behaviour, relationships, facilitating the lesson and general welfare. This range of perceptions again supports a 'general practitioner' analogy. LSAs reported measuring their impact through 'common-sense' approaches such as observing successes, establishing positive relationships with others as well as receiving positive feedback from colleagues. In the absence of qualitative frameworks such as the ECM outcomes, this approach to measuring one's own impact is sensible and accessible and based upon the fundamental objectives of their role i.e. supporting children's progress.

When triangulating the themes from the LSA and HT interview, the observations of the research and the academic literature, there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that LSAs make a distinct contribution (Abbott, McConkey & Dobbins, 2011; Clarke, Dyson, Millward & Robson 1999; Cremin, Thomas & Vincent, 2007; Mistry, Burton and Brundrett, 2004 and Moran & Abbott 2002). The current research contributes to this widely held perception by providing a model of practice (see figure 5-1) perceived as effective and within a school evaluated as 'Good' by OfSTED. What makes this study unique is the focus specifically upon the role of LSA within the special school. Within the literature there is a dearth of evidence reviewing the role of the special school LSA (Lacey, 2001), conversely, the LSA working in the mainstream setting has received a lot of attention since the DfES workforce reforms in 2003 (Blatchford et al., 2009b; Burgess & Shelton Mayes, 2009; Cremin, Thomas & Vincent, 2007; Giangreco, 2003; Groom, 2006 and Webster et al., 2010). Another unique aspect of the current research findings is the wide range of responsibilities

and impacts that LSAs contribute to. Does this 'general practitioner' role distinguish a unique role for the special school LSA that is not found in the mainstream setting?

(The conclusions discussed in this section were drawn from subsections 4.4.1, 4.4.3, 4.5.1 and table 4-3).

It is at this point within the discussion that the researcher feels it is necessary to reflect on the extent to which the research questions have been answered within this study. In relation to research question 1, the data gathered provides a clear, detailed and thorough portrayal of the special school LSA role across the domains of assessment, care, community and parent liaison, multi-agency working and teaching and learning. What may be less clear is the real or potential impact of the special school LSA which is explored as research question 2. The research offers data with regards to the extent to which the LSAs' actions are judged to meet ECM outcomes and it also offers insights into the ways in which LSAs make judgements about the effectiveness of their role. What the research does not do is offer tangible or quantifiable measures by which one can confidently assess the impact of the special school LSA. A fuller and more comprehensive answer to research question 2 will require further research allowing for longitudinal study.

#### **5.4 Mainstream vs. Special School LSA, Where is the Difference?**

It is worth reflecting on the multiple differences between the special school and mainstream school LSA when considering the findings, as these have been historically ignored. Summerville School comprises 36 children with either SLD or PMLD and it is not enough to simply say that these children may present with a higher level of need than those children identified as having SEN in a mainstream school. A child experiencing profound and multiple learning difficulties is also likely to have a profound intellectual impairment as well as sensory or motor impairments and as such they may remain in the very early stages of development all of their lives (Lacey, 2001). Within a mainstream setting it is likely that there will be a spectrum of difficulty of SEN ranging from a child identified as having SEN for simply having low attainment and relatively slow progress (Ofsted, 2010) to a child being identified as having significant learning difficulties. Across this spectrum it is also highly likely that despite their special educational need, the child or young person will have predominantly age appropriate (or slightly delayed) levels of development in areas like self-help skills, fine and gross motor skills, and communication skills, etc. They are not likely to have the severely delayed and

global developmental profile experienced by children identified as having PMLD. With this in mind one has a more accurate conceptualisation of the differing types of support offered by LSAs in mainstream and special schools. It is not a comparison of the frequency, type or level of support offered but instead a comparison between the developing skills that are supported. This leads appropriately into a discussion regarding why LSAs have been shown to be ineffective in supporting pupils with SEN to make progress.

This research was, in part, inspired by one of negative outcomes highlighted within Blatchford et al.'s (2009b) DISS project;

*“Those who received the most support from TAs made less progress than similar pupils with less TA support.”*

(Webster, et al. 2010, pg 1)

The current research does not aim to oppose such a finding, instead, the researcher hopes that light can be shed on why this finding emerged in the first place. As highlighted by Fletcher-Campbell (2010), this outcome is all well and good but there is no alternative approach, method of deployment, or model of LSA practice offered by either Webster et al. or Blatchford et al. An interesting finding from the current research is the high-density assessment approach adopted by LSAs. This approach requires an understanding of the needs that are important to that child. This allows targets to be set that are appropriate, achievable and are not measured against national tables and competition. With this in place, LSAs adopt a high-density approach to monitoring, noticing and adjusting. At this level progress is clearly recorded and guaranteed by well timed mediation. This approach may not be conducive to the target driven ethos of the mainstream environment, however, as highlighted by Muncey and McGinty (2007), it is what is valuable to the child that truly counts

*“If Excellence for all Children is to mean anything and target setting for individual schools is to be realistic and achievable, what we do must be both valuable and meaningful for individual pupils. Only then will we be seen to be treating our pupils and parents in a truly responsible and accountable way.”*

(Muncey and McGinty, 2007 pp.178)

The researcher suggests that a needs-focused, small-steps, high-intensity assessment approach needs to be adopted by all LSAs regardless of setting. Only then can LSAs and LSA management ensure that their contributions achieve what was originally intended; improved outcomes for children and young people.

Abbot et al. (2011) in their research into how mainstream schools meet the professional needs of teaching assistants found that a significant number of the respondents were unhappy with the lack of career structure in place for LSAs and also the low levels of pay. Within the current research, LSAs were asked about their career path, their experience and their job satisfaction as well as being given opportunities to talk about aspects of the role that they were unhappy with. Across all 14 interviews there was only one extract which could be linked to frustration with the career structure of the role in that there were not enough senior positions available for the number of HLTA qualified staff. This suggests a fundamental difference in either ambition or attitude of the LSAs between the current case study special school and the mainstream primary schools within Abbot et al.'s research. This may also suggest that there are distinct differences between adults seeking LSA work within the mainstream and special school.

One final difference that needs to be addressed is the 'catch-22' situation between the negative implications of the over reliance on the one-to-one proliferation approach (Giangreco, 2003) and the huge benefits that have been observed in this study by spending time with a child and establishing a thorough understanding of children's needs. One of the concerns identified with the one-to-one proliferation method is that it is an example of 'double standards'; whereby the least qualified become responsible for the education of those with the highest level of need (Webster et al., 2010). The second concern is that the approach reduces the amount of time that the child spends with the teacher and also increases feelings of dependence from the young person towards the LSA. These arguments should not be applied to the LSA in the special school as many children in the special school environment will depend on adult support for certain aspects. In addition to this, the areas in which LSAs are often supporting children are more 'small and basic step focused' arguably requiring less of the skills acquired in teacher training courses and instead, requiring a comprehensive understanding of pupils' needs that comes from close one-to-one or small group proliferation.

## **5.5 Implications for Theory**

This research, although a case study design, has strong literal and theoretical replicability (Yin, 2009). Transparent frameworks, data gathering and analytical methodologies informed by the literature, were applied throughout the research along with clear contextual information about the case school. This allows for the replication of the study in a similar setting to either further consolidate the model outlined within the current research (figure 5-1), or conversely to identify the nuances that exist between different contexts (as Yin points out, the emergence of two frameworks or theories can be practical as well as academic). The conceptualisation of the findings is well established within a critical realist framework. The literal replicability of the methodology used allowed for the researcher to identify a reality of the Summerville School that is in fact moulded by the contextual and environmental milieu. This framework, if applied elsewhere will also provide a contextually dependant reality, based upon a consistent methodological approach. As highlighted by Coolican (2009), the generalisation of the findings to other special school settings is not desired, nor valid within such qualitative research. What is more important is the analytical generalisability of the research.

One might wish to reflect upon the strengths of the model identified within the current research (figure 5-1) and how these may be used to share best practice between settings with different skill sets. Bayliss and Simmons (2005) suggest mainstream schools may be able to support social gains for children with PMLD in ways that special schools are unable to. This is because of the wealth of opportunities available for peer interactions in the mainstream environment (Bayliss and Simmons, 2005). As suggested in the current research, the high-density approach to monitoring, noticing and adjusting is effective at Summerville School but is not evidenced in the mainstream school when supporting the inclusion of children with SEN. Both Bayliss and Simmons (2005) and the findings in the current research present an example of school-specific strategic advantages. In order to achieve maximum gains in both the mainstream and special school settings, management must capitalise on these advantages by sharing expertise and theory, and further strengthening links between partnering special and mainstream settings. This particular hypothesised example of strength sharing could even be applied to the case in point as the opportunities for interaction with the community were not observed or discussed as expected. The already strong model of practice may be

further enhanced by exploiting opportunities for interaction with neighbouring mainstream environments.

The clear cut role identified in figure 5-1 highlights a model of practice that works efficiently and successfully in one special school. With the exception of this research, no other model exists to date and thus those wishing to examine the role of the LSA would be advised to take note of the research despite the findings lack of generalisability. For those working within the field of special education, the research demonstrates the multi-faceted roles of the LSA, the areas with which they have most impact and the contextual conditions that help to create the role. Later in the discussion, the researcher explores the extent to which LSAs have clarity in the perception of their role. Before broaching this topic it is worth noting the lack of LSA role clarity that exists within the literature (Hancock, Hall, Cable & Eyres, 2010; Lacey, 2001 and Thomas et al., 1998). This absence of a concrete framework for LSA roles, or at least the differing opinions of role, may be attributed to the lack of recognition that LSA roles are crafted by the context within which they develop. Roles do not emerge as the biological offspring of a job specification but instead as a result of the division of labour through negotiation and custom (Allen, 2001). In addition to this, it is clear from the current research that models of practice are significantly affected by the type of provision in which they are employed (e.g. special school, mainstream school, pupil referral unit, etc). Maybe then, the search for LSA role clarity within the field of research is a lost cause. Instead further case study research such as this should be employed to provide models of what works within specific contexts, at the same time acknowledging the social and environmental contributions to the role. For example, much can be learnt from the ways in which, within the current research, LSAs employ an approach based upon establishing relationships, valuing reciprocal parental feedback and employing a high-density approach to learning, to highlight but a few examples. It also demonstrates the 'thick end' of a national boundary shift for LSAs occupational roles (Hancock et al., 2010), incorporating increasing amounts of teacher-typical work. This leads the researcher to suggest that a re-conception of the LSA support role should be considered. This is more easily described by referring to the alternate taxonomy of 'teaching assistant'. The absolute integral nature of this special school support is more appropriately defined as the role of the 'Assistant Teacher' more so than a 'Teaching Assistant'.



## **5.6 Implications for Practice**

As discussed above, the generalisability of the model of LSA practice identified in figure 5-1 is limited as a 'one model fits all' theory. However, what it does describe is an acute model of practice within Summerville School. It is the researcher's hope that through the data gathering process as well as following the presentation of the research to the school, the LSAs will have increased role clarity. LSAs at Summerville School can draw upon the findings and their experience of the research to help reflect on the successes that they achieve both for themselves and for the children with whom they work. The following discussions are by no means presented as a criticism instead they are presented as possible implications for future practice within the school and for those interested in the mechanisms of the LSA role.

A strong theme that presented in the research was that the externally provided training for LSAs was not 'fit for purpose'. LSAs commented on how many of the externally led courses they had attended appeared to be geared towards the mainstream LSA or towards issues faced more commonly in the mainstream environment. Local Authorities providing training to their maintained special schools may need to further evaluate the appropriateness of their training or further still, consider sharing expertise between local special schools or from settings further afield if needs be. From the school's perspective, closer evaluation of the courses attended may help to ensure that LSAs valuable CPD time is spent attending a course that will meet the needs of both the LSA and the children of Summerville School in preference to courses which are centred more towards the mainstream support network.

One of the challenges perceived by the LSAs was being faced with the unknown, for example having delayed information regarding new pupils arriving into the school or not knowing in which class team they may be placed in the next academic year. As touched on previously, feelings of anxiety towards the unknown or perceiving it to be challenging can be linked into the theory of 'control'. Measures to help reduce these anxieties may include a shift in the LSAs locus of control (Rotter, 1966). Involving LSAs in decision making process or at least endeavouring to inform them of decisions affecting their role as soon as possible may help LSAs to attribute a more intrinsic locus of control thereby reducing anxieties and potentially work related stress associated with an extrinsic locus of control (Halpin, Harris & Halpin,

1985 and Rotter, 1966). As highlighted by the LSAs within this study, each day involves numerous anticipations of the unknown, specifically in terms of unpredictable pupil behaviour. Retaining an internal locus of control is important to job satisfaction and LSA management should include an awareness of its importance.

As with most institutions, staff absence can, at times, cause unrest within a workforce. This is no different within Summerville School. Prolonged teacher absence was perceived by the LSAs to have a number of effects. Planning and resourcing was affected. Supply teachers were sometimes called upon who were not perceived to be competent and Senior LSAs were asked to cover, thus reducing the number of bodies within the classroom. This scenario presents a complex problem for LSAs. As reported in the data, LSAs sometimes feel that the lack of supply teacher competency requires them to step in and take control. This can be awkward and frustrating for LSAs. The alternative to this is that senior LSAs with the HTLA qualification take on an extended covering role. This would be the least favourable option as the HLTA qualification was not designed for this purpose;

*“Higher Level Teaching Assistants” who are not qualified teachers should not be a substitute for those qualified teachers employed to cover’*

(NUT, 2003, p. 12)

Issues of absence are unfortunately inevitable and the grievances that LSAs expressed are likely to be an ongoing challenge.

What can be insisted upon however is that those LSAs working for extended periods without their class teacher do not miss out on experiential learning. As highlighted previously, LSAs will also be missing out on the unique collaborative learning opportunity that comes from working alongside a teacher. A supervisory model could be offered to LSAs in this position, whereby they receive weekly optional supervision or support from a senior colleague to reflect on the issues they are experiencing at the time.

Abbot et al. (2011) re-affirmed Blatchford et al. (2007) and Groom’s (2007) suggestions that mainstream LSAs would benefit from establishing regular visits to special schools in order to help develop their skills (this is also discussed above in section 5.5, in relation to the sharing of strategic advantages between mainstream

and special schools). Collaboration between LSAs at Summerville School is strong. Developing this further by linking with mainstream schools and pairing LSAs from both mainstream and special schools would have undeniable benefits for both parties in the sharing of knowledge and skills. It would certainly be interesting to explore the possibility of 'supervision or learning pairs' between schools as part of the LSAs' practice based CPD. This may be especially important as it would appear that the incumbent governments are continuing to make cuts within the public sector and both funding for HLTA and support staff CPD is less likely to be readily available (Graves, 2011). More creative CPD opportunities such as a 'learning pairs' approach across settings would be an example of the creativity required in order to meet need within an austere climate. Collaborative experiences should go beyond benefitting the individual and should also be adopted at a systemic level. For example, the clear and embedded notelet system used for assessment within the school highlighted the high-density approach to pupils' assessment and learning. Recent legislation in Ireland recognises the contributions that special schools can make towards wider educational contexts. In 2009 the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) insisted that sound practices within special schools in relation to assessment and accreditation need to be identified and showcased (NCCA, 2009). The system identified within this research is a case in point.

This theme of 'opportunity in collaboration' was strong within the research as well as providing avenues for further development. Continuing with this theme it is worth reflecting on the contribution that LSAs play at the output level when working in a multi-agency capacity and the potential knowledge amassed over the years. LSAs who have worked at Summerville School (or other schools) for a number of years will have been responsible for implementing the action plans, strategies or advices of numerous external agencies (Speech and Language therapists, behaviour specialists, EPs, Nutritionists, etc). The incidental learning that will have taken place over this time will be vast. LSAs will have knowledge of strategies to improve behaviour, develop articulation, reduce sensory anxiety, encourage choice making and other extremely useful strategies. LSAs within the research talked about a lack of special school specific training available to them, by recording this learning and sharing it regularly with the team, the LSA network can accumulate an expansive evidence base of effective and practical solutions to the challenges they encounter.

There was an overwhelming sense that the LSAs enjoy their role, however, there were several comments made during the interview that reflect the mentally

challenging aspect of the work. Some LSAs reported that the emotional pressure of working with challenging needs can often result in LSAs taking their work home in the form of mental stress or fatigue. Although staff working in special schools have been found to experience less stress than their mainstream counterparts (Trendall, 1989), there are likely to be occasions when this is reversed. Often in special schools, children with PMLD may have medical complications that can result in short life expectancies. Experiencing the death of a pupil is a highly emotional event and one that will inevitably result in staff being considerably affected both at school and when they return home. Other stressors are likely to include challenging behaviours, such as children hitting or physically injuring staff, or even witnessing children cause physical injury to others. With an increased sense of responsibility for care, the special school LSA is likely to be considerably more affected by such events than those working in a mainstream environment. LSAs and teaching staff would benefit from having an opportunity to talk and reflect about such issues when they occur. This should be accommodated within the LSAs working week in order to reduce any emotional burden experienced by LSAs outside of the school and also to act as a supportive measure ensuring the emotional well-being of all staff.

When examining the LSA role outlined within the research, there is arguably clarity and distinct responsibilities defined for all the LSAs. It would be hasty to assume that this level of clarity is congruent for the LSAs within Summerville School and also for LSAs in other settings. A lack of internal role clarity for LSAs has been documented to lead to confusion, and even breakdown in personal relationships (Clayton, 2006). The model of practice represented within the research (figure 5-1) could be used to help all LSAs reflect on their role. Used as an evaluative tool, LSAs and line managers could help reflect on the current strengths and areas of need within each LSA's role. This is likely to have most benefit to those working in a similar special school environment, however, LSAs supporting children with SLD or PMLD in different contexts could also draw upon the model to develop their understanding of how the role can operate across a number of domains. To further increase the clarity that Summerville Schools LSAs have, further exploration should be taken to identify the lack of acknowledgment from the LSAs towards their additional responsibilities. Only two of these responsibilities were voiced across the 11 LSA interviews. As highlighted by the HT, it may well be the case that some of the roles are more implicit and everyday than others. The importance of clarifying and celebrating these additional responsibilities may offer LSAs more ownership over their own professional development.

The research also highlights a role that EPs can offer as link professionals to the special school setting. As previously highlighted, the special school environment often presents mentally and physically challenging situations for staff. Experiencing the death of a pupil, witnessing a child who experiences high levels of anxiety or being physically hurt by a child are just a few examples. The LSAs within the research also reported a lack of opportunity to reflect and discuss their experiences and this is where the EP could offer an important role. Farrell, Woods, Lewis, Rooney, Squire and O'Conner (2006) identified the important role that EPs play in offering supervision for other professionals working with children and young people. Educational Psychology Services across the country are in a position to offer essential supervision space for LSAs to reflect upon and express their views towards the physical and mental challenges they can often encounter. In addition to this, the current research also demonstrates the capacity that EPs can have in supporting evaluative and exploratory research in educational settings as well as their more historical role in practicing case work.

## **5.7 Implications for Future Research**

This research is a case study of a primary aged special school catering for children with SLD or PMLD. The researcher would welcome additional research drawing upon the literal and theoretical replicability of the current design. Although the model of LSA practice outlined within the current research is true of the Summerville School LSA, one cannot generalise the model across other settings. Future research within similar and contrasting special schools, using the same design framework would offer insights into the model's durability as a model with potential generalisability.

Further research should also be conducted into the concept of high-density assessment and learning as identified within the research. LSAs are well versed in this approach and it has numerous advantages such as not relying upon withdrawing children from the class, encouraging relationship building, monitoring progress across all aspects of the school day, allowing for adjustments to supportive approaches, and it ensures nothing is missed. There is a weak evidence base for curriculum assessment approaches for children with SLD and PMLD (Lewis et al., 2010, NCCA, 2009). This is worrying as Farrell (2006) suggests that an appropriate, motivating and challenging system of assessment and accreditation is essential in special schools. The researcher would suggest further research is required into the

processes governing the P-Level assessment in special schools. Better still, identified assessment processes should be analysed and compared to the high-density approach outlined within this research. Further developments may include evaluating the method against longer term outcomes or even as it is implemented in another setting.

At the time of writing, current educational systems and philosophies are in flux. Head teachers, specialist teachers, learning mentors, LSAs and other professionals in the role of supporting education anticipate confirmation of a radical shake up to special educational needs provision and education as a whole. The recent SEN and disabilities green paper (DfE, 2011) has already laid out the government's objectives to 'remove the bias towards inclusion', along with proposals to radically shake up the way special educational needs provision is assessed for, provided for and funded. Graves offers a glimpse of the changes that are likely to follow if the green paper remains robust after consultation;

*"It seems unlikely, given the current political climate and the Coalition government's commitment to cuts in public expenditure, that extra funding will be provided for professional development for HLTAs. Indeed funding for HLTA status has already been discontinued and funding for CPD for support staff looks uncertain in the new government's plans. These changes, combined with the latest DISS (Deployment and Impact of Support Staff Project) report (Blatchford et al., 2009), which finds a negative impact on learning for those pupils who have high levels of TA support in the classroom, would suggest that fundamental changes to workforce composition are likely in the future..."*

*(Graves, 2011 pp. 19)*

There has been an increased focus on the effectiveness of the LSA role as a consequence of the surprising and high profile research by Blatchford et al. (2009b) as well as the associated negative press towards the lack of academic progress ensured by the role. This research aimed to identify the role and the distinct contribution made by LSAs, by offering an insight into a well-established LSA support network in a special school. It demonstrates how a workforce of varying qualification and experience can work flexibly as a collaborative team of general educational practitioners. Their role is extensive and integral to the efficiency of the

education delivered within their settings, so much so that the term 'Assistant Teacher' may be better applied than 'Teaching Assistant'. Across the multiple domains of assessment, teaching and learning, care, community and parent liaison, multi-agency working and beyond, LSAs conduct their role with a clear sense of purpose. They are driven by a sense of their capacity to make a difference towards outcomes for the children they support and their role is clearly one of a distinctive contribution. In light of the potential pressures on support staff in the future educational landscape, we should aim to identify, share and celebrate the valued contributions of support staff roles. Without highlighting 'what works where' and 'what is good for whom', we risk dismissing and discarding distinctive contributions such as those made by the special school LSA.

## 6 References

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## 7 Appendices

### 7.1 Appendix A: Literature Review Strategy Summary

#### ***Special schools:***

**Databases** = ERIC, ASSIA, Psychinfo

**Journals** = EPIP, BJSE

**Years** = no date specified (required for historical perspective)

**Search Terms** = “special school\*” and “Special Education”

**Total Hits** = 319

**Inclusionary Criteria** = English Language, peer reviewed, journal articles

**Exclusionary Criteria** = Journal articles were excluded based on the following criteria

Irrelevant content (96)

Pertaining to a specific SEN issue (52)

Not relating to SEN schools (4)

Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties School (EBD) (34)

Specific intervention (40)

Post School or post 16 transition (8)

Focus on Equality (9)

Medical focus (18)

Total number of articles included within the final literature review: 36. This does not include harvested journal articles or articles that were passed to the researcher from an external source (grey literature).

#### ***Learning Support Assistant (LSA):***

**Databases** = ERIC, ASSIA, Psychinfo

**Journals** = EPIP, BJSE

**Years** = 1990 onwards

**Search Terms** = “learning support\*”, “classroom support\*”, “teaching assistant”, “classroom assistant” and “paraprofessional”

**Total Hits** = 394

**Inclusionary Criteria** = English Language, peer reviewed, journal articles, articles published after 2001

**Exclusionary Criteria** =

Irrelevant content (123)  
English as Additional Language/ Bilingualism (11)  
Specific Intervention (49)  
Post 16 LSA (8)  
Specific SEN support (e.g. Autism specific support)(19)  
Medical focus (4)  
LSA for families (10)  
Union related (7)

Total number of articles included within this section of the literature review: 163.  
This does not include harvested journal articles or articles that were passed to the researcher from an external source (grey literature).

## 7.2 Appendix B: Table Outlining the Articles Included with the Literature Review Following the Systematic Search

Author	Journal	Title	Country	Method	Participants	Findings
<b>SPECIAL SCHOOL SEARCH</b>						
Douglas et al, 2011	European Journal of Special Needs Education	Access to Print Literacy for Children and Young People with Visual Impairment: Implications for Policy and Practice	Sweden	Qualitative: Summary	NA	Implications for teaching, resources and provision
Rix, 2011	International Journal of inclusive education	Repositioning of special schools within a specialist, personalised educational marketplace - the need for a representative principle	UK	Discourse Analysis	78 Schools: websites and public documents	Special schools have used the term inclusion to re-focus drives and mantras around the ideas of personalisation and specialisation to ensure their survival.
Katariina, 2010	European Educational Research Journal	Discourses on Inclusion, Citizenship and Categorizations of "Special" in Education Policy: The Case of Negotiating Change in the Governing of Vocational Special Needs Education in Finland	Finland	Interviews, ethnographic data, discourse analysis	3 special schools	Ambivalence towards ideas of inclusion and exclusion. Schools support inclusion on the one hand but legitimatise the existence of segregated vocational special schools
Feiler, 2010	Support for Learning	The UK 14-19 Education Reforms: Perspectives from a Special School	UK	Interviews	Case study	Impact of government reform on 4 areas mainly pertaining to the curriculum
Jenks et al 2010	International Journal of Rehabilitation	Quality of Arithmetic Education for Children with Cerebral Palsy	Netherlands	2 Groups: 44 CP in SS and 16 CP in MS. Control groups.	32 special schools	Special schools scheduled less arithmetic time and remedial strategies for teaching arithmetic did not seem to be optimal.
Dobbins et al 2010	Journal of research in special educational needs.	Developing Partnership with Parents in Special Schools: Parental Perspectives from Northern Ireland	Ireland	Mixed methods. Interviews, focus groups, questionnaire	1 special school (parents)	Educators need to pursue and engage parents in order to put the policy of partnership into practice.
Stephenson et al 2011	Teacher Education and Special Education	Professional Learning for Teachers without Special Education Qualifications Working with Students with Severe Disabilities	Australia	AB design, pre and post measure	2 special schools	VIG used. Resulted in teachers providing more opportunities for pupils
Qutaiba, 2011	Australian Journal of Teacher Education	The Relationship between the Level of School-Involvement and Learned Helplessness among Special-	Israel	School involvement Q and LH Q	40 participants, various schools	Negative correlation between school involvement and learned helplessness

		Education Teachers in the Arab Sector				
Obiakor et al 2011	International Journal of Special Education	Special Education Provision in Nigeria: Analyzing Contexts, Problems, and Prospects	Nigeria	Historical account	NA	Government must put acts and legislation in place. Need to raise awareness.
Zhou et al, 2011	Journal of visual impairment and Blindness	Assistive Technology for Students with Visual Impairments: Challenges and Needs in Teachers' Preparation Programs and Practice	USA	-	165 teachers of VI students	Significant deficits in knowledge pertaining to assistive communication technologies.
Kucuksuleymanoglu, 2011	International Journal of Special Education	Burnout Syndrome Levels of Teachers in Special Education Schools in Turkey	Turkey	Mixed methods	67 teachers, 7 special schools	Teachers working in SEN schools experienced higher levels of burnout.
Fyson, 2009	British Journal of Special Education	Sexually Inappropriate or Abusive Behaviour among Pupils in Special Schools	UK	Questionnaires	4 LAs	Large variation in policy, from non-existent to detailed.
Shah, 2010	Research Papers in Education	Home and Away: The Changing Impact of Educational Policies on Disabled Children's Experiences of Family and Friendship	UK	Qualitative life history and policy analysis	60 people's life stories	Need to re-connect public service provision with private lives of disabled children, as opposed to focusing on the inclusion-segregation debate of the classroom. How Educational policy shapes life trajectories.
Byrd, 2010	Teaching exceptional children plus	India, Families, and a Special School	India	Case Study	1 Special School	Quality academic instruction, job skills and parent support.
Norwich, 2008	British Journal of Special Education	What Future for Special Schools and Inclusion? Conceptual and Professional Perspectives	UK	Synthesis of international policy and teacher attitudes	Multiple sources across 3 countries	Proposes a flexible interacting continua that both mainstream and special schools should use when looking for greater commonality across dimensions (e.g participation, curriculum, etc).
Feeney et al, 2010	Support for Learning	The Transformative Nature of the Special School Placement: Reporting "Insistent" Data from Emerging Teachers and Exploring an Agenda for Future Research	UK	Qualitative	-	Impact of special school placement for emerging teachers is significant. Implications for more formal inclusion into training routes.
Baker, 2009	British Journal of Special Education	Special School Headship in Times of Change: Impossible Challenges or Golden Opportunities?	UK	Questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and focus group	9 SS head-teachers from 1 LA	Challenges for SS heads identified
Griffiths, 2009	British Journal of	"Asking "How" Instead of "Why"":	UK	Research diaries and	20 pupils with SEN	Identified successful approach to breaking

	Special Education	Exploring Inclusive Approaches to Teaching and Learning through Pupil and Teacher Responses to a School Link Project		group based interviews	statement	down barriers to learning and obstacles to inclusion via the use of a literacy programme.
Powell, 2009	Comparative Educational Review	To Segregate or to Separate? <b>Special</b> Education Expansion and Divergence in the United States and Germany	USA/Germany	Institutional analysis	-	Germany = dual track (segregation). USA = multitrack (inclusive).
Bunning et al, 2010	Child Language Teaching and Therapy	A Preliminary Investigation into Communication in the <b>Special</b> Needs Classroom during Key Stage 3 English Lessons	UK	VIG – transcription and interaction analysis	2 x KS3 English classes in SS	Teachers initiated more and used more time, pupils responded more
Forlin, 2010	Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs	Authentic School Partnerships for Enabling Inclusive Education in Hong Kong	Hong Kong	-	-	Implications of using a resource model. Utilising aspects of multi modal schools
Runswick-Cole, 2008	British Journal of Special Education	Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Parents' Attitudes to the Inclusion of Children with <b>Special</b> Educational Needs in Mainstream and <b>Special Schools</b>	UK	Narrative interviews and thematic analysis	24 parents. 7 professionals	Attitudes towards inclusion are guided by engagement with specific social models of disability. Inclusive education continues to be fragile.
Baker, 2007	Support for Learning	The British Government's Strategy for SEN: Implications for the Role and Future Development of <b>Special Schools</b>	UK	Analysis of text and reflections based on authors experience	-	Themes: SEN schools for most severe SEN and for providing outreach expertise to Mainstream
Waite et al, 2009	Educational Studies	Individual Target Setting in a Mainstream and <b>Special</b> School: Tensions in Understanding and Ownership	UK	Semi Structured interviews	Staff at SLD school and Mainstream link	Tensions highlighted between ownership of target setting and power balance
Male et al, 2007	Support for Learning	Who Goes to SLD <b>Schools</b> ? Aspects of Policy and Provision for Pupils with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties Who Attend <b>Special Schools</b> in England	UK	Questionnaires and SPSS	167 Special schools in England	Needs profile is diversifying. Increasing number of TAs assigned to meet needs.
Takala, 2007	British Journal of Special Education	The Work of Classroom Assistants in <b>Special</b> and Mainstream Education in Finland	Finland	Shadowing and interviews	14 CAs in mainstream and special schools	Multiple findings. CS in SS spent more time assisting teachers than in MS, etc

Lifshitz et al, 2007	European Journal of Special Needs Education	Comparison of Mediation between Paraprofessionals and Individuals with Intellectual Disability: Vocational Rehabilitation Centres versus Special Education Schools	Israel	Videotaping and coding interactions between PPs and children		School setting offered more opportunities...
Ashdown et al, 2007	Support for Learning	Special School Reorganization by a Local Unitary Authority: Some Lessons Learned	UK	-	1 Special School	Importance of cooperative teams and collaboration with professionals from different disciplines.
Woolson et al 2007	Educational Psychology	A Comparison of Special, General and Support Teachers' Controllability and Stability Attributions for Children's Difficulties in Learning	UK	Rating vignettes	39 mainstream and 25 special school teachers + 35 mainstream learning support teachers	Mainstream staff perceived special needs vignettes as having less control over their learning in comparison to special school teachers
Williams et al, 2004	British Journal of Special education	Teaching in Mainstream and Special Schools: Are the Stresses Similar or Different	UK	questionnaire	41 teachers from Ss and MS	No sig diff in levels of stress, but differences in type of tress.
Rayner et al, 2005	Management in Education	Transforming the School Workforce: Remodelling Experiences in the Special School	UK	Case study	Special school in pathfinder project	SS are unique and vulnerable. Challenge of remodelling function.
Read, 2004	History of Education	Fit for What? Special Education in London, 1890-1914	UK	Case study analysis	-	Empowerment to containment in education during early 20 <sup>th</sup> century
Brownlow 2007	British Journal of Special Education	LMSS: Illusion or control	UK	Critique of legislation	-	Legislation offers power through the illusion of control. In reality, little flexibility is offered through devolved management responsibilities from LEA to schools.
Muncey et al 1998	British Journal of Special Education	Target setting in special schools	UK			
Thomas, 1990	British Journal of Special Education	Evaluating Support	UK	Evaluating evaluations		Small scale empowered evaluations are more fruitful than large scale quantitative evaluation when investigating classroom support.
<b>TA SEARCH</b>						
Rose et al 2009	Research in Comparative and International Education	Classroom Support for Inclusion in England and Ireland: An Evaluation of Contrasting Models	UK	Survey and Interview	UK and Ireland LSAs	Distinctly different roles have emerged, both key to successful inclusion

Webster et al 2010	European Journal of Special Needs Education	Double Standards and First Principles: Framing <b>Teaching Assistant Support</b> for Pupils with Special Educational Needs	UK	Review and Reflections	UK Schools	TAs have inadvertently become the primary educators of pupils with SEN
Hammersley-Fletcher and Lowe, 2011	Management in Education	From General Dogsboddy to Whole-Class Delivery--The Role of the Primary School <b>Teaching Assistant</b> within a Moral Maze	UK	Interviews and Questionnaires	200 P school TAs 8 P school head teachers	Moral vs. Technocratic approach to TA deployment in Schools. Mixed perceptions exist between TAs and Head teachers.
Graves 2011	Management in Education	Performance or Enactment? The Role of the Higher Level <b>Teaching Assistant</b> in a Remodelled School Workforce in England	UK	Case Study	Review of assessment practices	HLTA self assessment leads to inflation self appraisal.
Tucker 2009	Pastoral Care in Education	Perceptions and Reflections on the Role of the <b>Teaching Assistant</b> in the <b>Classroom</b> Environment	UK	Review of literature	3 systematic lit reviews	Insight into the development of the TA role
Veck 2009	Oxford Review of Education	From an Exclusionary to an Inclusive Understanding of Educational Difficulties and Educational Space: Implications for the <b>Learning Support Assistant's</b> Role	UK	Case Study and interviews	Single English Sixth Form	Conceptualisation of educational differences and space is key to successful LSA role in terms of inclusive practice
Rubie-Davies et al 2010	School effectiveness and School improvement	Enhancing <b>Learning</b> ? A Comparison of Teacher and <b>Teaching Assistant</b> Interactions with Pupils	UK	Transcriptions and coding of interactions	130 lessons from 15 schools	Differences between teacher and TA language used in interactions results on pupils learning
De Schipper et al 2010	Journal of intellectual disability Research	Attachment Behaviour towards <b>Support</b> Staff in Young People with Intellectual Disabilities: Associations with Challenging Behaviour	Netherlands	Behaviour and attachment Scaling	Support Staff in specialist settings	Attachment behaviour is part of adaptation to being in group care. Relationships bear uniquely on challenging behaviour.
Giangreco et al 2011	Remedial and Special Education	Guidelines for Selecting Alternatives to Overreliance on Paraprofessionals: Field-Testing in Inclusion-Oriented Schools	USA	Multisite mixed methods evaluation study	26 schools	GSA programme impacted upon PP caseloads, utilisation and inclusive practises.
Ratcliff et al 2011	Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development	Paraprofessionals in Early Childhood Classrooms: An Examination of Duties and Expectations	USA	Surveys and observations	159 teachers 161 PPs	PPs delivered group instruction and frequently managed behaviour, lack of clarity about role also.
Shyman 2010	Psychology in the Schools	Identifying Predictors of Emotional Exhaustion among Special Education	USA	Self reporting and regression analysis	100 PPs	role conflict, emotional demand, sense of efficacy, and supervisor <b>support</b> were



		Paraeducators: A Preliminary Investigation				significant predictors of emotional exhaustion
Blatchford et al 2011	British Educational Research Journal	The Impact of <b>Support</b> Staff on Pupils' "Positive Approaches to <b>Learning</b> " and Their Academic Progress	UK	Naturalistic Longitudinal Design	8000 pupils	consistent trend for those with most <b>support</b> to make less academic progress than similar pupils with less <b>support</b>
Abbott et al 2011	European Journal of Special Needs Education	Key Players in Inclusion: Are We Meeting the Professional Needs of <b>Learning Support</b> Assistants for Pupils with Complex Needs?	Northern Ireland	Questionnaires	LSAs SENCos Northern Ireland	Strived for more training. SENCos view training as inadequate.
Burgess et al 2009	Support for Learning	An Exploration of Higher Level <b>Teaching</b> Assistants' Perceptions of Their Training and Development in the Context of School Workforce Reform	UK	Evaluative research, questionnaires and interviews	17 HLTAs	Need for greater differentiation between primary and secondary
Giangreco 2010	Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities	One-to-One Paraprofessionals for Students with Disabilities in Inclusive Classrooms: Is Conventional Wisdom Wrong?	USA	Discussion	NA	Increased scrutiny is suggested when assigning PPs to children with disabilities on a one-to-one basis
Hancock et al 2010	Cambridge Journal of Education	"They Call Me Wonder Woman": The Job Jurisdictions and Work-Related <b>Learning</b> of Higher Level <b>Teaching</b> Assistants	UK	-	-	Is releasing HTA's to cover lessons the most productive use a HLTAs time.
Angelides et al 2009	European Journal of Special Educational Needs	The Role of Paraprofessionals in Developing Inclusive Education in Cyprus	Cyprus	Qualitative methods	2 schools	Inclusion and exclusion were parallel processes. Confused roles
Giangreco et al 2010	Journal of Educational And Psychological Consultation	Paraprofessionals in Inclusive Schools: A Review of Recent Research	USA	Literature Review	-	Clarification of role and increased collaboration is offered as way forward
Conley et al 2010	Journal of Educational Administration	<b>Support</b> Personnel in Schools: Characteristics and Importance	USA	Analytical/discussion		Differing supervision implications for support staff
Fraser et al 2008	Education	Children's Views of <b>Teaching</b> Assistants in Primary Schools	UK	Questionnaires and interviews	3 Primary Schools	TAs viewed as useful, helpful and important members of the school. Pupil's views supporting the theory that TAs have moved from an ancillary role to a more pedagogical one.

Breton 2010	International Journal of Special Education	Special Education Paraprofessionals: Perceptions of Preservice Preparation, Supervision, and Ongoing Developmental Training	USA	Questionnaire	260 PPs	Desire for training, need for training and need to professional development
Suter et al 2009	Journal of Special Education	Numbers That Count: Exploring Special Education and Paraprofessional Service Delivery in Inclusion-Oriented Schools	USA	Questionnaire	92 special educators	Reliance on PPs, insufficient supervision, deployment model needs more balance
Tews et al 2008	Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities	Students with Disabilities' Perspectives of the Role and Impact of Paraprofessionals in Inclusive Education Settings	USA	-	-	Children view PPs favourable, could be missing out on socialization due to increased time spent with PPs
Hughes et al 2008	International Journal of Early Years Education	Responsibilities, Preparedness, and Job Satisfaction of Paraprofessionals: Working with Young Children with Disabilities	USA	Questionnaires and Interviews	52 PPs 59 Special Educators	Well prepared and collaborative members of the team, OK job satisfaction
Burgess et al 2007	Curriculum Journal	Supporting the Professional Development of Teaching Assistants: Classroom Teachers' Perspectives on Their Mentoring Role	UK	Questionnaires and Interviews	34 Primary school teachers	Mentoring should not follow the primary teaching model and should be contextually specific and explore more pertinent issues.
Devereux et al 2009	Research in Developmental disabilities	Social Support and Coping as Mediators or Moderators of the Impact of Work Stressors on Burnout in Intellectual Disability Support Staff	UK	Questionnaires	97 support staff	Practical coping and support acted as mediator to personal accomplishments.
Prieto et al 2007	Journal of faculty development	Teaching Assistant Training and Supervision: An Examination of Optimal Delivery Modes and Skill Emphases	USA	-	149 GTA's	Insufficient formal training. Training and supervision is useful for building TA self-efficacy
Blatchford et al 2007	British Educational Research Journal	The Role and Effects of Teaching Assistants in English Primary Schools (Years 4 to 6) 2000-2003. Results from the Class Size and Pupil-Adult Ratios (CSPAR) KS2 Project	UK	Questionnaires, attainment data, demographic data and observations	202 schools	No effect of TA presence of pupil attainment. Indirect effect to TA's on teaching (positive)
Devlin 2008	Intervention in School and Clinic	Create Effective Teacher-Paraprofessional Teams	USA	Advice	-	Strategies offered o support the relationship
Szwed 2007	Educational Review	Remodelling Policy and Practice: The Challenge for Staff Working with	UK	-	-	Roles and responsibilities of all staff need to be reconsidered in light of changing ideology

		Children with Special Educational Needs				
Groom 2006	Support for Learning	Building Relationships for Learning: The Developing Role of the Teaching Assistant	UK	Discussion	-	Workforce reform could provide the recognition of the varied roles performed by TAs
Takala 2007	British Journal of Special Education	The Work of Classroom Assistants in Special and Mainstream Education in Finland	Finland		14 CAs in mainstream and special schools	CA in mainstream spent more time assisting pupil, CA in special spent more time assisting teacher
Bedfordgmjr et al 2006	Management in Education	How Gaining Higher Level Teaching Assistant Status Impacts on the Teaching Assistant's Role in English Schools	UK	Evaluation	-	Impact is limited when compared to purpose
McVittie 2005	Education	The Role of the Teaching Assistant: An Investigative Study to Discover if Teaching Assistants Are Being Used Effectively to Support Children with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools	UK	Comparative case study, questionnaires	2 schools	TYAs own thoughts on role matched DFEE expectations. TAs thought they should be working with SEN pupils
Giangreco et al 2007	Focus on autism and other developmental disabilities	School-Based Screening to Determine Overreliance on Paraprofessionals	USA	Screening tool	27 schools	Overreliance on PPs reported.
Kerry 2005	Educational Review	Towards a Typology for Conceptualizing the Roles of Teaching Assistants	UK	Discussion	NA	Suffers from lack of precise definition (role)
Hammet et al 2005	School Leadership and Management	<b>Motivation, Stress and Learning Support Assistants: An Examination of Staff Perceptions at a Rural Secondary School</b>	UK	-	1 rural school	Self Esteem of TA's needs to be raised through professional development
Malmgren et al 2006	Journal of Research in Childhood Education	Boy in the Bubble: Effects of Paraprofessional Proximity and Other Pedagogical Decisions on the Interactions of a Student with Behavioral Disorders	UK	Observations and semi-structured interviews	Case study	Increased time with PP led to reduce interactions
Giangreco et al 2005	Focus on autism and other developmental	<b>Questionable Utilization of Paraprofessionals in Inclusive Schools: Are We Addressing</b>	USA	-	737 school personnel	PP changes needed to be made whilst addressing SEN issue in schools

	disabilities	Symptoms or Causes?				
Giangreco et al 2006	Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities	Addressing the Paraprofessional Dilemma in an Inclusive School: A Program Description	USA	Intervention implementation	Case study school over 3 years	Results of planning tool are highlighted
Giangreco et al 2004	Journal of Special Education Leadership	Alternatives to Overreliance on Paraprofessionals in Inclusive Schools	USA	Analysis and presentation	-	3 component administrative model I presented for alternative to PP use in schools
Broer et al 2005	Exceptional Children	Perspectives of Students with Intellectual Disabilities About Their Experiences with Paraprofessional Support	USA	interviews	16 young people	View of primacy and exclusivity of PP relationships with young people. Four themes emerged: mother, friend, protector and primary teacher. Positive and negative implications
Allen et al 2004	Intervention in school and Clinic	Strengthening Schools: Involving Paraprofessionals in Crisis Prevention and Intervention	USA	Discussion	-	PPs may be in a good position to play a key role in crisis prevention and management.

### **7.3 Appendix C: Semi Structured Interviews for Individual LSAs**

#### **Semi-Structured Interview to be Conducted with LSAs**

---

##### **General Introduction**

1. How long have you worked at \_\_\_\_\_ school?
2. What past experience of working with young people did you have prior this role?

Qualifications and Training?

3. What areas, if any do you think you would like further training?

##### **Interactions between LSA and teacher**

4. How are you deployed within the school?
5. Can you outline the ways in which you might support the class teacher?
6. How much time do you have to work with other staff in the school?

Teachers/LSAs/Other professionals

7. Can you give me examples of what this work might look like?
8. Do you feel that the amount of time you have available to work with teachers is sufficient?

##### **Supporting pupils**

9. How many children do you support in the school?

Is this fixed, or does it change between classes?

Typically do you support the number of children that you would expect to?

10. Do you support individual children or groups of children?
11. Can you outline the typical ways in which you may support a child in school?

Responsive

Designated (key worker etc)

Care/Assessment/Teaching and Learning/Multi agency work/Liaison with parents

##### **Impact of LSA role**

12. Which area of a young person's development do you think you have most impact on?

Example?

13. Which other areas of a young person's development do you think you have a positive impact on?

Example?

14. What impact do you think you have in the school, additional to your contribution towards the children and young people?

15. How do you measure the impact of your role?

**Additional**

16. Do you come into contact with parents frequently?

How do you work with, or support parents?

Where does this take place?

17. Are you ever involved in multi-agency work?

Can you give me some examples?

17. What is the most demanding element of classroom support?

18. Are there any areas of support that you think you excel at?

19. Are there any areas of support that you feel less confident in?

20. Do you have any other comments that you would like to add regarding the support you provide in the classroom, the opportunities you have to work alongside teachers and other staff and the impact that your role has upon the young people in the school?

## **7.4 Appendix D: Semi-Structured Interview with Head Teacher**

### **Post Data-Gathering Interview: Head teacher at Summerville School**

#### **Context**

##### **1. Can you talk a little about Summerville School?**

-ethos, pupil profile, population, structure, links, school focus and development, LA context, pen profile...

#### **Supporting the child**

##### **2. In what variety of ways do the LSAs support the children of Summerville School?**

##### **3. Are there any fundamental differences between the way that the individual classrooms are managed and in the type of way in which education is delivered?**

-Goals, priorities for children

-Numbers of staff, experience of staff

#### **Working with Others**

##### **4. Can you outline the varying ways in which the LSAs work with and communicate with other staff?**

-planning, social, reflection, support, training

#### **Impact of the role**

##### **5. What do you consider are the areas in which the LSA has most impact?**

##### **6. What are the ways in which the impact of the LSAs role is measured?**

## 7.5 Appendix E: Group Interview Schedule

### Group Semi-structured interviews (15 mins)

---

Q1. How long have you worked with each other in the capacity observed today?

Q2. Did anything occur during the observation which you would not class as typical?

Do you feel today's observation is a good reflection of your role?

Q3. Could you discuss the process and structures underpinning your working relationships?

Planning time

Role sharing

Social or non-work related contact/talk/support

Q4. What do you (teacher) find most supportive for yourself about the LSA role?

Q5. How might the effectiveness of your team work be enhanced in the future?

**Q6. [Opportunity to clarify points of researcher uncertainty regarding the observations]**



## 7.6 Appendix F: Observation Framework

<u>Interactions Between LSA and Teacher</u>		Time																													
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
<b>Deployment in Classroom</b>																															
Pupil Orientated																															
Individual																															
Group																															
Hover/move																															
Task Orientated																															
Passive/Listening																															
Degree of Autonc																															
Scripted																															
Some																															
Full																															
<b>Communication</b>																															
Initiated by																															
T																															
LSA																															
Purpose																															
Task focused																															
Pupil focused																															
Social																															
Other																															

<u>LSA supporting the pupil</u>		Time																													
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
<b>Supporting</b>																															
Working with pupils outside of classroom																															
Particular individual																															
Particular group																															
Working with pupils inside the classroom																															
Particular individual																															
Particular group																															
Anyone needing help																															
Degree of Autonomy																															
None																															
Some																															
Full																															
<b>Domain</b>																															
Teaching and Learning																															
Assessment																															
Care																															
Organisational/Housekeeping																															
Other																															

<u>Impact (post-hoc)</u>		Time																													
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
<b>ECM Outcome</b>																															
Be Healthy																															
Stay Safe																															
Enjoy and Achieve																															
Make a Positive Contribution																															
Achieve Economic Well-Being																															
<b>Benefactor</b>																															
Target individual																															
Other individual																															
Target Group																															
Other Group																															
Whole Class																															

## 7.7 Appendix G: Consent Form

### Identifying the Role of the special school Learning Support Assistant: A Case Study Evaluation

#### Consent Form

Please initial

box

1. I am happy to participate in this research.

2. I am happy for data about my role in the school to be accessed.

3. I happy that during the smaller group interviews that I am involved in, my name, and examples of the work that I do, may be discussed.

4. a) I am happy to be observed in my role as an LSA (LSAs only)

b) I am happy for the LSA in my classroom to be observed (teachers only)

5. I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions, and have had my questions answered satisfactorily. I am also aware that I can contact the researcher with any further questions.

6. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any point.

7. I understand that the interviews will be audio recorded.

8. I agree to the use of anonymous quotes

9. I agree that any data collected may be passed on to other researchers and that it may be published in anonymous form in academic journals and books.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name (participant)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signed

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name (researcher)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signed

## **7.8 Appendix H: Consent Form Covering Letter and Frequently Asked Questions**

Educational Psychology Service,  
\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\* ,  
\*\*\*\*\* ,  
Skytown.  
\*\*\*\*\*

EPS admin email:\*\*\*\*\*

[edward.chilton@skytown.gov.uk](mailto:edward.chilton@skytown.gov.uk)

Tel: \*\*\*\*\*

*Date* \_\_\_\_\_

Dear .....

I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist, employed by\*\*\*\*\* , and I am due to graduate in 2012 from the University of Manchester. As part of research towards my doctoral thesis, I am looking at identifying the role of the Learning Support Assistant (LSA), specifically in a special educational context.

I am interested in how LSAs work in special schools, what roles they play in supporting children and young people, in what way do they work and interact with teaching staff in the school and what impact do they have across the whole school. A clear description of the LSA role has yet to be identified in the academic literature and I think that to do so would provide a great point of interest in helping to support the development of the LSA role across other schools, both locally and further afield. It will also help the school to identify exactly how the LSAs in the school are making a positive contribution to the children and young people at Summerville School, and how they can help support this role in the future.

If you have any questions about the project please contact me, in the first instance, using the contact details above. If you would prefer, you may also contact Skytown City Educational Psychology service on the telephone number and email address provided. If you are happy to participate, please complete the attached consent form and return it the stamped addressed envelope, or alternatively hand it directly to Mrs \*\*\*\*\* (headteacher).

I look forward to hearing from you.

Many thanks,

Edward Chilton

## Identifying the Role of the special school Learning Support Assistant: A Case Study Evaluation

### **Information Sheet**

#### **What are the aims of the study?**

The aims of the study are to identify a model of practice that the LSAs adopt in Summerville School and how that impacts upon the children and young people in the school and upon the school itself. This model will then help the school to identify any areas that they may wish to strengthen and to also celebrate the successes of the LSAs. The findings will also help to create a model of LSA good practice that may be of interest to other special schools, mainstream schools supporting pupils with SEN and also for future academic purposes.

#### **Why have I been chosen?**

You have been chosen for one of the following reasons:

- a). You are currently working as an LSA in Summerville school and are thus the key focus of the research and you are also best placed to give a rich account of your current role.
- b). You are a teacher at Summerville school who has previously worked with, or is currently working with, an LSA in your classroom. You may have insights into the ways that LSAs support both yourselves and the children that you teach.

#### **What would the project involve?**

The project will involve the researcher conducting a half hour interview with each member of the learning support team during which questions will be asked in relation to following areas: interactions between LSAs and teachers, supporting in the classroom and the impact of the role. The research also entails one 30 minute observation of each LSA carrying out typical duties within the classroom. This observation will look at the 'type' of roles carried out and the 'types' of interactions that occur. The third element of the research will involve the class teacher and the supporting LSAs having a short (15 minute) semi-structured interview at the end of the day to discuss what was observed in the lesson and to talk about the dynamics between the staff.

I would also like to create a diagram showing how the staff at Summerville school interact, this will be to help me to get an understanding of which LSAs work with which teachers and also to help me understand the staffing structure within the school. This diagram will be called an organogram.

#### **How will confidentiality be maintained and what will happen to the data collected?**

The research will adopt the following process: the interviews will be recorded using an audio-recording device. Any names given will be anonymised during the transcription of these recordings (e.g. LSA 1 or Teacher 2, etc). The audio recordings will then be erased and the researcher will keep all the transcribed documents. Access to the transcribed material will

ultimately be a 'public document' once the research is completed. However, any names, personal details, the name of the school and any information which may identify the school will have been completely anonymised.

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

You are absolutely not obliged to take part in the research. If you do chose to participate and you wish to withdraw at any point, then you may do so and you will not be asked as to why you have made this decision. It is also absolutely fine if you wish to participate in only certain parts of the research.

### **Contact for further information**

If you would like any further information or have any questions please contact me using the contact details below:

#### **Contact details**

Edward Chilton

Telephone: \*\*\*\*\*

Email: [edwardchilton@skytown.org.uk](mailto:edwardchilton@skytown.org.uk)

In the event that you find any aspects of this research unsatisfactory, you should contact: Head of the Research Office, Christie Building, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL.

Thank you for taking the time to read this document and for considering this research.

Many thanks

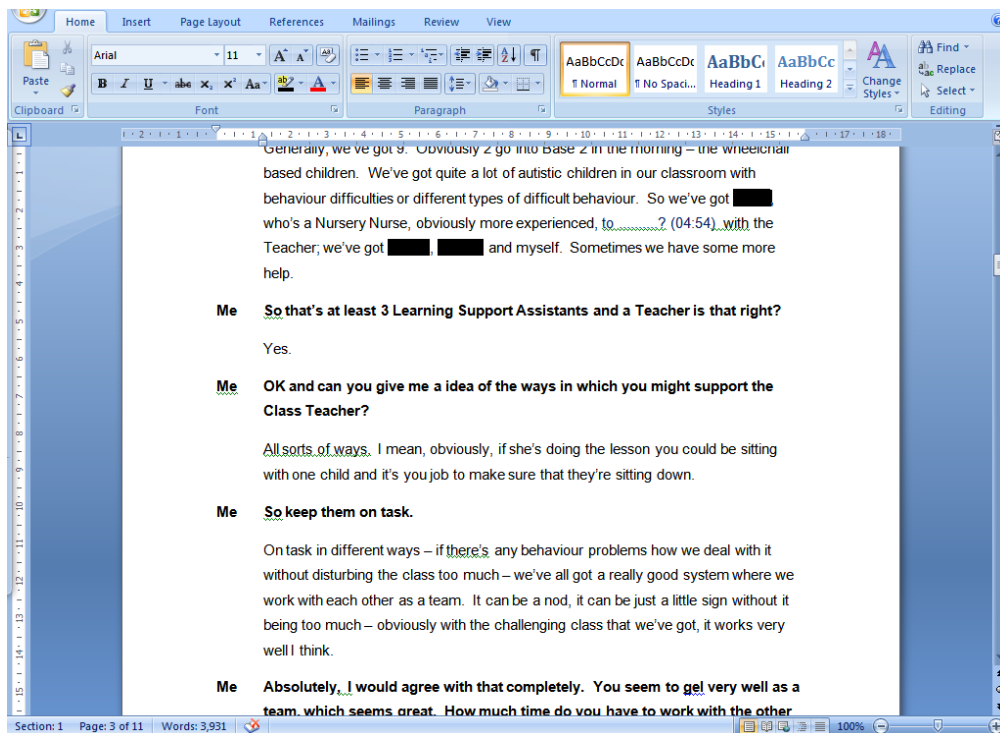
Edward Chilton

## 7.9 Appendix I: Outline of the Coding Process from Start to Finish

The following appendix describes the complete coding and theming process both through worded description and through the use of screen shots and photographs.

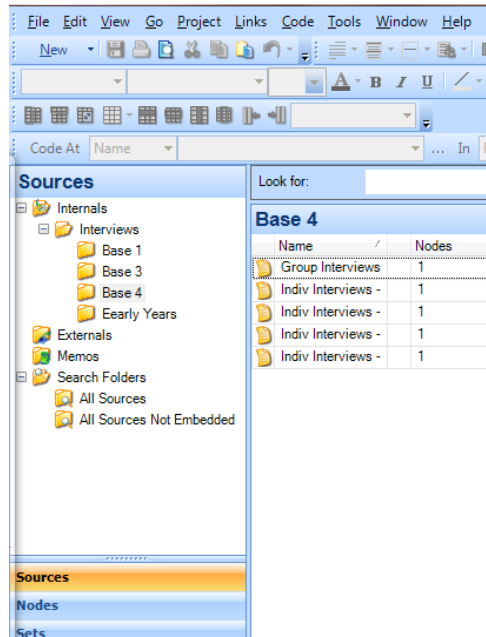
### Step 1: Transcribing the data

All interviews were transcribed using the *Microsoft Word* software and through the researchers own audio recording device. On occasion, segments of the audio were considered inaudible. These were highlighted in a different colour font and a time signature was added for subsequent reflection. Any names offered in the transcriptions were at this point removed.

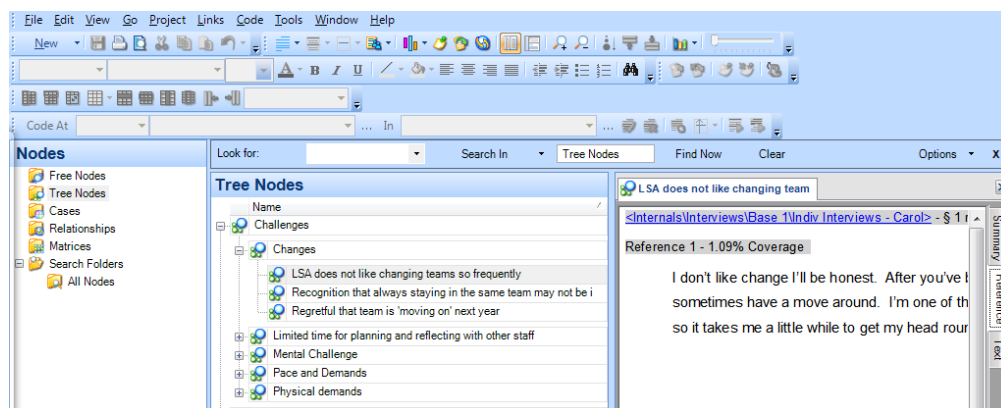


### Step 2: Coding and theming the data set

Once the interviews were transcribed they were collated into individual file folders by class. An *NVivo 8* file was then opened for each class and the transcripts for that class were merged into the file for coding. These are referred to in the *NVivo 8* software as 'internals'. The screen shot below shows how these files are organised in *NVivo 8*.



Each transcript was then coded using the *NVivo 8* software. Any extract that was considered valuable to code is labelled by the *NVivo 8* software as a free node (free in the sense that it is not linked to a theme or organising component at this stage). There were a total of 1559 extracts coded as free nodes. These were later condensed into 283 codes (tree nodes). This is represented by the hierarchical structure represented in the screen shot below. The left column shows the folders in which the data is saved in analysed form, the centre column shows the tree nodes and linked free nodes and the column on the right shows the extract coded as a specific free node.



During this process, the coding manual was considered and new themes were also generated as similarly themed codes began to emerge.

This then produced for sets of themes, one for each class. At this point the vastness of the data became unmanageable on computer screen and so the expanded hierarchical structures shown above were printed off and spread onto a larger surface for a second round of coding and coding checks (coding validity). This

process also resulted in small changes to the themes on occasion. The photograph below shows an example of the hierarchical structure from one class in its 'working' form.

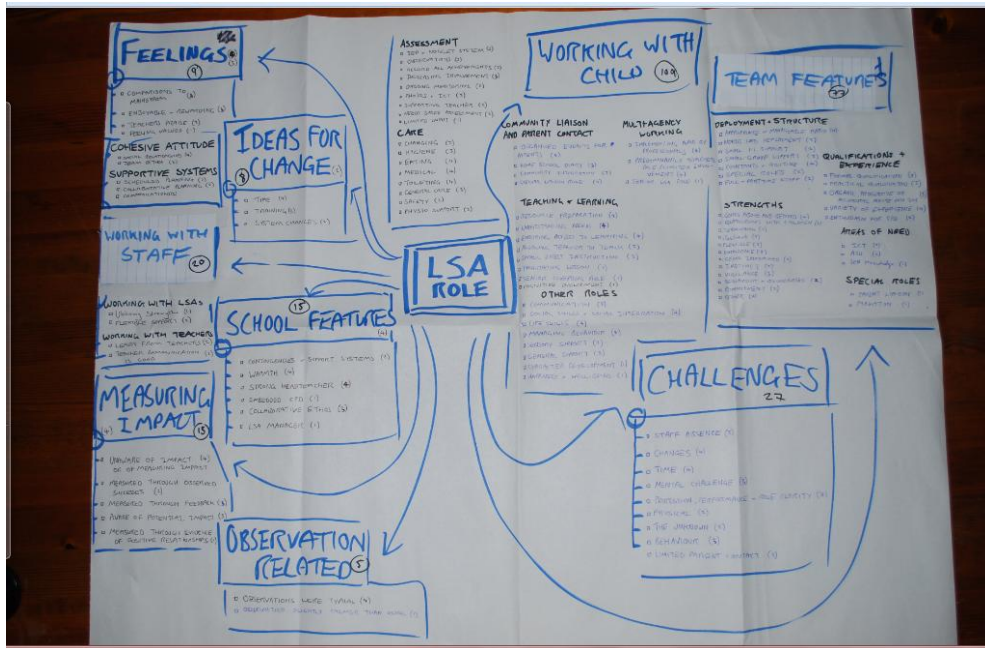


By switching to a manual process, the researcher was able to manipulate, check, organise and shuffle the codes more efficiently. Colour coding also helped to pull together new codes and themes. Whilst doing this, concise lists of themes and their respective codes were jotted down along with any codes that were considered irrelevant and removed. It was also at this stage that codes and themes were shown to the research supervisor in order to acquire a second opinion on the process (not the content) of the coding.

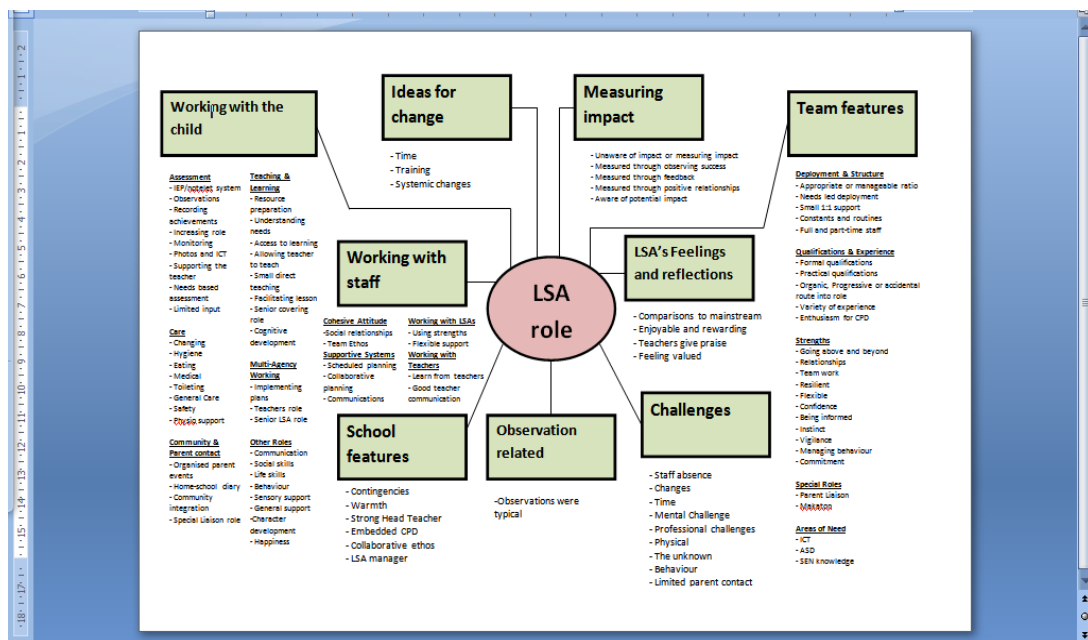
### Step 3: Merging the codes and themes

The next step was to merge the themes and the codes from the individual classes to create codes and themes representative of the Summerville School LSA role as a whole. This involved checking the themes and codes between classes for commonalities. The frequency with which each code or theme appeared across all four classes was noted by each theme or code representing the whole school LSA role. Codes that only appeared in one of the four classes were only included if the researcher felt that there were significant enough. Codes bearing minimal significance that were only represented in one class were removed.





At this stage the researcher had a diagrammatic representation of the LSA role within Summerville School. This hand-drawn diagram was later transferred into a digital file shown in the screen shot below.



This represents an outline of the coding process from audio recording to final themes.

## **7.10 Appendix J: Comprehensive Time-line, Risk and Contingency Table**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Those involved</b>	<b>Risk</b>	<b>Contingency</b>
10.11.2010	During a meeting with head teacher an informal invite to discuss future research was offered	TEP, Head teacher	NA	
16.12.2010	Initial meeting with Research sponsor to discuss possible future research	TEP, Head teacher	Collaborative decision may not be reached	Be prepared to be flexible and be prepared to walk away from proposal if necessary
19.12.2010	Meeting with tutor to discuss research plan. Move from Action research to evaluation.	TEP, Tutor	Direction could move away from the 'roughly conceptualised idea' held by research sponsor.	Ensure research remains purposeful and will benefit the sponsor school. Make sure that any change of direction is limited.
04.01.11	Meeting with EPS line manager to discuss research progress	TEP, Line manager	Line manager may not approve of the direction in which current research is heading.	TEP was aware of line manager's approval before meeting but was still prepared to be flexible with design.
21.02.11	First outline of thesis proposal submitted to tutor	TEP, tutor	Not appropriate	Time to re-design
10.01.11-21.03.11	Amendments made to proposal	TEP	Difficulties in completing proposal	Seek tutor support
21.03.11	Thesis panel	TEP, Panel	Proposal rejected at panel	Ensure time available for changes to be made
22.03.11 +	Complete RERA and UREC ethics forms	TEP, University	Proposal rejected by ethics committee	Ensure that both forms are completed thoroughly and any ethical considerations are taken into account.
Assumption is made at this point that UREC and RERA forms are accepted and research is approved				

03.05.11	Present research proposal to staff at Summerville school	TEP, School staff	Lack of clarity regarding intentions	Prepare well and provide information sheets
16.06.11	Distribute consent forms	TEP, school staff	Lack of information	Provide information sheet and contact details
30.06.11	Collect Consent Forms	TEP, participants	Consent forms not completed	Allow extension of time consent forms to be completed if necessary
06.07.11	Day 1 of LSA interviews	TEP, participants	Staff absence, unexpected events in the school day	Ensure contingency day is available to catch-up if necessary
07.07.11	Day 2 of LSA interviews	TEP, participants	Staff absence, unexpected events in the school day	Ensure contingency day is available to catch-up if necessary
12.07.11	Day 1 of LSA observations + 2 group interviews	TEP, participants	Staff absence, unexpected events in the school day	Ensure contingency day is available to catch-up if necessary. Ensure anonymity and be as unobtrusive as possible.
13.07.11	Day 2 of LSA observations + 2 group interviews	TEP, participants	Staff absence, unexpected events in the school day	Ensure contingency day is available to catch-up if necessary. Ensure anonymity and be as unobtrusive as possible.
14.07.11	Contingency day	TEP, participants	Continued staff absence	Ensure that research is in a position to continue if staff absence continues
Start August 2011 – finish November 2011	Transcribe interviews	TEP	Time	Ensure extra time is made available or request transcription help

November 2011 – March 2012	Begin coding		Time	Discuss the possibility of a later submission if necessary
31.08.11	Submit Thesis	TEP, University	Thesis not complete	Possible extension. Manage time efficiently

## **7.11 Appendix K: Ethical Approval Letter**



**Secretary to Research Ethics Committee 5**

**Faculty Office - Devonshire House**

Tel: 0161 275 0288

Email: [REDACTED]

Mr Edward Chilton

School of Education  
22<sup>nd</sup> June 2011

Dear Ed

**Research Ethics Committee 5 (Flagged Humanities) - Project Ref 11037**

I am writing to thank you for coming to meet the Committee on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2011 and providing follow up material to address the issues that I raised with you in my email of 31<sup>st</sup> May 2011. I can now confirm that by way of chair's action your project has now been formally approved by the University Ethics Committee 5 (flagged Humanities).

This approval is effective for a period of five years and if the project continues beyond that period it must be submitted for review. It is the Committee's practice to warn investigators that they should not depart from the agreed protocol without seeking the approval of the Committee, as any significant deviation could invalidate the insurance arrangements and constitute research misconduct. We also ask that any information sheet should carry a University logo or other indication of where it came from, and that, in accordance with University policy, any data carrying personal identifiers must be encrypted when not held on a university computer or kept as a hard copy in a location which is accessible only to those involved with the research.

Finally, I would be grateful if you could complete and return the attached form at the end of the project or by September 2012.

I hope the research goes well.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. A. ...".

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Faculty of Humanities and Secretary to URC 5 (Flagged Humanities)

[REDACTED]

## 7.12 Appendix L: Ethical Principles, Risks and Remedial Actions

Ethical Principle	Risk(s)	Action
1. Respect for human dignity	<p>Staff members may feel pressured or 'interrogated' about their level of knowledge and current practice. This may be amplified by the fact that the research is focused on the participants individual role</p>	<p>Provide detailed information to participants in advance of interviews. Hold a pre-meeting to build rapport and apply appropriate body language and demeanour with the goal of helping the participants to feel more comfortable.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Gain fully informed consent.</p> <p>Ensure participants are made aware of their anonymity within the interviews and limited anonymity within the group interviews</p>
	<p>The researcher's presence during the observations may provoke anxiety amongst the staff and the children in the classroom.</p>	<p>The researcher should introduce himself to the class before the observation and through discussion with staff, the researcher should clarify that he has no caused any undue stress or anxiety amongst the group</p>

		All staff members should be given prior notice of observation and they should be fully informed about its purpose. Anonymity of data should also be made clear.
2. Ensure integrity and quality	The interview format may not be appropriate for the participants involved. It may provoke concern or anxiety regarding their practice.	<p>Check suitability of interview design with supervising EP, tutor and colleague.</p> <p>Research interview design.</p> <p>Try to establish a relationship with participants and schools prior to interview.</p> <p>Be sure to feedback any information gathered.</p>
	My own interpretation and analysis of data may be subject to experimenter bias	Seek member-check reliability with all participants and complete inter-rater reliability measure.
	The researcher will be using design methods that are new to him and this in itself may present risks	The researcher will ensure that he has a high level of supervision and will be well read within the design of choice.



<p>3. Respect for free and informed consent</p>	<p>Staff at school may feel unable to participate in research due to time constraints, pressures of workload and meeting targets, uncertainty about issue at hand, or concerns about conflicts of interest with other staff.</p>	<p>Thorough discussion will be had with all participants outlining purpose of research, how the information will be used and ensure full anonymity.</p> <p>Interviews will be conducted during teaching time. This time will be allocated by the head teacher and thus ensuring that at no point are the participants having to use their own time to participate in the research</p> <p>Participants will also be informed of their rights to withdraw themselves and their previous contributions from the research at any point.</p>
	<p>Ensuring the consent of everyone involved in the study is gained</p>	<p>Direct consent will be gained from all teaching staff. Letters informing parents of the researcher's intent will be sent to all parents who may have children in the observed classroom.</p> <p>Reassurance will be given to parents that the focus of the observations will be on the adults in the room and at no point</p>

		will specific information about their child be included in the research.
4. Respect for vulnerable persons	Participants may be in some way vulnerable when discussing information regarding their role. (This could be for a number of reasons e.g. they may hold strong opinions regarding expected role or desired role)	Be mindful of this throughout the research and be careful to be appropriate at all times.  Check participant understanding of research content and ascertain whether or not participants feel comfortable discussing research topic.
	Participants may feel 'under-attack' when discussing effectiveness current strategies used in transition.	Be mindful of this and reassure participant at all times. Ensuring anonymity may also help relieve any anxiety.

	<p>The researcher will be conducting his research in a school for children with severe learning difficulties</p>	<p>The researcher has experience of working in such schools and will continue to interact with children in the respectful and caring manner with which he carries out all his responsibilities as a Trainee Educational Psychologist. He is also CRB checked.</p> <p>In the researchers' opinion the children present within the observed classroom are a no increased risk as a result of the researcher's presence.</p>
<p>5. Respect for privacy and confidentiality</p>	<p>Participants and other school staff may not want the findings to be traced to their situation as this could have implications for individual staff and the school as a whole.</p>	<p>Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the research process and once the research has been completed. All names, locations and school names will be completely anonymised.</p> <p>Staff who do not wish to be observed will have their wishes upheld.</p>
<p>6. Participation in a voluntary way</p>	<p>Once the research has begun, participants may feel obligated to continue despite their inner wish to withdraw. Similarly, the participant may have been</p>	<p>The researcher will stress to participants that they are free to withdraw from the research at any point and establish confidence in the participant's voluntary contribution before</p>

	coerced by a senior staff member to partake in the research.	commencing.
7. Procedures should avoid harm	There is minimal risk in this area.	The researcher will be sensitive in approach, ensure participant comfort and be mindful of how the content of the research may affect the participants at all times.

## 7.13 Appendix M: Individual Classroom Observation Data

### 7.13.1 Classroom 1 (Data Site 1)

#### 7.13.1.1 LSA Working with the Child

	LSA 1		LSA 2		LSA 3		Combined	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
<b>Supporting</b>								
<i>Pupils outside the classroom</i>								
<i>Individual</i>	0	0	1	3.33	0	0	1	1.11
<i>Group</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Pupils inside the classroom</i>								
<i>Individual</i>	8	26.67	14	46.67	13	43.33	35	38.89
<i>Group</i>	18	60	13	43.33	16	53.33	47	52.22
<i>Anyone needing help</i>	4	13.33	2	6.67	1	3.33	7	7.78
<i>Degree of autonomy</i>								
Scripted	11	36.67	6	20	10	33.33	27	30
Some	13	43.33	10	33.33	10	33.33	33	36.67
Full	6	20	14	46.67	10	33.33	30	33.33
<b>Domain</b>								
<i>Teaching and learning</i>	17	56.67	22	73.33	22	73.33	61	67.76
<i>Assessment</i>	3	10	0	0	0	0	3	3.33
<i>Care</i>	2	6.67	4	13.33	5	16.67	11	12.22
<i>Organisation/Housekeeping</i>	4	13.33	2	6.67	1	3.33	7	7.78
<i>Other</i>	4	13.33	3	10	2	6.67	9	10.00

#### *Support*

Just over 1% of the total support offered by LSAs took place outside of the classroom and when this did occur the focus was on supporting an individual child. Inside the classroom, the majority of LSAs support was directed towards supporting a specific group of children (52.22%) with a significant proportion of the support also being directed towards individuals (38.89%). The remaining support took the form of reactive and needs driven support for other individual children (7.78%). The degree of

LSA autonomy in relation to the focus or their support was spread evenly between being scripted (none), some and full at 30%, 36.67% and 33.33% respectively.

### *Domain*

Across the total 90 minutes of observation for classroom 1, a significant majority of the LSA's focus (67.76%) was towards teaching and learning (either directly or indirectly). The areas of care, organisation/housekeeping and assessment received 12.22%, 7.78% and 3.33% whilst support observed to be directed towards other areas (e.g. predominantly behaviour management) amounted to 10%.

#### **7.13.1.2 LSA Working with Others**

	LSA 1		LSA 2		LSA 3		Combined	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
<b>Deployment in the classroom</b>								
<i>Pupil Orientated</i>								
<i>Individual</i>	10	33.33	5	16.67	15	50	30	33.33
<i>Group</i>	15	50	23	76.67	14	46.67	52	57.78
<i>Hover/move</i>	5	16.67	2	6.67	1	3.33	8	8.89
<i>Task orientated</i>	15	50	17	56.67	16	53.33	48	53.33
<i>Passive/listening</i>	12	40	8	26.67	13	43.33	33	36.67
<i>Degree of autonomy</i>								
Scripted	13	43.33	7	23.33	12	40	32	35.56
Some	14	46.67	9	30	11	36.67	34	37.78
Full	3	10.00	14	46.67	7	23.33	24	26.67
<b>Communication</b>								
<i>Initiated by</i>								
Teacher	4	13.33	3	10	2	6.67	9	10
LSA	0	0	5	16.67	4	13.33	9	10
<i>Purpose</i>								
Task focused	3	10	5	16.67	3	10	11	12.22
Pupil focused	1	3.33	3	10	3	10	7	7.78
Social	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
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### *Deployment*

LSAs were deployed primarily with groups of children (57.78%) followed by a smaller proportion of deployment with individual pupils (33.33%). The proportion of support which was not specifically deployed and involved ‘hovering’ around the classroom or ‘moving’ amongst numerous pupils constituted only 8.89%. More than half (53.33%) of the support was task orientated and 36.67% involved taking a passive role in the lesson: for example, being directed by the teacher or listening to lesson presentation. Similar to the observations of support noted above. The spread of the autonomy with which the LSAs were deployed was relatively evenly spread between Scripted, Some and full autonomy: 35.56%, 37.78% and 26.67%

### *Communication*

Communications between staff occurred in 20% of the total time sample for classroom 1. These communications were initiated in equal measure between the LSA and the class teacher. Of these communications 12.22% were task specific and 7.78% were related to a particular pupil.

#### **7.13.1.3 Impact**

	LSA 1		LSA 2		LSA 3		Combined	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
<b>ECM outcome<sup>16</sup></b>								
<i>Be healthy</i>	2	6.67	4	13.33	5	16.67	11	12.22
<i>Stay safe</i>	5	16.67	3	10	2	6.67	10	11.11
<i>Enjoy and achieve</i>	20	66.67	24	80	23	76.67	67	74.44
<i>Make a positive contribution</i>	3	10	0	0	0	0	3	3.33
<i>Achieve economic well-being</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

<sup>16</sup> It is worth noting that when recording the ECM outcomes impacted by the LSA’s contributions, the researcher recorded only the main outcome benefitted. This is reflected on in more depth within the discussion.

<b>Benefactor</b>								
<i>Target individual</i>	8	26.67	14	46.67	13	43.33	35	38.89
<i>Other individual</i>	4	13.33	2	6.67	2	3.33	7	7.78
<i>Target group</i>	18	60	14	46.67	23	58.33	48	53.33
<i>Other group</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Whole class</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

### *ECM outcome*

In this post-hoc measure, the major contribution of LSAs impact upon positive outcomes was in the area of 'enjoying and achieving'. This contribution was perceived by the researcher to amount to 74.44% of the total time sample. This was followed by 12.22% perceived to impact upon 'being healthy' and 11.11% towards 'staying safe'. The remaining outcomes were perceived by the researcher to make up the smallest portion of LSAs contributions at 3.33% for 'making a positive contribution' and 0% towards 'achieving economic well-being'.

### *Benefactor*

A specifically targeted group was perceived to be the biggest benefactor of these outcomes, benefitting from 53.33% of the contributions. Specifically targeted individuals received 38.89% of the LSA's input and 7.78% of the total sample was focused on individual children who were not the originally intended focus of the LSA. LSAs were perceived to make no contributions to other specific groups or the whole class.

## **7.13.2 Classroom 2 (Data Site 2)**

### **7.13.2.1 LSA Supporting the Pupil**

	LSA 1		LSA 2		Combined	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
<b>Supporting</b>						
<i>Pupils outside the classroom</i>						
<i>Individual</i>	5	16.67	12	40	17	28.33
<i>Group</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Pupils inside the classroom</i>						
<i>Individual</i>	3	10	6	20	9	15



<i>Group</i>	14	46.67	10	33.33	24	40
<i>Anyone needing help</i>	9	30	2	6.67	11	18.33
<i>Degree of autonomy</i>						
Scripted	3	10	10	33.33	13	21.67
Some	14	46.67	17	56.67	31	51.67
Full	13	43.33	3	10	16	26.67
<b>Domain</b>						
<i>Teaching and learning</i>	2	6.67	15	50	17	28.33
Assessment	10	33.33	0	0	10	16.67
Care	6	20	12	40	18	30
<i>Organisation/Housekeeping</i>	7	23.33	0	0	7	11.67
Other	8	26.67	3	10	11	18.33

### *Support*

The total percentage of time spent supporting a child or children outside of the classroom in classroom two was 28.33% and this support was for primarily for an individual child. Inside the classroom, the majority of LSAs support was directed towards supporting a specific group of children (40%). The remaining support was split relatively evenly between supporting targeted individuals or others needing reactive support. The degree of LSA autonomy in relation to the focus or their support was weighted towards a partially scripted, partially autonomous role (51.67%) remaining LSA activity was evenly split between being fully scripted and completely autonomous.

### *Domain*

Across the total 60 minutes of observations for classroom two, LSA input was directed primarily towards the role of care (30%), followed by teaching and learning (28.33%), roles identified as 'other' (18.33%), assessment (16.67%) and organisation and housekeeping (11.67%).

#### **7.13.2.2 LSA Working with Others**

	LSA 1	LSA 2	Combined
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	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
<b>Deployment in the classroom</b>						
<i>Pupil Orientated</i>						
<i>Individual</i>	7	23.33	20	66.67	27	45
<i>Group</i>	14	46.67	10	33.33	24	40
<i>Hover/move</i>	9	30	0	0	9	15
<i>Task orientated</i>	15	50	17	56.67	32	53.33
<i>Passive/listening</i>	13	43.33	10	33.33	23	38.33
<i>Degree of autonomy</i>						
Scripted	2	6.67	11	36.67	13	21.67
Some	14	46.67	16	53.33	30	50
Full	14	46.67	3	10	17	28.33
<b>Communication</b>						
<i>Initiated by</i>						
Teacher	4	13.33	0	0	4	6.67
LSA	5	16.67	2	6.67	7	11.67
<i>Purpose</i>						
Task focused	3	10	0	0	3	5
Pupil focused	5	16.67	2	6.67	7	11.67
Social	1	3.33	0	0	1	1.67
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0

### *Deployment*

LSA deployment in classroom two was targeted with 45% deployed to the individual and 40% deployed to a group of children. The remaining time was spent hovering or moving around tasks or pupils (15%). Of this deployment 53.33% was task orientated and 38.33% of observations were of the LSA engaging in a clear passive and listening role. The level of autonomy shown within these intended deployed roles is consistent with the actual support given in table 6-2.

### *Communication*

In the total 60 minutes of observations there were 11 minutes within which communications took place between the LSAs and the teacher. Of these communications, four were teacher initiated and seven were LSA initiated. The

majority of the communications were pupil focused (7) with the remaining few focusing on tasks or social aspects.

### **7.13.2.3 Impact**

	LSA 1		LSA 2		Combined	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
<b>ECM outcome</b>						
<i>Be healthy</i>	6	20	12	40	18	30
<i>Stay safe</i>	0	0	3	10	3	5
<i>Enjoy and achieve</i>	22	73.33	15	50	37	61.67
<i>Make a positive contribution</i>	2	6.67	3	10	5	8.33
<i>Achieve economic well-being</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Benefactor</b>						
<i>Target individual</i>	7	23.33	18	60	25	41.67
<i>Other individual</i>	0	0	2	6.67	2	3.33
<i>Target group</i>	14	46.67	10	33.33	24	40
<i>Other group</i>	9	30.00	0	0	9	15
<i>Whole class</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0

#### *Impact*

Of the total observations made in classroom two, 61.67% were judged by the researcher to be primarily contributing towards the ECM outcome of enjoying and achieving. Being health was the primary outcome receiving 30% of the LSA's contribution. Making a positive contribution and staying safe were judged to be the targeted outcome of LSA support on 8.33% and 5% respectively. None of the LSAs actions were judged to primarily contribute towards the ECM outcome of enjoying and achieving.

#### *Benefactor*

The LSAs contributions in classroom two contributed primarily towards the target individual or target group (81.67%), with a remaining 18.33 benefitting non-target groups or individuals.

### 7.13.3 Classroom 3 (Data site 3)

#### 7.13.3.1 LSA Working with Pupil

	LSA 1		LSA 2		Combined	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
<b>Supporting</b>						
<i>Pupils outside the classroom</i>						
<i>Individual</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Group</i>	0	0	4	13.33	4	6.67
<i>Pupils inside the classroom</i>						
<i>Individual</i>	21	70	19	63.33	40	66.67
<i>Group</i>	7	23.33	4	13.33	11	18.33
<i>Anyone needing help</i>	2	6.67	3	10	5	8.33
<i>Degree of autonomy</i>						
Scripted	4	12.33	5	16.67	9	15
Some	12	40	8	26.67	20	33.33
Full	14	46.67	17	56.67	31	51.67
<b>Domain</b>						
<i>Teaching and learning</i>	21	70	19	63.33	40	66.67
Assessment	0	0	0	0	0	0
Care	0	0	5	16.67	5	8.33
<i>Organisation/Housekeeping</i>	4	13.33	9	30	13	21.67
Other	5	16.67	2	6.67	7	11.67

#### *Support*

In classroom three 6.67% of the support offered by LSAs took place outside of the classroom. Within the classroom, 66.67% of LSA time was spent supporting a individual child, 18.33% of their time was spent with a group of children and 8.33% of time was spent responding to a non-target child. LSAs in classroom took on an autonomous role for 51.67% of the time with 33.33% of their time being partially scripted and 15% being completely scripted.

#### *Domain*

When working with the child, the LSAs contributed primarily towards the areas of teaching and learning (66.67%), then by carrying out an organisational or housekeeping role (21.67%). The LSA participated in a 'care' role for 8.33% of the time and in other roles for 11.67% of the time. At no point did an LSA engage in activities judged by the researcher to be involved with assessment.

### **7.13.3.2 LSA Working with Staff**

	LSA 1		LSA 2		Combined	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
<b>Deployment in the classroom</b>						
<i>Pupil Orientated</i>						
<i>Individual</i>	16	53.33	20	66.67	36	60
<i>Group</i>	13	43.33	4	13.33	17	28.33
<i>Hover/move</i>	1	3.33	6	20	7	11.67
<i>Task orientated</i>	16	53.33	19	63.33	35	58.33
<i>Passive/listening</i>	12	40	4	13.33	16	26.67
<i>Degree of autonomy</i>						
Scripted	5	16.67	7	23.33	12	20
Some	11	36.67	6	20	17	28.33
Full	14	46.67	17	56.67	31	51.67
<b>Communication</b>						
<i>Initiated by</i>						
Teacher	5	16.67	5	16.67	10	16.67
LSA	5	16.67	8	26.67	13	21.67
<i>Purpose</i>						
Task focused	6	20	6	20	12	20
Pupil focused	2	6.67	1	3.33	3	6.67
Social	2	6.67	6	0	8	13.34
Other	2	6.67	6	20	8	13.33

*Deployment*

The pupil orientated deployment within classroom three was focused primarily towards the individual child (60%) and a target group (28.33%). Across the 60 minutes of observation in classroom 3, LSAs were deployed to task orientated activities within 58.33% of the time and 26.67% of the time was spent in a discrete passive or listening role. The degree of the autonomy with which LSAs managed their deployment was similar to the variations of autonomy witnessed in the type of support they were offering pupils (51.67% full autonomy, 28.33% partial autonomy and 20% was fully scripted).

### *Communication*

Communications took place within 23 minutes of the 60 minutes of observation. Of these communications, 10 were initiated by the teacher and 13 were initiated by the LSA. Of these communications 12 were focused towards a specific task, three were focused towards a pupil and eight were regarding social aspects.

### **7.13.3.3 Impact**

	LSA 1		LSA 2		Combined	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
<b>ECM outcome</b>						
<i>Be healthy</i>	0	0	4	13.33	4	6.67
<i>Stay safe</i>	5	16.67	6	20	11	18.33
<i>Enjoy and achieve</i>	23	76.67	23	76.67	46	76.67
<i>Make a positive contribution</i>	7	23.33	0	0	7	11.67
<i>Achieve economic well-being</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Benefactor</b>						
<i>Target individual</i>	21	70	19	63.33	40	66.67
<i>Other individual</i>	2	6.67	3	10	5	8.33
<i>Target group</i>	7	23.33	8	26.67	15	25
<i>Other group</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Whole class</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0

### *Impact*

The researcher judged that the ECM outcome benefitting most directly from LSA contributions was to 'enjoy and achieve' (76.67%), this was followed by 'staying safe' (18.33%), 'making a positive contribution' (11.67%) and 'being healthy'

(6.67%). None of the contributions focused primarily on contributing towards the ECM outcome 'achieving economic well-being'.

### *Benefactor*

The contribution made towards the ECM outcomes were judged to hold most benefit to the target individual (66.67%), followed by a target group (25%) and other non-target individuals (8.33%).

## **7.13.4 Classroom 4 (Data site 4)**

### **7.13.4.1 LSA Supporting the Pupil**

	LSA 1		LSA 2		LSA 3		LSA		Combined	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
<b>Supporting</b>										
<i>Pupils outside the classroom</i>										
Individual	5	16.67	8	26.67	3	10	10	33.33	26	24.76
Group	0	0	0	0	5	16.67	0	0	5	4.76
<i>Pupils inside the classroom</i>										
Individual	10	33.33	12	40	9	30	3	10	34	32.38
Group	10	33.33	8	26.67	8	26.67	0	0	26	24.76
Anyone needing help	5	16.67	2	6.67	6	20	2	6.67	15	14.29
<i>Degree of autonomy</i>										
Scripted	0	0	2	6.67	6	20	2	6.67	10	9.52
Some	4	13.33	10	33.33	3	10	2	6.67	19	18.10
Full	26	86.67	18	60	17	56.67	11	36.67	72	68.57
<b>Domain</b>										
Teaching and learning	10	33.33	14	46.67	8	26.67	1	3.33	33	31.43
Assessment	2	6.67	1	3.33	0	0	0	0	3	2.86
Care	17	56.67	10	33.33	9	30	1	3.33	37	35.24
Organisation/Housekeeping	2	6.67	0	0	12	40	0	0	14	13.33
Other	1	3.33	6	20	1	3.33	13	43.33	21	20

### *Support*

The LSAs in classroom four supported individual pupils outside of the classroom for 24.76% of the observations and they also provided group support outside of the classroom for 4.76%. The majority of the support was directed inside the classroom

and towards the individual pupil (32.38%), with the remaining support being directed towards a target group (24.76%) or to anyone else needing support (14.29%). The LSAs in classroom were judged to be 68.57% fully autonomous when directing their support, 18.10% partially scripted and 9.52% fully scripted.

### *Domain*

The support offered focused primarily toward the domain of care (35.24%) and teaching and learning (31.43). Organisational and housekeeping duties as well as the area of assessment received 13.33% and 2.86% respectively. Other smaller or less frequently referred to domains received 20% of the LSAs input.

### **7.13.4.2 LSA Working with Others**

	LSA 1		LSA 2		LSA 3		LSA 4		Combined	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
<b>Deployment in the classroom</b>										
<i>Pupil Orientated</i>										
<i>Individual</i>	15	50	15	50	6	20	12	40	48	45.71
<i>Group</i>	9	30	8	26.67	9	30	3	10	29	27.62
<i>Hover/move</i>	6	20	7	23.33	14	46.67	0	0	27	25.71
<i>Task orientated</i>	16	53.33	20	66.67	14	46.67	11	36.67	61	58.10
<i>Passive/listening</i>	1	3.33	6	20	6	20	0	0	13	12.37
<i>Degree of autonomy</i>										
Scripted	0	0	5	16.67	3	10	2	6.67	10	9.52
Some	4	13.33	8	26.67	6	20	2	6.67	20	19.05
Full	26	86.67	17	56.67	17	56.67	11	36.67	71	67.62
<b>Communication</b>										
<i>Initiated by</i>										
Teacher	2	6.67	2	6.67	6	20	3	10	13	12.38
LSA	7	23.33	6	20	8	26.67	0	0	21	20
<i>Purpose</i>										
Task focused	0	0	6	20	5	16.67	2	6.67	13	12.28
Pupil focused	9	30	3	10	3	10	1	3.33	16	15.24
Social	0	0	0	0	2	6.67	0	0	2	1.90
Other	0	0	0	0	6	20	0	0	6	5.71

### *Deployment*



LSAs were deployed to a target individual for 45.71% of the observation time and to a target group for 27.62% of the time. For the remaining time LSAs in classroom four took part in a hovering or responsive role. For 58.10% of the observations, LSAs were engaged in task orientated roles whilst 12.37% of their time was spent in a more passive or listening role. LSAs spent 67.92% of the time in a fully autonomous role in terms of the pupils with which they targeted. LSAs were judged to have partial autonomy with their deployment for 19.05% and they were also judged to be following fully scripted roles on 9.52% of the time.

### *Communication*

Over the total observation there were 34 LSA communications recorded. 21 of these were initiated by the LSA and 12.38% were initiated by the teacher. Of these communications 13 were task focused, 16 were pupil focused, two were focused on social aspects and six were regarding other varying topics.

### **7.13.4.3 Impact**

	LSA 1		LSA 2		LSA 3		LSA 4		Combined	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
<b>ECM outcome</b>										
<i>Be healthy</i>	11	36.67	4	13.33	5	16.67	1	3.33	21	20
<i>Stay safe</i>	7	23.33	12	40	4	13.33	12	40	35	33.33
<i>Enjoy and achieve</i>	12	40	14	46.67	24	80	14	46.67	64	60.95
<i>Make a positive contribution</i>	2	6.67	1	3.33	0	0	0	0	3	2.86
<i>Achieve economic well-being</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Benefactor</b>										
<i>Target individual</i>	15	50	20	66.67	12	40	13	43.33	60	57.14
<i>Other individual</i>	5	16.67	2	6.67	5	16.67	2	6.67	14	13.33
<i>Target group</i>	10	33.33	8	26.67	13	43.33	0	0	31	29.52
<i>Other group</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Whole class</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

### *ECM Outcome*

The researcher judged that the LSAs contributed primarily to the ECM outcome of 'enjoying and achieving' (60.95%). As a primary outcome benefitting from LSAs contributions, 'being safe' received 33.33% of LSA input, 'being healthy' received 20% of contributions and 'making a positive contribution' received 2.36% of contributions from LSAs. The researcher judged that the ECM outcome of 'achieving economic well-being' was at no point a primary target by LSAs.

#### *Benefactor*

The main benefactor of these contributions was a target child on 57.14% of occasions, a target group for 29.52% of the time and for 13.33% of the time other non-target individuals received the benefits of LSA contributions.